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Deadly Discourse: Negotiating Bureaucratic Consensus for the Final Solution through Organizational and Technical Communication

Mark Ward sr
Clemson University, markward@messagemedia.us

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DEADLY DISCOURSE: NEGOTIATING BUREAUCRATIC CONSENSUS FOR THE FINAL SOLUTION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

by Mark Lee Ward, Sr.
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Accepted by:
Dr. Steven Katz, Committee Chair
Dr. Donald McKale
Dr. David Novak
Dr. Sean Williams
ABSTRACT

The Final Solution was largely accomplished in eleven months; its executors, the Nazi SS, faced the constant problem that as killing and plunder escalated so did internal competition and corruption; and the SS deliberately cultivated an intensely competitive and polycratic organizational culture that fit the Nazi worldview of life-as-struggle. By tying these three observations together—that the Final Solution was punctuated, entropic, and polycratic—the problem arises: How did SS organizational communications manage, just barely long enough, to create a temporary social reality that regulated the internal contradictions of its genocidal project and fragmented bureaucracy? This study contends that through its organizational and technical communication—the outwardly normal and communally validated regime of formatted documents, official stationery, preprinted forms, filing codes, organizational nomenclature, and bureaucratic catchphrases—competing SS personnel found a common frame of reference to socially construct rules for temporary cooperation. Thus, their documents became boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Wilson & Herndl, 2007) which bridged competing organizational interests within the rhetorical community (Miller, 1994) of desk-murderers. To explore this thesis an evidentiary sample of surviving documents is selected from a single but representative SS bureau, the Security Police (Sipo) Technical Matters Group that administered the mobile gas van program. The documents are analyzed according to Longo’s (1998) cultural research methodology for technical writing in which texts are examined in their historical and cultural contexts and then analyzed as discourse, followed by an interrogation of how the texts have been ordered by their analysts for
purposes of study and the analysts’ relationships to the text. The organization of this project follows this methodology as Chapter 1 introduces the problem; Chapter 2 provides an historical narrative of the gas van program and its antecedents; Chapter 3 reviews the integrative aspects of the Group members’ national and institutional cultures, and the differentiating aspects of their organizational culture and its various subcultures; Chapter 4 describes the biographies and postwar testimonies of the Group’s principal actors; Chapter 5 introduces and describes the documents themselves; Chapter 6 offers an analysis, grounded in Miller’s (1994) concept of the rhetorical community, of the documents’ textual and visual rhetorics; Chapter 7 provides a discourse analysis of Group members’ use of linguistic resources; Chapter 8 explores various postwar orderings of the lengthiest and most notorious of the gas van texts, prior to and including Katz’s (1992a) introduction of the document into the technical communication literature; Chapter 9 interrogates how subsequent analysts within the discipline have ordered the text and what this may reveal about their relationships to it; and Chapter 10 elaborates possible implications for communication ethics. The research problem is answered with the claim that, rather than understanding the Final Solution only as the operation in extremis of Weberian bureaucratic rationality, the desk-murderers may be viewed as a rhetorical community that held chaos at bay through boundary objects—their documents—that deployed metaphors, narratives, and genres onto which competing interests could project their own interpretations while constructing temporary spaces of cooperation.
DEDICATION

To my wife Donna and her unfathomable love

and to the Six Million and their unfathomable loss
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

CAN GENOCIDE BE REGULATED?

An Ontological Shift

In popular imagination and cultural memory the potent phrases “Final Solution” and “Six Million” impart to the genocide a monolithic quality, a single all-encompassing crime perpetrated against a symbolically composite victim. And this tendency to deal with the unfathomable enormity of the Holocaust by reducing it to a singular act has important consequences for how the genocide is understood. Some ascribe “the Holocaust” to mystery and give it the singular quality of a radical and inexplicable (see Bauer, 1990) disjuncture in history (e.g., Fackenheim, interview with Rosenbaum, 1998, p. xvi; Wiesel, 1989, 2006). A variant on this theme is the view that the Holocaust is an aberration in the otherwise generally upward progress of Western civilization (e.g., Moore, 2005). Others believe “No Hitler, No Holocaust” (Himmelfarb, 1984) and emphasize the driving force of a singular will (e.g., Fleming, 1984)—while in stark contrast, Goldhagen (1996) controversially argued that a desire to eliminate the Jews was a “monolithic” German cultural axiom that the dictator merely catalyzed. Still others see in “the Holocaust” not a singular mystery but a singular continuity—whether a tragic culmination of great social forces rooted in the sweep of European history, as analysts (e.g., Freud, 1939; Lyotard, 1990; Sartre, 1948; Steiner, 1971) and historians (e.g., Cohn-Sherbok, 2002; Fischer, 1998; Mosse, 1978) of anti-Semitism point out, or the horrific denouement to generations of lived experience, a reality lived by the actual Jewish victims and by their descendants in the Jewish Diaspora of today. All of these
perspectives offer their own contributions to our attempts at understanding the genocide. For they rightly draw our attention to what was radical and unprecedented about the Final Solution; or to the dynamics of a totalitarian dictatorship; or to the interplay between cultural attitudes and individual actions; or how a potential for genocide was latent in European anti-Semitism; or how any history of the Shoah that ignores the victims’ experience is inadequate and incomplete.

Yet to explore the organizational and technical communication of the Final Solution, as this study endeavors to do, we must begin by limning the consequences of another reductionist ontology that is prevalent in the scholarly study of organizations—and then suggesting the possibilities opened by two alternatives to that ontology.

Since the discipline of “management science” emerged a century ago, scholars in organization studies have historically hewed to a functionalist or positivist ontology (Corman, 2005). In this view, “organizations” are ontologically distinct entities whose behaviors are driven not by individual mindsets but by the constant quest to maximize efficiency and productivity. Thus, from observations of organizational behaviors can causal theories be derived and predictions made “with the consciousness of the actors being superfluous” since decision-makers are impelled “to choose the option that best fits the situation and produces the best outcomes” (Donaldson, 2003, pp. 44-45). This way of thinking is, with respect to the Final Solution, neatly expressed by what Bauman (1989) called the “bureaucratic definition of the Holocaust” when he contended that “except for the moral repulsiveness of its goal . . . the activity did not differ in any formal sense . . . from all other organized activities designed, monitored and supervised by ‘ordinary’
administrative and economic sections” (p. 14). As such, the Final Solution “fits well the sober description of modern administration offered by Max Weber,” that efficiency and productivity are “raised to the optimum point” by an objective “discharge of business according to calculable rules and without regard for persons” (p. 14).

Since Bauman (1989) first advanced his thesis some twenty years ago, his insight has made a signal contribution to Holocaust studies. First, in addition to centuries of religious anti-Semitism, the modern development in Western culture of a capacity for bureaucratic and technological organization must likewise be regarded as a necessary condition for the Final Solution. Second, recognition that the Final Solution was a latent potentiality of Western bureaucratic and technological culture—indeed, the reverse side of a coin whose more familiar face is the “progress” we so often admire—is a profoundly important ethical insight. Yet no thesis is final. Bauer (2001) cogently pointed out that Bauman constructed an ontologically prior entity called “modernity” as the mainspring of the Final Solution, leaving little room for individual actors and their motivations. Here again we see—in reference to the Holocaust—the same ontological conversation found in organization studies between functionalist scholars who give primacy to the organization and other scholars who give primacy to organizational actors.

What, then, if we take the latter perspective? What if we look at the Final Solution with a different ontology, an alternative way of seeing the world? What if we hold up a different lens, one which looks with incredulity at grand narratives that—for all their value to our understanding of the genocide—would ultimately reduce the Holocaust to the monolithic singularities described above? And more specifically, what if we leave
behind the notion there are autonomous entities called “organizations” and instead see them as temporary clusters of consensus—fitfully negotiated and constructed through members’ communicative interactions—in the ongoing contest between larger historical, cultural, and social discourses? Indeed, what if we see the individuals themselves—even the bureaucratic murderers of the Nazi SS—not as fully integrated sites of intentionality but, instead, as sites of contestation between multiple voices? What insights might this shift of perspective impart to our understanding of the Holocaust and, in particular, the organizational and technical communication of the Final Solution?

Such an ontological shift opens the way, I believe, to new perspectives that can complement and expand our understandings of the genocide. We will better appreciate, for example, how the Nazi SS—the organization with primary responsibility to execute the Final Solution—was a fragmented hothouse of internal competition among highly personalized fiefdoms and overlapping power bases “that remained unresolved from the beginning” (Langerbein, 2004, p. 41), inhabited by men schooled in Nazi doctrine “to be a fighter on principle, a fighter for fighting’s sake” (Buchheim, 1965/1968, p. 322). We will see how the goal of a rationally controlled genocide was constantly undermined by an inherent contradiction within the project itself, as the SS was “confronted with an ongoing and intractable issue: How to stem wanton murder in an organization set up for mass murder; how to stem widespread corruption in an organization set up for large-scale looting?” (Friedländer, 2007, p. 544) And we will see, as Browning (1998) averred, that the SS genocidal project was “not a gradual or incremental program stretched over a long period of time but a veritable blitzkrieg, a massive offensive requiring the mobilization of
large numbers of shock troops” who then executed “a short, intensive wave of murder” that was largely accomplished in eleven months (p. xv).

Polycratic, entropic, punctuated. These adjectives are not typically used to describe the Final Solution. Many valuable studies (e.g., Allen, 2002; Aly, 2002/1991; Hilberg, 2003; Orth, 1998; Segev, 1987; Westermann, 2005; Wildt, 2003) have looked at the machinery of destruction from a functionalist ontology (as organization studies scholars define functionalism) which emphasizes the shared organizational values of SS members. But a shift in perspective—one that allows us to see the polycratic, entropic, and punctuated qualities of the genocidal program—permits us to appreciate how two other ontologies within organization studies, the interpretive and the postmodern, can add to our understanding. The interpretive view (e.g., Allen, 2005; Heracleous, 2006) regards organizations as “social realities . . . constructed by the actors in those situations, acting together” (Hatch & Yanow, 2003, p. 69). And postmodern scholars (e.g., Boje, Gephart & Thatchenkery, 1998; Burrell, 1988; Chia, 2003; Cooper, 1989; Cooper & Burrell, 1988; Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2006; Kilduff & Mehr, 1997; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Taylor, 2005) in organization studies deny Schein’s (1992) classic formulation that organizations are “a pattern of shared basic assumptions” (p. 12), rejecting the metaphor of organizations as “containers of tasks, technologies, and job functions” in which “communication is the way to attain message fidelity [and] organization is the means of attaining productivity and efficiency” (Putnam, Phillips & Chapman, 1996, p. 395). Instead they see organizations as fragmented and decentered constellations of temporary consensus embedded in larger historical, cultural and social discourses, sites where
knowledge is ambiguous and power is contested via multiple discourses. A functionalist approach would see Nazi SS organizational and technical communication as instruments for optimizing the organization’s awful purpose. And because functionalists “assume that organizational communication is encapsulated within the confines of an ontologically prior entity, the organization,” then “communication so situated is of course influenced if not determined by its pre-established [organizational] wrapper” (McPhee and Poole, 2001, p. 503). But through an interpretive approach we can see how communication was not just one of many things that the SS “did” but was constitutive of the organization itself, as its members negotiated and constructed a sense of themselves. And through a postmodern approach we can grasp how the social spaces SS members negotiated through their organizational and technical communications were constantly in flux, riven by contests among multiple voices over power and knowledge. In the end, as I will argue, we will see how Nazi SS communications—and in particular, their everyday documents—functioned as what Star and Griesemer (1989) called “boundary objects” that span the interstices of organizations because they are “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (p. 393). As such, these objects (in the Star and Griesemer study, the objects were geographical maps, specimen collections, and museum displays) come “to form a common boundary between the worlds [of project participants] by inhabiting them both simultaneously” (p. 412). Wilson and Herndl (2007) recently extended the concept to demonstrate how a boundary object (in their case, a project organization chart) can work rhetorically to
negotiate differences when parties are driven by “integrative exigence” to form a “trading zone” or “temporary space of cooperation and exchange between different disciplines or subdisciplines” (p. 132, citing Galison, 1997).

Similarly, this study will demonstrate how everyday documents of the Nazi SS functioned as boundary objects in holding together a fragmented bureaucracy just barely long enough to execute its genocidal blitzkrieg. As an alternative to the functionalist view that organizational communications are primarily instrumental, I will show how the texts’ rhetorical plasticity permitted competing SS interests to map their own interpretations onto the documents, while at the same time marshaling a common fund of rhetorical resources by which these interests—under the goad of an integrative exigence—negotiated a temporary space of cooperation. This thesis is keeping with, and indeed illustrates the value of, the interpretive and postmodern perspectives in organization studies which, respectively, hold that communication is constitutive of organization and that organizations are sites of contestation and consensus between multiple discourses.

Revisiting the Final Solution

The historiographical implications of an interpretive and postmodern view of the organizational challenge faced by the Nazi SS—that is, a view that takes into account the polycratic, entropic, and punctuated qualities of its genocidal project—are dramatically suggested by the testimony of Franz Stangl, the former commandant of Treblinka. In a 1971 prison interview he could still recount in vivid detail his first sight of the death camp in the late summer of 1942:
I drove there, with an SS driver. . . . We could smell it kilometers away. The road ran alongside the railway. When we were about fifteen, twenty minutes’ drive from Treblinka we began to see corpses by the [railway] line, first just two or three, then more, and as we drove into the Treblinka station, there were what looked like hundreds of them—just lying there—they’d obviously been there for days, in the heat. In the station was a train full of Jews, some dead, some still alive—just lying there—they’d obviously been there for days. . . . When I entered the camp and got out of the car on the square I stepped knee-deep into money; I didn’t know which way to turn, where to go. I waded in notes, currency, precious stones, jewelry, clothes. . . . The smell was indescribable; the hundreds, no, thousands of bodies everywhere, decomposing, putrefying. Across the square, in the woods, just a few hundred yards away on the other side of the barbed-wire fence and all around the perimeter of the camp, there were tents and open fires with groups of Ukrainian guards and girls—whores, I found out later, from all over the countryside—weaving drunk, dancing, singing, playing music. (Sereny, 1974, p. 157)

Stangl’s account beggars belief, conjuring a scene so fantastic as to recall the fevered hellscapes of Heironymous Bosch rather than anything human. Treblinka opened its gates July 22, 1942, and gassed its first victims the next day; within five weeks the operation had murdered some 312,000 Jews (Friedländer, 2007, p. 357) and deteriorated into the surreal tableau described by Stangl. Another SS officer who arrived about the same time
corroborated the scene, adding that SS guards stood on nearby rooftops and shot indiscriminately into arriving transports of Jewish victims in an improvised attempt at crowd control. But the shooting elicited such screams and cries that the SS hastily assembled a small orchestra in hopes of drowning out the noise and calming the new arrivals (Evans, 2009, p. 290). At least in its opening phase, if the Nazis’ own accounts are to be believed, the lethal chaos of Treblinka belied Bauman’s (1989) “bureaucratic definition of the Holocaust” (p. 14) in which

mass murder on an unprecedented scale depended on the availability of well-developed and firmly entrenched skills and habits of meticulous and precise division of labor, of maintaining a smooth flow of command and information, or of impersonal, well-synchronized coordination of autonomous yet complementary actions: on those skills and habits, in short, which best grow and thrive in the atmosphere of the office. (p. 15)

If we write a historical interpretation of the Final Solution that eschews a functionalist ontology and instead emphasizes the polycratic, entropic, and punctuated aspects of the genocide—that is, if we choose to proceed not from an assumption that organizations such as the SS and the Nazi state and party are entities with autonomous existences, but that organizations must be constantly negotiated and constructed by their members—then we are compelled to address the question: How did the genocide progress from its initial disorganization to its later organization? After all, on second thought would it not be
more reasonable to expect that, in an operation as massively unprecedented as the Vernichtungslager, rapid deterioration and degeneracy should have been the norm? Treblinka “processed” 312,000 victims in its first five weeks; Belzec 75,000 in four weeks; Sobibor 100,000 in three months; Chelmno 97,000 in six months (Friedlander, 2007, pp. 357, 363). Try to imagine the unimaginable: packed trains arriving daily, hundreds or thousands gassed within hours of debarkation, heaping mountains of decaying corpses, bulging warehouses of ownerless valuables, workers prying gold fillings from dead teeth, captors increasingly desensitized to any restraints. Nothing like this had been attempted in human history. Even the perpetrators lacked the cognitive apparatus to assimilate such a fantasy world. “Oh God, the smell. It was everywhere,” Stangl later recalled of a visit to Belzec in spring 1942, “the pits . . . full, they were full. I can’t tell you; not hundreds, thousands, thousands of corpses.” His lasting impression was the sight of a mass-burial pit filled so far above its capacity that “putrefaction had progressed too fast, so that the liquid underneath had pushed the bodies on top up and over and the corpses had rolled down the hill” (Sereny, 1974, p. 111).

Belzec began receiving victims March 17, 1942, using gas chambers of crude wooden construction that “were constantly breaking down, leaving deportees waiting for days without food and water,” and forcing the commandant to shut down the operation during June and July while new concrete gas chambers were built (Evans, 2009, p. 286). After Sobibor commenced killing operations in mid-May 1942 its mass graves, like those at Belzec, soon overflowed; when the putrefaction also entered the water table and began to contaminate the camp water supply the pits had to be excavated with a bulldozer (p.
The Sobibor gas chambers were shut down more than two months for reconstruction and expansion (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 222). Treblinka started gassings July 23, 1942, but the camp was even more inefficient than its predecessors as “gas chambers frequently broke down, sometimes when the victims were already inside, where they were forced to wait for hours until repairs were completed” and the inability to dig new burial pits fast enough meant “soon there were unburied bodies everywhere” (Evans, 2009, p. 291). To deal with the numbers, guards at times reverted to shooting Jews on arrival rather than gassing them. Lack of housing for camp guards forced them to pitch tents outside the fence, where they drank through the night with local prostitutes.

Likewise, the system of transports was often conducted through inefficient trial and error. Many Jewish survivors tell stories of lengthy and circuitous train journeys to the camps and of being made to wait for days at a time along the way. As late as 1943 the SS was still experimenting with transport procedures—in June that year, victims in one transport were stripped naked prior to departure in hopes of preventing escapes en route; half of the fifty freight cars arrived without a single passenger left alive (Evans, 2009, p. 288). From the German point of view it was far more efficient for the victims to walk the last mile themselves. Yet the influx of victims was at times so great, cattle cars packed with Jews were left standing for hours or days on a siding until the victims—those who had not died in the interim—could be processed. And the death camps themselves were ad hoc responses to the mounting disarray of the genocide’s first wave, what Desbois (2008) has evocatively called “The Holocaust by Bullets” in which the ranks of roaming SS death squads experienced massive nervous breakdowns and even suicides as their
execution-style killings escalated into the tens and hundreds of thousands. Although the SS established nerve clinics for traumatized killers, “Psychologically for the perpetrators, and perhaps even more for their superiors, it became increasingly difficult to deal with the repercussions of the mass executions” (Langerbein, 2004, p. 48).

The SS itself was the apotheosis of the unbureaucratic, personalized “polycracy” that thrived in Hitler’s Reich and gradually undermined the German civil service tradition of rational state government. Even in 1943 when SS chief Heinrich Himmler was also named Reich Interior Minister, he still “struggled to control what was rapidly becoming less an organization than a collection of disparate mini-empires,” prompting a key SS leader to quip that Himmler was “really organizing disorder” (Mazower, 2008, p. 256). Though a broad consensus existed about the supposed reality of “the Jewish enemy” and the justice of its physical annihilation in wartime, SS bureaus competed bitterly with each other and with outside agencies—the Party, the state apparatus, the military, the business cartels—to control aspects of Jewish policy according to their own priorities on killing methods, timing, labor utilization, and resource allocation. This struggle is symptomatic of the very inability of the Nazi polycracy to economically (Overy, 1995) and politically (Mazower, 2008) rationalize German territorial gains, which was a major factor in Germany’s defeat. Nazi strategy was founded on blitzkrieg victories rather than a long war of attrition, and thus on exploitation rather than integration of conquered territories.

Then, too, even as the SS succeeded in murdering millions, its “success” at genocide and exploitation sowed seeds of disorganization through increased infighting, looting, corruption, and barbarization in its own ranks. The Final Solution, like the Nazi
system itself, constantly fought to control a restlessly destructive dynamism that animated the entire enterprise in the first place. As it was, the major SS offensive against the Jews spanned, by Browning’s (1998) reckoning, only the eleven months between mid-March 1942 and mid-February 1943 (p. xv). In March 1942 the Jewish communities of Europe were still largely intact and 80 percent of the Six Million still alive; eleven months later Jewish communal life in Europe was destroyed and 80 percent of the Six Million were dead. In fact, the Final Solution—if it is defined as the programmatic attempt by the Nazi SS at physical annihilation of the European Jews on a continental scale—can be conceived as three phases: (1) the initial period, roughly from the summer of 1941 through the summer of 1942, in which the operations of the SS mobile shooting squads and then the openings of the death camps were characterized by widespread breakdowns; (2) the most “productive” period, roughly from the fall of 1942 through the voluntary closing of most death camps between the spring and fall of 1943; and (3) the final period in 1944 when the remaining camps were briefly revived for “mop up” operations. Thus, the middle period—the one that lives on in popular imagination as typifying vaunted German efficiency—lasted little more than a year, albeit with the breathtaking destruction documented by Browning. Chelmno was in operation for about 16 months (until April 1943, although briefly revived for three months in 1944); Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka for about 15 months (until October 1943); Majdanek for about 13 months (until November 1943); and only the gas chambers at Auschwitz kept going through the end of 1944 (Kogon et al. 1993/1983, pp. 220-224). By the fall of 1943 the signs of bureaucratic breakdown were apparent. In October, Himmler publicly threatened capital punishment
for camp officers who took “even one fur, even one watch, even one Mark or cigarette,” and sacked the commandant and administration of Auschwitz after SS investigators uncovered massive corruption and unauthorized killings of prisoners (Friedländer, 2007, p. 544). By 1944 Himmler’s control was starting to slip; when he ordered deportations halted to curry favor with the advancing Allies, Eichmann’s team spurned the new policy and simply continued sending Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz (Cesarini, 2004).

In the end, however, Treblinka and the other death camps—Auschwitz chief among them—experienced an initial chaotic phase but ultimately settled into a semblance of lethally bureaucratic discipline. How did this happen? The outcome was not inevitable; countering the inherently entropic tendencies of the Final Solution was contingent on individual and corporate action. But what action? This study argues that communication—specifically, organizational and technical communication—is the action that we must examine, for “organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse . . . the principle means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are” (Mumby & Clair, 1997, p. 181). The Treblinka that confronted Stangl in the late summer of 1942 was not coherent; left in that condition, the camp might have succeeded at its initial spasm of murder but been incapable of organizing a sustained program of genocide. Yet somehow, communication created coherence and imparted identity. That is the process this study aims to explore.

By proceeding from interpretive and postmodern perspectives that take into account that polycratic, entropic, and punctuated aspects of the Final Solution, we can reformulate our problem this way: How did SS organizational and technical
communications manage, just barely long enough, to create a short-term social reality that regulated the internal contradictions of its genocidal project and fragmented bureaucracy? This study will demonstrate how SS documents served as boundary objects onto which differing interests could map their own knowledges, triangulate mutually acceptable rules of action and socially construct spaces for temporary cooperation, thereby achieving the modicum of discipline and self-regulation (Deetz, 1998; Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1988; Jacques, 1996) required to mobilize and temporarily hold together a short-term genocidal blitzkrieg.

While acknowledging the value of Bauman’s functionalist “bureaucratic definition” of the Final Solution, the interpretive and postmodern perspectives also have much to offer. For one, they fit the historical record which portrays the SS as a distinctive social world characterized by constant struggle. The interpretive view recognizes that organizations are created by their members’ discourses, while the postmodern view forsakes “the premise that there is some pre-existing social object called ‘organization,’ which is defined by formal features and cohesive behaviors” and allows the analyst to see in SS organizational and technical communications “an array of multiple meanings . . . that require careful deconstruction in order to reveal the concealed and marginalized elements within them and thereby open them up for alternative interpretations” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putnam, 2004, p. 17). In fact the functionalist, interpretive, and postmodern approaches can be complementary rather than mutually exclusive—as suggested by Martin’s (1992, 2002; Martin, Frost & O’Neil, 2006) observation that at any given time organizations manifest the three dimensions of integration (what organization
members share), *differentiation* (how members inhabit different values, practices, and subcultures that must be negotiated), and *fragmentation* (how members forge temporary and issue-specific consensus amidst organizational change, confusion, and ambiguity).

Given the complex interplay of these three dimensions, organizational texts may have surface structures that appear stable and centered but also reveal structural processes by which “subjectivity and social reality are (re-)produced in an organizational milieu.” Collaboratively authored texts “are not singular, stable, or consensual” and potential meanings for stakeholders are “both precarious and prolific” (Taylor, 2005, p. 122). Surface consistency is belied as organizational interests splinter “into networks based on tasks, relationships, information, and functions” and members “create many belief systems or subcultures” so that “competing assumptions and values create a fuzziness where assumptions and values are contradictory” (Keyton, 2005, p. 37). How are these contradictions reconciled, if only temporarily? As I endeavor to show, organizational actors can generate boundary objects to meet the needs of their integrative exigences.

**Sample, Method, and Chapter Organization**

In exploring the organizational and technical communication of the Final Solution it is, of course, impossible to survey all surviving documents. A sampling is necessary, one that it is both manageable in size and yet representative. Such a sampling is found in surviving documents from SS Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei* or “Sipo”) Technical Matters Group that administered the so-called *Sonderwagen* or mobile gas van program. When mobile SS shooting squads or *Einsatzgruppen* proved psychologically unprepared
and logistically too few as the killing of Soviet Jews escalated, the SS attempted the expedient of bringing poison gas to their victims—before later settling on the method of bringing their victims to the gas. Browning (1991) has thus suggested,

Though the gas van was in retrospect a temporary solution to some of the technological and psychological problems facing the Germans in carrying out the Final Solution, it was not an insignificant episode. The fall of 1941 and spring of 1942, when the gas van was being developed and produced, spanned a crucial period in the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy when systemic mass murder of Jews outside Russia was just getting underway. . . . In this regard the history of the gas van reveals at least some continuity between the Einsatzgruppen operations and the subsequent attempt to extend the Final Solution to the rest of European Jews, and rather extensive cooperation by central authorities in Berlin. (pp. 57-58)

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the SS Einsatzgruppen roamed behind the advancing front to liquidate Jewish communities in the East. Though the death squads had received their charge from Berlin and were supplied with munitions and vehicles, SS field commanders decided their own movements and targets. The gas vans, however, represented a transition to the primacy of central administration, for the Sipo Technical Matters Group “was not only responsible for the constructions of the gas vans, but it directed/orchestrated centrally . . . the operations of the gas vans, providing the vans, drivers, and . . . parts/equipment; it controlled/supervised and coordinated the
operationing [sic] of the vehicles” (Beer, 1987, p. 415). Although in postwar trials the automotive and chemical experts of the Sonderwagen program disclaimed knowledge of the vehicles’ purpose, noted Browning (1991), “Their own documents portray a different picture” in which Berlin technicians were “kept fully abreast of the problems arising in the field,” responded with innovative adjustments to garner acceptance from superiors and internal clients, blamed others for what could not be fixed, and “developed the euphemistic code language so typical of the Final Solution—it hid reality from [private subcontractors] and at least partially from themselves” (p. 67). Here we see, in the first attempt by the SS to centrally administer its Final Solution, the role of organizational and technical communication in—as Mumby and Clair’s (1997) thesis would predict—creating a coherent social reality and framing members’ identities.

Thus, an analysis of documents from the Sipo Technical Matters Group offers, first of all, the opportunity to examine a sampling of the Final Solution in microcosm at the moment when decentralized killing was giving way to central administration. Second, the gas van program was of limited duration and run by a single, relatively small SS bureau, so that its surviving paper trail—seven documents in all—is manageable. Yet, third, the Sonderwagen program was large enough to yield a representative cross-section of documents (a routine letter, field report, engineering proposal, requisitions, replies—all replete with visual cues, filing codes, and often extensive handwritten marginalia) and SS personnel (executive, expert, managerial, non-managerial, clients). Fourth, extensive testimony from gas van program participants at all organizational levels was taken for postwar trials and their “organizational stories” (Boje, 1991, 1995, 2001; Pacanowski &
O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) offer much information on the organizational life of the Group and its personnel. Fifth, by examining a corpus of documents from the same bureau—rather than analyzing single texts in isolation—the analyst can see the flow of documents in light of their historical and cultural contexts and the biographies of the actors, permitting an attempt to reconstruct (or deconstruct) the organizational discourse of which the texts were a part. And sixth, the lengthiest of the documents has received wide attention in the technical communication literature (e.g., Dombrowski, 2000a; Katz, 1992a) so that new insights from this study may be compared with other scholars.

The literature on technical communication also furnishes an appropriate methodology for this study, namely Longo’s (1998) proposal that cultural research into the object of technical writing be delimited in five ways: (1) the object as discourse; the object within its (2) cultural and (3) historical contexts; (4) the object as ordered by its analyst; and (5) the object’s relationship to its analyst. In operationalizing this method, this study will rearrange Longo’s ordering of her five delimiters. The study will begin by providing the historical context of the SS gas van program (Chapter 2); move next to the cultural contexts by proceeding in descending order from the integrative dimensions of Nazi German national culture and the institutional culture of the Nazi movement, and the differentiating dimensions of the organizational culture of the SS and its various bureaus (Chapter 3), to the fragmenting dimensions of local organizational subcultures and their various actors and interests (Chapter 4); explore the discourses of the Sipo Technical Matters Group by first introducing and describing the gas van documents (Chapter 5) and then analyzing the killers’ use of textual and visual rhetorics (Chapter 6) and language
(Chapter 7) to do the “boundary work” (Wilson & Herndl, 2007) required to temporarily bridge their differing interests and (re)produce their rhetorical community; follow the different orderings imposed on the most notorious of the gas van documents by tracing the surprising postwar provenance of the distinctive translation that Katz (1992a) first introduced into the technical communication literature (Chapter 8) and by tracing how the document has since become a boundary object in bridging the diverse interests and motivations of technical communication scholars around a consensus interpretation of the document’s ethical implications for their discipline (Chapter 9); and finally suggest the ethical implications of the “ontological shift” proposed by present research in which the document is viewed in social rather than solely individual terms (Chapter 10).

The Importance of the Study

Continued study of the Holocaust is important because factors that contributed to the Final Solution—bureaucratic specialization and the technology to wield power at a distance from its consequences—are accelerating in our own generation beyond what could be imagined even in the Third Reich. Investigating the extreme case of the Final Solution puts into stark relief the dynamics by which organizational and technical communication can be employed to regulate and control even self-contradictory and ultimately destructive ends, thus furnishing an extreme-case sample of great significance for denaturalizing this regulatory dynamic in contemporary organizations.

This project likewise has significance for Holocaust Studies. I am not aware of any close studies of the organizational and technical communication of the Holocaust,
certainly none that meaningfully bring to bear the relevant literatures. In the twenty years since the sociologist Bauman published *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), his thesis—that the genocide was not an aberration of Western modernity but a result of potentialities latent in its capacity for bureaucratic and technological organization—has gained broad acceptance. As it happens, I agree with Bauman that the Holocaust “uncover[ed] another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire” (p. 7). But I cannot go so far as his assertion that “the very idea of the Endlösung [Final Solution] was an outcome of the bureaucratic culture” (p. 15). This is the functionalist view that organizational imperatives ultimately drive individual actions, a view that is increasingly questioned within organization studies. Thus, against Bauman’s contention that organizational cultures drive ideas, my study suggests that ideas construct organizational cultures as those ideas are communicated among organization members.

A similar rejoinder to Bauman’s thesis was advanced by the eminent Holocaust historian Bauer (2001). The German bureaucracy, he noted, “often was a fumbling, ineffective, contradiction-ridden machine, where each fiefdom in the Nazi state had its own interests and fought against everyone else to preserve them,” so that “the unique efficiency they showed in destroying the Jews, often for pseudo-pragmatic reasons, really showed the remarkable impact of ideology on them” (p. 78). My study illustrates how competing desk-murderers negotiated spaces for consensus. Thus, the Holocaust is not evidence for the capacity of modern bureaucratic culture to produce either progressive or destructive ideas, but rather the capacity of progressive or destructive ideas to cohere as social realities through the communications of modern bureaucrats.
CHAPTER TWO

FROM DARWIN TO DEATH WAGONS

Origins of European Anti-Semitism

What destructive ideas, then, ultimately cohered as social realities through the communications of the SS gas van bureaucrats? Because ideas and ideologies are historical rather than natural—although the dominant interests in organizations would wish it to appear otherwise—then an answer to this question must excavate the historical discourses that formed the ideologies. Such is the kind of broad inquiry that Kynell and Seely (2002) advocated for employing historical methods in technical communication research—an inquiry that broadly explores historical contexts and interpretations, while generating a framework for gathering data and evaluating their relevance so that the analyst can identify patterns, construct a narrative, and advance an interpretation. Piecing together a narrative of the Sonderwagen program can provide a working set of facts from which to contextualize the murders. Even more, the exercise permits the cultural critic to historicize that which had become the naturalized “common sense” of the Sipo Technical Matter Group—exposing axioms that, because they broadly and unconsciously resonated among the Group’s competing interests, enabled members to produce texts which could become boundary objects and temporarily bridge intraorganizational differences.

Such bridging was required in part because the SS desk-murderers “clearly understood that their deeds were not positive except in the value system of the Third Reich” (Lozowick, 2000, p. 8) and needed a countervailing ideology to overcome long-held and traditionally ingrained Christian beliefs against the killing of innocent life. By
the time of the Final Solution, however, history had produced such an ideology, one that ultimately made Judeocide the “common sense” of a vast modern bureaucracy. What was this history?

Though the Jews of Europe created over two millennia a rich and vibrant culture, their story is indelibly marred by tragedy and victimization that culminated in the greatest crime of the age. Their culture and identity were shaped by a diasporic history in which they faced ongoing pressures and hostilities from the dominant cultures in which they resided. “Jewish history cannot be told as the history of the Jews only, because they have nearly always lived within the context of other civilizations” (Dimont, 1962, p. ix). And nearly always they have lived within the context of anti-Semitism. In Christian Europe the roots of anti-Semitism “can be traced back to New Testament teaching,” noted Cohn Sherbok (2002), for whether or not one believes “the Gospels and Paul’s epistles are inherently anti-Jewish, there is no doubt that the Church has used Scripture as a framework for its teaching of contempt” (p. 34). And further, as Crossan (1996) observed, “Without that Christian anti-Judaism, lethal and genocidal European anti-Semitism would have been either impossible or at least not widely successful” (p. 35).

Dimont (1962) has divided Jewish history into six phases, each of which presented challenges that threatened the Jews’ survival: their encounters with ancient Egypt and the Mesopotamian empires; with the Greco-Roman empires; with diaspora throughout the Mediterranean world; with the Islamic empire; with the Christian Europe of the Middle Ages; and with the modern age of virulent anti-Semitism. Similarly, Carroll (2001) has characterized Jewish history as defined against the three genocides
committed against the Jews by ancient Babylonia and Assyria, by the Roman empire, and during the European Holocaust.

While the history of the Jewish nation extends more than four thousand years, one place to begin the story of European Jewry is the year 63 BCE when the Jews of Palestine were first confronted by a European power. That year Rome conquered Jerusalem and instituted a brutal colonial occupation. When the Jews revolted through a series of three wars in 66-73, 113 and 132-35 CE, the Romans first destroyed Jerusalem and its Jewish Temple, and finally expelled all Jews from Palestine. Estimates of the Jewish population at the time range from half a million to 2.5 million, but “the ratio of Jewish dead in Palestine at the hands of Rome may well approximate the twentieth-century record of one in three” Jews worldwide who died in the Holocaust (Carroll, 2001, p.79). Thus the Roman genocide may have killed as many as 800,000 Jews before selling the survivors into slavery and exiling any escapees from their homeland. “In the second century CE, the majority of Jews were stateless and dispersed into every corner of the Roman world, from India to the Atlantic Ocean, over three continents” (Dimont, 1962, p. 118-119).

And they were cast into a world that regarded them with hostility disproportionate to their numbers. In Greco-Roman times, noted Johnson (1987), “the specific hostility towards the Jews was a function of Jewish monotheism and its social consequences.” Their custom of male circumcision “was regarded by the Greco-Roman world as barbarous and distasteful,” while Jewish laws of diet and cleanliness discouraged social intercourse with Gentile society and “perhaps more than any other factor, focused hostility on Jewish communities” (pp. 133-134). Riots against the Jews broke out in
many cities and the Jews were excoriated by Cicero (for being “superstitious barbarians”), Horace (“proselytizing and credulous”), Livy (“atheists”), Seneca (“accursed race”), Quintillian (“a curse”), Apion (ritual murderers), Martial (lechers and beggars), Tacitus (“base and abominable”), and Juvenal (mercenary beggars); thus the Romans “had already concocted all the libels, issued all the slurs, made all the jokes, and promulgated all the misunderstandings that would cause the Jews of Europe twenty centuries of suffering . . . [and] laid the groundwork for classic European anti-Semitism” (Konner, 2003, pp. 83-89).

How did Jewish culture and identity survive the destruction of its capital, the end of its historic political and religious system, and the genocide and dispersion of its people? “They responded to this new challenge with another formula for survival: Diaspora Judaism” (Dimont, 1962, p. 118). Thus the stage was set for the subsequent history of the Jews of Europe—a people without a national territory, keeping themselves apart from their hosts, thereby retaining a religious and racial identity but also inspiring the suspicion and hostility of others who regarded the Jews as aliens in their midst. This situation was then cemented by two critical developments. First, the Jews replaced the destroyed Temple system of national leadership, which had been based in Jerusalem, with a decentralized rabbinical or Diaspora Judaism in which rabbis (teachers) presided over local synagogues. Their “creation of a religious-legal code, the Talmud . . . served as a unifying force and a spiritual rallying point . . . [that] almost invisibly ruled the Jews for close to fifteen hundred years” (Dimont, 1962, p. 17).

The second development that shaped the subsequent history of the European Jews
was the rise of Christianity. With “Greco-Roman antipathy . . . as the background for the emergence of Christian hostility towards the Jewish nation” (Cohn-Sherbok, 2002, p. 17), the Roman Empire’s conversion to Christianity under Constantine in the fourth century made the Church heir to the pagan world’s anti-Jewish prejudice. “The virulence of Christian Jew-hatred stemmed from grafting the blame of the Gospels [for allegedly killing Christ] onto a trunk and root already thick and deep” (Konner, 2003, p. 89). And when the once-powerless Christian church became an imperial institution, its animus against the Jews was no longer “relatively benign propaganda” but instead “turned lethal” (Crossan, 1996, p. 152). Thus developed an uneasy coexistence as separatistic Talmudic Judaism and a Christian host culture that was largely anti-Jewish were thrown together in the same geographic space.

Over the ensuing centuries the two cultures could at times coexist in relative peace. Jews were invited to settle in Italy, France, and Germany during the sixth through eighth centuries to help found cities and encourage trade. By the eleventh century, a sophisticated Sephardic Jewish culture emerged in Moorish Spain and Portugal, and a vibrant Yiddish-language Ashkenazic Jewish culture arose in France and Germany. But in time, the pendulum again swung back toward persecution. Jews fled the Rhineland in 1096 when Crusaders slaughtered Jewish communities on the way to the Holy Land and “blood libel” accusations arose that charged Jews with the ritual murder of Christian children. By the fourteenth century Jews were blamed for the European outbreak of bubonic plague—because, perhaps due to their cleansing regulations, they survived in proportionately greater numbers than their gentile neighbors. Jews fled to Poland and the
Slavic lands after more than 350 Jewish communities in Germany were destroyed by mobs (Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996, p. 33), even as Jews were banished from England and France and forcibly baptized in Spain. The Spanish Inquisition was instituted in 1478 to root out “converted” Jews who secretly practiced their first religion, until the Sephardic Jews were expelled altogether from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497.

Official ghettoization of the Jews began in 1555 when Pope Paul IV mandated the creation of a sealed Jewish enclave in Rome (Kertzer, 2001, pp. 27-28). Europe’s Catholic rulers followed suit in their own countries throughout Southern Europe and then Protestant lands in Northern Europe took up the trend. These walled ghettos, invariably situated in the least desirable quarters of a city, were intended to prevent all but narrow commercial contacts between Jews and Christians. The “solution” of sealed ghettos occurred naturally to the European mindset of the age since the continent’s polity was based on self-administering dukedoms, baronies, and guilds. Councils of ghetto elders, charged with collecting heavy taxes and raising the funds to support community services, soon evolved into corrupt oligarchies that shifted the burden to the peasantry. The Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe were also ghettoized. But because Poland (then an imperial federation of Poland, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Lithuania) had few large cities, segregation evolved into the founding of exclusively Jewish villages and hamlets, which were administered by regional councils of elders that also favored their own cliques. “While the Jews enjoyed communal autonomy . . . they could not participate in political life” so that, as the Polish empire began to pull apart under a welter of competing ethnic elites, the Jews’ already weak situation worsened over time (Dwork & Van Pelt, 1996, p. 34). The desperation of
Jewish life gave rise to Hasidism, a mystic and revivalist variant of the Judaism that in time became dominant in Eastern Europe.

The Protestant Reformation weakened the power of a Catholic Church implacably opposed to Jewish influence (Kertzer, 2001). For a time, many Reformers defended Jews as people under a covenant with God (Cohn-Sherbok, 2002, pp. 157-163). Thus in the sixteenth century, “a small numbers of Jews ventured a return to Central Europe” but found “their reception was not congenial—not in an age of religious turmoil” where “they encountered the animus of Protestant Reformers and Catholic Counter-Reformers alike” (Sachar, 2005, p. 4). Only after the Protestant-Catholic Thirty Years War (1618-1648) ended “with religious passions largely exhausted . . . did Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand III allow substantial numbers of Jews to resettle” in imperial cities such as Prague, Budapest and Frankfurt, so that “other German princes also then relaxed their bans on Jews” (p. 4). But permission for Jewish resettlement in Central and Western Europe was not motivated by humanitarian concern. Since Jews were viewed as aliens and denied participation in the European feudal land system, they had instead developed alternative vocations in trade and moneylending. “Determined to exploit this Jewish talent for producing liquid wealth, substantial numbers of rulers were willing intermittently to protect ‘their’ Jews as dependable sources of taxes and loans” (p. 5).

By the mid eighteenth century, the Jewish population of Central and Western Europe may have totaled 300,000 to 400,000 persons. But with the feudal system in decline and the powerful trade guilds alarmed by Jewish immigration, local rulers ensured that Jews remained confined to vocations disdained by gentile society. “Perhaps as many
as three-fourths of the Jews in Central and Western Europe were limited to the precarious occupations of retail peddling, hawking, and . . . moneylending” (Sachar, 2005, p. 5). And because most Jews struggled to survive, “they generated a sizable underclass of beggars, fencers, pimps, even robbers, thereby creating a self-fulfilling gentile scenario of Jews, one that would be endlessly invoked by Jew-haters throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (p. 5). In Eastern Europe, meanwhile, the end of the eighteenth century saw the breakup of the Polish federated empire and partition in 1772 by Prussia, Austria, and Russia. The latter restricted Jews to remaining within the “Pale of Settlement” in former Polish lands and prohibited immigration further east into Russia proper.

Yet as the nineteenth century dawned, though “in the East, the circumstances of Jewish life were steadily worsening . . . in the West there was tentative prefigurement of better times to come” (Sachar, 2005, p. 17). This was the culmination of trend which had begun in Western Europe as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. National identities had emerged as monarchs asserted control over previously autonomous feudal lords, thus providing for centralized governance, language, military, universities, coinage, weights and measures, maps, and roads. “These ambitious projects ensured royal wealth by creating the conditions for sustained economic growth and consolidated royal power by creating loyal subjects” (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, p. 10), a development that by the end of the early modern period impacted Western and Central European Jews in two ways. First, the Jews’ experience in moneylending and trade now offered a “wider vocational leeway” so that “as trade and manufacturing moved beyond traditional guild jurisdiction, Jews began moving into occupations substantially more diversified than moneylending
and peddlery” and emerged as leading dealers in cattle, timber, textiles, silks, satins, gold, silver, and gems (Sachar, 2005, p. 21). Second, some “Enlightenment philosophers took the principle of homogenization and universalism to its logical conclusion: social equality” (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, p. 10). Emergent democracy, however, proved a two-edged sword for Jews. On the one hand, they were offered equal rights of full citizenship as “emancipatory movements quickly spread throughout western and central Europe in the wake of the French revolution and Napoleonic conquests” of 1799-1813 (p. 13). But the revolutionaries favored reason over religion and national community over ethnic identity, so that the expected requirement for full citizenship was assimilation into the dominant Christian culture. The vistas opened by the twin prospects of enlightenment and emancipation prompted a split in the Jewish culture of Western and Central Europe.

The Haskala, the Jewish Enlightenment, opened new avenues of study, new possibilities for intellectual engagement. For the first time, the study of traditional Jewish texts was joined by a pursuit of general knowledge: science, mathematics, contemporary world affairs, the languages and literature of the gentile world. These enlightenment Jews steadily increased in numbers throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. They developed radically different ideas from their traditional co-religionists about scholarship and education, communal organization and leadership, and, ultimately, lifestyle. They wished to establish a new relationship with the gentile world, to be citizens of the country in which they lived. Emancipation was their goal. (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, p. 11)
Though the 1814 defeat of Napoleon led to a rejection of French-imposed Jewish emancipation in the nations he conquered, the humanist ideals unleashed in the French Revolution could be not altogether stopped. In the Potato Famine year of 1848, for example, democratic revolutions—though quickly put down—broke out in France, Germany, and other European countries. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the demise of Jewish ghettos in Western and Central Europe and the emergence of Jews into significant roles in commerce, banking, science, art, academia, and the free professions. In a survey of the most important figures of art and science throughout human history, Murray (2003) noted that between 800 and 1800 CE only eleven figures were Jewish—but between 1870 and 1950 the world Jewish population, just 2.2 percent of the global total, produced 12.4 percent of the 1,277 leading figures.

The emancipated Jews of Western and Central Europe were also, in their turn, impacted by increasing contact with the dominant Christian culture during the nineteenth century. “This long-awaited and eagerly sought development was bittersweet. Many Jews who cared about their distinctive identity as Jews saw here a profound dilemma: how to both accept the offer to join the body politic on equal terms and to remain meaningfully Jewish” (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, p. 13). Some clung to Orthodox Judaism, while the many Polish Jews who began migrating into Central Europe maintained their Yiddish language and mystic Hasidic faith. Others were inspired by the Jewish Enlightenment to launch Reform Judaism and translate the sacred texts and liturgies of their religion into vernacular languages. In 1897 Theodor Herzl of Hungary founded the secular Zionist movement and urged Europe’s Jews to prepare for a return to the Holy Land, while in
1898 the Bund (League) of revolutionary Jewish socialists was founded and attracted even greater support (Gilbert, 2001, pp. 20-29). Meanwhile, masses of ordinary Jews simply assimilated into the dominant culture by either becoming secularized and nonobservant while still retaining a Jewish identity, or by intermarriage or outright conversion to Christianity. Thus “when the twentieth century opened there were three main ways of life which Jews followed or aspired to,” namely the settled life of assimilation, or emigration away from ongoing social barriers and economic hardships, or “bringing about a revolutionary change in the Jewish situation” through Marxist socialism or through a Zionist rebirth of Jewish nationalism (pp. 19-20).

