

Chapter 6

Remembering the Holocaust

"The darkness he was in and the darkness Fagan described--the darkness where assassins move and arsonists provide the only light." (p. 387)

The dilemma for the post-war artists who experienced the Holocaust themselves was that they found that their words, their images, their techniques were far too impoverished to grasp the experience of the "Final Solution". Further, they were like Lady Macbeth, stained irretrievably with the tattoo of guilt as survivors of the experience. They might repeat over and over again, 'Out, out, damned spot,' but "the scars of the outrage would remain with us forever."¹ There was an incommensurability between their artistic tools and the physical **and** spiritual annihilation which was the central thrust of the Holocaust. Reality often exceeded the power of the imagination to conjure up images commensurate with the experience the artist wished to record.²

If the Holocaust is viewed as "the triumph of death in its most nihilistic guise," to use Eli Wiesel's famous phrase, then there appeared to be an abyss, an incommensurability between the techniques used to portray the Holocaust or the Shoah and the experience itself. Steven Spielberg, nevertheless, joined the side of those who believed that the Holocaust should be represented, and that the representation could be done with honesty and integrity. In making that choice, his battle was not only with the Holocaust deniers, but with those at the other end of the spectrum who insisted that the reality of the Holocaust outstripped any human capacity to represent it.

Hannah Arendt once described the Nazi destruction of the Jews as such a gross lie that documenting it as a fact would be unconvincing.³ The problem, as Arendt described it, is that we know of no event in history where the story, particularly of the concentration camps, is so difficult to tell. In addition, Arendt made the claim that explaining the Holocaust within traditional categories was also impossible.⁴ Not impossible per se. Explanation required subsuming the actions of the perpetrators and the event within new categories of comprehension.

Claude Lanzmann went a step further than Hannah Arendt by arguing that the Holocaust could neither be explained nor represented. Yet he made the great classic of the Holocaust, *Shoah*, which Spielberg admired so much. However, he did so by refusing to "picture" the Holocaust. Any fictional representation would be a sacrilege. Instead, his film focused on the testimony of survivors - Jewish, German, Polish. Spielberg acknowledged that thus far, "documentary filmmakers have done the best work in communicating information about the Shoah, especially Claude Lanzmann's, *Shoah*, which I think is the greatest work done about the Holocaust on the screen,"⁵ Lanzmann did not return the compliment.

The Holocaust is above all unique in that it erects a ring of fire around itself, a borderline that

cannot be crossed because there is a certain ultimate degree of horror that cannot be transmitted. To claim it is possible to do so is to be guilty of the most serious transgression. Fiction is transgression. I deeply believe that there are some things that cannot and should not be represented...both the serial (*Holocaust*) and the Hollywood movie (*Schindler's List*) transgress because they 'trivialise', in the sense that they erase the unique nature of the Holocaust...The trouble is that, in a way, reconstruction is tantamount to fabricating archives.⁶

Lanzmann phrased Spielberg's dilemma as follows: "He (Spielberg) could not tell Schindler's story without also saying what the Holocaust was. And how could he do that by telling the story of a German who saved 1,300 Jews, since the overwhelming majority of Jews were not saved?"⁷ The 1300 Jews rescued make up less than one-sixtieth of one percent of the 6,000,000 Jews murdered. In telling the story of the rescue of the Schindler Jews, the Holocaust could **not** be represented but only distorted. When Claude Lanzmann asked the critical question: "So does *Schindler's List* distort the overall picture, or twist the historical truth?" he answered, "I think it does."⁸ Lanzmann said that for Spielberg, "the Holocaust is a backdrop. The blindingly dark sun of the Holocaust is not confronted."⁹

According to the critics opposed to representing the Holocaust, particularly in film, representation, even when the Holocaust is only used as a backdrop (in fact, particularly when it is only used as a backdrop), is impossible because destructive desire in its extreme horrific form cannot be portrayed. The techniques of representation are inadequate to the task.¹⁰

On the other hand, there is an imperative to represent the Holocaust lest we forget. But that imperative goes deeper. There is within us a deep desire imaginatively to represent what terrifies and horrifies. "The pressing need to represent the Holocaust in poetry, novels, films, drama, music and history must come from a desire to repeat in the imagination happenings and events that horrify and fascinate."¹¹ Destructive desire, especially in its extreme form, demands representation.

But does it demand to be represented in order to rationalize and normalize demonic desire itself? In other words, the issue is not only one about the inability to capture the full "truth" of the Holocaust or the shortcomings of language and artistic techniques to represent the Holocaust - the aesthetics of representation. The debate is ultimately a moral one. In representing the Holocaust, is the Holocaust

normalized so that its singularity and inexplicability are denied? If the Holocaust is normalized, does this mean that destructive desire, that radical evil, is conveyed as something which is part and parcel of 'normal' reality?

