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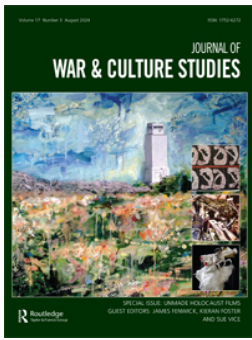
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Stanley Kubrick's Quest for the Heroic: Turning *Wartime Lies* into *Aryan Papers*

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This article asks why Stanley Kubrick's longstanding wish to direct the film version of Louis Begley's 1991 novel *Wartime Lies* never came to fruition. In Begley's novel, the protagonist Maciek recounts the experience of living in hiding under a false identity in Nazi-occupied Poland. Kubrick drafted a series of quite different plotlines and conclusions for the film version, to be called *Aryan Papers*, in which Maciek's aunt Tania takes a highly dramatic role in their destiny. The more Kubrick changed *Aryan Papers*, in response to the pressure of Hollywood expectations and the cultural valorization of active Holocaust resistance, the less it resembled the very work he had chosen to adapt. This impasse shows why the director could not ultimately bring *Aryan Papers* to the screen.

KEYWORDS Stanley Kubrick, Louis Begley, *Aryan Papers*, *Wartime Lies*, adaptation

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I will argue in this article that Stanley Kubrick's unmade *Aryan Papers* is paradigmatic of the difficulty of filming a Holocaust-related drama.¹ Kubrick began work on adapting Louis Begley's Holocaust-era novel *Wartime Lies* in 1991, the year of the book's publication, and preparations were at an advanced stage when the film was abruptly abandoned. By the autumn of 1993, Kubrick had been, as James Fenwick shows, on the brink of starting to film, with a Warner Bros release envisaged for 1994 (Fenwick 2020: 16). However, despite the evidence in Kubrick's archive held at the University of the Arts London, showing his extensive research,

¹The phrase 'the quest for the heroic' is borrowed from Hillman (2015: 235).

annotated scripts, casting lists, shooting schedule, and photographs of wartime events as well as possible locations, no filming ever took place.²

Critics have speculated about the reasons for this work remaining unmade. Taking an institutional perspective, Peter Krämer argues that all Kubrick's unrealized projects can be viewed as the predictable outcome of the cinema industry's financial priorities rather than expressive of auteurist exceptionalism (quoted in Fenwick et al., 2021: 4). Yet, even if such other examples of Kubrick's uncompleted films as *Napoleon* or *Eric Brighteyes* can be accounted for on these functional grounds, *Aryan Papers* is a case apart when considered in the light of its archival history.

In a contrasting vein, other critics claim that Kubrick's ambivalence about his Jewish heritage prevented his realizing a film about the wartime murder of the Jews, despite this subject being, in Nathan Abrams' words, 'the very thing he had been contemplating for so long' (Abrams 2023: 364). As Geoffrey Cocks points out, Kubrick had turned down an offer to direct a film version of Edgar Wallant's novel *The Pawnbroker* (1961), taken on instead by Sidney Lumet and released in 1964 (2004: 158). The combination of 'personal and artistic reasons' (Cocks 2004: 158) which motivated Kubrick's decision not to direct this film, about a New York pawnbroker who is tormented by flashbacks to the murder of his family in a concentration camp, might appear even more pressing in the case of *Wartime Lies*. The novel is set in Poland's Galicia, the south-eastern region where the filmmaker's forebears had once lived, bringing the wartime catastrophe close to home (Cocks 2004: 157).

Abrams sees the resulting absence from Kubrick's oeuvre of explicit engagement with the Holocaust, or indeed of Jewish-identified characters, as a way of perversely marking the significance of that history (Abrams 2023: 350). For Marat Grinberg, aesthetic considerations acted together with the 'psychological and commercial' pressures on the director to generate his 'failure' to make the film (2021: 209). Kubrick's plan to give *Aryan Papers* the look of the documentary photographs he had spent much time gathering was both 'ideal' for the Holocaust material, yet would at the same time constitute an 'utterly impossible' verisimilitude (Grinberg 2021: 210).

Following these various arguments which put forward a comprehensive collection of pitfalls, it might seem more surprising that Kubrick decided to take on the filming of Begley's novel than that he never realized it. In addition to these factors, as I will claim here, there are other conclusions to be derived from the production history and draft screenplays of Kubrick's adaption of *Wartime Lies* about the reasons for its remaining unmade. Although Kubrick optioned this novel for the sake of its plot about remarkable survival against terrible odds, its protagonists, the youthful Maciek and his aunt Tania, follow an untypical trajectory. Their evading death by 'passing' as non-Jewish in Nazi-occupied Poland makes them witnesses of, rather than subjected to, landmark events and atrocities such as the Warsaw Ghetto

²See the Stanley Kubrick Archive website and catalogue, University of the Arts, London. With thanks for assistance to the UAL Special Collections staff, especially Georgina Orgill. <https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/library-services/special-collections-and-archives/archives-and-special-collections-centre/the-stanley-kubrick-archive>

Uprising or deportation to Auschwitz. Analysing Kubrick's draft material reveals that the story of the unsuccessful efforts to make *Aryan Papers* is also the story of the obstacles to conventional narrative and its cinematic expression posed by a Holocaust experience lived out on the margins.

Narrative representability

Kubrick's concerns about a viable filmic narrative emerge in relation to the entire process of adapting Begley's novel. At the most general level, he decided that the all-consuming historical frame to the individual story told in *Wartime Lies* would be represented cinematically. As part of giving the film the documentary 'look of a photograph' (Grinberg 2021: 209), *Aryan Papers* was to feature contextual information in the form of newsreel inserts and newspaper headline-style titles to individual sections. In addition, generic expectations of definitive action and visual drama arise throughout, posed most clearly in Kubrick's grappling with whether to add elements of retribution and defiance to the seemingly low-key conclusion to *Wartime Lies*.

