

**FROM TEXT TO SCREEN: IMAGES AND ISSUES IN  
*SCHINDLER'S LIST***

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## PREFACE

I first heard of *Schindler's List* when I was reading a film review of *Parzania*, two years later, I found the book gracing my would-be supervisor's book shelf. Instinctively I reached out for it and in two days (almost breathless days) I had completed the book. The book's more famous counterpart—the film is of course better known to the world—it was one of the many reasons why I wanted to work on this little-popular book.

The book is by an Australian—one of the foremost writers of Australia, as Prof. Dickstein was to tell me later in an email—but relatively unknown of in Indian academic circles. Australian lit still forms for little interest in Indian academic circles now and my supervisor Prof. Sareen instantly approved of the idea.

Another reason why I chose to work in this area was because the book and the film together have never been studied –never called for a study on adaptation. Also that my teacher Mr Bhattacharyya urged me to work on something unusual for my M.Phil. This dissertation is an effort in that same direction.

The last but not the least reason why I went ahead with this project was because of the novel's appeal both in terms of content as well as form—if there was such a thing as a genre called “documentary” in narrating fiction (as in film studies) I'd call it that or perhaps not; like its hero that too remains an enigma for me.

## Introduction: Representing History

Thomas Elsaesser in his article discusses at length the idea of history, representation and cinema. He says, "History, when it is not just what's past, but what is being passed on, seems to have entered a conceptual twilight zone, not least because it has become a past that cinema and television can 'master' for us by digitally remastering archival material."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, memory when contrasted with history, have gained admirers both among the public as well as the elite among academics. It has begun to serve as a subject of public interest as well as in interpretation. Thomas Elsaesser is of the belief that "...history has become the very signifier of the inauthentic, merely designating what is left when the site of memory has been vacated by the living."<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the Holocaust Elsaesser's comment attains special importance, "...or what of the memory of the events which live in the culture because of the images they have left, etched on our retinas, too painful too disturbing not to remember? No longer is storytelling the culture's meaning-making response; an activity closer to therapeutic practice has taken over, which acts of re-telling, re-remembering, and repeating all pointing in the direction of obsession, fantasy, trauma."<sup>3</sup>

Elsaesser believes that the United States is most fortunate in having a public art such as cinema which may be said to have done "mourning work" on behalf of the state. He says,

Not all people are either as lucky or as bold. One only has to think of Japan, a country that appears until recently not even to have begun reflecting on the fact that the memory others have of it requires opening up its "history" to outside scrutiny. Germany on the other hand, has often either invited such scrutiny or has not been allowed by others to forget events that cannot be contained in consensus accounts or exempted from contested representation. The crimes of Nazism have demanded voicing and recollecting, be it by giving testimony or by acts of commemoration.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elsaesser, Thomas. "subject positions, speaking positions: from *holocaust*, *our hitler*, and *heimat* to *shoah* and *schindler's list*," in Vivian Sobchak, ed. *The Persistence of History : Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

In this light one can of course look at Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List*. A movie converted into a cultural event, because it was released soon after the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington. One needs to look into the relation between History and its representation but also at the issue of what it means to bear witness to such events. This becomes especially important when public memory subsumes personal memory and speaks for "someone" in a medium such as cinema.

Literary theorists have for long discussed the paradoxical nature of an event of the nature of the Holocaust that defies representation and yet makes a demand for it. On one side are those who believe that in order to preserve the silence of respect, of honour to the dead, and in order to record the "permanent scar on the face of humanity", all forms of narratives, dramatization and even figurative speech must be deemed as misrepresentations. There is this fear that such literariness is merely a mode of representation, a rhetoric which will confine the events to a point in time—fast receding.

Yet there are several European films which have tried to grapple with issues of Fascism and the Holocaust in a spirit of critical commitment and we can say even moral anguish. It begins right from Alan Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), to Hans Jurgen Syberberg's *Our Hitler* (1977). Many of them have focused on the issue of representation Jean Marie Straub's *Not Reconciled* (1965) and Edgardo Cozarinsky's *One Man's War* (1981) are examples in point.

On further analysis it is seen that Thomas Elsaesser's study presents a brilliant thesis—the reason why the holocaust can be represented, what he calls as, "the representational reality of Nazism". He says,

German fascism was the first political ideology which borrowed the materials, the techniques, and the *mise-en-scene* of its self image from the cinema and the show business. Fabric and drapery, floodlights and recorded sound, scaffolding and plaster became the preferred props and elements. What has been called *Stimmungsarchitektur* (mood architecture) found its way from stage and screen and public life. As a result, cinematic representations of Nazism after Nazism are of necessity involved in a dimension of self-reference or *mise-en-abyme*. They are confronted with a choice of evils: either adhere to a stringent form of understatement and visual asceticism in order to counter the visual pleasure and seduction emanating from the regime's spectacular stagings of itself, or expose



the viewer once more to the fascination, making the emotional charge residing in these images part of the subject matter itself.<sup>5</sup>

And so these fascinations continued in the 1940s and 1950s in films made about Nazism where a “*film noir*” kind of atmosphere prevailed to depict the “demonic” nature of Hitler and his henchmen and in films of a more contemporary filmmaker such as Jean Marie Straub who practiced “aesthetics of resistance”.

A renewed interest in Nazism was noticed around 1970 with Luchino Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969) and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Conformist* (1970) which battled on enemy terrain—the territory of fascination, sex, death and violence because this time the enemy was within—the self. Elsaesser believes,

The representational reality of this self rather than its historical meaning was what made fascism material for a certain (idea of) cinema in the first place. This in turn signaled the crisis of another and previous (idea of) cinema: that of neo-realism. This choice of topic, we have to assume, was neither naïve nor speculative, but one that recognized the seductive appeal, but one that recognized the legacy of Nazi aesthetics (even where its politics had lost its appeal) in present-day commodity culture, also given to conspicuous waste and spectacular destruction.<sup>6</sup>

Elsaesser further notes of Baudrillard’s characteristic response on this issue:

Jean Baudrillard, taking a characteristically wide sweep, analyzed the phenomenon in the context of a general nostalgia and detected in the cinema’s “retro-fashion” a distinct “retro-scenario”: Western Europe, locked into the political stasis of the cold war, with the intelligentsia demoralized by the post-1968 defeat of its revolutionary dreams, nostalgically imagines through the cinema a time where a country’s history still means individual victims, still signified causes that mattered and decisions of life and death. The attraction of a return to history as story and image was the illusion it could give of a personal or national destiny: a need Fascism had tried to gratify on a collective scale. For Baudrillard, too, retro-cinema was therefore less a move towards coming to terms with the past than the fetishization if not of fascinating fascism, then of another trauma located in the present: the absence of history altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Elsaesser talks of Martin Brozrat’s argument that to be able to talk about the “Third Reich” as “the German people’s own history” one needs to take individual

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> ibid

responsibility for all that occurred in the reign and not just present Hitler as some Pied Piper who charmed the masses. He argues that personal narratives and reminiscences has to be evoked and told in order that “the quasi-hypnotic paralysis of most of the German people with regard to the Nazi past” can be gotten rid of. Spielberg’s film then, as Elsaesser argues is a “post-modern” analysis of fascism: “around the topos of absolute power and the cancelling out of values in a situation of crisis.”<sup>8</sup>

While reading and writing of issues such as the Holocaust it would perhaps be worthwhile to actually sit back and reflect upon a few questions—do popular representations of the Holocaust trivialize the issue or do they “actually help in an element of memory for a public who might otherwise remain uninformed about the event?”<sup>9</sup>

With the appearance of a film such as *Schindler’s List* such issues have once again reared their heads—issues of popularization and trivialization are once again doing the rounds of academic circles, journals, conferences and even television talk shows. With this film, can we detect the winds of change—a coming to terms with these notions of such popularizations. Carl Becker, a historian at the Cornell University is of the opinion that “Mr. Everyman” is more powerful than the historian because he must adapt his knowledge to the needs of the masses and also that unread history books serve no function in the world.

In a survey on earlier research work done in this area I find there is a substantial amount of scholarship in the area of Adaptation theory in general, and of course Auteur theory had been pretty much influential too in the 1960s, with the field continuing to grow ever larger and wider. But a study on the adaptation work done on this film is missing. There are however numerous articles and studies on the film per se. There are also reviews of the book available. In India, studies on the Holocaust adapted onscreen or otherwise is missing. Studies on Australian literature are slowly making their way into the English departments in the country, under the guise of Post-Colonial literature.

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<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> Doneson, Judith E. “Holocaust Revisited: A Catalyst for Memory or Trivialization?” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 548, The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future (Nov., 1996), pp. 70-77.

There are also various articles on books, memoirs, narratives and personal histories available on J-Stor. There are also different kinds of histories of the Third Reich. I've made a study of two such books myself—*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer and *Inside the Third Reich* by Albert Speer, Hitler's armaments minister. I've also made a study of the recent book by Keneally—*Searching for Schindler* which deals with how he went about researching and writing a book such as *Schindler's Ark*.

While these are helpful in developing an understanding of the Holocaust in general they do not contribute to a particular understanding of Keneally's text being converted into film. The story could be called an anomaly in itself; for while there were Jewish heroes, there were none, gentile. Keneally's book is an extraordinary tale of a very ordinary man, bent on economic exploitation of the situation--especially the Jews but who turned into a saviour for them at the end of the war.

There are of course the documentaries--Resnais's *Night and Fog* and Lanzmann's *Shoah* and numerous feature films on the Holocaust in Europe but until Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Hollywood had never adopted the Holocaust to narrate a story. David Bathrick in his article notes of this very problem of representation of the Holocaust by Hollywood:

Freud's notion of screen memory, write LaPlanche/Pontalis, "is characterized both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content. The analysis of such memories leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to unconscious phantasies. Like the symptom, the screen memory is a formation produced by a compromise between repressed elements and defense." Thus screen memories are "compromise formations" which serve both to conceal a repressed traumatic experience that cannot be recovered directly as well as to represent the memory traces of a later date whose content is connected to its own by symbolic or similar links. Might not the cinematic screen represent a similar form of "compromise formation," a medium by which memories are recovered, however indirectly, as traces of a later date? In what way do the narrative inversions in these and similar films themselves provide a critical rereading of the classic Hollywood cinema's attempts to represent the Holocaust?

The first, and for much of the media discussion in Europe and the United States most pressing issue concerned the matter of employing a comedic mode to deal with such a topic. Yes, Charlie Chaplin had done it well in his 1940 film *The Great Dictator*, although he himself later acknowledged that if he had known the extent of the German horror he would never have made the film. Yes, the East German DEFA film based on Jurek Becker's novel *Jakob the Liar* employed gentle humor and fairytale fantasy to tell his story of resistance, but, one might

argue, this took place in the Ghetto prior to being transported to the killing fields in Treblinka and Auschwitz. Can one or should one laugh?<sup>10</sup>

Theodor Adorno's often misinterpreted injunction that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric is an appropriate place to begin such a discussion simply because it has come to serve as both prohibition and caveat. As prohibition, it has often been cited, along with George Steiner's *Language and Silence*, as a call to refrain from any form of aesthetic expression in the face of the unspeakable atrocities of the Holocaust. Whereas Steiner's more encompassing position puts forward the notion that in the post-Holocaust world, language and even thought have come to occupy a different ontological status from authentic experience - "The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason" - Adorno's hyperbolic provocation focuses on what he sees as the aporia inherent to the institutional framework of existing aesthetic experience. "Barbaric" in this reading are the inevitable feelings of pleasure evoked by prevailing forms of aesthetic stylization; the notion, more specifically, that a transfiguration occurs and that some of the horror of the event is thereby removed.

