

SCHINDLER'S LIST AND THE HOLOCAUST

Truth, Art and Morality

by

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DRAFT: NOT TO BE USED OR QUOTED WITHOUT PERMISSION

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TO ALL THE MISSING JEWISH CHILDREN

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NOTE: All quotes at the beginning of each chapter have been taken from Timothy Findley's novel, *Headhunter*, Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1993.

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## PREFACE

Whatever the controversies that arose over the movie, *Schindler's List* is generally characterized as a powerful significant film and a moving cultural phenomenon. A June 1994 letter to the editor from a German woman captures this perspective. "It is years since I have seen a film of such importance...Since the release of the film in Germany in early March until the beginning of May, i.e., in two months, four million, mainly schoolchildren and young people - often whole school classes - have seen it...hundreds of schoolchildren sit still, deeply moved. All reports mention that, 'you could hear a pin drop.'"<sup>1</sup>

Movie-goers were filling the theatres to watch *Schindler's List*, leaving the theatre with deep sorrow at the depths to which humanity could sink and perhaps even some resolve Never Again to allow humans to be used as fodder for the genocidal intentions of a small group of humans. Meanwhile, preparations were underway to kill every Tutsi man, woman and child in Rwanda.<sup>2</sup> Information had been forwarded to the UN about the plans.<sup>3</sup> UN peacekeepers were present in Rwanda with a mandate to protect civilians. Yet, when on 6 April 1994, the genocidal plan began to be executed, the UN forces withdrew. When this orgy of violence became widely recognized for what it was, the international community took an inordinate amount of time to deploy equipment and troops to attempt to mitigate the disaster. By the time they arrived, the mass murder had almost been completed. In ten weeks, beginning when Germans were still filling the theatres to watch *Schindler's List*, approximately 800,000<sup>4</sup> people had been massacred in a low-tech murder machine in Rwanda at almost twice the rate at which the Nazis killed Jews.<sup>5</sup>

The juxtaposition of such a powerful film on the Holocaust filling theatres throughout the world at the same time as the world demonstrated its impotence when plans were underway to destroy the Tutsi of Rwanda cannot be ignored. Further, the Holocaust in Europe occurred during a war behind Nazi lines, while the genocide in Rwanda began with a UN force in Kigali with a mandate to protect civilians.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the United States, the country in which the movie, *Schindler's List*, was created and where it played to such large audiences and to generally very positive reviews, performed a critical role in supporting the withdrawal of the peacekeepers and delaying their deployment back to Rwanda in the largely failed effort to mitigate the disaster.

How could such a powerful film about one genocide be so impotent in motivating the nations of the world just as another genocide was underway?<sup>7</sup> We have analyzed the reasons for the impotence in dealing with the Tutsi genocide elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> This book is concerned with the paradox: a film,

at one level so powerful, was ineffective in motivating people to act when another genocide was underway.

Heretofore, the combination of power and impotence has not been a source of controversy concerning a movie that has generated a great deal of other critical debate. Those debates have been about its truth value and distortions of history, its reliance on Hollywood manipulative techniques - the aesthetic dimensions of the film - and, when dealing with the instrumental effects of the movie on the moral outlook of the audience, the issue was over which lessons the movie taught<sup>9</sup> and not its impotence in effecting action. Dealing with the truth value of the film, its artistic devices, and its didactic function, however, provides a route to understanding the power of the film to arouse our emotions and its impotence in motivating our actions.

To what extent is the film a distortion and to what degree does it honestly represent what occurred? "The presentation of the victims...is stylized. The performers - largely good-looking ones at that - hide in spotlighted latrines or, worst of all, comfort one another with balletic grace in the gas chamber."<sup>10</sup> The debate over the **accuracy** of the historical representation is also supplemented by one about interpretation based on selection and focus. The filmmaker was found to be, "at fault in representing historical outcomes mainly as a consequence of the actions of extraordinary people: the extraordinary Hitler murdered the Jews, the extraordinary Schindler saved them...a theory of history that, in both cases, attempts to absolve non-Jews generally of the taint of complicity."<sup>11</sup>

This controversy over the film's historical "truth" has been complemented by an argument over its aesthetics. The movie has been accused of "Holocaust porn," utilizing Hollywood norms to win a mass appeal, "By relying on the traditional entertainment-industry formula of sex, violence, and sentiment."<sup>12</sup> The aesthetic devices used to reach a mass audience have been criticized by many members of the cultural elite.

This takes us into a third issue - the moral debate. How are the moral heroes and victims pictured? What is the nature of the moral depravity conveyed by the film's portrayal of the Holocaust? What moral outlook is conveyed by such a portrayal? What is the moral impact of the film on its audience? Are the villains portrayed as aliens, "mechanical robots of violence," while the hero is, at the same time, an anti-hero, so that the film avoids moral sermonizing?<sup>13</sup> Or is the movie a clear moral tale with a message so that the film can itself be assessed as having either a redeeming or an unredeeming moral purpose?

This book is about Falsification, Horror and Evil, or, in more positive terminology, Truth, Beauty and Goodness, the basic staples of philosophical discourse. In abstract language, the philosophical categories divide into Epistemology, Aesthetics and Ethics. Though this is a book on philosophy and not just an analysis of one film, the discussion does not begin with the abstract arguments of philosophers, but rather first with a novel and then with a Hollywood movie on the same topic, both with mass appeal. A very concrete, readily accessible particular book and movie are used to communicate very significant philosophical issues which are critical to enagaging human action in history.