The director's earliest draft changes turn the uneasy ending of Begley's novel, in which Tania and Maciek live out the final years of the war in Poland before emigrating, into a narrative with aspects of partisan combat and personal vengeance. Indeed, Kubrick names in a viewing list some earlier films which centre on armed revolt, including *Escape from Sobibor* (Jack Gold 1987) and, with its focus on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, *For Those I Loved* (Robert Enrico 1983).³ In *Wartime Lies*, by contrast to Kubrick's scenarios for *Aryan Papers* in which Tania shoots dead the man responsible for her father's murder and flees to join the partisans, no such definitive action takes place.

The varied versions of a conclusion drafted by Kubrick for *Aryan Papers* enact the fact that the staple elements of a fictional plot are likely to be thwarted by the reality and implications of the Holocaust, as a long-drawn-out and continent-wide process of the 'destruction of targeted categories of human beings' (Bauman 2021: 250). The most basic feature of fictional narrative, that the reader or spectator should 'grasp past, present and future in a significant shape' (Brooks 1984: 312) is itself undermined in this context. The 'significant' nature of the Holocaust experience lies in its flouting any expectation of temporal continuity and sense-making, by wrenching individuals from a known past into an unrecognizable present, rendering the future unimaginable and its recall unutterable. The workings of chance replace cause and effect in the unfolding of events, and characters' moral being can be connected only arbitrarily to their experience and its outcome. As Michael André Bernstein has argued in relation to the construction of character in Holocaust fiction, it is difficult to embody these elements without implying negative judgement at individuals' seeming passivity or failure to predict the calamity about which the reader's hindsight gives them certain knowledge (see Bernstein 1998).

³Stanley Kubrick, *Aryan Papers*, SK Notes, 18/2/16, SKA.

The very notion of genocide, by targeting its victims on the grounds of their 'racial' being, annuls such other motors of the plot as individual agency or ambition. Therefore, the conclusion of a fictional narrative, or 'the desire for the end', in Peter Brooks' phrase, must reckon with irreparability rather than resolution in a Holocaust context (1992: 52). Indeed, 'the end', in the sense of the fulfilment of the Holocaust's grim promise, is precisely what might not be desired or open to representation. Recent films such as *Defiance* (Edward Zwick 2008) or *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino 2009) attempt to redress these liabilities by representing retaliation, although their exclusive focus risks the notion of 'resistance' becoming, in Mia Merrill's phrasing, as much 'a marketing term [as] a movement' (Merrill 2022).

These challenges to narrative teleology mounted by a Holocaust story are exaggerated in the case of Kubrick's film by the decision to base it on Begley's *Wartime Lies*, with its emphasis on the psychic cost of survival through pretence. The film would have followed *Wartime Lies* in centring on the efforts by Maciek and Tania at hiding in plain sight in Nazi-occupied Poland. This takes the form of disguising their Jewish identity through 'effectively functioning' as non-Jewish, an enactment backed up by the acquisition of the authenticating documents of the film's title (Green 2022: 113). They flee their home-town, referred to throughout only by the initial T. but probably Tarnopol (now Ternopil in Ukraine), for the larger cities of Lwów and then Warsaw (Cocks 2004: 157). Tania assumes the guise of a Catholic widow, her nephew Maciek in the role of a son who cannot go to school, while his grandfather, Tania's beloved father, takes separate lodgings to divide the risk. Tania advocates this strategy of 'open hiding' by contrast to the alternative, which she deems too risky, that of concealing their 'physical existence' by paying local people to hide the family away out of sight (Green 2022: 114).

The novel's ambivalent ending includes reference to the protagonist Maciek's new life in an unnamed '*tranquil country*', which was, for Begley, the USA. Such present-day calm remains impossible to reconcile with Maciek's past: 'our man has no childhood that he can bear to remember; he has had to invent one' (Begley 1992: 3, 198; all further page numbers in the text). Such metafictional phrasing, suiting the novelistic form of this semi-autobiographical story, could have had a cinematic equivalent. As Maciek reports, Tania's criticisms in private of his public persona, 'as if one performer were speaking to another about their art' (170), would demand the actor playing this role — in which Kubrick had cast Johanna ter Steege — to portray the performance within the performance.

The perilous circumstances of Maciek, Tania and the grandfather's mode of open hiding are crucial to the plot's progress, since their actions are prompted by the constant risk of being unmasked. This is shown in the form of their hair's-breadth escapes from danger or betrayal and their horrified witness at a remove of scenes of murderous violence, through a window, from a cellar or within a crowd. This story of evasion, placing Maciek and Tania on the edge of events which constantly threaten to engulf them, is typified in *Wartime Lies* by the way in which they find

out about the murder of the grandfather towards the war's end. In the novel, the catastrophe of the grandfather's death takes place outside the diegesis. It is communicated to Tania by hearsay and plunges her and Maciek into despair. In Kubrick's script, by contrast, this episode is rewritten in versions showing a tendency towards increasingly active dramatization. The introduction by Kubrick of a plotline in which Tania retaliates against her father's betrayer marks an effort to redress the reduction of drama in a Holocaust narrative about passing, which rather demands lying low and staying inconspicuous.