Reading Adorno's emphasis as one that ultimately stresses historically contextualized modes of aesthetic response rather than the ontological status of any autonomous art work, as it is often understood, helps us shift its intended meaning in the direction of caveat and away from taboo. As Enzensberger and even Adorno himself have sought to explain, the power of Adorno's famous oracular conundrum should lie precisely in the challenge it poses to contemporary artists to find new ways in which to create; to work themselves aesthetically out of the dilemmas posed by a post-Holocaust age; to think at every moment through one's spatial and temporal contingencies.

All of which takes us to the heart of the critical debates which found their initial impetus with the appearance of NBC's television series *Holocaust* in 1978 and their reinscription more recently in the discussions around Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. The central question has revolved around whether the Hollywood paradigm is capable of even grasping such an event as the Holocaust. Those who have been skeptical about such an eventuality

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<sup>10</sup> Bathrick, David. Rescreening "The Holocaust": The Children's Stories in *New German Critique*, No. 80, Special Issue on the Holocaust (Spring-Summer, 2000), pp.41-58.

focus on both institutional and textual considerations and often stage their arguments around three major issues: trivialization, fictionalization, and visualization.

When Paddy Chayefsky responded to the scandal surrounding NBC's *Holocaust* series with the simple declarative sentence "television is trivialization," he did not do so with the hope of upgrading the aesthetic standards of American television, nor was he thinking only about television as a medium. The trivialization argument concerns itself at a broader level with what happens when a subject such as the Shoah is turned into a product; with what are thought to be the inevitable effects upon its reception, when, in the words of Miriam Hansen, "it is circumscribed by the economic and ideological tenets of the culture industry, with its unquestioned and supreme values of entertainment and spectacle; its fetishism of style and glamour; its penchant for superlative and historicist grasp at any and all experience; and its reifying and leveling effect on everything it touches."<sup>11</sup> For some critics it is the vulgarity of its commercialization - in the case of NBC, the overbearing frequency of the commercials, including soap ads; in the case of *Schindler's List* the previewing hype - which is seen as blasphemy within such a context. For others, like Eli Wiesel or Art Spiegelman, there is something intrinsically incommensurable about the "re-creation" of the traumatic events for the sake of entertainment.

Given the all encompassing and ever expanding powers of media and its reach to ever larger numbers of people it becomes virtually impossible to control at any point how a film is made and received. Bathrick comments that it cannot entirely be seen as:

An act of despair, but simply to remind ourselves that in the struggle to define the limits of representation we are dealing with something that is considerably beyond the "naked fragile body" of an individual person, be he or she a critic or a film artist. When we speak of films like *Schindler's List* or *Holocaust*, we are no longer talking about an individual work of art or even your ordinary media event. Taken together with a film like the American television series *Roots*, they have to be understood as institutional formations in themselves which at their inception and still today have come to be marked as historical watersheds for how cultural identities are to be defined nationally and even globally. We are talking about socio-economic conglomerates which in some cases have impacted large sectors

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<sup>11</sup> Hansen, Miriam Bratu, "Schindler's List" is not "Shoah": The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory in *Critical Inquiry* Vol.22, No.2 (Winter 1996), pp 292-312.

of the educational, religious, cultural, political, and even diplomatic life in the societies in which they were shown.<sup>12</sup>

Bathrick believes that “Looking at our films in question, the NBC Holocaust series and Spielberg’s film were major political and commercial events in the collective and political life of both the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. In this regard there can be no after *Schindler’s List* just as there is no after *Holocaust*, unless one take’s after to mean in the wake of. Every film since those events perforce must define itself, negatively or positively, in relation to the images they communicated and the historical memory they have come to represent.”<sup>13</sup>

Bathrick further reports on the critique Hollywood is meted out at adopting the Holocaust for telling a story.

The critique of Hollywood’s tendency to fictionalize the Holocaust has less to do with the status of film as a commercial medium and more with its treatment of such a subject within the generic confines of the classical Hollywood narrative.

To abbreviate two arguments which are proffered for why films like *Holocaust* and *Schindler’s List* are incapable of grasping the complexities like the Shoah. The first has to do with narrative codes and subject position. Can a generic structure grounded in the notion that the basic plot of any film is driven by the desire of a single individual to achieve a specific goal appropriately depict a situation in which, according to Nazi accounts, the average life span of a camp prisoner was approximately three months; where the fate of the victims was determined almost solely by chance and not by choice; where the compositional principles of unity, motivation, linearity and closure reveal themselves as singularly inadequate in the face of an event that by its very nature defies one’s ability to make sense of it. In short, the very scale and magnitude of the suffering and victimization paralyze dramatic action just as the fictional compulsion for not only closure but happy closure delivers the lie at the very level of its form. Contingent to the issues of narrative flow and subjectivity, there arises a second consideration based on the implicit claim that such a style seems to be making about its abilities to tell everything. This is not only, or even necessarily achieved through a combining of fiction and non-fiction, as one finds excessively in the NBC film, or, as in *Schindler’s List*, by shooting in black and white in an implicit citational gesture to the documentary footage from the camps and the historical period that it seems to be quoting. As Alexander Kluge has demonstrated in his own cinematic and theoretical practice, the

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Bathrick, *op.cit*

combination of fiction and non-fiction, story and history can be employed precisely through montage editing and framing techniques to problematize self-reflexively the claim of any one mode of cinematic representation to have privileged access to historical truth. Rather, what distinguishes the classical codes governing *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List* is their assumed claim to the status of "master narrative" by virtue of the manner in which they fold all other accountings of the Holocaust experience into their own representations, and, in so doing, endow themselves with an aura of being the whole story.<sup>14</sup>

A third critique of the Classical Hollywood film has been directed at its supposed facile assumption that it can indeed express the inexpressible, that the images are "authentic." Clearly the critique of cinematic visualization is linked to the more general recognition that any representation whether historiographical or aesthetic is, in Dominick LaCapra's words, "constitutively limited" in both what it can know and knowingly transmit, and for that reason alone must be frugal (meticulous) in the way it chooses to depict even the most insignificant events or details. As a survivor of the Shoah, the Hungarian writer Imre Kertesz finds *Schindler's List* drowning in Kitsch, in part because of what its "falsified" images do to his sense of self. "The survivor looks on helplessly as he is Spielberg, who by the way was born after the war, has absolutely no idea - nor can he - about the authentic nature of a Nazi concentration camp. So why does he torture himself trying to make everything appear authentic." What is interesting and important here is that Kertesz is not arguing against realist representation or the inclusion of detail, but against the appearance of their authenticity, their claim to be real.

In his discussion of the NBC series, Lawrence Langer concurs with Lance Morrow of *Time Magazine* "that the two or three black and white photos from the camps displayed by the Nazi officer Eric Dorf in *Holocaust* are more powerful and heartbreaking than two or three hours of dramatization.

Before we delve any further into the topic an understanding of the holocaust as it happened is imperative. **The Holocaust** is derived from the Greek word **Holokauston**: *holos*, "whole" and *kaustos*, "burnt", also known as **The Shoah** which is the term generally used to describe the genocide of approximately six million European Jews during World War II,

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<sup>14</sup> ibid

a program of systematic state-sponsored extermination by Nazi Germany, under Adolf Hitler, its allies, and collaborators.

Some scholars maintain that the definition of the Holocaust should also include the Nazis' systematic murder of millions of people in other groups, including ethnic Poles, the Romani, Soviet civilians, Soviet prisoners of war, people with disabilities, gays and political and religious opponents. By this definition, the total number of Holocaust victims is between 11 million and 17 million people.

The persecution and genocide were carried out in stages. Legislation to remove the Jews from civil society was enacted years before the outbreak of World War II. Concentration camps were established in which inmates were used as slave labor until they died of exhaustion or disease. Where the Third Reich conquered new territory in Eastern Europe, specialized units called **Einsatzgruppen** murdered Jews and political opponents in mass shootings. Jews and Romani were crammed into ghettos before being transported by freight train to extermination camps—which were established in plenty throughout Reich territory, where, if they survived the journey, the majority of them were killed in specially constructed gas chambers. Every arm of Nazi Germany's bureaucracy was involved in the logistics of the mass murder, turning the country into what one Holocaust scholar has termed as "a genocidal state".

**Holocaust** was adopted as a translation of the word **Shoah**—a Hebrew word connoting catastrophe, calamity, disaster, and destruction—which was first used in 1940 in Jerusalem in a booklet called *Sho'at Yehudei Polin*, and translated into English as *The Holocaust of the Jews of Poland*. **Shoah** had earlier been used in the context of the Nazis as a translation of **catastrophe**; in 1934, Chaim Weizmann told the **Zionist Action Committee** that Hitler's rise to power was an "unvorhergesehene Katastrophe, etwa ein neuer Weltkrieg" ("an unforeseen catastrophe, perhaps even a new world war"); the Hebrew press translated **Katastrophe** as **Shoah**. In the spring of 1942, the Jerusalem historian Ben Zion Dinur (Dinaburg) used **Shoah** in a book published by the United Aid Committee for the Jews in Poland to describe the extermination of Europe's Jews, calling it a "catastrophe" that symbolized the unique situation of the Jewish people. The word **Shoah** was chosen in



Israel to describe the Holocaust, the term institutionalized by the Knesset on April 12, 1951, when it established **Yom Ha-Shoah Ve Mered Ha-Getaot**, the national day of remembrance. In the 1950s, Yad Vashem was routinely translating this into English as "the Disaster"; at that time, the word **holocaust** was often used to mean the conflagration of much of humanity in a nuclear war. Since then, Yad Vashem has changed its practice; the word **Holocaust**, usually now capitalized, has come to refer principally to the genocide of the European Jews. This in short is the history of the word *Holocaust* and how it came into existence and into circulation. The Columbia Encyclopedia defines "**Holocaust**" as "name given to the period of persecution and extermination of European Jews by Nazi Germany". The Compact Oxford English Dictionary and Microsoft Encarta give similar definitions. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines "**Holocaust**" as "the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II".

Scholars are divided on whether the term Holocaust should be applied to all victims of the Nazi mass murder campaign, with some using it synonymously with "**Shoah**" or "**Final Solution of the Jewish Question**", and others including the killing of Romani peoples (Roma and Sinti) and, the deaths of Soviet POWs, Slavs, gays, Jehovah's Witnesses, the disabled, and political opponents.

Yehuda Bauer believes that the **Holocaust** should include only Jews because it was the intent of the Nazis to exterminate all Jews, while the other groups were not to be totally annihilated. Besides Bauer, scholars like Xu Xin, Ben Kiernan, Edward Kissi, Simone Veil, Monika Richarz, and Francis Deng refer solely to the destruction of the European Jewry when using the term "**Holocaust**".

Inclusion of non-Jewish victims of the Nazis in the Holocaust is objected to by many persons including Elie Wiesel, and by organizations such as Yad Vashem established to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. They say that the word was originally meant to describe the extermination of the Jews, and that the Jewish Holocaust was a crime on such a scale, and of such totality and specificity, as the culmination of the long history of

European anti-semitism, that it should not be subsumed into a general category with the other crimes of the Nazis.

Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann maintain that although all Jews were victims, the Holocaust transcended the confines of the Jewish community—other people shared the tragic fate of victimhood. Laszlo Teleki applies the term "Holocaust" to both the murder of Jews and Romani peoples by the Nazis.

Sometimes, the term "*Holocaust*" is used to describe events that have no connection with World War II. The terms **Rwandan Holocaust** and **Cambodian Holocaust** are used to refer to the Rwanda genocide of 1994 and the mass killings by the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia respectively, and **African Holocaust** is used to describe the slave trade and the colonization of Africa, also known as the **Maafa**.