But the nineteenth century emancipation of Western and Central European Jewry also prompted a reaction among the Christian majority. Most gentile Europeans retained their traditional anti-Semitic animus against an outgroup. To that animus was added a growing resentment against what seemed to be a disproportionate representation of Jews in merchandising, retailing, finance, and the free professions such as academia, law, and medicine. As Europe rapidly industrialized in the nineteenth century, traditional small merchants, artisans, and rural smallholders were being left behind. Jews were an easy target for their resentment, especially when Jews were their creditors or when Jewish department stores—then a new retailing concept—displaced small independent merchants. Many Europeans, for whom religious anti-Semitism had long been a settled fact of their culture, now gave heed to stories of supposed Jewish economic domination and began to speak of a “Jewish problem.” Yet an even more ominous development was also on the rise: an anti-Semitism based not on religious or economic discrimination, but on race.
The Rise of Racial Anti-Semitism

On the one hand, religious anti-Semitism envisioned a solution to the “Jewish problem” through conversion to Christianity; on the other, liberal anti-Semitism pushed for Jewish emancipation that would lead to assimilation into the national community. Both solutions sought the eventual disappearance of the Jews, though both addressed the “problem” by believing Jews would voluntarily change when offered the self-evident blessings of Christian religion or society. Yet racial anti-Semitism held that Jews could not change. Religious confession and social integration were mutable qualities but race was immutable. For racial anti-Semites it followed that the “Jewish problem” could only be solved by the segregation, exclusion, and ultimate removal of racial aliens from the racial community.

How did such a pernicious doctrine arise? While religious anti-Semitism is as old as the Common Era and economic discrimination had been practiced since at least the feudal era, racial anti-Semitism was a modern development. The 1859 publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* inspired a worldwide intellectual ferment. The sensation brought wide attention to an 1855 work, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, by the French ethnologist Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau. His thesis, which “obsessed on the idea that history was entirely determined by race,” had little impact in France but was widely endorsed in Germany where many local Gobineau Societies were established (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, pp. 20-22). Germans were attracted by Gobineau’s argument that “racial vitality” is the engine of human history. Since this
vitality varied among the races, these races are innately unequal with the white race—and especially the putative Aryans—occupying the top of the hierarchy. Retaining that position required Aryans to avoid interbreeding with lower races.

In 1869 an English cousin of Darwin, Sir Francis Galton, published *Hereditary Genius* in which he coined the word “eugenics” and contended that inherited intelligence levels are distributed across populations in the same way as the inherited physical norms of height and weight. A leading German popularizer of Social Darwinism, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel, claimed in his *General Morphology* of 1866 that nation-states may be compared to biological organisms and thus subject to the laws of natural selection and survival of the fittest. By century’s end his views had gained such currency within German society that his Social Darwinist paean, *The Riddle of the World*, “became a runaway bestseller when it was published in 1899” (Evans, 2003, p. 36).

The word “anti-Semite” was coined in an 1873 pamphlet, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, written by Wilhelm Marr. Between 1870 and 1900 an estimated 1,200 publications were printed in Germany on the “minority” question, more than all other political topics combined, and the vast majority of these from an anti-Semitic perspective (Goldhagen, 1996, p. 64). Yet all the anti-Semitic tracts then in circulation “were overshadowed by the Anglo-German writer Houston Chamberlain’s *The Foundation of the Nineteenth Century*” published in 1899. Chamberlain, the son-in-law of famed German composer and anti-Semite Richard Wagner, “argued that the antiquity and mobility of the Jewish people illustrate the confrontation between superior Aryans and parasitic Semites” (Cohn-Sherbok, 2002, p. 215). The significance of Chamberlain is that
he popularized a connection between the “scientific” Social Darwinist ideas swirling through Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century and the emerging popular resentment against the recent legal emancipation of Jewry. “It took Wagner’s circle to introduce explicit anti-Semitism into racist discourse” by simplifying Gobineau’s view of history as a racial struggle into “a struggle between the Aryan or Nordic type and the Jew, the race and counter-race” and connecting that struggle with German national destiny (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2002, p. 23). No longer could the “Jewish Question” be solved through baptism and conversion; the Jews were not redeemable for, while they could change their religion, they could not change their race. In contrast to nineteenth-century liberals who legislated Jewish emancipation in the hope that the Jews would disappear through assimilation, racial anti-Semites believed the only solution was exclusion of Jews from Aryan society.

Onto this stage strode Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party and, from 1933, chancellor of the German Reich. The degree to which Hitler either reflected or shaped the society around him is debated by Holocaust scholars (e.g., see Rosenbaum, 1998), although historians on all sides agree that his movement constructed its political maxims out of German nationalist and völkisch themes which long predated National Socialism. Hitler’s (1925/1943) own manifesto, Mein Kampf, cobbles together such themes with its assertion, for example, that “all the events of world history are but the expression of the racial instinct for self-preservation” (p. 406). In the dictator’s cosmology, finite individuals were nothing and could only find their fulfillment in the eternal life of the race and, in particular, the state which is “the living organism of a
people” and “safeguards the preservation of that people” (p. 595). Because it is “racial primal elements which, providing culture, create the beauty and dignity of a higher humanity” (p. 595), the races may be classed, from highest to lowest, as either culture-founding, culture-bearing, or culture-destroying. The highest races preserve themselves by safeguarding their blood against intermixture with lower races, while the lower seek to raise themselves by diluting the blood of their betters. As such, life is a “struggle for existence” and the “two powerful life-instincts” (p. 391) of hunger and love are the engines of human action. For by satisfying their hunger humans can live today, and by satisfying their love-instinct humans can live on tomorrow in their offspring.

Yet even while Hitler was rising as a political figure during the 1920s and early 1930s, the eugenics movement represented cutting-edge science throughout Europe and North America (Friedlander, 1995; Black, 2003). Thus when the Nazis came to power their program of “positive” and “negative” eugenics (i.e., encouraging the fit to breed and discouraging the unfit) gained significant support among the German elites who shaped public opinion. Government loans to encourage fecundity were widely applauded by the masses. A law authorizing sterilization of the handicapped—long advocated by eugenicists and seriously considered prior to the Nazi takeover—was promulgated in July 1933, less than six months after Hitler was appointed German chancellor. An estimated 300,000 persons were sterilized in the years before the war (Friedlander, 1995, p. 30). As a leading German physician wrote at the time, “All work has only one great meaning: the Volk” and to ignore this reality would reduce medicine to mere technique. Nazi reform of medical education must therefore begin “by refashioning the curriculum to include such
new disciplines as demographic policy and racial eugenics” so that institutions can “teach
the student that the health of the Volk stands above the health of the individual as the
ultimate aim of the art of medicine, [and] hence to be a doctor to the [collective] people is
more important than science itself!” Physicians thus had a “holy obligation” and “duty as
an alert biological soldier” to implement the sterilization law as “a pillar of the National
Socialist state” and to “be concerned not only with the present generation, but should
strive to transcend it and direct its efforts toward the health of the eternal Volk” (Löhr,

**Development of the Gas Vans**

As early as 1935 Hitler told intimates that, when the time came and under the
cover the war, he would move from sterilization of those deemed unfit toward their active
euthanasia (Friedlander, 1995, p. 39). Then in 1938 when Hitler was petitioned by a
Leipzig couple to grant a “mercy death” to their incurably deformed infant, the dictator
took the occasion to authorize secret planning toward a general child euthanasia program.
This program, run by his personal chancellery, commenced in the summer of 1939 even
as war broke out that September. The following month Hitler signed a general remit—
symbolically backdated to September 1, the start of the war—for his chancellery head to
initiate euthanizing of handicapped adults. But Hitler’s personal chancellery was too
small to run such a large operation. Additional staff were hired and housed in a
confiscated Jewish villa at Tiergarten Strasse 4, so that the program became known
among intimates simply as “T4.” And because a number of chancellery officials were
members of the SS, they called upon the Black Corps for assistance.

“Euthanasia” centers were secretly established at sanitoria and other converted buildings across the Reich. Rooms in these centers were sealed and outfitted to admit gas from carbon monoxide canisters. Officials in the program estimated 70,000 “eligible” adults lived in German lands and by the summer of 1941 achieved their goal. But the need to transport victims on public roads, and afterwards to issue suspiciously faked death certificates to their families, sparked widespread rumors. Protests, often voiced through the churches, were heard. Hitler decided in August 1941 that, because the euthanasia program had achieved its numerical goal and now domestic tranquility was needed as the war expanded into the Soviet Union, it was time to quell popular discontent and end the “official” euthanasia project. Besides, euthanasia operations could surreptitiously continue among SS concentration camp inmates. This program, code-named “14f13” after a paragraph in the camp regulations, claimed some 20,000 lives (Friendlander, 1995, p. 150). And as the SS moved toward its “final solution of the Jewish question in Europe,” the experienced euthanasia personnel were instrumental in setting up stationary gas chambers at the SS death camps.

Gas vans were initially used in the euthanasia program and likely originated with the Criminal Technical Institute, an SS police lab that could obtain the gas canisters needed for the child and adult euthanasia programs (Friendlander, 1995, p. 139). Who invented the vans is unclear, but by 1940 they were used by a special SS commando to kill asylum patients in Polish territory annexed to the Reich—territory that included the village of Chelmno where, in December 1941, the first operational death camp—and the
only one to kill with mobile gas vans rather than stationary gas chambers —was established. But the vans employed in 1940 used carbon monoxide gas from canisters rather than exhaust gas. Such vans would have been difficult to operate in Soviet lands invaded by Germany in June 1941 since the bulky, heavy, and expensive canisters could not practicably have been supplied from factories in the German Reich to the distant East.

Shortly after the invasion, however, the notion arose of employing mobile gas vans that used their own exhaust gas, rather than carbon monoxide canisters, to kill victims. The idea was a response to a growing “problem” being experienced by special SS shooting squads, the notorious Einsatzgruppen, which since June 1941 had fanned out across the conquered lands with a mandate to massacre Soviet Jews. That problem came to a head on August 15, 1941, when Himmler visited Einsatzgruppe B in Minsk and asked its commander, Arthur Nebe, to execute 100 Jews so that the Reichsführer-SS might see an Aktion for himself. When Himmler was visibly disturbed, he was told of the mounting psychological strain experienced by the shooters. Later that day Himmler asked Nebe to devise a less unnerving procedure for killing Jews (Hilberg, 2003, p. 343). So the SS commander asked for and received permission from the Reichsführer to attempt dynamiting a test group of victims. As it happened, though, Nebe was an administrator from Berlin on temporary assignment to gain field experience. His normal position was head of the Reich Criminal Police Main Office, Germany’s plainclothes detective police force which operated as a branch of the mammoth Reich Security Main Office headed by Himmler protégé Reinhard Heydrich. Nebe asked a deputy to have a chemist at his bureau’s police lab, the Criminal Technical Institute, procure the dynamite and conduct
the experiment (Browning, 2004, p. 354).

Yet the month before Himmler’s visit, Nebe had experienced his own close call with death after driving home drunk from a party and falling asleep in his car with the motor still running. He mentioned to lab director Walter Heess the possibility of using exhaust gas to kill Jews rather than the bottled gas used in the euthanasia program. Heess relayed the idea to his chief chemist, Albert Widmann, when the two were riding the Berlin subway together (Browning, 2004, p. 355; Dwork & van Pelt, 2002, p. 276). Thus when Nebe summoned the Widmann to bring both dynamite and hoses for experiments in Minsk, the latter knew what was in prospect. For the dynamite procedure, mental patients from a nearby asylum were rounded up. “The gruesome experiment required two explosions to kill all the test victims locked in a bunker and left parts of bodies strewn about and even hanging from nearby trees” (Browning, 2004, p. 355). By contrast, mental patients were more “satisfactorily” killed after being placed inside sealed rooms into which exhaust gas was introduced via hoses from vehicles parked outside.

Based on these impromptu results Heydrich decided to move forward with more tests. But the Criminal Technical Institute was primarily a police lab. So the task was assigned to Walther Rauff, head of the Technical Matters Group within the Heydrich’s Administration and Finance Office. Rauff oversaw five separate divisions, among them the Security Police transportation service headed by Friedrich Pradel. In turn, Pradel supervised the Berlin motorpool whose 4,000 vehicles were maintained by foreman Harry Wentritt. Since Rauff was preoccupied with ongoing high-level negotiations with the Wehrmacht High Command to obtain munitions for the Einsatzgruppen shooting
actions—while also splitting his time in Prague performing special tasks for Heydrich—practical execution of the project fell to Pradel. He asked Wentritt if it was feasible to vent exhaust gas into a closed van and received an affirmative reply. Rauff then suggested to Pradel that he acquire truck compartments from Gaubschat, a Berlin factory, on the pretext that the specially sealed boxes were needed to transport dead victims of a spotted fever epidemic. The company also agreed to mount the superstructures onto truck chassis that Pradel would provide (Beer, 1987). But the latter’s initial attempt to acquire five truck chassis from the Wehrmacht was turned down, necessitating Rauff’s personal intervention to secure the vehicles (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 53).

Once the chassis and bodies were assembled by Gaubschat, the vans were taken to Wentritt’s garage. There in secrecy his mechanics ran a removable hose from the exhaust pipe to a hole drilled in the van compartment. To find out how long it took for carbon monoxide levels to reach 1 percent, trials were conducted by police lab chemists wearing gas masks. A prototype van was then tested on a group of about 30 Russian POWS from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Results were “satisfactory” and, by November or December 1941, about twenty Sonderwagen (“special vans”) were ready for service. Three were furnished to the Higher SS and Police Leader of the Warthegau (a Polish district annexed by Germany) at the request of its Gauleiter (Nazi regional governor) in order to liquidate the Lodz ghetto (Kershaw, 2008, 60-88) and make room there for new shipments of Jews deported from the West; the remaining vans were dispatched for field service with the Einsatzgruppen in Soviet territory (Kogon et al. 1993/1983, p. 53; Browning, 2004, p. 355). At the same time Rauff hired August Becker, a chemical expert
who had worked with the Criminal Technical Institute in the earlier euthanasia program, to act as field inspector for the gas van program. In time a fleet of about twenty gas vans was in operation, about half on Soviet territory and the rest in Eastern Europe.

Yet even as vans were being supplied by Rauff’s office to the Einsatzgruppen and the Chelmno death camp, competing alternatives for “humane” killing methods were being devised by other SS bureaus. During the Final Solution a total of six killing centers were operated: one (Chelmno) by the Higher SS and Police Leader of the Posen Region which encompassed the Warthegau; three (Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka) by the SS and Police Leader of the Lublin District, who had originally been charged by Himmler with establishing a “Jewish reservation” in Polish territory not annexed by the Reich; and two (Auschwitz, Majdanek) by the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office as extensions of its concentration camp system, so that its two killing centers also housed prisoners for slave labor (Friedlander, 1995, p. 287). While the Posen camp employed gas vans, the Lublin camps procured former euthanasia personnel to install gas chambers using carbon monoxide pumped in from stationary engines (Treblinka used a diesel engine from a captured Russian submarine). And the Economic and Administrative Main Office camps employed prussic acid pellets; because its camps also housed slave labor, supplies of Zyklon B were already on hand as a pesticide to keep down vermin.

Operational Challenges in the Field

The importance of the Sonderwagen project is suggested by the fact that Heydrich’s former personal chauffeur was assigned to be its first driver (Breitman, 1991,
But in this hideous competition, the gas vans were seriously “disadvantaged.” From the first, the vehicles created unanticipated problems. Given their specialized use, Pradel had to acquire chassis and truck bodies from separate sources. The exigencies of wartime meant that he could not always obtain chassis from the same manufacturer. Work on the bodies had to be outsourced to Gaubschat. Then to preserve secrecy, final modifications were made by SS welders in Wentritt’s garage.

Once the gas vans entered service in the field, complaints quickly mounted. A memo dated 27 April 1942 discussed how the “cargo” might be unloaded more quickly if vans could be modified with equipment to tip up the truck compartment or its floor (Beer, 1987). Then a report sent by Becker (Hochstadt, 2004, pp. 137-138) from Kiev and dated 16 May 1942 stated, “The trucks . . . get stuck in the rain” and “The place of execution ... [lies] off traveled roads and is thus by its location already hard to reach, in damp or wet weather not at all.” When ordinary wear-and-tear occurred, parts could only be obtained “by persuasion and bribery” since “transport to Berlin [for repairs] would be much too expensive and require too much fuel.” Then, too, “Because of the uneven land and the indescribable condition of the roads, the seals and rivets came loose over time.” Thus during Aktionen the SS personnel had to be “kept as far away as possible . . . so that their health won’t be harmed by leaking gases.” Even then, SS personnel who unloaded the bodies “complained to me about headaches which appear after each unloading.” Nor were prisoners conscripted to do the unloading, for “fear that [they] . . . would use an opportune moment to flee.” Finally, reported Becker:
The gassing is without exception not properly done. In order to finish the action as fast as possible, the drivers fully open the throttle. With this method those to be executed suffer death by suffocation and not, as planned, by being put to sleep. My instructions have shown that by proper use of the pedal, death comes more quickly and the prisoners fall asleep peacefully. The distorted faces and excretions, which have been seen previously, can no longer be noticed.

(Hochstadt, 2004, p. 138)

By the time of Becker’s report in May 1942 the SS had already been engaged for at least half a year in its “Final Solution,” or an organized programmatic attempt (rather than ad hoc or sporadic persecution) at the physical elimination (rather than the mere removal and deportation) of the Jews on a continental scale (rather than only Soviet Jews). But this SS program was also competing for resources—building materials, rolling stock, fuel supplies, budget allocations—with the Wehrmacht (which was in the midst of the largest military invasion in history) and civilian agencies that advocated conservation of Jewish labor until after the war. Voices competing to control aspects of Judenpolitik were many: regional Gauleiter such as the demagogic Streicher; Goebbels’ propaganda ministry; Goering’s Four Year Plan office; Ribbentrop’s Foreign Office; Frank’s General Government of occupied Poland; Rosenberg’s Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories; the Interior Ministry; the Justice Ministry; the Economics Ministry; the Armaments Ministry; the Plenipotentiary for Labor; the Party Chancellery; the Führer Chancellery; various regional and local agencies; and Himmler’s SS. Even to run the gas
vans, the SS depended on the Wehrmacht for allocations of motor fuel and therefore had to compete with other military priorities (Tooze, 2007, p. 481).

In the spring of 1942 as the Sipo Technical Matters Group discussed among themselves various technical improvements to remedy the gas vans’ operational shortcomings, other SS bureaus—relying on the experienced T4 experts—prepared to open extermination camps with stationary gas chambers. Soon the SS would discover it was vastly more efficient to transport the victims to the gas than vice versa. And other momentous events beyond the Group’s control also intervened. Heydrich was attacked by a car bomb in Prague on May 27 and died eight days later, so that Rauff lost his powerful sponsor. A month later Rauff decided his future was not in running the Sonderwagen program. Better to prove himself again in the field. In late July he accepted command of an Einsatzkommando that was being formed to travel behind Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps; if the planned conquest of Palestine was achieved, his unit could liquidate Jews in their own homeland. Thus, the gas van program Rauff left behind began to wind down. Though twenty vans had been built by the end of June, an order for ten more special compartments remained unfilled (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 54). By fall, Rauff had officially relinquished his position as head of department II D (Nizkor, 2002). In September 1942 Becker wrapped up his inspection tour. About that time, the Wehrmacht’s second and final offensive against the Soviets was bogging down near Stalingrad, thus limiting the scope for new Einsatzgruppen operations. Besides, “By the end of 1942, the Einsatzgruppen and their SS cohorts had largely fulfilled their mission” (Rhodes, 2002, p. 257). Then, too, the stationary gas chambers had proven their superior
“efficiency” and were manufacturing death at horrifically unprecedented rates. Heydrich’s Reich Security Main Office had failed in its bid to directly conduct the exterminations through its gas van technology. Compared to the millions murdered in the gas chambers of Poland—or even the estimated 1.5 million executed in mass shootings—the mobile vans were retired from their deadly service with “only” some 150,000 victims “credited” to their account, along with another 150,000 murdered by the vans assigned to Chelmno (Greif, 2001. p. 231).
CHAPTER THREE
THE PEOPLE’S COMMUNITY

Organizations as Open Systems

Boundary objects, as we saw in the opening chapter, can bridge the interstices of organizations because they combine plasticity with elements “robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393). And as we learned in the previous chapter, one of the integrative elements for the gas-van murderers of the Sipo Technical Matters Group was a shared culture of anti-Semitism whose religious and economic basis had a long history in European society and which, since the emergence of Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had intensified by acquiring a racial animus. Thus, the basis of anti-Semitism shifted from the mutable trait of religious confession to the immutable trait of racial identification, an historical development that helped the killers overcome more traditional inhibitions against murder.

In time, the Nazi establishment developed what Browning (2004) called a “chimeric anti-Semitism.” Yet this chimera gained directive force because it intersubjectively cohered with an even more powerful schema in German culture, that of the Volksgemeinschaft or racial people’s community. Thus, the commonplace slogan THE JEWS ARE OUR MISFORTUNE (Die Juden sind unser Unglück) may have interlocked with Germans’ self-perception as an historically exceptional if ill-starred community of fate, while the common metaphor JEWS ARE PARASITES may have gained resonance by offering a neatly symmetrical contrast that instantiated Germans’ communitarian view of themselves. The chimera of the wandering Jew (an age-old myth), of the “rootless
cosmopolitan” (a common phrase of the time), may have interlocked with Germans’ cultural schemas regarding their own metaphoric vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft* that was organically bound through *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil)—and which therefore excluded not only Jews but other *Fremde* (strangers) such as the Sinti and Roma, while frowning on such nonconformist or “asocial” Germans ranging from homosexuals to Jehovah’s Witnesses. For that reason,

Popular support for National Socialism was based on ideological norms which had little directly to do with anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews, and which can be summed up most adequately by the sense of social, political, and moral order embodied in the term *Volksgemeinschaft* (“National Community”), ensured by a strong state which would suppress conflict to guarantee strength through unity. (Kershaw, 2008, p. 185)

Exploring the cultural touchstones of Nazi German society is important for grasping how the everyday documents of the Sipo Technical Matters Group functioned as boundary objects to create spaces for its competing interests to temporarily cooperate. The broader picture of Third Reich culture matters because, as postmodern scholarship in organization studies asserts, organizations are not closed systems (as in the traditional “container” metaphor). Organizational cultures absorb and appropriate elements of the discourses going on in the larger culture of the surrounding society. As Alvesson (2002) explained,
Organizations can be understood as shaping local versions of broader societal and locally developed cultural manifestations in a multitude of ways. Organizational cultures are then best understood not as unitary wholes or as stable sets of subcultures but as mixtures of cultural manifestations of different levels and kinds. (pp. 190-191)

Martin (2002) demonstrated how drawing boundaries around organizational cultures (again, as in the container metaphor) is problematic because boundaries are “moveable, fluctuating, permeable, blurred, and dangerous” (p. 315). Rather, “an organization is a nexus, in which a variety of internal and external cultural influences come together” (p. 339) and where the latter may be related to race, gender, socioeconomic status, national culture, industry, and profession. Indeed, suggested Keyton (2005), it is “more accurate to think of any organizational culture as being many cultures that are blurred, overlapped, and nested to create an organizational multiculture” so that “the way in which subcultures relate to one another is the organization’s culture” (p. 67).

Everyday documents are, as this study endeavors to demonstrate, vital means for organizational subcultures to negotiate their relations. Using as a framework Martin’s (1992, 2002; Martin, Frost & O’Neil, 2006) “three-perspective theory” which suggests that organizational cultures manifest aspects of integration, differentiation and fragmentation, this chapter begins by exploring those cultural aspects (national, institutional, organizational) that may have been integrative for the SS gas van program participants, and ends by introducing an key differentiating aspect of SS organizational
culture (namely its unsuccessful attempt, as an ideologically driven Party formation, at absorbing Germany’s professionally driven regular police forces). Then the next chapter picks up the differentiating aspect of the Sipo Technical Matters Group’s subcultures, before finally exploring the fragmenting aspect of individual members’ motivations and the shifting nature of their interrelations. For if we can see the killers’ organizational milieu not as a stable “container-like” unity, but as a fluid environment of constantly shifting consensus and dissensus that reflected larger as well as local discourses, we can begin to see their documents as objects that worked across boundaries when the integrative exigence of the Final Solution arose.

Unifying Principles of Institutional Culture

Elsewhere (Ward, 2008) I have argued that, based on my discourse analyses of autobiographies by ordinary Germans who lived through the Third Reich, Germans of the period may have broadly shared a cultural schema in which humans are seen primarily as objects rather than initiators of action. Thus at a broad societal level, this cultural view of human activity may have been an integrating aspect of organizational life for members of the Sipo Technical Matters Group and provided one basis for negotiating their relations and constructing at least a short-term coherent social reality that encompassed genocide.

This assertion is based on the assumption that one function of culture is to cognitively organize shared knowledge into schemas that permit culture members to swiftly derive cultural meanings enchained to words, phrases, images, and concepts. These skeins of meaning may cohere into cultural models as they become “organized into
prototypical event sequences enacted in simplified worlds” (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 22). By triggering shared schemas that delineate concepts and the relations between them, culture members swiftly communicate inferences, listeners quickly fill in missing information to accurately interpret those inferences, and members are provided with mental scenarios with which to frame their encounters and experiences with the world. As cultural models coalesce—perhaps around expert opinion, folk theories, intrinsic persuasiveness, lived experience, conformity with observed conditions, or cultural sanction—they gain broad acceptance and become socialized until the models accord with individuals’ views of themselves, what they find motivationally satisfying, and what they experience as obligations.

Thus, a cultural model that saw humans as the objects of action may have gathered directive force for Nazi-era Germans because the model was built on schemas that “hung together” and had coherence for their lived experience. That lived experience is repeatedly expressed in the autobiographies I analyzed, through recurring references to the severe dislocations caused by the First World War (1914-18), the Communist revolution (1918-19) and monetary hyperinflation (1922-23) which followed, and the Great Depression (1929-32). These events are touchstones for the majority of life stories examined. The cultural model that underlies these accounts is a simplified world where the prototypical sequence of events reveals the action of external forces over which the individual has no control. Given the stability of this schema, as suggested in the autobiographies, the momentous events of “national reawakening” during the Third Reich and emergence of a heroic leader may have instantiated for ordinary Germans the
cultural model INDIVIDUALS ARE OBJECTS and thus “facilitated the task of communicating familiar inferences about the world” and “allowed these inferences to be made swiftly and accurately in the first place” (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 52). Just as my earlier research suggested a connection between this cultural model and the willingness of SS field personnel to accept killing orders, in the same way the model may have contributed to the willingness of SS headquarters personnel—including members of the Sipo Technical Matters Group—to administer those orders and, under the integrative exigence of orders from above, at least temporarily negotiate among their own competing interests the consensus required to do so.

The cultural model INDIVIDUALS ARE OBJECTS may also help explain the popular salience, as described above, of the Volksgemeinschaft myth. At bottom, the concept of the racial people’s community formed the basis of what Koonz (2003) has called the “Nazi conscience.” She pointed out, “Although it may be repugnant to conceive of mass murderers acting in accordance with an ethos that they believed vindicated their crimes,” the Nazis were “modern secularists” who “followed a coherent set of severe ethical maxims derived from broad philosophical concepts” which “they saw as appropriate to their Aryan community.” In “assert[ing] the superiority of their own communitarian values,” they fostered a racial-ethnic public culture that offered not just “its savage hatreds but its lofty ideals,” “relied not only on repression but also an appeal to communal ideals of civic improvement,” and built “a vibrant public culture founded on self-denial and collective revival” (pp. 1-3). Thus, Koonz concluded, “The road to Auschwitz was paved with righteousness.” In his recent exposition of modern political
religions, Burleigh (2007) describes how “the fundamental structure of the Nazi creed was soteriological, a redemptive story of suffering and deliverance, a sentimental journey from misery to glory, from division to mystic unity based on the blood bond that linked souls.” Indeed, “Even when Nazism appeared most indebted to modern science, namely in claiming that its racism was ‘scientific,’ this discourse was as much cultural and religious, as anyone . . . can readily establish” (pp. 105-106). The power of this story, of the reawakening and redemption of the mystic People’s Community, was such that “Hitler’s personal hold on the vast majority of Germans stemmed from and expressed, as far as the content of his message went, three different and suprahistorical creeds: The ultimate purity of the racial community, the ultimate crushing of Bolshevism and plutocracy, and the ultimate millennial redemption (borrowed from Christian themes known to all)” (Friedländer, 2007, p. xx).

The concept of Volksgemeinschaft—variously translated into English as either national community, people’s community, or racial community—also instantiated in the German mind a binary opposition between Gemeinschaft (“community”) and Gesellschaft (“society”). The former was associated with Kultur and the organic life of a people, while the latter was linked the Zivilisation and the atomistic tendencies of urban and industrial modernity. Thus, Volksgemeinschaft became the unifying conception for the institutional culture of the National Socialist movement. For Hitler and his circle saw National Socialism as a great popular movement. The Party was only the political expression of that movement, while the Volksgemeinschaft embodied the “socialist” side of National Socialism and its goal of creating a racially-based national community in
which class privilege was leveled and all citizens of German blood could advance by merit. Such a “national reawakening” struck a responsive chord in a people who had been—unjustly, they believed—defeated in war and devastated by hyperinflation and depression. By the same token, the regime stoked this popular sentiment with myriad measures to increase racial consciousness (e.g., see Koonz, 2003; Fritzsche, 2008; Burleigh & Wipperman, 1991). For example, after the September 1935 enactment of the Nuremberg Laws, “By 1936 almost all Germans—all who were not Jewish—had begun to prepare for themselves an Ahnenpass, or racial passport,” carefully filling out blank forms “that could be purchased in any bookshop” and then using the document “to enroll in a Nazi youth group, serve in the Wehrmacht, get married, or take a [state-subsidized] vacation trip” (Fritzsche, 2008, p. 76). The literature on the place of the “people’s community” in Nazi thought and popular discourse during the Third Reich is vast. But as regards the Nazi institutional culture that may have influenced the discourses of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, two facets of the Volksgemeinschaft may stand out.

First, Nazi institutional culture advocated a distinctive view of technology which redescribed technological pursuits as aesthetic expressions of Volksgeist or the spirit of the people’s community. This explains how the Nazis could have preached a seemingly preindustrial vision of blood and soil while at the same time embracing the technological fruits of rational Enlightenment means-end calculation. Schoenbaum (1966) argued the Nazi stance toward technology was a “double revolution” (pp. xxi-xxii) in which the Nazis cynically employed technological means to achieve non-technological ends, thus using technology in a tactical sense but without really believing in it. By contrast, Herf
(1986) convincingly argued that the Nazis did believe in technology, but by reinscribing its meaning. Technology became under National Socialism not a rational manifestation of Enlightenment values but an aesthetic expression of Volksgeist. Every dazzlingly modern autobahn and train, every model factory and farm, every people’s car (Volkswagen) and people’s radio (Volksempfänger), expressed the national will-to-power. There was no disjunction for the Nazis between industrial and agricultural virtues, for they incorporated technology into their romantic ideology.

Thus as “reactionary modernists,” Herf (1986) contended, the Nazis rejected Enlightenment rationality while embracing its technological fruits. They “succeeded in incorporating technology into the symbolism and language of Kultur—community, blood, will, self, form, productivity, and finally race—by taking it out of the realm of Zivilisation—reason, intellect, internationalism, materialism, and finance” (p. 16). As Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1944) dialectical theory might suggest, National Socialism responded to the alienating effects of the post-Enlightenment myth of “rationality” by positing a new communitarian myth of its own. Indeed, as Allen (2002) documented, the many industrial enterprises run by the SS were known to install machinery that was operationally inefficient but satisfied an aesthetic desire to glorify the Volk by employing the most “modern” devices. In the same way, the automotive and chemical experts of the SS gas van program operated in an institutional milieu where technical skill was lauded for its contribution to the people’s community.

Second, according to the Nazi Führerprinzip (“leadership principle”), Hitler proclaimed that “the chief purpose of the state was to promote higher personalities to
positions of authority: It builds not upon the idea of majority, but upon the idea of personality” (Overy, 2004, p. 100). In the same way, the Leader of the nation would emerge from the people and, in the “truest” sense of democracy, rise naturally as an expression of the national will. The dictator cribbed his Prinzip from a vulgarized reading of Nietzsche that was popular in fin de siècle Europe (p. 103) and promoted by the Pan-German movement that Hitler followed as a young man in Vienna (Hamann, 1999, pp. 243, 236-237). In Germany, too, “Notions of ‘heroic’ leadership had been part of the political culture of the nationalist Right in the years before the First World War” whereby “a rebirth of the nation was promised through the subordination to a ‘great leader’ who would invoke the values of a ‘heroic’ (and mythical) past” (Kershaw, 1998, p. 180).

Thus the Nazi Führerprinzip “was not something grafted on to German political culture, but derived its appeal from a wide, though by no means universal, expectation of a German redeemer” (Overy, 2004, p. 105). In his autobiography Mein Kampf, written in 1924 while Hitler was still a fringe politician, the future dictator declared,

The movement must promote respect for personality by all means; it must never forget that in personal worth lies the worth of everything human; that every idea and every achievement is the result of one man’s creative force and that the admiration of greatness constitutes, not only a tribute of thanks to the latter, but casts a unifying bond around the grateful. Personality cannot be replaced; especially when it embodies not the mechanical but the cultural and creative element. (Hitler, 1943/1925, p. 352)
Further, wrote Hitler (1943/1925), the importance of the outstanding personality is seen in the fact that “The prerequisite for the creation of an organizational form is and remains the man necessary for its leadership.” Organizational forms are useless without “the suitable leader” whose personality is needed “to direct and drive it forward.” For that reason, while leadership requires ability, “greater importance must be attached to will and energy than to intelligence as such, and most valuable of all is a combination of ability, determination, and perseverance” (p. 349). The *Führerprinzip* was seen as antidote to the dysfunctional special-interest politics of the Weimar Republic. Interminable parliamentary wrangling and decision-by-committee would, according to Hitler’s theory, give way to a system in which the ablest leaders would naturally emerge, not by birth or wealth but by merit, as an expression of the group’s collective will, thereby establishing clear lines for action, responsibility, and accountability.

In Hitler’s own practice of the *Führerprinzip* he set in motion a “polycracy,” a Social Darwinist jungle world where Nazi satraps competed for power and Hitler’s approval. Both before and after his accession to power Hitler deliberately put followers into overlapping offices (see Read, 2003). This tactic served five purposes: His followers competed with each other rather than potentially combining against him. Disputes could only be settled by Hitler, preserving his power. The “ablest” followers rose to the top. Meanwhile, since Hitler was famously reluctant to make decisions, he could bide his time to see which side prevailed and back the winner. And the system freed Hitler, a notorious bohemian who detested regular hours and working habits (see Speer, 1970), from daily involvement in the minutiae of state affairs. These factors combined with horrific effect
to bring about the Jewish Holocaust as the dictator let it be known he desired solutions to
the “Jewish question” (Judenfrage), his subordinates competed in “working towards the
Führer,” and the competition produced a “cumulative radicalization” that resulted in
bulging Jewish ghettos and, ultimately, mass murder. Hitler himself—or at least the myth
of the Leader—functioned as a boundary object for temporarily holding together the
polycratic Nazi system. Thus, “working towards the Führer” was

a key to how the Third Reich operated. . . . Hitler’s personalized form of rule
invited radical initiatives from below and offered such initiatives backing, so long
as they were in line with his broadly defined goals. This promoted ferocious
competition at all levels of the regime . . . In the Darwinist jungle of the Third
Reich, the way to power and advancement was through anticipating the “Führer
will,” and, without waiting for directives, taking initiatives to promote what were
presumed to be Hitler’s aims and wishes. (Kershaw, 1998, pp. 529-530)

While the leader cult around Hitler is well known, the Nazis advocated the Führerprinzip
as the organizing principle for all levels of society. The peculiarly egalitarian rank
systems of the Nazi Party, Hitler Youth, SA and SS, in which virtually every rank is
designated a Führer, is but one expression of the leadership principle. A similar trend has
been noted in contemporary organizations. Citing Deetz’s (1995, p. 87) observation that
modern corporations engage in “managing the ‘insides’—the hopes, fears, and
aspirations—of workers, rather than their behaviors directly,” Alvesson and Wilmott
(2004) reported how organizations strive to regulate employees’ self-identities and “produce the appropriate individual” by employing “the now widely used terms ‘leader’ and ‘team leader’ . . . which appeal to the positive cultural valences assigned to discourses of supremacy and sport” (p. 437). In the Third Reich, the historian Peukert (1987/1982) affirmed, “Not the least of the achievements of National Socialist mass organizations was that . . . they provided a considerable number of people with tasks and jobs which boosted their sense of self-esteem and even offered real if limited opportunities for promotion” (p. 72). And as we will see below, the Nazi “leadership principle” was an important integrative element within the cultures of the SS and the Sipo Technical Matters Group. The principle facilitated the rhetorical boundary work of their documents by bringing into being an organizational culture that provided explicit frames for the roles of senders and receivers while simultaneously giving implicit sanction to the competition between them over power and knowledge. As boundary objects, then, documents created zones that could accommodate both custom and contestation.

**Aspects of SS Organizational Culture**

The *Führerprinzip*, with its idea that outstanding personalities should by their merits rise to leadership as an expression of a group’s collective will, introduced the broader cultural theme of *Volksgemeinschaft* into the organizational life of the Third Reich. Eighty years before Alvesson and Wilmott noted how organizations tap into attractive cultural themes by employing the terms “leader” and “team leader,” thereby channeling employees’ aspirations into “appropriate” self-identities, the SS was already
doing so. Thus the personnel of the Sipo Technical Matters Group included a “senior storm unit leader” (Rauff), “main storm leader” (Pradel), and “junior storm leaders” (Wentritt and Becker). Such SS rank titles not only affirm the place of the *Führerprinzip* in its organizational culture, but also highlight two others aspects of that culture which are especially salient for the present study: the valence given to “fighting spirit” and the ongoing internal friction that resulted from the absorption of Germany’s civil-service professional police forces into the ideologically-driven Party organization that was Himmler’s SS.

As described at the outset, the SS was the archetype of Nazi polycracy. The practical outworking of the *Führerprinzip* in SS organizational culture resulted in ceaseless internal competition among overlapping power bases. Because the SS grew *ad hoc* as Himmler accreted new offices and powers, SS personnel often held multiple positions within different SS sections—or combined SS activity with positions in state government or the Nazi party—to consolidate their personal power. And because the *Schwarze Korps* (Black Corps) styled itself as a kind of elite third branch of government—not the state, not the party, but the Leader’s personal executive (Krausnick, 1968/1965)—Himmler sought to cultivate a *kaempfende Verwaltung* (“fighting administration”) by recruiting university men, many of whom held doctorates, with *Faehigkeit zur Hingabe an den absoluten Wert einer Idee* or the ability to devote themselves to the absolute value of an idea (Wildt, 2003, pp. 205, 129). Reflecting the Social Darwinist worldview of the Nazi movement, SS training programs urged each member “to be a fighter on principle, a fighter for fighting’s sake” (Buchheim, 1968/1965, p. 322) and cultivated an “open”
leadership style through training that “abandoned overly simplistic indoctrination in favor of . . . inventiveness” and initiative (Aly, 2000, p. 55). Substantive doctrine and theory “was astonishingly meager” and educational materials “no more than . . . vaporizings” (Buchheim, 1968/1965, p. 319); in fact, because the SS had no central animating vision except to be elite defenders of the National Socialist state—and since it operated as a “irregular” executive within the regime’s extralegal sphere—then “all that mattered was maximum readiness and ability on the part of the SS man for certain concrete and specific purposes” and the emphasis on fighting spirit really meant that “in practice success was all that mattered” (p. 327). The SS mentality, then, stressed “heroic realism,” “soldierly bearing” and “hardness,” but grounded these concepts in the Nazi worldview of Volk and Führer in order to uphold the movement’s ideal of the “political soldier” (pp. 319-348). Thus could Himmler, in his infamous Posen Speech of October 1943, extol the “glory” of genocide as expressing the “fundamental principle” that SS members could remain “honest, decent, loyal, and comradely” by practicing “the most important virtues” of loyalty, obedience, bravery, truthfulness, honesty, fellowship, acceptance of responsibility, industry, and abstinence (Westermann, 2005, p. 93).

However, the culture of the SS (a Party organization) collided with that of Germany’s regular police forces (a State apparatus) when the two were merged after 1936. Browder (1990, 1996) has written extensively on Himmler’s accumulation of power: his 1931 appointment as leader of the Party’s Schutzstaffeln (Protective Squad) that guarded Hitler; his competition with Goering and Goebbels to build a Party security service; his 1934 ascendance over the Sturmabteilung (SA stormtroopers) when the
unruly brown-shirts were brought to heel by Hitler; and his gradual takeover of the pre-
Nazi political police forces of the various German states. But the key moment was
Himmler’s June 1936 appointment by Hitler as Chief of the German Police, at one stroke
freeing Himmler from interference by the Reich Interior Ministry and allowing him to
consolidate the SS and regular police into a single entity. Yet the melding of SS
subculture and professional police subculture never quite “took.” Himmler himself
expected it would require a generation to mold the organizational culture he envisioned.

Prior to Himmler’s 1936 appointment there had never been a national police body
in Germany, not even an equivalent of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Police
forces answered to the various state and municipal governments—although the Reich
government mandated adoption of some common standards as a condition for receiving
federal subsidies. Thus most state’s police forces were divided into uniformed Order
Police (Ordnungspolizei or Orpo), which encompassed the metropolitan Protective Police
(Schutzpolizei or Schupo) and the rural Gendarmerie; and the plainclothes Criminal
Police (Kriminalpolizei or Kripo) for ordinary detective work, and political police for
combating the political street violence, strikes, putsch attempts, and other threats to
public order that were rampant in Weimar Germany. The political police in Prussia, the
German state that occupied two-thirds of Reich territory, were called the Secret State
Police (Geheimestaatspolizei or Gestapo). Each of these branches had, as Browder (1990,
1996) has documented at length, their individual subcultures, training requirements,
professional standards, rank titles, and career paths. At the same time, by 1936 the SS
had, as a Party organ, created its own Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst or SD) under
Heydrich as an intelligence bureau for monitoring threats to the state. The SD had developed its own subculture, appealing to individuals who were drawn to espionage and the ideological mission of shaping the new Nazi state. When Himmler became Chief of the German Police he allowed the regular uniformed police (Orpo) to retain a separate organization. But he put Kripo and Gestapo under a new umbrella to be called the Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei or Sipo), which was then placed under Heydrich. Thus the professional plainclothes detectives of the Kripo and Gestapo were thrown together with ideologically motivated Party spies of the SD to create an entity known as “Sipo and SD” whose subcomponents were often in friction. Himmler’s overarching vision was to combine SS and police into a single State Protection Corps. But as Höhne (1969/1966) has described, the Sipo and SD were as difficult to combine as oil and water.

The members of the Sipo and SD were drawn from different backgrounds. The Sicherheitspolizei consisted primarily of the traditional police officials and administrative law experts; the SD intelligence organization, on the other hand, was a bustling, heterogeneous collection of men thrown up by the arbitrary SS career regulations—a further reflection of the fact that the SD was a Party organization and the Sicherheitspolizei a State institution. (p. 253)

The SD did not have access to State funds and its budget was chronically in deficit. Thought was given to abolishing the SD but Himmler feared that other Party rivals might rush in to fill the void. SD personnel not only feared losing their jobs if the Service was
disbanded, but also feared losing their positions if merged with the trained professional detectives of the Gestapo and Kripo. By the same token, Heydrich was concerned that a merger of SD and Sipo would bring an influx of legal-administrative personnel who would hinder the SD’s freedom of action. Then, too, Himmler’s soundings of the Nazi inner circle “convinced him that the Party leadership would never permit a combination of a Party organization with a State institution to form a new official super-authority” (Höhne, 1969/1966, p. 256). Party leaders did not want an intelligence agency backed by State authority looking into their affairs. Thus in September 1939 Heydrich at last created a “Reich Security Main Office” (Reichssicherheitshauptamt or RSHA) that amounted to “no more than a feeble compromise” (p. 256) since the Sipo and SD retained separate organizational identities and budgets, the one still a State organization and the other dependent on the Party. So as not to alarm Party leaders, the RSHA

was never allowed to use the name in public; the instructions laid down that the letter-heading “Reichssicherheitshauptamt” was not to be used in correspondence with other authorities. The RSHA, in fact, led a shadowy existence; officially no one was supposed to know of it. It remained an organization valid for internal purposes only; the only title appearing on the surface was that of “Chief of the Sicherheitspolizei and SD” (CSSD). Even the dream of combining the SD with the Sicherheitspolizei came to nothing. Party and State refused to mix. (p. 256)

Thus, members of the SD and the Gestapo continued to compete with each other in the
field of intelligence (even as both competed with the intelligence operations of the Wehrmacht and the Foreign Ministry). The inability to mix Party and State is seen in microcosm with Walter Rauff who simultaneously headed the Technical Matters Group of the Security Police (RSHA Amt II D) and of SD foreign intelligence (RSHA Amt VI F). And as the men of the SD who had come up through SS recruiting standards feared merging with regular police professionals, the latter also were confronted with a perhaps unwelcome array of confusing new rules after their organizations were brought into the SS. These included pressure on career police professionals to apply for membership in the SS, the conditions under which membership and an SS rank equivalent to their police rank would be granted, expectations that those accepted into the SS would quit their membership in other Party organizations, and requirements to wear SS service dress and insignia. Numerous and often confusing and conflicting directives were issued. In practice, however, those who served in the regular uniformed Order Police received nearly automatic acceptance into the SS at an equivalent rank; but for the plainclothes professional detectives of the Security Police, rank parity “was contingent upon a whole series of conditions” (Buchheim, 1968/1965, pp. 203-213).

Police personnel, who often had years or decades of professional training and experience in their duties, were also subjected after 1936 to ideological training designed to instill in them the “soldierly” SS ethic and to “create an organizational culture in which anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism emerged as institutional norms” (Westermann, 2005, p. 98). Those police accepted into the SS thereby submitted themselves to the organization’s requirements for physical stature and mental aptitude, documented
“Aryan” ancestry (both for the SS member and any woman he proposed to marry), attainment of the SS sports badge, and regular participation in SS membership activities in addition to their police jobs (p. 101). Some police veterans no doubt disapproved of special treatment given to police candidates who came up through SS recruitment channels so that “preference in recruiting police officers [was] given to those men who were members of the Hitler Youth, the SA [storm troops], or the SS” (p. 95). Under 1937 guidelines issued by Himmler, police were to receive ideological training from the Race and Settlement Main Office (RuSHA) in coordination with SS training directors and special lecturers. When the RuSHA became overwhelmed by the large scale of the program, indoctrination of police was taken over by the SS Training Office (pp. 103-104). Nevertheless, training was intended to be practical rather than strictly doctrinaire:

The guidelines encouraged the selection of a speaker with a previously established personal relationship with the listeners. The latter measure was intended to encourage questions and the free exchange of ideas between comrades united in a shared mission. The ability of the lecturer to relate the material to the everyday life and experience of his listeners was also viewed as critical to successful instruction. Guidelines for these presentations, however, reminded the lecturer of his responsibility to “reflect on the fact that he is neither political prophet nor priest but rather stands as a political soldier in front of political soldiers.” (Westermann, 2005, p. 105)
Again may be seen the SS emphasis not on theory and dogma but on practicality, initiative, and “soldierly” freedom of action within the framework of the general Nazi worldview—an unfamiliar mix for police veterans who had made their careers before the advent of the new regime. These organizational contexts may help explain why, in the Sipo Technical Matters Group, the career police officer and transport manager Pradel insisted on being addressed according to his police rank and—as we will learn in the next chapter by exploring the biographies and motivations of the Group’s individual actors—why Pradel disliked and did not get along with Rauff. How the values, practices, and subcultures that each man inhabited were differentiated within the Group is important to understand, for they are the two main players in its discourse on the gas vans.