While small details of the enactment of openly hiding in the novel possess clear filmic potential — Tania and Maciek meet the grandfather at the cathedral in Warsaw and carry out a 'prayer performance'; Tania studies shop windows to be able to see behind her in case anyone is following them (100, 73) — Kubrick's changes heighten the magnitude of these events to suit a feature film. The number of revised versions of the episode of the grandfather's death, in addition to other expanded plotlines, expose the questions about what to dramatize, and how to do so, which are central to the film's remaining not only unrealized but perhaps unrealizable.⁴

***Wartime Lies* and 'Aryan papers'**

Kubrick optioned Begley's *Wartime Lies* even before the novel's publication (Abrams 2023: 350). He entered assiduously into working on the screenplay for the film version entitled *Aryan Papers*. Although Kubrick was already accustomed to working alone on his scripts, the contact with Begley was notably minimal, and the director's annotations to this screenplay constitute a debate with himself (Ciment 1983: 177; Grinberg 2021: 208). However, the choice of this text as a way of embodying Kubrick's longstanding interest in the wartime fate of the Jews is not an obvious one. The emphasis of *Wartime Lies* is on the psychic cost of living a lie, as the occasion for recounting the terrible occurrences that necessitated it, enabled by the false documents or 'Aryan papers' after which the film is titled. The novel accomplishes this through the mode of narration. While told in hindsight by the adult Maciek, the first-person viewpoint of the child he once was — aged 9 at the German invasion in 1939 — constitutes a defamiliarizing means of depicting Holocaust-era persecution and atrocity as if 'from below' (Vice 2015: 12).

The significance of the novel's narrative mode is evident even in the smallest details of word-choice and tone, as we see in relation to Tania and Maciek's first experience of openly hiding, using 'the Aryan papers' secured by the grandfather, which takes place in Lwów during the winter of 1941. Maciek reports Tania's unexpected relief at the cold weather: 'All our Aryan friends were at dinner or playing

⁴In addition to the film *Unfolding the Aryan Papers* (2009) by the artists Jane and Louise Wilson, which responds to such 'initial fragments' of Kubrick's project as the wardrobe stills, other filmmakers have been suggested as candidates to direct a version of *Aryan Papers*, including Ang Lee and Luca Guadagnino: see respectively Macnab (2009) and Macnab (2020). Yet, as of 2024, it remains unmade.

cards; no time to hunt the polluting Jew' (67). Although ironic inflection is clear in Maciek's use of the paradoxical epithet 'Aryan friends' and the tendentious 'polluting Jew', he does not formally signal to the reader that he is quoting Tania. Rather, Maciek blends her words, with their origins in yet other utterances, seamlessly into his narration.

Holding up these phrases for scrutiny by the means of embedded voices enhances their monstrous nature, by revealing the pervasion of exclusionary thinking in everyday life. An element of bleak irony characterizes the situation in Tania's implying that antisemitic persecution is a seasonal pursuit. It is perhaps surprising, since it clashes with the real-time depiction of events, that Kubrick decided the film's action would be accompanied by a voiceover, to be based closely on Maciek's narration of this kind in the novel. The director adds to the script a question which typifies the difficulty of adapting such effects for the screen, asking if this voice should be that of the child, in the moment of witness, or, as in the novel, that of the adult looking back.⁵ While both registers are perceptible in the novel's version of Maciek's narration, it seems that Kubrick would have opted for an adult voice accompanying the dramatized actions of the child.

The screenplay makes clear that the arrival of Tania and Maciek in Lwów on the first leg of their life in hiding was to be told in relation to their false papers.⁶ This is consistent with the shift of emphasis from subjective to tangible as indicated by the adaptation's change of title from *Wartime Lies* to *Aryan Papers*. The novel's briefly related practicalities of Maciek's grandfather acquiring what he calls these 'non-sense documents' (52) are expanded by Kubrick into a major plot device, the papers into a significant diegetic object. In the screenplay, the documentation is subject to much handwritten comment. While historically such validation would have consisted of a photo ID, birth, baptism, marriage certificates and a so-called 'ancestor pass', Kubrick raises the crucial question about how to represent such documents, asking, 'what do [Aryan papers] consist of? Identity card? How do you show Aryan status?'⁷

This question goes to the heart of the film's efforts at authenticity as well as the problem of enacting the fantastical notion of 'Aryan status' onscreen. In his graphic memoir *Maus* (1986, 1991), Art Spiegelman translates the illusory but vital 'racial' categories of the Nazi regime into the imagery of animal species. The equivalent of this metaphor in Kubrick's film lies in the emphasis on the materiality of the documents. Such an effect is a cinematic embodiment of Maciek's claim in the novel that having the right papers is crucial but not sufficient to remaining undetected. Those relying on such validation need a convincing cover 'story', but also what he calls the 'right look' (92, 72). We might thus imagine the film using close-ups on the various documents and the different versions of false papers that Tania and Maciek acquire throughout the war.

⁵Kubrick, *Aryan Papers*, Synopsis, 18/2/1/5, 20, SKA.

⁶Kubrick, *Aryan Papers*, 18/2/1/6, Screenplay 28, SKA.

⁷Kubrick, Screenplay, 18.

Yet such imagery itself is open to question. Kubrick's marginal note about the first set of documents asks, 'how do we do the photos of the boy and Tania?', wondering, it seems, whether their papers should look real or forged, include their photos or those of other people.⁸ His notes on the screenplay assert, in addition, the 'need' for baptismal certificates, but Maciek's description of the process of acquiring them is judged 'Too complicat[ed]' to include.⁹ Kubrick's emphasis on the documents at this early moment would establish in the viewer's mind the crucial practice of 'passing', while also highlighting the need for suspense. The possibility of unmasking and its terrible consequences necessarily present in all narratives of passing and life-or-death deception is embodied here by the papers. Kubrick adds a note to the script suggesting the significance of this effect for the plot, for instance when Maciek and Tania flee Lwów for Warsaw and might be challenged: 'suspense set up re train or station'.¹⁰

However, Kubrick's script reveals that the threat of being caught out or denounced as Jews, even when presented as a conceptual or routine occurrence in the novel, can only be shown in the form of an individual instance. In *Wartime Lies*, Maciek reports the grandfather's description of his life hiding openly in Warsaw as repeatedly subject to the 'minor problems of blackmail, nothing too expensive':

Usually, it was some low-life youth who followed him for a while in the street, then asked for a light and said, Pan looks familiar to me, could he help with a little cash? (98)

While the use of the Polish honorific 'Pan', or 'Sir', preserves a façade of social nicety, the notion of looking 'familiar' as voiced here constitutes an uncivil threat. It is a scarcely veiled reference to guessing at a stranger's 'racial' secret which is as dangerous as the certainty represented by personal acquaintance.