While Claude Lanzmann condemned Spielberg for using the Holocaust even as the background to the tale of Oskar Schindler, Jason Epstein, a critic writing in *The New York Review of Books*, took an opposite tack. He was critical that the Holocaust was left in the background and not dealt with more directly so the underlying hatred that provided its thrust could be understood. "Spielberg... has placed the oddity Schindler in the foreground of his tale and let him determine the triumphant outcome."¹² Epstein argued that even if the movie brings the Holocaust to our attention, it does not confront us with the underlying issues of intolerance and man's humanity to man. "*Schindler's List*, as its admirers insist, makes us face the Holocaust yet again. But it also encouraged us to face the Holocaust in a most complacent and self-serving way."¹³

Everyone agreed that the central issue of the Holocaust and its perpetrators was the issue of an unbounded destructive desire. Some argued that such actions were difficult to represent and retain credibility. Others claimed that such actions could not be and should not be represented at all. Still others insisted that if unbounded destructive desire were to be represented, it should not be done as background to a story of rescue.

However, Spielberg had his defenders. The critic in the *National Review*, John Simon, celebrated Spielberg's portrayal of the Holocaust. "What makes the film art? First, its ability to treat catastrophe with complete understatement and an objectivity that, though by no means feelingless, does not parade its feelings...the film is unostentatiously but scrupulously authentic."¹⁴ David Margolick, a critic writing in *The New York Times*, agreed with John Simon, arguing that the film managed to be not only authentic, but accessible as well, something *Shoah* did not manage.

What '*Schindler's List*' has shown is that in the right hands - that is hands sympathetic and scrupulous enough to care about authenticity and capable of making the fantasm credible - fiction can appear more real than reality. By adding plot and character and Itzhak Pearlman's violin, by softening the horrid reality enough to keep it watchable, Mr. Spielberg seems to have made the Holocaust more accessible, believable and relevant to more people than ever before - and with the Holocaust revisionism and Louis Farrakhan in the news, at a particularly welcome time.¹⁵

Not only did some critics defend Spielberg's portrait of the Holocaust as authentic, accessible, credible and relevant, but they argued that the film allowed the audience to enter the picture, to experience the Holocaust in a way that *Shoah* never did. The movie, as a powerful portrait of the Holocaust, was not only moving and compelling, but, "The movie puts you inside the experiences of Holocaust survivors and actual victims as close as a movie can."¹⁶ Or as Jonathan Alter stated even more forcefully, "'Schindler's List' inserts the audience squarely inside the crime of the century, and by doing so, it enlarges the potential of the medium itself - to teach as well as entertain, to evoke history as much as fantasy, to prepare us for our own context of violence."¹⁷ For a film-maker rather than a movie-maker, as Spielberg used to refer to himself, that is as a cinematic director who previously was committed to entertaining rather than informing or educating, what is the consequence of this new marriage between the art of film-making and the craft of movie-making?¹⁸

The critics may not be so much at odds as might first appear. The Holocaust may be a background which is authentic in one sense, and accessible, credible and relevant because of its realism, but may not be authentic in another sense of portraying the Holocaust in such a way that we understand and comprehend the source of the horror, the roots of man's deepest destructive desires. So while the movie educates an audience *about* the Holocaust, informs viewers that the Holocaust occurred, and captures some degree of the horror, it may not educate the audience about the Holocaust in a deeper sense.

How has the Holocaust been remembered? What are the conventions which have been used in the past to record this event in our memory systems? How does Spielberg's remembrance of this event - both of its perpetrators and victims - reinforce those memories or dismember them? What facts are selected and explanatory generalizations adopted to accomplish this task?

Though Spielberg did not get his narrative of the Holocaust quite right (as I will shortly demonstrate), he at least avoided the fallacious reasoning of the tragic portrait of the Holocaust that has dominated modern discourse. After all, he let us **see** the Holocaust. This alone, quite aside from the film's historical distortions and ersatz morality, quite aside from its brilliance as a piece of cinema, makes the film important and valuable.

What is the tragic portrait of the Holocaust that Spielberg avoided and was he correct in ignoring it? The Hannah Arendt tragic perspective on the Holocaust was recently updated and elaborated upon brilliantly by Zygmunt Bauman. In

that version, the Jews were themselves infected with the Nazi virus and allowed themselves to become contributors to the process of extermination. The Jews were depicted in a different language than innocence. They share fully in the guilt.

This judgement not only applies to the past leaders in Europe but to the present Jewish leadership. In both Israel and abroad those leaders are castigated for using the Holocaust to justify some deplorable Israeli state policies and to solidify the diaspora Jewish community using the religion of the Holocaust. From the tragic perspective, all the conflicts, all the degrees of collaboration of the Jews with the Nazis in their own destruction, become the central focus of the portrait.