Where then did Rauff and Pradel, and the other senders and receivers of the Sonderwagen documents generated in the spring and summer of 1942 by the Sipo Technical Matters Group, fit within the organizational structure of the SS? Or perhaps, we might rephrase the question as it pertains to the rhetorical work of the boundary objects they produced. We have seen how the institutional culture of the Nazi movement and the organizational culture of the SS provided many integrative elements, and also how the clash of SS and civil service cultures generated a tacit and ongoing element of differentiation within the newly created Sipo and SD. But what were the formal divisions in the organization that differentiated the gas van killers into their various subcultures and created the formal boundaries which their texts were required to span?


By the time that the Sonderwagen program was ordered in the late summer and early fall of 1941, the SS comprised the Allgemeine SS (“General SS”) and Waffen-SS (“Armed SS”). The latter were military formations that participated in frontline duty, while the former was concerned with internal security through its police powers, intelligence operations, camp system, and slave-labor industries. Power bases within the Allgemeine SS that were significant players in the Final Solution included the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) headed by Reinhard Heydrich, the Economic and Administrative Main Office (WVHA) headed by Oswald Pohl, and two regional SS officials—Wilhelm Koppe and Odilo Globocnik—who held regional posts in the system of SS and Police Leaders (SSPFs) that Himmler established as his personal representatives in the Occupied Eastern Territories.

The RSHA conducted “The Holocaust by Bullets” (Desbois, 2008) through its mobile Einsatzgruppen shooting squads that operated in captured Soviet territory from June 1941 through the end of the war, though most mass executions were completed by 1943. In response to Himmler’s August 1941 order that a less psychologically stressful method of mass killing be devised the RSHA, as described in Chapter 2, launched a fleet of mobile gas vans that ultimately numbered about 20 vehicles and operated throughout the occupied Soviet lands and in the Balkans. Gas vans were also furnished to Koppe who in December 1941 set up the first operational death camp at Chelmno in former Polish territory that had been annexed to Germany proper. Arthur Greiser, the Nazi governor of the territory, wanted to make his district Judenrein (“Jew-cleansed”) as soon
as possible; as a condition for accepting 20,000 Jews and 5,000 Gypsies to be deported from Germany he asked Himmler and Koppe for assistance in liquidating 100,000 Polish Jews from the overcrowded Lodz ghetto, thus saving him the expense of feeding them.

The vans offered certain advantages for the RSHA because they could be quickly built and Einsatzgruppen personnel were already in the field to employ the vehicles. Permanent gassing facilities would take months to construct and would not easily fit into the RSHA organizational structure. However, stationary gas chambers that killed with prussic acid were developed by the SS Economic and Administrative Main Office (WVHA) and its Concentration Camp Inspectorate which ran the dual slave-labor-and-extermination camps at Auschwitz and Majdanek. And gas chambers that killed with carbon monoxide were built by Globocnik, a Himmler favorite and the SS and Police Leader of the Lublin District in occupied Poland, at the extermination-only camps of Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor. Thus the Final Solution ultimately encompassed some 1.5 million shootings and 150,000 gas van murders committed under the aegis of the RSHA by the Einsatzgruppen in the field; an estimated 150,000 murders at Chelmno overseen by Koppe and conducted with gas vans supplied by the RSHA; and some 4 million gassings at the two WVHA camps (which also held prisoners for hard labor) and the three Aktion Reinhard camps (built solely for exterminations) managed by Globocnik. Nevertheless, the RSHA had a presence in all the extermination facilities since, under its internal security mandate, its Gestapo units selected those to be detained in the camps and then monitored potential resistance activities by the inmates.

The SS chain of command for the Final Solution began with Reichsführer-SS
Heinrich Himmler. All those in charge of killing operations—Heydrich of the RSHA, Pohl of the WVHA, and the system of SS and Police Leaders—reported to Himmler. The RSHA itself was comprised of seven divisions: Amt I, Personnel; Amt II, Administration and Finance; Amt III, Domestic Security Service; Amt IV, Gestapo (Secret State Police); Amt V, Criminal Police (plainclothes detective force); Amt VI, Foreign Security Service; and Amt VII, Ideology (Hilberg, 2003, pp. 284-285). During the war Heydrich was also named Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, or governor of occupied Czechoslovakia—where he was assassinated by Czech partisans and died June 4, 1942. Until then Heydrich engaged in constant turf battles with the SS Order Police (regular uniformed police), while his Security Service struggled for supremacy with the intelligence services of the Wehrmacht and Foreign Ministry.

Amt II Administration and Finance, headed by Hans Nockemann, was comprised of four departments. Among these was II D Technical Matters led by Walther Rauff. The SS lieutenant colonel, however, reported directly to Heydrich—going over the head of Nockemann—and was responsible for negotiating with the Wehrmacht High Command for allocations of munitions and vehicles with which to supply the Einsatzgruppen. It was not uncommon in the RSHA for important subordinates to work directly with Heydrich, as did Adolf Eichmann. In contrast to the “banal” bureaucrat famously portrayed by Arendt (1963), Eichmann displayed—in keeping with SS officer training—considerable independent initiative and dexterity when at Heydrich’s direct request he organized Jewish deportations to the death camps, even though he technically reported to Gestapo (Amt IV) chief Heinrich Muller.
Under the nomenclature of the RSHA the units responsible for the gas van program were II D (Technical Matters Group, headed by Walter Rauff, of the Administration and Finance Office), IID3 (Sipo transportation, directed by Friedrich Pradel), and IID3a (Berlin main garage, managed by Harry Wentritt). Rauff’s brief included IID1 (film, photography, criminological equipment), IID2 (telephone and teleprinter communications), IID4 (armory), and IID5 (supplies). He was also head of the Technical Matters Group (VI F) of the Foreign Security Service (Amt VI), in which capacity he performed personal tasks for Heydrich in occupied Czechoslovakia. In the initial testing of the gas vans Group II D received assistance from the chemical experts of the Criminal Technical Institute, a detective police lab designated Group V F of the Reich Criminal Police Main Office (Amt V). Internal clients for the mobile gas vans were officially the Sipo and SD Regional Offices which the RSHA had set up in the occupied Eastern territories. These offices nominally oversaw the Einsatzgruppen so that orders for the vans were initiated by Sipo and SD regional officials. In turn, the Sipo Technical Matters Group furnished both the vans and their drivers, along with any spare parts that might be needed during operations. When these “special missions” were completed then the vans and drivers were returned to the motor pool in Berlin. In addition, the Technical Matters Group employed a field inspector (August Becker) to check on operations, alert Berlin to any problems, and recommend options to remedy the deficiencies.

Thus, we see a number of formal boundaries relevant to any consideration of the Group’s documents. Rauff was the executive conduit between the gas van program and its stakeholders—the top echelon of the RSHA, the program staff, the internal clients, the
vendors and suppliers. Pradel was the midlevel managerial conduit between Rauff and the motor pool employees. Wentritt was the junior-level conduit between Pradel and the Berlin mechanics. Becker was the conduit between Rauff and the program’s field operations. And in contrast to the executive, managerial and technical staff who worked in Berlin, Becker and the drivers were deployed in the field and worked with the end users of the vans. In numerous ways the organization was subdivided “into networks based on tasks, relationships, information, and functions” (Keyton, 2005, p. 37) that could—and did—lead to multiple and contradictory realities. Or as Martin’s (1992, 2002) theory holds, we now see the outlines of organizational differentiation as members inhabited differing subcultures that had to be negotiated.

**German Bureaucratic Document Protocols**

Understanding the lines of organizational authority within the SS, and in particular Heydrich’s Reich Security Main Office, is important for another reason. For the authorship and routing of the gas van documents produced by the Sipo Technical Matters Group cannot be grasped without a knowledge of its organizational relationships, imperatives, and prerogatives.

On June 1, 1940, a directive was issued and circulated to all RSHA offices that set out exacting guidelines for document creation. These included explicit instructions on filing codes; the bureaucratic implications of letterheads and departmental symbols; who had authority to sign documents in his own name, who had authority to sign for his immediate superior, who did not have such authority, and how authority or non-authority
should be indicated; how handwritten notations should be made in colored pencils according to rank; and that “Long, complicated sentences should be avoided, and margins should be left for comments” (Lozowick, 2000, p. 48). These RSHA guidelines also reflected standard bureaucratic protocols observed in German governmental organs from the First World War through the Third Reich. As Lozowick explained,

The signer of a document generally was not the person who wrote it, and often the writer was not the person who initiated it. In many cases, there is great doubt today as to the identity of the document’s creator, which is to say the person who determined what the content would be. This is a major stumbling block for historians because the tendency is to conflate these processes and attribute them to the person who signed the document. The signer was indeed responsible for what the document says, but the question is whether he was the only one responsible.

(p. 44)

Document protocols reflected the common assumption that:

The head of the system expresses his will, at the middle levels it is translated into detailed instructions, and at the junior levels it is carried out. When underlings run into a problem or into new possibilities, they notify their superiors at the middle level, who in turn draft new proposals for action, and present them to the top man. He approves, and proposals return to the working level in the form of instructions.
The assumption is that this method integrates in a maximal way the broad outlook of the senior official with the lower officials’ view of reality in the field. The mid-level officials must be an efficient pipeline in both directions—they must transfer principles of policy from above to below, and report the difficulties or opportunities for action from below to above. (p. 45)

Rauff held a position at the rank of Referent and, because he therefore served as “chief technical adviser and aide of the Minister, Secretary, and Division Director, he was in charge of a particular field of work . . . [and was] actually in control of most current business, once policies have been approved by his superiors” (Brecht & Glaser, 1940, p. 25; quoted in Lozowick, 2000, p. 46). Thus, for example, in the German original of the technical proposal which various scholars (e.g., Dombrowski, 2000a; Katz, 1992a) have analyzed, the signer of the document—the dispatcher Willi Just—signed by hand his last name only. Above his name, Just also handwrote the initials “I.A.” This means Just was signing im Auftrag, as opposed to in Vetretung or “I.V.” Only the agency head under whose institutional symbol a document was issued could sign in his own name. A person one rank below was permitted to sign I.V. or “as the representative of” his superior, which in fact meant he was “signing at his own discretion, under the authority that his commander had granted him” (Lozowick, 2000, pp. 48-49). By contrast, “A person signing I.A., ‘at the direction of,’ was not signing at his own discretion, but rather by order of his commander, who did not want to be bothered signing himself. The source of authority for the signature is not the rank of the signer but the rank of the person who
The greater our sensitivity to these author codes, the greater our accuracy in describing the shaping of policy—and, when the issue is creation of policy within a bureaucratic system, there is no objective testimony. This is even more true with regard to the testimony of bureaucrats of murder . . . Decisions were not made by a specific person, but rather sprouted from within an undergrowth of senior officers who could make decisions and subordinates who knew what to propose. . . . [T]hey all understood their mission clearly and pursued it out of choice. When they faced groups of officials with other intentions, they reacted in a way that was meant to advance, as best they could, the policy that they had chosen. (p. 56)

Thirty years after the fact, Rauff in his postwar deposition still placed great stress on the matter of representational authority.

How the issue of Heydrich’s representation was regulated when I returned to the RSHA at the beginning of 1941 [and Heydrich was posted to Prague as Deputy Reich Protector of occupied Czech territory], I don’t know. I can only assume that someone represented him in his absence, without however being able to say who that could have been. Also for the time of his activity in Prague and for the time after his death, I don’t know what the representation regulation was. I can only assume that during this time the heads of department were directly subordinated
to Himmler. Furthermore a man like, for instance, [Gestapo chief Heinrich] Mueller would never have subordinated himself to . . . another head of department at the same level. I neither know anything about whether there was a regulation regarding the representation of one head of department by another. I would personally say that, in case of impediment affecting one head of department, the respective head of division became active under his own responsibility or turned directly to the head of the main office. (Nizkor, 2002, p. 13)

Rauff was shown a document by postwar investigators and immediately interjected, “I cannot explain why in the letter from section IIA2 of 19 November 1942 shown to me, Dr. Siegert is mentioned as ‘head of department in representation’ and why this letter is also signed by Streckenbach ‘in representation’” (Nizkor, 2002, p. 13). He also observed how, in 1939 before his stint as Technical Matters head and when he held a junior rank, “Although I am mentioned as a participant in most of these [department head] meetings and although the initial under the protocols [meeting minutes] is without doubt my own, I have no memory at this time of having taken part in these meetings. . . . I consider it possible that . . . being the youngest of those present, I was put in charge of writing the protocol” (p. 8).

Another vital clue for understanding the origins of RSHA documents is their filing codes, which were regulated by the June 1, 1940, directive. Thus the notation on the technical proposal signed by Willi Just—“IIID3a(9) Nr. 214/42 g.Rs.”—is a filing code that means:
File under Department IID3a [Pradel’s motor pool] (9) [Just’s identification]

214 [subject code; documents presented at Nuremberg suggest the 200s may have referred to Sonderwagen matters] 42 [year] g.Rs. [classified Geheime Reichssache or “Secret Reich Matter”].

These insights into German bureaucratic protocol in general, and RHSA practice in particular, highlight the importance to heed Lozowick’s (2000) warning and avoid the tendency “to conflate these processes and attribute them to the person who signed the document” and instead realize that “The signer of a document generally was not the person who wrote it, and often the writer was not the person who initiated it” (pp. 44-45).

Keeping in mind, then, that German bureaucratic documents were usually collaborative products that emerged from a thicket of junior, midlevel and senior personnel—who were the members of the Sipo Technical Matters Group? If we imagine for a moment that organization and fragmentation represent two poles of social existence, the first a state of (at least temporary) consensus and the second an opposite state of complete fragmentation into individual interests, it is relevant to ask: What were those individual interests that the Group held at bay, via the rhetorical work of their boundary objects, to stave off fragmentation—and thereby collaborate on documents of such stunning calculation and callousness toward the mass murder of other human beings?
CHAPTER FOUR
THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR MOTIVES

Personnel of the Gas Van Program

Organizations at any given time manifest, as we learned earlier, the three dimensions of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation (Martin, 1992, 2002; Martin, Frost & O’Neil, 2006). Perhaps boundary objects might therefore be conceived as putting forth integrative discourses that strive to resonate with what organization members share, in order to negotiate those members’ differentiated values, practices, and subcultures in a way that, when prompted by an integrative exigence, can produce temporary and issue-specific consensus amidst the change, confusion, and ambiguity of organizational fragmentation. Thus, to illuminate the integrative dimension of the Sipo Technical Matters Group we have so far followed Longo’s (1998) cultural research methodology by first exploring the historical and cultural contexts that the killers broadly shared—the long history of religious and economic anti-Semitism and modern history of racial anti-Semitism, and German cultural touchstones about the natures of human activity and community as these were subsequently picked up and expressed in the Nazi doctrines of Volksgemeinschaft and Führerprinzip. These historical and cultural contexts are salient, we discovered, because organizations are open systems that absorb larger societal discourses and then shape local versions. Next we investigated the differentiating dimension of the Sipo Technical Matters Group by exploring the varieties of values, practices, and subcultures its members inhabited—the differentiation between ideological Party followers and career police professionals, and the myriad organizational divisions
of the SS and its Reich Security Main Office (RSHA).

Now we can move onto the dimension of fragmentation within the Sipo Technical Matters Group, how competing interests dealt with change, confusion, and ambiguity as they contested, negotiated, or resisted attempts at temporary and issue-specific consensus. Exploring the flux of their consensus and dissensus also brings us to the next level of Longo’s (1998) methodology, as we begin to see the texts they produced as a discourse.

The roster of gas-van murderers begins with Walther Rauff. In his role as head of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, he was to “The Holocaust by Bullets” (Desbois, 2008) what Adolf Eichmann was to the Holocaust by gas. Once the Final Solution had become policy, Eichmann was the executive manager who implemented the gassing phase by negotiating with agencies such as the Reichsbahn (national railway administration) and arranging the logistics of transporting Jews to the death camps. In the same way Rauff was the executive manager of the initial shooting phase of the Final Solution, negotiating on Heydrich’s behalf with the Wehrmacht High Command to obtain the munitions required to gun down an estimated 1.5 million Jews. Both held the rank of SS- Obersturmbannführer (lieutenant colonel). Yet Eichmann is better known to the postwar world because Auschwitz, rather than Babi Yar, came to symbolize the Holocaust. The liberation of the camps exposed the gas chambers and crematoria for all to see, while the dead of the Einsatzgruppen shootings remained scattered across vast territories and their locations often unknown. The film footage taken by the Allies at Dachau and Bergen-Belsen have shocked the world since they were first shown at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946. By contrast, the Einsatzgruppen officers reentered postwar German society, many
to respected positions in civil service and industry. When put on trial in the 1960s and early 1970s they were prosecuted only as accomplices to murder and many were acquitted or given light sentences. For his part, Rauff fled to South America and lived out his days under the protection of the Chilean government until his death in 1984.

Born in 1906, Rauff was the son of a banker who raised him with martial discipline. Too young to see service in the Great War, he joined the German Navy in 1924 and rose to first lieutenant and the command of a minehunter. When charges of adultery and a messy divorce compelled his resignation from the navy in 1937, Rauff was befriended by a former shipmate and reserve naval officer who simultaneously held a commission in the SS. In fact, Rauff was so desirable as an SS recruit that he suffered no obstacles from his “hurried” remarriage to a woman whose former husband was Jewish. “Rauff repaid his benefactors with a zeal that always earned the highest accolades in his personnel file” (Browning, 1991, p. 60). Through his personal connection Rauff was hired in 1938 by the SS Security Service and made a mobilization expert in preparation for the 1939 German invasion of Poland. Heydrich was organizing Einsatzgruppen to follow behind the Wehrmacht and murder Polish leaders and intelligentsia. Thus Rauff joined a specially created bureau charged with compiling a personnel card file “to provide a comprehensive list of SS and police personnel who could be called on to form a special command for action in Poland” and later to “select SS officers who would work ‘ruthlessly and harshly to achieve National Socialist aims’” (Rossino, 2003, pp. 11-12). He was present at numerous high-level meetings and at least once entrusted with preparing the minutes (Nizkor, 2002)—much as Eichmann assisted Heydrich in drafting
the infamous Wansee Protocols.

Rauff “was thus very well informed about the mass murder taking place in Poland since the beginning of the war” (Mallmann & Cüppers, 2005, p. 4). After the success of the Polish campaign Rauff received permission in 1940 to volunteer for a naval tour as commander of a minehunter squadron in the English Channel, a potentially important posting as Hitler weighed a seaborne invasion of Britain. But Operation Sealion was abandoned as Hitler decided instead to prepare an invasion of the Soviet Union. Heydrich personally interceded with Admiral Raeder, the commander-in-chief of the Navy, to have Rauff returned to the RSHA in early 1941. His Polish experience would be valuable as Heydrich was mobilizing Einsatzgruppen for the upcoming Russian campaign. Then, too, Heydrich had likewise joined the SS (in 1931) after being cashiered from the Navy over charges of sexual impropriety and breach of promise, so that he and Rauff had their naval backgrounds in common. Rauff was put in charge of the technical department that would supply the Einsatzgruppen preparing for “special tasks” in conquered Soviet lands. In that capacity he quickly “rose on the SS ladder” and became “one of those most centrally responsible for the mass murder of the Jews” (Mallman & Cüppers, 2005, p. 5).

At the same time, his boss Heydrich had been appointed—in addition to his RSHA post—by Hitler as the chief civil administrator of occupied Czech territory. Thus, while retaining his RSHA positions, “Rauff followed his superior Heydrich to Prague when the latter was appointed Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia [in September 1941]. Rauff’s job there was to direct organizing the technical intelligence service in Heydrich’s new office” (Mallmann and Cüppers, 2005, p. 5). As a
consequence, Rauff split his time between Berlin and Prague.

The project of adapting the concept of gas vans, used previously in the “euthanasia” program, was given to Rauff’s Technical Matters Group since the Berlin motor pool was already supplying vehicles to the Einsatzgruppen. The vans entered service by December 1941 but were attended by constant breakdowns and unanticipated operational difficulties. And within six months the mass shootings and mobile gassings were beginning to wind down, especially as purpose-built extermination camps would soon be coming online. After Heydrich was assassinated in June 1942, the following month Rauff took an SS field command in Africa. Eventually he ran a slave labor camp in Tunis and by war’s end headed Gestapo operations in Milan, Italy.

_Friedrich Pradel_, who reported to Rauff as head of the Sipo transportation service (IID3), was born 1901 and went on to attain his Abitur and briefly attended university. He trained three years for a career in sales but in 1925 changed direction and entered officer training for the Prussian municipal police force, where Pradel achieved the rank of major and became a specialist an automotive affairs. After the absorption of German police forces into the SS in 1936, a year later he was brought to the Berlin headquarters of the regular uniformed police. Soon, however, he was transferred to Heydrich’s Security Police and put in charge of its four thousand motor vehicles (Browning, 1991, pp. 60-61). Rauff testified after the war about the friction between them:

> For the provision of the motor vehicles of the Security Police my subordinate Pradel was responsible. Pradel, who had come from the Order Police, didn’t like
me and was in a certain conflict with me. As to whether I had differences with
him regarding the [gas vans] . . . I consider that possible, but cannot remember it
exactly. (Nizkor, 2002)

The friction between the two men is suggested by an incident regarding Pradel’s transfer
from the Order Police to the Security Police. A year after Pradel came to Berlin he was
granted an SS rank equivalent to his rank of major in the municipal police. That same
year, 1938, he was granted Nazi Party membership retroactive to 1937 (Browning, 1991,
pp. 60-61). But Pradel continued to identify professionally with the uniformed police.
The gas van field inspector, Becker, testified after the war that even though Pradel was
given the equivalent SS rank of *Hauptsturmführer* (captain) he preferred to be addressed
by his police rank of “Major” (Klee, Dressen & Riess, 1991/1988, p. 69). In fact, Pradel
did not officially request a transfer from the regular uniformed police to the Security
Police until February 1942. Rauff supported the transfer but damned Pradel with faint
praise. He lacked leadership qualities, Rauff asserted, and neither could his “inner
attitude” (political reliability) or “Weltanschauung” (ideology) be vouchsafed. But Pradel
managed automotive affairs “with considerable success,” Rauff allowed, and the Security
Police could not develop such expertise on its own any time soon (Browning, 1991, pp.
60-61). The transfer was granted but not until December 1943. Pradel’s limited
leadership skills and initiative are also seen in the fact that he was unable to secure the
chassis needed for the first gas vans so that Rauff had to intervene with the Wehrmacht.
Since the superstructures would have to be outsourced to a contractor, it was also Rauff
who suggested the ruse of ordering the specially sealed truck compartments on the pretext of needing them to transport corpses infected with spotted fever (Beer, 1987).

The nature of Rauff’s orders to Pradel for the gas vans were disputed by the two men after war. “Pradel claimed he protested to Rauff, but was told that any difficulties he made would have to be reported to Heydrich. Rauff denied that he threatened Pradel; the latter was so ambitious, he said, that that was totally unnecessary” (Browning, 1991, p. 101). In any event, Pradel had already organized vehicle supply for the Einsatzgruppen and had heard from drivers of the mass shootings. Since he had also seen a number of the Einsatzgruppen daily situation reports, he knew of the mass murders occurring in Soviet territory (p. 61). As for his ambition, Pradel’s may have been of a different sort than Rauff’s since he was arrested by the SS in 1944 for black marketeering. Accused with several co-workers of trading gasoline for liquor, he was sent to the Oranienburg concentration camp but then released in January 1945 to serve on the Eastern Front with the Waffen-SS. “Thus Pradel fell far short of the Nazi ideal but was useful for his technical expertise until he succumbed to the temptation of corruption” (p. 61). After the war Pradel resumed his police career, until his 1961 arrest and subsequent trial for his gas van activities. He and Wentritt were tried together and both convicted in 1966, Pradel receiving a seven-year sentence and Wentritt three years.

Harry Wentritt was born 1903, the son of a Berlin trolley driver, and at age sixteen entered vocational training to become an electrical mechanic. He was an “old fighter” who joined the Nazi Party in 1932, before Hitler’s accession to power, and was active in the National Socialist Motor Corps and a motorized SA stormtroop. Wentritt in
1935 found work with the Gestapo as an auto welder and subsequently transferred a year later from the SA to the SS (Browning, 1991, p. 61). In June 1941 when the chief mechanic at the Sipo garage in Berlin was transferred to similar duties at the Sipo and SD Regional Office in Minsk (Langerbein, 2004, p. 107), Wentritt was appointed to the job. Within three months Wentritt—who held the rank of SS-Untersturmführer (second lieutenant)—learned from Pradel about the orders to construct mobile gas vans. “Though admittedly not endowed with a quick mind, in the course of time he too realized that the proposed gas vans were for killing Jews” (Browning, 1991, p. 61).

August Becker was born 1900, the son of a factory owner, and after brief service in World War I went on to earn a Ph.D. in chemistry in 1933. His political reliability was unimpeachable, having joined the Nazi Party in 1930 and the SS in 1931, serving in the Gestapo in 1934 and in an armed SS regiment in 1935-38, and then moving to the Security Service (SD) in Berlin where he was put in charge of the bureau responsible for replicating inks and photocopies. In December 1939 he was loaned to the T4 euthanasia program (Friedlander, 1995, pp. 210-211), where he participated in the first test of a gas chamber and then organized distribution of carbon monoxide canisters to the killing centers (Browning, 1991, p. 58). Among T4 personnel he was known as “Red Becker” for his hair. When T4 was officially closed in August 1941, Himmler recalled his SS personnel in order to use their newfound expertise. As field inspector for the program, Becker left Germany in January 1942 and over the next nine months visited each of the four Einsatzgruppen operating in Soviet territory, keeping in frequent contact with Rauff (pp. 68-71; Beer 1987). Yet even Becker’s dulled ethical threshold was finally exceeded
at the end of his inspection tour. In September 1942 he arrived in Minsk where SS units were in the midst of clearing the Jewish ghettos of the Ukraine and Ostland. In the last major operation of the gas vans, some 55,000 Minsk Jews were killed (Rhodes, 2002, pp. 255-256). This was too much even for Becker, who after three days in Minsk hitched a ride on a truck bound for Warsaw and then back to Berlin (Klee et al. 1991, p. 71). Becker was promoted in 1943 from SS-Untersturmführer (second lieutenant) to SS-Obersturmführer (first lieutenant), worked for a time at a state-sponsored agricultural products company in the occupied East, and returned to Berlin with the RSHA Foreign Security Service (Amt VI). After the war he was sentenced by the Allies to three years in a labor camp for his membership in the SS—deemed a criminal organization—and remained free until 1960, when he was condemned by a German court for his role in the T4 and gas vans murders. But his ten-year sentence was commuted for health reasons and Becker was released to a nursing home; he died seven years later.

Albert Widmann was born 1912; though the son of a locomotive engineer, he managed to earn a 1938 doctorate in chemistry from Stuttgart’s respected Technische Hochschule. During his student days Widmann worked during his vacations for Dr. Walter Heess, a Stuttgart police lab chemist who in 1938 was appointed head of the Criminal Technical Institute (KTI) of the Reich Criminal Police Main Office (RKPA) in Berlin. Heess brought along his protégé Widmann, who had just graduated, and made him head of the KTI chemistry section. Active in the National Socialist Motor Corps since 1933, Widmann was granted Nazi Party membership in 1937 and then entered the SS in 1939. When the KTI was asked to advise the T4 euthanasia program, Widmann
performed animal tests. His recommendation that pure carbon monoxide gas be used as the killing agent was accepted. Once the Einsatzgruppen mass shootings commenced and Himmler in August 1941 asked that a less stressful killing method be devised, RKPA chief Arthur Nebe summoned Widman to make tests—conducted on asylum patients—of dynamiting victims and of killing through vehicle exhaust gas. Later in Berlin when Heydrich ordered construction of a gas van fleet, Widman rounded up Soviet prisoners from nearby Sachsenhausen concentration camp and conducted tests to determine what level of carbon monoxide would be lethal. “Attracted by tasks ‘more important to the war effort’ than fighting crime, Widmann would subsequently become involved not only in the gas van but also in demolition, poison gas grenades, and poison bullets” (Browning, 1991, p. 58).

Willi Just, born 1899, was older than the youthful “up-and-comers” such as Rauff (born 1906) who were prized by the SS, and also had been professionally surpassed by the younger Pradel (born 1901) and Wenttritt (born 1903) to whom he reported. His SS personnel file shows that Just saw frontline duty during the First World War, worked as a welder, and in 1920 joined the Schutzpolizei (Schupo) or regular municipal police. These experiences may have distinguished Just from the younger Rauff, Pradel, and Wentritt. For one thing, those who were born too late for frontline service often felt cheated of a defining life-experience and sought other ways to compensate. Also, Just obtained steady postwar civil-service employment that insulated him from the hyperinflation of 1922-23, a time when younger persons often struggled to establish themselves—as was the case with Pradel. After the Schupo was absorbed by the SS, Just went to work in 1937 as a
welder for the Gestapo. He was “expected” to seek SS membership and was accepted in 1938, but did not join the Nazi Party until 1941. The overall picture of Just is a steady blue-collar worker who was content with the job security afforded by civil service and not driven as much by ideological or professional zeal (Browning, 1991, p. 102 n33).

**Wilhelm Findeisen** had been Heydrich’s personal chauffeur until assigned to be a gas van driver. In prior years, however, his career had been both colorful and checkered. During the hyperinflation that wrecked the German economy after the First World War, Findeisen left his apprenticeship to a designer and instead worked a series of jobs as a driver, newspaper deliveryman, and oil factory worker. Even before the Nazis came to power, Findeisen felt he had at last found secure work when the SA hired him as a driver. After the Nazi takeover in 1933 he obtained a permanent post as the personal driver for the Berlin police chief. But when the SS Security Service offered higher pay he joined the Black Corps in time to serve as a driver for the Einsatzgruppen during the 1939 German invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Then followed a brush with fame: On November 9, 1939, Hitler narrowly missed an assassin’s bomb and the SS suspected (erroneously) that two British agents were involved. The SS lured the agents to a café just across the Dutch border and conducted a daring abduction. Findeisen, the driver for the raid, was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class by Hitler himself and promoted to be Heydrich’s personal driver. Soon, however, Heydrich sacked him for habitual drinking and returned Findeisen to his old post in the RSHA. Later that same month, in November 1941, Findeisen’s superiors gave him a chance at rehabilitation by assigning him to the top-secret Sonderwagen project. He would operate one of the vans being furnished to the
Sipo and SD Regional Office in Ukraine. Though he kept his position, Findeisen was among the minority of specialists who never attained SS officer rank (Langerbein, 2004, pp. 108-109). After the war Findeisen testified that he refused orders to shoot victims: “My job was simply to drive the van” (Klee, Dressen & Riess, 1991/1988, p. 72).

Thomas Gevatter (not his real name; Langerbein, 2004, p. 108) was reassigned to drive gas vans in June 1942 after serving during the previous year as a driver for the Einsatzgruppe B shooting squad. An SS-Hauptscharführer (technical sergeant), he was drafted in the summer of 1941 for active SS duty in Russia, leaving his position as a driver for the State Police in occupied Czechoslovakia. Gevatter had apprenticed ten years earlier as a truck driver but lost his job during the Depression. He launched an independent trucking business and also joined the SS in 1931 in hopes of bettering his employment prospects, attracted also by the group’s smart uniforms and elite image. Gevatter’s business nevertheless failed but, when the Nazis came to power in 1933, he was made an auxiliary police officer to help round up leftist opponents of the regime, and then awarded a permanent position as a driver with the State Police in Dresden. After war broke out in 1939 he subsequently served as a driver in Czechoslovakia and Russia before his transfer to the gas van program.

Emanuel Schäfer appears in the surviving gas van documents as an internal client of the program, the Sipo and SD chief in occupied Yugoslavia who requested a gas van for a “special mission.” A member of extreme rightwing paramilitary Freikorps units that were active after the First World War, in 1925 he earned a doctorate in jurisprudence but remained involved in rightwing organizations and joined the SS in 1931. After the Nazi
seizure of power in 1933 he held top police positions in Breslau, Oppeln, Kattowitz, and Cologne. At the Kattowicz posting he was the first Gestapo chief with jurisdiction over the newly established Auschwitz concentration camp (Langbein, 2004, p. 287), and in 1941 he oversaw the first deportations of Jews from Cologne. Heydrich transferred him in January 1942 to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where Schäfer, by then an SS-Standartenführer (full colonel), headed the Sipo and SD Regional Office. There he made a “thoroughly humane impression” and, unlike the usual “pigheaded SS man,” was seen as “reasonable” and “very accommodating,” even “beloved” by his immediate staff. After the war, judicial authorities noted his high education and described Schäfer as a “correct and honest official” who was “not to be viewed as an evil Gestapo functionary, rather as an official who—to be sure an enthusiastic National Socialist with early knowledge of the criminal practices—did his duty, but showed humane tendencies and endeavored to remedy the excesses of the regime” (Browning, 1991, p. 59). Nevertheless, he was condemned to six-and-a-half years in prison for ordering the gas-van murders of nearly 7,000 Jewish women and children.

These, then, are among the key players in the SS gas van program. They represent each subculture of its organization—executive, expert, mid and junior level management, technicians, field personnel, clients. But beyond recounting individual biographies for each representative figure, we must now turn to their interactions. If “the way in which subcultures relate to one another is the organization’s culture” (Keyton, 2005, p. 67), we must explore the interrelationships within the Sipo Technical Matters Group to grasp the rhetorical boundary work their texts were required to perform.
Individual Relationships and Motives

For the personnel of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, their experiences of organizational life were governed in large measure by their working relationships with each other and with those in whom the organization had contact. A framework for their relationships was provided by the RSHA organization chart (see Figure 4.1): SS leader Himmler was equivalent to a Minister of Police Affairs and Heydrich as head of the RSHA was equivalent to a ministerial director-general. The heads of the seven RSHA divisions, including Amt II Administration and Finance chief Hans Nockmann, were equivalent to deputy directors-general. One level below was Rauff, who as head of II D Technical Matters held the rank of Referent, a post that functioned as chief technical adviser “in charge of a particular field of work . . . [and] actually in control of most current business, once policies have been approved by his superiors” (Brecht & Glaser, 1940, p. 25; quoted in Lozowick, 2000, p. 46). In turn, Pradel was equivalent to a department commander as head of IID3, the Sipo transportation service.

For his Sipo brief (II D) Rauff oversaw five bureaus, one of which was the Sipo transportation service (IID3) managed by Pradel, who in turn supervised chief mechanic Harry Wentritt of the main Berlin motor pool (IID3a). Handwritten notations on the back of a gas van document show that one of Wentritt’s employees, Willi Just, acted as a dispatcher in routing vehicle repair orders. Becker, the expert field inspector, reported independently to Rauff. The drivers, including Findeisen and Gevatter, were on the Berlin payroll but worked in the field so that their primary relationships were with the Group’s internal clients, namely the Sipo and SD regional offices and the individual
Figure 4.1: Reich Security Main Office and Technical Matters Organization Charts
*Einsatzgruppen* units to whom the gas vans were furnished.

Though Rauff, as head of technical matters for both the Security Police and the Foreign Security Service (i.e., head of II D and VI F) answered nominally to the directors of those bureaus, he reported directly to RSHA chief Heydrich on the *Einsatzgruppen* project and in the personal tasks Rauff performed when his Heydrich was also named Nazi governor of occupied Czechoslovakia. That Rauff had minimal dealings with his nominal superior is suggested in a voluntary deposition he gave in 1972:

If further confronted with the name [of] Dr. Nockemann, I can say that he also was, as far as I remember, head of Department II. About Dr. Nockemann I remember that he had a car accident at which his wife and his driver lost their lives. Dr. Nockemann then left Department II and was later killed in action in Russia. I cannot say, however, when the accident was and when he left Department II. I would now say that Dr. Siegert was Dr. Nockemann’s successor, but I cannot state this with certainty (Nizkor, 2002, pp. 3-4).

When Rauff returned from his naval tour to the RSHA in 1941 and was named heard of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, he recalled in 1972, “Regarding the equipment of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Russian campaign I must have received my instructions from the then-in-charge head of department, without being able to say if at the time it was Dr. Nockemann or Dr. Siegert” (Nizkor, 2002, p. 9). Later, when Rauff was ordered to construct a fleet of gas vans, he remembered, “I don't think that Dr. Siegert was involved
in these matters at the time, although he probably knew about them” (p. 12). That Heydrich would deal directly with a Referent was not unprecedented since the literature on Adolf Eichmann (e.g., Lozowick, 2000; Cesarini, 2004) has demonstrated that the latter, as manager of the Jewish affairs bureau (IVB4) of the Gestapo, frequently had direct dealings with Heydrich as well as his nominal superior, Gestapo chief Heinrich Muller. For example, Rauff noted that negotiations with the Wehrmacht to obtain supplies for the Einsatzgruppen “were even conducted by Heydrich himself whenever I was not getting any further” (Nizkor, 2002, p. 9). Even if Rauff was hazy in his memory of his nominal Amt II superior, his recollections of Heydrich were clear and vivid:

Heydrich was an insanely ambitious man, a fox who was extremely suspicious and tolerated no one next to, let alone above, him. He was also a person who could not lose. Not even in a game. Accordingly the relation between him and all other persons at a very high level . . . was very difficult due to Heydrich’s personality. I can thus repeat my statement mentioned above that an honest and straight person . . . had a shocking effect on Heydrich. (Nizkor, 2002, p. 13)

. . . When confronted with the following characterization of Heydrich, “Vindictive person, exceptionally fast on the uptake, always exactly informed. Arguing with him was useless—he stuck to decisions that were often against any reason—during such arguments he made tough and unjust statements to the point of being insulting, leaving no room for opposition,” I would . . . myself underwrite this statement word by word as being accurate. (p. 15)
Rauff then related a telling organizational story about the RSHA chief:

I myself never tried to fight through an argument with Heydrich because that was useless. . . . In this context I would like to repeat that Heydrich could not bear to lose in a game and that therefore my comrades and I in Prague had agreed to let him win at “Doppelkopf” [a card game]. On the other hand it is certainly correct that Heydrich could be a very charming and attentive host. (Nizkor, 2002, p. 15)

Yet another organizational story was told by Findeisen, who for a brief time served as Heydrich’s personal driver. During an outing on a cold winter night, the RSHA chief smelled alcohol on Findeisen’s breath and decided to teach him a lesson in hopes of sobering up his chauffeur. Heydrich took the wheel, dropped Findeisen off at his quarters, and commanded him that night to walk several miles through the snow and report back to the office. When Findeisen quickly reappeared and was still visibly drunk, he admitted to Heydrich that he had found a ride back to headquarters. Heydrich on the spot sentenced him to ten days’ arrest and sent Findeisen back to his former posting (Langerbein, 2004, p. 109). This was the larger-than-life personality, the ambitious and vindictive boss who could also turn on the charm, who set the tone for organizational life in the RSHA.

The relationship of Rauff with his own subordinate, Pradel, was shaped by the former’s jealousy for rank privileges, proximity to power and resultant sensitivity to the larger sphere of SS power politics—and the latter’s self-identification as a career police professional, operations manager, and automotive expert. Rauff moved in circles where
“Gradually I became aware that there were many intrigues inside the RSHA” (Nizkor, 2002, p. 5). To be successful in his post he also had to navigate the constant “problem of SD-Police and Wehrmacht [relations]” in which “there were always quarrels” (p. 12) over jurisdiction. Taking the side of his boss, Rauff implicitly accepted Heydrich’s rationale for the gas vans, recalling in his postwar deposition, “Whether at that time I had doubts against the use of gas vans I cannot say. The main issue for me at the time was that the shootings were a considerable burden for the men who were in charge thereof and that this burden was taken off them through the use of the gas vans” (p. 12). Yet in his elevated organizational position, Rauff was only concerned with the big picture and not the details: “Regarding the annihilation of Jews in Russia I know that gas vans were used for this purpose. I cannot say, however, from when on and to what extent this happened” (p. 12). Though no doubt being evasive in his postwar testimony, Rauff implied the Sonderwagen project was for him only a minor function:

I used to think that the thing with the gas vans started at the time when I was at the navy. Today I have doubts about this and consider it possible that this matter only got going after I had returned from the navy. At any rate I know that at some time after my return I saw two of these gas vans standing in the yard, which Pradel showed to me. Somehow I then also learned that the gas vans were used for the execution of sentences and for the killing of Jews. (p. 12)
Rauff was more fully and directly occupied with the *Einsatzgruppen* shooting actions, which occurred on a far vaster scale than the gas van killings. As he explained in 1972 about his considerable administrative responsibilities, “The fuel required by the *Einsatzgruppen* was provided by the Wehrmacht. That had been agreed upon at the highest level. The required ammunition was supplied directly to us by the Wehrmacht pursuant to negotiations with the Wehrmacht, and we then sent it to the *Einsatzgruppen*” (Nizkor, 2002, p. 9). For the gas van operations he had Becker in the field to keep him informed: “It is correct that I received something from Becker about the use of gas vans. I myself had told Becker to send me a corresponding report” (p. 12). But the *Sonderwagen* were only an adjunct to the much larger shooting actions. The vans were an improvised stopgap measure, causing the *Einsatzgruppen* even more psychological strain than shooting. The vans supplemented, but never replaced, the mass shootings which continued unabated until the tide of war turned against the Germans.

Nevertheless, even regarding the gas vans, in his postwar deposition Rauff was still jealous of his rank: “I consider it impossible that Pradel should have carried out the development of the gas vans on his own initiative. He must have received an order for this either from me or from another superior standing above me” (p. 12). Pradel only dealt with mid-level non-entities, Rauff suggested: “The major . . . that Pradel mentions [in postwar testimony] is not known to me,” while by contrast, “I always dealt on a higher level, i.e., with General Fellgiebel [Wehrmacht signals chief] in matters of communication material. In matters of motor vehicles I dealt at a similar [top] level with the OKW [Wehrmacht High Command]” (p. 6). As far as Rauff was concerned, Pradel
was a nobody: “I personally can thus not imagine that [the RSHA personnel chief] should have told something about ‘Barbarossa’ [the 1941 invasion of Russia] to a subordinate like Pradel for negotiations with the Wehrmacht” or detailed Pradel to negotiate with the National Socialist Motor Corps to obtain drivers (p. 9). Even thirty years later he bristled at Pradel’s postwar suggestion that Rauff was a latecomer: “It is not correct that, as Pradel states, I only returned to the department from the navy after the commencement of the Russian campaign” (p. 6). From Rauff’s perspective Pradel was only a subordinate, one of five department heads he supervised. Moreover, as his comments regarding Pradel’s transfer from the regular Order Police to the Security Police confirm, Rauff made clear that he regarded Pradel as a professional technocrat rather than a true SS man.

The arms-length and strained relationship between Rauff and Pradel provides an important context for understanding the initial development of the Sonderwagen. As described above, in postwar testimony Pradel claimed he protested the order to construct gas vans and complied only after Rauff threatened to tell Heydrich, while Rauff claimed that no prodding with needed to bring the ambitious Pradel into line. Yet the men agreed on one point. Rauff testified it was “impossible” that Pradel should have built the vans without superior orders, a point also emphasized in Pradel’s own postwar description:

Toward the end of 1941, my immediate superior, Rauff, ordered me to check with Wentritt, the head of the motor pool, to find out whether it would be possible to introduce exhaust fumes into the interior of a closed van. I executed this order, and Wentritt confirmed that it was possible. Rauff then gave instructions that
suitable vehicles should be found and adapted in this way. (Kogon, Langbein & Rückerl, 1983/1993, p. 53)

Once the order was given and Rauff got the ball rolling, however, Pradel took it from there and asked Wentritt about the technical feasibility of the project. At first Wentritt “asked Pradel if there was a way out, but Pradel told him—‘in a friendly tone’—to think of his wife and children” (Browning, 1991, p. 61). Then he told Pradel that from a technical standpoint the requested alterations would be simple. Wentritt testified at his 1960s trial that he was only a link in the chain of command. When the order to design and construct gas vans came in the fall of 1941 he had only been on the job for a few months and, at the relatively young age of age of 37 or 38, was replacing the respected former chief mechanic who had served five years in the post. Thus, according to Wentritt’s interpretation,

Pradel did not go into further details . . . He instructed me to fix the vans in such a way that the engine exhaust fumes could be introduced into the van. . . . Pradel then told me that another pipe had to be fitted inside the van to prevent the occupants from interfering with the admission of the gas. Thus the work carried out in our motor pool was essentially determined by Pradel and his superiors. (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 54)

Was Pradel’s admonition “to think of his wife and children” a veiled threat? Just as
Pradel later claimed Rauff had warned that any “difficulties” would be reported to Heydrich, was Pradel doing the same to Wentritt? This seems possible, though another interpretation may be conjectured. Both Browning (1992) and Goldhagen (1996) have recounted how police reservists in Poland, when told by their commander of orders to conduct a mass shooting of Jews, bade the men to think of their wives and children in Germany who were being subjected to Allied aerial bombings. The men believed this rationale and the purported link between unarmed civilian Jews in a remote Polish hamlet and an alleged global Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy against Germany. Herf (2006) and Fritzsche (2008) have both noted how ordinary Germans, from the frontlines to the home front, increasingly believed this link as the war went on. When confronted with the knowledge of German atrocities in the East, it was easier for Germans to turn the tables and see themselves as victims.

In December 1941 as the first gas vans entered service, Becker entered the picture as a chemical expert on loan to the Sipo Technical Matters Group. As he later testified:

Himmler wanted to deploy people who had become available as a result of the suspension of the euthanasia program, and who, like me, were specialists in extermination by gassing. The reason for this was that the men in charge of the Einsatzgruppen in the East were increasingly complaining the firing squads could not cope with the psychological and moral stress of the mass shootings indefinitely. (Klee et al, 1991/1988, p. 69)
After his posting to Rauff’s department, Becker testified, “[Rauff] explained the situation to me, saying that the psychological and moral stress on the firing squads was no longer bearable and that therefore the gassing program had started” (Klee et al. 1991/1988, p. 69). Rauff stressed the point that that gas van program was already in motion. Becker stated, “He said the gas-van drivers with drivers were already on their way to, or had indeed reached, the individual Einsatzgruppen.” Thus Becker was appointed inspector for the gas van program: “My professional brief was to inspect the work” and “ensure that the mass killings carried out in the lorries proceeded properly” with “particular attention to the mechanical functioning of these vans” (p. 69). Becker left Germany in January 1942 and over the next eight months visited each of the four Einsatzgruppen operating in Soviet territory. He began with Group D in the Crimea and ended with Group A on the Baltic, keeping in frequent contact with Rauff (Klee et al., 1991, pp. 68-71; Beer, 1987).

As the surviving gas van documents confirm, operations were centrally administered by Rauff and the Sipo transportation team. Internal clients, primarily the Sipo and SD Regional Offices that oversaw the Einsatzgruppen, requested vans from Rauff. When these requests were granted, the Sipo motor pool provided both vans and drivers. When repairs and spare parts were needed, clients telegrammed their requests for these as well. Handwritten notations on the telegrams show these requests were bucked to Pradel and eventually down to Willi Just for coordination and fulfillment. And when the “special missions” were completed, vans and drivers were returned to Berlin. These operating procedures were a crucial change from the way that the Einsatzgruppen conducted mass shootings, for historians are now learning the extent to which
“commando heads were given free rein in terms of how to carry it out. The way the [shooting] massacres took place depended on the circumstances—topography, the presence of partisans—different factors that the Germans had to weigh” so that “the perpetrators of genocide used everything—cliffs, grain silos, beaches, irrigation wells, ditches” as mass graves (Desbois, 2008, pp. 81, 98).