This monograph has three themes which are dealt with in each of its parts - artistic truth and historical truth, the role of artistic devices in conveying "truth", and the morality of these efforts. In Part I, all three themes are dealt with in order in analyzing Thomas Keneally's novel upon which the film was based. In Part II, the analysis examines both the Schindler story and the representation of the Holocaust in the movie to assess the modes in which the "truth" of both presentations was conveyed. Part III attempts to explain how Steven Spielberg's Oscar Award winning film used the story of Oskar Schindler to communicate the horror of the Holocaust in such a powerful way without assaulting the viewer's sensibilities. Part IV deals with the third theme, morality: the morality of any historical distortions; the morality of employing certain film techniques to communicate the message of the film; and the moral impact of the movie itself. The moral issues emerge most clearly in explicating Spielberg's interpretation of why Schindler rescued the Jews.

The issues are summarized in the following questions:

1. What is the truth - factual                         the Holocaust  
   - general             re  
   - larger                 Oskar Schindler?
2. What artistic devices were used to make the film a powerful dramatic vehicle? Given any distortions, were they necessitated by dramatic license in order to make the film interesting, where the need for drama overcame any requirement for accuracy? Or, rather, was it the case that a specific dramatic format dictated the distortions even though a more accurate depiction could have been told equally dramatically?
3. Was the choice of artistic techniques and deformations of the truth dictated by an underlying ideology and morality?<sup>14</sup>
4. Finally, what is the effect of that ideology on the viewer's actions in this world? Does a movie even have a moral responsibility with respect to action?

The three themes culminating in a discussion of the power

and impotence of film in motivating human action are interlinked by an analysis of the underlying magic of both the novel and the film. Rather than a strict reverence for the historical truth both claim to portray, beneath the verisimilitude there are conjurer's tricks. Behind the apparent accuracy there is to be found distortion and distraction. The magic of Hollywood is focused on the malice of the Holocaust and the virtue of one man's efforts to save a small group from becoming the victims of mass murder. However, the magic is not confined to Hollywood. Although the central message of moral theory is usually based on the view that each individual must accept responsibility for his or her own actions, is that message subverted when the virtuous rescuer is a magician who works his wonders through charm and chutzpah, deceits and determination, skills which run counter to the ordinary norms encouraged in creating a responsible citizen and member of the community?

The use of magic characterizes both the saviour and movie-maker. This volume argues that the movie works because of the use of a particular set of tricks, movie maker's devices that allow the viewer to see the Holocaust and view a horror that would, without such tricks, otherwise make us ill. Spielberg uses the deceits and tricks of a conjurer to convey a story about another trickster who rescued Jews from the ashes of history. How can this use of trickery to bring about a rescue as well as to portray that rescue and the horrors of the Holocaust itself be morally justified?

More significantly, how could *Schindler's List* be at once such a powerful film and so impotent? This volume analyzes two standard issues dealt with concerning any historical film - the degree to which the story of the Holocaust told through the tale of Schindler's rescue effort deviates from historical truth, and the degree to which magic artifice is used so successfully in conveying those stories in a powerful manner - the aesthetic characteristics of the film. However, this book argues that the way the history is distorted and the way the aesthetic devices are employed, particularly the plot, lead us away from responsibility rather than towards it. The film practices magic to induce impotence rather than align our individual powers to produce collective responsibility.



## ENDNOTES

. The quotes in the Preface are all taken from letters to the editor in the *New York Review of Books*, XLI:11, June 9, 1994, pp. 60-1. The first quote is taken from a letter written by Marion Dönhoff. Recall that 1944 was being commemorated in Germany as 'the year of the resistance'. The première of the movie in Germany took place in Frankfurt on 1 March 1994 and by the fifth week of showing had risen to first place in the charts where it remained for another six weeks. "By the fifteenth week of showing, when it was still eighth in the German charts, it had been seen by 5,719 million people" in Germany. (William J. Niven, "The Reception of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in the German media," *European Studies Review* (1995), 165.) As a result, a German translation of Thomas Keneally's book also became a bestseller, selling a million paperbacks alone and 90,000 hard copies, whereas previous sales since 1982 had only totalled 5,000 in spite of having been serialized at the time by *Stern*. Film critics in Germany were generally ecstatic about the movie, praising its cinematography and lack of sentimentality, but overwhelmingly valuing the movie for its therapeutic effect against collective amnesia and the rise of neo-Nazism. (Niven, 169)

. I was about to begin the final draft of this book in December 1994 when I received a call from John Eriksson of the American International Development Agency asking if I would consider undertaking an evaluation study for the OECD countries and international agencies on the availability of any early warning signals and the responses to them in dealing with the Rwandese crisis. I accepted. Consequently almost all my waking hours in the first eleven months of 1995 were consumed by the genocide in Rwanda, assessing what was known about the plans beforehand, and what actions were taken by outsiders to prevent or mitigate it. The final report of myself and my Norwegian colleague, Astri Suhrke, "The Genocide in Rwanda: Early Warning and Conflict Management," was submitted at the beginning of December. Only then was I able to return to this manuscript. The irony of the juxtaposition of the showing of the film and its winning of all the Academy awards as another genocide proceeded virtually unimpeded could not be ignored.