The Nazis themselves no longer have to be pictured as a uniform black, from the evil intentions of Hitler to the sadism and cruelty of his henchmen. They are instead normalized, depicted as merely an extreme manifestation of modern bureaucracy and instrumental rationality gone awry. The crime, thus, is no longer a German one, but a crime of modernity in which we all share. The Holocaust was a byproduct of the creation of the all-powerful nation-state, the civilization of those states based on the esteem for value free science, and the social engineering of perfection in the name of instrumental rationality.

The Holocaust was an outcome of a unique encounter between factors by themselves quite ordinary and common; and that the possibility of such an encounter could be blamed to a very large extent on the emancipation of the political state, with its monopoly of its means of violence and its audacious engineering ambitions, from social control - following step-by-step dismantling of all non-political power resources and institutions of social self-management.¹⁹

The Holocaust is then not the antithesis of modernism but its expression. Why? Because the Holocaust was just an industrialized system to produce death. This is what modernism is about - production. It does not matter what is produced. There are no values to assess what products are or are not acceptable. What matters is that the communication systems, the specialized skills, the engineers, the railways, the chemical factories, the civil servants, the whole system of a division of labour involving the synchronization of autonomous but complementary actions could all be coordinated in one bureaucratic maze to engage in such production. Civilization is one big mask, one camouflage covering the face of evil, which is the real underlying face of modernism. Modernism is the worship of techné, of means without value given to the ends, of the efficiency of matching means to ends.

Both Spielberg's and Keneally's versions of *Schindler's List* belie this interpretation. Amon, the epitome of evil, is the antithesis of a vehicle of the banality of evil, of a bureaucratic apparatchik. He is cruel. He is arbitrary. He is a psychopath. As Helen Hirsch said, he is the antithesis of rationality and bureaucracy precisely because there are no rules by which you know what you can do to live or die. The issue was not being recruited to participate in one's own destruction, but that there were no rules to the game.

This is the contradiction of Nazism - arbitrary exercise of destructive power in a *guise* of bureaucratic norms. The tragedians takes the bureaucratic norms to be the expression of Nazism. The romantics take the arbitrary cruelty and abnormality of the evil to be the characteristic features of Nazism. The fact is, they were **both** the Janus (and contradictory) faces of Nazism - the normal, functioning rule bound system, **but** in service to the appetites of powerful arbitrary and truly mad masters at the top. The fact that only 10 per cent of the SS could be characterized as 'abnormal' is irrelevant. The very foundation of the system was to corrupt its participants because the structure itself was a contradiction of a sick marriage of the technology of modernism with an inherited medieval system of organization which is **not** the expression of modernism.

Modernism worships the reconfiguration of economics in service to desire. Nazism reconfigures desire in the service of economics and the worship of the selfish gene. Nazism is not modernism gone awry, but the inverse mirror of modernism. Nazism is totalitarian rule under an all powerful state. Modernism extols the individual and his or her hedonistic pursuit of desires. In modernism, the power of the state is constantly undermined by technology and innovation; its power is not reinforced. The factory system was but one passing expression of the contradictory wedding of modernism with the old order, in which a medieval model of industrial peasants operating within a feudal organization were used to produce goods on a mass scale. But modernism is not to be identified with routinization of systems, but with innovation and change. Modernization **increasingly** places more and more responsibility in the hands of individuals. The problem with modernity is **not** the all powerful governing state and business organization controlling all aspects of the lives of individuals. Industrial systems created on such a blend of medievalism and modernism end up as industrial dinosaurs whether in state capitalist or entrepreneurial capitalist systems.

The Nazi system was **not** the expression of modernism. The tragedians have taken the contradictory systems built up when feudal systems of organization were wedded to modernist assumptions and goals as the face of modernism when they are,

in fact, the failure of modernism to throw off the shackles of an inherited hierarchical *formal* feudal order of authority when it no longer has any substantive power.

Let me just take first one item of 'fact' followed by another item of 'value' in the Arendt/Baumann vision of the Holocaust. One of the presumptions of the tragic perspective on the Holocaust is that the essence of the Holocaust was the factory system producing death, and not the intentions of the Nazis to exterminate the Jews from Europe by the most expeditious means available. Killing Jews point blank was "primitive and inefficient."²⁰ "(T)he version of anti-Semitism ought to be seen as a thoroughly modern phenomenon; that is something which could occur only in an advanced state of modernity."²¹ "(O)ne could neither conceive of, nor make, mass murder on the Holocaust scale of (sic!) no matter how many *Kristallnächte*."²² The point was that it would take 200 years to produce the number of deaths to match the achievements of the Holocaust.