Still, even when the Sonderwagen project introduced central administration to the genocide, the organizational life experienced by the gas van drivers reflected more of the ad hoc nature of mobile field operations than the bureaucratic routines of Rauff, Pradel, Wentritt, and Just at RSHA headquarters in Berlin. The drivers accompanied the Einsatzgruppen over vast territories, but strove to confine their activities to driving and avoided participating in the loading and unloading of Jewish victims. The odium of their duties need not be recounted here in full. But their postwar testimony features organizational stories of how their own organizational culture clashed with that of the Einsatzgruppen. In the culture of the latter, everyone—drivers included—were expected to participate in shootings so that all might be bloodied and bound together by their shared complicity. Though specialists and technicians permanently assigned to the death squads “had a unique status in their units . . . because their job was crucial for the proper functioning of the Einsatzgruppen” and this “gave the specialists a sense of pride,” they were often viewed by comrades with “jealousy, suspicion, and at times contempt because the specialists’ knowledge was limited to a narrow and ‘secondary’ function” to the “soldierly” mission of killing the enemy (Langerbein, 2004, pp. 103-104).

Postwar testimonies of the gas van drivers feature organizational stories of how
*Einsatzgruppen* officers attempted to coopt them into the squads’ culture by pressuring them into personally killing Jews—and how the *Sonderwagen* drivers resisted. The units’ regular drivers typically participated in shootings—including Wentritt’s predecessor who, when transferred to field duty, soon became an enthusiastic volunteer (Langerbein, 2004, p. 115). Gevatter testified after the war of his hesitation and distaste for driving the gas van, to the point where he one day deliberately ran his vehicle into the mud to delay the gassing—and was forced at gunpoint by an *Einsatzgruppen* officer to personally conduct the killing on the spot without waiting to extricate the van (Langerbein, 2004, p. 117).

Findeisen also believed his orders set him apart: “I was told that the whole operation and the van itself were secret. It was expressly forbidden to photograph the vans and I was not to let anyone near the van” (Klee et al., 1991/1988, p. 71). Even under intense pressure he kept his distance:

One evening several officers appeared and ordered certain people to go with them. They went into a private flat where they picked up a professor and his daughter. These people were then taken to a spot close to a piece of open land where a grave was dug. The people, i.e. the officers, then gave orders for these two people to be shot. One of the officers said to me, “Findeisen, shoot these people in the neck.” I refused to do this as did the other men. The girl must have been about eighteen or nineteen. The officer shot the people himself as the others refused. He swore at us and said we were cowards, but apart from that he did not do anything to us. (Klee et al., 1991/1988, pp. 71-72)
Findeisen’s relief at not having to kill face-to-face, at being able to maintain his specialist façade and distance himself from personal responsibility, was palpable when he testified, “My job was simply to drive the van. The van was loaded at headquarters . . . [and] the door was bolted and the [gas] tube connected . . . I drove through the town and then out to the anti-tank ditches where the vehicle was opened. This was done by prisoners” (Klee et al., 1991/1988, p. 72). Another gas van driver, Erich Gnewuch, similarly testified, “I myself never shot a single Jew; I only gassed them” (Kogon et al., 1993/ 1983, p. 58).

Nevertheless, Findeisen’s self-identification as a specialist spurred him to go the extra mile and “clean the gas chamber of his vehicle at the end of each action” and “always make certain that his vehicle was ready for its sinister purpose, even during the bitter cold of winter, when he carefully nurtured a fire under the engine to prevent it from freezing” (Langerbein, 2004, pp. 117-118).

Altogether, a look at the complex of relationships that shaped the organizational life of the Sipo Technical Matters Group reveals it was comprised of varied interests and motivations. For Pradel, Wentritt and the automotive experts, Browning (1991) cited their professional identities as a driving force, that “The shortcomings of the gas vans were a negative reflection on their workmanship that had to be remedied” or blamed on others, so that “Their greatest concern seemed to be that they might be deemed inadequate to their assigned task” (p. 67). But the full panoply of motives goes even deeper to an individual level: Rauff, the convinced Nazi of upper middle-class origins who made a Faustian bargain with Heydrich to resurrect his career. Pradel, the lower civil servant, mid-level manager, and automotive expert who identified with the professional police
forces rather than the SS. Wentritt, the working-class mechanic who was new on the job and did not want to jeopardize his big break. Becker, the SS loyalist who did what was asked of him. Widmann, the young self-made man who—like Albert Speer—saw a chance to explore the professional opportunities made possible by the National Socialist regime. Findeisen, the drunkard relieved that “My job was simply to drive the van.”

As individual identities and motivations intertwined in the Sipo Technical Matters Group, conflicts emerged—from the friction between Rauff and Pradel as the respective representatives of SS culture and professional police culture, to the friction between the barbarized Einsatzgruppen and the gas van drivers sent out from Berlin who clung to their identities as specialists. In assessing the organizational life of the gas van program, however, Browning (1991) made a telling point:

[As] Pradel and his automotive experts [were] . . . occupied with procuring, dispatching, maintaining, and repairing motor vehicles, their expertise and facilities were suddenly pressed into the service of mass murder when they were charged with producing gas vans. In the course of half a year, some twenty vans passed through their shop, requiring only a moderate expenditure of time and energy on their part—a minor episode interrupting their normal routine. (pp. 66-67)

Boundary objects serve, as Wilson and Herndl (2007) demonstrated, to create a “trading zone” which by its is a “temporary space of cooperation and exchange between different
disciplines or subdisciplines” (p. 132, emphasis added). This study began with the assertion that new insights might be gained by shifting our perspective from a symbolically monolithic view of “the Final Solution” and being willing to see the genocide’s polycratic, entropic, and punctuated aspects. The latter aspect, which sees the Final Solution as a blitzkrieg burst of murderous intensity, accords with the notion that boundary objects by their nature produce only temporary trading zones. Such spaces do not endure unless continually negotiated. Browning’s observation that the *Sonderwagen* project endured just half a year affirms that the competing interests within the Sipo Technical Matters Group only needed to produce a temporary cooperative space—and further, that this consensual space quickly unraveled when events superseded the gas van enterprise and members’ integrative exigence was removed. They did not need an ontologically prior entity called an “organization” to provide them a stable “container” of shared values in which to function, but only a temporary interstitial zone in which to cooperate—just barely long enough.

Analyzing how their everyday documents served as boundary objects in creating such a zone is the next stage of our inquiry.
CHAPTER FIVE

DOCUMENTS FOR DESTRUCTION

Setting up the Analyses

So far this study has suggested that a shift in perspective—of viewing “The Final Solution” not as a single, symbolically composite crime but as a contingent constellation of locally polycratic, entropic, and punctuated events—might yield new insights into the Nazi genocide. One such insight is in seeing the perpetrators’ need to negotiate their own competing interests long enough to create temporary spaces of cooperation and exchange, an exigence that—as this study argues—could be met by production of organizational texts to serve as boundary objects (Griesemer & Starr, 1989; Wilson & Herndl, 2007) for bridging their differences. In turn, the suggestion that everyday documents can function in this manner requires the view that organizational communications are not only instruments of message clarification for maximizing productivity but are also means by which members constitute, construct, and continually renegotiate their associations.

To analyze texts from this perspective necessitates a research methodology that can account for the larger historical and cultural discourses that bear upon text production—and such a methodology has been proposed by Longo (1998). Following that method, we have to this point explored the historical and cultural contexts of the mobile gas van program administered by the Sipo Technical Matters Group of the SS Reich Security Main Office. In particular, since organizations reflect larger societal discourses which they shape into local versions, the cultural contexts for their communications must explore the surrounding national culture (in our case, that of Nazi
Germany), institutional culture (of the National Socialist mass movement), and relevant organizational culture (of the Nazi SS, its Reich Security Main Office, and the Sipo Technical Matters Group itself). Further, we learned of Martin’s (1992, 2002; Martin, Frost & O’Neill, 2006) thesis that at any given moment an organization simultaneously manifests the three dimensions of integration (what members share), differentiation (the various subcultures that members inhabit), and fragmentation (so that members must continually renegotiate their association amidst organizational ambiguity, change, and confusion). Thus, we have outlined what members of the Group shared (the historical legacies of religious, economic, and racial anti-Semitism; the cultural heritages of the “people’s community” and the “leadership principle”), their differentiated subcultures (convinced Nazis versus career police professionals; the descending levels of the organization), and their fragmentation (the mélange of local and personal interests and motives from which they had to forge temporary and issue-specific consensus).

All of this is a prelude, however, for the next phase of research which is called for in our methodology, namely to analyze the texts of the Sipo Technical Matters Group as an organizational discourse—the better to understand their function as boundary objects. Discourse is “an increasingly significant focus of interest” as researchers seek ways to “theorize the increasingly complex processes and practices that constitute ‘organization’” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putnam, 2001, p. 1). Since the 1990s, reported Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (2001), “management and organizational theorists have started to show a keen interest in discursively based studies of organizations,” thus establishing “a field of inquiry termed ‘organizational discourse’” and sparking a “proliferation of such research
and associated publications” (p. 6). A diverse range of approaches has emerged as researchers wrestle with the fact that “discourse patterns fuse with organizational processes in ways that make language and organizations a unique domain—one that differs from the study of linguistics in general and discourse analysis in other social settings” (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, p. 78). With specific regard to technical communication, Berkenkotter (2002) surveyed approaches for analyzing everyday texts in organizational settings and reported that technical writing is chiefly analyzed via the three methods of rhetorical criticism and theory, genre analysis, and discourse analysis “as developed within the context of applied linguistics” (p. 48). These three approaches—when combined with insights garnered from the recent and diverse scholarship in organizational discourse studies—suggest three complementary methods for analyzing the Nazi texts.

First, while Katz (1992a) has previously raised the possibility of critiquing the killers’ use of the Aristotelian topoi, other avenues of rhetorical critique are also available to the analyst (e.g., see Burgchardt, 2010). Here I choose to employ three such avenues. One is grounded in Miller’s (1993, 1994) conception of the rhetorical community which is held together by marshalling the rhetorical resources of metaphor, genre, and narrative; a look at the Nazi documents from this perspective can yield a socio-rhetorical analysis suited to seeing the organization as a site of both contestation and consensus. The next is grounded in Sauer’s (2003, 2006) conception of the Cycle of Technical Documentation in Large Regulated Industries, which explains how embodied local knowledge is rhetorically transformed into actionable engineering knowledge and again into
generalizable and scientific standards. The last is suggested by the growing literature on visual rhetorics (e.g., Hill & Helmers, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Katz commented briefly on the paragraph structure of the gas van document he analyzed and this important point can be extended through a detailed look at the visual rhetorics of the five-page German original. From the filing code at the top, to the signature code at the bottom, these visual aspects speak volumes about the origination of the documents (Lozowick, 2000). The documents are replete with visual clues, from the use of official-looking preprinted forms to the copious handwritten marginalia.

Second, Berkenkotter (2002) noted that Miller’s landmark 1984 essay on genre as social action has prompted many “scholars and researchers . . . [to] become interested in describing professional, disciplinary, and organizational genres” (p. 49). Miller and Selzer (1985) also proposed a five-step method for discovering genre-specific and institution-specific special topics in technical communications: (1) compare documents with their accompanying internal directives; (2) compare multiple documents from the same organization and checking for language that recurs on different occasions; (3) examine any written guidelines the organization has issued for its writers; (4) check for internal correspondence about a project or any marginalia and notes to writers that may appear on documents; and (5) utilize interviews of the writers. All five of these steps will be pursued to discover recurring genres in the Sonderwagen documents—of which there are many. Eliciting the organizational genres of the Sipo Technical Matters Group can, then, assist in unpacking the culture that informed its discourse.

Third, while Berkenkotter (2002) favored linguistically-based discourse analyses,
the recent literature on organizational discourse suggests that researchers are pursuing a wide range of approaches. This diversity stems from the fact that “organizational discourse is poorly defined” so that “Despite numerous theoretical antecedents, it has few clear parameters and, as a field of study, it incorporates a variety of diverse perspectives and methodologies reflecting its multi-disciplinary origins” (Grant, Keenoy & Oswick, 1998, p. 1). Thus, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) offered an open-ended definition whereby “discourse is viewed as a way of knowing” (p. 79), while Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam (2004) suggested that:

the term “organizational discourse” refers to the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed. (p. 3)

By this definition, the present study would explore the document traffic of the Sipo Technical Matters Group and how its members’ subjective experiences of this discourse brought the organizational object of bureaucratic genocide into being. But viewing “discourse . . . as a way of knowing” or “texts . . . that bring organizationally related objects into being” potentially opens the field to many approaches. To make sense out of this diversity, Grant and Iedema (2005) distinguished between linguistically-based organizational discourse analysis (“ODA”) and organizational discourse studies (“ODS”) whose approaches have “emerged from within organization and management studies [and
are] highly varied” (p. 38). Thus, *contra* Berkenkotter, research into organizational texts can legitimately follow ODS methods—which, Grant and Iedema argued, can be mapped along five dimensions according to whether the focus is on: theory versus empirical data; a monomodal versus a multimodal orientation; “what is” (pattern analysis) versus “what could be” (marginal meanings); cognition versus practice; and critique/emancipation versus pragmatic intervention. These five dimensions, however, do not offer researchers five either/or choices. Rather, each dimension should be seen as a continuum along which researchers can locate methodological combinations appropriate to their projects. Thus, my study adopts the following locations within each dimension:

1. a *theoretical* focus that is “oriented toward the philosophy of social organization and representation, using discourse as an abstract explanatory construct” (Grant & Iedema, 2005, p. 44) by introducing interpretive and postmodern perspectives on organizing, while also plumbing the *empirical data* of the SS gas van documents through linguistic analysis.

2. a *multimodal* orientation that investigates sense-making not only through language but via such means as visual rhetorics and organizational stories.

3. an attempt to discern *patterns* by discovering organizational genres in the gas van documents, while also excavating these texts to discern meanings—such as any hesitations about the killing project—that were *marginalized*.

4. a commitment to “the view that *cognition* is prediscursive” (Grant & Iedema, 2005, p. 52) so that culturally situated mental models may have influenced SS
organizational experience, while also acknowledging that mental schemas do not predetermine behavior; since discourse has both symbolic and material dimensions, communities of practice must negotiate “the tension between human interaction . . . and the tools, technologies, language forms, and artifacts that humans use in interaction” (p. 53).

5. a combination of critique and intervention that offers an account of destructive power/knowledge at work in the Final Solution and also explores the ethical insights this cautionary example affords to communicators today.

In particular, my methodological decision not to rely solely on language—but to incorporate a theoretical focus and not view empirical data alone as sufficient explanation for organizational phenomena—can help address an admitted limitation of my study: namely, that I am an English speaker doing research on German documents. If organizational discourse is seen as a way of knowing (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, p. 79) and of bringing organizationally related objects into being (Grant, Hardy, Oswick & Putnam, 2004, p. 3), then items such as the SS document writers’ word order or sentence structure (in the original German) are not wholly decisive for my analysis of how the killers’ historical and cultural ways of knowing may have enabled them to bring organizationally related boundary objects in being. Other scholars of technical communication, for example, have offered useful analyses by working from English translations of the lengthiest gas van text: Katz (1992a) pointed out how the German technical writers unconsciously employed topics (i.e., a way of knowing) that are common
to Western rhetorical policy deliberation (i.e., *a bringing into being*). Likewise, Dombrowski’s (2000a) review focused on how “this document exemplifies certain values” (i.e., *a way of knowing*) and then “puts into concrete action a whole set of values [that stem] from its cultural context” (i.e., *a bringing into being*) (pp. 83-84).

Even a linguistics-based approach to analyzing everyday texts, Stillar (1998) convincingly argued, is incomplete without rhetorical and social perspectives. Language may instantiate *textual resources* that are dependent on (in our case) German language to structure and organize information. But Stillar observed that language—whether German or English or another tongue—also instantiates *ideational resources* (a text is “about something” in that it describes who are the participants and their roles and what are the circumstances and time perspective) and *interpersonal resources* (a text, because it is “to and from somebody,” shapes interaction and constructs social relations as writers assign roles to and express attitudes toward addressees) (pp. 20-21). Thus according to Stillar’s model, analyses of ideational and interpersonal functions of language are not wholly dependent on the specific tongue of the writers. And because “language is characterized and analyzed in terms of its role in social practice” (p. 92), he noted, its ideational and interpersonal aspects are necessarily elaborated through rhetorical and social theory.

To sum up, then, my analyses will proceed in the following manner: First, the remainder of this chapter will be given over to the necessary prequel of introducing the documents themselves by describing the specific circumstances of each text and providing English translations. Chapter 6 will carry the rhetorical and genre analyses by laying the theoretical groundwork and then offering interpretations of the texts. And
Chapter 7 will offer an organizational discourse analysis through theoretical grounding and then by interpreting the documents to reconstruct the discourse in which the desk-murderers created a temporary space for consensus. Throughout, we will see how the SS documents functioned as boundary objects.

Introducing the Documents

Before moving to analyses—rhetorical, generic, discursive—of the gas van corpus generated by the Sipo Technical Matters Group, a brief introduction of each document is helpful. Seven surviving texts from the Group are included in this study along with two others that, although not sent or received by the personnel of the Group, are documents in which its clients refer to their usage of the gas vans. Each introduction provides the document type, date, sender, recipient, stated purpose, and historical and organizational settings. In this chapter, English translations for most documents are also provided—translations that will serve as the bases for rhetorical analyses of the texts in Chapter 6. The German originals are reproduced in Chapter 6 to accompany analyses of their visual rhetorics.

The documents of the Group span the spring and early summer of 1942 and were generated between late March and late June of that year. This was the period after the vehicles had already been tested, built and placed in service, and when the Sonderwagen program was at its most active—so that the documents deal with “customer service” to SS clients and with internal Group discussions about meeting the mounting challenges of field operations that stretched from Poland and Yugoslavia to the Baltic States, Ukraine,
and Russia. Over these three months, then, the competing interests of the Sipo Technical Matters Group experienced their greatest integrative exigence for cooperation on the gas van project. They satisfied that exigence and temporarily sustained a consensus, if only for a few months until mobile gas vans were overtaken by stationary gas chambers developed by other SS competitors, by generating texts to serve as objects with which to negotiate trading zones across their intraorganizational boundaries. The nine documents include the following texts:

A letter dated 26 March 1942 sent by Rauff and responding to a request from the Mauthausen concentration camp for the temporary dispatch of a gas van (Figure 5.1). The camp system was run by another SS division, the Economic and Administrative Main Office (WVHA) and its Concentration Camp Inspectorate. Presumably the Mauthausen request came up through the WVHA hierarchy and, because concentration camps were officially classed as internal security facilities to detain enemies of the state, the request was routed by the RSHA to the Criminal Technical Institute (KTI) of its Reich Criminal Police Main Office (RKPA) because the KTI was a police lab whose chemical section secured supplies of poison gas. Apparently the KTI inquired with Rauff’s II D about the availability of his department's gas vans, which killed by exhaust gas rather than using expensive and cumbersome carbon monoxide canisters. Rauff replied that vans were unavailable and, rather than wait, the Mauthausen camp doctor should obtain gas canisters on his own.

A report dated 16 May 1942 sent to Rauff by Becker, field inspector for the gas van program (Figure 5.2). A longtime SS officer with a Ph.D. in chemistry and
II D Bureau HQ

[File under 167/1942 secret]

Secret

26 March [1942]

1.) Note

to the
Criminal Technical Institute
at the Reich Criminal Police Office

Berlin

In the attachment, I refer back to the procedure of the garrison doctor at
concentration camp Mauthausen.

The special vans manufactured by us are at this time in operation pursuant to
the order of the Chief of the Security Police and the SD. There are more vans
under construction, whose delivery is however dependent upon the
appropriate shipping orders being issued by the General Plenipotentiary for
Vehicles [GEK]. At what point in time the GEK will confirm the state of
preparedness is not known, and, after that happens, one must further factor in
a rebuilding period of around 8-14 days that will be necessary. At that point in
time, I would be prepared to put a special van of that kind at the disposal of
the Mauthausen concentration camp for a specified time. At the given time, I
will let you know as soon as the van can be deployed.

Since I assume that the Mauthausen concentration camp cannot wait
indefinitely for the delivery, I request that you use steel bottles with carbon
monoxide or respectively other remedies to get things started.

2.) II D 3 a - Major Pradel - for information and WvI. for the completion of new
special vans.

by order of

Rauff

Figure 5.1: English Translation of 26 March 1942 Rauff Letter
Source: Holocaust History Project (http://www.holocaust-history.org/19420326-rauff-sonderwagen)
Field Post Office  
No 32704  
B Nr 40/42  

Kiev, 16 May 1942  

SS-Obersturmbannfuehrer Rauff  
Berlin  
Prinz-Albrecht-Str. 8  

Handwritten: Sinkkel (?) b.R  
P 16/6

Handwritten: TOP SECRET

To:            Handwritten: pers.  

R/29/5 Pradel n.R  
b/R

The overhauling of vans by groups D and C is finished. While the vans of the first series can also be put into action if the weather is not too bad, the vans of the second series (Saurer) stop completely in rainy weather. If it has rained for instance for only half an hour, the van cannot be used because it simply skids away. It can only be used in absolutely dry weather. It is only a question now whether the van can only be used standing at the place of execution. First the van had to be brought to that place, which is possible only in good weather. The place of execution is usually 10-15 km away from the highways and is difficult of access because of its location; in damp or wet weather it is not accessible at all. If the persons to be executed are driven or led to that place, then they realize immediately what is going on and get restless, which is to be avoided as far as possible. There is only one way left; to lead them at the collection point and to drive them to the spot.

I ordered the vans of group D to be camouflaged as house-trailers by putting one set of window shutters on each side of the small van and two on each side of the larger vans, such as one often sees on farm houses in the country. The vans became so well-known, that not only the authorities, but also the civilian population called the van “death van,” as soon as one of these vehicles appeared. It is my opinion, the van cannot be kept secret for any length of time, not even camouflaged.

The Saurer-van which I transported from Simferopol to Taganrog suffered damage to the brakes on the way. The Security Command (SK) in Mariupol found the cuff of the combined oil-air brake broken at several points. By persuading and bribing the H.K.P. (?) we managed to have a form machined, on which the cuffs were cast. When I came to Stalino and Gorlowka a few days later, the drivers of the vans complained about some faults. After having talked to the commandants of those commands I went once more to Mariupol to have some more cuffs made.
for those cars too. As agreed two cuffs will be made for each car, six cuffs will stay in Mariupol as replacements for group D and six cuffs will be sent too SS-Untersturmfuehrer ERNST in Kiev for the cars of group C. The cuffs for the groups B and A could be made available from Berlin, because transport from Mariupol to the north would be too complicated and would take too long. Smaller damages on the cars will be repaired by experts of the commands, that is of the groups in their own shops.

Because of the rough terrain and the indescribable road and highway conditions the caulking and rivets loosen in the course of time. I was asked if in such cases the van should be brought to Berlin for repair. Transportation to Berlin would be much too expensive and would demand too much fuel. In order to save those expenses I ordered them to have smaller leaks soldered and if that should no longer be possible, to notify Berlin immediately by radio, that Pol. Nr ... is out of order. Besides that I ordered that during application of gas all the men were to be kept as far away from the vans as possible, so they should not suffer damage to their health by the gas which eventually would escape. I should like to take this opportunity to bring the following to your attention: several commands have had the unloading after the application of gas done by their own men. I brought to the attention of the commanders of those S.K. concerned the immense psychological injuries and damages to their health which that work can have for those men, even if not immediately, at least later on. The men complained to me about headache which appeared after each unloading. Nevertheless they don’t want to change the orders, because they are afraid prisoners called for that work, could use an opportune moment to flee. To protect the men from those damages, I request orders be issued accordingly.

The application of gas usually is not undertaken correctly. In order to come to an end as fast as possible, the driver presses the accelerator to the fullest extent. By doing that the persons to be executed suffer death from suffocation and not death by dozing off as was planned. My directions now have proved that by correct adjustment of the levers death comes faster and the prisoners fall asleep peacefully. Distorted faces and exertions, such as could be seen before, are no longer noticed.

Today I shall continue my journey to group B, where I can be reached with further news.

Signed: Dr. Becker
SS Untersturmfuehrer

Figure 5.2: English Translation of 16 May 1942 Becker Field Report, Page 2 of 2
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
experience in the T4 euthanasia program, Becker was an expert on loan to the Sipo Technical Matters Group and reported directly to Rauff. He left Berlin in January 1942 and over the next nine months visited each of the four Einsatzgruppen (denoted A, B, C, and D) that were operating the vans on Soviet territory captured by the Germany since its June 1941 invasion. As Rauff affirmed in a 1972 deposition, “It is correct that I received something from Becker about the use of gas vans. I myself had told Becker to send me a corresponding report” (Nizkor, 2002).

An internal technical document dated 5 June 1942 that proposes for Rauff’s consideration a series of engineering improvements to enhance the killing capacity of the gas vans (Figure 5.3). This is the document that Katz (1992a) set out to analyze. Given what is known about Third Reich bureaucratic protocols and RSHA filing codes (see previous chapter), it is unlikely that the signatory of the document, motor pool dispatcher and welder Willi Just (Noakes & Pridham, 1988, p. 1202), was the author or instigator of the proposal but instead was directed to sign the document.

A telegram dated 9 June 1942 and sent to Pradel by Schäfer, chief of the Sipo and SD regional headquarters in occupied Yugoslavia, informing Berlin that two gas vans and their drivers completed their “special mission” and were returning to Germany (Figure 5.4). Partisans were particularly active in Yugoslavia so that by early 1942 the Wehrmacht used the pretext of reprisals to have most Jewish males in Belgrade and Serbia executed by shooting. More than 5,000 remaining Jewish women and children were placed in a concentration camp; in April the military administration chief procured an SS “delousing van” with two drivers to “clean out the camp” by the end of May.
I. Note:

Conce.: Technical adjustments to special vans at present in service and to those that are in production

Since December 1941, 97,000 have been processed, using three vans, without any defects showing up in the vehicles. The explosion that we know took place at Kulmhof is to be considered an isolated case. The cause can be attributed to improper operation. In order to avoid such incidents, special instructions have been addressed to the services concerned. Safety has been increased considerably as a result of these instructions.

Previous experience has shown that the adjustments would be useful:

1.) In order to facilitate the rapid distribution of CO, as well as to avoid a buildup of pressure, two slots, ten by one centimeters, will be bored at the top of the rear wall. The excess pressure would be controlled by an easily adjustable hinged metal valve on the outside of the vents.

2.) The normal capacity of the vans is nine to ten per square meter. The capacity of the larger special Sauer vans is not so great. The problem is not one of overloading but of off-road maneuverability on all terrains, which is severely diminished in this van. It would appear that a reduction in the cargo area is necessary. This can be achieved by shortening the compartment by about one meter. The problem cannot be solved by merely reducing the number of subjects treated, as has been done so far. For in this case a longer running time is required, as the empty space also needs to be filled with CO. On the contrary, were the cargo area smaller, but fully occupied, the operation would take considerably less time, because there would be no empty space.

The manufacturer pointed out during discussions that a reduction in the volume of the cargo compartment would result in an inconvenient displacement of the cargo toward the front. There would then be a risk of overloading the axle. In fact, there is a natural compensation in the distribution of the weight. When [the van is] in operation, the load, in its effort to reach the rear door, places itself for the most part at the rear. For this reason the front axle is not overloaded.
3.) The pipe that connects the exhaust to the van tends to rust, because it is eaten away from the inside by the liquids that flow into it. To avoid this, the nozzle should be so arranged as to point downward. The liquids will thus be prevented from flowing into [the pipe].

4.) To facilitate the cleaning of the vehicle, an opening will be made in the floor to allow for drainage. It will be closed by a watertight cover about twenty to thirty centimeters in diameter, fitted with an elbow siphon that will allow for the draining of thin liquids. The upper part of the elbow pipe will be fitted with a sieve to avoid obstruction. Thicker dirt can be removed through the large drainage hole when the vehicle is cleaned. The floor of the vehicle can be tipped slightly. In this way all the liquids can be made to flow toward the center and be prevented from entering the pipes.

5.) The observation windows that have been installed up to now could be eliminated, as they are hardly ever used. Considerable time will be saved in the production of the new vans by avoiding the difficult fitting of the window and its airtight lock.

6.) Greater protection is needed for the lighting system. The grille should cover the lamps high enough up to make it impossible to break the bulbs. It seems that these lamps are hardly ever turned on, so the users have suggested that they could be done away with. Experience shows, however, that when the back door is closed and it gets dark inside, the load presses hard against the door. The reason for this is that when it becomes dark inside the load rushes toward what little light remains. This hampers the locking of the door. It has also been noticed that the noise provoked by the locking of the door is linked to the fear aroused by the darkness. It is therefore expedient to keep the lights on before the operation and during the first few minutes of its duration. Lighting is also useful for night work and for the cleaning of the interior of the van.

7.) To facilitate the rapid unloading of the vehicles, a removable grid is to be placed on the floor. It will slide on rollers on a U-shaped rail. It will be removed and put in position by means of a small winch placed under the vehicle. The firm charged with the alterations has stated that it is not able to continue for the moment, due to a lack of staff and materials. Another firm will have to be found.
The technical changes planned for the vehicles already in operation will be carried out when and as major repairs to these vehicles prove necessary. The alterations in the ten Saurer vehicles already ordered will be carried out as far as possible. The manufacturer made it clear in a meeting that structural alterations, with the exception of minor ones, cannot be carried out for the moment. An attempt must therefore be made to find another firm that can carry out, on at least one of these ten vehicles, the alterations and adjustments that experience has proved to be necessary. I suggest that the firm Hohenmauth be charged with the execution.

Due to present circumstances, we shall have to expect a later date of completion for this vehicle. It will then not only be kept available as a model but also be used as a reserve vehicle. Once it has been tested, the other vans will be withdrawn from service and will undergo the same alterations.

II. To Gruppenleiter II D
SS-Obersturmbannführer R a u f f
for examination and decision

By direction /I.A./

JUST
Reich Security Main Office

Stamps: 1003 9 Jun 1942
II D 3a No 964/42
10 June 1942
Handwritten: After return immediate repair
R 10/6 Notify about repair
ND Nr 144702
Belgrad No. 3112 9.6.42 0950 – SOM
To: Reich Security Office, Amt Room 2 D 3 KL. A-Z. HD. V.
Major Pradel – Berlin
Subject: Special-van-Saurer

preceding messages: None

The Drivers SS-Scharführer GOETZ and MEYER have fulfilled their special mission and could be ordered back with the van mentioned above. In consequence of a broken rear-axle-half, transportation cannot be made by car.

Therefore I have ordered the vehicle loaded and shipped back to Berlin by railroad.

Estimated arrival between 11th and 12th June 1942. The drivers GOETZ and MEYER will escort the vehicle.

The commandant of Security Police and Security Service
Belgrad – Room 1 – BNR 3985/42
signed: Dr. SCHAEFER, SS-Obersturmbannführer

Figure 5.4: English Translation of 9 June 1942 Schäfer Telegram, Page 1 of 2
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
II D 3a (2) Berlin, 11 June 1942
T.O.S. a Dr. SUKDEL

For further action and immediate start of repairs,
I request to be informed about arrival of vans.

By direction:
signed: JUST
Berlin, 16 June 1942

II D 3a (9)
Note

The vehicle arrived 16 June 1942 about 1300 h. After thorough
cleaning the repairs will start immediately.

By direction:
signed: (?)

II D 3a (9) Berlin, 13 July 1942

1. Note: The S-truck Pol 71463 is ready.
2. Sent to the motor pool management T. F. Wiederhausen for its
information and further notice.

By direction:
signed: (?)
(Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 71). The victims were driven across town, asphyxiated in the vans along the way, and buried in mass graves previously dug at a local shooting range. After this “special mission,” the telegram relates, the drivers and van were ordered home by rail since one van had a broken axle. The document also contains handwritten notes—dated 11 June, 16 June, and 13 July—attributed to Just which chart the repairs.

A request for more gas vans dated 15 June 1942 from Trühe, chief of the Sipo and SD regional headquarters for the Eastern Territories (Reichskommissariat Ostland), the office that controlled the activities of Einsatzgruppen A in the Baltic States and B in Byelorussia and Smolensk (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 56) (Figure 5.5). The telegram also requested a supply of hose to repair gas leaks in the three vans already in operation. In the summer of 1942 the SS was clearing the Jewish ghettos of the Ostland; from mid-May through the end of July, A and B murdered some 55,000 Jews using gas vans (Rhodes, 2002, pp. 255-256). Thus the local commandant reports his three vans were “insufficient” to provide “special treatment” for the weekly transports of victims. Pradel (designation “R 16/6”) asked in a handwritten notation to be kept apprised of the matter.

A 22 June 1942 reply to the Ostland request from Rauff’s office that promises delivery of another van by mid-July along with a supply of hose (Figure 5.6). In several notations Just (“II D 3a 9”) is active in disseminating follow-up communications and refers back to the Schäfer telegram to suggest the van used in Yugoslavia be refitted for Ostland. The ghetto-clearing murders were observed in September by Becker at his last inspection stop. Even the “gassing expert” who “euthanized” thousands from a distance could not witness killing on this scale and returned to Berlin (Klee et al. 1991, p. 71).
Reich Security Main Office
Message Center

Stamps: 1900 15 Jun 1942
Riga E 2
Message No 152452

Handwritten:
II D 3a Maj Pradel
R 16/6
Wiederhausen

Riga 7082 - 15-6-42 - 1855 - BE

To: Reich Security Main Office, Room 2 D 3 A - Berlin

TOP SECRET

Subject: S-vans

A transport of Jews, which has to be treated in a special way, arrives weekly at the office of the Commandant of the Security Police and the Security Service of White Ruthenia.

The three S-vans, which are there, are not sufficient for that purpose. I request assignment of another S-van (5 tons). At the same time I request the shipment of 20 gas-hoses for the three S-vans on hand (2 Diamond, 1 Saurer) since the ones on hand are leaky already.

The commandant of Security Police and Security Service
Ostland
Room IT - 126/42 GRS
signed: TRUEHE, SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer

Stamp:
No 240/42
II D 3a 16 June 1942

Procedure: (handwritten)
1. When can we count on having another S-van ready?
2. Are gas-hoses on hand, ordered or when to be delivered?
3. Request answer.

R 16/6

Figure 5.5: English Translation of 15 June 1942 Trühe Telegram
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501

127
Reich Security Main Office

II D 3a B Nr 240/42

TOP SECRET

Filed:
Message Nr 107903
Sent by message center
2016, 22 June 1942
Riga EM 2

1) FS (?)
   To the commandant of the Security Police
   and Security Service Ostland
   Riga

Subject: S-van

The delivery of a 5-ton Saurer can be expected in the middle of next
month. The vehicle has been at the Reich Security Main Office for repairs and
minor alterations up to this time. 100 meters of hose will be supplied.

By order of
(signature as in heading)

2) Dissemination at once by II D 3a (9)

By direction
RAUFF

Handwritten note:

II D 3a (9)

Berlin, 13 July 1942

Nr I Z. Wiederhausen (?) for further action and attention to the note of 13 July
1942 on back page of telegram from Belgrad. For the reasons mentioned 5
sections of hose, each of 10 meters, can be supplied me.

By direction
(signature illegible)

Typed on second page:

Procedure:

1. When can we count on having another S-van ready?
2. Are gas-hoses on hand, ordered or when to be delivered?
3. Request answer.

Figure 5.6: English Translation of 22 June 1942 Rauff Reply to Trühe
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
Telegrams of 15 June 1942 from Trühe and 9 June 1942 from Schäfer retyped and consolidated onto a single sheet of paper. From the handwritten notation at the top of the sheet it was either seen by or referred to Pradel, while a notation scrawled next to the Schäfer text makes reference to the “final disposition” (Fertigstellung) of the matter. Since this document contains the same texts as the earlier telegrams, no English translation is presented here.

In addition, two other documents, although not sent or received by the personnel of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, shed some light on the Sonderwagen project as the Group’s clients refer to their usage of the gas vans:

Sipo and SD situation report for Einsatzgruppe B dated 1 March 1942 and covering the period 16-28 February 1942. The report described how two gas vans arrived 23 February 1942 in Smolensk and were then dispatched to two of the six subunits that comprised Einsatzgruppe B. Notably, the report complained, “Both vehicles arrived at Smolensk with defects and, after the defects were remedied, were assigned to the Einsatzkommandos” (Beide Fahrzeuge kamen defekt in Smolensk an und wurden nach Behebung der Defekte den Einsatzkommandos zuguteilt). Since this is the key information about the vans, no English translation is presented here.

Letter dated 11 April 1942 from SS major general Harald Turner, the German administrative chief for occupied Serbia, to Himmler’s chief of staff Karl Wolff (Figure 5.7). The fifth paragraph describes how, with the help of the SD, he secured a “delousing van” that he expected would achieve in two to four weeks a “definitive clearing out” of a camp for Jewish women and children. The letter is important because Turner puts
Privy Councillor Dr. Turner  
O.U., April 11, 1942
SS-Major General
F.P. Number 18.739

Dear Comrade Wolff!

Now that the decision has been taken in my favor, I would be remiss—since I am convinced that this is singularly and only thanks to your influence and your tireless activity—if I did not transmit to you my most comradely and heartfelt thanks.

I can also again today, the more so since you know me well enough, only again repeat, that the matter did not have to do with my person - the person concerned could have just as easily had another name - but rather with a necessary battle that had to be fought against one-sided Wehrmacht interests, by which in the final unsspoken result the SS Leaders, and therewith also the SS and further also the civil servants would have been affected.

The best proof for this is, on the one hand, a remark woven into an official document from WB Southeast “the appointment of the Higher SS and Police Leader, which did not take place according to the proposal here” or words to that effect, and on the other hand, the comment of the Chief of the General Staff WB Southeast after receipt of the decision in my favor “herewith the Wehrmacht has lost a battle.”

In any event, there reigns here in all circles, even the Wehrmacht who have in any way followed this struggle, only joy over this victory and this joy you have alone, as I see it, afforded these people. My thanks for that.

May I use this occasion to send you as an attachment a copy of a letter from me to the Reichsführer of January 15, 1942 to which I have yet to receive an answer. I am not complaining because as I know, such things take time and I don't feel it is right for me to press the Reichsführer for the settlement of an affair. I know that for such matters you have an interest and the reason I now draw your attention to it is only because this question is now more than critical. Already some months ago, I shot dead all the Jews I could get my hands on in this area, concentrated all the Jewish women and children in a camp and with the help of the SD got my hands on a “delousing van,” that in about 14 days to 4 weeks will have brought about the definitive clearing out of the camp, which in any event since the arrival
of Meyssner and the turning over of this camp to him, was continued by him. Then the time is come in which the Jewish officers to be found in prisoner of war camps under the Geneva Convention find out against our will about their no longer existing kinfolk and that could easily lead to complications.

Were the affected persons now to be freed, they would in the minute of the arrival have their ultimate freedom, but like their racial comrades not for very long, and then this entire question should be resolved once and for all. Any consideration could have counter-effects on our prisoners in Canada, if it comes out that the freed persons do not move around freely here... I personally do not agree with this consideration.

With best wishes for your personal well being, heartiest greetings and

Heil Hitler!

I am as always

your loyal

TURNER
“delousing van” ("Entlausungswagen") in quotation marks, acknowledging the term to be a euphemism for killing by poison gas. The murders were subsequently carried out in the “special mission” referenced by Schäfer in his 9 June 1942 telegram to Pradel.

With such documents as those above did the bureaucrats and technicians of the Sipo Technical Matters Group endeavor, as Browning (1991) noted, to hide reality from themselves. But as we will see in succeeding chapters, the documents also served as objects for the creation and legitimation of an alternative reality as those who trafficked in these texts thereby bridged the boundaries between their differing perceptions and constructed a community of killers.
CHAPTER SIX
A COMMUNITY OF KILLERS

Constructing the Rhetorical Community

What are we to make of the horrifying documents we have just encountered? A functionalist ontology would tell us that individual mindsets are superfluous, that organizations are driven to optimize results, and thus organizational communications must privilege clarity and accuracy because they are instruments to achieve the collective purpose. But why, then, do all the writers employ recurrent euphemisms about “special vans,” “special missions,” and “special treatment”? (In time, references to “special vans” were simply shortened to “S-vans.”) Why did Rauff couch his letter on the gassing of concentration camp prisoners within the context of a medical “procedure”? Why did Becker refer to Jewish victims as “prisoners” and their mass murder as “executions”? Why did the men of the Sipo motor pool take such obvious pains to avoid mention that the “cargo” and “load” carried by their vehicles was, in fact, human? That the language served to distance these killers from their crimes is obvious and has been long remarked by historians. But if the language distanced these bureaucrats away from the import of their actions, did their discourse—through the boundary objects it produced—also draw them toward a common identity and construct for them a shared coherent reality?

Or according to Miller’s (1994) conception, the men of the Sipo Technical Matters Group formed a “rhetorical community.” Farrell (1991) similarly suggested that what he called the “rhetorical forum” instantiates “two very different sorts of loci [that] may always intersect there,” namely “the cumulative weight of customary practice” and
“the inevitably uncertain fact of others” (p. 198). Miller (1994) then drew on Farrell’s “inclusion of sameness and difference” and defined the “rhetorical community” to be the community as invoked, represented, presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse. It is constituted by attributions of characteristic joint rhetorical actions, genres of interaction, ways of getting things done, including reproducing itself . . . [by] structuring aspects of all forms of socio-rhetorical action. . . . It operates more generally, however, as a site where centrifugal and centripetal forces must meet . . . (pp. 73-74)

In this chapter we will approach the Sonderwagen documents as a rhetorical discourse— for by Longo’s (1998) methodology, analyzing discourse is the next phase of the study—that “invoked, represented, presupposed, and developed” the community of killers that was the Sipo Technical Matters Group. In so doing we will follow Miller’s thesis that rhetorical communities marshal the resources of metaphor, narrative, and genre in order to (re)produce themselves and will look for these phenomena in the Group’s corpus. The origins of her conception of the rhetorical community are seen in Miller’s early essay, “Technology as a Form of Consciousness” (1978), in which she argued that interpreting action requires familiarity with “both the personal formation of mental character and the collective development of cultural character” (p. 229). In “A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing” (1979) she pointed out that effective writers must grasp “the concepts, values, traditions, and style which permit identification with [their] community.
and determine the success or failure of communication” (p. 617). And in “Genre as Social Action” (1984) Miller observed that exigence is at the core of rhetorical situation, and this exigence “must be located in the social world . . . [as] a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes” that functions “neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as social motive . . . [that] provides the rhetor with a sense of rhetorical purpose . . . [and] a socially recognizable way to make his or her intentions known” (pp. 157-158). Thus genres emerge “as typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (p. 159), so that “as a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality” (p. 165).

During the 1990s Miller developed her interest in culture through her conception of the rhetorical community. In “Rhetoric and Community: The Problem of the One and the Many” (1993a) Miller described the “social grounding” (p. 80) of rhetoric and cited social constructionist insights from a wide range of scholars: Bakhtin, Booth, Burke, Fish, Geertz, Mead, Rorty, Vygotsky. She quoted with approval McKerrow’s (1989) assertion that “rhetoric constitutes doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge,” a view that “allows the focus to shift to how the symbols come to possess power—what they ‘do’ in society” (pp. 103-104) as these opinions or “good reasons” (Fisher, 1978, 1987) attain communal validation. Then in “The Polis as Rhetorical Community” (1993b), she built a case that “Aristotle’s synthesis of sophism and Platonism shows rhetoric to be shaped by community” (p. 235) because the polis “is most centrally a site of contention” (p. 239). Thus, she concluded the polis may be understood “as a discursive projection, a set of assumptions implicit in any argument; it is the community invoked, represented,
presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse” (pp. 239-240). Finally, in “Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre” (1994) Miller tied together her interest in community with her work in genre. The latter are cultural artifacts because, as significantly recurring actions, they become “bearers of culture . . . [that] literally incorporate knowledge—knowledge of the aesthetics, economics, politics, religious beliefs and all the various dimensions of what we know as human culture” (p. 69). Analysts can therefore unpack this knowledge and make inferences about a culture by unpacking its genres. In the end, Miller (1994) arrives at a definition of genre in which

Genre . . . [is] that aspect of situated communication that is capable of reproduction, that can be manifested in more than one situation, more than one concrete space-time. The rules and resources of a genre provide reproducible speaker and addressee roles, social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigences, topical structures (or “moves” and “steps”), and ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources. (p. 71)

To connect genre with rhetorical community, Miller (1994) described genre as “a mid-level structurational nexus between mind and society.” Therefore, rhetoric is implied because generic social actions are always “addressed” to others through linguistic resources (p. 71). Next she returned to her earlier description of “a discursive projection . . . [which] is the community invoked, represented, presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse” (1993b, pp. 239-240; 1994, p. 73) and ascribed this quality to the
rhetorical community, which she went on to describe as

constituted by attributions of characteristic joint rhetorical actions, genres of interaction, ways of getting things done, including reproducing itself. Like Giddens’ structures, rhetorical communities “exist” in human memories and in their specific instantiations in words; they are not invented anew but persist in structuring aspects of all forms of socio-rhetorical action. (Miller, 1994, p. 73)

Thus rhetorical community precedes genre—or, as her article title put it, rhetorical community is the cultural basis of genre. But genre also sustains community by reproducing it and by reconciling its “centrifugal and centripetal forces” (Miller, 1994, p. 74). These opposing impulses, of contestation and custom, make a community rhetorical. And to ultimately sustain themselves rhetorical communities employ: metaphor and figuration to bridge the gap between difference and similarity; narrative to create a field in which differences may be converged into a shared project; and genre as “ways of marshalling rhetorical resources” (p. 75) in order to pragmatically structure communal action. Following Miller’s line, we would see the rhetoric of the SS gas van documents as socially grounded and constitutive of doxastic knowledge, or communally validated “good reasons.” Tragically, the rhetoric validated “good reasons” for Judeocide. This being so, the genre of Nazi organizational and technical communication is a cultural artifact that incorporates the writers’ knowledge of their national, institutional, and organization cultures. As such, examination of their texts may, by revealing actions that
were significant and recurring, allow us to draw inferences about their culture. As will be described below, the gas van documents deployed genres as individual authors employed their shared rules and resources, and thus institutionalized their organizational genres through reproduction.

These generic rules and resources were efficacious for community members because they provided “reproducible speaker and addressee roles [e.g., the SS chain of command], social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigences [e.g., the competition among SS bureaus to control policy; the struggle of SS personnel for career advancement], topical structures [e.g., the ‘moral’ justifications for the Final Solution; the duty to carry out the orders of legitimated authority]; and ways of indexing an event to material conditions [e.g., the ‘need’ to eliminate a perceived enemy in wartime], turning them into constraints or resources” (Miller, 1994a, p. 71). Structurally, generic action connects individual thinking to social exigence, thus implying rhetoric—because the action is always “addressed” to others—and creating a discourse which projects the community it necessarily invokes. If we concede that gas van documents deploy organizational genres, then we are likewise conceding they were preceded by a rhetorical community which supplied the genres’ cultural basis. In their generic aspects, the Nazi documents as boundary objects constituted sites where speakers and addressees contested their divisions and yet also practiced their identifications. The killers had their justifying metaphors and narratives, and their genres—such as the technical documentation of their murders—converted those cultural resources into lethally pragmatic social actions.
Protean Metaphors and a “Safety” Narrative

To sustain their community the desk-murderers would deploy metaphor and figuration to bridge the gap between difference and similarity, narrative to create a field in which differences might be converged into a shared project, and genre to marshal rhetorical resources and thus pragmatically structure communal action. Because metaphor and narrative establish conditions for genre to then structure action, this section will analyze the metaphors and narratives found in the SS documents and in the next section look more closely at the community’s genres.

Upon inspection, it is striking how protean are the metaphors of this rhetorical community as it negotiates each situation. Rauff’s 26 March 1942 letter metaphorically places the gas vans within the domain of public health (“I refer back to the procedure of the garrison doctor”), the domain of the vans’ original usage during the T4 euthanasia program; similarly, Turner’s 11 April 1942 letter refers to the vehicles as “delousing vans.” Yet Becker, after five months behind the Eastern Front with Einsatzgruppen A and B, metaphorically places the gas vans within the domain of a military or policing operation by referring to Jewish victims as “prisoners” to be “executed.” The military metaphor is likewise instantiated in the 9 June 1942 telegram from Schäfer, head of the Sipo and SD regional office in Serbia, by a reference to completion of the “special mission.” By contrast, the automotive specialists at the Berlin motor pool metaphorically place the gas vans within the domain of transportation by referring to victims as “load” and “cargo” in their 5 June 1942 proposal for technical improvements.