In other genocides, pragmatic considerations such as control of territory and resources were central to the genocide policy. However Yehuda Bauer, a Holocaust scholar differs and says that the basic motivation [of the Holocaust] was purely ideological, rooted in an illusionary world of Nazi imagination, where an international Jewish conspiracy to control the world was opposed to a parallel Aryan quest. No genocide to date had been based so completely on myths, on hallucinations, on abstract, nonpragmatic ideology—which was then executed by very rational, pragmatic means.

The slaughter was systematically conducted in virtually all areas of Reich-occupied territories in what are now 35 separate European countries. It was at its worst in Central and Eastern Europe, which had more than seven million Jews in 1939. About five million Jews were killed there, including three million in occupied Poland and over one million in the USSR. Hundreds of thousands also died in the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Yugoslavia and Greece. The **Wannsee Protocol** makes clear that the Nazis also intended to carry out their "final solution of the Jewish question" in England and Ireland.

The directives were such: anyone with three or four Jewish grandparents in the lineage was to be exterminated without exception. In other genocides, people were able to escape death by converting to another religion or in some other way assimilating. This option was not

available to the Jews of occupied Europe, unless their grandparents had converted prior to January 18, 1871. All persons of recent Jewish ancestry were to be exterminated in lands controlled by Germany.

The Nazis would never have been able to do what they did if the roots of their anti-semitic beliefs were not rooted many centuries before. In the Roman Empire, in the name of Christianity, by the Romanians, in Poland and during the Russian Empire, European Jews have a long history of being subjected to religious hatred, persecutions as well as some brief times of tolerance. Now follows a short history of the history of the genocide that raged before the Nazis' "Final Solution".

In medieval Europe, many persecutions of Jews in the name of Christianity occurred, notably during the Crusades—when Jews all over Germany were massacred—and a series of expulsions from England, Germany, France, and, in the largest expulsion of all, Spain. Jews were frequently put on trial and executed for a variety of imagined religious offenses against Christianity. On many occasions, Jews were accused of a blood libel, the supposed drinking of the blood of Christian children in mockery of the Christian Eucharist. Jews were also falsely accused of torturing consecrated host wafers in a reenactment of the Crucifixion. Towards the end of the middle ages, Martin Luther's teachings inspired and deeply influenced Protestant traditions and culture. He was widely known for his writings about the Jews, the nature and consequences of which are the subject of much debate among scholars, many of whom have characterized them as anti-Semitic. He stated that Jews' homes should be destroyed, their synagogues and schools burned, money confiscated, and rights and liberties curtailed.

The 19th century began with a series of anti-Jewish riots in Germany which spread to several neighboring countries including Denmark, resulting in mob attacks on Jews in Copenhagen and many provincial towns. These riots were known as "**Hep! Hep! Riots**", from the derogatory rallying cry against the Jews in Germany. Riots lasted for five months during which time shop windows were smashed, stores looted, homes attacked, and Jews physically abused. In the aftermath of the riots, saw the abolition of discriminatory laws applied especially to Jews, the recognition of Jews as equal to other citizens, and the

formal granting of citizenship. This process known as the 'Emancipation' was a major goal of European Jews of the 19th century, and led to active participation of Jews in the civil society. By the early 20th century, the Jews of Germany were some of the most integrated in Europe. The situation changed in the early 1930's with the rise of the Nazis and their explicitly anti-semitic program.

Due to the organization and overwhelming military might of the Nazi German state and its supporters, few Jews and other Holocaust victims were able to resist the killings. There are, however, many cases of attempts at resistance in one form or another, and over a hundred armed Jewish uprisings. The largest instance of organized Jewish resistance was the **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**, from April to May of 1943, as the final deportation from the Ghetto to the death camps was about to commence, the **ZOB** and **ZZW** fighters rose up against the Nazis. Most of the resisters were killed, but the few who did survive the war are currently residing in Israel. There were also other Ghetto Uprisings, though none were successful against the German military.

There were also major resistance efforts in three of the extermination camps. In August 1943, an uprising also took place at the **Treblinka** extermination camp. Many buildings were burnt to the ground, and seventy inmates escaped to freedom, but 1,500 were killed. Gassing operations were interrupted for a month. In October 1943, another uprising took place at **Sobibor** extermination camp. This uprising was more successful; 11 SS men and a number of Ukrainian guards were killed, and roughly 300 of the 600 inmates in the camp escaped, with about 50 surviving the war. The escape forced the Nazis to close the camp. On October 7, 1944, the Jewish **Sonderkommandos** (those prisoners kept separate from the main camp and involved in the operation of the gas chambers and crematoria) at Auschwitz staged an uprising. Female prisoners had smuggled in explosives from a weapons factory, and Crematorium IV was partly destroyed by an explosion. The prisoners then attempted a mass escape, but all 250 were killed soon after.

There were a number of Jewish partisan groups operating in many countries. Also, Jewish volunteers from the Palestinian Mandate, most famously Hannah Szenes, who parachuted into Europe in a failed attempt to organize resistance.

**Jehovah's Witnesses** in Germany were persecuted between 1933 and 1945. They were scorned by the name **Ernste Bibelforscher** (Earnest Bible Students) at that time, because Jehovah's Witnesses would not give allegiance to the Nazi party, and refused to serve in the military; they were detained, put in concentration camps, or imprisoned during the Holocaust. Unlike Jews, homosexuals and Gypsies, who were persecuted for racial, political and social reasons, Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted on religious ideological grounds. The Nazi government gave detained Jehovah's Witnesses the option: if they were to renounce their faith, submit to the state authority, and support the German military, they would be free to leave prison or the camps. Approximately 12,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were sent to concentration camps where they were forced to wear a purple triangle that specifically identified them as Jehovah's Witnesses. In the end, about 2,000 of their members were incarcerated and perished under the Nazi system.

Anti-Semitism was common in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s (though its roots go back much further). Adolf Hitler's fanatical brand of racial anti-Semitism was laid out in his 1925 book *Mein Kampf*, which, though largely ignored when it was first printed, became a bestseller in Germany once Hitler gained political power.

On April 1, 1933, shortly after Hitler's accession to power, the Nazis, led mainly by Julius Streicher, and the Sturmabteilung, organized a one-day boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses in Germany. A series of increasingly harsh laws were soon passed in quick succession. Under the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service", passed by the Reichstag on April 7, 1933, all Jewish civil servants at the Reich, Lander, and municipal levels of government were fired immediately. The "Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service" marked the first time since Germany's unification in 1871 that an anti-Semitic law had been passed in Germany. This was followed by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that prevented marriage between any Jew and non-Jew, and stripped all Jews of German citizenships--their official title then read "subject of the state" and of their basic civil rights, e.g., to vote. Similar restrictions and harassment of 100,000 Germans of part-Jewish descent, known as "mischling" was part of the Nazi regime's fanatical anti-Semitic binge, though most "mischling" are not considered for extermination in the Holocaust.

In 1936, Jews were banned from all professional jobs, effectively preventing them exerting any influence in education, politics, higher education and industry. On 15 November 1938, Jewish children were banned from going to normal schools. By April 1939, nearly all Jewish companies had either collapsed under financial pressure and declining profits, or had been forced to sell out to the Nazi-German government as part of the "Aryanization" policy inaugurated in 1937.

Another distinctive feature of the Holocaust was the extensive use of human subjects in medical experiments. German physicians carried out such experiments at **Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen** and **Natzweiler** concentration camps. The most notorious of these physicians was Dr. Josef Mengele, who worked in Auschwitz. His experiments included placing subjects in pressure chambers, testing drugs on them, freezing them, attempting to change eye color by injecting chemicals into children's eyes and various amputations and other brutal surgeries. The full extent of his work will never be known because the truckload of records he sent to Dr. Otmar von Verschuer at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute were destroyed by von Verschuer. Subjects who survived Mengele's experiments were almost always killed and dissected shortly afterwards.

Throughout the 1930s, the legal, economic, and social rights of Jews were steadily restricted. In legally defining "who is Jew", the Nazis considered anyone of Jewish descent, even the descendants of converts who converted from Judaism after January 18, 1871, (the founding of the German Empire) were still considered Jews. Friedlander writes that, for the Nazis, Germany drew its strength for its "purity of blood" and its "rootedness in the sacred German earth." In 1933, a series of laws were passed which contained "Aryan paragraphs" to exclude Jews from key areas: the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service; the physicians' law; and the farm law, forbidding Jews from owning farms or taking part in agriculture. Jewish lawyers were debarred, and in Dresden, Jewish lawyers and judges were dragged out of their offices and courtrooms, and beaten up. At the insistence of then President Hindenburg, Hitler added an exemption allowing Jewish civil servants who were veterans of the First World War, or whose fathers or sons had served, to remain in office. (Hindenburg was disturbed that people who had fought and

bled for Germany would be forced from their state jobs.) Hitler revoked this exemption in 1937. Jews were excluded from schools and universities as the Law to prevent overcrowding in schools and from belonging to the Journalists' Association, or from being owners or editors of newspapers. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of April 27, 1933 wrote:

In 1935, Hitler introduced the Nuremberg Laws, which: prohibited Jews from marrying Aryans, annulled existing marriages between Jews and Aryans (the Law for the protection of German blood and German honor,) prohibited Jews from serving as civil servants, stripped German Jews of their citizenship and deprived them of all civil rights. In his speech introducing the laws, Hitler said that if the "Jewish problem" cannot be solved by these laws, it "must then be handed over by law to the National-Socialist Party for a final solution (*Endlösung*). "The expression "*Endlösung*" became the standard Nazi euphemism for the extermination of the Jews.

Jewish intellectuals were among the first to leave. The philosopher Walter Benjamin left for Paris on March 18, 1933. Novelist Leon Feuchtwanger went to Switzerland. The conductor Bruno Walter fled after being told that the hall of the Berlin Philharmonic would be burned down if he conducted a concert there: the *Frankfurter Zeitung* explained on April 6 that Walter and fellow conductor Otto Klemperer had been forced to flee because the government was unable to protect them against the "mood" of the German public, which had been provoked by "Jewish artistic liquidators". Albert Einstein was visiting the U.S. on January 30, 1933. He returned to Ostende in Belgium, never to set foot in Germany again, and calling events there a "psychic illness of the masses"; he was expelled from the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and the Prussian Academy of Sciences, and his citizenship was rescinded. Saul Friedlander writes that when Max Liebermann, honorary president of the Prussian Academy of Arts, resigned his position, not one of his colleagues expressed a word of sympathy, and he died ostracized two years later. When the police arrived in 1943 with a stretcher to deport his 85 year old bedridden widow, she committed suicide with an overdose of barbiturates rather than be taken.

On 7 November 1938, Jewish minor Herschel Grunspan assassinated Nazi German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris. This incident was used by the Nazis to initiate the transition from legal repression to large-scale outright violence against Jewish Germans. What the Nazis claimed to be spontaneous "public outrage", was a concerted action of Nazi party and SA members and affiliates, who after a Joseph Goebbels hate speech started mass pogroms throughout Nazi Germany, then consisting of Germany proper, Austria and Sudetenland. The pogroms became known as **Reichs Kristallnacht** ("the Night of Broken Glass", literally "Crystal Night"), or **November pogroms**. Jews were attacked and Jewish property was vandalized, over 7,000 Jewish shops and 1,668 synagogues (almost every synagogue in Germany) were damaged or destroyed. The death toll is assumed to be much higher than the official number of 91 dead. 30,000 were sent to concentration camps, including **Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Oranienburg** concentration camp, where they were kept for several weeks and released when they could either prove that they were about to emigrate in the near future, or after property transfers to the Nazis. The German Jewry was collectively made responsible for restitution of the material damage of the pogrom, amounting to several hundreds of thousand Reichsmark, and furthermore had to pay collectively an "atonement tax" of more than a billion Reichsmark. After these pogroms, Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany accelerated, while public Jewish life in Germany ceased to exist.