One of the great values of the film, and the volume on which it was based, is to belie this misrepresentation. In three days of search and destroy missions in the Krakow ghetto, with a relatively small group of armed soldiers hunting those who were hidden, 4,500 were killed. This is just the murderous product of one SS group in one ghetto in three days searching out those who were in hiding. Those who came into the open could be dispatched much more quickly. But even assuming this scale of operation, mounting an action every second week, assuming the victims **all hid and resisted**, in three years, only ten groups of SS troops could wipe out three million people. Since the other three million Jews died from starvation and disease, 6,000,000 Jewish dead could be produced quite independently of the factory system. The majority of the approximately 600,000 Belorussian Jews²³ were killed well before the extermination camps were created to kill Jews by factory technology.

"Then, around mid-October (of 1941), special and action commandos of Einsatzgruppe B started decimating the Jewish communities of Soviet Belorussia by murdering not only men but women, children, and the aged as well. The ghetto of Minsk was among the few to be largely spared. By the end of the year a large percentage of the Belorussian Jews were dead, and those who remained alive were enclosed and tormented in ghettos."²⁴

In the Ukraine, "in retaliation for the arson in Kiev all Jews were arrested and that on September 29 and 30 a total of 33,771 Jews were executed."²⁵ At that rate, six million Jews could be killed in 200 days. The Khmer Rouge did not need factories in that society to dispatch 1,000,000 of their

countrymen. Stalin did not need factories of death to kill **thirty** million. And, as I indicated in my preface, the Hutu extremists took ten weeks to murder 800,000 Tutsis. It would take some analysis, but I believe an industrial analyst could demonstrate that given the bureaucracy, the railways, etc., the factories of death were not critical to the mass production of death. Whether they were cost efficient is another story. Less than ten dollars worth of pellets were used to gas about 1,500 Jews. In terms of the cost of the gas alone, the production factories of death were extremely efficient, especially when, in moral horror, in an effort to save even this money, children were thrown into the crematoria without being gassed first or the amount of gas was reduced and the death was more agonizing and painful.

But if the costs of the troops, of the facilities, of the transportation system are all taken into consideration, it is questionable whether this system was efficient at all. It had the **appearance** of efficiency. This was their import. The factories of death were conjoined with the factories of production to get rid of labour not useful to the productive process as part of the compromise between those who believed in maintaining the Jews as slave labourers and those who were intent on eliminating them. The factories of death were not so much the results of a concern with the efficient production of death, but the needs of a bureaucracy to perpetuate itself. They were offshoots of the euthanasia experiments when the death bureaucracy was looking for something to do when the euthanasia program was cut off because of German Christian protests after 100,000 had been exterminated.

The other item which the novel and the movie both challenge with the vividness of detail rather than systematic argument is the motivation behind the mass killing. This issue of "values" of the tragedians can also be stated simply. Modern antisemitism is discontinuous with traditional antisemitism, and is born, **not** out of personal animosity and age-old ethnic hatreds, but out of the modern process of homogenization and the threat of eliminating differences. As a result of emancipation, the distinctiveness of the Jews had to be reestablished on a new and stronger foundation than culture, independent of human will and creativity, where Jewishness displaced Judaism by being identified with genetic racial inheritance. In sum, because Modernism homogenized humans and took away their identities which depended on differences with others, differences had to be reinvented in a new and much more deep-rooted guise.

But why the Jews? Why not establish difference on citizenship - Germans versus French? Why the distaste for the camouflaged Jew, assimilated and unrecognized as having any difference? Why is there a need for difference based on racial inheritance? Only because racial inheritance was the bedrock

of belief, not of moderns, but of the 'bluebloods', of the aristocrats who believed in their divine right to rest exclusive rulership in their class and the petty bourgeoisie and professionals who aspired to aristocratic status. The bourgeois were the expression of the success of modernism. The Jews were increasingly successful bourgeoisie. Antisemitism became more virulent, and projected that virulence as an attribute of the Jews rather than themselves, precisely because Jews were **not** hidden, precisely because they were successful bourgeoisie who were also obviously Jews even though they no longer 'looked' different. Jews belied the aristocratic premise of the superiority of blood. It is not the homogenization of modernism and the need to reestablish differences on a deeper level, but the resurrection of a belief in fundamental differences in the face of a modernism that allowed differences and pluralism in the private sphere while everyone was treated as equal in the public one.

The testimony of the Poles in Claude Lanzmann's film attests to this version. The movie belies the tragic perspective's conviction that the Nazis resented the Jews simply because Jews were no longer anonymous. It is not their public role as 'one of us' that is the problem, but their appearance in public even though they are not one of us. In one vivid scene in the movie, Nazi thugs laugh as one of their numbers cut the side curls off a Hasidic Jew as he stands stoical and defenceless among them. Why pick on Hasids if those who are resented are the camouflaged Jews who cannot be distinguished from pure Aryans?

The tragic version of the Holocaust is itself built on two radically different hypothesis, that the Holocaust was a direct expression of the rationality of modernism, and that modern antisemitism was an innovation based on the rejection of the homogenization of modernism. In other words, Nazism was both the most extreme expression of modernist outlooks and values, and a rejection of those values.