As it happens, though, none of the documents authored by members of the Sipo
Technical Matters Group employ the word “Jews”; the only instances occur in the correspondences of the Group’s internal clients, as seen in the of the 11 April 1942 Turner letter and 15 June 1942 Trühe telegram. The overall impression corroborates Browning’s (1991) interpretation that the technical experts of the Group “developed the euphemistic code language so typical of the Final Solution [because] it hid reality from [private subcontractors] and at least partially from themselves” (p. 67). Their documents are extraordinary in the rhetorical gymnastics to which they go in avoiding mention of the vans’ true purpose. Their metaphors are protean in that the Group’s members resort to the metaphorical domains closest to hand—Rauff assenting to the medical metaphor when responding to a request from the Mauthausen camp doctor; Becker utilizing the military metaphor fostered by his immediate experience behind the Eastern Front; Just deploying the transportation metaphor which is the currency of the motor pool.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) noted how metaphors aid cognition of abstract concepts by grafting onto them familiar domains from the experiential world. The documents authored by Group members are rhetorically striking in that the texts borrow from the respective experiential domains of their authors in order to cognize the abstraction of the Final Solution of the Jewish Question. Clients such as Turner and Trühe who came face-to-face with killing could refer explicitly to “Jews” in their correspondences, but the managers and technicians who administered van operations from Berlin could not. Even Becker, who for months had become inured to gassings in the field, still could not commit to paper the word “Jews” but wrote only of “prisoners” to be executed—a resistance that recalls the gas van drivers who, in clinging to their self-
identities as specialists, kept their vehicles running while at the same time steadfastly refusing to personally shoot any Jews. Thus did the rhetorical community that was the Sipo Technical Matters Group employ metaphors to bridge the gap between similarity and difference, as representatives of the Group’s various interests—the executive, the chemical expert, the automotive experts—agreed in their own ways to hide the reality of mass murder and construct a more comforting shared reality of professional normality.

As a rhetorical resource of the community, narrative created a field on which differing interests could converge in order to share a common project. That narrative was the “need” to “ease the burden” on those SS men who were undertaking “difficult” tasks on behalf of the Reich. Even decades after the war, this narrative was uniformly cited by members of the Sipo Technical Matters group—by Rauff, Pradel, Wentritt, Becker, and Findeisen—in their postwar testimonies. They could have ascribed their actions to careerism, superior orders, peer pressure, duress, or years of being propagandized. Many did cite these factors, which are at least comprehensible if not exonerating, in their actions. Yet at the time of their later trials and testimonies, at a time when claims to be concerned about the psychological stress of the killers would have seemed (and still seem) ludicrous in the extreme, it is striking that they still clung to this narrative. Becker’s field inspection report is the most explicit of the gas van documents in this regard, with its concern for SS men being subjected to toxic gases and scenes of grotesquely contorted corpses. But in its own more technical oeuvre, the Just proposal is also centered on the same narrative. The document refers to safety instructions for preventing explosions and proposed measures to regulate pressure build-up inside the
vans, as well as measures to complete the killings more quickly and then streamline the unloading of corpses and subsequent clean-up of the van compartment. Though the Group’s chemical and automotive experts disagreed on solutions, their concurrence on the narrative created a field on which they could converge and join in a shared project.

Because the Group reconciled its differences around a narrative of occupational safety, another helpful approach for understanding how the gas van participants functioned as a rhetorical community is a return to the larger institutional context and see the Final Solution as an “industry.” In this regard, a productive framework for rhetorical analysis is Sauer’s (2003) Cycle of Technical Documentation in Large Regulated Industries (p. 76) that identifies critical moments when the “rhetoric of risk” is transformed from one modality to another, so that documents created at different moments may call on different rhetorical strategies. This framework is particularly appropriate because Sauer’s Cycle is meant to describe hazardous industries—and perpetrators of the gas van murders saw themselves as contending with dynamically hazardous work—and because her conception of a “cycle of documentation” lends itself to comparing multiple documents within the same schema. Thus, we can examine the two lengthiest Sonderwagen documents—the Becker field inspection report and the Just technical proposal—as parts of a Cycle of Technical Documentation that dynamically strives, at different critical stages, to regulate risk through the rhetorical transformation of embodied experience into technical writing.

Key to Sauer’s model is the tension between “idealized rhetorical models” and the “capacity of individuals to document the knowledge to assess and manage risk” which
they encounter in “real environments [that] are dynamic, uncertain, and complex” (p. 16).

Sauer studied coal mining, a large regulated industry in which technical documentation attempts to promulgate generalizable safety standards that can somehow cope with dynamic and ever-changing environments whose conditions are highly localized.

Repellent as the notion may be, the SS gas van killers saw themselves working in “hazardous” conditions. They operated in remote sites among hostile populations. Each operation occurred in a new and unfamiliar location. The Einsatzgruppen were dealing with a new and uncertain technology that was being stretched beyond the original limits of its design. Their vehicles were ill-suited to local conditions, too cumbersome for off-road use or wet conditions, and subject to dangerous “load” shifts. And the technology tended to degrade over time and leak hazardous gases at increasing rates. The SS men were dealing with toxic fumes that could inflict bodily harm and accumulations of gaseous pressure that could explode. Not all of their Jewish victims went as proverbial sheep to the slaughter; after the war SS men testified that many victims cried, pleaded, begged, became hysterical, or attempted flight. The vehicle camouflage that was supposed to obviate the problem was completely ineffective. The killers operated under the delusion of what Browning (2004) has called “chimeric anti-Semitism” and saw these Jews as dangerous enemies, allied with partisan guerillas and carriers of disease and filth. As Herf (2006) has shown, the Germans increasingly believed their propaganda about “Judeo-Bolshevism” as the war went on. And as the SS killers prepared to unload their “cargo” they had no idea what would be revealed when the doors were opened. But they could expect billows of toxic gas and the psychologically damaging sight of hideously
distorted corpses covered in excrement, vomit, and blood. The fact that drivers invariably ignored instructions and instead “floored” the gas pedal, to finish the killings as swiftly as possible, testifies to their anxiety.

Sauer’s (2003) thesis holds that “three different types of warrants grounded in embodied sensory experience” can be brought to bear in judging risk: (1) embodied sensory knowledge acquired by workers who physically sense or perceive conditions in specific local environment; (2) engineering experience acquired as engineers develop material histories of each site by observing and recording physical signs and indices; and (3) scientific knowledge, invisible to the physical senses, acquired as scientists interpret inscribed data (p. 182). In turn, embodied sensory experience is rhetorically transformed, by means of technical writing, from one modality to another at six critical moments within the Cycle of Technical Documentation in Large Regulated Industries. According to Sauer, these moments are:

1. When oral testimony and embodied experience are captured in writing
2. When information in accident reports is re-represented in statistical records
3. When statistical accounts are re-represented as arguments for particular policies
4. When policies and standards are transformed into procedures
5. When procedures are re-represented in training
6. When training is re-represented to workers (pp. 75-76)
In its entirety, the cycle is a process whereby stakeholders interact to bring locally
dynamic hazardous environments under the control of generalized safety standards. Thus
site-specific experience is in tension with the effort to standardize experience. Then, too,
the economic and safety interests of the stakeholders must be balanced. Sauer uses an
instructive analogy to highlight the inherent problem in a “rhetoric of risk” that, she
theorized, cannot deliberate policy only in terms of probabilities but must acknowledge
an irreducible element of uncertainty. She describes three types of compliance: stopping
at stop signs, following doctor’s orders to take pain medication as needed, and adjusting a
furnace or air-conditioner to maintain a constant room temperature as the weather
changes (pp. 50-51). Stop signs provide a clear rule to follow in all cases. Following a
doctor’s orders to take pain medication “as needed” requires us to ascertain when
compliance is appropriate. But “In the third case, we may find ourselves technically out
of compliance even as we increase our efforts to bring conditions into compliance” (p. 51). In the same way, the constantly changing environment of a coal mine requires
constant monitoring and remedial adjustment to control risk levels and avoid disaster.

Sauer’s framework offers an opportunity to reconceive the Final Solution from
the Nazi point of view as a “large regulated industry” and grasp how its technical
documentation attempted to bring under control an inherently unstable and (from the
perpetrators’ perspective) dynamically hazardous enterprise. Indeed, the historical record
of the Third Reich offers numerous testimonies—such as those cited at the outset of this
study—of camps operated on a “wild” basis until standards were introduced. Historians
generally agree that, while anti-Jewish pogroms have occurred for centuries, it took the
organizing capacity of a modern bureaucratic state to prosecute the Holocaust. Thus the
Just and Becker documents become, when viewed through Sauer’s model, attempts to
rhetorically transform embodied sensory experience at different critical moments in the
Cycle of Technical Documentation. This is why examinations of two related documents
—rather than single documents in isolation—is a valuable exercise and enables us to
grasp an ongoing process. The rhetorics of the two documents are different because they
occur at different points in the Cycle. Indeed, Sauer’s model lets us step back even
further and view the gas van program within the Nazis’ overall project of experimenting
with different killing methods to find the least “risky” and most “productive.” Shooting
was the first experiment, gas vans the second, and stationary gas chambers the final
“successful” solution of their self-appointed problem.

In the Just and Becker documents are seen references to all the critical moments
in the Cycle of Technical Documentation. For example, the Just proposal refers to a
Sonderwagen explosion at the Chelmno death camp caused by human error and reports
how “In order to avoid such incidents, special instructions have been addressed to the
services concerned. Safety has been increased considerably as a result of these
instructions” (Kogon et al. 1993/1983, p. 137). Here we see implied the entire Cycle:
local documentation; accident report; statistical report; policy and regulations; practices
and procedures; training and instruction. The Becker report also refers to different critical
moments in the Cycle and illustrates the tension between different forms of experience.
The IID3 inspector gathered local documentation by interviewing van drivers and other
personnel; he reported to Rauff on accidents that occurred in the field; and he described
how practices and procedures were communicated to field personnel through training and instruction, but that Einsatzgruppen resisted compliance by privileging their local experiences and perceptions of risk. Thus the SS men open the throttle to hasten the killings, and unload the vans themselves to prevent prisoner escapes.

The Becker report is an example of Point 1 in Sauer’s (2003) Cycle of Technical Documentation (“when oral testimony and embodied experience are captured in writing”) as Becker attempted to rhetorically transform embodied sensory experience into engineering knowledge. The Just proposal is an example of Point 3 (“when statistical accounts [and accident data] are re-represented as arguments for particular policies”) as the writer(s) attempted to rhetorically transform engineering knowledge into generalizable standards based on “scientific” knowledge (i.e., how the “cargo” can be “processed” more quickly if void air spaces are reduced, and how the “load” will respond to the stimuli of light or darkness and afford a “natural” weight distribution). Thus the Becker and Just documents, in their work as boundary objects, manifest different rhetorics because they sought different rhetorical transformations at different critical moments—but always as variations of the same narrative, a narrative of occupational safety which created a field on which their respective interests could converge.

Discovering Organizational Genres in the Texts

We have explored, according to Miller’s (1994) scheme, how the rhetorical community of the Sipo Technical Matters Group reconciled its “centrifugal and centripetal forces” (p. 74) by deploying metaphor to bridge difference and similarity, and
deploying narrative to create a field on which they might converge for a shared project. Miller also posited genres as a third means of reconciliation by which the community can marshal its rhetorical resources to pragmatically structure communal action. Here Miller’s work (1985a, 1987, 2000) on special topics (*idioi koinoi or eide*) is useful in identifying genres in everyday organizational documents. For if genres are viewed not as mere sets of formal requirements but as socio-rhetorical actions, then it necessarily follows that invention according to topics which are special to a given rhetorical community will carry much of a text’s argumentative weight. Miller (1985a, 1987) dealt at length with classical and historical treatments of special topics, a discussion that need not be recapitulated here. Together with Selzer, the two argued in “Special Topics of Argument in Engineering Reports” (1985b) that in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* special topics are both genre-specific and institution-specific, which then “suggests a third kind of special topic for contemporary theory, a kind based on specialized knowledge of disciplines” (p. 313). Through an analysis of arguments presented by two transit development plans they illustrated three categories of “specialized” special topics: generic special topics, institutional/organizational special topics, and disciplinary special topics.

The category of institutional/organizational special topics is most germane to an analysis of the SS gas van documents. For although the Becker and Just documents were informed by disciplinary knowledge of chemical and automotive engineering, these “objective” conventions were subordinated to the imperative of the Final Solution. Thus, to discover why experts might place their knowledge at the service of genocide is to understand their institutional milieu—for as we learned above, rhetorical community
precedes genre and, in fact, provides the cultural basis for genre. Miller and Selzer (1985) began their discussion of institutional/organizational special topics by quoting March and Simon’s (1958) observation that “the world tends to be perceived by . . . organization members in terms of the particular concepts that are reflected in the organization’s vocabulary” (p. 165). Thus, explained Miller and Selzer (1985), “When such concepts and vocabulary are sources of arguments, we call them institutional special topics” (p. 325). The two researchers examined two transit development plans for arguments whose invention was grounded in institutional/organizational concepts and vocabularies. They discovered that a Nebraska engineering firm, in drafting transmittal letters for two very different Illinois transportation project proposals (an airport expansion and a highway traffic study) employed similar language stressing the company’s “commitment” to Illinois, its recent opening of a “major office” there, and its intention to maintain “close” relations with clients “throughout the duration of the project” (p. 326). Examination of the two transmittal letters demonstrated that “these points thus become company-specific sources of persuasion” (p. 327).

What points became “company-specific sources of persuasion” for the men of the Sipo Technical Matters Group? Easily the most recurring language is the adjective “special” (Sonder). The term “special van(s)” or the abbreviation “S-vans” is used three times in the Rauff letter, twice in the Just proposal, twice in the Schäfer telegram, three times in the Trühe telegram, and once in Rauff’s reply to Trühe. The term “special mission” appears in the Schäfer telegram, while the Trühe telegram references Jews to be “treated in a special way.” Clearly, then, “special” constituted an organization-specific
source of persuasion. An internal directive to this effect is seen in a 20 September 1939 telegram issued by RSHA chief Reinhard Heydrich that stated, “To avoid any misunderstandings, please take note of the following: . . . a distinction must be made between those who may be dealt with in the usual way and those who must be given special treatment.” In fact, because the code word became so widespread it could no longer camouflage the murders, in March 1943 Himmler ordered his chief statistician to use the term durchgeschleust (“processed”) in official reports of the killings (Kogon et al., 1993, pp. 5-8; Hilberg, 2003, p. 1305). The Eichmann bureau used the term Sonderbehandlung so frequently that it eventually had to distinguish between the term’s legitimate and metaphorical usages by coining the term SB-Fälle (“SB cases”) as “a euphemism for the euphemism” (Lozowick, 2000, P. 128). Through such recurring everyday language within organizations, observed Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy (2004), are exposed those metaphors—in the case of the SS, the metaphor of murder as specialized handling or treatment—that resonate with members, become archetypes that “provide rich summaries of the world and function as dominant ways of seeing,” and thereby legitimate actions (pp. 109-116).

Another organization-specific source of persuasion that emerges from the recurring language of the documents is that of a military “operation,” “action,” or “mission.” These words recur in these and other documents from the gas van program, such as a 1 May 1942 letter to Himmler from the Nazi governor of annexed Poland that references “the special treatment operation” to murder 100,000 Jews using gas vans at the Chelmno death camp, a measure characterized by the official as an “operation against the
Jews” and a precedent for “taking action against” native Poles (p. 6). The Becker field inspection report refers multiple times to “prisoners” and “executions,” in keeping with the overall justification for killing Soviet Jews. At the end of 1941 as the mass shootings in Soviet territory gradually solidified into a general plan for exterminating all European Jews, Himmler emerged from a December 18 meeting with Hitler and noted the dictators’s instruction in his appointment diary: “Jewish question / to be extirpated \[auszurotten\] as partisans” (Longerich, 2001, p. 155). The punctilious use of titles may also be seen as evidence of a military ethos, as well as the organization’s adherence to the Nazi “leadership principle.”

Two more special topics suggested by the documents may be seen in the recurrent titling “Secret Reich Matter” (geheime Reichssache). First, we should not underestimate the persuasive power of partaking in secret knowledge. Second, the application of “Reich” to virtually everything in Nazi Germany had a subtle linguistic purpose for the regime; as Fritzsche (2008) noted: the “pretentiousness of Nazi vocabulary in which Reich-this and Reich-that puffed up the historical moment of the regime” (p. 133). The word “Reich” does not readily translate in English and carries mystic connotations not only of empire but also of German national history and greatness. Thus the documents are prominently headed “Secret Reich Matter” and “Reich Security Main Office.”

The military-style attention to forms and protocols was prescribed by a 1 June 1940 directive, circulated to all RSHA offices, which provided exacting guidelines for document creation (Lozowick, 2000). As we learned in Chapter 3, the directive set forth explicit instructions on filing codes, the bureaucratic implications of letterheads and
departmental symbols, as well as who had authority to sign documents in his own name, who had authority to sign for his immediate superior, who did not have such authority, how authority or non-authority should be indicated, and even how handwritten notations should be made in colored pencils according to rank. (Thus, Rauff is the only signatory who, as *Gruppenleiter* of II D, is “big enough” to sign documents without specifying his rank; it is also interesting that Rauff’s signature is larger than his junior colleagues.) The directive further implores, “Long, complicated sentences should be avoided, and margins should be left for comments” (p. 48).

Marginal comments also provide clues for discovering organizational special topics. In fact, even *handwritten* notes scrupulously follow RSHA protocols as writers head their notes with their organizational identification codes—for example, Just’s identification was II D 3a (9)—and sign their names with the appropriate “I.A.” (*im Auftrag*) notation, while frequently enumerating their points 1, 2, and so on. This reinforces the suggestion that bureaucratic procedure and convention was a powerful organization-specific source of persuasion that served to normalize genocide. Rauff’s postwar testimony, as we have seen, expounded at length about the importance of rank and protocol in the organizational culture of the RSHA.

Miller’s (1993, 1994) conception of rhetorical communities and their genres is echoed in the literature on organizational culture where “it is common to identify cultural forms” (Alvesson, 2004, p. 320) such as Trice and Beyer’s (1993) oft-cited categories of organizational language, symbols, narratives, and practices. According to the latter scheme, the gas van documents reveal traces of an organizational culture whose forms
encompass language (the metaphors deployed to legitimize murder), symbols (the visual rhetorics of the documents), narratives (the saga of “soldierly” and “heroic” comrades whose suffering through “hard” duties on behalf of the “people’s community” should be eased), and practices (observance of bureaucratic conventions and of the Nazi leadership principle).

But by whatever names, having discovered a number of genres in the gas van documents, what do we learn about the rhetorical community that produced/reproduced them—and how it deployed genres to pragmatically structure social action? Recall Miller’s (1994) demonstration that genres are cultural artifacts. Because the Sipo Technical Matters Group validated these significantly recurring actions, their genres may be seen as having borne their culture and incorporated their knowledge. Genre is “that aspect of situated communication that is capable of reproduction, that can be manifested in more than one situation” and thereby “provide[s] reproducible speaker and addressee roles, social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigences, topical structures (or ‘moves’ and ‘steps’), and ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources” (p. 71, emphasis in original). Further, genre connects the individual mind and the larger rhetorical community, sustaining the community by reproducing it and by reconciling its centrifugal and centripetal forces.

Thus does genre furnish “ways of marshalling rhetorical resources” (p. 75) to pragmatically structure communal action. It then follows that the SS bureaucrats’ genres—the significantly recurring references to “special” tasks, to secrecy, to national consciousness, to protocols informed by the leadership principle and a military/
bureaucratic ethos—bear their culture and incorporate the exigences of their shared social knowledge. Genres structured group actions by providing:

- speaker and addressee roles that could be reproduced according to SS rank protocols (Obersturmbannführer, Hauptsturmführer, Untersturmführer) and organizational hierarchies (II → IID → IID3 → IID3a → IID3a9) that instantiated the leadership principle (and connected members to the broader Nazi theme of “community”).
- social typifications of a recurrent social exigence to “partially hide reality from themselves” by references to “special” tasks of a “secret” and “military” nature, while also normalizing these tasks by folding them into bureaucratic routines.
- topical structures (or idioi topoi) that furnished a mental topology on which members could ground their arguments and make “moves” or “steps” that others within the community might find persuasive—such that patently absurd arguments (“the procedure of the garrison doctor,” “the gassing is without exception not properly done,” “ninety-seven thousand have been processed,” “Goetz and Meyer have completed their special mission”) became the basis for deliberation and decision.
- ways of indexing genocide (by exchanging correct correspondence; by adhering to speaker/addressee roles in reporting problems, proposing solutions, and making and fulfilling requisitions) to the material conditions of
everyday bureaucratic life at the Sipo Technical Matters Group and its Berlin motor pool, and turning those conditions into a structure of resources for and constraints upon pragmatic action.

Genres thus served as rhetorical resources to reconcile the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the community. In other words, their presence permitted the everyday documents of the Sipo Technical Matters Group to function as boundary objects, plastic enough to meet the local needs of the organization’s respective interests and robust enough to forge, just barely long enough, a temporarily shared identity.

**Visuality in the Rhetorical Community**

The notion of rhetorical community would seemingly be broad enough to take within its ambit the *visual* rhetorics that contribute to the community’s (re)production. Yet the rhetorical properties of visuality have resisted facile categorization. Visual images have “long been suspect as irrational, illogical, and somewhat slippery” to many scholars, so that a “traditional bias for modes of verbal expression and against visual images” is found in much of the literature (Hope, 2006, p. 31). Kostelnick and Roberts (1998), for example, proposed visual equivalents for the five classical canons of rhetoric, a too-neat logocentric solution that seems reductionistic and unsatisfying. Instead, DeLuca (2006) urges researchers to leave behind “Gutenberg’s Galaxy” and recognize that attempts to “approach images with the mindset and methods of print ensures we will misread them; adopting an image orientation is a necessary first step” (pp. 86-87). For as
Balter-Reitz and Stewart (2006) averred, “The classical argumentation model of claim, evidence, and inference does not seem to provide much insight into the working of visual artifacts” (p. 116). Thus, I have elsewhere (Ward, 2010b) advanced the proposition that a given arrangement of text and graphics has symbolic potency for a given audience because the author/designer and the user, engaged in a communal conversation that is grounded in the exigence of shared social knowledge, together co-construct its meaning. In so doing, they “satisfy a mutual need to establish a rule of action and ensure the continuance of their common world” (pp. 68-69). In this light, let us consider the visual rhetorics of the Sonderwagen documents.

To begin, the Rauff letter of 26 March 1942 is seemingly the most nondescript of the gas van documents. If only the written text is considered then the letter is most noteworthy not for what it says but, rather, what it does not say. The text does not mention the purpose for which a gas van was requested by the Mauthausen camp, except to reference “the procedure of the garrison doctor” and thus give tacit assent to the public health metaphor—or as Lifton (1986) proposed, the “medicalization” of killing. The text studiously assumes a passive tone, shifting the locus of action from the author to his superiors Heydrich (the “Chief of the Security Police and SD” or CSSD) and the General Plenipotentiary for Vehicles (GEK), thereby denying the request but without taking responsibility. Further, as Höhne (1969/1966, p. 267) explained, because the document concerned business that had circulated outside Heydrich’s Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) then the letterhead omitted the word “Reichssicherheitshauptamt” (which by contrast was featured prominently on internal documents) and referred to Heydrich as
Geheim

1.) Schreiben:
An das krim. tech. Institut
beim Reichskriminalpolizeiamt
Berlin.

In der Anlage reiche ich den Vorgang des Standortarztes K.L. Mauthausen zurück.


2.) II D:3 a – Major Prade 1 – zu Kenntnis und W.vl. bei Fertigstellung neuer Sonderwagen.

[Signature]

Figure 6.1: German Original of 26 March 1942 Rauff Letter
Source: Holocaust History Project (http://www.holocaust-history.org/19420326-rauff-sonderwagen)
CSSD rather than as RSHA chief. Finally, the letter is most interesting to historians because the final paragraph mentions bottled gas as an alternative to the special vans, thus clearly implying—but not actually stating—a connection. Why would bottled gas solve a problem when “special trucks” are unavailable? The letter does not say. And the offhand mention of other “remedies” (Hilfsmitteln) employs a word used as a reference to poison gas in other SS documents.

Visually, however, the document’s rhetoric would be experienced as normal, standard, and business-as-usual. The letterhead mentions no “Reich Security Main Office” but features only a nondescript abbreviation (“II D Rf/Hb” or II D Referat [Bureau] Hauptbüro [Headquarters]) that calls little attention to itself. Though the “Secret” (Geheime) stamp is placed to draw eye traffic, it is less obtrusive than the “Secret State Matter” (Geheime Reichssache) stamp that is found on other documents and in which the type is larger and bolder. The formatting of the letter is impeccable with the text precisely flush left. Interestingly, the final paragraph which is denoted as “2” was apparently added later with a different typewriter because the type is not as heavy, the two lines of text angle slightly upward from left to right, and the last line intersects the “I.A.” of the signature block. This may, then, be a copy of the letter that was routed to Pradel for his information. In any event, Rauff signs his last name by hand with an oversized executive flourish and Pradel countersigns his receipt of Note 2 with a hurried scribble, but the filing codes in the upper left are handwritten with a clerk’s precise and legible script. Finally, the document does not avail itself of a feature found on typewriters made for the SS—namely a key that types the “lightning-bolt” SS runes (and which may
be seen in the German originals of the Becker and Just documents). Indeed, unlike the other documents that are filled with references to SS units and ranks, the 26 March 1942 Rauff letter contains no visible SS identifications at all. Since the letter might circulate outside the RSHA and perhaps outside the SS, its language had to be carefully couched and its visual appearance had to be entirely normal and businesslike.

The 16 June 1942 Becker field inspection report is interesting in that, unlike the 26 March 1942 Rauff letter, its visual rhetoric is a collective creation. The text may have been composed by Becker but the visual elements show as many as six participants. Thus, as the document proceeded through the Sipo Technical Matters Group bureaucracy, visual components were added at each step of the process to create a cumulative and collective rhetoric. Among the visual features of the Becker report are the following:

- The word “Reichssicherheitshauptamt” is omitted from the letterhead, perhaps because it had to be sent through the military field post (*Feldpost*).
- The three pages of the document appear to have been originally stapled together, with the staple affixed at a 45-degree angle.
- The stamped words “Secret State Matter” (*Geheime Reichssache*) are boxed and in bold type, and thus more prominent than the word “Secret” stamped on the 26 March 1942 Rauff letter.
- An SS typewriter with a key for the trademark SS runes was employed, as seen at the top of the first page in Rauff’s SS rank title and on the final page in Becker’s title.
- Rauff and Pradel have each countersigned the document toward the upper right of the first page.

- A motor pool employee, whose difficult-to-read handwriting appears in other gas van documents, has underlined “(Saurer) stop completely in rainy weather” in the first paragraph and made a marginal notation beside that text.

- The second paragraph in which Becker describes how the vans’ camouflage has failed is marked off in the left margin by a double-slash.

- An entrance stamp has been placed at right angles in the lower left of the first page. Within it, the written notation “II D 3 a” has been made in Pradel’s hand, while the filing code has been written (here as well as in the top left corner) by the same hand that wrote the code in the 26 March 1942 Rauff letter. Space is provided in the block to write in a “Procedure” (Vorgang), though the line is left blank. The date within the stamp appears to be 16 June 1942, indicating the document has taken a month to travel through the mails and then down the Sipo Technical Matters Group chain of authority.

- The text is flush left. As in the 26 March 1942 Rauff letter, the left margin is generous but at the right margin the text is typed almost to the edge of the sheet. As Lozowick (2000) has noted, RSHA guidelines on document style called for a wide left margin to facilitate marginal notations.

- Someone has made handwritten bracket marks around most of the paragraphs.

- Beside the text in which Becker described how SS personnel unload corpses themselves because they fear that prisoners compelled to do the work might
take the opportunity to flee, and where Becker requested that orders be issued to remedy the situation, there is in the left margin a handwritten question mark and what appears to be a capital “R.” This may be Rauff making a note of Becker’s request.

- Becker signs the report in his own name since his signature is not denoted as either “I.A.” or “I.V.”

In this document we see the rhetorical community, in a very physical and tangible way, literally co-constructing its meaning. It is almost a kind of palimpsest in which an earlier creation is subsequently modified by later creations on the same parchment. Here the theory I articulated (Ward, 2010) works nicely: confronted by the uncertainty of a new datum—Heydrich’s order to build gas vans—the bureaucrats of the Sipo Technical Matters Group generated documents as boundary objects by which they could triangulate a rule of action that reestablished their belief in “the system” and continued their common world. While Holocaust historians have focused solely on Becker’s written text, that is not the entirety of the document. To address the question “Why?” a vital task is seeing “the community as invoked, represented, presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse” (Miller, 1994, p. 73) through the entire document—its codes, numbers, dates, letterhead, logos, stamps, countersignatures, underlining, marginal notations, and more.

Through these elements we can see the rule of action that the community triangulated and discern the belief they established and the meaning they co-constructed. And what was that meaning? Genocide was absorbed into the common world of accepted
Die Überholung der Wagen bei der Gruppe D und C ist beendet. Während die Wagen der ersten Serie auch bei nicht allzu schlechter Wetterlage eingesetzt werden können, liegen die Wagen der zweiten Serie (Sauer) bei Regenwetter vollkommen fest. Wenn es z.B. nur eine halbe Stunde geregnet hat, kann der Wagen nicht eingesetzt werden, weil er statt wertvoll, benützt ist er nur bei ganz trockenen Wetter. Es tritt nur die Frage auf, ob man den Wagen nur an Ort der Exekution in Stand benutzen kann. Erstens muss der Wagen an diesen Ort gebracht werden, was nur bei guter Wetterlage möglich ist. Der Ort der Exekution befindet sich aber meistens 10 - 15 km abseits der Verkehrswege und ist durch seine Lage schon schwer zugänglich, bei feuchtem oder nassen Wetter überhaupt nicht. Fährt oder fährt man die zu Exekutierenden an diesen Ort, so wären sie sofort was los ist und werden unzulässig, was nach Möglichkeit vermieden werden soll. Es bleibt nur der eine Weg übrig, sie am Sammelorte eins abdomin und dann hinauszuführen.


Die Vernichtung wird durchweg nicht richtig vorgenommen. Um die Aktion möglichst schnell zu beenden, geben die Fahrer

In Beauf des heutigen Tages erfolgt meine Weiterrunde nach der Gruppe B, so mich weitere Nachrichten erreichin können.

[Signature]

Untersturmführer.
bureaucratic rules of action, reestablishing belief in professional bureaucracy and giving genocide its meaning (for them) as procedure. Bogost (2007) has observed that procedure itself constitutes a rhetoric “of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions” (p. ix) for procedures can be expressive “in a way that invokes political, social, and cultural values” (p. 5) as rhetors engage in “the practice of authoring arguments through processes” (p. 28). While Bogost’s theory of procedural rhetoric is concerned with computational procedures, it does point up the notion that processes in themselves can make arguments. Black (2001) documented how the Nazis from their earliest days in power used the latest punch card technology and strove to employ “massively organized information . . . [as] a means of social control” (p. 7). Historians Aly and Roth (2004) in their review of Nazi census-taking noted that “the simple abstraction of humans into mere numbers” (p. 6) expresses a fundamental worldview in which “the person becomes a case, an example, an index card” (p. 23)—or, as in Becker document, at first mere “prisoners” for execution and then, ultimately, just a filing code.

The visual rhetoric of the preprinted RSHA telegrams can be interpreted the same way, for their lines and boxes and serial numbers all scream “Procedure!” The letterhead states “Reich Security Main Office News Transmission” (Reichssicherheitshauptamt Nachrichten-Uebermittlung) and immediately below is a “Space for Entrance Stamp” (Raum für Eingangsstempel), with boxes at the upper left and upper right to stamp the transmission and receipt dates by “Hour, Day, Month, Year.” Below the lefthand box, each preprinted telegram form has a sequential “News Transmission Number” (N.-U. Nr.). And below the heading “Telegram – Radio Wire – Writing – Saying” the sender can
paste his message with the aid of preprinted baselines. Finally, along the left-hand side of the form in type rotated 90 degrees is the word “File Margin” (Heftrand) to allow space for recipients to make notations. Thus, organization members would experience the rhetoric of the telegram form as an argument for normal everyday bureaucratic procedure. Yet of further interest to the analyst are the handwritten notations on the front and back of the telegrams. These messages, which request vehicles and supplies or report vehicle damage, once received were routed through the Sipo Technical Matters Group chain of authority. Thus they provide—together with Rauf’s 22 June 1942 reply to one of the requests—clues to how, organizationally, the gas van program was administered on a daily basis.

Such visual elements as those described above performed “rhetorical boundary work” (Wilson & Herndl, 2007) between the multiple levels and subcultures within the Sipo Technical Matters Group. The need for such boundary work was considerable, for competing interests within the Group included the executive level represented by Rauff who, in his mid thirties, identified with young and ideologically-driven RHSA leadership cadre cultivated by Heydrich and Himmler; the middle management level represented by Pradel, who identified with the professional culture of career police officers and saw himself as a transportation expert; the junior level represented by Wentritt, the upwardly mobile technical school graduate who had recently been named chief mechanic of the Sipo motor pool in Berlin; the employee level represented by Just, an older man in his forties who had been a welder in German police service for more than twenty years; the clerical level whose participation can be seen in the typing, stamping, coding, and filing...
of the documents; the expert level represented by Becker who, with his Ph.D. in chemistry, was on loan from the T4 euthanasia program and dispatched by Rauff as a field inspector; the field personnel represented by the gas van drivers Findeisen and Gevatter who clung to their identity as specialists and refused to personally shoot any Jews; the internal clients represented by Schäfer and Trühe who, like Rauff, were dedicated “SS men” and headed the regional offices that oversaw the Einsatzgruppen shooting squads; and finally the suppliers, including the subcontractor Gaubschat that built the truck compartments, the Armed Forces High Command with whom Rauff negotiated allocations of truck chassis and motor fuel, and the General Plenipotentiary for Vehicles that released the trucks.

How were such variations in perspective integrated to achieve, as Wilson and Herndl (2007) put it, a “trading zone, a temporary space of cooperation and exchange and exchange between different disciplines or subdisciplines” so as to “make discordant language and knowledge understandable by demonstrating how these ways of thinking and speaking fit within a common project” (p. 132)? In this regard, the visual aspects of the Schäfer and Trühe telegrams are eerily reminiscent of the “knowledge map” (p. 141) by which project team members in the Wilson and Herndl study charted their respective participation in the project. The preprinted RSHA telegram form provided lines and boxes for nearly every level of the Sonderwagen administration to map its participation. Spaces are graphically marked off for the client’s messages, the entrance stamp of the Sipo Technical Matters Group, the countersignatures of Rauff and Pradel, and the routing stamp needed to properly file the document, while the back of the telegram provided a
Figure 6.3: German Original of 9 June 1942 Schäfer Telegram, Page 1 of 2
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
Figure 6.3: German Original of 9 June 1942 Schäfer Telegram, Page 2 of 2
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
Figure 6.4: German Original of 15 June 1942 Trühe Telegram
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501

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Reichssicherheitshauptamt

Berlin, den 22. Juni 1942

II B 3 a E. Nr. 240/42

1.) FS

An den Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei

und der SD Ostfront

in Riga

Betreff: S-Wagen

Mit der Überstellung eines S-Wagens ist Mitte nächsten Monats zu rechnen. Das Fahrzeug befindet sich 
zur Instandsetzung und Vornahme kleiner Änderungen 
z.B. beim Reichssicherheitshauptamt. 100 m Schlauch 
werden mitgegeben.

I.A.

(Unterschrift wie Kopf)

2.) Wv. sofort bei II B 3 a (9)

Vorgang:

1) Wann ist mit Bereitstellung eines weiteren S-Wagens zu 
   rechnen?

2) Sind (9) Verschlussleisten vorhanden, in Beschaffung
   oder wann lieferbar?

3) Antwortentwurf vorliegen

Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
Figure 6.6: German Original of Retyped Telegrams from 15 and 9 June 1942
Source: Nuremberg Documents PS-501
handy space where each level—Rauff, Pradel, Wentritt, Just—notated questions, answers, instructions and procedures, while carefully denoting their individual numerical codes. From this single sheet of paper, one can reconstruct precisely the chain of command and how requests for vehicles, repairs, and supplies progressed through each level. As Wilson and Herndl discovered with their missile team, I believe the document forms of the Sipo Technical Matters Group helped to create trading zones as “temporary formations in which distinct groups with different orientations, professional commitments, and characteristic forms of argument can cooperate in specific practices” (p. 145).

Even as the visual rhetoric of the one-page telegram forms is revealing, so is the visual rhetoric of the lengthiest document in the gas-van corpus. For the 5 June 1942 technical proposal is, visually, the most unique of the documents under study. The visual rhetoric that clearly stands out above all else is the *formality* of the document design. The proposal was meant to impress in its appearance as well as its argument. Those who have never created a document on a typewriter, but who have always enjoyed the convenience of editing their copy on a word processor, cannot understand the painstaking difficulty and repeated attempts required to produce such a document on a typewriter—and, further, on a manual typewriter (with, of course, no self-correcting capability). And to have sustained the precision of the margins and tab sets over five typewritten pages would have required supreme effort. Notice also two very telling difference between the Just proposal and both the Becker field inspection report and even Rauff’s 26 March 1942 routine business letter. In the latter two cases the lines of type extend almost to the right
edge of the sheet and words are hyphenated haphazardly so as to create a somewhat ragged right margin. The line endings are within acceptable bounds but, clearly, the right margin received only the “usual” attention and no great effort was made to diminish its raggedness. But the Just proposal is notable because its has a generous right margin, as well as the left, so as to present a visually pleasing symmetry on the page; for that matter, the top and bottom margins also allow a visually pleasing amount of white space; and the manual line endings are regulated to keep the text from being too ragged at the right margin. Clearly, this is a serious document, not routine at all, and intended to impress. Considerable effort would have been required not only to compose and phrase the text, but also to produce the document. The seriousness is also suggested by the fact that, at the top of the document, it is marked not only “Reich Secret Matter” in bold type but is also denoted “Only Copy.” The Just proposal is also notable in that no one else has made any marginal notations and stamped any routing instructions upon it. The document apparently received “kid glove” treatment.

How, then, to interpret the meaning that the rhetorical community co-constructed from this object? Any answer is speculation, of course. But perhaps a better approach to an answer is to rephrase the question: Why were the other documents treated as merely routine and this document was not? The stakes, apparently, were higher. Becker’s stinging report of van operations in the field had forced the hand of the Berlin-based automotive technicians of the Sipo Technical Matters Group. After they had built the Sonderwagen and sent them to the field, the vans were just another set of vehicles among the four thousand they administered. But now the technicians came face-to-face with the
I. VORBESPRECHUNG

Betreff: Technische Abänderungen an den im Betrieb eingestützen und an denen sich in Herstellung befindlichen Spezialwagen.


Die sonstigen bisher gesammelten Erfahrungen lassen folgende technische Abänderungen zweckmäßig erscheinen:

1.) Um ein schnelles Einströmen des CO unter Vermeidung von Überdrucken zu ermöglichen, sind an der oberen Rückwand zwei offene Schlüsse von 10 x 1 cm lichter Weite anzubringen. Diese sind außen mit leicht beweglichen Schaumwolleblechklappen zu versehen, damit ein Ausgleich des evtl. eintretenden Überdruckes selbsttätig erfolgt.

2.) Die Beschickung der Wagen beträgt normalerweise 9 - 10 pro m². Bei den größtformatigen Spezialwagen ist eine Ausnutzung in dieser Form nicht möglich, da dadurch zwar...


5.) Die bisher angebrachten Beleuchtungsfenster können entfallen, da sie praktisch nie benutzt werden. Bei der Verwendung weiterer Fahrzeuge wird durch den Fortfall der Fenster mit Besparung der teueren Anbringung und Ersparung der selben erhebliche Arbeitszeit eingespart.

Drängen der Ladung nach der Tür erfolgte. Dieses ist darauf zurückzuführen, daß die Ladung bei eintretender Dunkelheit sich nach dem Licht drängt. Es erschwert das Hinklicken der Tür.

Ferner wurde festgestellt, daß der aufstrebende Läufer wohl mit Bezug auf die Unehrenlichkeit des Dunkels immer dann eingesetzt, wenn sich die Türen schließen. Es ist deshalb zweckmäßig, das die Beleuchtung vor und während der ersten Minuten des Betriebes eingeschaltet wird. Auch ist die Beleuchtung bei Nachtbetrieb und beim Beinigen des Wageninnern von Vorteil.


Vorstehende technische Abänderungen sind an den in Betrieb befindlichen Fahrzeugen zur dann nachträglich auszuführen, wenn jeweils ein Fahrzeug einer anderen größeren Reparatur unterzogen werden muß. An den im Auftrag eingesetzten 10 Severo-Fahrzeugen sind die vorstehenden Abänderungen so weit als möglich zu berücksichtigen. Da die Hersteller-Anstalt gelegentlich einer Rücksprache bedürfte, daß konstruktive Abänderungen z.T. nicht oder nur für kleinste Abänderungen möglich sind, ist bei einer anderen Firma der Versuch zu unternehmen, mindestens einen...
eines dieser 10 Fahrzeuge mit allen Neuerungen
und Änderungen, die sich bisher aus der Praxis
ergaben, auszustatten. Ich schlage vor, die Firma
in Hohenmuth mit der Einzelausführung zu beauf-
tragen.

Nach den Umständen ist bei diesem Fahr-
zeug mit einer späteren Fertigstellung zu rechnen.
Es ist dann nicht nur als Muster-, sondern auch
als Reserve-Fahrzeug bereitzuhalten bzw. einzusetzen.
Bei Bewährung sind die übrigen Fahrzeuge scheinbar
daus dem Betrieb zu ziehen und dem Musterfahrzeug ent-
sprechend umzubauen.

II. Gruppenleiter II D
H.-Obersturmbannführer Reuff

mit der Bitte um Kenntnisehme und Entscheidung
vorgelegt.

[Signature]
vans’ purpose and were given direct responsibility for using their know-how to devise solutions to keep them going. Confronted with this new datum and its threat to continuance of their common world, they created a document whose highly formal and serious rhetoric (textually and visually) enabled them to absorb the datum into a habitual rule of action—they retreated, that is, behind a genre they knew quite well: technical communication.

In this chapter we have seen how the members of the Sipo Technical Matters Group deployed metaphor, narrative, and genre in their texts to construct a rhetorical community. Beside their texts, where do their visuals fit in? Did the visual rhetorics in their documents supply metaphors to bridge the gaps between their similarities and their differences? Or did their visual rhetorics furnish narratives that created a field in which their differences could be converged into a shared project? Or did their visual rhetorics constitute genres the desk-murderers employed to pragmatically structure social action?

In my view, we must heed here Williams’s (2006) warning that any interpretive framework must take into account visual intelligence or the “intuitive and unconscious cognitive nature of visual communication,” a mode of meaning that “eludes traditional semiotic, rhetorical, and other logocentric measurement techniques” (p. 32). As Barry (1997, 2006) pointed out, images are cognized much differently than words. The latter are cognized by the conscious/thoughtful half of the human brain, while images are cognized not only by the conscious/thoughtful half but also by the unconscious/intuitive half. And this whole-mind cognition occurs instantaneously, so that to “read” images as if they were “texts” may be untrue to the way that images are cognized. The analyst must
take care not “to reduce the rhetorical force of images to meaning, domesticating them for our studies” (DeLuca, 2006, p. 82). Or as Messaris (2003) cautioned, “Images can inveigle us into seeing them as real, even though most of us know full well that they are artificial constructions,” a fact that “serves as a clearer demarcation of how images differ from words” (p. 553).

The visual rhetorics of the Sonderwagen corpus imparted to the documents a patina of bureaucratic normalcy that, according to the properties of visual intelligence, could be processed cognitively and intuitively at a mere glance. What the visual elements of the documents say to the looker is, to paraphrase Bauman’s (1989) description, “Here is an objective discharge of business according to calculable rules and without regard for persons” (p. 14). This visual rhetorical argument may alternately be seen as metaphor, bridging the gap between the killers’ similarities and differences by explaining the new (mass murder) in terms of the familiar (bureaucratic routine); as narrative, telling a story of business-as-usual in order to create a field on which members’ differences might converge; or as genre, marshaling rhetorical resources to pragmatically structure social action, sometimes as simply as filling in the blanks. Images may, as suggested above, be “somewhat slippery.” But any analysis of a text that excludes the visual element may miss a vital aspect of the meanings being conveyed—and, in our case, of the rhetorical boundary work being done.
CHAPTER SEVEN
DISCOURSE OF DEATH

What Discourse Analysis Can Add

In the previous chapter we followed the implications of Miller’s (1994) thesis that rhetorical community is the cultural basis for genre. In so doing we saw the murderers of the Sipo Technical Matters Group as a community that—through organizational texts that served as boundary objects to negotiate their differences—marshaled the rhetorical resources of metaphor, narrative, and genre to (re)produce itself. Along the way we employed two of three approaches, rhetorical and genre analysis, that Berkenkotter (2002) cited as methods for research into everyday organizational texts. What, then, could the third approach—discourse analysis—add to what we have already learned? Within the context of organization studies, Alvesson (2004) asked a similar question: Is the “organizational discourse” approach merely a re-labeling of the “organizational culture” approach since the two frequently study the same things? Or to rephrase this question for the present study: If we have seen—through rhetorical and genre analyses—that rhetorical community (re)produces the organizational culture which furnishes the basis for genres by which organizations pragmatically structure social action, can discourse analysis bring anything new to the table?

Alvesson (2004, pp. 328ff) answered this question by proposing four distinctions: (1) Where researchers who accord primacy to organizational culture assume that much organizational meaning is tacit and therefore precedes discourse or is not expressed via discourse, those who privilege organizational discourse see meaning as driven by
language use and social reality as locally constructed through such discursive acts as categorizing, identifying, and relating. (2) Where those who see organizational culture as decisive assume language use reveals meaning, those who give primacy to organizational discourse assume language use creates temporary meaning, order, and power distribution. (3) Where those who look first to organizational culture seek connections and syntheses that produce a patterned organizational reality, those who look to organizational discourse would identify local impacts of discourse that produce organizational fragility and fragmentation as it generates local variations and multiple social realities. (4) Where those who point to organizational culture see members caught in their own webs of meaning, those who interrogate organizational discourse tend to see members caught in webs of classifications their language use brings about; and where organizational culture researchers view subjects as bearers of meaning who create and interpret reality, some discursivists assign those functions to organizational discourse rather than to people.

Thus, we can add to the previous analyses of the Sonderwagen documents by shifting our perspective and seeing where discursivist assumptions may lead us. This move, however, need not vitiate the earlier analyses. Stillar (1998) has forcefully argued that the choice is not either/or but both/and, since a discursive approach can work alongside rhetorical and social-theoretical approaches in analyses of everyday texts. “Discourse involves rhetorical action because it constitutes a major means through which we link ourselves to one another,” while “the act of participating in a discourse is also, of course, a social act” (pp. 5-6). Thus discoursal, rhetorical, and social approaches are “different, but complementary, perspective on text as practice, as action” (p. 5). Craig
likewise observed that because discourse is conceptualized as “language in use, or more broadly, the interactive production of meaning,” then discourse analysis represents a point of convergence between rhetoric and other traditions of communication theory. It brings a rhetorical perspective to our understanding of forms of communication (such as personal interaction) that were not traditionally thought of as rhetoric. And it enriches the rhetorical perspective with insights and techniques from pragmatics, conversation analysis, cultural studies, and other fields. (Craig, 2000)

This chapter adds to the previous analyses by demonstrating from a discursive perspective how documents can do boundary work by drawing on linguistic resources to create zones of consensus. Such a discursive approach—as distinct from a cultural approach—allows us, as Alvesson (2004) suggested, to better see the ways in which how meaning was driven by language use, social reality was constructed through discursive acts, language use created temporary order and power distribution, this order was fragile and fragmented because discourse creates multiple local variations and realities, and that discourse creates webs of classifications in which organization members become caught.