. On 11 January 1994, a cable had been sent by General Romeo Dallaire, Commander of the UNAMIR peacekeeping contingent in Rwanda, carrying the message of a high level informant that a plot had been developed listing every Tutsi man, woman, and child in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. The plan was to exterminate them. Based on previous small scale massacres, the plotters had calculated that 1000 could be killed every 20 minutes largely relying on the use of machetes.

. Cf. Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 261-5; Prunier (p. 261) claims, "that the daily killing rate was at least five times that of the Nazi death camps." But if you take the 6,000,000 to have been killed **systematically from December of 1994 onwards, then the 6,000,000 were killed** over approximately 120 weeks at a rate of 50,000 per week, whereas the Tutsi were systematically slaughtered at a rate of 100,000 per week. Low-tech murder was almost twice as efficient as the factory death created by the Nazis. In both cases, the preparatory period for the genocide, when many were also killed, is excluded from the calculation.

. In discussing the slaughter of the Tutsi in Rwanda in juxtaposition with the memory of the Holocaust, and in pointing out that the rate of murder was almost twice that of the rate of murder of Jews, there is no intention to take anything away from the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Of course, there were external

imilarities between the two events. Women and children were killed in the Holocaust as well to eliminate the future possibility of avengers. (Heinrich Himmler, 4 October 1943, speech in Posen to SS officers) But the differences between the two genocides are even greater. It is not simply that the killing of the Tutsi was a low-tech operation while the Nazi system of mass murder was organized along factory lines, but the motives of the perpetrators of the two crimes were not congruent, even though they overlapped. Though the Hutu extremists who organized the genocide did so to create a purely Hutu nation and to provide lebensraum in one of the densest populated countries in the world, the Tutsi were once the real overlords of the Hutu and were believed to pose a real threat to Hutu rule; Jews never held a similar position in relation to Germany. Rather, the killing of the Jews was intended to remain a secret "carried to the grave" (Himmler, op. cit.; cf. Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Termination of the Jews of Europe*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 5-6); the mass murder of the Tutsi was carried out in the open. Finally, the Tutsi extermination of Jews was put into effect to eliminate all human beings who were considered non-human and not just because they were considered enemies. This is stated dogmatically because of the preposterous claims of the German historian, Ernst Nolte, that Hitler acted preemptively against Jews in light of the claim Weizmann's 1939 claim that all Jews would fight on the side of England. (Cf. *Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s*, ed. Aspects of the Third Reich, ed. H. W. Koch, London: Macmillan, 1985. For a definitive refutation of Nolte cf. Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.)

. In referring to the UN failure in Rwanda, I do not mean to ignore other genocides or the UN failure in Bosnia during the nineties. (Cf. Bernard Osse and Erick de Saint-Exupéry, "The UN's Failure: An Interview with Tadeusz Zawiecki," *New York Review of Books*, XLII:14, 21 September 1995, 38-9.) It is not that Rwanda was such an easy genocide to stop, and its forewarnings and arreance coincided with the showing of the movie in theatres around the world. In Bosnia, the "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims, including mass murder and rape, largely at the hands of the Serbs, occurred primarily in 1992. Further, though there were mass murders, the bulk of the three-quarter of a million Muslims were merely driven from their homes. Finally, in 1992, the primary responsibility for the Balkans rested in the hands of Europe as Jacques Poos had announced on behalf of the EC in 1991, not on the USA. (Cf. Timothy Garton Ash, "Bosnia in Contexture," *New York Review of Books*, XLII: 20, December 21, 1995, 27-31.) At the time of the Rwandese genocide, it was the reluctance of the USA that was criticized for the delayed response to the Rwandese genocide. Further, when the US finally bombed the Serbs to the bargaining table in August and September of 1995, it failed to stop the mass murder, even though men of military age were led off to be killed in the so-called UN safe area of Srebrenica and women and children were included in the mass killings in the other so-called safe area of Tuzla in 1995. The aim was to end the war and force the parties to sign a peace agreement. (Cf. Rogan Koenig, "Taming the Bullies of Bosnia," *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 December 1995, 78.)

. The movie is not being isolated for its impotence. However, as the most powerful cultural event in recent memory dealing with genocide in general and the Holocaust in particular, the film highlights the abyss between the memory of the Holocaust and its lack of evident impact on action. At the same time, movies play a more seminal role in developing memory, and the morality implicit in the memory system, than historiography. "In the contemporary process of elaborating historical consciousness, historiography may well be playing a secondary role to film and television, popular literature, state commemorations, monuments, and museums." (Friedlander 1993, 47) Further, "the interpreted versions of the Holocaust in its texts now lead us to our actions in the world in light of the Holocaust." (James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, preface, p. 3.) There have even been a number of suggestions that the movie actually had the opposite effect, stimulating anti-Semitic reaction. Just after the film opened in Lübeck, Germany, the first attack on a synagogue in Germany since the Nazi period took place when one of the few synagogues that survived Kristallnacht (protected because of the danger to the St. Annen-Museum next door) was set on fire.

. Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, *Genocide in Rwanda: Early Warning and Conflict Management*, Copenhagen: DANIDA, 1996.