The problem with this thesis is that it is the antithesis of modernism, the expression of the revolt against modernism's assumption that all humans are created equal and capable of self-perfection independent of their heritage. Modernism is based on the presumption of self-determination of all peoples, a traditional Jewish value which opposed both tyrants and imperial systems of organization. Modernism is based on the rule of law. In that sense, modernism is totally consistent with pre-modern Jewish norms and principles. The failure of modernism is its inability to base the sovereignty of peoples and the rule of law on a commanding voice of moral authority.

In the tragic version, the Holocaust was virtually an inevitable product of modernism. "(W)e live in a type of society that made the Holocaust possible, and that contained

nothing which could stop the Holocaust from happening."²⁶ But it is a version that only works by making totalitarian structures the epitome of modernism when they are, in fact, the results of **bad** attempts to combine premodern organizational forms with modern conceptions and priorities.

Both the book and the film belie the tragic version of the Holocaust. Though neither offers an explanation, both fictional versions are consistent with an account that recognizes genocide, not as an expression of modernity, but as the expression of the transition to modernity in which a group, rooted in a homogeneous view of the world, but without the experience or traditions of rule of the old elites, acquire power. In an effort to establish their own distinctive elitist identity, they reject past traditions and increasingly resort to violence to forge a common identity. It is the interaction of culture, with stressful economic, political and social conditions in the adaptation to modernity that facilitate the creation of genocidal regimes. Revolutionary and war situations combined with very specific situations translate facilitating conditions into total domestic genocides. In such conditions, the victims do not play a part in their own destruction by their passivity, but, in the face of overwhelming force and their own lack of access to arms, effective isolation from neighbours who are themselves intimidated by that violence, as well as the passivity of outsiders and by-standers, and a normal defensive 'freezing-up' as a result of their own impotence, the victims become fodder for the developing murder machine.²⁷

Any narrative of the Holocaust must be constructed consistent with the soundest theoretical foundation and according to all the facts as they are known. Further, the aesthetic format should be memorable; it must awaken us to the repetitions in the present. As Michael Ignatieff wrote,

All forms of moral engagement rely on narratives which turn history into a story of rights and wrongs. The cause of liberal interventionism failed in Bosnia not because intervention was too risky or too likely to fail, but because the cause itself could not make its moral narratives prevail.²⁸

Spielberg justly belies the tragic version of the Holocaust. In that sense his film is great success as history. Further, though his movie is a powerful contribution to monumental history and to sensitizing the present generation about the past, and though it is the most authentic and powerful evocation of the terror of the Holocaust for the victims, and, therefore, is an **emotionally** accurate piece of antiquarian history, it is not a comprehensive or even an adequate representation about even the act of witnessing itself. It is certainly not a contribution to an integrative

antiquarian history so that we emerge with a better understanding of why what happened happened. In that sense, Spielberg is also a false witness.

Spielberg's film and the lives of the survivors are witnesses to Hitler's failure to exterminate the Jews from history and the face of this earth. It has been the most powerful rebuke for the masses of those who would continue Hitler's work. "The operation's aim (the Holocaust deniers) is obvious; it is a question of depriving, ideologically, a community of what represents its historical memory."²⁹ But those rescued are also witnesses to Hitler's relative success in eliminating the prominent place of the Jews in European history and geography. Further, Spielberg's film is not a testament to witnessing, to the Jewish tradition of a witness as a key source to the truth. This is because Spielberg has himself adopted a Christian sense of witness, of witness in the form of witnessing through your life rather than through testimony and the oral and written word. In Christianity, one is a witness in what one does with one's life. So Oskar Schindler gives witness both to his own virtue and the fact that Germans could have acted to save Jews.³⁰ Spielberg provides a testimony to a small part of what was and a larger possibility of what might have been.

The problem is not only on the focus of a German who provides a witness for what could have been done. There is also a problem in the depiction of non-Germans. In Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, there are no equivalent Poles to those in Claude Lanzmann's film. We hear the raucous shriek of the young Polish girl screaming, "Goodbye Jews! Goodbye Jews! Goodbye Jews!" as they are being herded into the ghetto. The message is clear and unequivocal. The Poles sympathized with what the Nazis did to the Jews. There are no other Poles in the film testifying otherwise. But the story is far more equivocal as Lanzmann showed. Some Poles helped Jews. And some of them did so out of very mixed motives and sometimes with disastrous results for the Jews and themselves. In the movie, *Angry Harvest*, the Polish farmer hides the fleeing woman out of a combination of genuine charity and personal loneliness and frustration. Sexual obsession and possessiveness overtake his initial ambivalences so that, though he takes the risk of being caught, he is ultimately a coward who betrays his "prisoner" whom he saved by not telling her about her husband. There is another level of betrayal. He argues with her and continues to hold the Jews libel for the death of Christ and tries to win her conversion. His betrayal is spiritual as well as physical. He is a false witness on both the transcendental and the immanent plain. In the end, she takes her own life in despair.