The Killers’ Use of Linguistic Resources

As we saw in Chapter 5, Stillar (1998) has argued that language constructs meaning through ideational resources since a text is “about something,” interpersonal
resources since a text is “to and from someone,” and textual resources since a text has structure and organization that permit cohesion and coherence). Stillar’s breakdown of these resources and their constituent parts are summarized below in Table 7.1.

From a discursivist standpoint, then, what meaning did the gas van program administrators construct through their language use? Discourse analysis of the 5 June 1942 Just technical proposal is instructive because not only has this document been widely commented upon in the technical communication literature (e.g., Dombrowski, 2000a; Katz, 1992a). Further, according to Sauer’s (2003) scheme the Just proposal represents a culminating moment in the Cycle of Documentation when embodied local sensory experience, which the 16 May 1942 Becker field report had captured in writing and turned into engineering knowledge, was finally re-represented for policy deliberation so that it might be transformed into generalizable organizational standards. Then, too, Lozowick’s (2000) observations about accepted bureaucratic protocols in Nazi Germany affirm that the Just document almost certainly was collaboratively authored by mid-level and junior functionaries attuned to the preferences of the top man. A linguistically-based discourse analysis of the document and its use of ideational resources, shown below in Table 7.2, demonstrates quite strongly that the desk-murderers constructed for themselves a social reality in which mental processes—that is, in which thinking—are entirely absent, except in the faulty reasoning of those (the manufacturer and the subcontractor) outside the organization. To use Stillar’s (1998) scheme, ideational resources derive from “the type of social activity involved” (p. 53), so that the Just document is clearly embedded in a situation where the “field of discourse” (p. 54) privileges the social
### Table 7.1: Resources for Discourse Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEATIONAL RESOURCES</th>
<th>INTERPSIONAL RESOURCES</th>
<th>TEXTUAL RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>What text is about</em></td>
<td><em>Where text is to and from</em></td>
<td><em>Constructs coherence from text parts</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Types and Participant Roles</td>
<td>Positional</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actional</td>
<td>Assigns speech roles</td>
<td>Unmarked theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (agent + patient)</td>
<td>Constructs speaker orientation</td>
<td>Marked theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work (agent + location)</td>
<td>Indexes speaker attitude</td>
<td>Multiple theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer (agent + item + location)</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resultative (agent + item + recipient)</td>
<td>Indexes authority, politeness, etc</td>
<td>Reference (antecedent for third-person pronoun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designative (agent + range)</td>
<td>Assigns obligations, etc to addressee</td>
<td>Ellipsis (word presupposed for subsequent text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>As constructed through:</td>
<td>Conjunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processor and phenomenon</td>
<td>Speech function</td>
<td>Additive (e.g., and, furthermore,)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>In addition, for instance, likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Adversative (e.g., yet, but, however,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Command</td>
<td>instead, at any rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Exclamation</td>
<td>Temporal (e.g., finally, first, meanwhile,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>secondly, in short)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>(via modal verbs, e.g., can, could,</td>
<td>Causal (e.g., therefore, as a result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usually realized by a linking verb</td>
<td>may, might, must, ought to, shall, will, would)</td>
<td>Lexical cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duo-relational (two participants)</td>
<td>Attitudinal lexis</td>
<td>Repetition (repeating same word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification (identification + identifier)</td>
<td>Qualitative and emphasizing adjectives</td>
<td>Synonymy (lexical item similar to previous item)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution (carrier + attribute)</td>
<td>Manner and degree adverbs</td>
<td>Hyponymy (specific-general relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification (classifier + classifier)</td>
<td>Linking verbs</td>
<td>between lexical items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession (possessor + possessed)</td>
<td>Reporting verbs</td>
<td>Metonymy (part-whole relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location (located + locator)</td>
<td>Cognitive verbs</td>
<td>between lexical items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-relational (one participant)</td>
<td>Sentence Adjuncts</td>
<td>Collocation (lexical items tend to co-occur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential (&quot;there are&quot;)</td>
<td>Links (signal cohesion between sentences)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalent (&quot;it is&quot;)</td>
<td>Topics (indicate field of reference)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudinals (indicate speaker's assessment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocatives (assign addressee for sentence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question tag (e.g., &quot;doesn't she?&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Adapted from Stillar (1990, pp. 22-52)*
activities of “doing” and “being” and devalues “sensing” (p. 25). In the social reality of the document there are chiefly actional processes that feature “agent” and “acted upon,” and to a somewhat lesser degree the activity of making duo-relational identifications and attributions. But of mental processes—which “have two central participants: a processor (the sentient being that does the ‘mentalizing’) and a phenomenon (that which is ‘mentalized’)” (p. 23)—there are virtually none, or at least no field for such social activity by members of the Sipo Technical Matters Group.

Also noteworthy is the way in which the Just document deploys interpersonal resources, especially the heavy use of modal verbs. Modalities “construct a speaker’s/writer’s attitude toward the ideational content . . . of the text” (Stillar, 1998, p. 35). The Just document is remarkable for the clear connection between modality and ideation in that actional processes are almost entirely modified by modal verbs that modify the main verbs, while relational processes are largely unmodified. Thus, the writers’ position and relation toward action is constantly modified by shifting action from the present to the past (has been, have been, etc.) or the future (will be, could be, etc.), while by contrast the writers’ social activity of identifying and classifying is unmodified and takes place in the present. The analysis here is aided by the fact that modal verbs are characteristic of Germanic language and, in fact, the six English modal verbs derive in their etymologies directly from the six German modal verbs: können/kann = can; sollen/soll = shall; wollen/will = will; müssen/muss = must; mögen/mag = may; dürfen/darf = dare. That the writers socially construct distance from their subjects of their actional processes is reinforced by the fact that, of the document’s 36 sentences that depict actional processes,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENTENCE</th>
<th>IDEATIONAL / INTERPERSONAL RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Since December 1941, ninety-seven thousand have been processed, using three vans, without any defects showing up in the vehicle.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (97,000 have been processed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: have been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 The explosion that we know took place at Kulmhof is to be considered an isolated case.</td>
<td>Relational-classification (explosion is an isolated case)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 The cause can be attributed to improper operation.</td>
<td>Relational-attribute (cause is improper operation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: can be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 In order to avoid such incidents, special instructions have been addressed to the services concerned.</td>
<td>Actional-transfer (instructions addressed to services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: have been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Safety has been increased considerably as a result of these instructions.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (safety has been increased)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: has been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Previous experience has shown that the adjustments would be useful.</td>
<td>Relational-attribute (adjustments are useful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 (1) In order to facilitate the rapid distribution of CO, as well as to avoid a buildup of pressure, two slots, ten by one centimeters, will be bored at the top of the rear wall.</td>
<td>Actional-affective (slots will be bored)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 The excess pressure would be controlled by an easily adjustable hinged metal valve on the outside of the vents.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (pressure would be controlled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 (2) The normal capacity of the vans is nine to ten per square meters</td>
<td>Relational-identification (capacity is 9-10 square meters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The capacity of the larger special Sauer vans is not so great.</td>
<td>Relational-identification (Sauer capacity is not so great)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 The problem is not one of overloading but of off-road maneuverability on all terrains, which is severely diminished in this van.</td>
<td>Relational-identification (problem is maneuverability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 It would appear that a reduction in the cargo area is necessary.</td>
<td>Relational-attribute (reduction is necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 This can be achieved by shortening the compartment by about one meter.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (This can be achieved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: can be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 The problem cannot be solved by merely reducing the number of subjects treated, as has been done so far.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (problem cannot be solved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: cannot be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 For in this case a longer running time is required, as the empty space also needs to be filled with CO.</td>
<td>Relational-attribute (longer running time is required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 On the contrary, were the cargo area smaller, but fully occupied, the operation would take considerably less time, because there would be no empty space.</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (operation would take less time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 The manufacturer pointed out during discussions that a reduction in the volume of the cargo compartment would result in an inconvenient displacement of the cargo toward the front.</td>
<td>Mental-verbal (manufacturer pointed out result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 There would then be a risk of overloading the axe.</td>
<td>Relational-existential (There would be a risk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: would</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 In fact, there is a natural compensation in the distribution of the weight.</td>
<td>Relational-ambient (There is a natural compensation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 When [the van is] in operation, the load, in its effort to reach the rear door, places itself for the most part at the rear.</td>
<td>Actional-motion (load places itself at the rear)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.2: Linguistic-Based Discourse Analysis of 5 June 1942 Gas Van Proposal
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENTENCE</th>
<th>IDEATIONAL / INTERPERSONAL RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 For this reason the front axle is not overloaded.</td>
<td>Relational-attrition (axle is not overloaded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 (3) The pipe that connects the exhaust to the van tends to rust,</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (pipe tends to rust)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because it is eaten away from the inside by the liquids that flow into</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>to</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 To avoid this the nozzle should be so arranged as to point downward</td>
<td>Actional-transfer (nozzle should be arranged downward)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>should be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 The liquids will thus be prevented from flowing into the pipe.</td>
<td>Actional-motion (liquids will not flow into pipe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>will be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 (4) To facilitate the cleaning of the vehicle, an opening will be</td>
<td>Actional-affective (opening will be made)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made in the floor to allow for drainage.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>will be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 It will be closed by a watertight cover about twenty to thirty</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (it will be closed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centimeters in diameter, fitted with an elbow siphon that will allow</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>will be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the draining of thin liquids.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 The upper part of the elbow pipe will be fitted with a sleeve to</td>
<td>Actional-affective (pipe will be fitted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoid obstruction.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>will be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Thicker dirt can be removed through the large drainage hole when</td>
<td>Actional-motion (dirt can be removed through the hole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the vehicle is cleaned.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>can be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 The floor of the vehicle can be tipped slightly.</td>
<td>Actional-affective (floor can be tipped)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>can be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 In this way all the liquids can be made to flow toward the center</td>
<td>Actional-motion (liquids can flow toward the center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and be prevented from entering the pipes.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>can be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 (5) The observation windows that have been installed up to now</td>
<td>Actional-affective (windows could be eliminated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could be eliminated, as they are hardly ever used.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>could be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Considerable time will be saved in the production of the new vans</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (time will be saved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by avoiding the difficult fitting of the window and its airtight lock.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>will be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 (6) Greater protection is needed for the lighting system.</td>
<td>Relational-attrition (protection is needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 The grille should cover the lamps high enough to make it</td>
<td>Actional-transfer (grille should be high enough)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impossible to break the bulbs.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>should</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 It seems that those lamps are hardly ever turned on, so the users</td>
<td>Mental-verbal (users suggest elimination)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have suggested that they could be done away with.</td>
<td>Modal verb: <em>have, could be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Experience shows, however, that when the back door is closed and</td>
<td>Actional-motion (load presses against door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it gets dark inside, the load presses hard against the door.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 The reason for this is that when it becomes dark inside the load</td>
<td>Actional-motion (load rushes toward light)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rushes toward what little light remains.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 This hampers the locking of the door.</td>
<td>Actional-affective (this hampers locking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 It has also been noticed that the noise provoked by the locking of</td>
<td>Actional-resultative (noise is linked to fear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the door is linked to the fear aroused by the darkness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 It is therefore expedient to keep the lights on before the</td>
<td>Relational-attrition (It is therefore expedient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operation and during the first few minutes of its duration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Lighting is also useful for night work and for the cleaning of</td>
<td>Relational-attrition (Lighting is useful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the interior of the van.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.2 continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Ideational / Interpersonal Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 42 (7) To facilitate the rapid unloading of the vehicles, a removable grid is to be placed on the floor. | Actional-affective (grid is to be placed)  
Modal verb: to be |
| 43 It will slide on rollers on a U-shaped rail. | Actional-resultative (it will slide)  
Modal verb: will |
| 44 It will be removed and put in position by means of a small winch placed under the vehicle. | Actional-resultative (it will be removed)  
Modal verb: will be |
| 45 The firm charged with the alterations has stated that it is not able to continue for the moment, due to a lack of staff and materials. | Mental-verbal (the firm has stated it is not able) |
| 46 Another firm will have to be found. | Actional-affective (another firm must be found)  
Modal verb: will have to be |
| 47 The technical changes planned for the vehicles already in operation will be carried out when and as major repairs to these vehicles prove necessary. | Actional-resultative (changes will be carried out)  
Modal verb: will be |
| 48 The alterations in the ten Sauer vehicles already ordered will be carried out as far as possible. | Actional-resultative (alterations will be carried out)  
Modal verb: will be |
| 49 The manufacturer made it clear in a meeting that structural alterations, with the exception of minor ones, cannot be carried out for the moment. | Mental-verbal (manufacturer made it clear) |
| 50 An attempt must therefore be made to find another firm that can carry out, on at least one of these ten vehicles, the alterations and adjustments that experience has proved to be necessary. | Actional-affective (attempt must be made)  
Modal verb: must be |
| 51 I suggest that the firm Hohenmuth be charged with the execution. | Actional-affective (I suggest the firm be charged) |
| 52 Due to present circumstances, we shall have to expect a later date of completion for this vehicle. | Actional-resultative (we must expect later completion)  
Modal verb: must |
| 53 It will then not only be kept available as a model but also be used as a reserve vehicle. | Actional-affective (it will be kept available)  
Modal verb: will be |
| 54 Once it has been tested, the other vans will be withdrawn from service and will undergo the same alterations. | Actional-affective (vans will be withdrawn)  
Modal verb: will be |

Table 7.2 continued
the writers are the subject in only *two* sentences (51 and 52) that appear at the end and
describe relationships with suppliers rather than actual vehicle operations.

Even without exploring the textual resources of the Just document (which would
then involve issues of German-to-English translation), and instead examining only those
linguistic resources necessarily found in all languages (that is, resources that construct
what a text is about and its speaker and addressee), a discourse analysis suggests the
bureaucrats of the Sipo Technical Matters Group used language to create a meaning that
devolved *sensing*, although *doing* was heavily modified to deflect the writers’ and
addressee’s position and relation toward actional processes by shifting them out of the
present. Returning to Alvesson’s (2004) four distinctives for analyses that privilege
organizational discourse before organizational culture, we would see the Just document
doing boundary work by locally and temporally constructing organizational meaning,
order, and power distribution via such discursive acts as categorizing, identifying, and
relating; that the attempt to locally construct meaning, order, and power distribution is
born of the need to counteract organizational fragility and reconcile fragmented local
variations and multiple social realities; and that organization members become caught in
the webs of classifications their discourses bring about.

**Reconstructing an Organizational Discourse**

Finally, in following Grant and Iedema’s (2005) dimensional approach to
organizational discourse studies, we can also turn to the interplay between communally
validated language patterns and the meanings those patterns marginalized. And this can
be addressed by attempting to reconstruct/deconstruct the discourse carried on within the Sipo Technical Matters Group by the various participants in the gas van program.

The discourse of the 26 March 1942 letter issued by Rauff seems straightforward to interpret: A rival SS bureau had requested a gas van and Rauff was indisposed to grant them such aid, whether because of their rivalry, or because design modifications for new gas vans were still being worked out, or because RSHA operations were officially secret, or because Rauff was preoccupied with supplying the Einsatzgruppen and did not want to be otherwise bothered—or all of the above. Similarly, the telegram traffic between the Sipo Technical Matters Group in Berlin and the Sipo-and-SD regional headquarters in occupied territories—which occurred in the early and mid summer of 1942, when more gas vans of improved design were available—can be straightforwardly interpreted as a simple administrative discourse regarding vehicle requisition and disposition. By reducing these discourses to “banal” administrative routine, organization members suppressed and marginalized non-Nazi construals of their deeds.

The organizational discourse that culminated in the exchange between the 16 May 1942 Becker field inspection report and the 5 June 1942 Just technical proposal, however, is highly instructive about organization members’ marginalization of traditional moral meanings. According to my reconstruction, this discourse began in the late winter of 1941-42, involved all levels of the organizations in deliberations of policy, and extended through the early summer, at which time the discourse is remarkable for the swiftness with which organizational consensus broke down.

The early stage of the discourse is suggested by the Sipo-and-SD situation report
for Einsatzgruppe B. Dated 1 March 1942 and covering the period 16–28 February 1942, the report noted that gas vans had arrived February 23 “at Smolensk with defects and, after the defects were remedied, were assigned to the Einsatzkommandos.” Even at this early stage, then, defects were already apparent. Then, too, Becker had embarked the previous month on his field inspection tour and, since he regularly reported to Rauff, news of vehicle defects was presumably reaching the Berlin office. And sometime after the December 1941 opening of the Chelmno death camp, an embarrassing explosion occurred when gas pressure inside one of the vans caused the back doors to blow and ejected its still-living cargo of victims. Thus in his 26 March 1942 letter to the Criminal Technical Institute, Rauff turned down a vehicle request from the Mauthausen camp on the grounds that all the Sonderwagen ordered by Heydrich were already deployed and any additional gas vans were still under construction.

In fact, new vehicles were not only under construction; their very design was still under discussion as complaints from the field mounted. In April, Becker witnessed an Aktion that was launched on Easter Sunday. That day, a militia of local collaborators rounded up Jewish men, women, and children from the town of Stalino until some 200 victims were assembled in the interior courtyard of the local hotel. An SS sergeant had been dispatched from Berlin by the RSHA, driven a gas van to Stalino, and put at the disposal of Einsatzkommando 6 and its commander (Kogan et al., 1993, p. 63). The next day, Easter Monday, operations resumed at 7 a.m. when the local militia forced the captive Jews to remove their usable outer clothing and loaded about fifty or sixty victims into the van. Once the doors were bolted and the gassing began, the SS driver took off for
an abandoned mine shaft outside of town. But as a member of the SS commando recalled after the war,

The gas-van could not be driven right up to the shaft and we had to pull the bodies out of the vans and drag them to the shaft which was about eight meters away, and then throw them in. … When the doors were opened a cloud of smoke wafted out. After the smoke had cleared we could start our foul work. It was frightful. You could see they had fought terribly for their lives. Some of them were holding their noses. The dead had to be dragged apart. It was while doing this that I first found out how heavy a human being can be. (Klee et al., 1991, pp. 72-73)

Over the course of three and a half hours the procedure was performed four times until all 200 Jews had been gassed. “I know for sure it was Easter Monday,” the SS man later testified, “because I clearly remember discovering colored eggs back at the quarters after the execution” (p. 72). Given the complaints continually reported by Becker, the Berlin office began discussing improvements for its Sonderwagen. In a proposal dated April 24, Pradel suggested overlaying the van compartment’s metal floor with a sliding wooden grille set on rollers and activated by a winch for easy unloading of victims. Though Rauff approved, the subcontractor Gaubschat replied that winches were unavailable due to wartime equipment shortages and its own workers had been drafted for military duty (Browning, 1991, p. 64). A memo dated 27 April 1942 discussed how “cargo” might be unloaded more quickly by installing “tip-up equipment for the box-superstructure,” or
alternately a “facility to tip-up the bottom-grate” or “a facility to move in and out the bottom-grate.” As the historian Beer (1987) noted, “The proceeding was analogous to the development of the prototype. The matter was debated first internally and then Rauff gave an order for a van with the planned alterations to the Gaubschat factory. This one should be tested practically and only after that a decision should be taken on the vans to be altered further.” With such discussions still ongoing, Becker’s detailed and highly critical report of the vans’ design and operational shortcomings arrived in May.

How this organizational discourse proceeded next is a matter of some conjecture. That the 5 June 1942 Just technical proposal was a response to the 16 May 1942 Becker field report seems clear enough. But as discussed in Chapter 3, it also seems clear that Just was not the author or instigator of the proposal. The men of the Sipo Technical Matters Group adhered to protocols that reflected a strict chain of command—even the extensive handwritten notes on the telegram traffic, for example, demonstrate how the most routine correspondences were efficiently routed down through a numerically designated hierarchy. According to protocol, then, the 5 June 1942 proposal emerged from a thicket of savvy mid-level and junior functionaries who then ordered Just to sign the document. Among these, Pradel emerges—again, according to protocol—as a figure of particular importance since his mid-level status made him the nexus between Rauff on the executive level and the junior managers of the motor pool.

A clue to Pradel’s role in the Just proposal may be found in the Becker field report. Rauff signed the latter document to acknowledge receipt and placed a question mark in the margin beside Becker’s request that orders be issued requiring gas vans be
unloaded by prisoners. That the document was then routed to Pradel is indicated by his own countersignature. The fact that Pradel saw Becker’s report hints strongly that Pradel must also have had a hand in producing the document intended as a response to Becker’s report. This is reinforced by the careful language use and precise graphical appearance of the Just proposal and which speak of its importance to its authors. Willi Just is alternately described in the historical literature as a welder (Noakes & Pridham, 1988, p. 1202) and dispatcher (Browning, 1991, p. 64), and his employee designation of IID3a(9) affirms that he was subordinate to chief mechanic Wentritt and, at number nine, not high in rank. Yet his extensive handwritten notations on the backs of the Schäfer and Trühe telegrams suggest that Just—who had more than twenty years of experience as a welder—had a significant role in coordinating repairs for the gas vans. Perhaps among the four thousand vehicles in the Sipo motor pool, which Pradel and Wentritt oversaw, Just was the dispatcher and mechanic they assigned to keep track of the gas vans. So while Just may have had a hand in initially formulating the recommendations of the 5 June 1942 technical proposal and was the logical person to be its signatory, he signed the document “I.A.” (im Auftrag) or “by direction.” What seems most likely is that Pradel, Wentritt, and Just collaborated on the proposal, secured a technical writer to draft the language and a skilled typist to produce the draft, and ordered Just to sign.

But what was the impetus for producing such a detailed, lengthy, and graphically impressive document? Did Rauff, upon receiving Becker’s report, commission Pradel to draft a response? Did Pradel, perhaps to absolve himself of the vans’ problems and thus protect his organizational turf, take the initiative and instigate a reply to Becker’s report?
Did Wentritt and Just, either responding to field complaints or sensing an opportunity to resolve design discussions in their favor, suggest to Pradel that the occasion was ripe for a formal technical proposal? Or did perhaps Becker himself implore Rauff to have his automotive experts suggest possible solutions?

My interpretation takes into account a 23 June 1942 memo, written by Pradel, in which he objected for security reasons to using a Czech subcontractor, as was suggested in the Just proposal. Why would Pradel take pains to point out a fault in the proposal, if he himself had a hand in it? For that reason I surmise that the organizational discourse proceeded in this manner: An ongoing internal discussion about design modifications for new gas vans was brought to a head by Becker’s report, prompting Rauff to request from Pradel a response. Pradel delegated this task to Wentritt, who together with Just worked up the major points for proposed solutions. Then Pradel approved the points in principle, used his managerial clout to have the proposal professionally written up and typed, and directed Just to sign. (The writer or typist finished the document June 4 since that date and the initials “wa” are found in marginalia at the end of the memo.) After the proposal was submitted to Rauff for consideration and decision, however, Pradel pointed out the difficulty of employing a Czech subcontractor.

The proposed firm, Sodomka at Hohenmauth . . . [is] unsuitable for work of a secret nature. (A Czech firm in an entirely Czech area, with a Czech labor force.) We suggest that Gaubschat should be asked to make the required changes on one cargo compartment only and then test it. Those alterations that Gaubschat cannot
make because of their secret character will be done in our own shop. (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 56)

Why did Pradel object to a proposal drafted by his own bureau? Perhaps if the proposal had been commissioned by Rauff, rather than originally instigated by Pradel, the latter felt safe to clarify the proposals of subordinates who, after all, were competent in technical matters only. Perhaps Pradel engaged in the common negotiating tactic of starting with a comprehensive proposal and then suggesting the alternative (i.e., building a single prototype rather than embarking on a full-scale project of dubious prospect) that he felt Rauff would accept or that Pradel wanted all along. Or perhaps something came up after the proposal was submitted and Pradel sensed a need to respond—and indeed, the very day that the ink was drying on Just’s signature, RSHA chief Reinhard Heydrich died in a car-bombing by Czech assassins. Little wonder, then, that Czech contractors would be deemed security risks.

This in turn provides an opening to probe the rhetorical concept of *kairos* or the idea of the opportune moment. By raising the issue of contingency, a look at the *kairos* of the document writers can reinforce the argument that the gas van texts were boundary objects, stitching together a fluid constellation of competing interests as the documents created temporary spaces for intraorganizational cooperation.

The Just proposal may have been, from a purely technical standpoint, plausible in its lethal recommendations. The gas vans at Chelmno had, except for one explosion caused by human error, performed flawlessly; in only six months the operation had
essentially satisfied the quota of 100,000 victims set by the regional Nazi governor to reduce the overcrowded Jewish ghetto in Lodz (Hilberg, 2003, p. 927). And because the Chelmno vans were smaller Opel models than the Saurers used by the Einsatzgruppen, they demonstrated how problems in the field could be resolved by reducing the size of the Saurers. Together with other minor improvements—protecting the compartment lights with a steel grill, putting a drain in the floor—the vans could be made more maneuverable, less prone to leakage, and could “process” just as many victims.

Moreover, the visual rhetoric of the Just proposal may have been impressive in its well-ordered typescript and formal appearance.

But kairotically the document was a marked failure because its arguments were advanced at anything but an opportune moment. Between Becker’s letter and Just’s proposal, momentous events intervened. Heydrich was attacked by a car bomb in Prague on May 27 and died eight days later—on June 4, the day that the Just proposal was typed up and ready for signature. In turn, Rauff lost his powerful sponsor and was transferred a month later to field command. Meanwhile, the gas van program Rauff had left behind was winding down. Pradel testified after the war that about twenty gas vans had been built by 23 June 1942, but the subcontractor Gaubschat had not yet delivered the remaining ten special compartments which were on order (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, p. 54). The Just proposal was put forward when, kairotically, the timing could not have been worse. The Sonderwagen program was at a technical impasse. The vehicles in the field were experiencing problems and, given wartime exigencies, no realistic prospects for new and improved models were in sight. By fall, Rauff had officially relinquished his
position as head of department II D (Nizkor, 2002). In September, Becker returned to Berlin from his inspection tour only to discover that Rauff was not in the capital. Instead he spent an hour debriefing Pradel on the intractable technical problems with the gas vans. Pradel merely listened silently until Becker was finished, and then told the inspector to submit a report and settle up his travel expenses at the cashier’s office (Klee et al. 1991, p. 71). The organizational discourse that culminated in the 5 June 1942 Just proposal had swiftly unraveled. By that fall as Becker was being reimbursed for his travel, the Wehrmacht’s second and final offensive against the Soviets was bogging down at Stalingrad, limiting the scope for new Einsatzgruppen operations. Besides, the mobile SS death squads were nearing the end of their grisly work.

Yet Browning (1991) has pointed out how the failure of the Sonderwagen was apparent earlier as suggested by 15 June 1942 telegram in which Trühe requested more gas vans because the three on hand were not sufficient to handle weekly transports of deported Jews that were arriving in Minsk. The clearing of the Minsk ghetto, when some 55,000 Jews were “processed,” was the height of the gas van program. But these large numbers were only achieved because the Sonderwagen were utilized in a single location rather than in mobile operations. The ultimate “reason for the rapid eclipse of the gas van,” Browning noted, is that “if it worked adequately only in the setting of a stationary camp, it was rendered obsolete almost immediately by the far more efficient gas chambers that were being put into operation in the first half of 1942” (p. 65). Thus the Just document, despite the obvious pains of its authors to impress their audience, illustrates the importance of timing and situation—or how the boundary objects, birthed
amid flux and then dropped into a swirling sea of shifting organizational currents, are inherently evanescent so that the cooperative spaces they create are temporary. For “as organizations become larger, more complex and more geographically extended, so will multiple discursive communities emerge, each with a particular construction of the world, each with a potential distrust or animus towards the others,” leading to the irony that “successful organizing establishes the grounds for disorganization” (Gergen, Gergen & Barrett, 2004, pp. 51-52)

And how does this reconstruction of the gas van program’s organizational discourse suggest ways that participants marginalized traditional moral meanings for their actions? The blindness engendered by bureaucratic and technical routinization, career ambition, job security, professional identity, euphemistic code language—all are part of the answer. But if their discourse privileged nazified themes—advancing the “people’s community,” observing the “leadership principle,” being “soldierly” and “hard” and a “fighting” pragmatist in the approved SS manner—and therefore marginalized traditional morality, we return once again to three aspects of the Final Solution that were introduced at the outset of this study. First, the gas van program was conceived and executed within a polycracy; though the SS was held together by the centripetal forces of racism and anti-Semitism, it was at the same time constantly riven by the centrifugal force of a social Darwinist culture that prized fighting and struggle for their own sake. Second, the *Sonderwagen* program was, like the Final Solution itself, entropic; the more that the program extended its operations, the more its contradictions tended to undermine the program. And third, perhaps most all, the gas van program was short; just six months
after Heydrich’s initial order to construct the *Sonderwagen*, the consensus of the participants had irretrievably broken down. Heydrich was dead; Rauff was transferred; Pradel turned to black marketeering and after the war resumed his police career; Becker had his fill of mass murder and went into agriculture; the mechanics and drivers drew a clear distinction between *Sonderwagen* operations and “normal” duties.

The organizational consensus to marginalize their society’s traditional morality and pursue deeds that “they clearly understood . . . were not positive except in the value system of the Third Reich” (Lozowiock, 2000, p. 8) was possible because that consensus was, in the end, only required to be short-lived, a transitional stage between Babi Yar and Auschwitz. The trading zones created by the boundary objects of organizational texts produce only “temporary formations in which distinct groups with different orientations, professional commitments, and characteristic forms of argument can cooperate in specific practices” (Wilson & Herndl, 2007, p. 145). Through texts that activated and disseminated shared metaphors, narratives, genres and discourses, the rhetorical community of the Sipo Technical Matters Group held together a consensus about its “special vans” just long enough to structure lethally pragmatic action. Just long enough, but no longer.
CHAPTER 8

REVISITING “EXPEDIENCY”

Boundary Work in Action

Having explored the historical and cultural contexts of the Nazi gas van documents, and then analyzing these texts as a discourse, our cultural research methodology (Longo, 1998) calls for an interrogation of the orderings imposed on the texts by their analysts and what this may suggest about the relationships of these analysts to the texts. Here it is productive to focus on the lengthiest text among the corpus, the Just proposal of 5 June 1942. For Document II D 3a (9) NI. 214/42 G. RS. has led a curious afterlife that illustrates the necessity for the final two delimiters in Longo’s method—and ironically, allows us to see this heinous document functioning as a boundary object within the discipline of technical communication.

Tracing this “rhetorical boundary work” (Wilson & Herndl, 2007) in action and assessing its implications calls for three moves to be set out in this and succeeding chapters. The infamous Just document was introduced into the technical communication literature nearly twenty years ago by Katz (1992a), and yet his own encounter with the text was not in isolation but was transmitted to him through another’s frame of reference. Thus, the antecedents to his influential “ethic of expediency” thesis are worth exploring, that his argument might be revisited in light of previous orderings imposed upon the text he analyzed. The following chapter explores how subsequent technical communication scholars have appropriated Katz’s thesis and imposed their own orderings on the Just text, turning it into a boundary object that, according to Star and Griesemer’s (1989)
thesis, has proven plastic enough for adaptation to the local needs of differing
disciplinary perspectives and yet robust enough to maintain a consensus between them
regarding a key point of technical communication ethics. Yet because rhetorical boundary
work is necessarily driven by the local needs of the participants—rather than, say, by
historical scholarship about the Holocaust—that opens a space in the final chapter to
explore an alternative view of what I believe we might learn about organizational and
technical communication ethics from the shameful example of Sipo Technical Matters
Group and its textual artifacts.

Lanzmann and the “Why” Question

Since it was issued 5 June 1942 under the signature of Willi Just, the technical
proposal for boosting the killing efficiency of the SS gas van fleet has surfaced in a 1983
book (Kogon et al.) on the Nazi use of poison gas; a controversial 1985 film and
subsequent book (Lanzmann) by a poststructuralist French filmmaker; a 1988
compendium (Noakes & Pridham) of original Nazi documents; several general histories
of the Holocaust; Steven Katz’s landmark 1992 essay; and numerous journal articles and
books (e.g., Brassuer, 1993; Dombrowski, 2000; Sullivan & Martin, 2005; Moore, 2004)
on technical communication ethics. Each of these iterations has, as Longo (2006)
predicted, “imposed an ordering on the object and its contexts, thereby excluding some
ways of understanding the object and excluding others” (p. 126). The implication is that
technical communicators have necessarily imposed an ordering on the Nazi text to
legitimate certain ways of understanding ethics and exclude others. Interrogating “those
silences, absences, and exclusions still held within the dominant knowledge and
discourse of [our] field’s practices” requires an “antidisciplinary, situated, and personal”
exploration that “add[s] discussions of power, politics, ethics, and cultural tensions to our
understandings of what we do when we communicate” (pp. 126-127).

Long before the infamous Just document was introduced into the technical
communication literature, others had already imposed their own orderings on the text,
starting with the document’s appearance in the 1983 original German edition of the book
*Nazi Mass Murder: A Documentary History of the Use of Poison Gas* (Kogon et al.). The
authors’ stated purpose was “to set down, in a precise and indisputable manner, the
historical truth about the massacres perpetrated by means of poison gas during this [Nazi]
period” (p. 2) and refute the then-new phenomena of Holocaust denial. As such the
authors’ commentary on the Just proposal places the document in relation to the overall
situation in the spring of 1942 when “the killing machinery had to be made more reliable.
And its capacity had to be increased, as the German zone of occupation within the Soviet
Union was constantly being increased” (p. 55). In their view, this explains the
document’s stress on solving problems with the gas vans’ maneuverability, reducing the
running time needed to dispatch victims, and shortening the time required to construct
new vans. The document is also described as “couched in an extreme form of Nazi
double-talk, a monstrously inhuman language” (p. 55). In the appendices to the book, the
Just proposal is easily the longest of three original documents reproduced.

Yet the authors’ sober record of the gas van program did not stop deniers from
construing the relevant documents according to their own lights. David Irving, perhaps
today’s best known denier, claimed in 1992 that “I accept that this kind of [gas van] experiment was made on a very limited scale, but that it was rapidly abandoned as being a totally inefficient way of killing people” (Evans, 2001, pp. 122). This line of “reasoning” was advanced, with the Just and Becker documents explicitly cited in support, during an online discussion that occurred 25-27 February 2003 on the Axis History Forum. In the exchange, a denier allowed that the Just and Becker documents are among “the few cases where the homicidal function is clear from the context,” but contended that since both documents “refer to the deficiencies of those vehicles as a method of killing en masse” then the texts can be interpreted as referring to limited field trials that were soon abandoned. The Just proposal, he argued, only “anticipates the production of further gas-vans.” When other Forum members challenged the denier, he scoffed that the Just and Becker documents are “Just two letters, hardly overwhelming documentary evidence.” Instead, he continued, the Just and Becker documents tended to prove his case since they were written “a few months after the commencement of field trials of the vehicles modified as homicidal gas-vans, deal largely with defects, and make suggestions for improvements. In other words, exactly what one would expect to find in reports on field trials.” He cited the Trühe telegram of 15 June 1942 as more evidence that only three gas vans were built on a trial basis and “their killing capacity proved to be inadequate, even for one transport arriving per week.” Finally, to explain away testimony that gas vans were widely sighted across occupied Soviet territory, the denier argued that the Becker document “proves” the gas vans were largely a legend. The document “refers to attempts to camouflage the gas-vans, to make them look indistinguishable from
ordinary vehicles. But all that would have achieved would have been to cause the local population to misidentify ordinary vehicles . . .‖ This kind of ordering, imposed on the Just and Becker texts, is what prompted Kogon et al. (1993/1983) to publish *Nazi Mass Murder: A Documentary History of the Use of Poison Gas*.

Two years after Kogon, Langbein and Rückel ordered the text of the Just proposal by precisely setting forth the exact document and embedding it within a professionally researched historiography, an altogether different ordering was imposed by the French filmmaker Lanzmann for his 1985 film *Shoah*. (That the film was being made when the Kogon book was published, and that Lanzmann knows the German language, suggests the possibility he may have seen the once-obscure document so prominently featured in *Nazi Mass Murder*.) In the film and a 1985 English-language book based on the script, Lanzmann presents an abridged and altered translation of the Just document in which text is freely omitted, elided, rearranged and, in the subject line of the document, even added—all without ellipses or other indications of any changes. The result is a text that appears entire but is less than half the length of the original document. Why would Lanzmann do this? The question has salience for the present study because it is the 1985 Lanzmann version—rather than the original 1942 Nazi document—that was picked up by Katz (1992a) and has subsequently become a standard point of reference for discussions of technical communication ethics. To cite one example of why the choice of a reference point matters, consider: While the Lanzmann translation and two mainstream scholarly translations (Kogon, et al., 1993, pp. 228-235; Noakes & Pridham, 1988, pp. 1202-1203) all primarily employ the word “load” to translate the document’s euphemism for the
Jewish victims, in two places Lanzmann instead chose “pieces” and “merchandise.” And it is these two words, rather than the more common “load,” which have often drawn notice in the technical communication literature.

Five years after the release of the film and book, Lanzmann contributed to an edited volume (Deguy, 1990) of essays about *Shoah* and reflected at length about his work: “What interests me is the film. One has been able to discuss Nazism for forty years. One doesn’t need the film for that” (p. 282; cited in LaCapra, 1999, p. 96). Thus the film is “a fiction of the real” (Lanzmann, 1990, p. 301) and “poetical construction” (Lanzmann, 1985, p. v) that takes place not in the past but the present. Slavishly reliving and recounting the past only hinders the project of working through it in the present. Thus the film, at nine-and-a-half hours in length, steadfastly refuses to incorporate archival footage and material. As Lyotard (1990) explained in discussing Lanzmann’s film, memory through inscription, or through “word representations (books, interviews) and thing representations (films, photographs) of the extermination,” is no defense against forgetting, which is itself effaced in Western culture (p. 26, *passim*). Thus Lyotard (see 26-29) praises Lanzmann’s *Shoah* precisely because it “rejects representation in images and music.” The film, as Lyotard noted, seeks instead to indicate “the unpresentable of the Holocaust . . . by the alteration in the tone of voice, a knotted throat, sobbing, tears, a witness fleeing off-camera, a disturbance in the tone of the narrative, an uncontrolled gesture” because

what is not inscribed, through lack of inscribable surface, of duration and place
for the inscription to be situated, what has no place in the space nor in the time of
domination, in the geography and the diachrony of the self-assured spirit, because
it is not synthesizable—let us say, what is not material for experience because the
forms and formations of experience . . . are inapt or inept for it—cannot be
forgotten, does not offer a hold to forgetting . . . (Lyotard, 1990, p. 26)

As Lanzmann himself discussed, the impetus of *Shoah* is not to historically reconstruct
the past but, rather, to act it out in the present and thus deal with the ongoing radical
disjunction of the Holocaust. In the film Lanzmann interviewed Jewish survivors, Polish
bystanders, and German perpetrators. He staged scenes that encourage speakers to act out
their memories and work through them—for example: interviewing a Jewish man, who
was forced by the Germans to cut off women’s hair before they were gassed at Treblinka,
in a rented barber shop as the man cuts the hair of a hired extra; or bringing a group of
elderly Polish peasants together with a survivor of the Chelmno death camp and then
interviewing them in front of the village church where the Jews were imprisoned before
being gassed. As Lanzmann cajoled, pestered, and even badgered the speakers to work
through the past, the results captured on film are often stunning—not least when offhand
statements by low-level Nazi functionaries and acquiescent Polish bystanders reveal the
degree to which their anti-Semitism still lies just beneath the surface.

For Lanzmann the project of working-through excludes the question of *why*. As
he propounded, “‘Why were the Jews killed?’ The question immediately reveals its
obscenity. There is indeed an absolute obscenity in the project of understanding”
(Lanzmann, 1990, p. 279). Understanding leads to historicizing, which leads to normalizing. Instead, he wrote,

Blindness should be understood as the purest mode of looking, the only way not to turn away from a reality that is literally blinding: clairvoyance itself. To direct a frontal look at horror requires that one renounce distractions and escape-hatches, first the primary among them, the most falsely central, the question why, with the indefinite retinue of academic frivolities and dirty tricks [canailleries] that it ceaselessly induces. (p. 279)

In a 1998 interview with journalist Ron Rosenbaum (1998), Lanzmann reiterated his stance with a more vernacular explanation:

When I was making Shoah I was like a horse with [blinders]. I did not look to the side, neither my right side nor my left side. I was trying to look straight into this black sun which is the Holocaust. And this blindness, this voluntary blindness was—is—a necessary requisite, the necessary conditions for the creation. And this blindness was the contrary of blindness, it was like clairvoyance, it was to see, to see absolutely clearly, you know. And the only way to cope with this blinding reality is to blind one’s self to all kinds of explanation. To refuse the explanation. It is the only way. It was a moral attitude, an ethical touchstone. (Rosenbaum, 1998, p. 261)
And why is the Holocaust a black sun? The abyssal nature of the genocide was conveyed to the journalist by Lanzmann in another revealing statement:

You can take all the reasons, all the fields of explanation . . . And every field can be true, and all the fields together can be true. But these are conditions. Even if they are necessary, they are not sufficient. A beautiful morning you have to start to kill, to start to kill massively. And I said that there is a gap between all the fields of explanation and the actual killing. You cannot give birth—in French we say engendre—you cannot generate such an evil. And if you start to explain and to answer the question of Why you are led, whether you want it or not, to justification. The question as such shows its own obscenity: Why are the Jews being killed? Because there is no answer to the question of why. (Rosenbaum, p. 260, emphasis in original)

Other commentators who are sympathetic (e.g., LaCapra, 1999) to engaging with Lanzmann’s views, and those who are not (e.g., Rosenbaum, 1998), have noted how the filmmaker’s personal biography may have necessarily influenced his outlook. Once private secretary to Jean-Paul Sartre, he stands in “a long tradition in French thought that emphasizes tragic, self-rending ecstatic experience—a complex tradition often drawing from Nietzsche and Heidegger and passing through Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot to reach among such recent thinkers as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida,” noted LaCapra (1999, p. 98). But then, after
pointing to Lanzmann’s admission that “the circularity of the film is linked to the obsessional character of my questions, of my own obsessions” (p. 188, citing Lanzmann, 1990, p. 300), LaCapra added, “It is perhaps not irrelevant that these obsessions were those of a secular intellectual who was not raised as a practicing Jew but now assumed a certain Jewish identity in significant measure through the making of his trilogy of films (Why Israel, 1983; Shoah, 1985; Tsahal, 1994)” (p. 118). A critic of Lanzmann, the psychoanalyst Sean Wilder, ascribed the filmmaker’s zeal to the “late conversion phenomenon” (Rosenbaum, 1998, p. 2354). Thus, contended LaCapra (1999), an important perspective from which to understand Shoah and its “significant, historically dubious omissions” is that the film’s content is “prompted by Lanzmann’s desire to have only characters who relive or act out the past, and who do so in ways that provide him with relatively unproblematic objects of transferential identification” (pp. 127-128). In the 1990 volume of essays about Shoah, Lanzmann himself was straightforward about his personal project of identification:

The idea that has always been the most painful for me is that all these people died alone. . . . A meaning for me that is simultaneously the most profound and the most incomprehensible in the film is in a certain way . . . to resuscitate these people, to kill them a second time, with me; by accompanying them. (p. 291)

What then of the gas van document in Shoah? First, it must be noted that Lanzmann saw the book version, which reproduced “the complete text of the film,” as being different in
nature than the film. While the subtitles in the film naturally come and go with the on-screen action,

Bringing them together, on the other hand, in this book, engraving on page after page the succession of sheer instances that in the film maintain the rhythm imposed by their sequence, having them pass from the inessential to the essential, suddenly gives them another status, another dignity, as it were a seal of eternity. They have to exist by themselves, to justify themselves without any indication of what is happening, without any image . . . (Lanzmann, 1985, p. viii)

The challenge for Lanzmann, observed Lyotard (1990), is that, on the one hand, “One must, certainly, inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe one-self safe and sound.” But on the other hand, it is “one thing to do [representation] in view of saving the memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing” (p. 26). Thus, the gas van document occupies a curious place in the book version of Shoah. As the only archival material in the book it is burdened with the task, as Lyotard would have it, of representation not to save memory but to preserve in writing “the unforgettable forgotten.” Further, the gas van document follows the only instance where Lanzmann the interviewer asks the “Why?” question of his subjects: “Why do they think all this happened to the Jews?” (Lanzmann, 1985, p. 99) This question comes near the end of a lengthy scene in which Polish villagers of Chelmno have been gathered in front of the
village church—where Jews had been locked up before gassing—to talk about the past.

Lanzmann’s questioning throughout the sequence elicits telling answers about the underlying attitudes of these bystanders toward their former Jewish neighbors. Then the Why question prompts a Polish man to relate a story that, implicitly rather than explicitly, reaffirms the supposed blood-guilt of the Jews for the death of Christ. In his telling, the Jews’ own rabbi admitted their blood-guilt and instructed the people to comply with the Germans. Immediately after this story, another man describes the working of the gas vans and then a Jewish survivor of Chelmno relates his observations of the killings. The SS technical proposal for boosting the vans’ killing efficiency—or rather, Lanzmann’s version of the original document—is then reproduced as a coda to the lengthy Chelmno sequence.

Though Lanzmann does not cite his sources, he knew the German language so that it is reasonable to speculate he may have seen the document in the 1983 volume *Nazi Mass Murder* (Kogon et al.). Not only did Lanzmann’s film and book alter the 1942 Nazi document, but the version printed in the English edition of the book—the version read by Katz (1992a)—is an English translation of a French translation of the original German.

But for Lanzmann, the purpose of the gas van text is not documentation:

The worst moral and artistic crime that can be committed in producing a work dedicated to the Holocaust is to consider the Holocaust as past. *Either the Holocaust is legend or it is present: in no case is it a memory*. A film devoted to the Holocaust . . . can only be an investigation into the present of the Holocaust or
at least into a past whose scars are still so freshly and vividly inscribed . . . that it reveals itself in a hallucinated timelessness. (Lanzmann, 1990, p. 316, emphasis in original)

Felman, whose important commentary (1992) on Shoah was translated into French with the help of Lanzmann himself, has contrasted the film’s artistic purpose with the juridical and documentary purpose of the 1961 Eichmann trial, arguing that “law’s story focuses on ascertaining the totality of facts and events. Art’s story focuses on what is different from, and more than, that totality” (Felman, 2002, p. 153, emphasis in original). For Lanzmann, “The truth kills the possibility of fiction” (cited in Felman, 2002, p. 153) so that the Just gas van proposal is appropriated into a “poetical construction” (Lanzmann, 1985, p. v) and “a fiction of the real” intended as a “work of art” and “not at all representational” (LaCapra, 1999, p. 96). Among all the serious works on the Holocaust that “by their exactitude, their severity, are, or should be, best qualified not to let us forget,” Lanzmann’s Shoah thus stands out as “the exception, maybe the only one,” that refuses to “represent what, in order not to be forgotten as that which is the forgotten itself, must remain unrepresentable” (Lyotard, 1990, p. 26).

As we will learn below, the ordering imposed by Lanzmann on the Just gas van document is important for understanding the text’s subsequent function as a boundary object for the technical communication discipline. For I contend that, by deleting those portions of the text which show the document as a discourse between organizational actors and instead including only those passages that go straight to the killing, the
Lanzmann translation—now so familiar to technical communicators—may have encouraged a simplistic characterization of the text as incomprehensibly foreign to any dynamics of our own organizational lives.