. The morality conveyed by the film and the moral outlook of the filmmaker were rarely discussed; the focus was largely on the role of the film in serving a particular moral didactic function - a lesson to Holocaust deniers or neo-Nazi Germany, alternatively, in a minority German critical view, as part of a campaign to harass and even financially blackmail Germany, magnifying Nazi crimes in contrast to those of other countries, particularly the communists. However, some critics (Sigrid Löffler in the *Wochenpost* - 24 March 1994, p. 22) did ask whether the film served as a ritual of absolution, particularly for Germans.

.. John Gross, "Hollywood and the Holocaust," *New York Review of Books*, XLI: February 1994, p. 15.

.. Op. cit.

.. Monica Strauss.

.. Marion Dönhoff.

.. This book challenges the conventional view that historical deformations are stated by dramatic needs (cf. the various essays by historians in Mark Kishlitz, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, New York: HarperCollins, 1995; they virtually all presume that the distortions that they found were stated by artistic priorities.); instead, a specific morality dictates using a form of drama which deforms history in a particular way. It isn't the artist or the filmmaker that leads to the deformations, but his moral outlook and ideology.

schindler's list - 1

## Chapter 1

### Desire

"It is a mark of our respect for those who lead us into darkness that we bring him back for burial, pay their debts and console their loved ones with lies." p. 624

Steven Spielberg<sup>1</sup>, one of the most brilliant and certainly most successful<sup>2</sup> fantasists of the twentieth century, once said, "You have probably seen the most successful films I shall ever make, but I don't think you have seen the best of what I can do as a filmmaker."<sup>3</sup> *Schindler's List* was Spielberg's attempt to show the best he could produce and direct as a filmmaker. The movie won seven Oscar Awards.

The movie's central character is Oskar Schindler who has been honoured in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as a Righteous Gentile. He was the central character in Thomas Keneally's 1982 Booker Prize winning novel<sup>4</sup> on which the film was based. Both the book and the movie tell the story of Oskar Schindler's rescue of Jews. But it is the 'list' in the title rather than Schindler that I want to discuss first before I delve into the problem of portraying the Holocaust or Oskar Schindler.

A major theme of both the movie and the novel is the passion for making lists. The Nazis drew up lists of the Jews registering in Krakow<sup>5</sup>. They had lists of all the Jews relocated into the Jewish ghetto. Lists were drawn of the Jews to be transferred to Plaszów concentration camp. Lists were made of Jews to be shipped to Auschwitz. And then, of course, there was the Schindler list: those Jews who worked in his enamelware factory; those Jews relocated to the labour camp attached to his factory; and, finally and ultimately, **the** Schindler list of Jews transferred by Schindler to Brinnlitz and saved from the Nazi murder machine.

To list is also to categorize - rescued or rescuer, good or bad, artistic or exploitive, true or false. The Jews rescued by Oskar Schindler have themselves been listed and categorized within the sub-group of survivors, and, within that sub-group, will be known in history under Schindler's banner as Schindler Jews or *Schindlerjüden*, not only in Yad Vashem, not only in the novel which the literati will read, but in the hearts and minds of a mass audience through Spielberg's film.

To list, both as the record of particular humans who actually lived and the clustering of those particulars within general categories, conveys reality. There is clearly no disclaimer that any resemblance of the characters to persons living or dead is purely accidental. The book and the movie deliberately set out to record and classify people who lived and were saved, and people who died. The movie was intended to depict reality rather than a fantasy world. Spielberg decided to tell the truth and make a document, not just a movie, about the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> For Spielberg, the challenge was, "how to make

the unimaginable factual, and how to create not so much a motion picture but a document of those intolerable times."<sup>7</sup> What better way than to start with names, lists of particular persons, those who died in and the few who were saved from the Holocaust.

The film is also about listing in two other, very different senses. Both are aesthetic. One is visual - putting a border around a number of objects either for safety purposes or confinement.<sup>8</sup> When Schindler lists (registers) his Jews and thus enables them to be listed (categorized) as survivors rather than victims, he also lists (in this third sense) the sanctuary in which they are protected; Schindler draws a border around those Jews and saves their lives from the charnel house of Auschwitz. On the other hand, Amon Goeth, the SS Kommandant of Plaszów, *lists* the Jewish ghetto and carries out the order to confine the Jews to a few blocks.

The other aesthetic sense of "to list" is auditory. Oskar Schindler not only registers the names of the Jews whom he will save, henceforth leading to their categorization as Schindler Jews, he not only draws a protective barrier around them, but he does so because he hears (*lists*) their desire to live. *Schindler's List* refers to Schindler *listening* to the plight of the Jews. Keneally wrote his novel because he first heard or 'listed' to the story of Leopold (Poldek) Pfefferberg, a Schindler Jew in Los Angeles, and then based his novel on the stories told by a number of other Schindler Jews and some documents they provided. Spielberg made a film about the Holocaust using the Oskar Schindler tale because he 'heard' the ghosts of his forefathers.

While Oskar Schindler *lists* in this fourth and alternative aesthetic sense, Amon Goeth asks the Gestapo investigators **not** to pay attention (or *list*) to what Oskar did when he kissed the young Jewish girl on his birthday, echoing the plea in Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, "Graue Gouvernors, list not to his exclames."<sup>9</sup> Amon, in turn, did not listen to the pleas of his Jewish victims.