For the film, this account of a habitual state of affairs related by Maciek at one remove is condensed into a specific event which takes place much earlier, while the family is still resident in T. It is depicted in real time just as grandfather is returning home with his new identity papers. Rather than 'some' low-life youth in a 'usual' occurrence, grandfather is accosted on a particular occasion by an individual blackmailer whose words are reported by Maciek:

If Pan doesn't want trouble, perhaps he can find a little more cash and we can settle this right away.¹¹

While in the novel it is implied that the grandfather has been in the habit simply of paying off the blackmailers, in the film he is shown to retaliate in this singular instance. Grandfather 'lunges at the low-life youth', 'bashing his head' against a concrete wall before leaving him on the ground, 'bloody and unconscious'. The

⁸Kubrick, Screenplay, 53.

⁹Kubrick, Screenplay, 27–8.

¹⁰Kubrick, Screenplay, 58.

¹¹Kubrick, Screenplay, 30.

episode concludes with grandfather leaving the scene: he 'picks up his Aryan identity papers and walks away'.¹²

The annotations to this sequence show that the practical details of this incident, rather than the likeliness of its occurrence, preoccupied the director. In the novel, the grandfather is described at a much later point as threatening a would-be blackmailer, and it is his defiance that leads ultimately to his death. The screenplay's version, in establishing the grandfather's propensity for active self-defence so early in the narrative, even before the flight from his home-town of T., poses other complexities. Kubrick's typewritten question about grandfather's documents included in the script, 'is his address in the kennkarte?', meets with his handwritten response, highlighted in a square box: 'This is a problem'.¹³ As the director's note to the screenplay puts it of the blackmailer, 'T is not a big town. GF should probably say something about [fearing to see] him again'.¹⁴ Kubrick adds as a possible resolution, 'maybe [grandfather] doesn't go out', suggesting a shift to physical concealment which is not taken further.¹⁵ Implicit in these detailed deliberations is a scepticism about the visual and dramatic value of the documents to which the film's title refers, even as they are placed centre stage. Indeed, by this means the satirical effect of the phrase 'Aryan papers' in the film's title is emphasized, echoing Begley's deploring it as a wartime expression for 'the shedding of one's Jewish identity' which is 'bizarre and shameful' (Begley 1992a).

In the blackmail sequence for the film, the would-be extortionist is oblivious to grandfather's new documents, as affirmed by Kubrick's handwritten addition to Maciek's voiceover: 'He didn't really take a good look at the papers'.¹⁶ Locating the action in T. itself dramatizes the opposition between bodily and bureaucratic authentication. The questions about grandfather's personal recognizability are immediately followed, as if by association, with Maciek's description of the liability that the fact of circumcision posed for Jewish men and the possibility of his undergoing 'reconstructive surgery'.¹⁷

The mode of enacting grandfather's encounter with the blackmailer in the screenplay registers, along with the generic propensity of cinematic narrative for dramatic action, a wish-fulfilment scenario in which Jewish self-defence is a possibility. The importance of resistance in Holocaust memory resides, as Yehuda Bauer argues, not in such action's contemporary success in derailing German strategy, nor on resisters' chances of survival, but in its 'effect on post-war Jewish consciousness' (Bauer 2002: 140). Such recall restores 'honour' to a memory which is otherwise compromised by the spectacle of Jewish helplessness in the face of insuperable 'mass death' (Bauer 2002: 140–2). Indeed, Grinberg sees the addition of such acts of retaliation as embodying Kubrick's 'revising' his earlier notion that 'the Jews had participated in their own demise', to the extent that such vengeance was itself to be feared

¹²Kubrick, Screenplay, 30.

¹³Kubrick, Screenplay, 30.

¹⁴Kubrick, Screenplay, 30, square brackets showing handwritten amendment.

¹⁵Kubrick, Screenplay, 30.

¹⁶Kubrick, Screenplay, 30.

¹⁷Kubrick, Screenplay, 30, and Begley, *Wartime Lies*, 52.

(Grinberg 2021: 209). The emphasis on resistance by the grandfather in this small instance, and more significantly by Tania at the film's end, would act to redeem Maciek's perception of powerlessness in the novel. He likens himself, if left without Tania's protection, to 'a stray cat that anyone could stone', concluding that, 'we were always afraid and nobody was afraid of us' (180, 67).

Aryan Papers and Wartime Lies

The extent and nature of Kubrick's annotations to the script for *Aryan Papers* show him to be an adept literary critic and possessed of a sharp eye for logic and consistency, even if they also give an insight into the obstacles his plans encountered. The notes reveal that Kubrick paid the highest level of attention to turning-point events, as well as those which he altered to construct the new emphasis on action, both kinds leaning towards cinematic spectacle.