As the war started, large massacres of Jews took place, and, by December 1941, Hitler decided to completely exterminate European Jews. In January 1942, during the Wannsee conference, several Nazi leaders discussed the details of the "Final Solution of the Jewish question" (**Endlösung der Judenfrage**). Dr. Josef Bühler urged Reinhard Heydrich to proceed with the Final Solution in the General Government. They began to systematically deport Jewish populations from the ghettos and all occupied territories to the seven camps designated as Vernichtungslager, or extermination camps: **Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Maly Trostenets, Sobibór and Treblinka II**. Sebastian Haffner published the analysis in 1978 that Hitler from December 1941 accepted the failure of his goal to dominate Europe forever because of his declaration of war against the United States, but that his withdrawal and apparent calm thereafter was sustained by the achievement of his



second goal—the extermination of the Jews. Even as the Nazi war machine faltered in the last years of the war, precious military resources such as fuel, transport, munitions, soldiers and industrial resources were still being heavily diverted away from the war and towards the death camps.

Poland, home of the largest Jewish community in the world before the war, had had over 90% of its Jewish population, or about 3,000,000 Jews, killed. The penalty imposed by the Germans for hiding Jews was death, and this was carried out mercilessly. In spite of this some Poles hid Jewish children and families and saved their lives at risk to their own families.

**Greece, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Lithuania, Bohemia, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Latvia** each had over 70% of their Jewish population destroyed. Belgium, Romania, Luxembourg, Norway, and Estonia lost around half of their Jewish population, the Soviet Union over one third of its Jews, and even countries such as France and Italy had each seen around a quarter of their Jewish population killed. Denmark was able to evacuate almost all of the Jews in their country to nearby Sweden, which was neutral during the war. Using everything from fishing boats to private yachts, the Danes whisked the Danish Jews out of harm's way. Some Jews outside Europe under Nazi occupation were also affected by the Holocaust and treatment from the Nazis.

As the armies of the Allies closed in on the Reich at the end of 1944, the Nazis decided to abandon the extermination camps, moving or destroying evidence of the atrocities they had committed there. The Nazis marched prisoners, already sick after months or years of violence and starvation, for tens of miles in the snow to train stations; then transported for days at a time without food or shelter in freight trains with open carriages; and forced to march again at the other end to the new camp. Prisoners who lagged behind or fell were shot. The largest and most well known of the death marches took place in January 1945, when the Soviet army advanced on Poland. Nine days before the Soviets arrived at the death camp at Auschwitz, the SS guards marched 60,000 prisoners out of the camp toward Wodzislaw, 56 km away where they were put on freight trains to other camps. Around 15,000 died on the way. In total, around 100,000 Jews died during these death marches.

In July 1944, the first major Nazi camp, Majdanek, was discovered by the advancing Soviets, who eventually liberated Auschwitz in January 1945. In most of the camps discovered by the Soviets, the prisoners had already been transported away by death marches, leaving only a few thousand prisoners alive. Concentration camps were also liberated by American and British forces, including Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945. Some 60,000 prisoners were discovered at the camp, but 10,000 died from disease or malnutrition within a few weeks of liberation. Ghettos were established in Europe in which Jews were confined before being shipped to extermination camps.

Michael Berenbaum writes that Germany became a "genocidal state". Every arm of the country's sophisticated bureaucracy was involved in the killing process. Parish churches and the Interior Ministry supplied birth records showing who was Jewish; the Post Office delivered the deportation and denaturalization orders; the Finance Ministry confiscated Jewish property; German firms fired Jewish workers and disenfranchised Jewish stockholders; the universities refused to admit Jews, denied degrees to those already studying, and fired Jewish academics; government transport offices arranged the trains for deportation to the camps; German pharmaceutical companies tested drugs on camp prisoners; companies bid for the contracts to build the crematoria; detailed lists of victims were drawn up using the Dehomag company's punch card machines, producing meticulous records of the killings. As prisoners entered the death camps, they were made to surrender all personal property, which was carefully catalogued and tagged before being sent to Germany to be reused or recycled. Berenbaum writes that the Final Solution of the Jewish question was "in the eyes of the perpetrators ... Germany's greatest achievement."

Saul Friedlander writes that: "Not one social group, not one religious community, not one scholarly institution or professional association in Germany and throughout Europe declared its solidarity with the Jews." He writes that some Christian churches declared that *converted* Jews should be regarded as part of the flock, but even then only up to a point.

Friedlander argues that this makes the Holocaust distinctive because anti-semitic policies were able to unfold without the interference of countervailing forces of the kind normally

found in advanced societies, such as industry, small businesses, churches, and other vested interests and lobby groups.

Before the war, the Nazis had thought of mass resettlements of the German (and subsequently the European) Jewry to areas outside Europe. Because Germany had lost her colonies in World War I, diplomatic efforts were undertaken to negotiate arrangements with the colonial powers, primarily the United Kingdom and France. These efforts included plans to resettle Jews to British Palestine, Italian Abyssinia, British Guinea, British Rhodesia, French Madagascar, and British Australia.

Plans to reclaim former German colonies like Tanzania and Namibia as a place to resettle Jews were halted by Adolf Hitler, who argued that no place where "so much blood of heroic Germans had been spilled" should be made available as a residence for the "worst enemies of the Germans". Of the envisioned resettlement areas, Madagascar was the most seriously discussed. While Jews were murdered on a mass scale since 1939, in 1940 some Nazis considered eliminating Jews by the unrealistic Madagascar Plan which, however futile, in retrospect did constitute an important psychological step on the path to the Holocaust. The planning was carried out by Eichmann's office; Heydrich called it a "territorial final solution". The plan was to ship all European Jews to Madagascar. In view of the difficulties of supporting more population in the General Government in July 1940, Hitler, still hoping for success with the Madagascar plan, stopped the deportation of Jews there. This was temporary, however, as the military situation offered no possibility to conquer Britain. The plan may have been foreseen as a remote and slower genocide through the unfavorable conditions on the island. Although the Final Solution was already in place and Jews were being exterminated, the formal declaration of the Plan's end was abandoned on February 10, 1942, when the German Foreign Office was given an official explanation that due to the war with the Soviet Union Jews are going to be "sent to the east".

On September 28, 1939, Germany gained control over the Lublin area through the German-Soviet agreement in exchange for Lithuania. According to the Nisko Plan, they set up the Lublin-Lipowa Reservation in the area. The reservation was designated by Adolf

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Eichmann, who was assigned the task of removing all Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. They shipped the first Jews to Lublin less than three weeks later on October 18, 1939. The first train loads consisted of Jews deported from Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. By January 30, 1940, historians estimate a total of 78,000 Jews had been deported to Lublin from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. On 12 and 13 February 1940, the Pomeranian Jews were deported to the Lublin reservation, resulting in Pomeranian Gauleiter Franz Schwede-Coburg to be the first to declare his Government "judenrein" ("free of Jews"). On March 24, 1940 Hermann Göring put a hold on the Nisko Plan, and by the end of April, abandoned it entirely. By the time the Nisko Plan was stopped, the total number of Jews who had been transported to Nisko had reached 95,000, many of whom had died due to starvation.

During 1940 and 1941, the murder of large numbers of Jews in German occupied Poland continued, and the deportation of Jews were deported to the General Government was undertaken. The deportation of Jews from Germany, particularly Berlin, was not officially completed until 1943. By December 1939, 3.5 million Jews were crowded into the General Government area. This in short is the history of the Holocaust.

In Chapter 1, Adaptation Theory as well as Auteurism will be looked into closely. Within the theoretical framework of Adaptation of course lies numerous debates – and all shall be looked at in great details. This is especially helpful while making a study of a cinematic text such as *Schindler's List* for it presents a very unusual case. While Adaptation Theory takes into account the rendition onto celluloid of the more popular classic texts, *Schindler's List* the film is a cinematic adaptation of a literary text comparatively unknown.

In Chapter 2, the differences between the text and the film have been noted for a study and examination of the same. While Adaptation theory talks about the theory of adapting a literary text onto the screen in more general terms this chapter analyses the possible reasons for the particular deviations of the case study—*Schindler's List* the film—from its parent literary text.

In Chapter 3, a close analysis or review of the book and the film has been attempted. The reasons for converting the literary text into film—the politics of converting that, ideological stands et al have been explored. The reasons for writing the two texts into being, their individual ideologies and the socio-political conditions under which they exist and are circulated are markers that need to be analysed in great depth. Also looked at in some details is the auteur, Spielberg's works which will help us contextualize *Schindler's List* as a film in his oeuvre.

In the appendix to the dissertation is reproduced an interview with the author which this scholar conducted via email. The author airs among others his views about the film vis-a-vis the book.

## Chapter 1

### Cinema: Theory and Practice

A study of *Schindler's List*—both the film and literary text necessitates a certain understanding of Adaptation theory as it does Auteur theory. And so even before we delve into the analyses of both film and text it becomes even more crucial to understand the medium of film itself. Dudley Andrew divides it up roughly into four major areas but even before he does that he states, “Every question about film falls under at least one of the following headings: raw material, methods and techniques, forms and shapes, purpose or value. These categories adapted from Aristotle divide the phenomenon of film into the aspects which make it up and which can be interrogated.”<sup>1</sup> Andrew says that “the raw material” question include basic questions about the medium such as those that seek its relation to reality, illusion and photography, use of time and space or processes such as those of colour, sound, and the make-up of the movie theatre.

The “methods and techniques” of film includes questions of the processes which are creative and which shapes the raw material. It also includes questions of technological developments like the zoom shot etc, the psychology of the filmmaker and even the economics of film production.

“The form and shapes” of cinema is the category that includes questions about the kinds of films which have been or could have been made. It includes questions about cinema’s ability to adapt artworks (which includes the theory of Adaptation of course), genre and audience expectation or effect. At this point in time we are looking at cinema as a completed process and here questions of how it is shaped and how it is received by the audience are answered.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew, J.D. *Major Film Theories: An Introduction*. London: OUP, 1976.

“The purpose and value” of cinema is the category that deals with questions of the role of cinema in man’s life. What does it mean for mankind once all this raw material has been processed and given significant form and shape by a process?

It is interesting to note that theorists target at answering these questions in their particular treatises. Also interesting is the fact that a single question can be asked from various perspectives and within this single question are contained also numerous other questions hinting at interdependency in this field of study.

Cinema was beleaguered by theory even before it had completed two decades of existence. The first series of essays sought to carve out a niche for it in the world of modern culture since it had grown up around serious as well as popular culture. And it had already begun to alter history. Dudley Andrew notes of the particular difficulty theorists at first must have faced with questions that dealt with its separation from other art forms from which it borrowed and was an integral part of. Men who sympathized with the new born cultural being called film first sought to free it from the stranglehold of other media and give it a life of its own. Thus were born the second wave of film criticisms. These theorists sought to give cinema a stature of its own and at par with the other arts. They believed in this doctrine because cinema, they said changed the way the world was looked at –they claimed that it changed the meaninglessness and chaos of the world into a sustaining structure and rhythm. During this phase of criticism cinema was compared with virtually all the other arts. In France a section of enthusiasts claimed that cinema shared links with music for it concentrated on shaping the look and flow of reality. By 1935 it was well established as an art form independent of all other arts but sharing with them the ability to transform the dross and the mundane into scintillating and eloquent matter.

Bazin differed from conventional theorists in claiming that cinema stands beside the world while looking just like it. He also added that while it would be wrong to speak of the concept of “reality” onscreen, he nevertheless coined a term borrowed from geometry that accurately described the phenomenon which is cinema. He called cinema an “asymptote of reality”—forging an alliance in terms of proximity and dependency. He believed that cinema “through its technical genesis” would bring us back to reality itself. In nearly every essay, Bazin proclaimed cinema’s dependence on reality. “Cinema attains its fullness in

being the art of the real,” he said. The next few words on Bazin attain special importance when seen in conjunction with the art of a director such as Spielberg. He was a theoretician who believed that cinema could act as a “sesame” to worlds unknown and vaster than ours and “giving us knowledge of empirical reality otherwise unavailable.” He also believed that cinematographic language was a language not restricted like our own to dictionaries or to alphabets—it included all the potentials of “the unadorned image and the unedited scene as well.”<sup>2</sup> And nearly all of Spielberg’s works examined in the light of the Auteur theory and written about in greater details in Chapter 3 serves to highlight this very aspect.