**Implications of the Lanzmann Alterations**

Technical communicators first encountered II D 3a (9) NI. 214/42 G. RS. when Katz (1992a) analyzed its rhetoric and discovered what he called an “ethic of expediency.” Yet he was working from a text upon which Lanzmann had already imposed a distinctive ordering. That Katz (1992a) accepted the Lanzmann version of the document as genuine is clear: “This is a real memo” (p. 256) are the first four words of his essay. Like Katz, I too assumed the text was genuine when I first read it in the book version of *Shoah* and subsequently wrote about the document (Ward, 2009, 2010a). Even the journalist Rosenbaum (1998), who spent a dozen years researching the various controversies among Holocaust scholars and became a Lanzmann critic, “thought *Shoah* an impressive achievement when I saw it” and “was not aware until I began researching the literature . . . how the film had raised him [Lanzmann] to the vatic, prophetic heights” (p. 252). LaCapra (1999), an admirer of the film, likewise allows that “discussion of *Shoah* has been marked by an understandable inclination to ritualize the film and to regard its viewing as a ceremonial event with respect to which criticism pales or even seems irreverent” (p. 95). Seemingly, the “sin . . . to believe one-self safe and sound” (Lyotard 1990, p. 26) by accepting a representation as memory, is a widespread temptation. For as Foucault (1977) observed, Western culture ascribes to an *author* the
function “to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of discourses within a society” (p. 124). But does the fact that Katz’s (1992a) “ethic of expediency” thesis is based on a “false” document invalidate his argument? In my view, he raises an important point about expediency with which technical and organizational communicators must engage. By his analysis, the Just proposal happens to be—if its morality is set aside—a well-constructed example of persuasive rhetoric whose wording is well-crafted for its organizational ethos. “Indeed,” Katz points out, “in this memo one can find many of the topoi first defined by Aristotle in the Rhetoric that are used to investigate any situation or problem and provide the material for enthymemic arguments” (p. 257). Within the memo’s first section the SS writer “uses the common topic of relationship: cause/effect arguments, in conjunction with the topic of comparison (difference) and the topic of circumstance (the impossible), are used to investigate the problem . . .” Then in the closing section the writer employs cause/effect and contraries to refute counterarguments. “Thus, in a series of enthymemes that make use of the topoi, [the author] investigates and proves his case for a reduction in load space” that would boost the killing efficiency of the gassing vans (p. 257). Moreover, as I discussed in relation to the visual design of the document, Katz noted that the proposal employs good document design by dividing the text into “numbered sections that are clearly demarcated by white space for easy reading” (p. 257), while the “stuffy” grammatical style—featuring polysyllabic words, modified nouns, a passive voice, and subordinate clauses that separate subject and verb—effectively shifts responsibility from “from the writer (and reader) to the organization they represent” (p. 258). Altogether, then, Katz concluded that
Just's memo to his superior, while an extreme case, is not an anomaly nor a problem in technical writing only, but a [general] problem of [Western] deliberative rhetoric . . . I will suggest that it is the ethic of expediency that enables deliberative rhetoric and gives impulse to most of our actions in technological capitalism as well . . . (Katz, 1992a, p. 258)

But because his thesis is based on the Lanzmann version, is Katz’s argument necessarily colored by Lanzmann’s prior ordering of the text? Did his reliance on Lanzmann predispose his analysis toward the expedient elements of the SS text at the expense of those elements in the 1942 original—which I have alternatively chosen to highlight in my own analysis (and thereby imposed my own ordering)—that would show the document as a dialogue?

Without implying that Lanzmann’s interpretations of the Just document were thereby mirrored by Katz, let us interrogate the implications of the former’s alterations. The stripped-down 1985 Lanzmann version arguably emphasizes those elements of the original 1942 document that are expedient, giving the impression of a text that is straightforwardly about killing efficiency—to the point of adding words in the subject line that make the document appear as if it were about stationary death camp operations at Chelmno rather than (as was really the case) about mobile operations across the occupied Soviet Union. (And indeed, Katz [1992a, p. 256] astutely associated the vans’ deployment with the Einsatzgruppen killings “in the early Nazi program of exterminating the Jews and other ‘undesirables,’ just months before the Final Solution of gas chambers.
and death camps was fully operationalized.”) The Lanzmann version of the Just text is, in fact, presented as the coda to an entire film sequence about Chelmno, so that in Shoah the document is clearly framed as being associated with the death camp. What are stripped out of the document are those elements of the text which show it as a discourse between competing organizational actors. The Lanzmann version emphasizes the aspect of “Here is how we can kill more Jews” and omits the aspect of “My plan resolves your complaints.”

In the document heading that states the subject of the memo, to the phrase “Changes for special vehicles now in service” Lanzmann adds “at Kulmhof (Chelmno),” a qualifier which is not in the original document. By this alteration the text appears to be specifically focused on death-camp operations at Chelmno when, in fact, the text is not concerned with Chelmno at all. This tends in the Lanzmann version to emphasize a putative desire to expediently kill more Jews at Chelmno (even though the 97,000 Jews murdered had already fulfilled the camp’s “quota” for reducing the population of the nearby Lodz ghetto) and tends to suppress the discursive nature of the Just text—namely its authors’ intention to respond to Becker’s highly critical report about the fleet of 20 gas vans deployed for mobile operations across Soviet territory. As we have seen, these vans were modified by a private subcontractor from trucks manufactured by Saurer and Diamond (or Opel), whereas the three vans at Chelmno were Renaulds (or Dodges) and smaller than the Saurer models operating behind the Eastern Front (Greif, 2001, p. 230; Browning, 2004, pp. 418-419; Beer, 1987, pp. 402-417). Thus the memo writer is not arguing for intensified killing at Chelmno, as the Lanzmann alteration makes it seem.
Rather the SS technician is arguing, in his first paragraph after the subject heading, that size is not the primary criterion and is citing Chelmno as an example of how smaller vans can achieve “safety” and “efficiency.”

In the first paragraph Lanzmann makes a key alteration by deleting four sentences that describe a truck explosion at the Chelmno camp. This deletion downplays the aspect, which I discussed in Chapter 6, of the document writers constructing an “occupational safety” narrative. The killers could create a field on which to converge their competing interests and undertake a shared project by constructing a narrative in which they attempt to carry out improved “safety” standards and avoid accidents from pressure buildup, unbalanced “loads,” diminished maneuverability, and corroded pipes.

The Lanzmann translation omits (without use of ellipses to indicate the omission) Point 1 of the original memo, in which the writer establishes the need to enhance “safety” by regulating pressure buildup within the vans and offers a solution. Instead Lanzmann skips straight to the sensational Point 2, thus giving the appearance of a direct connection between his abridged introductory paragraph and the details of killing. The Lanzmann translation of Point 2 is defensible but, when compared with two other mainstream translations (Kogon et al., 1993/1983, pp. 228-235; Noakes & Pridham, 1988, pp. 1202-1203), some of his word choices might be perceived as more vivid and less neutral than those in the other versions. Where Lanzmann used the word “pieces,” the other translations employed “numbers” and “number of subjects treated.” Where Lanzmann used the word “merchandise,” the other translations rendered the German as “cargo” and “load.” What Lanzmann rendered as “packed solid” is phrased by the other translators as
“completely full” and “fully occupied.” And for the penultimate sentence that described how the victims press toward the rear door, the mainstream translations say the human cargo “is always primarily concentrated there” or “places itself for the most part at the rear.” But in the Lanzmann version the victims are “mainly found lying there at the end of the operation.” Individually these word choices are defensible, especially given the unavoidable issues of translation (e.g., see Steiner, 1983; Johnson, 1985). But, in the aggregate, the word choices made by Lanzmann appear, in my view, discordant because they seem to “mix metaphors.” For example, the word “merchandise” seems out of place because, not only did the Nazis place no exchange value on Jews, but the word invokes a different metaphor—that of a commercial enterprise—than the transportation metaphor that, as I noted in Chapter 6, otherwise suffuses the Just document. The word “pieces” also seems to connote an economic calculation, versus the transportation terminology of “load” and “cargo” found in the other translations. Of the five remaining points in the original text Lanzmann deletes three, transposes the order of the remaining two, and then renumbers those points. His translation of Point 2 (Point 6 in the original) is conventional until near the end, when the following sentence is rendered: “Also, because of the alarming nature of the darkness, screaming always occurs when the doors are closed.” The word “screaming” is a considerable liberty when compared to the two mainstream versions: “Furthermore, it has been observed that the noise always begins when the doors are shut presumably because of fear brought on by the darkness” and “It has also been noticed that the noise provoked by the locking of the door is linked to the fear aroused by the darkness.” Lanzmann also deletes the final sentence of this section—which refers to
using the van compartment’s interior lighting for night operations and general cleaning, thus again removing an aspect of the document’s “safety narrative.” Two of the three points omitted by Lanzmann (Points 3 and 7 of the original) also reinforce this “safety” orientation: one point recommends steps to prevent corrosion of the pipes, and the other proposes a winch-operated movable floor that would allow the killers to “unload” the van without having to enter the compartment and risk exposure to noxious residues in a confined space.

In Point 3 of the Lanzmann version (Point 4 in the original) the writer describes modifications to facilitate cleaning of the vehicles. The filmmaker’s translation shortens the section by about half and proceeds to its conclusion: “During cleaning, the drain can be used to evacuate large pieces of dirt.” The implication—especially when the loaded term “evacuate” is employed—is that “large pieces of dirt” is a euphemism for human feces. This is clearly an important aspect of a correct interpretation. But again, a part of the perpetrators’ putative “safety narrative,” an element of their discourse that both hid its true purpose and simultaneously legitimated intraorganizational cooperation, is downplayed in the Lanzmann translation.

The final paragraph of the Lanzmann translation again shortens the original text by about half. Two sentences from the beginning and end of the section are elided into one. What Lanzmann deletes is an account of a discussion with the SS contractor about the proposed modifications, a recommendation to engage another contractor, an affirmation of unavoidable delay, and a compromise proposal to outfit at least one of the ten new vans as a model for testing, after which the other nine can be modified over time.
One last time, then, the discursive aspect of the document is diminished. (Historians would note that the final paragraph, with its reference to ten new Saurer vans on order, is further affirmation that the document is concerned with vehicles for mobile use with the Einsatzgruppen rather than stationary use in Chelmno—since the latter used only three vehicles, none of them Saurers.)

Altogether, among the seven points contained in the original document, Lanzmann included only the three points that deal most directly with killing, while omitting the other four points—as well as most of the introductory and concluding sections—that carry on the authors’ procedural and “safety” narratives. So, do such alterations in the Lanzmann translation call into question Katz’s (1992a) “ethic of expediency” thesis? Katz initially used the document as a classroom illustration until Carolyn Miller suggested he “consider the memo in relation to Aristotle’s discussion of deliberative rhetoric” (Katz, 2004, p. 195) and prompted a ninety-page conference paper that was condensed and published in 1992 as “The Ethic of Expediency,” which has since become a landmark essay in the discipline, plus a sequel article (Katz, 1993). First, let me emphasize that my critique is not intended to suggest his concerns are unfounded or the subsequent attention given to ethics by technical communicators has not been useful. Katz has rendered the discipline a signal service in bringing ethics to the forefront. As Katz (2004) recently, and rightfully, noted, “When I wrote it [in 1990], discussions of ethics in technical communication were little more than the requisite paragraph or two on accuracy and precision of language, or whistle blowing, stuck in the corners of chapters buried inside textbooks.” At the time, he pointed out, despite the “rhetorical advances
[that] were being made in other areas of technical communication, ethics seemed immune” to such critiques. But now “the field has come . . . [to see] ethics as central to and of the same substance as the epistemic nature of technical writing” (pp. 195-196).

Nor do I venture here a refutation of Katz’s cogent arguments regarding Western rhetoric. While Katz pursued a much larger point for which the Nazi memo was only a steppingstone, I have set myself the task of illuminating the actual document. Furthermore, I acknowledge it is not entirely fair to expect that Katz would have questioned the Lanzmann version of the Nazi memo—even as I did not initially question its authenticity. The only other English translation (itself only a partial translation) available at the time was released in 1988 in a massive multi-volume series (Noakes & Pridham) known mostly to Holocaust scholars. On the other hand, the 1985 Lanzmann film Shoah was popularly and critically acclaimed; most criticisms of his method were confined to Holocaust scholars. And as Slack, Miller and Doak (1993) notably observed from Foucault (1977), in our culture we ascribe authorship to books and not technical documents. In a contest between a celebrated filmmaker and a faceless bureaucrat, our presumption inclines (as did mine) toward the former.

Nevertheless, if “The Ethic of Expediency” is a standard “point of reference” on communicators’ ethical compass, and if for nearly twenty years that reference point has been grounded differently than what we believed, then a reconsideration is appropriate—a project with which Katz, as chair of this dissertation, agrees. Katz (1992a) began his analysis of what he believed to be the Nazi memo by stating “it is an almost perfect document” (p. 256). But this “perfection” rightly belongs to the 1985 Lanzmann version
which was altered by a cinematic master for dramatic effect, that it might be more “true” than the 1942 original. So it may be fairly asked: What of the actual Nazi document?

In this light, several references Katz (1992a) made to the document must at least be qualified. He noted that the text begins with a purpose statement designed to “invoke an assumption or goal shared by the audience” (p. 256). But as we have seen, the purpose statement in the 1985 Lanzmann text substantially alters the meaning and orientation of the introductory paragraph in the actual 1942 document. Next, as Katz pointed out, “In keeping with some of what today are recognized as the rules of good document design, the memo is also divided into three numbered sections that are clearly demarcated by white space for easy reading” (p. 257). In fact, the actual Nazi document has seven numbered sections. Katz attributed a “stuffy” grammatical style to the memo due in part to its heavy use of modified nouns. But the examples he provided—natural tendency, full capacity, sealed drain, fluid liquid, technical changes—appear only (except for “technical changes”) in the Lanzmann version and not the mainstream translations.

Nevertheless, my analysis does not invalidate—but rather tends to confirm—Katz on these points. The document’s purpose statement does invoke shared assumptions and goals, except that my analysis of the actual 1942 text suggests the authors shared an “occupational safety” narrative. The design of the original document is good and—now that we see its true length—was composed with unusual care, a fact which my analysis of its visual rhetoric expands upon to describe how the design itself constitutes an argument. And the style of the authors is stuffy, although, aside from issues of translation that Katz acknowledged at that point in his article, my analysis of the entire 1942 original text
points to use of modified verbs, rather than modified nouns, in shifting responsibility away from the authors.

Yet my study would seem to disconfirm Katz’s (1992a) argument that “All the stylistic features I have pointed out communicate and reveal a ‘group think,’ an officially sanctioned ethos grounded in expediency” (p. 258). And this is where the choice of a reference point—that is, the Lanzmann version or the German original—may make a difference. In his translation, with its omissions and alterations, Lanzmann went straight to the heart of the murders and dispensed with the document’s bureaucratic and organizational elements. From Lanzmann’s perspective this was a defensible resort to representation, not for the sake of inscription but as an evocation of what cannot be represented. Katz then encountered what Lanzmann evoked, took the representation to be inscriptive, and extrapolated from the text an ethic of groupthink and group expediency. This is not to suggest that Katz’s analysis was “determined” by the Lanzmann text, that an underlying ethic of expediency is not a concern in the Western tradition of deliberative rhetoric which animates our technological capitalism, or that the SS gas van killers did not engage in expedient conduct and did not share a certain ethos. Rather, I repeat the truism that different reference points can lead to different destinations. And my study, which begins with the original document and all its organizational complexities, perhaps not surprisingly leads to a different destination. For my analysis points away from groupthink and instead argues that the gas van documents served as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Wilson & Herndl, 2007) by which competing organizational actors negotiated their differing interests in order to achieve a temporary and ultimately
short-lived consensus. The SS authors and their audience shared coded terminology, but “groupthink” connotes mindlessness—akin to Arendt’s (1963) “banality of evil” thesis. Yet the “solutions” offered by the SS writers—when read in full, rather than in the abridged Lanzmann text—seem instead to impress by their hideous ingenuity and problem-solving ability. As Lozowick (2000) observed, SS mid-level managers were “people of initiative and dexterity who contributed far beyond what was necessary” (p. 9). Such people present a much different—and more challenging—picture than the “banal” bureaucrats of popular imagination.

Nevertheless, the power of popular imagination is enduring and important to reckon with. As we will see in the next chapter, the popular image of the banal Nazi technocrat has played a decisive role over the past generation as technical communicators have grappled with the implications of Katz’s thesis—and especially the realization that skilled technical writing could be practiced in the service of genocide. Thus, the infamous Nazi gas van document emerged once again as a boundary object—this time as an object over which scholars and practitioners could negotiate a trading zone for consensus on a key point of technical communication ethics. And in that consensus, the figure of the banal Nazi technocrat became a prominent feature.
An Ahistorical Consensus?

Historiography is not “objective.” Since no historian can survey all the primary data—both witnesses and documents are inevitably lost to time—the writing of history requires selectivity and interpretation. Nevertheless, professional historians give allegiance to “the continuing authority of a somewhat outdated, but still in many ways influential, philosophy of science” (Megill, 1989, p. 627) which impels them to practice a certain way of knowing. Their “historical method” examines the empirical evidence of original documents and artifacts, which are then sifted and hypotheses advanced and progressively falsified, until a consensus may emerge about the likeliest interpretations. This is important to understand as, in this chapter, we trace the boundary work performed among technical communicators by the object of the infamous Just document.

Why important? Historians would say technical communicators’ consensus about the meaning of the Holocaust—or at least the meaning it holds for their discipline—is ahistorical. This does not suggest historians are right and others wrong. Rather, the question here is why technical communicators, despite their differences, followed a certain way of knowing as they negotiated a consensus on the lessons of the SS gas van document. After all, scholars could have taken up Katz’s (1992a) hypothesis, which he expanded upon in 1993, examined multiple Nazi technical documents for themselves, and followed the historical method to develop their consensus. But they did not. Why not?

Elsewhere (Ward, 2009, 2010a) I have described how the emphases in Holocaust
scholarship have shifted over the years: from the “intentionalist” perspective that sees the long-planned intentions of Hitler as the driving force behind the Final Solution (e.g., Fleming, 1984), to the “functionalist” position which contends that increasingly murderous anti-Jewish local initiatives finally reached a critical mass and accelerated into genocide (e.g., Aly & Heim, 1991), to the current emphasis on the role of ideology. In recent years scholars have focused on both the negative and “positive” aspects of the Nazi program, as the regime strove to foster what Koonz (2003) has termed a “Nazi conscience.” The exclusionary ethos of racism and anti-Semitism was balanced by the “socialist” side of National Socialism which sought to form “Aryan” Germans into an inclusive and classless people’s community. Much scholarship has emerged since the late 1990s on the broad social consensus which undergirded the Nazi regime (e.g., Fritzsche, 1998; Gellately, 2001; Johnson & Reuband, 2005; Aly, 2006). This racial-ethnic public culture offered not just “its savage hatreds but its lofty ideals” as it “defined good and evil, condemning self-interest as immoral and enshrining altruism as virtuous” (Koonz, 2003, p. 2). The system “relied not only on repression but also an appeal to communal ideals of civic improvement” and built “a vibrant public culture founded on self-denial and collective revival” (p. 3). Burleigh (2007) has described how “the fundamental structure of the Nazi creed was soteriological, a redemptive story of suffering and deliverance, a sentimental journey from misery to glory, from division to mystic unity based on the blood bond that linked souls” (p. 105).

Though historians’ views of the genocide and its causes have shifted—and will no doubt shift again in the future—their changing views are based on a way of knowing that
strives to expand the evidentiary base so that interpretations may be continually refined. But the tides of Holocaust scholarship have not come near the shores of technical communication research. In other respects, technical communication scholars are exemplary in their continuous investigation of new cases to contribute new knowledge about their practice. Yet the case of Nazi technical writing and the Holocaust is an exception—even though the 1992 Katz article touched off a broad and perhaps even unprecedented disciplinary discussion of ethics. Katz himself moved on in a 1993 sequel article and extended his thesis by reviewing the social-epistemic rhetoric of Hitler’s Mein Kampf. But again and again in the literature, subsequent citations of Katz’s thesis reference only the Nazi gas van document—until scholars as diverse as Markel (1997) who rejects postmodern ethics, and Longo (2000) who embraces postmodern thought, have all cited Katz’s thesis in concluding that the case of Nazi technical writing demonstrates the danger of amoral technocracy.

One of the key ethical tenets of the discipline is therefore rooted in a historical example, but the example has been interpreted in an ahistorical manner. Thus historians, based on their empirical research into the available sources, reject amoral technocracy as the mainspring of the Final Solution; yet technical communicators, based on their consideration of a single artifact, have adopted the explanation as a conventional wisdom. One of way of knowing is not necessarily superior to the other. But why, in the case of technical writing and the Holocaust, did technical communicators follow one way of knowing and not the other? And perhaps more curiously, why is this conventional wisdom arguably the opposite of Katz’s thesis—even though subsequent scholars have
all cited Katz in support of their views? Indeed, why is Katz’s (1992a) “Ethic of Expediency” so widely cited, but his 1993 sequel, in which he followed up the initial article by detailing the connection between epistemic rhetoric and the construction of morality, so little noticed in comparison?

Confronted with the Just gas van document and the realization that a skilled technical writer could draft such a text, I contend that the artifact became more useful to the discipline as a boundary object than a starting point for interrogating how our own epistemic rhetorics socially construct notions of what is prudent and moral. The Nazi document is plastic enough so that scholars of diverse viewpoints can—like looking at a Rohrschach blot—project their own local needs upon it, yet robust enough so that shared condemnation of the text can create a trading zone where scholars may negotiate a common identity as moral beings who may be defined in opposition to the putatively amoral Nazis. “We” have morals (whatever those might be for each of us) while “they” are without morals. Such a binary opposition comfortably distances scholars and practitioners from the disquieting notion that SS technical writers were free moral agents like us, and also permits technical communicators to distance their profession from the taint of the Nazi case.

**Expediency without Ethics**

Katz’s (1992a) original article, composed by him in 1990, was very much in keeping with the universalizing trend that was evident in much of Holocaust scholarship two decades ago. In fact, his implicit call for a post-Holocaust rhetoric that takes into
account the “dark side” of classical Western rhetoric is reminiscent of Bauman’s (1989) call, published at about the same time, for a post-Holocaust sociology. There Bauman urged his profession to no longer regard the Holocaust as an aberrant detour in the upward progress of Western modernity, but rather as a product of potentialities inherent in the West’s culture of technological and bureaucratic organization. Though Holocaust scholars today place more emphasis on the particularities of the genocide, most would also agree with Bauer (2001) who pointed out that “absolute uniqueness leads to its opposite, total trivialization: if the Holocaust is a one-time, inexplicable occurrence, then it is a waste of time to deal with it” (p. 14). But because Auschwitz does in fact “change everything,” the call to develop a post-Holocaust rhetoric is a summons worth heeding. Moreover, in his initial article and its sequel (1993) Katz astutely illustrated how, because notions of “prudence” and phronesis are socially constructed, rhetoric may be employed for evil ends. One need not agree that Aristotelian rhetoric is inherently “expedient” to concur that it can be so employed. Thus, even though many Holocaust scholars today would question Katz’s thesis on several important points—his endorsement of Arendt’s (1963) “banality of evil” thesis, his focus on the primacy of Hitler’s will in driving the genocide, his argument that the “moral basis” the Holocaust was spun from an ethos of scientific and technological expediency rather than a millenarian ideology—his nuanced analysis spotlights the truly important point that the Nazis’ rationale for mass murder was an ideologized social construction. By contrast, as we will see, technical communicators have since then largely contented themselves with tilting at stick-figure Nazi villains who had no morals or even no ideology.
Although Katz (2004, pp. 195-196) expected his thesis to be greeted with outrage, the work was widely acclaimed and soon became a standard point of reference for discussions of ethics in technical communication (Smith, 2000, p. 450). Yet these approving citations have, I contend, imposed new and different orderings on the Just gas van document. The Nazis, argued Katz, reconceived expediency as an ethical value that, in their eyes, gave a “moral basis” to the genocide. But immediately after the initial article was published, commentators began focusing almost entirely on the “expediency” half of the thesis and ignored the “ethic” half. Where Katz portrayed the Nazi document as an extreme perversion of rhetoric, scholars now routinely cited the document as an extreme perversion of “hyperpragmatism” (Scott, Longo & Wills, 2006, p. 9). Descriptions of the desk-murderers as amoral, indifferent, detached, and neutral—words actually used in the literature—thus misread the lessons of the Nazi gas van document by ignoring “ ethic” to focus only on “expediency.” That the Nazis did have an ethical philosophy makes us uncomfortable. It is far easier to dismiss the perpetrators as automatons and thereby comfort ourselves that “we” humanistic scholars are different than “ those” amoral technocrats. One can argue, as I have done (Ward, 2009, 2010a), that current scholarship on the Holocaust views the “Nazi conscience” as a redemptive secular religion. But whether one believes that the Nazi ethic was soteriological or technological, the point is that the Third Reich had an ethic.

And what is an “ ethic”? Markel (2001) wrote that ethics “ concern the individual’s thinking and conduct about matters of right and wrong” and “people’s ethics are derived to a greater or lesser extent from their society’s morality” (p. 29). Thus, if we join Katz in
positing that the Nazis had an ethic—whether the technological ethic asserted by Katz or the soteriological ethic that I maintain—then we concede that, for example, the writer of the Nazi memo engaged in “thinking and conduct about matters of right and wrong” and was influenced “to a greater or lesser extent [by his] society’s morality” (Markel, 2001, p. 29). In turn, then, we now have phronesis: the document writers practiced “thinking,” prudently (for their rhetorical community) pondered “right and wrong,” were sensitive to socially constructed mores around them, and through their conduct enacted their heinous convictions. And so again, we end up with a far different picture than stick-figure automatons.

While Katz (1992a) characterized the Nazi text as exhibiting an “ethos of objectivity, logic, and narrow focus” that was “taken to extremes” (p. 257), he did not stop there—as most subsequent scholars have done. Instead he added, “Here, expediency is an ethical end as well” (p. 257). And though Katz claimed his argument corroborates Arendt’s (1963) “banality of evil” thesis, he also claimed to “go beyond” Arendt by finding that the Nazi writer was not “simply doing his duty” but had “adopted the ethos of the Nazi bureaucracy he works for as well” (Katz, 1992a, p. 258). In other words, the SS technical writer was not a man with no ethical concerns but, rather, was enacting convictions about right and wrong that he had adopted as a free moral agent after a volitional process of socialization.

Further, noted Katz (1992a), the Nazi document belongs to the “problem of deliberative rhetoric” because it examples “that genre of rhetoric concerned with deliberating future courses of action” (p. 258, emphasis added). There is deliberation
occurring in the document and not simply mere amorality, indifference, detachment, and neutrality. Instead, a “morality” is implicated here because expediency “was rhetorically embraced by the Nazi regime and combined with science and technology to form the ‘moral basis’ of the holocaust” (p. 258). Thus, an ethic of expediency is not the absence of morality but, rather, constitutes a certain type of morality. Katz correctly warned, “We have tended to understand the holocaust from a nonrhetorical, Platonic standpoint, which amounts to a refusal to understand it at all” (p. 258). The seemingly caricatured Nazi villains that technical communicators have drawn for themselves amount idealized anti-forms that, I believe, can be seen as amounting to a refusal to understand. Because the gas van document is the product not just of “expediency” but an “ethic of expediency,” the Nazi technical writer manifested a phenomenon described in rhetorical theory: namely, “the role of ethos” as that “moral element in character” which provides “an essential link between deliberation and action” (p. 259). Put another way, a purely expedient technocrat might seek technical perfection for its own sake; but to say that a desk-murderer was impelled by an ethic of expediency is to recognize that a moral calculus took place that linked deliberation and action. While logos ponders the means, Katz noted, ethos and pathos furnish the impetus.

Many technical communication scholars have cited Katz’s (1992a) observation that “All deliberative rhetoric is concerned with decision and action. Technical writing, perhaps even more than other kinds of rhetorical discourse, always leads to action, and thus always impacts on human life,” (p. 259). But we should neither forget his next sentence which states, “In technical writing, epistemology necessarily leads to ethics”
(Katz, 1992a, p. 259). If we take this at face value, then we must concede that the Nazi writers’ epistemology led to “ethical” behavior according to their lights. Only if we suggest the writers had no epistemology, which cannot be true, can we say they had no ethics. The problem in technical communication is not any disconnect between epistemology and ethics, Katz averred, but “how that relationship affects and reveals itself in human behavior” (p. 259). The challenge of the Nazi gas van document is not to explain how the writers separated epistemology and ethics, but how the writers’ epistemology shaped their ethics and how those ethics influenced their actions. Nazi technical writers enacted a set of ethical principles they believed were moral and provided justification for their actions. “Although the characterization seems hard to swallow, Hitler’s was an ‘ethical’ program in the broadest sense of that term,” for the dictator believed “power must be based on a ‘spiritual idea,’ a philosophy” and “understood—all too well—that his political program for world war and mass extermination would not be accepted without a moral foundation” (Katz, 1992a, p. 263).

Though Katz may have analyzed the “wrong” document, he arrived at a “right” conclusion by illuminating how the Nazis enacted a heinous ethic, but an ethic nonetheless. This is why scholars who have cited “The Ethic of Expediency” as a warning against amoral technocracy and mindless hyperpragmatism can perhaps, I would suggest, be said to have drawn an opposite conclusion to what Katz argued.

Why have technical communicators negotiated a new ordering of the Nazi gas van document—and along the way, found the Nazi text more useful as a boundary object than a historical artifact? Longo (1998) contended that how analysts order a text says as much
about the analysts as about the text. Thus, to begin my interrogation into what the
disciplinary deliberation about the Just text may reveal about the discipline itself, I turn
first to two published cases—representing two very different poles of response—in which
scholars’ responses to the Katz thesis precluded their participation in rhetorical boundary
work and, as a result, excluded themselves from the emerging disciplinary consensus.
The cases are instructive for two reasons: First, they suggest the limitations of boundary
work, a work that apparently is precluded when at least one side advances exclusive
claims that erect rigid boundaries no object can bridge. And second, the cases established
two outliers of reaction—between which much boundary work could and did occur.

Protecting Rhetoric and Rhetoricians

Only two adversarial exchanges have occurred in print over “The Ethic of
Expediency.” But these exchanges illustrate three distinct agendas for technical
communication that argue, respectively, for the primacy of rhetoric’s social-epistemic
function as the key to understanding technical writing (Katz, 1992a; 1993), the primacy
of reasoned deliberation based on rationally derived ideals (Rivers, 1992), and the
primacy of clear, precise, and accurate use of instrumental language (Moore, 2004).

In the same journal and year Katz (1992a) published “Ethic,” Rivers (1992)
offered a Response which contended that the “rhetoric” of Hitler and the Third Reich
should not be considered rhetoric at all. Though he did not specifically address the SS gas
van proposal, the import of Rivers’ refutation is that the document is best understood as a
nonrhetorical communication. The Rivers refutation is based on Quintilian’s notion of vir
bonus, or that a good orator must by definition be a good man. For example, at the time Katz and Rivers were writing in the early 1990s, one-time Klansmen and white supremacist David Duke was making headlines as a populist vote-getter in Louisiana politics. Yet because Duke operated within an American polis comprised of competing voices, Rivers pointed out, he was compelled to “give allegiance to virtues he may not possess and to a culturally determined vir bonus that he alone cannot create” (p. 858). Similarly, in the polis of Weimar Germany, Hitler’s rhetoric never won him a free election. (However, by 1932 the National Socialists were the largest of Germany’s seven major parties and tallied 37 percent of the electorate in a multi-party system where an absolute majority was not practically attainable.) But once Hitler achieved dictatorship and became “the ultimate vir bonus,” all deliberation ceased, according to Rivers. Thus, he concluded that, because “Rhetoric within the Sophistic tradition does not exist without competing voices,” then “after 1933, rhetoric as understood within the Sophistic tradition ceased to exist.” Nazi public discourse was not thoughtful persuasion but propaganda. And because “apathy, fear, and hatred are the weapons of propaganda and the fuel for mass hysteria, not the topoi of Aristotle or the public and competing voice of the vir bonus” (p. 858) then, according to Rivers (and despite Aristotle’s classification of pathos as a mode of appeal), propaganda is nonrhetorical. On that basis Rivers “question[s] the assumption that the key to Hitler’s success can be credited to his rhetorical skill” and denied that such an assumption is “in line with classical rhetorical practice and theorizing” (p. 857). In the end, Rivers contended, “The complicity of millions cannot be attributed to the rhetorical virtue of Hitler or a virtue that is socially constructed. A
silenced society constructs nothing.” Free discussion and deliberation were absent in the Third Reich, so that “In Hitler’s Germany, any competing voice that would have tried to talk the Nazis out of their final solution would have simply been shot” (p. 858).

In his counter response, Katz (1992b) rejoined that “I did not wish to examine Hitler’s rhetorical success against notions of ethos found in all of classical rhetoric, but only that of Aristotle,” and that Rivers “shift[ed] the grounds of my argument by collapsing what I see as two more or less distinct traditions—that of Quintilian and that of Aristotle—into one.” Compared to Aristotle, Cicero and the Sophists, Quintilian reposed more trust in Isocrates’ dictum that rhetorical practice cultivates moral development. “Thus,” Katz argued, “Quintilian’s notion of ethos is perhaps more ‘Platonic’ than any of his predecessors” and “can be seen as an idealistic response to the political corruption and absence of any real deliberative rhetoric in late imperial Rome” (pp. 859-860). The rub here may be that Hitler’s rhetoric (or propaganda) brought him successes but not of the kind which are more familiar to our own democratic polis. Katz (1992b) himself pointed out that Hitler’s achievements cannot be measured by electoral votes alone, for his career was marked by other kinds of rhetorical successes that do not conform to democratic ideals: the construction of Nazi ethos and ideology, the building of a movement that toppled the Weimar Republic, the rise to political power, the seduction of the German people, the silencing of the opposition, and the carrying out of war and genocide. Hitler used rhetoric, as Foucault might say, to surround
sanctioned discourse with silence and so to legitimize and institutionalize both the discourse and the silence. A silenced society does construct something; it constructs silence, which in this case was necessary to carry out the holocaust. And silence is rhetorical too. (p. 859)

Within the social construction that was Nazi Germany, apathy and fear and hatred “can become valid rhetorical strategies” (Katz, 1992b, p. 859). While they may not be formally named among the *topoi*, these strategies are still amenable to Aristotelian analysis as “logical extensions and perversions of the more legitimate rhetorical uses of emotions and character we find in Aristotle’s Rhetoric” (p. 859; cf. Aristotle’s discussion of emotions in Book II of the *Rhetoric*). However, just as this study has compared Katz’s (1992a) thesis about expediency to what current scholarship on National Socialism and the Holocaust, so too can Rivers’ fair question about the rhetoricity of Nazi discourse be examined from that angle: First, given current scholarly understandings of the Third Reich, is it historically true that the Nazi regime had no competing voices and constructed only silence? And second, though Rivers did not address himself to the SS memo reviewed by Katz in “The Ethic of Expediency,” what is the implication of his thesis for analyzing Nazi technical communication? Can the SS technical memo be viewed as nonrhetorical?

The assertion made by Rivers, that “any competing voice that would have tried to talk the Nazis out of their final solution would have simply been shot,” is not necessarily sustained by the historical record. Current research confirms that the SS had no need
threaten anyone into carrying out the genocide. In 1992, the same year that Rivers was writing (and so he would not have been aware of it), the historian Browning documented in a landmark study that the historical record contains not a single instance of anyone being punished for declining to kill Jews. The postwar claims of perpetrators, that they were forced under duress to pull triggers and drive gassing vans, are attempts at exculpation. The real question is why 80 to 90 percent of rank-and-file conscripts voluntarily accepted assignments to killing squads (the remainder affirmed the justice of the murders and only pleaded “weakness” rather than moral opposition). In their view of the German home front, scholars have overturned the notion that Nazi Germany constructed only silence. Johnson and Reuband (2005) described how “a new conception of the Nazi dictatorship has been developing in the international scholarly community,” in contrast to the former view that “was heavily influenced by the theorists of the ‘totalitarian school’ that emerged during the early years of the 1950s” and that saw “dictatorial regimes and not the people who lived under them as the problem and construed terror and coercion to be the essential features of Nazi, Soviet, and other dictatorial societies” (p. xv). Emphasis on “the supposed omnipotence of secret police agencies” has receded as

a fundamentally new view of the Nazi dictatorship is emerging that stresses complicity and consent rather than coercion and compulsion. We are now beginning to understand, for example, that the Gestapo was far more limited in its resources and powers than was once thought, and that to be effective it had to
concentrate on policing targeted enemies like Jews and communists, on the whole leaving most of the German population considerable latitude to go about their private lives. They were able to do this because Hitler and his ideology had widespread support from the German population. (p. xv)

Indeed, only two percent of German citizens were ever interrogated by the police on suspicion of illegal acts (Johnson & Reuband, 2005, p. 298). For the Nazi regime realized that attempts at complete totalitarian control of private life would foment discontent and thus become self-defeating. The dictatorship, founded on popularity as much as power, was sensitive to “public mood” and received regular reports—which were remarkably frank—from the SS Security Service. On a number of key issues Hitler and state authorities backed down in the face of popular unrest: Christian crosses were restored to public school classrooms after protests in Bavaria. The euthanasia program was ended after Catholic clerics preached against the killings. The effort to merge Protestants into a single Reich Church was abandoned, as Hitler decided to put off a reckoning with the churches until after the war. Jewish husbands in “mixed” marriages were released from custody after their Gentile wives demonstrated in the streets. A recent study by Aly (2006) documented how the Nazi government crafted progressive social-welfare policies (often funded through plunder) in response to popular aspirations for social leveling.

Historians also confirm that, far from having few competing policy voices, Nazi Germany was, as we learned in Chapter 3, an intensely competitive polycracy. Seen in this light, the SS gas van document must be viewed as rhetorical, if rhetoricity is defined...
as a product of competing voices. The 1942 document must be placed in its rhetorical context of the attempt by the SS to consolidate its still-contested hold over Jewish policy, as well as internal competition within the SS to develop a killing procedure that reduced the psychological stress on the killers. The Just proposal was composed at a heady time when gas vans were “competing” for a place in the Final Solution, all in the midst of history’s largest military invasion.

At the time (when the SS had even experimented with dynamiting Jews in situ as an alternative to mass shootings) the “success” of the gassing vans was viewed by their SS advocates as critical to demonstrating that a “final solution of the Jewish question in Europe” was feasible. Otherwise, competing voices might prevail which demanded Jewish labor be utilized for the war effort, or coveted the scarce resources devoted to the extermination project, or counseled postponement of a Final Solution until after the war was won and a “territorial solution” (deporting the Jews to perish in Siberia) could be implemented.

Perhaps no other SS document illustrates this point—how technical communication can be embedded in organizational politics—more than the infamous Wannsee Protocol, called “perhaps the most shameful document of modern history” when discovered by the Nuremberg prosecutors. The Protocol is the minutes of a January 20, 1942, conference of ministerial secretaries convened by Heydrich to assert his control over the implementation of the Final Solution and secure the cooperation of key state agencies represented. The minutes, composed by Eichmann under the direction of Heydrich, are an exemplary document in their concise language, clear organization, and
physical appearance. But the rhetoric of the document goes far beyond its mere words. Detailed analyses of the historic circumstances and hidden SS agenda behind the Wannsee Conference and Protocol have recently been published by Roseman (2003) and Cesarini (2004, pp. 110-116). Their analyses are, for technical communicators, perhaps reminiscent of Mirel’s (1988) study of how one organization’s computer users manual functioned rhetorically as a sop to infighting factions, a preemption of further conflicts, and a depiction of administrative commitment to progress. Though the manual’s authors are in no way equated here to the Nazi SS, the dynamic portrayed by Mirel was writ large—and hideously lethal—by the authors of the Wannsee Protocol and the Sipo Technical Matters Group gas van document.

Rivers’ implication, that the memo is nonrhetorical, is ostensibly based on the assumption that rhetoric emanates from competing voices, and yet current scholarly understandings do not support the contention that Nazi Germany was a “silent” society and had no “competing” voices—even if those voices competed in a repugnant Social Darwinian milieu. Why then did Rivers appeal to the popular, but historically inaccurate, generalization that the Nazis shot all dissenters out of hand? (Even the most brutal dictatorships, much less those founded on popular support, will attempt to “reeducate” dissenters.) To read Rivers’ critique is to get the clear impression that he is “protecting” rhetoric, or a certain idealized view of rational polity, against what he perceives to be Katz’s implication that rhetoric is value-neutral rather than innately good. In our culture, “Hitler” and “Nazi” are the god terms for ultimate evil; for Rivers, to use these two words in connection with rhetoric is to slander the latter—and by extension, to diminish the
scholars who study it. “We” teach *rhetoric*, while “they” practiced *propaganda*.

Rhetorical study is a lofty calling, essential to democratic society, but for Rivers, Katz’s argument unacceptably relativized rhetoric into mere expedience.

Thus even in this early exchange, the only part of Katz’s thesis that mattered was the “expedience” and not the “ethic.” But to illustrate the point here about rhetorical boundary work, less than a year later Brasseur (1993) made the same move—casting off “ethic” and making “expediency” the focus—but as we will see later, successfully appropriated Katz’s thesis in support of her own. What, then, was the difference between Rivers and Brasseur? We will explore Brasseur’s case later on. Yet as for Rivers, he opposed rather than allied his argument to Katz’s. In other words, he precluded any possibility of boundary work. And Rivers did not mention the SS gas van document, thereby removing from the equation what would with Brasseur and later disciplinary deliberations become an *object* for performing boundary work. Instead Rivers conducted his argument on an entirely abstract plane, leaving no tangible object available to bridge his differences with Katz and create a trading zone between them. As a result, Rivers’ argument quickly dropped from the scene—a result that also reveals something about the self-identity of the technical communication discipline. If scholars lauded Katz and ignored Rivers’ attempt to exclude propaganda and silence from rhetoric, then by the early 1990s the leading edge of the discipline agreed on the proposition that *everything* is rhetorical. Generally this might help explain the outcome to the second adversarial exchange with Katz, one that hinged on a putative separation between rhetoric and instrumentality.
Safeguarding Science and Civilization

While Rivers (1992) argued that Katz incorrectly discovered *rhetoric* in the Nazi technical memo, Moore (2004) argued that Katz incorrectly discovered *Aristotle* in the SS document. But once again, as with Rivers, the case entirely omits any reference to or engagement with the document itself. Thus, no object is available to work across the boundary between the two competing perspectives and create a trading zone. Instead, Moore patently opposed himself to Katz with personal attacks and a critique grounded in translation issues, culminating with the accusation that an elitist animus against capitalism motivated Katz to selectively—and negatively—construe the Greek *sympheron* as “expediency” rather than more neutrally as “advantage” or “utility.” Then, after striving to refute “The Ethic of Expediency” based on translation and quotation issues, Moore concluded with a second line of refutation by asserting that humankind is more driven (through religious and humanitarian impulses, evolutionary advantage, or self-interest) to long-term cooperation than momentary expedience. (Another way to cast and interpret this exchange in terms of boundary work is to note that the Aristotelian text was rendered brittle, rather than made plastic, by Moore’s insistence on staking out an “either/or” opposition to Katz).

Moore (2004), and Katz in response (2006), have both written at length on the translation and quotation issues. Yet there is one question that Moore did not directly address: How might his thesis explain the SS gas van document? Katz (2006) saw this as one of the fundamental flaws in Moore’s argument and suggested, “Professor Moore does not address the issue of the Nazi memo, which is the focal point of my *College English*
article, and only touches on the use of expediency in Nazi Germany as a way of accusing me of trying to make deliberative ‘rhetoric and technical communication look bad’” (p. 5). For a possible explanation of the gas van document from Moore’s theoretical perspective, it is necessary to survey his other writings on what he calls “instrumental discourse.” The debate over Moore’s theory is summarized in a recent article by Warnick (2006) who noted that Moore “did not coin the term instrumental discourse, but over the past ten years he has made it his own by being its chief proponent in the field of technical communication.” At the time of this writing, the latest iteration of Moore’s theory of technical communication as instrumental discourse is found in his 2006 article, “From Monologue to Dialogue to Chorus: The Place of Instrumental Discourse in English Studies and Technical Communication.” Though its final section concluded with an indictment of “The Problems of Totalizing Rhetoric,” the first section on “Defining Instrumental Discourse” may suggest a theoretical framework for interpreting the SS text.

According to Moore’s (2006) basic definition, “Instrumental discourse is individually verified discourse that registers social agreements so people can cooperate in order to coordinate and control their activities” (p. 387). Rhetorical and instrumental discourses are different species of communication, as “Rhetoric tries to persuade, but instrumental discourse tries to govern, guide, and control” (p. 388). The former is needful because social agreement requires “a process (sometimes long, sometimes short) of discussion and argumentation” (p. 387). But the latter is equally needful for “If people want to live together peacefully and ethically, and if people want to work together for a common and greater good, then they need such instrumental genres of discourse as laws”
and commercial documents that allow “people around the world to engage rapidly, safely, and economically in huge numbers of transactions for their mutual benefit” (pp. 387-388). Humans have evolved these two species of communication as a matter of survival.

Sometimes we need communications that help us change our minds (and the minds of others) to adapt our behaviors to new situations, or to newly perceived situations. Since the time of Aristotle, we have called those communications rhetorical or persuasive communications. But once people agree about how to behave in certain situations, then they need other kinds of communications to record their cooperation and to coordinate their activities. (p. 392)

As different species of communication, Moore contended, rhetorical and instrumental discourses manifest different qualities. “Rhetorical discourse typically has direct or indirect appeals to logos (i.e., logic), ethos (i.e., the author’s character), and pathos (i.e., the audience’s emotions),” while “instrumental discourse is ‘those utterances that are supposed to achieve their purpose directly, as they stand, without the need to produce any additional ‘reasons’ or ‘supporting arguments’” (p. 388). Because rhetorical documents are authored for persuasion rather than application, he continued, these utterances “tend to be more personal” as the speaker or writer must establish argumentative credibility; by contrast, instrumental discourse bears the authority of collective agreement and thus “is typically impersonal, and frequently uses imperative mood or passive voice” (p. 391). And because instrumental documents must be applied to real situations, Moore concluded
that they may be revised as conditions change, whereas “rhetorical documents do not usually get updated” (p. 391). In other words, instrumental discourse depends on contexts and rhetoric does not.

Nevertheless (and to parody Aristotle), for Moore rhetoric is the dialectic counterpart of instrumentality. Moore views rhetorical and instrumental discourses as a continuum where (1) persuasion leads to social agreement, (2) this agreement is codified in an instrumental document, (3) persuasion then ceases and cooperation begins, and (4) the parties “apply the agreement to intervene successfully in the world in a specific situation” (p. 387). Yet instrumental documents “do not map perfectly onto existing or changing situations” (p. 391) so that reevaluation and adjustment is required from time to time, “at which point persuasion again becomes the dominant purpose of the communication” (p. 387). Thus rhetoric leads to agreement, which leads to instrumental codification, which leads to intervention in reality, which leads to change, which leads once again to rhetoric.

To “achieve its purpose directly,” instrumental discourse manifests the three properties of changeability, mappability, and sovereignty. Thus, “Because contexts change frequently, instrumental communications also change frequently,” unlike literature which “is not context-dependent” (p. 389). Further, instrumental discourse is mappable because “it has a close correlation with some physical object, task, or situation, so that users readily identify what the object, task, or situation is and what they are supposed to do,” although “the map may or may not resemble what is being mapped” (pp. 389-390). For the purposes of analyzing the SS gas van document, Moore’s
conception bears a closer look.