Listing in the sense of listening is not only a moral requirement and essential to the aesthetic magic of the movie, but it is also critical for historical continuity. For Spielberg<sup>10</sup> and for Keneally, (and for myself as well), the film, the novel, and this analysis, are all in part written so that the lessons of the Holocaust will continue to be heard. As the son of the famous British Prime Minister Walpole wrote, "List, sirs, and may this bloody record be a warning to future tyrants."<sup>11</sup> But, as I shall argue, *Schindler's List* does not serve to open our ears to tyranny, but to shut them off, to

enclose them within an encapsulated safety shell so that the raucous violence of the external world is excluded.

Recording. Categorizing. Confining (for safety or punishment). Listening. The first two convey reality. The second pair convey visual and auditory aesthetic categories. But there are an additional two meanings of "list" that are more obviously moral.

There is a fifth sense in which Schindler can be said to have listed, in the sense of *leaning* physically one way versus another, which conveys a person's moral orientation. During the war, Oskar never listed as a drunk, in spite of what the critic, Robert Fulford, wrote.<sup>12</sup> But, like a ship, according to the Spielberg interpretation, the cargo in his heart listed and he careened from the Nazis to the side of the Jews. Though Steven Spielberg believed Oskar Schindler emerged as "a great human being", he viewed him initially as an exploiter of slave labour: "From the very beginning of his career as a factory owner, a man about town (a sort of *gad* about town), I don't think he had any intention of saving people. I feel he had strong intentions to fill his coffers with war profits by exploiting slave labor."<sup>13</sup> In this sense, "list" conveys moral weakness, a lack of steadfastness. In Spielberg's version of the story, as I shall show, Schindler is literally saved from such a fate in a symbolic moment, an epiphany, when he turns his back on the accumulation of wealth and uses the wealth that he has accumulated to save "his" Jews.

Schindler also enters **himself** in a list in a sixth sense; to list is also to joust. In both the novel and the movie, Oskar Schindler takes on Amon Goeth in a tournament of good versus evil. Goodness and evil spar like medieval knights. Schindler wins Helen Hirsch (the housemaid of Amon Goeth), from Amon, the arch-villain of the movie, in a game of blackjack as the penultimate symbolic scene in their rivalry. In this sense, "list" conveys moral strength and determination.

Not only does Schindler *list* in all the various senses above, so does Spielberg. In making this particular film, he had to list a small selection of characters, including a small subset of Schindler Jews, to tell the story within a limited time frame. Listing entails selection. In selecting, whole categories of events are omitted. Further, to represent the Holocaust and Oskar Schindler's role in it, Spielberg had to choose a category of drama - romance rather than tragedy, comedy or satire - as a form for telling the story. Further, Spielberg had to protect the sensitivities of the viewers of this mass horror and draw limits on what could be represented. As Thomas Keneally himself said of the film and the survivors

response to it, "Of course, they realize that there are things he didn't show that nobody could have shown -you can't portray the stench, for example. And the prisoners aren't as skeletal as they were in reality. And then the clearing of the ghetto - you had babies tossed in the air and shot like skeet. You can't show that in cinema."<sup>14</sup> Spielberg also had to demonstrate that he could both protect the sensibilities of Holocaust survivors while demonstrating that he had listened to the terrors of its victims. He could not trivialize this unique trauma of the twentieth century as simply another version of *Jaws*.

In meeting the demand of both realism and sensitivity, and in choosing a fictional form to represent historical reality, Spielberg had to lean towards the norms of fictional rather than factual representation. In doing so, Spielberg not only chose to focus on the joust between Amon Goeth and Oskar Schindler, but had to wrestle with his own demons and terrors that have haunted all his films to avoid turning the film into the projections of a fantasist. Spielberg was haunted by the ghosts of his forefathers. As Hamlet's father's ghost demands in the name of revenge rather than memory, "List, list, oh list. If ever though didst thy dear father love, revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."<sup>15</sup> In doing so, he emerged as the hero who had overcome his own fears. But at what cost?

Listing - whether in the sense of enumerating, categorizing, drawing boundaries around, listening, expressing a preference or competing - is ultimately about human desire. List has the same root as lust, the Anglo-Saxon *lyst*. Lust came to mean having a strong list, an excessive or inordinate desire, as in the depiction of the Nazis and, "All those who lusted after the gains and possessions of the Jews."<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare clearly understood Amon Goeth's character in Spielberg's depiction of Amon's treatment of Helen Hirsch: "Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind, for which thou whipst her."<sup>17</sup> Amon Goeth fantasized about growing old together with Helen Hirsch, as he confessed to Oskar Schindler before that final card game. But his passion for Helen was unrequited given Nazi prohibitions. So he beat her.

In repressed desire, desire which is unrequited and destructive, we project onto another our own failings and incorporate the virtues of the other within ourselves. We may list virtues, but we allocate them to the wrong columns and identify them with the wrong people. Then, while drawing arbitrary and artificial boundaries and distinctions between ourselves and the other, we appropriate the other as an extension of ourselves. At the most extreme, we destroy the other in a process of acting out our own self destruction,



often in the name of re-creating ourselves, or, more accurately, preserving ourself for all eternity. Because we project onto the other and incorporate the other as extensions of ourselves, the most characteristic symptom of destructive desire is the inability to listen. The categories we use - who is human and who is inhuman, for example - indicate that we are engaged in destructive desire when we call those inhuman who are truly human, and appropriate the category of superhuman to ourselves precisely when we are most inhuman. To the degree we attribute the wrong attributes to ourselves and others and completely invert the categories of good and evil, to the degree we draw fictional boundaries between people while disrespecting the natural boundaries which protect the dignity of the other, to the degree we fail to listen to the other and attempt to appropriate what belongs to the other to ourselves, to that extent do we lean towards evil and away from the good and surrender the effort of wrestling with our personal demons.