Adaptation involves questions of narration, point of view, sense of space and time, authorship, style and tone as well as other things that span the worlds of both cinema and the literary world. Although the two mediums are different—critics would put it down as words versus images—they are in essence not very different. But before we delve into such an understanding with the help of the particular film and text it becomes all the more important to understand the position of Adaptation in the cinematic world. This in turn will help us understand the contrasts and continuities in the two media.

According to Metz, filmmakers, analysts and even spectators think in terms of texts—because the texts add something to individual messages. This it does by creating a context for meaning. This master text is created so structurally, in turn it plays a role in creating a total experience or “**signification**”. It will suffice to say that the various codes do not exist in the mind of the spectator but is actually a brainchild of the Creator—the Director of the film. “The text becomes a vibrating system for both spectator and analyst, and a system which bends the codes into a particular configuration, forcing them to release their messages in a prepatterned context. The text is much more than a collection or ensemble; it is for the analyst and for the successful viewer a particular logical system of a given number of codes, capable of conferring value on messages.”<sup>3</sup>

From the very inception of cinema, adaptations of works of literature onto the screen have been a norm rather than an exception. In fact, the growth and development of cinema is heavily indebted to literary sources. Griffith one of the very early practitioners of the

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*



cinematic art is known to have arrived on the sets each day carrying a Dickensian novel in hand—it is not for nothing that he adapted onscreen such classics as Tennyson’s *Enoch Arden*, Browning’s *Pippa Passes* and Jack London’s *Call of the Wild*.

Joy Gould Boyum however notes in her work, *Double Exposure*, that Griffith cannot be hailed as the father of Adaptation. In this he was only following the lead of French and Italian filmmakers who had initiated this art as early as 1902. The very same year too, George Melies began his cinematic odyssey by filming *A Trip to the Moon* loosely connected to Jules Verne’s novel. However primitive or amateurish these early adaptations may have proved to be—they were praiseworthy in their effort to reach out to the lower classes and hence educating them as Boyum calls it “in the great tradition”. Writing as early as 1911, Stephen Bush made a case for adaptation,

It is the masterpiece of the ages that especially invites filming, and the reason for it is very plain. An epic that has pleased and charmed many generations is most likely to stand the test of cinematographic reproduction...after all, the word classic has some meaning. It implies the approval of the best people in the most enlightened times. The merits of a classic subject are nonetheless certain because known and appreciated by comparatively few men. It is the business of the moving picture to make them known to all.<sup>4</sup>

On the level of business, Boyum notes, it supplied filmmakers with a much-needed source of plots and characters. And if the work happened to be popular then it proved an asset for the screen as ‘proven property’ it also gave movies “that suspect vulgar form which even Griffith had at first held in contempt and which right from the outset suffered from a sense of inferiority regarding its status and respectability” - a touch of class.

And so it has ever been that adaptations have always occupied a position of privilege in the movie industry and been honoured at the Academy Awards. Not surprising then that in the year 1939 every film competing at the academy awards was an adaptation—*Wuthering Heights*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and *Gone with the Wind*.

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<sup>4</sup> Boyum, J.G. *Double Exposure: Fiction to Film*. Calcutta: Seagull, 1989.

If adaptation had its admirers it had its detractors too and these came from the ranks of not filmmakers but academics, theorists and later day critics. Their objections they put into print and despite early admiration and support for adaptation quashed it totally. Even Vachel Lindsay passionate about the film medium, advocating it as “film art” objected to adaptations on the grounds that it violated the medium’s uniqueness. Woolf too, almost of the same camp was of the opinion that the “alliance” between film and literature was “unnatural” and “disastrous” to both mediums. From her language it was clear that her bias of course lay with the written word. She writes of them as the “prey” and “unfortunate victim” and movies as a “parasite” and which feeds on books with “immense rapacity” and movie audiences as “the savages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.

But these arguments were not to be last in their field—things were going to improve after World War II. With the advent of sound and a host of other technological advancements, cinema underwent such radical changes that even Andre Bazin was forced to concede in his essay, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema” that “the filmmaker...is, at last, the equal of the novelist.” Cinema by now had pervaded the upper and middle class too and made of them-- celebrated cine-goers. Hannah Arendt-one of the defenders of high culture was of the opinion that:

The entertainment industry is confronted with gargantuan appetites, and since its wares disappear in consumption, it must constantly offer new commodities. In this predicament, those who produce for the mass media ransack the entire range of past and present culture in the hope of finding suitable material. This material, however, cannot be offered as it is; it must be prepared and altered in order to become entertaining indeed; there are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect, but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say.<sup>5</sup>

Boyum notes, that on the one hand are the “ransacking hordes” of mass culture; on the other hand the defenders of high culture fighting for a breathing space. The emblem of this war inevitably adaptation. Why the adaptation? Boyum answers this question in her characteristic way.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

Because as Arendt suggests, it is here that the gold of art is transformed into the dross of entertainment, and refined, legitimate culture is pummeled into its vulgar mass form, the biases underlying this view are hard to miss: that a work of literature (or anything truly worthy of the name) is by definition a work of complexity and quality which is addressed to an educated elite; that movies, in contrast, are mere entertainment, directed at anyone and everyone; and that to adapt a book to film is thus of necessity to adjust it, not so much to its new medium as to its audience. That is, to the uneducated, undifferentiated mass, with its inevitably limited comprehension and predilection for the homiletic sentiment. Adaptation, in Arendt's view, is synonymous with betrayal.<sup>6</sup>

George Bluestone's work of 1957 *Novels into Films* shared similar views—when a filmmaker presumes to adapt a work of substance and significance “destruction is inevitable”. Andre Bazin who was still then untranslated however would have been found to disagree with such a view. He was of the opinion that for an intelligent, sensitive adaptation it was still possible to achieve “an almost dizzy height of fidelity.”

Defenders of high culture have thus always supported Bluestone's bias for the written word. Things have hardly changed. Film language as opposed to the written language is seen as “transparent” and “crude”. And so comparisons have always been made with the great works of literature such as those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe and others.

But film still proves elusive to theorists who would isolate its defining qualities. As Susan Sontag puts across-- “cinema is a kind of pan-art.” Cinema is known to have reached far and wide in its use of and absorption of just about every kind of art. In its visual aspect it shares much with painting, its dependence on movement with the art of dance, in its ability to produce kinetic and emotional effects with that of the art of music, with theatre it shares aspects of performance and spectacle and last not but not the least as its technological basis—architecture. But closest to the film heart lies the art with which it shares clearly the most of plot, characters, setting, dialogue, imagery and the manipulation of time and space—literature.

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

In 1969 Robert Richardson was writing into being his opinion—"literary criticism and film criticism can benefit from each other". Leo Tolstoy as early as 1908 had foreseen the effect film would have on the future:

You will see that this little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life—in the life of writers. It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy scene and to the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary...but I rather like it. This swift change of scene, this blending of emotion and experience—it is much better than the heavy, long-drawn out kind of kind of writing to which we are accustomed. It is closer to life. In life, too, changes and transitions flash by before our eyes, and emotions of the soul are like a hurricane. The cinema has divined the mystery of motion. And that is greatness.<sup>7</sup>

Some critics have been keen to demonstrate, as Imelda Whelehan notes in her book, some modernist writers were experimenting with 'cinematic' techniques in their prose fiction. Some critics however are of the opinion that with the progress of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two forms have somehow come to become pretty interdependent. Keith Cohen, a critic, argues that the novel had itself developed 'cinematic' tendencies at a point when the form seemed to have exhausted itself. Geoffrey Wagner picks up Cohen's point and elaborates further – "Cinema is at its most convincing when it declines to be a dramatic mode and leans, rather, on its immediate antecedents in the aesthetic representation of reality(or irreality)—namely the novel."<sup>8</sup>

There are however arguments against film the medium too. Gabriel Miller states that 'the novels' characters undergo a process of simplification when transferred on the screen. He believes that film is not very successful in dealing either with psychological states or with dream or with memory, nor can it render thought. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan however concludes that this position is not only controversial but also demonstrates both an ignorance of film narrative strategies and an assumption that it is fiction which deals

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan eds. *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

with psychological dramas, thought, dream, and memory in a transparent way that needs no artificial mediation. They note further “the assumption that fiction is more ‘complex’ than film is another way of privileging ‘art’ in fiction and undermines the possibility of serious study of the verbal, visual and audio registers of the film, as well as suggesting that film is incapable of metaphor or symbolism.”<sup>9</sup>

Semiotics in this context becomes particularly valuable. Metz is of the belief, “In between specific and non-specific codes are a number of codes which cinema shares with other media.” Dudley Andrew says, “Metz likes to point here to chiaroscuro lighting, a code specific to painting but one which was employed endlessly in German expressionist films. Similarly most narrative techniques, such as flashbacks or stories told within other stories, can be found in literature as well as in cinema.”

Bluestone asserts that the relationship between the two mediums-film and literature has been “overtly compatible, secretly hostile”. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan adds further that “commercially it is obvious that a popular film adaptation of a novel can transform the text’s value, from esoteric object to object of mass consumption, but while a guiding concern remains with the privileging of the literary text other issues are evaded or marginalized to the extent that ‘the novel is a norm and the film deviates at its peril’ even though the necessity of transference across the two media is universally acknowledged as inevitable.” Hortense Powdermaker, in an anthropological study of Hollywood tells us the reasons why the popular movie adaptation simply must deviate:

The original source may be a novel or play the studio has purchased, and the writer is employed to do an adaptation from it. He makes the changes necessary for dramatic effect in another medium, those required to conform to the producer’s personal fantasies and his notions of what the public wants, and to meet the taboos of the production code, and tailors it all to the screen personalities of the actors who will play the star roles. Sometimes only the title of the original play or novel is left.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan notes that although Powdermaker points out the conflicting demands of the producer or director/auteur, censorship and social mores and the personalities of the actors, there are echoes of the processes of literary criticism in transforming the meanings available to the reader of the classic novel or the Shakespeare novel.

What then becomes clear is that certain features of novelistic expression must be retained in order to guarantee a 'successful' adaptation, but clearly the markers of success vary depending largely on which features of the literary narrative are deemed essential to a reproduction of its core meaning.

Bluestone observes that:

The filmmakers still talk about 'faithful' and 'unfaithful' adaptations without ever realizing that they are really talking about successful and unsuccessful films. Whenever a film becomes a financial or even critical success the question of 'faithfulness' is given hardly any thought. If the film succeeds on its own merits, it ceases to be problematic.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan argue, that the impetus for most adaptations rests in relationships between characters rather than the overarching themes of the novel in question, and these characters now separated from the parent body now carve out a niche for themselves.

What happens, therefore, when the filmist undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation, is that he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel—the novel viewed as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic life of their own.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bluestone, *op.cit*

<sup>12</sup> Cartmell and Whelehan *op.cit*

Wagner is perhaps one of the first commentators to identify three types of adaptation : transposition – a novel ‘directly given on screen’; commentary – ‘where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect’ ; and analogy (e.g. a film that shifts the action of the fiction forward in time or otherwise changes its essential context; analogy goes further than shifting a scene or playing with the end, and must transplant the whole scenario so that little of the original is identifiable).

Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley in *Screening the Novel* (1990) are more interested in the interdependency of film and the literary tradition – ‘Film may have been a non-verbal experience, but it based its narrative on the western European cultural experience of literature’. They identify the fact that film emerged at the height of realist traditions in the novel and in drama, and claim that there has been a perhaps unconscious tendency to attempt to translate classic realist texts into ‘authentic’ historical realism.

While the act of judging textual fidelity may become an inexact science, dogged by value judgements about the relative artistic worth of film and literature, the practice of comparing narrative strategies in order to better establish what key shifts are made in the process of transition may be quite comforting. After all the process of presenting a literary text on film is one in which all the stock devices of narrative-point of view, focalization, tense, voice, metaphor-must be realized by quite some other means, and this is where the creativity of the adaptor comes into question. Brian McFarlane’s work *Novel to Film* deals with such an approach. He notes that there needs to be a critical distinction made between those narrative features that can be transferred from one medium to another and those that fail to do so.

McFarlane makes his intentions clear when he analyses questions of authorship, and the influence of the industrial and cultural contexts on the process that is adaptation. He focuses on the structural effects of exchange and translation from one narrative form to another. McFarlane declares “discussion of adaptation has been bedeviled by the fidelity issue”. The narratological approach affords the advantage of studying the differing conditions within which fiction and film narrative are situated. And it depends upon the necessity of ‘violating’ the original text.

Bluestone affords another exciting and novel point—he notes that the novel has three tenses—the film has only one. Here he makes a major distinction between the two forms: there is no past tense in the film. The ‘first person’ novel point of view is not the same as seeing the action from the camera; in the novel, the narrator tells and the reader listens, but there is not equivalence, rather a warm intimate relationship. According to Giddings the past represented in the movies is a contemporary even aspirational one:

We look back to the past as travelers on a journey look back to the way they have come. If we modernize those staging-posts along our journey to our own way of thinking, it is in a sense a way of admitting they are no longer appropriate or relevant in their original form to speak to us of the twentieth century. If we slavishly endeavor to recreate them as we think they have appeared in their own time we produce a fake antique.<sup>13</sup>

Giddings et al believe that this craving for recapturing the past is not necessarily a new thing—they cite the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. Gothic revival as one example and the later craze for pageants as another. This craving they identify as an intense moment of nostalgia where greed for images of the past, even fictionalized ones through the vehicle of adaptation ‘are all symptomatic of the condition of the national psyche which is shedding layers of modernity and reverting to its own past tones under the stress of contemporary economic, political and social crisis’. As is clear from these remarks, this investment in the idea of what is the past which certain adaptations foreground, makes for a critical perspective that moves away from questions of fidelity and historical verisimilitude, and enables a critique of the ideology as a shaping force in the production of popular adaptations. Peter Reynolds notes:

Animated images of literature in performance are seldom produced by accident or chance, nor are they natural and ideologically neutral. They have been designed and built (consciously and unconsciously) by their author(s) in order to project a specific agenda and to encourage a particular set of responses.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*



Moving away from the point that the *mise-en-scene* cannot be as influencing as the omniscient narrator in fiction which gives rise to an anarchic or liberated viewer is, according to Reynolds, slightly off the mark when he remarks ‘what the spectator sees and hears is what he or she is allowed to see, and to set the agenda by foregrounding one issue or set of issues is to marginalize others’. Such decisions are made, as Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan suggest on “the basis of being faithful to what the author would have expressed had they possessed the freedoms to discuss certain subjects, or if they had had access to the same technology—one example of this kind of justification for certain production choices may lie in Laurence Olivier’s claim that Shakespeare ‘in a way wrote for the films’”.

The subject of adaptation throws up a lot of interesting questions—have those writers work been selected whose works were deemed ‘lightweight’ in comparison to the more ponderous, complex or heavyweight as particularly suited for adaptation? Are some forms of literary work more suited to lend themselves to particular cinematic/television treatments?

It also becomes imperative to investigate the extent to which an adaptation seeks to represent the past and how that very idea coalesces with the period in which the adaptation is made. In some cases it is seen that the will for historical veracity somehow overtakes the will to realize a particular work of fiction—that is cleansing the narrative of certain historical anachronisms. Imelda Whelehan notes, “In the case of films such as *Schindler’s List* (1993) there is a danger that the Hollywood focus on spectacle and heroism replaces a sense of history altogether.”

To find a meeting point for the two media, one alternative or novel angle of investigation might lie in the area of research seeking explanations for the success with audiences – particularly in the case of classic adaptations and to speculate on the ways that the interface between a literary text and its filmic adaptation is interpreted and used by its audience.

With Film Semiotics is associated the name of the celebrated Christian Metz whose work in film theory acted quite like the foundation stone of not only film theory but also of cinema in general. He was of the opinion that film theory in the first fifty years produced a

diverse and intelligent view of the medium—cinema but which could only be termed as “general”. This reduced the art to something of the whims of every theorist then—to subsume the medium in a sea of comprehensive philosophy. Using cinema as a field of battle then theorists have been only for and against differing world views. For him, thinking about films in general terms should be discouraged. He says, “This often brilliant age of theory will grow old badly and become decrepit if it goes on much longer. Let us use Mitry’s gigantic work to ease ourselves into a second phase of theory, an era of specific rather than general study, an era ostensibly more limited but infinitely more precise than what has gone before.”<sup>15</sup>

As leader of the new way films should be studied Metz was to advocate a rigorous and precise study of the material conditions which let cinema function. It is this description of the processes of signification in the cinema that forms his focus point. In following Charles Pierce and Ferdinand de Saussure he calls this method a ‘Semiotics’ of the cinema.

As can be seen, Metz’s work or the focus of his writings falls into two categories: the establishment of a science of the cinema and following that the analysis of particular films by this method. Metz then divides the field into two parts—the filmic and the cinematic. The filmic by definition is that area of questions that deal with film’s relation to those activities that go into the making of a film—such as technology, industrial organization, directors’ biographies, censorship laws, audience response and the cult of stars. The cinematographic aspect is however, much narrower in focus—it forms the subject of the films. Semiology then becomes by definition the science of meaning and film semiotics then becomes a comprehensive model capable of explaining how the film embodies meaning or signifies it to the audience. It then hopes to determine the laws which make viewing of a film possible and to uncover particular patterns of signification which give individual films or genres their special characteristics.

“Every artform, indeed every communicational system, has, a specific material of expression which marks it off from other systems. We distinguish between cinema and

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<sup>15</sup> Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. New York: OUP, 1974.

painting or between painting and speech, not on the basis of the kinds of signification each customarily transmits but on the basis of the material through which any signification is possible in each. In speech we attend to a flow of discrete sounds; in painting to a two dimensional framed organization of lines and colors.”<sup>16</sup>

What becomes interesting to a semiotician are the questions: how can material of expression be made to signify? And how can the various aspects of the soundtrack be made to bear meaning? The answer lies in linguistics. For like all systems of signification the semiotics of cinema too, takes off from linguistics. At the very beginning Metz posed the seminal question that scores of critics—especially the ones studying adaptations have asked—“ In what ways and to what extent is cinema like verbal language?” Metz answers the question by saying that film/language analogy is strained at the level of appearance. “Filmic signification doesn’t at all look like verbal language. Cinema’s signifiers are just too closely tied up to their signifieds: images are realistic representations and sounds are exact reproductions of what they refer to. One cannot break up the signifiers of film without dismembering their signifieds at the same time. There is not even any internally natural way to give filmic signifiers tense. While some filmmakers have resorted to using colour for present tense scenes and black and white for past or conditional (dream) tenses, this is clearly a sophisticated convention added to cinema rather than an indigenous aspect of the language itself.” And thus for us, *Schindler’s List* shot in black and white comes to represent a bygone era and comes to signify the truth as it happened.

Thus we see that the method of signification is what allows a full fledged understanding of adaptations—Metz says, “...these systems *function* in ways which permit comparison.” Dudley Andrew comments, “Metz quickly qualifies this hope by pointing first to the obvious fact that language is exchanged between people whereas film utterances are given by a source to an audience. Film, therefore, seems to function far more like novels or symphonies than like verbal language. It is a smooth and continuous message unrolling before a silent spectator.”

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew, *op.cit*

For detractors who believe in the superiority of the written word as opposed to the film image it will be disappointing. Metz says, "...the failure of early film film/language analogies come not from too much use of linguistics applied to cinema, but from too little use of it. The relationships between these media are not simple and, once initiated, the linguistic study of film must be pursued to the end if one wants to see exactly the kind of signifying system cinema is."<sup>17</sup>

Cinema is not an alien language assert semioticians—they believe that countless non-specific cultural codes which do not depend on cinema for their existence are transferred live into the movies—which include our basic habits of perception which, according to them, transform even our vision of nature. "in between specific and non-specific codes are a number of codes which cinema shares with other media," says Metz. Metz here gives the example of chiaroscuro lighting, a code specific to painting but one which was used extensively by German expressionist cinema. "Similarly most narrative techniques, such as flashbacks or stories told within other stories, can be found in literature as well as in cinema."<sup>18</sup>

Pertinent to this point is Auteurism—which we shall now look at. We can claim that certain films are authored—this is to mean that they are the creative expressions of an artist, analogous to the way when we speak of an author of a book. But this becomes a point of serious contention, for a film may often employ several visions—that of the director, the cinematographer, the producer and others. However we shall see that in terms of control over textual operation and meaning as well as over visual style and narrative themes it is possible to have a theory of auteurship. And we see that in Spielberg's films—one of which forms as a case study here which will suffice to prove my contention.

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<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> ibid

## Chapter 2

### *Schindler's List: Author vs. Auteur*

Spielberg's *Schindler's List* released in December 1993 has already become for the present generation the most important source of historical information affecting popular perceptions of the Holocaust. Barely four months after release, the film had already netted its makers \$170 million, an unheard-of sum for a movie about the Holocaust. While some groups' praise the efforts of those connected with the movie, other circles condemn its perspective and motives.

Such reactions make it clear that *Schindler's List* is not just a movie. It has become part of an ongoing worldwide cultural war that for decades has been debating both the nature and causes of the Holocaust and the advisability of having artists interpret the events surrounding the Nazi genocide. My observations on Spielberg and his work, therefore, are meant to provide a perspective on their place in this important cultural conflict.

Thomas Kenneally's *Schindler's List* is a novel spanning 429 pages and as the jacket of the book claims, "the story of Oskar Schindler, an Aryan who risked his life to protect Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland, who continuously defied and outwitted the SS, and who was transformed by the war into an angel of mercy." Whereas Spielberg's film spanning a little over one and a half hours is perhaps a story about the Jews ever shipped out of Auschwitz and perhaps unwittingly saved by Schindler right from the word go.

The changes substantial as they are, is perhaps because Spielberg has to cater to the taste of particular audiences and follow classical Hollywood formula. Also factors of length, modes of representation, the times as also the director's worldview play an important part. The differences between the literary text and the cinematic text are many and sometimes even startling.