In a representative instance, Kubrick notes that the method of showing the fate of the Kramer family, Tania and Maciek's neighbours in T., must be made more dramatic. Early in the novel, Tania finds out from her German protector Reinhard that the following day 'all Jews in T. would be taken away' (57). Maciek joins Tania at the window of Reinhard's house as she weeps while watching the 'long and disorderly procession' of Jews, 'the curtain parted so that she could see out and yet remain hidden' (59). The terrible fact of T. becoming '*judenrein*', as Maciek puts it, by Christmas 1941, takes place to the accompaniment of 'no sounds', and after 'perhaps an hour, the avenue was empty' (59). Although Maciek 'tried to look for the Kramers' and their little daughter, his playmate Irena, the number of people and difficulty of 'distinguish[ing] faces' means that 'I never saw them' (59).

Kubrick's annotations to this episode in the screenplay make plain that this mode of representing atrocity in terms of its silence, brevity and impersonality, despite the dismaying effect of these factors in the novel, is not suited to a filmic portrayal. To offset this, the director urges that the 'Aktion in T.' must be shown to be 'more violent and awful than the book', and that 'Something dramatic for the Kramers' must be devised.¹⁸ The sense here that Holocaust atrocity is being manipulated for the sake of maximum drama and spectacle is, however dismaying it might seem, intrinsic to the process of changing medium.

In relation to an event with starker implications for the main characters and the filmic form, Kubrick was especially attentive to the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising attempted by the Polish resistance in 1944, when Maciek and Tania narrowly escape deportation. This episode shows Tania extricating them from the deadly threat of a round-up policed by German and Ukrainian soldiers. In this instance, on-the-spot improvisation and role-play on her part take the place of the identity documents whose authenticating effects are no longer sufficient.

In this scenario, amid the crowd of people held near Warsaw's Central Station, Tania turns herself overnight into a 'stooped over, soot-smeared old woman' to

¹⁸Kubrick, Synopsis, 7.

avoid being 'hunted' for sexual assault, yet emerges the following morning 'transformed' into 'a dignified and self-confident young matron'.¹⁹ This instance is a diegetic crux, since nephew and aunt are reprieved from the atrocity most closely associated with the Holocaust world, that of death in Auschwitz. As Tania and Maciek are horrified to learn, this is the destination of the trains onto which people are being forced.²⁰ The episode shows the difficulty of distinguishing between action and reaction in such circumstances, constituting one of the prompts for Kubrick's decision to expand upon Tania's resourcefulness by adding elements of physical force on her part.

The episode of the round-up is full of cinematic potential, set as it is in the bombed-out centre of Warsaw after the Germans have vanquished the Polish resistance. In the novel, the uprising is witnessed at first from a rooftop by Maciek, who sardonically observes that now, by contrast to the distant view of the Ghetto Uprising a year earlier, 'we and our fellow watchers were part of the spectacle, and no one on the roof was cheering' (129). In the film, the role of such explication would have been taken by a newsreel, to be supplemented by the voiceover, as a typewritten note suggests: 'Add some facts'.²¹ This omniscience contrasts with Maciek's limited perspective arising from his hiding-places in courtyards and cellars.

The episode's importance for Kubrick's conception is signalled by the extent of his script annotations. These engage with the feasibility of the 'special show' mounted by Tania in the novel, where it is aimed at the presiding Wehrmacht captain in her efforts to evade deportation (148). Her words to the captain are reported by Maciek. His customary method of blended quotation, here as in the novel, allows him to retain Tania's phrasing in his voiceover. In this way, Maciek conveys her performance of an indignation at being inconvenienced which, as evident in the phrases I have italicized below, could belong only to a non-Jewish woman:

With the most *appalling bad luck* she had come to Warsaw the day before the uprising to have her son's eyes examined by a noted specialist, and had been trapped for six weeks in *filthy Warsaw cellars*.²²

The script enhances the tension of this episode by slowing down Tania and Maciek's getaway. In a detail not present in the novel, the Wehrmacht officer, having authorized a pass for them to leave Warsaw for T. by train, suddenly calls Tania back to ask for the name and address of the 'eye specialist'. The film's version of their escape thus increases the suspense, as Maciek relates:

My heart stopped.

Composed, Tania thought for a moment, as if to recall a six-week old address. Then she made up a name and address in a district of Warsaw where many

¹⁹Kubrick, Synopsis, 18/2/1/6, Kubrick, Screenplay 83, 92; Begley, *Wartime Lies*, 147.

²⁰Kubrick, Screenplay, 94; Begley, *Wartime Lies*, 148.

²¹Kubrick, Screenplay, 72.

²²Kubrick, Screenplay, 95, my italics; Begley, *Wartime Lies*, 148–50.

professional men had their offices, adding that if it wasn't at number 47 it would be 57.²³

This tension is defused only when it emerges that the officer seeks a recommendation — 'touching his glasses, [he] said he was long overdue to have his eyes properly checked' — rather than to challenge the story's truth.²⁴ Kubrick's handwritten comment on this exchange, as in the case of grandfather's encounter with the black-mailer, is put in uncompromising terms: 'This is ridiculous'.²⁵ Yet it is not the detail of the fictional plot at this point, which amplifies the novel's throwaway mention of an eye specialist (149), that is of concern to Kubrick. Rather, it is the historical unlikelihood of anyone mentioning an address at all, 'considering the state of the city, 90% in ruins'.²⁶ As the director adds, 'How could Tania buy dresses or go to eye doctor during the Uprising?'²⁷

No resolution is put forward to this question, in what is otherwise a convincing change to the novel's more literary version of Tania's speech, where her professed fondness for Thomas Mann as a German author prompts the captain to accede to what she admits are her 'hot tempered' demands by placing her in a 'first-class compartment' (149–50). In the screenplay, it is Tania's audacity in her role as 'Frau Major Reinhard', 'a Polish woman married to a German officer', which impresses the Wehrmacht captain, just as it would the viewer, the latter with the extra awareness of its riskily enacted status.²⁸ This propensity for crucial yet small-scale action on Tania's part bears out Hana Green's argument that 'passing' itself should be categorized as an instance of resistance (2022: 112). However, as the following examples of definitive action show, a depiction of resistance in this way 'without using force' did not fulfil Kubrick's aspirations for his film (Bauer 2002: 120).