The Poles in Lanzmann's film also give various versions of their roles as witnesses, from those who genuinely liked

and befriended Jews but felt impotent to help them given the ruthlessness and thoroughness of the Nazi war machine. There were others who envied their wealth and beauty, and others who wanted them evicted but not murdered. And then there were those who projected the responsibility for their murder onto the Jews themselves. From Spielberg, however, the impression given is that the Poles were almost as bad as the Nazis, only they did not do the killing themselves. One example. In Lanzmann, testimony is repeatedly given that the Poles drew their hand across their throat as a warning to the Jews of what awaited them in the extermination camps. Whether this is a post hoc rewriting of history or an actual representation of what the intentions of the Poles were remains ambivalent. But in Spielberg, there seems to be no doubt that the slice across the throat was **not** a sympathetic warning, but a symbolic identification with the murderers.

What we witness are caricatures of the sympathies of a minority of the Poles, thereby libelling the rest of the Poles as well as letting them off the historical hook at one and the same time. The film takes place in Poland after all. One cannot expect a film focused on Schindler's role in saving Jews (or the book upon which it was based) to place the role of the Nazi regime as both continuous with and an extension of that of previous regimes carried to much greater extremes - the policies of Frederick the Great to "Germanize" Poland through settlement and conversion of Poles and the expulsion of the mass of impoverished Jewry, the more extreme efforts of Bismark and the Wilhelmian leadership to uproot the Polish gentry and ethnically cleanse the Polish lands of Polish peasants in the belief that "Germanization can only be applied to soil and never to people,"³¹ and then the extremist of all, the Nazi regime's efforts to exterminate the Jews in Poland while utilizing the Poles as an expendable and exploitable labour force.

The dominant result on the domestic population was increased nationalism and resistance in which the Jews, who spoke the German dialect of Yiddish, were caught in between. They resorted to emigration and Zionism. The absence of any reference to the Zionist resistance and Schindler's involvement with it misrepresents history. We will have to explain why this reference, which is in the novel, is omitted in the film.

We also have no account in the movie of the Jews who strove to survive so they could be witnesses in the legal sense, available to provide testimony about the atrocities of the Nazis. Mietek Pemper, Amon's typist with the photographic memory, is not a figure in the film. Nor are Germans included in the film who were determined to be witnesses. Raimund Titsch, Julius Medritsch's manager, who took reels of actual film, is excluded. So is Oswald Bosko. He not only stored information in his head to give testimony against the Nazis,

but he gave witness as well in helping the Jewish underground, and it cost him his life. The intention of Oskar to survive as a witness is left out of the movie.

This total exclusion of the voices of the witnesses themselves, of Jews who saw their role in survival as recording for history what they had witnessed, of the Germans who accumulated evidence, and even of Oskar's role as a determined would-be witness, is too complete to be just a matter of winnowing and compression needed for a film. The fact is, Spielberg is just not interested in the issue of witnessing in the sense of giving testimony. Spielberg is brilliant in having **us**, his audience, feel the Holocaust in the marrow of our bones. He gives **us** a vision of the place and time which is meticulously authentic. But Spielberg does not try to use the camera so that we see in a deeper sense, so that he allows us to reach the Holocaust through our intelligence. The film is visual, not vocal, cinematic not an assembly of talking heads. The film is akin to seeing through a glass darkly, not by throwing a search light into the horror of Hades, but by lighting one candle there. So, as we look down the outhouse hole in which the young boy hid, and we see one shivering but angelic child staring upwards, we are never put in the hole. We are never put into the gas vans or the crematoria. We remain spectators when we look at the Jews, but participants when we feel and hear the Nazis. Thus we are made into the interlocutors between the Jews and the Nazis rather than seeing the experience through the eyes of the witnesses. We experience the Holocaust through their guts. As I will suggest in the conclusion, this is but one of the factors that reinforces fear and a frozen response to genocide rather than activist intervention.

Did Spielberg provide his audience with the historical truth in his representation of the Holocaust? The question does **not** require that Spielberg recreate the world of the Krakow ghetto and of Plaszów as experienced by the survivors, the Schindler Jews. It is not about the "objective" accuracy of the "facts", although clearly the authenticity of the sets and costumes and, to some degree, the characterization, were essential to recreating this authenticity. Through his artistic devices he has rendered that experience more authentically than any other. But, contrary to the cognitive versions of representation of the realists and idealists, the representation is authentic with respect to the **emotions** of the survivors, in particular, the dominant emotion of fear and terror that they experienced virtually every moment the Nazis began their ascent to power.