In the film, a sense of mystery is built into the character of Oskar Schindler, that he is a man of expensive but delicate tastes is of course effectively shown through multiple shots of him laying out ties to match with his numerous suits, taking out a wad of cash from a drawer etc. and these shots are juxtaposed with previous shots, of Jews calling out their

names who are about to be ghettoized. Schindler also has his back turned to the camera when he walks into a nightclub. Frank Manchel in his article dwells on it at length:

Only in hindsight can we appreciate the reason for the detailed way in which the camera records Schindler's hypnotic style-bribing head waiters, ordering the best food and wine, spending money freely, ignoring anti-Semitic jokes, and having his picture taken with his honored guests. Throughout the movie, Spielberg repeatedly shows the successful results of Schindler's charming behavior; and each new time we witness the outcome of his charismatic ways, the rewards he receives take on greater significance. What is at first only an episode showing how a master manipulator gets valuable war contracts and weasels his way into owning an impounded enamelware plant eventually becomes a major motif in the film, educating us to the fact that it was these unique talents that saved over a thousand Jews from annihilation. As for Spielberg's reason for teasing us in the opening scenes with the secret of who this flamboyant man is, clearly the director is foreshadowing the fact that the reason for Schindler's heroic metamorphosis will forever be an enigma. Besides its scenes of nudity, terrifying violence, outstanding performances by the film's three major actors, and spectacular cinematography-all ingredients that appeal to mass audiences-the film contains a macabre sense of humor.<sup>1</sup>

However, a close-up later reveals Schindler to be physically impressive, charming with a penchant for women. The book describes all of this and more but also does not clearly explain the ambiguities within the man. The external appearance is of course adeptly shown in the film but the psychological subtleties are not explored in the film at all. As Bordwell argues in his work, *Classical Hollywood Cinema* this aspect of portraying Schindler this way, could be because, "Hollywood cinema emphasizes action 'the outward expression of inner feelings'".<sup>2</sup> This gives rise to a rather biased representation of Schindler onscreen.

The book gives a very candid description of the character of Oskar Schindler-

Herr Schindler, chancing his glimmering shoes on the icy pavement in this old and elegant quarter of Cracow, was not a virtuous young man in the customary sense. In this city he kept house with his German mistress and maintained long affair with his Polish secretary. His wife Emilie chose to live most of the time at home in Moravia, though she sometimes came to Poland to visit him. There's

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<sup>1</sup> Manchel, Frank. "A Reel Witness: Steven Spielberg's Representation of the Holocaust in Schindler's List" in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 83-100.

<sup>2</sup> Bordwell David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *Classical Hollywood Cinema : Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University 1975) .

this to be said for him, that to all his women he was a well-mannered and generous lover. But under the normal interpretation of *virtue* that's no excuse.

Likewise he was a drinker. Some of the time he drank for the pure glow of it, at other times with associates, bureaucrats, SS men for more palpable results. Like few others, he was capable of staying canny while drinking, of keeping his head. That again, though, under the narrow interpretation of morality, has never been an excuse for carousing. And although Herr Schindler's merit is well documented, it is a feature of his ambiguity that he worked within or, at least, on the strength of, a corrupt and savage scheme; one which filled Europe with camps of varying but consistent inhumanity and created a submerged, unspoken of nation of prisoners.<sup>3</sup>

There is a scene in the film in which Pfefferberg removes his Jewish arm band (which they had been forced to wear as per the directives of the rulers, the Nazis) to enter a church to discuss business deals, Schindler is also present in that church and on that particular bench in which Pfefferberg and his cronies are seated and introduces himself to Pfefferberg. He later uses Pfefferberg to get luxurious items from the black market to be included in hampers going to senior SS officers to get contracts for DEF-his enamelware industry.

The film perhaps tries to show that no public place was safe for the Jews anymore excepting the church where under the guise of attending Mass (only when they remove their armbands with the star of David on them can they become like the others of the populace and cease to remain the hunted) they could hold covert talks on black market dealings in peace.

Schindler was not a practicing catholic but he wouldn't be so near committing blasphemy either. The only times Schindler had ever attended Mass were when he was a child and when his own mother died. As I've argued before, the film aims to show Schindler in a particular light- a businessman who accidentally helps his Jewish workers and who carps about it all the way. The film shows him to be in church possibly to show that for him, only business matters and that he's unscrupulous about how he gets his contracts –even if it means that he commit near blasphemy to sign the deals.

In another short Spielberg shows a Jew packing up his treasures, heirlooms etc. as the SS stand guard over the family. They are forced to vacate the house and as they are hurled out

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Keneally *Schindler's List*. Sceptre, Australia: 1995.

into the streets Schindler moves into the apartment as if by a previous arrangement and as he tumbles into the cozy, luxuriant bed he says, “this couldn’t have been better” and which cuts across to the Jewish family in the ghetto where the lady of the house whispers, “it could have been worse”. This scene again shows Oskar in a bad light. It was perhaps intended to show how the Jews were served up as victims to money-throwing Germans.

There is another sequence of shots in which Schindler is trying out of hordes of girls as typists for the post of secretary in which it is clearly evident that professional adroitness does not arouse as much admiration for him as does prettiness of face. He keeps them all- there is even a photo shoot with all of them. This undoubtedly is the portrayal of a womanizer and also that of a man who uses women to get his contracts from the SS.

In another short we see Schindler with his wife in a restaurant prophesying that his name would be remembered by all- he had been a failure at previous businesses and now he was profiteering because of the war. This improvisation in Schindler’s character which further highlights his character is because of Hollywood’s insistence on the fact that “once defined as an individual through traits and motifs, the character assumes a causal role because of his or her desires. Hollywood characters, especially protagonists are goal oriented.”<sup>4</sup>

We read nothing of this sort in the book excepting the fact that he actually does make money by supplying enamelware to the army. Oskar’s family business goes bust- he makes an unwise marriage and moves off to Cracow as a sales manager of a firm. He later makes his own business off a bankrupt company previously called record which he renames as DEF and then makes a fortune out of it. He also meets Itzak Stern at about this time who iterates the saying from the Talmud, “He who saves one life saves the entire world.” It is perhaps at about this point in space and time that Oskar actually undergoes a transformation. Though outwardly nothing changes –he still remains a heavy drinker and a womanizer, as also a businessman but somewhere a humanitarian zeal to help the suffering Jew workers in his factory makes a mark in his character.

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<sup>4</sup> Bordwell et al, *op. cit.*



There's also this shot in which a one-armed Jew- a machinist at Schindler's DEF who comes to thank him while Schindler is at lunch, Schindler is not amused at all, in fact he is quite upset. Later he berates Stern for it-he tells Stern that it is bad business for him and that Stern is simply interested in saving Jews. This is another instance of the particular way Spielberg portrays Schindler's character. There is no such story in the book. In fact, very early on he decides to work for the Jews and disregards his business interests.

In one of the scenes the Jews are made to shovel snow and the one armed man is shot—this is to show how the Jews were treated by the Nazis. This is of course in keeping with the story in the book. This bid is also to evoke sympathy and at the same time hatred towards the Nazis. It is sentimental no doubt and images are always powerful. This particular incident is mentioned with a host of others in the book-not in isolation and with no such motivation while Spielberg chooses his images with a certain worldview.

There are certain individuals who are completely done away with in Spielberg's film. There is no mention of Abraham Bankier who was Schindler's manager and who was being bundled off to an extermination camp (in the book) but the film shows that it is Stern; Schindler also calls him as his plant manager. Spielberg chooses to follow the storyline more or less but sometimes makes minor changes-this is one such case. Perhaps he felt that too many characters would crowd the mise-en-scene. And as seen Spielberg also does have his own agenda.

As portrayed in the film, relations between Schindler and Stern are a bit different (to put it mildly) from that mentioned in the book. It's almost as if Schindler dominates the Jew, Stern. Perhaps Spielberg intends to show the Jew as no more than a victim figure. Since Schindler has the money he calls the shots. Perhaps also to highlight the contrast in character-Stern is ascetic and mild while Schindler is flamboyant and domineering.

In the book we see that Stern and Schindler actually share a beautiful relationship. Stern is always aware of his value to Schindler and plays upon it in times of crisis to his community. He also (very early on) recognizes the altruistic streak in Schindler and which

he uses to his own advantage by rescuing more and more of his Jewish brethren. Schindler also acts quite the disciple to Stern.

One of the most famous scenes in the film—that of a little girl in a red coat is also used to advantage by Spielberg to evoke pathos not only in the audience but also his protagonist, Oskar Schindler. Oskar follows her passage in the Jewish ghetto on a day of Aktion—seated on his horse atop a hill overlooking the ghetto. It is perhaps to indicate the transition (minimal even though it may be, as depicted in the film) in Schindler. It also shows the onslaught of violence on innocence. The very next shot shows the little girl in red to go into hiding under a bed. She is later killed—here again Schindler is the witness.

In the book there is a little girl in red as in the film, whose name is Genia. She is a niece of Mrs. Dresner's. Also it is not clear in the book whether she survived the dismantling of the ghetto at Cracow. In all probability she didn't. Curiously it is at this juncture that Schindler's nature takes a turn for the better (as many moralists would like it said) and Keneally notes in the book, "much later, in terms uncharacteristic of jovial Oskar Schindler, Cracow's favourite party guest, Zablocie's big spender, in terms that is which showed, behind the playboy exterior, an implacable judge, Oskar would lay special weight on this day. 'Beyond this day, he would claim, 'no thinking person could fail to see what would happen. I was now resolved to do everything in my power to defeat the system.'"<sup>5</sup>

Another improvisation by Spielberg is while the Cracow ghetto is being dismantled—literally being torn apart an SS officer gives a piano recital—this is probably the very last Aktion. It is a comic shot in which two soldiers standing at the doorway battle weary as evinced by their lopsided helmets make guesses as to whether it is Bach or Wagner's composition being executed. This scene offers two different kinds of explanations—it could mean that for the SS such killing was a normal everyday even aesthetic event (it was after all getting rid of the Jewish vermin who had almost a stranglehold on the rich German culture) as piano playing or it could mean that there was an aesthetic side to even SS sensibility. No such incident is mentioned in the book again.

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<sup>5</sup> Keneally, *op. cit*

In the film Oskar Schindler manages to appear as an entrepreneur who has no head for business, only “panache” as he declares very early on to a hypnotized Stern (no doubt succumbed to the man’s charm). It is Stern who manages his business for him.

On the other hand, the book shows Schindler to be a man of the world who manages not only to oil up his SS contacts effectively but also run his business smoothly—with the help of Bankier and Stern of course but who also smoothly effects the rescue for the *Schindlerjuden*. For certain acts of Schindler’s, Stern is no more than just a witness. This again is in keeping with the way Spielberg intends to portray Schindler. It is no doubt a very narrow focus and a distorted one at that.

In another short, Schindler raves and rants at Stern that people don’t consider DEF as an enterprise but only just as a haven for Jews. He blames Stern for giving people such an impression and adds, “...it’s dangerous to me.” This is in keeping with the way Spielberg chooses to focus on Schindler the business man and not the altruist. It’s almost as if Schindler blunders into altruism much against his own wishes.

The book however reveals that Oskar meets certain SS officers and influential ones too-like Colonel Eric Lange who are embittered with the Nazi schema of things and who help out Oskar often in outwitting the SS to protect the *Schindlerjuden* though covertly.

Rebecca who later marries Joseph Bau has quite a number of pages dedicated to her in the book as she is manicurist to Amon Goeth and therefore a witness to certain acts of Amon’s. She is also love interest to Joseph Bau who follows pre-war courtship etc.-by writing of this incident and contrasting it with the others in the camp Keneally tries to show the desperation and the urgency which has set into the mindset of the inmates at Amon Goeth’s labour camp. Keneally notes of urgency in sexual matters not quite in the vein of Rebecca and Joseph. Keneally also talks of other unconventional love such as those of an SS NCO Albert Hujar who falls for a Jew girl. Even Madritsch the industrialist’s daughter falls for her young man, a Jew from Tarnow and which romance is nipped right in the bud. Spielberg chooses to show Rebecca and Joseph Bau’s marriage and later shows them together at Brinnlitz but this was not to be. Spielberg shows the couple at Brinnlitz(after

which they are rescued in the end) in keeping with the classical Hollywood formula of a happy ending. Spielberg shows Helene as the manicurist for Goeth in place of Rebecca. Again perhaps, Spielberg did not intend to crowd the screen with too many characters. And also to show perhaps Goeth's attraction for his maid a Jew, again an aberration in the Nazi schema of things.

Madritsch who is an important character in the book- a brother industrialist to Oskar and also quite as humane is done away with partially in the film. He is to be seen in just two shots in which Oskar asks him to relocate with him to Moravia so that more lives could be saved, and the second shot where he refuses.