The romance plot

While Kubrick's adding to Begley's original the elements of active and armed defiance unites a certain kind of Holocaust remembrance with dramatic convention, his plans to include a romance for Tania, a resolutely 'maiden aunt' in the novel (194), seem only to respond to the latter imperative. However, the script annotations sketching out a possible affair for Tania also register the need for narrative consistency and pave the way for the all-important armed resistance at the film's end.

In the novel, Tania is described at the outset as 'unlikely to marry', despite — and because — of her beauty and wealth. Her claim to Maciek that she has 'a heart of stone' except 'when it came to grandfather and me' is crucial to the novel's portrayal of this unconventional female character (69). Tania's pre-war association with the *bon viveur* Bern is described as one with 'an acknowledged old bachelor', that

²³Kubrick, Screenplay, 96.

²⁴Kubrick, Screenplay, 96.

²⁵Kubrick, Screenplay, 96.

²⁶Kubrick, Screenplay, 96.

²⁷Ibid., and Kubrick, *Aryan Papers* 18/2/1/12, Final treatment, SKA, dated 9.6.91.

²⁸Kubrick, Screenplay, 95–6.

during the Nazi occupation with the adoring 'German friend' Reinhard implied to be a relationship that is strategically valuable (11, 47). In the novel, the possibility is briefly raised of her marrying her late sister's husband, Maciek's father, but dismissed by Tania since, as she complains, he renders himself ineligible because he 'measured everything out with an eyedropper — time, affection, money' (69).

Despite this unpromising backdrop, in the screenplay Kubrick returns to the possibility of Tania's union with her brother-in-law. In phrasing that invokes psychology while responding rather to the demands of the plot, he asks, 'Why does M[aciek]'s father not fall in love with, or make love to, Tania?'²⁹ Since the director declares that it is 'not clear' why she 'comes to live with them [Maciek's family]' in the first place, he asks, 'why shouldn't T[ania] make love to the father? Then there would be nothing to explain'.³⁰ This would make more clear-cut Maciek's explanation in the novel that Tania arrived simply 'to make a home for my father and to bring me up' (69).

In addition, uniting Tania with Maciek's father would provide a resolution to the otherwise distracting presence of this unnamed character who is absent, far from the Nazi invaders in the Urals, for most of the novel and whose post-war return is only briefly narrated. If the romantic plotline could not be developed, Kubrick claims of Maciek's father that, 'since he is a bit of a mess in the story', there is 'no point to having him around'.³¹ Pondering further his own conundrum, Kubrick asks, 'Should he get killed?', observing that, 'No one but M[aciek] would care very much and he could be lulled'. The director proceeds to list the kinds of death for Maciek's father typical of the era: 'War. Einsatzcommando'.³² Like the suggestions accompanying the Kramers' deportation, these embody the larger dilemma of trying to realize a drama about the wartime genocide. They reverse the priority of history and plot by deploying Holocaust atrocity to resolve matters of narrative coherence.

As an alternative to the possible relationship with Maciek's father, Kubrick tried out the idea of a courtship between Tania and one of the two men whom she and Maciek meet during the final months of the war, when they have fled Warsaw for the rural hamlet of Piasowe. In the novel, the principled Komar, 'the entrepreneur of Piasowe' and supplier of the moonshine vodka known as *bimber*, assists Tania and Maciek immediately on their arrival (162). There is no suggestion of intrigue between him and Tania, by contrast to her association with Nowak, one of Komar's clients and the 'principal dealer' in *bimber*.³³ In the novel, Tania's response to Nowak's advances is, as she tells Maciek, one of deliberate flirtation with a man she privately abhors as a 'repulsive gangster' (174).

Tania's true feelings get the better of her in the novel, necessitating the final flight she and Maciek must take. Maciek overhears his aunt, impatient with Nowak's increasing familiarity, 'shouting ... that he must never again touch her arm, never

²⁹Kubrick, Final treatment.

³⁰Kubrick, Final treatment.

³¹Kubrick, Synopsis, 18.

³²Kubrick, Synopsis, 18.

³³Kubrick, Synopsis, 173.

again forget his place, the war was ending and so was her acquaintance with louts like him' (185). Like that of her father defying the final threat to denounce him, the details of whose death she has just heard, Tania's 'valiant imperiousness' does not resolve but creates a life-threatening problem (Eder 1991). Indeed, the need for her acts of sexual barter such as that with Nowak is laid bare when her willingness to engage in it ends. Nowak's planned 'revenge' for being 'insulted' by Tania is to denounce her and Maciek as Jews to the Gestapo (185–6).

In his screenplay, Kubrick posits an alternative to the novel's depiction of an unmarried woman who, rather than enjoying a conventional romance, tactically trades 'sexual and social favours' to ensure her own and her nephew's safety (Hájková 2013: 503). For the film, by contrast, Kubrick introduces the possibility of a real relationship at first between Tania and Komar, adding 'Romance?' beside the screenplay's version of their first meeting.³⁴ However, on further reflection — 'maybe attracted but too old' — a more suitable match was sought, in the form of Nowak.