The issue of the truth value of Spielberg's recreation of the Holocaust is not based on whether his representation corresponded to people's actual impressions. The issue is whether it accorded with **all** the evidence, whether it was

comprehensive and coherent in representing the Holocaust, and whether the story was placed in the appropriate context. The movie does not meet the standards of comprehensiveness. The view of the bystanders is a caricature. Spielberg is brilliant in conveying the arbitrary brutality and cruelty of the Nazis, but not their "rational" side", their overarching policy and dedication to industrial efficiency in achieving their goal of ridding Europe of Jews. Spielberg ignores the active role played by other Germans in rescuing Jews, though, admittedly, very few and very halting. Spielberg definitely distorts the wide panorama of responses of the Jews to the Holocaust.

Spielberg is a chameleon in another way. On the one hand, he claims that he is not inventing the story. He is **not** its author. He is not the imaginative creator of this tale. He is merely adapting the story told by another (Keneally) to the exigencies of an effective film, giving great credit to his own scriptwriter, Steven Zallian, for the adaptation,³² repeating that tale lest the story of the Holocaust and of Schindler become lost. It is true that he has only partial title to the story, but not because he borrowed the events of the story from Keneally, but because the basic plot and characterization are borrowed from the dominant mythology of the Christian West, as I shall try to show in the next chapter. The facts extracted from Keneally are shaped to fit within that myth.

As an artist who recreates that traditional story using the facts of reality, Spielberg is brilliant. In doing so, he has to recreate and invent scenes and create a story that appears as authentic as the ones told by the survivors themselves in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, with which Spielberg was so impressed. But the scenes in *Schindler's List* have far more affective power. The story told is indeed not original, but it is also **not** the story of either Oskar Schindler nor an accurate and comprehensive visage of the Holocaust, even if it is one which most authentically captures its terrors. It is the repetitive story of the hero as saviour, which was not Keneally's tale.

If the novel pulls us into participating in the imaginative creative role, the movie imposes the creation upon us because it wraps us all in its emotional blanket so we cringe and cry, hiss and sigh together. But this is the paradox. The more manipulative the film is in sucking us inside, the more contradictions and omissions that our imaginations must overcome in creating a scene, the more the story is inverted and becomes alienated from what it was purported to be - a story told by insiders - to become a story told by an alien voice external to the action who must manipulate to convey credibility.

"Steven Spielberg...found the book a perfect vehicle

for the kind of morality tale at which he excels. He has said that he felt a special responsibility for taking up the subject as a Jew, but the film has a quintessentially American flavor. Its maverick, reluctant hero bears a strong resemblance to Indiana Jones. The rescue plan combines entrepreneurship with moral generosity very much in the humanistic-capitalistic spirit."³³

However, when there is no proprietorship for the contents of a house, it becomes haunted and the furniture begins to move about as if under its own powers. The dilemma is that the most powerful film ever created about the Holocaust is also destined to be haunted by the dead ghosts of that Holocaust, by those who died struggling against it, and by those who found Zyklon-B seeping into the shower room rather than water. For, in the movie, the Jews are either passive participants in their own extermination, or secondary characters.

But this discussion of the depiction of character rather than the Holocaust as a whole must await the next chapter.

- . Primo Levi, *Awakening*, tr. Stuart Woolf, Boston: Little, Brown, 1965, p. 1.
- vi depicted the inability of survivors to "wash our consciences and memories clean from the foulness that lay upon them." Spielberg, by contrast, approaches the Holocaust as he did all his other films, with the innocent wonder and amazement of a child, and, therefore, saw it in all its horror without being desensitized at the same time.
- . Ibid, p. 294. Cf. Eli Wiesel's *Night* where he describes "the impotence of the familiar in the face of modern atrocity" p. 79.
- . Hannah Arendt criticized the documentary publication by American Jews, *Back Book* (1946), because, "a false reality according to a lying ideological propaganda and publicity of the style embodied in this book can only succeed in making a true story sound unconvincing." Hannah Arendt, "The Image of Hell," *Commentary* 2:3 (September, 1946) 291-95, p. 292.
- . See Hannah Arendt, "Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps," *Jewish Social Studies*, 12 (1950): 49-64, p. 49. Arendt also claimed that totalitarianism as well as the Holocaust could not be understood with additional categories of understanding. "Totalitarian domination as an established fact, which in its unprecedentedness cannot be comprehended through the usual categories of political thought, and whose 'crimes' cannot be judged by additional moral standards or punished within the legal framework of civilization." Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1954; New York: Viking Press, 1961, p. 26.
- . Gabriel Erem, "Steven Spielberg: *Schindler's List*," *Lifestyles*, 23:128, March, 1994, pp. 8-9.
- . Claude Lanzmann, "Why Spielberg has distorted the truth," *Le Monde*, reprint *Guardian Weekly*, April 3, 1994, p. 14.
- . Op. cit. The number of Schindler Jews were 1,098, 801 men and 297 women. In addition to others saved by Oskar Schindler, the total of 1,300 includes approximately 100 Jews saved from the frozen cattle cars just before the end of the war. This incident was not depicted in the movie, but was described in the book and was critical to Emilie Schindler being recognized as a Righteous

title.