Mappability does not involve pure representation, positivism, or correspondence theories of the truth. Social construction, individual experience, and functional use partially create the perception of correspondence in instrumental discourse, but none of these ways of creating meaning involves positivism or pure representation. . . . For people who create instrumental discourse, language is a jumping off point, not pure representation. The crucial question is this: can the user perform the task presented in the document or communication? Instrumental discourse is based on a usability theory of language: language is a contingent social agreement whose validity depends on individuals applying the language to intervene successfully in reality. If the intervention is successful, then the language is useful or mappable. (p. 390)

Finally, for Moore, the sovereignty of instrumental discourse “is established in two ways: by social groups and by individual experience” (p. 391). In the end, therefore, instrumental documents are deficient if they: cannot accommodate changing needs and circumstances, do not readily correlate with the intended intervention into reality, and lack socially legitimated authority or individually legitimated efficacy. Changeability, mappability, and sovereignty are the ideal conditions of instrumental discourse but may not always be achieved in reality. “Like anything else, certain conditions are more conducive to cooperation,” Moore writes. Ideally, “Cooperation should be democratic”
and “freely chosen but with the awareness that people are not always free to do anything they want” due to personal, social, ideological, physical, and economic constraints. For one thing, “To attempt the total involvement of all people in all decisions of any sizable group would be economically impossible” (p. 393).

Moore’s theory of instrumental discourse, then, leads to two possible interpretations of the Nazi SS technical memo: either (1) the document is part of the argumentative process leading to an eventual agreement on the design of the gassing vans, in which case it is rhetorical; or (2) the document instrumentalizes a collective agreement on the killing operation, in which case it is not rhetorical. Clearly, the former would seem the appropriate interpretation according to Moore’s criteria, so that the SS memo is rhetorical. Yet that conclusion, based on the 2006 iteration of his theory, may leave some loose ends when compared to his 2004 critique of Katz and “The Ethic of Expediency.” For Moore’s 2004 article seems only to leave open two possibilities, that either: (1) because the memo does not produce “utility” then it is nonrhetorical; or (2) because the memo is rhetorical then it must be grounded in an ethic of “utility” (as opposed to an ethic of “expediency”)—despite the fact that such utility was in the apparent service of Nazi evil. By comparing Moore’s own theory of instrumental discourse and his later critique of Katz—which we will review below—a fundamental contradiction seems to arise: If the authors of the Nazi gas van memo were arguing for adoption of their design recommendations (rather than codifying an agreement about the vehicle design), then they were engaging in rhetoric. But according to Moore, as we will see below, rhetors argue for utility (rather than expediency) with the object of urging
what is good as their main consideration. Yet the SS document was not good unless one allows that concepts of goodness are socially constructed—which Moore does not allow since, by his theory, rhetoric is representational and does not depend on context, and only instrumental discourse engages in social construction. How then, if we follow Moore’s line, can the use of “utility” for terrible ends be accounted for?

Moore’s (2004) attack on Katz and his “ethic of expediency” thesis began with a lengthy discussion of translation issues, after which Moore launched into his own views “utility” and “goodness” by citing the Roberts (1954) translation of *The Rhetoric*:

If Aristotle believes that orators “must not make people believe what is wrong,” then his *Rhetoric* would reflect an “ethic” that encouraged orators to support what was just and right. That is precisely what Aristotle does: he advocates what is just and right, though he is aware that some orators do not practice what he preaches. (Moore, 2004, p. 12)

Thus for Moore (2004), orators do not operate on expediency. (And neither, in his view, do governments: “I find it hard to believe that ‘expediency outweighs compassion in government’” [p. 23]). Moore believed the best reading of *The Rhetoric* 1.3.4 is (referring again to the Roberts translation) that the political orator who “aims at establishing expediency” will, as “the main consideration,” urge acceptance of a proposal “on the ground that it will do good” (p. 15). To Katz’s contention that Aristotle “collapses all ethical questions in deliberative rhetoric into a question of expediency,” Moore
steadfastly maintained that “Aristotle does not ‘elide’ goodness and utility” but rather “keep[s] both ideas separate and distinct” (p. 13). In summary, then, for Moore, “Aristotle does not believe that deliberative discourse is based on expediency; he believes that deliberative discourse is based on goodness and utility, and that goodness and utility embrace many other virtues, including happiness, justice, honor, health, moderation, courage, beauty, and so on” (p. 27). Finally, Moore’s concluding section seemed to suggest that the rhetoric of an evolved humanity should instantiate its “instincts for building social cooperation” (p. 21)—a conclusion that seems to accord rhetoric a role in the social construction of good ends, except that his 2006 article claimed that role only for instrumental discourse.

Thus we return to the seemingly fundamental contradiction in Moore’s logic: If the SS gas van memo was rhetorical (according to his theory of instrumental discourse) because it argued for policy change, and if rhetors necessarily plead (according to his critique of Katz) for utility and goodness, how can one account for rhetoric that urges evil ends unless without moving past Moore’s representational theory of rhetoric and instead conceding Katz’s point about rhetoric’s social-epistemic dimension?

In addition to the conundrum that “utility” was used to bring about evil in Nazi Germany, which raises a basic question about Moore’s views on rhetoric, a second logical inconsistency may be seen—in light of the Nazi document—which has implications for his instrumental discourse. For on the one hand, the Moore of 2004 argued that Aristotelian rhetoric should produce not social constructions but such ideal forms as goodness, utility, happiness, justice, honor, health, moderation, courage, and
beauty. Therefore, by this reading, the SS memo is nonrhetorical. (Or anti-rhetorical?) Yet the Moore of 2006 contended that rhetorical discourse is defined in a continuum against instrumental discourse—the former being persuasion that leads to agreement, the latter codification of that agreement. Therefore, by this reading, the memo is rhetorical (although the instrumental agreement to which it leads is extermination). Then again, in contrast to “ways of meaning” that instantiate “pure representation, positivism, or correspondence theories of the truth,” Moore only allowed that instrumental discourse involves social constructions whereby “language is a contingent social agreement whose validity depends on individuals applying the language to intervene successfully in reality” (p. 390). Therefore, by this reading of the Nazi document (which Moore himself does not conduct), the gas van memo—would also be instrumental since the validity of its coded and euphemistic language is contingent on the social agreement of the SS desk-murderers.

Katz has willingly tested his thesis in the awful crucible of the Holocaust, which is arguably the central and most vexing question of Western modernity. Technical communicators could benefit if Moore and other scholars of the genre were willing to do the same. Katz (2006) responded to Moore by noting their respective interpretations are “based on different epistemologies” and concluded,

I do not believe human objectivity is possible, which an instrumental view seems to require, and so cannot believe in a non-ideological instrumentalism—whether it be called utility or expediency. Nor do I share Professor Moore’s unbridled
enthusiasm for technology and/or capitalism, or his ‘optimism’ concerning the behavior of corporations and government.” (p. 7)

That sentiment was echoed by Browning (1998), a leading Holocaust researcher who has commented on the potential for further genocides that,

I fear we live in a world in which war and racism are ubiquitous, in which the powers of government mobilization are powerful and increasing, in which a sense of personal responsibility is increasingly attenuated by specialization and bureaucratization, and in which the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. (p. 223)

Disciplines from theology (e.g., Rubinstein, 1966) to sociology (Bauman, 1989) have wrestled with the implications of a post-Holocaust world. Moore has propounded a thought-provoking theory of rhetorical versus instrumental communication. But this theory of communication—as must all theories of communication and rhetoric—must account for Auschwitz. Thus, I concur with Katz’s thesis on many of its crucial points: that the SS gas van document is rhetorical, that it is amenable to Aristotelian rhetorical analysis, that phronesis is a social construction, and that the Holocaust is not an aberrant Platonic anti-form that is beyond analysis. Whether or not the SS gas van proposal is an exemplar of technological expediency or social utility, there is surely sufficient evidence to conclude that either can be taken to extremes. The many articles written by scholars of
technical communication about, say, the Challenger disaster are a testament to this fact (e.g. Dombrowski, 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Herndl, Fennell & Miller, 1991; Miller, 1993; Moore, 1992; Pace, 1988; Winsor, 1988, 1990). Further, the argument that an ethic of expediency does broadly underlie Western deliberative rhetoric—but with the caveat that different expediencies are possible, whether technological or ideological—could be a possible reading of the implications suggested by my own analysis. Elsewhere (Ward, 2009, 2010a) I have argued for the basic desirability and need to study more cases, engage in more in-depth discussion, learn more of how technical communication can be abused, and encourage more scholars to take up the investigation.

Interest in such an investigation was not, however, the impetus for Moore’s (2004) critique of Katz. Where Rivers desired to protect rhetoric—and by extension, rhetoricians and, even further, the exceptionalism of democratic polity—from being tarred by association with Nazism and the Holocaust, Moore desired to protect technical writing—and thus technical writers, Western capitalism and, by extension, notions of Western progress and the innate goodness of human nature—from that same association. In a subsequent book chapter Moore (2005) explicitly decried “authors of contemporary academic studies of technical communication [who] frequently attack capitalism as the source of many of the social problems of our time” (p. 53). He put Katz and Carolyn Miller at the head of a list of “critical theorists” within technical communication who fill students “with bias and misinformation” and “ignore the fact that the cultures that have the most freedom, the most social opportunities, the most democracy, the longer life spans, and the highest standards of living are precisely the cultures in which high-tech
state capitalism plays a central role in the economy” (p. 54). In the past five hundred years “science, engineering, technology, and capitalism helped bring more and more benefits to humanity,” while capitalism in particular “played a significant role in the rise of political freedom” (p. 73). The influential Frankfurt School of critical theorists were creatures of their time, Moore asserted, who reacted “to the Nazi control of German businesses and sciences, and so they attacked instrumental reason, capitalism, science, and technology” in their “hostility toward the abuses of the Third Reich” (p. 74). Thus, the first generation of critical theorists engaged in the “fallacy of guilt by association” and “invented a philosophy that made Hitler and Nazism appear to be the inevitable outcome of science, technology, and capitalism, and not an aberration” (p. 74).

According to Moore, however, technical communicators must move past the critical theories—from the likes of Heidegger and Habermas—that have “biased Western thinking for two generations” and instead recognize that “after a half century of increasing freedoms and standards of living [throughout] the world, it is time to see that Hitler, Nazism, and Fascism were not the inevitable outcomes of science, technology, and capitalism” (p. 74).

In the most direct manner possible, the problem of Nazism and the Holocaust are identified by Moore as the primary challenges to Western science, technology, and capitalism. If critical theorists can succeed in using the Holocaust as a wedge, the entire Western edifice is threatened and therefore must be vigorously defended. To make his argument, Moore, like Rivers, picked up only on the “expediency” portion of the Katz thesis and not the “ethic” portion. And just as Rivers saw Nazism and the Holocaust as
the crucial wedge issue that jeopardized his own worldview, so too did Moore. Their critiques represent two poles of response to the disquieting notion that skilled technical writers furthered genocide: Rivers sought to protect rhetoric, rhetoricians, and an idealized view of beneficently rational democratic polity; Moore strove to protect technical writing, technical writers, and an idealized view of beneficent progress through Western technology, science, and capitalism. In both cases, the binary and oppositional nature of their claims precluded the possibility of rhetorical boundary work and ultimately excluded both scholars from an emerging disciplinary consensus.

Converging on a Comfortable Distance

The consensus which has emerged is, as we will see below, one that accepts the “ethic of expediency” thesis in name but has spun it into a warning against amoral technocracy, thereby suppressing Katz’s (1992a, 1993; cf. Katz & Rhodes, 2010) assertion that a culture can vest expediency with moral, ethical, and spiritual value. Since our cultural methodology (Longo, 1998) calls on us to finally interrogate how orderings have been imposed on a text and what this reveals about analysts’ relationships to it, we come now to those orderings of the Nazi gas van document imposed by analysts who claim agreement with Katz. In line with the analysis presented in Chapter 6, it may be said that the technical communication discipline is a rhetorical community whose many and varied interests have constructed a metaphor (the banal Nazi technocrat against whom all parties can identify themselves), generated a shared narrative (about amoral technocracy) to serve as a field onto which their interests may converge, and produced an
institutional genre ("ethic of expediency" as a heuristic designation) to pragmatically structure social action.

That the many interests within the discipline have created a trading zone—a zone where diverse interests cooperate to heuristically affirm the dangers of amoral technocracy—demonstrates that boundary work has occurred. In the heinous Nazi gas van document the discipline has found an object plastic enough to permit its varied interests to map their own local needs onto the text, but robust enough to maintain a common identity across these sites. The analysis below does not claim to provide an exhaustive survey of every reference to "the ethic of expediency" in the technical communication literature. But I believe the analysis is nevertheless broadly representative of the disciplinary discourse over the Katz thesis. And here the mechanics of rhetorical boundary work can, I believe, be helpfully likened to Latour’s (1987) description of academic arguments in science and engineering—or "technoscience," as he put it. Latour posited six principles (p. 259) for technoscientific argument, of which the first three are key for our study: (1) "Facts" are determined by later users and thus are "a consequence, not a cause, of a collective action." (2) Claimants "speak in the name of new allies that they have shaped and enrolled" in order to marshal support and "tip the balance of force in their favor." (3) Arguments hinge on "a gamut of weaker and stronger associations" so that understanding "facts" amounts to understanding their advocates.

As such, arguments proceed as scholars buttress their claims by marshalling impressive arrays of citations but, in so doing, construe the original citations in ways that lend support to their own arguments. A *modality* is thereby imparted to the citation by
which the original claim of a scientist or engineer is modified or qualified to suit and build a new claim. In time, a “fact” can become “blackboxed” or allowed to operate without being questioned; it is simply easier to accept the “fact” than to reopen the box and revisit the complexities of its construction. Only input and output matter; you put something into the box and it then produces the expected result. So too can such dynamics be seen in how “The Ethic of Expediency” has been shaped and enrolled as an ally in the claims of later users—until it has become a useful blackbox into which technical communication scholars, who wish to make a point about amoral technocracy or hyperpragmatism or technological determinism, need only cite the Nazi gas van document and the desired output of “factual” backing for their claims is the result. In a sense, then, a boundary object can become a Latourian blackbox. And for such cases, Latour’s first two rules of method for following technoscientific argument are to confront blackboxed facts and “follow the controversies that reopen them,” and to investigate claims “not [by looking] for their intrinsic qualities but at all the transformations they undergo later in the hands of others” (p. 258). That is what we will attempt now to do.

Brasseur (1993) first appropriated Katz to make an argument against “the objectivist paradigm.” Where Katz had analyzed the SS gas van document to make a claim about Western deliberative rhetoric, Brasseur lent a new modality to “Expediency” by citing it in support of her own claim that objectivist “language practices can obscure or hide the complexity of the social environment” (2004, p. 476). She initially illustrated this point by citing a study (Paradis, 1991) of a power-tool users’ manual that contributed to injury and death because written instructions reflected the manufacturer’s
preoccupation with objective language and ignored the workplace situations in which the tool was employed. Then, Brasseur asserted that Katz’s analysis of a Nazi document offered “a similar critique” (p. 477), even though Katz had raised the issue of the writer’s rhetorical use of the Aristotelian topoi and demonstrated how the writer skillfully took into account the ethos of his readers—a critique not at all “similar” to that of a users manual written without any regard for how it would be read. Brasseur held up the SS gas van document as an exemplar of an “objectivist paradigm” manifested in “ideals of clarity and conciseness” of language—and cited Katz in support of his thesis, even though Katz (1992a) had remarked on “the style of Just's memo, particularly the euphemisms and metaphors used to denote, objectify, and conceal process and people... as well as use of figures of speech...” (p. 257). And my own analysis, detailed in Chapters 6 and 7, suggests how the language of the Just proposal served to (re)produce the rhetorical community of the SS gas van bureau by deploying metaphor, narrative, genre, and linguistic resources as means of negotiating their differences.

Thus, by imparting a new modality to Katz in support of her own claim, Brasseur (1993) imposed a new ordering on the Nazi document by citing it as an example of objectivity in language use. And by modifying Katz’s critique to become “similar” to her own, Brasseur appropriated the gas van text to suit and build a new claim about “the problems inherent in an epistemology which positions technical communication as a solely expedient venture without any explicitly stated ethical concerns” (p. 115)—even though Katz (1992a) argued that in the Nazi document “Here, expediency is an ethical end as well” (p. 257).
Brasseur’s modal alteration of the “expediency” thesis was then perpetuated by Johnson-Eilola (1996) who continued to pair the Katz study with the same Paradis (1991) study of a power-tool user’s manual. In Johnson-Eilola’s reading, the Paradis study illustrated “instructing users in functional but not conceptual aspects of technologies,” of which the Nazi gas van document thus becomes “a more extreme case” (p. 179) even though the latter was an engineering proposal and not a set of instructions. Then Johnson-Eilola shaped the Katz thesis yet again and enrolled it as an ally for a new argument by claiming Nazi technical writing as an example of “expediency and decontextualization” (p. 179, emphasis added). Thus, where Katz contended that the Just proposal shows the “inherent dangers of the prevailing ethic of expediency as ideology” (p. 269, emphasis added), Johnson-Eilola (1996) appropriated Katz to impose a different ordering by which the SS writers emptied their rhetoric of context such that the gas van text became a “technical communication [which] allowed Nazi administrators and engineers to sidestep ethical issues” (p. 249). For Katz, the SS bureaucrats enacted ethical convictions grounded in ideology; but the new claims of Brasseur and Johnson-Eilola seem to imply the gas van administrators had no ethics or ideology. The Nazi document thereby becomes an “extreme case” of an attitude that emphasizes “relatively mechanical writing skills” (Johnson-Eilola, 1996, p. 178)—with Katz cited in support, despite the fact that Katz began with a brief illustration of how the writer’s skillful use of rhetoric was used to argue for what he regarded as an ethical end.

Five years after its publication “The Ethic of Expediency” appeared to have achieved blackbox status. A survey of the literature on technical communication found
the Katz article to be among the most-cited and a “standard reference point” for the discipline (Smith, 2000, p. 450). Yet the disciplinary consensus hewed to the claims of Brasseur and Johnson-Eilola and the settled “fact” that the Nazi gas van document was an extreme example of expediency without any ethic. In a textbook published that year on *Foundations for Teaching Technical Communication*, Ornatowski (1997) concluded his chapter on rhetoric by mentioning in passing the by-then conventional wisdom that the Nazi bureaucrats were the leading example of being “indifferent” to the role of rhetoric in technical, scientific, and commercial discourse—although, once again, Katz had argued that the SS killers were surprisingly attuned to rhetorical nuances. But this is the way, even in scientific and technical argumentation, that scholarship works and the rhetorical community of academics evolves “knowledge.” In the present case, consensus on the ethical import of the Nazi gas van document was not grounded in any empirical analysis of the text itself but, rather, through a communal *phronesis* in which the text functioned as a boundary object to bridge the interstices of the technical communication discipline.

A strikingly creative shaping and enrolling of the Katz thesis occurred that same year when Markel (1997) appropriated it for his argument against “postmodernism and postmodern ethics in particular” (p. 291). In support of his contention that postmodernism “is particularly vulnerable to charges of relativism,” he averred that “Perhaps the most devastating critique of relativism in rhetoric and ethics is Stephen [sic] Katz’s description of what might be called the worst case scenario: the ethic of expediency demonstrated by Nazi technical communicators” (p. 291; also repeated verbatim in Markel, 2001, p. 108). This modality is strengthened in the following sentence, which urged readers to consult a
recent book on literary theory “for a detailed discussion of the problem of relativism in postmodern thought” (p. 291). The implication here is that relativism, which Markel defined as a state of having “no coherent normative theory against which our ideas and actions can be measured” (p. 290), is bad because it can lead in a worst-case scenario to Nazi mass murder. In this way, a new ordering is imposed on the Just gas van proposal by which the writer had “no coherent normative theory against which [his] ideas and actions can be measured.” Was Markel claiming that the SS killers were postmodernists? As noted in Chapter 3, Herf (1986) has instead described the Nazis as “reactionary modernists” who saw high technology as an aesthetic expression of the people’s spirit and will to power. Further, and as this study has demonstrated, the Nazi perpetrators of the Final Solution did operate from a coherent normative theory—namely the Nazi Weltanschauung of racial and national renewal, the “Nazi conscience” that Koonz (2003) has described—against which they measured their ideas and actions. Katz (1992a, 1993), too, argued that the Nazi technical writer acted “prudently” according to his own and his society’s conception of virtue. Nevertheless, the modality imparted to the Katz thesis by Markel reinforced the emerging disciplinary consensus that Nazi technical writers had no ethical values.

In a striking demonstration of how boundary objects can potentially bridge even highly divergent perspectives, Longo (2000) came to the same conclusion as Markel—but from a markedly different direction. While Markel appropriated the Katz “ethic of expediency” thesis to argue against postmodernism, Longo appropriated it to argue for a postmodern critical approach to technical communication research and pedagogy.
One of the backgrounds for her claim is an earlier article in which Longo (1998) dismissed the social constructionist approach to research—an approach that seeks to understand how participants construct their organizations through communication—by claiming this approach takes the organization as stable and normative and does not interrogate its position within the wider societal discourse on knowledge and power. (In this article Longo advocated the cultural research methodology that has guided the present study. Her critique of the social constructionist approach is valid and one I have taken into account by, as explained in Chapter 1, utilizing both interpretive and postmodern perspectives on organizations rather than rejecting one for the other. Ultimately, my debt to Longo is in adopting the meta-structure of her methodology—researching a text’s historical and cultural contexts, seeing the text as a discourse, interrogating its analysts and their orderings of the text. But I differ from her by believing that social constructionism has its uses and is not necessarily captive to the limitations she cited.) In her book on the history of technical writing in the United States, Longo (2000) again mounted a critique of social constructionist research. Against this approach she held up Katz’s article on the ethic of expediency as a paradigm of cultural research. Where social constructionists “do not adequately . . . deal with issues of difference and change within organizations,” the Katz article “illustrated the importance of difference and change by exploring discourse practices within the community of Nazi Germany” through a “study that analyzed culture in an inclusive sense” (p. 8). Thus, instead of being a rhetorical analysis with a larger claim about Western deliberative rhetoric, the “ethic of expediency” thesis in Longo’s modality is transformed: “Katz clearly placed current
technical writing practices in contests for power and knowledge legitimation, a research outcome that relies on a critical approach to the object of inquiry” (p. 9).

In contrast to Markel (1997) who appropriated Katz for his claim that Nazi technical writers had “no coherent normative theory against which [their] ideas and actions [could] be measured” (p. 290), Longo (2000) interpreted the Katz study as showing how “Hitler’s rhetoric . . . formed a coherent foundation for his programs and propaganda” (p. 8). Then, to further appropriate “The Ethic of Expediency” for her argument in favor of cultural research and against social constructionism, Longo argued at length on what Katz would have done if he had been a social constructionist. Thus, not only the argument, but its author as well, was given a new modality. (And yet a reshaping of Katz that still permitted Longo to participate in the discipline’s boundary work over the Nazi gas van document. By contrast, the explicit and personal nature of Moore’s [2004] attacks on Katz, to the point of “questioning” his motives, placed Moore outside the discussion.) In the end, however, the disciplinary consensus remained intact: the Nazis, Longo asserted, erected a “runaway technocracy” that was “built single-mindedly on scientific knowledge” (p. 9).

Also that year when Dombrowski (2000a) devoted an entire chapter in his textbook on Ethics in Technical Communication to the problem of Nazi technical communication, he returned to Brasseur’s objectivist paradigm in stating that the “Just memorandum presents a real example of technical objectivity taken to an extreme” (p. 103). Although the chapter reproduces the majority of the Kogon (1993/1983, pp. 228-230) translation of the gas van document, rather than the Lanzmann version,
Donmbrowki himself reorders the text in several notable respects (at least from the perspective of the present study, which argues the socio-cultural significance of such details): the original notation “Only Copy” and the document’s filing code are omitted; the salutation to Rauff is moved from the end of the document to the beginning; the reference to the Kulmhof truck explosion is stricken; the paragraphs are renumbered differently than the original; the proposals to reorient the vehicles’ gas nozzles, eliminate the observation windows, and add a winch-operated removable floor grid are deleted; and the final two paragraphs that discuss the difficulties in implementing changes and suggest a single prototype be built are likewise deleted. The net effect of this reordering is to omit portions of the document that place it within a larger organizational conversation and, as this study argued in Chapter 6, show how it drew on rhetorical resources (the “safety” narrative, the “transportation” metaphor) and linguistic resources (devaluation of thinking and sensing, modified verbs) to function as a boundary object for negotiating competing organizational interests in the Nazi regime. Indeed, although Dombrowski referenced the Becker field inspection report he did not connect it with the Just document. In line with the disciplinary consensus on putatively amoral Nazi technocrats, only those portions of the document mattered which most directly described the killing.

Dombrowski thus imposed an ordering on the text that lent itself to considering the gas van document only in isolation and not as a discourse within an actual rhetorical community. Such a rendering also changed the modality of the Katz thesis such that Dombrowski grafted it into his own claims about the technological imperative. In Katz’s (1992a) original article this line of reasoning is mentioned in passing only once, in a
single sentence that referenced Ellul’s theory—and that Katz qualified as a factor “that may partly explain what occurred” (p. 266, emphasis added). But in Dombrowski’s (2000a) reordering, the level of certainty regarding the operation of a technological imperative, “that what we can do, we should do” (p. 103, emphasis in original), is increased and becomes the main point. The rhetorical quality of the document, which was the focus of Katz’s analysis, is lost. Thus, in an article Dombrowski (2000b) published the same year, he surveyed the literature on technical communication ethics and characterized the Katz article as a riff on technological determinism. The word “rhetoric” does not appear in Dombrowski’s two-paragraph review. Instead, the “ethic of expediency” thesis is modified so that its main thrust becomes “the danger of having technical excellence serve as the sole rationale for action” (p. 16). The disciplinary consensus to ignore any Nazi “ethic” and emphasize only the killers’ “expediency” is reaffirmed, for the Nazi technical writers “lack” any ethics, were “profoundly amoral,” and acted with “the technical perfection of a technology [as] the sole rationale” (p. 16).

Like Arendt’s Eichmann, the gas van bureaucrats are not faulted for having wrong ethics but for having no ethics. And just as Dombrowski echoed Brasseur’s appropriation of “the ethic of expediency” to contest the objectivist paradigm, Monberg (2002) imparted the same modality such that “Steven Katz has forcefully revealed the consequences of . . . a ‘pure’ form of objectivity” (p. 216). Likewise, that same year a book review by Ornatowski (2002) asserted, “The foundation of this ethic [of expediency] is the detachment of technological rationality.” Finally, to culminate a dozen years of disciplinary discussion about the Katz thesis, the editors (Johnson-Eilola &
Selber, 2004) of *Central Works in Technical Communication* declared that in “Katz’s analysis of the rhetoric of Nazi memoranda during the Holocaust, he illustrates the potential of an ideologically neutral model of technical communication” (p. 193). This summation is breathtaking for, if the historical record of the Final Solution indicates anything, the SS perpetrators were anything *but* ideologically neutral—and yet this statement, the result from a dozen years of rhetorical boundary work, represents the definitive disciplinary consensus on Nazi technical communication to date.

**What the Orderings May Reveal**

Our cultural research methodology (Longo, 1998) therefore calls the question: What does this consensus, and the ordering of the Nazi text that is requires, reveal about technical communicators’ relationships to that text? One thing stands out: whatever a scholar is *against*, the Nazis are powerfully cited as being *for*. In this way, the SS gas van document is completely protean—or as Star and Griesemer’s (1989) original conception of boundary objects put it, is “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (p. 393). Arguably, Katz’s 1992 article may be said to have attained the same qualities as a boundary object itself. Even the phrase “ethic of expediency” has become a theme in the profession’s institutional narrative by which members of the discipline can pragmatically structure social actions. Use of the phrase no longer even requires explicit reference to the Nazi object or any summation of the Katz thesis. For example, Dragga (2001) in his influential critique of technical illustration
practices described a case that was “insensitive and indifferent to the human condition” and succinctly concluded, “It is a graphic that exhibits ‘the ethic of expediency’” (p. 266). And in a recent volume honored with a National Council of Teachers of English book award in technical and scientific communication, the editors’ (Scott, Long & Wills, 2006) introduction states, “In its more extreme forms, hyperpragmatism may be driven by an ethic of expediency, to use Katz’s term” (p. 9). No further explanation is needed. The blackbox works smoothly as the authors input their thesis about hyperpragmatism (“utilitarian efficiency . . . at the expense of . . . ethical action”), the box does its work, and the output is a “fact” that supports their claim. The boundary objects of the Nazi document, the Katz article, and the heuristic phrase have done their rhetorical boundary work: scholars with diverse, even opposing perspectives, can simply use “the ethic of expediency” to support their claims.

In the case of Nazi technical writing, interpretations perhaps reveal as much about the interpreter as about the interpreted. In my view, the disciplinary discourse may reveal a need to distance “us” from “them” and the thought that “they” might in some respects be people like “us.” This study has endeavored to demonstrate that even Nazi desk-murderers inhabited rhetorical communities with dynamics found in many organizations; that they shaped local versions of larger historical and cultural discourses to satisfy the exigences and epistemes of their times; that through their local discourses they engaged in sense-making by socially constructing coherent realities constitutive of organizational culture and identity; and that they produced boundary objects to temporarily negotiate their competing interests and fragmented interpretations in the face
of organizational change and ambiguity. From this perspective—from the “ontological shift” proposed at the outset of this study—comes the suggestion that, rather than be satisfied in ascribing wrongdoing to an absence of ethical action, it may be profitable to consider, as we will do in the concluding chapter, how communal boundary work can make wrong ethical action seem right.
CHAPTER 10
SOME ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

A Bias for Explanation

This study began by suggesting that an ontological shift—from a perspective which views “The Final Solution” in monolithic terms as a symbolically composite crime, to a perspective that sees the genocidal program as a contingent event of a polycratic, entropic, and punctuated nature—might open a door to new insights. Since then we have explored how the gas van administrators of the Nazi SS manifested the three dimensions of integration, by what they shared; differentiation, by the various subcultures they inhabited; and fragmentation, by their need to forge temporary and issue-specific consensus amidst organizational change, confusion, and ambiguity. Through Longo’s cultural research methodology we then charted the integrative elements of the killers’ shared historical context and national and institutional cultures, the differentiating elements of their organizational culture, and fragmenting elements of their individual biographies and motivations. The methodology led us next to interrogate how the texts of the Sipo Technical Matters Group constituted a discourse that constructed a rhetorical community, their documents functioning as boundary objects that drew upon metaphor, narrative, genre, and language to bridge their competing interests and create a temporary space for exchange. We then took the final steps called for by the methodology in looking at the ways subsequent analysts have imposed orderings on the Nazi gas van texts for the purposes of their respective studies—and discovered that the Just document, the lengthiest of the corpus, has functioned as a boundary object among
technical communication scholars, thereby revealing much about the discipline’s relationship to the text.

All of this, in laying bare the rhetorical boundary work performed by the Nazi documents, is well and good. We have learned, from a supreme worst case, about dynamics of organizational discourse. But beyond that, what difference can our understanding of these dynamics make? How might we apply this understanding of organizational discourses to our own organizational lives?

To explore the ethical implications of this study for organizational and technical communicators, let me begin with two observations. First of all, as the second and third generations after the Holocaust we did not experience the genocide directly but have encountered it only through mediation. What, then, is the effect of that mediation on the lessons we draw? Is our impulse for monolithic and universalized lessons driven, at least in part, by what mediates how we view the Holocaust? For most of us, our mediation is the histories we read, histories prepared by historians who, as a discipline, aspire to “scientific” inquiry and the discovery of generalizable laws. As Megill (1989) noted, historians evince a strong “bias for explanation,” or penchant for reasoning from effect to cause, which “is to be found in the theoretical and methodological handbooks” of historiography (p. 629). He described a “relative unanimity in [this] preoccupation” since historians “remain deeply influenced” by a philosophy of science “overwhelmingly concerned with ‘explanation,’ which [is] viewed as answering the ‘why’ question” (p. 628 n4). White (1999) similarly observed among historians the assumption that true historiography must be capable of “extract[ion] from its linguistic form, served up in a
condensed paraphrase purged of all figurative and tropological elements, and subjected to
tests of logical consistency as an argument and of predictive adequacy as a body of fact”
(p. 5). This explanatory bias is manifested in a yearning for universality and “the idea that
a field is scientific only if it produces general laws” (Megill, 1989, p. 633).

Are we, the generation that has only encountered the Holocaust through such
mediation, ourselves therefore biased toward generalizable answers? In my view, our
own bias for explanation carries over into discussions of technical communication ethics
through a tendency to view them, as Porter (1993) suggested, “as an infrequent moral
problem that may arise . . . as [in] a matter of the occasional whistle-blowing decision”
(p. 132) so that scholars “treat ethics as a matter of individual decision making . . .
separate from and prior to composing” (p. 130). This leads to an emphasis is on
generalizable ethical systems that prescribe the actions of individuals—rather than seeing
composition as social action that is by nature processual, so that ethical intuition is
inextricably bound up in the action and ethical decision-making is shaped by the
structural contexts in which it is grounded. Thus, if technical communicators perceive in
the monolithic enormity of “the Holocaust” a call for generalizable lessons, the “ethic of
expediency” (Katz, 1992a) may be more tractable for the discipline as a universalized
warning against amoral technocracy rather than an invitation—which Katz extended
more explicitly in an infrequently cited sequel article (1993)—to interrogate the vagaries
of how notions of prudence and virtue, including our own, are socially constructed.

But are these two perspectives—ethics as a prescription of individual action and
ethics as a description of structural contexts—mutually exclusive? I believe not and will
suggest below how they might be productively blended. Ethics and action are linked, not separable; for even as ethical decisions are outcomes of social action, ethical intuitions (Faber, 1999) simultaneously form an important ground for social action. The personnel of the Sipo Technical Matters Group acted not without any ethic but, rather, engaged in ethical action of the profoundest moment. When assigned to create and administer a program for gassing human beings, they each decided to accept their tasks in accordance with their ethical lights. But as we have seen, it was not simply a matter for each member of the rhetorical community to articulate a clear-cut ethical philosophy and on that basis decide, at a given moment in time, that henceforth he would accept the ethical primacy of the “occupational safety” narrative—and of the “war” and “transportation” metaphors and the organizational genre of “special” missions and tasks—over the ethical claims of their society’s conventional morality. Perhaps Lanzmann is helpful here when, as we noted earlier, he declared, “[T]here is a gap between all the fields of explanation and the actual killing. You cannot give birth—in French we say engendre—you cannot generate such an evil” (quoted in Rosenbaum, 1998, p. 260, emphasis in original). The desk-murderers did not “give birth” to their murderous campaign by one day explaining it to themselves and deciding from that moment to proceed. Instead, their ethical intuitions gave salience to the organizational texts they produced as boundary objects, whereby they negotiated their differences and, for about six months, created and sustained a consensus to act.
Disciplinary discussions of professional ethics in technical communication have cited the example of Nazi technical writing as, on the one hand, a prime violation of Kant’s categorical imperative (Dombrowski, 2000a, pp. 53, 113), and on the other as a “devastating” challenge to “relativism in rhetoric and ethics” (Markel, 1997, p. 291; 2001, p. 108). But even though none would doubt that Nazi desk-murderers failed Kant’s (1785/2002) maxim to “act so that you use humanity . . . always at the same time as end and never merely as means” (pp. 46-47), can we say that the ethical lessons of their atrocities can be framed only in Kantian terms? Are ethical judgments from a “nonfoundational” perspective disqualified because, as Markel contended, Nazi technical writing is relativism’s own worst-case scenario?

Foucault’s (1984) approach to ethics—or at least his observation that individuals become defined by naturalized institutional authorities—is an important perspective for grasping why the men of the Sipo Technical Matters Group did what they did. As Dragga (1997) discovered, most communicators make ethical choices through intuition, feelings, or conscience (pp. 166-168). And Faber (1999), who built on Dragga’s work to propose a theory of “intuitive ethics,” noted that intuitions are “a composite of cultural lessons” whose values and ideologies are routinized “until their adoption simply becomes common place” (p. 193). Likewise, as we have seen, the SS gas van murderers intuitively shared common historical and cultural contexts—a history of religious, economic and racial anti-Semitism, a culture steeped in völkisch values of national community and the leadership principle—which permitted them to produce texts with metaphors, narratives,
and genres that resonated across otherwise diverse organizational interests. By generating boundary objects to bridge competing subcultures, their documents and discourses created islands of temporary stability—zones to intuitively marshal routinized and ethicized values and ideologies for issue-specific consensuses—amid the constant flux of organizational change, confusion, and ambiguity. (A parallel to this concept is suggested by Katz and Rhodes [2010] in their recent discussion of “ethical frames.”) Yet, in contrast to this picture of individuals making decisions from a constellation of cultural and institutional biases, much of the literature on technical communication ethics focuses on single moments of decision—such as “the” decision to launch the Challenger space shuttle or “the” decision to knowingly publish a misleading user manual.

Most of the current literature on technical communication ethics generally places the two perspectives—ethics as a prescription of individual action and ethics as a description of structural contexts—in binary opposition. Markel (1993, 1997) has argued strenuously for modern “foundational” approaches to ethics and against postmodern “nonfoundational” approaches, offering technical communicators an either/or choice. On the other hand, Dombrowski (1995) disdains the “technologizing” of ethics. Faber’s (1999) theory of intuitive ethics draws from Bourdieu, Fairclough, and Foucault. And Sullivan and Martin (2001) have suggested that communicators develop a narrative approach to ethics by making a habit of telling the “universal audience” (a concept borrowed from Perelman [1969]) a story of how their actions in a given situation affirm life. Yet I contend that reconciliation between modern and postmodern ethical approaches may be found in the concept, described below, of “prescriptive” and “descriptive” ethics.
as being complementary approaches for guiding ethical action. And by recognizing that ethics are both an outcome and a ground for the social action of rhetoric, we can move beyond a perhaps somewhat simplistic and ahistorical explanation of Nazi technical writing as amoral technocracy, and begin a discussion which can lead us toward a deeper understanding of the social field on which our technical and organizational communications play out.

This study has argued that organizations are comprised of multiple voices and competing interests, that the boundaries between these interests must be bridged (at least temporarily on an issue-specific basis) for consensual action to occur and that, when prompted by an integrative exigence, organizations can generate discursive objects (such as texts and documents) that are plastic enough for adaptation to each interest’s needs and yet robust enough to bridge their identities and thereby create a temporary trading zone for consensus. Since these social actions generates zones across boundaries in order to enable further social actions—and since ethical intuitions are an important ground for giving boundary objects the salience needed to do rhetorical boundary work—then it is useful to conceive of ethics, as well as actions, playing out across these zones. For this reason I find it useful to draw from Sturges’s (1992) concept of an Ethical Dilemma Domain and his notion that ethical questions should be conceived not as single points of decision but as positioned within a proverbial gray area. This view is markedly similar to Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall’s (1965) social judgment theory, which proposes that a belief or opinion held by a person should be conceived not as a point along a line but as a band or “latitude of acceptance.” By seeing the Nazi technical writers as individuals who
could tolerate ethical choices within certain thresholds, we change the basic question about their documents. Those who see an opinion as a point on a line will ask, “Why did they make ‘the’ decision to facilitate genocide?” But when we see opinion as a band, then our focus shifts and we ask, “What cultural and institutional factors shifted the writers’ latitudes of acceptance so that genocide fell within their tolerable ethical thresholds?” With that new question, our analysis moves away from categorical Kantian ethics to the realm of rhetorical communities that govern persuasion and influence.

We could ask, then, as Dragga (1996, 1997) and Faber (1999) might do, how racial anti-Semitism may have been routinized to become the intuition that guided the ethical decisions of the desk-murderers. In an organization as massive as the Nazi bureaucracy, such routinization could have been driven by a plethora of reasons: careerism, deference to authority, true belief, and more. But like the practitioners in Dragga’s study, at the level of individual ethical decision-making they acted on culturally informed intuition. How, then, can we break through the naturalized intuitions of our own organizational settings and strive toward ethical conduct?

On the one hand, Markel (1997) has taken “nonfoundational” (and especially postmodern) ethics to task for not providing technical communicators with actionable guides to behavior (p. 290). On the other hand, because “foundational” ethics are categorical, then by their nature, systems such as Kant’s (1785/2002) are prescriptive rather than descriptive. In general terms, foundational ethics may tell us what to do but they don’t explain anything, whereas nonfoundational ethics may explain things but they don’t tell us what to do.
Sturges’ (1992) posited that ethical dilemmas are functions of significance and magnitude. Whether or not you should take a pencil from work, for example, does not present a dilemma because the significance and magnitude of the action are so obviously trivial. And whether or not you should kill someone in a premeditated act does not (for most people) present a dilemma because the significance and magnitude are obviously so high. But whether or not you should kill someone in self-defense may pose a dilemma because even though the magnitude of the act is high, the significance—at least legally and morally—is less. Thus, in between the clearly trivial and the clearly unethical is a gray band in which ethical questions present dilemmas. Similarly, Sherif’s (1965) social judgment theory holds,

An attitude is not adequately represented by a single point on a continuum . . . [but rather] the ranges or latitudes of rejection, acceptance, and noncommitment are also crucial . . . [so that] the latitude of rejection increases with the extremity of the respondent’s most accepted position and with his involvement in the issue . . . Assimilation and acceptance occur when the communication falls within or near the range of accepted positions, but when the communication falls far beyond this range, contrast and rejection result. (Saltzstein, 1966, pp. 162-163)

How are individuals’ ethical thresholds or latitudes constructed? Here Foucault’s (1984) project of describing the regularization of institutionalized authorities comes into play: “Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with
universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying” (pp. 45-46). I contend that in such an investigation the rhetorical boundary work that occurs in institutions and organizations is a productive object for inquiry, for it is by and through this work that we constitute ourselves as subjects for collective action.

Foundational approaches to ethics are advantageous because they suggest possible courses of action when organizational and technical communicators are confronted with ethical dilemmas. But why do issues become ethical dilemmas in the first place? How do individuals determine significance and magnitude so that particular questions fall between what they deem clearly trivial and clearly unethical? And what is the influence of cultures and institutions upon those individuals as they place ethical questions within their personal latitudes of acceptance, rejection, or noncommittal? Nonfoundational approaches can illuminate such ethical questions—even the question of Nazi technical communication that, at first glance, seems so obviously amenable to a Kantian framework. As Sullivan and Martin (2001) pointed out, “There are times when we will find ourselves in an ethical dilemma in which moral laws are in conflict,” and “the weakness with [the Kantian] position is that it provides no course of action when there seems to be no morally right or correct choice” (p. 264). Although the practicing professionals whom Dragga (1997) interviewed at length may refer to “the narratives of cases and scenarios” that they heard in their professional training, they “come to the job with a sense of ethics developed chiefly through the influence of their mothers and
fathers.” Then at work, they “look to colleagues and supervisors as sources of continuing moral guidance” and ultimately “make their moral choices according to feelings and conscience” (p. 173). Or as we have seen in this study, they generate boundary objects whose communally validated metaphors, narratives, genres, and linguistic forms resonate across the organization’s individual interests and thereby (re)produce the rhetorical community.

How are feelings and conscience formed? The literature suggests a number of answers to that question. Faber (1999) has extended Dragga’s insight—and connected it to Foucault’s (1984) ethical approach—by citing key social theorists who have “documented processes whereby agents unconsciously make ideological, political, and value-based judgments . . . [and perpetuate] certain values, ideologies, and political objectives [that] are unknowingly disseminated and reproduced through specific functions of everyday life” (p. 191). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have shown how figurative language reifies cultural beliefs. Bordieu (1980/1990) coined the term *habitus* to describe the “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (p. 53) by which societies structurally inculcate their ideologies. Giddens (1984) cited “the habitual taken-for-granted character of the vast bulk of activities of day-to-day life” (p. 376), a process of routinization by which societies “structurate” common rules for morality, power, and communication. Fairclough (1992) noted how a society’s very discourse naturalizes certain values as language itself becomes invested with favored ideological assumptions. Now this study—which, as we reviewed in Chapter 3, understands organizations “as shaping local versions of broader societal [discourses so that] . . . organizational cultures
are then best understood not as unitary wholes or as stable sets of subcultures but as mixtures of cultural manifestations of different levels and kinds” (Alvesson, 2002, pp. 190-191)—brings these societal processes to the organizational level and suggests how organizational actors unconsciously engage in rhetorical boundary work to disseminate and reproduce their own local manifestations of broader discourses.

Thus the gas van bureaucrats undoubtedly acted, on a personal level, for a variety of everyday reasons. But on a deeper level, their decision to place genocide within their ethically tolerable latitudes of acceptance must be analyzed in terms of their cultural cognition, habitus, routinization, naturalization, vested language, and regularized institutional authority. Such an analysis does not excuse the SS perpetrators as being merely culturally determined products of their society or institution. But a full understanding of their actions is impossible without such analyses. Even Foucault (1984), a postmodernist who rejected a foundational approach to ethics, believed that individuals could cultivate the power to denaturalize and subvert institutionalized influences by asking these four types of questions:

1. **Ethical substance:** Which part of my self or my behavior is influenced or concerned with moral conduct? What do I do because I want to be ethical?
2. **Mode of subjection:** How am I being told to act morally? Who is asking? To whose values am I being subjected?
3. **Ethical work:** How must I change my self or my actions in order to become ethical in this situation?
4. **Ethical goal:** Do I agree with this definition of morality? Do I consent to becoming this character in this situation? To what am I aspiring to when I behave ethically? (Foucault, 1984, pp. 352-355, adapted in Faber, 1999, p. 195; Moore, 1987, pp. 82-83)

Is Nazi technical communication a “devastating” challenge to postmodern “relativism,” as Markel (1997) contended? I believe not. If we take up the Foucauldian project of analyzing “the kind of collective that is implied by the history of an institution’s beginnings and the regularization of its practices, for it is in the context of the collective’s identity that individual decisions are made” (Moore, 1987, p. 89), then we can find useful insights into the Nazi killers’ ethical decision making. And if we conceive that our inquiry is concerned not simply with “the” single moment of decision but with the individual, organizational, and cultural dynamics—including the rhetorical boundary work—by which human actors shift the latitudes of what they are willing to accept or reject, then we open ourselves to a descriptive approach to ethics rather than taking only a prescriptive approach.

Thus, I make a twofold proposal for a synthesis of foundational and nonfoundational approaches to ethics. First, both foundational approaches (which focus on prescription) and nonfoundational approaches (which focus on description) are needed for full understanding. Second, although foundational approaches can help organizational and technical communicators set stable and appropriate thresholds for what is clearly trivial and what is clearly unethical, when questions arise in the latitude between those
thresholds and thereby become true ethical dilemmas, then surely a nonfoundational approach—such Foucault’s (1984) four areas of questioning—can be a useful supplement to foundational approaches.

Each of us is, in our own organizational life, engaged in a daily process of sense-making and of negotiating that life in the face of constant organizational ambiguity and change. In that ongoing progress, the boundary objects we encounter and which we communally generate are many—from the kinds of documents described in this study, to the diverse arrays of objects described by Star and Griesemer (1989) and by Wilson and Herndl (2007). All three studies, though in highly different contexts, indicate that such boundary objects are intrinsic to organizing—indeed, the organizations under study could not cooperate effectively without these objects, for they bridged competing interests while permitting a common identity. But because organizational conditions are in constant flux, these spaces of consensus are inherently temporary and require constant maintenance and renegotiation. Star and Griesemer and then Wilson and Herndl have shown how boundary objects can be benign, while the present study demonstrates by the example of Nazi genocide how these objects can produce effects of even unprecedented evil. Somewhere between these poles of salutary cooperation and extreme malignity will lay the boundary objects that we encounter each day. Foundational or prescriptive ethical systems can provide beneficial and actionable guides for our responses. But without a framework for describing and denaturalizing the rhetorical boundary work in technical and organizational communication, we may be unable to take ethical action as our own boundary objects continue to both legitimate and hide themselves from our view.
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