The exigencies of an action plot for the film thus overcome the construction of a strategically motivated relationship with Nowak, who is presented in the novel as an antagonist. Kubrick's handwritten notes set out the way in which the film's romance might unfold, suggesting that Nowak rather than Komar could come upon Tania and Maciek when they arrive from Warsaw. As the director puts it: 'maybe start with Nowak!', the exclamation mark conveying his conviction that this could be a breakthrough.³⁵ As Kubrick adds about the location of their first meeting, 'Nowak could chat her up in restaurant', alongside the telling declaration that 'Komar is of no use'.³⁶ In the synopsis, Kubrick adds 'good-looking' to the description of Nowak as the 'local racketeer', laying the ground for Tania's response to be genuine and without ulterior motive.³⁷

As in relation to the putative romance with Maciek's father, the need for cohesive narrative takes precedence here over the inconclusiveness and equivocality of Begley's novel. This priority is affirmed in another idea for Nowak, in which he is drawn into the partisan action of Kubrick's draft denouement. After uncertainty about whether he should be 'their [the Polish resistance's] informant or working for the Germans',³⁸ Kubrick decides on the latter, with the result that 'Nowak is killed'.³⁹ These shadow scenarios show the character's journey from blackmailing gangster to assassinated traitor via that of love interest, in a version of the screenplay in which Tania and Maciek end up in Israel on the state's founding in 1948.⁴⁰ While the outline of Begley's novel persists, the distance from its details within these variations emphasizes what became terminal difficulties for Kubrick's shaping and controlling this story for its filmic form.

³⁴Kubrick, *Aryan Papers*, 18/5/1/5, Scene breakdown, 114, SKA.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 107.

³⁷*Ibid.*, and Synopsis, 11.

³⁸Kubrick, Scene breakdown, 93.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 126.

The revenge plot

The draft romance with Nowak in Piasowe takes place while Tania and Maciek continue to live under the conditions of open hiding in the hope of being reunited with the grandfather. In the novel, Tania eventually hears that another refugee from Warsaw, a man answering to the grandfather's description, 'with a name that could be the right one', is living in a nearby village (178). Her journey alone to the village is told indirectly and in hindsight, just as Maciek hears it from Tania on her return. By the time she got to the village, Tania learnt that the grandfather, described by a local peasant as 'a very fine refugee, with a gold watch and gold rings and money', had been shot a week earlier (183). He was recognized by his former estate manager Miska, who betrayed him to the Germans. Tania hears the news second-hand from this eyewitness to the murder. She does not encounter Miska, although the reporting peasant advocates a visit to the latter's village of Zielne, since Miska 'might want to sell the gold he took from the Pan's body' (183). Tania pretends to ponder a visit to Zielne for this purpose, but instead 'stumbles' back to Piasowe, abandoning a wish for her death only for Maciek's sake (184). Having related Tania's heartbroken account of grandfather's murder, in the novel Maciek simply concludes, 'This was the worst day in our lives'. He and Tania 'cried' until morning when 'we had to get ready for work' (184).

For the film, all the layering of temporality and mediation of voice in relation to the grandfather's death is abandoned in preference for present-time action. Likewise, no trace remains of the novel's portrayal of Tania and Maciek having to resume their tasks in Piasowe 'as usual' the following day (184). Instead, several scenarios inspired by the novel's details but significantly diverging from them are sketched out. In the screenplay, we read this new version of Tania's response to hearing of her father's murder which radically reimagines the novel's constituent details. The suggestion of the peasant in the novel that Tania should seek out Miska is enacted:

Tania will go to Zielne and find Miska's house. She will pretend to be interested in buying jewelry and be offered a piece we recognize as belonging to her father. The scene will build to a climax and end with her killing Miska.⁴¹

These changes to the novel's plot again serve several purposes. These include wish-fulfilment on the part of director and the implied audience about the possibility of a forceful Jewish reaction to persecution and the demands of positive 'narrative uplift' (Nunn 2020: 65). Yet such changes raise in turn other problems in terms of the screenplay. Kubrick's notes on the film's synopsis show his awareness that Miska's death might appear, as he puts it, too 'gimmicky'.⁴² By this he seems to mean lacking in convincing narrative logic, in addition to being uncharacteristic of Tania. Kubrick answers his own question later in the draft, by constructing a chain of cause-and-effect arising from the situation. When Tania travels to Miska's house

⁴¹Kubrick, Screenplay, 124.

⁴²Kubrick, Synopsis, 1.

to inquire about the gold, 'her reaction [to Miska's boasting] betrays she's a Jew. She has to kill him with a Baby Browning' gun, or, in another version, a knife.⁴³

In addition to its borrowing the detail of the Baby Browning — or perhaps the gun itself — from Maciek's recall of his father's 'Browning pistol' much earlier in the novel (16), Tania's act of self-defence in the film's scenario is aligned closely to its concern with the all-important concealment of identity. She has to kill Miska not just to avenge her father but because her elaborate strategy of pretence is at risk. Yet this level of narrative justification was, as Kubrick's additional changes show, not seen to be sufficient. Tania's visit to Miska in the script is positioned as a way of finding out about her father's murder more directly than in the novel, where it emerges only through gossip. Indeed, among his notes for the film's conclusion, Kubrick advances the idea of depicting the murder itself, which, as his handwritten note observes, Begley 'doesn't even dramatize': 'Plant an episode with Pan Miska, [grandfather's] estate manager, who denounces him'.⁴⁴

But, as Kubrick acknowledges, the logistics of such a suspense-filled and emotionally gruelling encounter are hard to picture: 'How could [Tania] prevent Miska from immediately recognizing her?'.⁴⁵ Recognition here means not just Miska's awareness of Tania's family connection to the dead man, but that she too is Jewish. In addition to sketching out possible resolutions to this problem of recognition, ranging from it 'doesn't matter' to '[Miska] denounces her as [he] has father — rabid Jew-hater', Kubrick introduces a further twist to the notion of Tania's revenge which takes the plot even further from that of the novel.⁴⁶ Tania is startlingly described as shooting the rest of Miska's family too: 'his wife and children are seen *but* Tania kills them'.⁴⁷ The weight of the conjunction 'but' seems to imply a reckless campaign of mass vengeance on her part. However, this is another element of the new scenario's efforts to increase tension and maintain the sense of crisis, since we learn that Tania 'knows' she was 'seen by wife'.⁴⁸ Tania shoots to protect herself.