But desire can be sublimated, transposed through alchemy into an ostensible virtue. Instead of projecting onto others our own failures, we take ourselves to be the exemplification of all human failure and incorporate the vices of the worst in humanity as our own. Virtue and vice are generalized as belonging to all of us so that any distinctions between the virtuous and those responsible for vice are considered arbitrary and artificial. Instead of appropriating the other as an extension of ourselves, we extend ourselves and reach out into the hearts and minds of others. We identify with all humanity. We are condemned to understanding everyone, to comprehending the "reasons" for any action, thereby destroying the capability of judging any of them. In projecting the other into ourselves, we can no longer hear the inner voice that is uniquely or historically our own. We are all too human. As such, our personal demons become merely the exemplifications of the demons that supposedly haunt us all.

Hannah Arendt adopted the latter thesis in the explication of Nazi behavior. After all, "the 'banality of evil' suggests that we all do share the same common propensities eventually leading to ultimate criminality."<sup>18</sup> In the movie, Spielberg took the former view that the criminality of the Nazis was an expression of destructive rather than sublimated desire. Schindler simply inverted that destructive desire by preserving others rather than himself. He sacrificed himself for the preservation of "his Jews". For Amon Goeth, after the war, "Inasmuch as he **never** lusted to help others, he was not now able to help himself,"<sup>19</sup> The opposite could be said of Oskar Schindler: inasmuch as he lusted to help others, he was **not** then able to help himself. The movie is about

destructive desire and its inversion and poses a direct challenge to the thesis that Nazi evil was a form of sublimated desire.

There is a third expression of desire, of the lust that underpins the list. In desire which is creative, we take responsibility for our own actions and respect the autonomy, independence and dignity of others. But we also acknowledge their own personal responsibility for evil. We recognize them for their individuality and refuse to assign individuals to pre-established categories based on appearances or, on the other hand, to eliminate categorization altogether. And we are most reluctant to categorize even those who exemplify destructive desire as either inhuman, relegating them to nothingness, or as essentially and fully human, however inhumanly they may behave. We protect the weak and refuse to give special protection to the strong while we recognize our own strengths and weaknesses and do not blame others for who we are. We never regard the other as an extension of ourselves or ourselves as merely the extension of general humanity.

The most characteristic symptom of creative desire is the ability to listen both to what others say and what our own inner voice based on what our inculcated communal memories tells us. The creative expression of desire is neither the route to virtue nor the avoidance of vice, but the recognition of how they have become part of one mixture. What is important is developing the ability to discern between them. In the end, creative desire commands that we wrestle with the forces of evil, both outside and within.

I shall argue that destructive desire is central to the meaning of 'list' in the film, while, in the novel, a form of sublimated desire underpins the explanation of Schindler's behaviour. The movie is concerned with the contest between destructive desire and its inversion, between the horrific destructiveness of the Holocaust and the salvation of an "elect" few. This argument is only fully developed in the final section.

However, what fascinated many reviewers was not the underlying thesis of the movie - even if they noticed it - but why and how Spielberg could have taken on such a project in the first place. That Spielberg, the great fantasizer of imaginative desire without any boundaries or limits, would attempt to tackle such a profound and fundamental issue as the Holocaust was a surprise to many. The results were awaited with scepticism. As the critic, Robert Kolker, wrote, "He (Spielberg) is the great modern narrator of simple desires fulfilled, of reality diverted into the imaginary spaces of

aspirations realized, where fears of abandonment and impotence are turned into fantasy spectacles of security and joyful action."<sup>20</sup> The Holocaust, in contrast, is a tale of unfulfilled desires, of the fantasies of mad dictators and a totalitarian, anti-Semitic system destroying the lives of millions of people, including six million innocent Jewish men, women and children who were largely abandoned by the world to their fate. Their abandonment is connected with the historical spectacle of the systematic and industrialized production of death. The Holocaust is a tale of basic desires frustrated and destroyed by corrupt ones, by desires that have gone mad. Could the joyful fantasist Spielberg, the storyteller of simple desires fulfilled, tell a story that apparently belonged to the opposite end of the spectrum from his traditional preoccupations? Could he tell a story in which the black side of desire is central and select the appropriate narrative structure for the tale? Could he listen with sensitivity to the pains of those who suffered, draw the appropriate boundaries between what could be depicted and what could easily become pornographic violence? In choosing to depict the Holocaust via the story of Oskar Schindler, were Spielberg's inclinations correct? Could Spielberg provide the requisite insight into the monumental tale of black passion?

Many questioned the suitability of an imaginative fantasist undertaking such a representation, assuming the Holocaust could be represented at all. In spite of Spielberg's clear brilliance in representing horror, he was widely considered unsuitable to undertake the task when the horror to be depicted was the Holocaust.