.. Op. cit.

.. Op. cit.

.. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, New York: 1983 who argued that representation was impossible and also that it was undesirable because presenting, and thereby explaining, the Holocaust allowed the Holocaust to be deemed within conventional means of aestheticization and rationalization.

.. Hans Kellner, "'Never Again' Is Now," *History and Theory*, 33:2, 1994, 3.

.. Jason Epstein, "A Dissent on Schindler's List," *New York Review of Books* 11:8, April 21, 1994, p. 65.

.. Op. cit.

.. John Simon, "From the Jaws of Death," *National Review*, January 24, 1994,

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.. David Margolick, "Schindler's Jews Find Deliverance Again," *New York Times* January 3, 1994.

.. Gabriel Erem, "Steven Spielberg: *Schindler's List*," *Lifestyles*, 23:128, March, 1994, p. 9.

.. Jonathan Alter, "After the Survivors," *Newsweek*, December 20, 1993, p. 116

.. "Spielberg does in fact draw a clear distinction between film-making and life-making. He defines himself as a movie-maker. His primary intention is to entertain rather than inform or educate." Taylor (1992) p. 29.

.. Bauman (1991) xiii.

.. Bauman (1991) p. 36.

.. Ibid, p. 73.

.. Ibid, p. 89.

.. "According to the census of 1926, the 407,000 Jews in Belorussia formed 8.1% of the republic's total population. A considerable proportion of the urban population was Jewish. There were 53,686 Jews (40.8%) in Minsk; 37,745 (43.7%) in Grodno; 37,013 (37.5%) in Vitebsk; and 21,558 (42%) in Bobruisk." By 1939, as a result of emigration of Jews from the region to Leningrad and Moscow largely, the population was reduced to 375,000. In September of 1939, when western Belorussia which had been under Polish rule in the inter-war period, was annexed by the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of Jews were added to the Belorussian population, including refugees from the rest of Nazi-occupied Europe. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 4, pp. 446-7.

.. Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did The Heavens Not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History*. New York: Pantheon, 1988; 1990, p. 265.

.. Mayer (1990) p. 268, quoting a report of the leader of Einsatzkommando 4a to the Einsatzgruppe C to their superiors in Berlin.

.. Ibid, p. 88.

.. Cf. Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Assimilation during the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) which attempts to distinguish the various conditions in different nation-states in Europe which either facilitated or inhibited the effectiveness of the genocide against the Jews. For a more general thesis on the conditions facilitating genocide, see Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 who extends the analysis of the Holocaust to include the genocide of Armenians in Turkey, the massacre of elites in Cambodia and the organized 'disappearances' in Argentina. For a more sociological than psychological approach, see Florence Mazian, *The*

ocide? *The Armenian and Jewish Experiences in Perspective*, Ames: Iowa University Press, 1990. For a more detailed analysis of the Jewish and Armenian genocides along these lines, see Robert F. Melson, *Revolution and Genocide: The Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. The last volume is clearest in linking genocide to the problem of the collapse of an old regime and the effort of revolutionaries to construct a new society according to an ideological vision which tries to combine a mismatch of old regime values and those of modernity, but makes clear that very specific revolutionary and warlike conditions are needed to translate facilitating conditions into total domestic genocide. Gérard Prunier's volume *Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 provides an historical interpretation consistent with the above biological, psychological and political scientific analyses of genocide. A right-knit leadership elite who controlled the military, political and economic apparatus of the state used a well-organized civil service in a controlling territory utilizing a disciplined population and modern communications to perpetuate the latest massive genocide in the transition to modernity.

.. Michael Ignatieff, "Homage to Bosnia," *The New York Review of Books*, XLI: April 21, 1994, p. 3.

.. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, tr. Jeffrey Mehlman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 20.

.. Some newspapers went further when the film was shown in Germany in an effort to demonstrate that Schindler was not alone or even exceptional and that many Germans did act to save Jews. For example, the *Müncher Merkur* ran a 14-page series recording the assistance of other Germans to Jews. "Schindler war nicht der einzige, der damals half," was included as part of the insert to each story. William J. Niven, "The reception of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in German media," *European Studies*, xxv (1995), pp. 180-1 for a discussion of this phenomenon.

.. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Boston, 1943, p. 388. Cf. William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1773-1945*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980 for a discussion of German policy towards Poles and Jews in the east prior to the rise of Hitler.

.. When Steven Spielberg accepted his People's award on March 7th of 1994, he went out of his way to stress that his films were team efforts, read the screenwriters' names of all his films, and placed a special emphasis on the knowledge of Steven Spielberg.

.. Ruth R. Wisse, "'Schindler' and the Victim Image", *The Jerusalem Report*, March 10, 1994, p. 55.