After such a finale, there is no question of everyday life in Piasowe being resumed. Rather, an entirely new episode is hazarded for the film, in which Tania 'flees to forest and partisans', having paused to collect her nephew. Even such flight has to be logically motivated, and Kubrick suggests that 'Nowak and/or Komar will realize she killed Miska' or 'Maybe Nowak warns her to escape/[she] finds partisans or Russian cavalry patrol'.⁴⁹ Involving either of these two men, especially Nowak, whose role in her survival is much more ambivalent in the novel, turns Tania's actions into part of a shared ousting of the Nazi occupiers. Perhaps, as Kubrick adds, this will take the form of visual spectacle in which we might 'see Germans pulling out?'.⁵⁰

Thus conventional conceptions of liberation and victory over Nazism are dramatized. A firm ethical boundary is established between those on the side of the

⁴³Ibid., 12, and Final treatment.

⁴⁴Kubrick, Synopsis, 1; Final treatment.

⁴⁵Kubrick, Final treatment.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., my italics.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

aggressors and those who oppose them, seeming to unite, at this final stage, Polish black-marketeers and Russian soldiers with a Jewish woman and her nephew. In the novel, however, the liberation's function varies. It does not bring Tania and Maciek the freedom to live openly, their staying on in Poland requiring 'new names and new lies' and, even in the post-war era, 'new Aryan papers' (192–3). The dismaying fact of their masquerade having to persist beyond the war's end, and its aftereffects for the adult Maciek's psyche, is the sombre note on which the novel ends. It shows the cost of Jewish survival rather than its unalloyed triumph.

Conclusion

Among the reasons for *Aryan Papers* remaining unproduced is its seeming to be superseded by the release in 1993 of *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg's film about the rescue activities in wartime Poland of the eponymous 'good German'. Kubrick's verdict on Spielberg's film is critical of such unrepresentative stories, as Frederic Raphael reports him saying: 'Think that's about the Holocaust? That was about success, wasn't it? The Holocaust is about six million people who get killed. *Schindler's List* is about 600 who don't' (quoted in Abrams 2023: 352). Kubrick's own filmic project, we might think, would therefore not be 'about success' but address instead the likelihood of death and the liabilities of survival.

Nonetheless, as shown by his struggles with crafting a suitable ending for *Aryan Papers*, including his later returning to plot elements more similar to those in Begley's novel (Grinberg 2021: 209), Kubrick's screenplay can only answer Maciek's rhetorical question from the novel, 'why do we find it so difficult to admire those who are tormented and make no defiant gesture?' (122), by imagining those gestures. This emphasizes the paradoxical outcome of Kubrick's attempt to film Begley's *Wartime Lies*. The director's decision to adapt the novel was prompted by those very aspects of its unusual Holocaust story which made the task so difficult. While his filmography shows that Kubrick did not shy away from contested or demanding projects, Begley's novel posed particular questions arising from its Holocaust-related plot. Kubrick's alterations for *Aryan Papers* highlight these distinctive features, including the fact that its main characters are a young woman and a child, its locations the lodging houses of Polish cities and rural hamlets, as part of this experience of survival by passing. Kubrick's plans foundered on the dilemma of how to give visual substance to a text which centres on the fantasied construction of difference and the psychological consequences of what Maciek in the novel calls being 'chained to the habit of lying' (171).

For Kubrick, the draft ending in which Tania kills Miska is where the 'quest for the heroic' emerges most strongly. Kubrick claims, 'there is very little plot until the uprising', as if only acts of armed insurrection such as this stop the narrative seeming, in his words, 'muddled and undramatic'.⁵¹ The added episode of vengeance killing is designed to give active expression to Tania's courage and her single-minded devotion to her father and nephew, as Kubrick's comment suggests: 'Tania

⁵¹Kubrick, Screenplay, 21.

is ruthless in her pursuit of survival. Unemotional'.⁵² Yet it embodies the Holocaust mythology that only armed resistance has any acknowledged status as a response (Epstein 2008: 286). The addition of acts of revenge on Tania's part constitutes not just a personal response but the 'moral and political statement' of 'taking up arms against the murderers of Jews' (Bauer 2002: 140).

Such additions support Kubrick's claim — and that of Joy McEntee in this special issue — that *Aryan Papers* would really be about Tania, the 'beautiful and brave aunt' (169), rather than Maciek, the novel's first-person narrator. The transfer of novel to screen would dramatize Tania's actions, no longer seen exclusively through Maciek's eyes with the effect that her actions and words would be shown directly, rather than reported second-hand as they are in the novel. As Kubrick concludes, 'Maciek tells the story, it is the story of Tania'.⁵³ This change of emphasis derived from the change of medium, in which events Maciek did not witness are shown independently.

However, although it relies upon the depiction of Tania acting alone, the addition of her acts of armed defiance at the film's denouement exceed the determinism of filmic form. Kubrick's changes reveal the incompatibility of Begley's story of evasion which culminates in 'shame at being alive' (3) with Hollywood expectations of redemptive conclusions and ethical reward, and ultimately the filmic project itself. Begley's novel was not easily adaptable to cinematic form, and Kubrick's decisions about how to make it more filmic became a formal and conceptual impasse which obliterated the grounds on which he had chosen it.

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