This doubt was reinforced by Spielberg's mesmerized preoccupation with grotesque horror. A review of Spielberg's previous films suggests that he accepted horror as the norm. In the face of horror, he would renew the traditional and conventional metaphors for attacking horror. Whatever was indigestible in reality can be reversed by the imaginative, indeed magical action of the human spirit. Spielberg was the archetypal innocent American who had never lost his faith in the human spirit or in his ability to convey its triumph even in the face of the horrors of the Holocaust. Spielberg set out to remove the teeth from the giant jaws of the shark while showing the shark in all its terror. He set out to bring us closer to the fearful dinosaur monsters, but, in doing so, demonstrated human transcendence over the most ominous fears of nature. Could one of the greatest catastrophes in human history be encompassed within a human story of rescue?

A fantasist concerned with unboundaried desires was a questionable choice to depict the Holocaust, particularly when

Spielberg had practiced his art by listening to his own imaginative voices rather than the historical voices of others, though he drew from the whole rich history of film technique in representing horror. He seemed committed to the triumph of the human spirit over all evil forces. These doubts turned to dogmatic rejection for those convinced that the Holocaust was incapable of being represented in film at all, let alone by a fantasist.

If, as Spielberg says, *Schindler's List* is intended primarily to communicate very important **information** about the Holocaust (in contrast to an explanation for its occurrence), what relationship does the imaginative depiction of Oskar Schindler have to the Holocaust as the background of the story? In Spielberg's interpretation, Oskar Schindler's motives and actions were apparently as inexplicable as earlier theorists and commentators had claimed the Holocaust to be. What message is communicated by the relationship of one to the other, that is, by the structure of the movie and the relationship of a fictional recreation of an individual heroic rescuer and the portrayal of the horrific reality of the Holocaust itself?

As Seymour Chatman ends his book on narrative in fiction and film, "In my view, there are two narrative rhetorics, one concerned to suade me to accept the form of the work; another to suade me of a certain view of how things are in the real world. The investigation of these two rhetorics and their interaction strikes me as a crucial project for students of literature and of film."<sup>21</sup> Since *Schindler's List* includes both the depiction of the Holocaust and a central portrait of the rescuer, Oskar Schindler, there are in fact at least four narrative rhetorics: the representational qualities used to convince the audience that the portrait of the Holocaust is authentic; the aesthetic form for representing the Holocaust; the correspondence with reality of the Schindler tale of rescue; and the formal structure of that representation. If the representation is carried out such that the Holocaust is presented as both representable **and** explicable, but Oskar Schindler's tale is representable but **not** explicable, then the juxtaposition of the two stories conveys the message that the Holocaust, and hence destructive desire, is explicable, but the inversion of destructive desire in its expression of self-sacrifice is not.

In addition to the truth and credibility of the historical representation and the aesthetic question, there is another dimension of narrative which Chatman does not mention in restricting his understanding of narrative to a rhetorical conception. The moral dimension must be addressed - the

meaning and comprehension of desire communicated by the portrayal. What message does the film (or the book) convey about comprehending desire as expressed in an act of heroic rescue as an inversion of destructive desire? What moral understanding does the film communicate when destructive desire is represented in a fully understandable light but its inversion is not?

The question is not the suitability of Spielberg as the fantasizer of unboundaried desire, who created a series of film fantasies of hope and joy in overcoming the greatest of horrors, turning his creativity to make a record of destructive desire and the rescue from it. This is what Spielberg had always filmed, only this time he claimed that it was the representation of reality and not just the projection of his own fantasies. The central question is the degree to which the film represented reality, the techniques of capturing that representation and their effects, and the moral message encompassed by the film. To what extent is the movie a projection of Spielberg's fantasies onto reality to create a form of collective memory which is sacriligious to the Jewish sacrifice of the Holocaust?

In the appearance of desire, is everything named that should have been named? Are they included in the right categories? In the link between the movie as a monument to history and the actors with their arms joined to the survivors they represented, they drop stones on the grave of Oscar Schindler. Does the audience inherit a *Yegar-sahadutha*<sup>22</sup>, a witness or testimony (etched in celluloid rather than stone) to what occurred? Has the Holocaust been protected only as a pile of stones, a rigid, fixed, material witness in contrast with written and recorded testimonials, which, like the Torah itself, always remains subject to interpretation? In watching snippets of the Holocaust as a backdrop to a story of rescue, do we hear from the survivors or do we see a story as reality as filtered through the imaginative creativity of Spielberg? Spielberg claimed to produce a document - literally, a *documentum* - a lesson intended to teach us. The movie certainly reinforces the fact that the Holocaust happened, but what lesson does it teach about what happened? To what metaphysical ideology of desire does the film lean in representing the battle between good and evil?

## ENDNOTES

. Though I speak of the film as Spielberg's, as if this were a film in the European auteur tradition, it was, in fact, a product of a brilliant group of creative artists. Nevertheless, the imprint of Spielberg as director is unmistakable. Spielberg rejected the auteur tradition and insisted that credit be shared for all "successful" films. (Cf., Philip M. Taylor, *Steven Spielberg: The Man, His Movies, and Their Meaning*, New York: Continuum, 1992, p. 8) The film which runs to three hours and fifteen minutes, is a Universal release and a Polin Entertainment Production, Spielberg's production company. The producers are Steven Spielberg, Gerald R. Molen and Branko Lustig. (Lustig is a Holocaust survivor with such films as *Sophie's Choice*, *War and Remembrance* and the *Wings of the Dove* to his credit.) Steven Zallian wrote the script; Stephen Spielberg spoke for Zallian's major contribution when Spielberg accepted a People's Award for his outstanding contribution to films. Michael Kahn provided the brilliant editing and the superb cinematography can be credited to Janusz Kaminski. The authentic sets and costumes were created by Ewa Braun and Anna Biedrzycka-Sheppard respectively. John Williams (who composed the music for Spielberg hits such as *E.T.* and *Jaws*) is responsible for the music which so enhanced the visual impact of the film. In addition to Liam Neeson as Schindler and Ben Kingsley as Itzhak Stern, Ralph Fiennes, the British actor, played Amon Goeth, Embeth Davidtz played Helena, and Leopold "Poldek" Pfefferberg was played by Jonathan Sagalle. The film won seven Oscars: for best picture, director, adapted screenplay, art direction, cinematography, film editing and original musical score.

. Success is denoted here in terms of money. By the end of 1993, four of the top ten best grossing films of all time were Spielberg creations. *Jurassic Park* which he finished editing while shooting *Schindler's List*, and *E.T.* are the top two grossing films, having taken in over one and one-half billion dollars in box office receipts between them. *Indiana Jones Last Crusade* and *Jaws* grossed almost half billion dollars each. (Cf. *Newsweek*, December 20, 1993, p. 116; the information was taken from *Variety*.) To Spielberg's surprise, *Schindler's List* has also been a success in commercial terms.

. Philip M. Taylor, *Steven Spielberg: The Man, His Movies, and Their Meaning*, New York: Continuum, 1992, p. 141.

. Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's List: a Novel*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981. In Britain, the book was titled, *Schindler's Ark*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.

. Krakow is spelled Cracow in the book, *Schindler's List*, and in other sources. However, unless contained in a direct quote or when directly referring to the text of the book, I will use the spelling, 'Krakow'.

. The Holocaust has been referred to as the genocide of the Jews, as the Shoah, the Judeocide, the *churban*, the disaster, the apocalypse. At different times I will use many of the above terms, but generally I simply use "Holocaust" as the most popular term designating the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. For a discussion of the significance in the choice of designation, see chapter "Names of the Holocaust" in James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, 1990.

. Steven Spielberg, Backside, Soundtrack CD, Universal City Studios & Amblin

entertainment, 1993.

. A bounded environment is created for security against random violence, to search for comfort by surrounding ourselves with artificiality. It has been amplified in the creation by the Ghermezian brothers of the largest indoor entertainment/shopping, recreation malls in both Edmonton, Alberta, and Bloomington, Minnesota. One is currently in the planning stages for the Washington area where the mall is slated to be called, "The American Dream." People keep saying, 'Why don't you build it like in the old days?' But if you put a roof on top, and doors at the entrances, people feel secure." (Gus Baumgardner, former chairman of the Planning Board of Silver Springs, and a consultant and spokesperson for the Ghermazian proposal, in David Finkel, "The Malling of Silver Springs: The Ghermazians and 'The American Dream'," *The Washington Post Magazine*, December 1995, 18.

. Christopher Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*, 1633, I, ii.

.. Spielberg stated, "*Schindler's List* is not a movie meant to entertain. It is meant to communicate very important, personally important, information about the existence of the Holocaust and the witnesses." Interview with Gabriel Erem, *Lifestyles*, 23:128, new year, 1994, p. 8.

.. Henry Walpole, *Otranto*, 1789, p. 89, requoted from *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 137. Most of the other quotes on the meaning of list are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary* as well.

.. Robert Fulford, "Spielberg's Diminished Oskar Schindler," *Globe and Mail*, p. 9, 1994, C1.

.. Gabriel Erem, "Steven Spielberg: *Schindler's List*," *Lifestyles*, 23:128, New Year, 1994, p. 10. As I will later document, this interpretation is **not** based on historical fact.

.. Philip Marchand, "Reality Fails to tarnish Schindler's List hero," *Toronto Star*, April 23, 1994, L10. Cf. Alfred Andersch, *Efraim's Book*, New York: Random House, 1984 in which testimonial quotes from the West German 1965 Auschwitz rehabilitation trials are used to support the claim that Auschwitz is inexplicably silent at least one occasion, SS-Man Küttner, known as Kierwe, flung a baby into the air and Franz killed it with two shots." (p. 143)

.. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 1. Robert Fothergill, a Professor of English and colleague at York University, reminded me of this quote.

.. *Popular Science Monthly*, 211, June (1882).

.. William Shakespeare, *King Lear* iv, vi.

.. Friedlander 1993, 109.

.. A. Day, *English Secretary* (1625), *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 1637.

.. Philip M. Taylor, *Steven Spielberg: The Man, His Movies, and Their Meaning*, New York: Continuum, 1992, p. 31.

.. Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 203.

.. Genesis 31: 44-9. In Aramaic, the phrase, literally translated, means one-heap for a witness. Evidently, it is the only Aramaic phrase used in the entire Torah. Cf. James E. Young, *Writing And Rewriting The Holocaust: Narrati*

l the Consequences of Interpretation, Bloomington: Indiana University Press  
90, p. 19.