At the very last when Oskar is presented with the ring engraved with a line from the Talmud he blubbers, drops the ring and finally breaks down. Here Stern takes charge- having finally come into his own for the war is over, with the Nazis defeated. Another one of those images concocted by Spielberg to evoke pathos.

Spielberg also chooses to do away with the character of Mietek Pemper who was a secretary to Amon Goeth and who being blessed with a photographic memory later acted as witness in Amon Goeth's trials and also for the Resistance.

Another character we do not find mentioned in the film at all is Raimund Titsch, manager to Madritsch and also as humane. He took photographs of the Plaszow Labour Camp at great personal risk to his life. These photographs found later were an important source of information for the way of life in the labour camp and which helped Spielberg design his sets or scout for locations that the photographs depicted and which lent a realistic feel to the film.

Missing are also details of Schindler's journey to Budapest to help members of the Resistance gather information. He travelled in a goods train, at great personal risk to his person. This is another example of how Spielberg projected his protagonist in only one particular light.

William Shirer's by now famous book-*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* which etches out Nazi Germany in great details does talk about dissenters within the Nazi party as also within the military –with whose support Hitler carved out his empire–embittered as they were hatched many a plot to get rid of the dictator with none executed. In this light, I believe Oskar Schindler as an individual with his limitations displays far greater courage and ingenuity in the face of adversity and at great personal risk to his person in saving even 1100 lives and in living upto the line from the Talmud in reality.

Hence we see that Spielberg's *Schindler's List* follows what Bordwell calls as "Hollywood scenarists' academic insistence upon formulas for exposition, conflict, complication, crisis and denouement." <sup>6</sup>

In spite of the differences between the literary text and the film—sometimes seminal sometimes trivial one cannot help but make a detailed study of the film. For through it we see the auteur in Spielberg give shape to a vision that perhaps was very close to his heart. Frank Manchel writes that after receiving the Directors Guild Award on March 15, 1994, Spielberg commented, "When I first read this book, I said, 'There are a lot of directors in this world who are much better than me to make this picture.' I did not see it when I committed to direct it in 1982. I didn't see it because I wasn't ready to see it ... I didn't want to see it." On another occasion, he said, "I've never given up the ghost of my childhood.... I've been hanging on to that. I really feel I stopped developing emotionally when I was 19."<sup>7</sup>

A few years' work in television during the late sixties and early seventies had landed Spielberg his first theatrical feature, *The Sugarland Express* (1974). Although the film went practically unnoticed, one critic, Pauline Kael, identified the strengths and weaknesses that would define Spielberg's work up to *Schindler's List*. Characterizing his first feature as "commercial and shallow and impersonal," the New Yorker critic also praised the director's ability to make the mundane entertaining. She then went on to write: "The director ... is twenty-six; I can't tell if he has any mind, or even a strong personality,

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<sup>6</sup> Bordwell et al, *op. cit*

<sup>7</sup> Manchel, *op. cit*

but then a lot of good moviemakers have got by without being profound. He isn't saying anything special ... but he has a knack for bringing out young actors, and a sense of composition and movement that almost any director might envy."

Judging *Schindler's List* from this perspective, one can easily recognize the work of a master film technician in love with the classical Hollywood tradition. Audiences are given not only what they know about the Holocaust from past films but also a format with which they are comfortable. We have a central figure, Oskar Schindler (played superbly by Liam Neeson), who faces a series of obstacles that occur in a specific way during a specific period and are resolved by the film's conclusion. Through a spectacular reconstruction of historical events—for example, the rounding up of the Polish Jews by the conquering Nazi forces in 1939, the establishment of the Podgorze Ghetto in March 1941, the construction the following year of the Plaszow Forced Labor Camp, the destruction of the ghetto in 1943, the dehumanization of helpless people terrorized by merciless guards, the exhuming and burning of ten thousand Jewish bodies in 1944, and the horrors of arriving at Auschwitz-Spielberg and his ingenious collaborators visually "document" Raul Hilberg's unforgettable explanation of how the Nazis adapted centuries of anti-Semitism to the three stages of their Final Solution to the Jewish problem: "The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers that followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live." For more than three hours the moving picture creatively reconstructs details of what only the survivors can remember. No films of the atrocities at Plaszow exist, and, as Janet Maslin reminds us, the only surviving photographic record is a set of stills produced by Raimund Titsch, an Austrian Catholic factory supervisor who ran a uniform plant inside the Plaszow Forced Labor Camp. Thus, for countless viewers, Spielberg's staged recreation of the humiliation, torture, and murder of millions and millions of Jews becomes "proof" that the Holocaust occurred. Using actual locations in Poland to heighten the movie's claim to verisimilitude, the filmmaker parades thousands of extras before us to illustrate a mass exodus from the suburbs to the city, from the city to the ghetto, from the ghetto to the labor camp, from the labor camp to the extermination center. In Classical Hollywood style, the story of the millions is demonstrated by the fortunes of the few.

The narrative dictates the action, the pace, and the imagery. This is a story of a culture that disappeared in six horrifying years, and how the efforts of one man made a difference to the few survivors. And once again in classical Hollywood style, we are given one of the screen's most unforgettable villains, Amon Goeth (memorably played by Ralph Fiennes), who epitomizes for the audience the horrors of the entire Nazi war machine. While the top brass routinely take bribes and individual soldiers only follow orders, Goeth is a psychopath who appears to murder indiscriminately. He is first seen killing an educated Jewish woman overseeing the construction of the Plaszow Forced Labor Camp, not because she is wrong in her opinion (he acknowledges that she is right) but because she criticizes Nazi incompetence. Later, we see him standing on the balcony of his home at the base of a hill overlooking the camp, watching the morning roll call and then casually, apparently randomly, shooting Jews for target practice. In the end, Spielberg shows an unrepentant Goeth executed by the Poles for crimes against humanity.

In 1982, hardly anybody associated with the fortunes of Hollywood would have thought that in 1993 Spielberg was to create a masterpiece in *Schindler's List*. At thirty five he was markedly different from other Hollywood "wunderkind" types like George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese, who had studied film while in college. Spielberg was self-taught relying more on his acumen-- what he gathered was from watching movies and making them. While his college educated peers would frequent the art houses, appreciate the great masterpieces from around the world, and aspire to Andrew Sarris's pantheon of cinematic masters, Spielberg found himself appreciating what would be termed as the world of B movies: the serials, science-fiction films, action-thrillers, westerns and combat movies.

Whatever the interpretations to *Schindler's List*, it is undeniable that there has been strong public reaction to Spielberg's supposed documentation of the Holocaust. Worldwide audiences applaud its seeming authenticity, one can only marvel at his visual virtuosity and honor his storytelling genius, inspired as they are by his humanity.

### Chapter 3

#### *Schindler's List: How critics view it*

Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List* extending for a little over 180 minutes and shot in black and white by Janusz Kaminski is a moving reel (also real) life drama of epic proportions. The subject of both the film and the book, *Schindler's Ark* from which it is adapted—is the Holocaust.

The book *Schindler's Ark*, published in 1982, spanning over 429 pages is the biography of Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist, a member of the Nazi party and yet who constantly outwitted the outfit of its Jewish victims. While Spielberg's tale is one of a simple play of good versus evil, Keneally admits, "When you work from the other end of the beast, when you chronicle the predictable and measurable success evil generally achieves, it is easy to be wise, wry, piercing, to avoid bathos. It is easy to know the inevitability by which evil acquires all of what you would call the *real estate* of the story even though good might finish up with a few imponderables like dignity and self-knowledge. Fatal human malice is the staple of narrators, original sin the mother fluid of historians. But it is a risky enterprise to have to write of virtue."<sup>1</sup>

Keneally's task though not an easy one triumphs marvellously. It moves rapidly from incident to incident to talk of the heroic exploits of Oskar Schindler who risks his life time and again to make things easier for his Jews (the *Schindlerjuden*). As already confessed by Keneally it is no easy rendering, of this tale. The story begins in the present with flamboyant, debauch Oskar Schindler at Goeth's party with its host of select Nazi officers intent on filling up their personal coffers. But present alongside these are also Oskar's fellow humanitarians, Madritsch and Titsch—his manager. Like Oskar they try as much to keep things sane for their Jewish workers including smuggling truckloads of black market bread for the starving populace of the Jewish workers at the garments factory at Plaszow, Amon Goeth's labour camp. Their hearts are not approving of their stay in the raucous party at Goeth's but their business acumen as well as their instincts for survival force their

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<sup>1</sup> Keneally, Thomas. *Schindler's List*. Australia: Sceptre, 1995



physical presence at such parties most of the nights. It's either you eat or be eaten system so they choose to play the role of the eaters rather than the eaten.

Spielberg's film however begins in the past(in colour) with Sabbath in progress—with the end of service and the wisp of the dying candle we are transported imaginatively to the black and white world of the Jews arriving from the suburbs to Cracow and about to be ghettoized. The scene cuts to a figure laying out ties against his suits for a matching effect, laying out cufflinks , a wad of cash and a watch—in short the picture of luxury. Next we are greeted by scenes at a night club where we are not told about the man's identity until he has successfully curried favor with the Nazi top brass and until a bewildered officer asks about the ebullient host are we told, "That's Oskar Schindler!"

Frank Manchel opines that this is Spielberg "teasing us in the opening scenes with the secret of who this flamboyant man is the fact that the reason for Schindler's heroic metamorphosis will forever be an enigma." While this enigmatic personality also inhabits Keneally's world of the words the book however pronounces in clear terms that with respect to Oskar *virtue* is such a dangerous word that one needs "to rush to explain":

Herr Oskar Schindler, chancing his glimmering shoes on the icy pavement in this old and elegant quarter of Cracow, was not a virtuous young man in the customary sense. In this city he kept house with his German mistress and maintained a long affair with his polish secretary. His wife Emilie chose to live most of the time at home in Moravia, though she sometimes came to Poland to visit him. There's this to be said for him, that to all his women he was a well-mannered and generous lover. But under the normal interpretation of *virtue* that's no excuse.

Likewise he was a drinker. Some of the time he drank for the pure glow of it, at other times with associates, bureaucrats, SS men for more palpable results. Like few others, he was capable of staying canny while drinking, of keeping his head. That again, though, under the narrow interpretation of morality, has never been an excuse for carousing. And although Herr Schindler's merit is well documented, it is a feature of his ambiguity that he worked within or, at least, on the strength of, a corrupt and savage scheme; one which filled Europe with camps of varying but consistent inhumanity and created a submerged, unspoken of nation of prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

Thus having laid the background we can now move into the more intricate details of the whys and the hows of such a work being written and subsequently filmed. We begin with the book-Keneally in the preface to *Schindler's Ark* talks of how he first conceived of the story that is *Schindler's Ark*.

In 1980 I visited a luggage store in Beverly Hills and asked about the prices of briefcases. The store belonged to Poldek Pfefferberg, a Schindler survivor. Beneath Pfefferberg's shelves of imported leather goods, I first heard of Oskar Schindler, the German *bon vivant*, a speculator, charmer, and sign of contradiction, and of his salvage of a cross section of a condemned race during those years now known by the generic name, Holocaust. To use the texture of devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course which has frequently been followed in modern writing. It is the one I have chosen to follow here; both because the craft of the novelist is the only craft to which I can lay claim, and because the novel's techniques seem suited for a character of such ambiguity and magnitude as Oskar. I have attempted to avoid all fiction, though, since fiction would debase the record, and to distinguish between reality and the myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature.

I would like to honour the efforts which the late Mr. Martin Gosch expended on bringing the name of Oskar Schindler to the world's notice.<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere in another book, *Searching for Schindler* Keneally notes while reading of Schindler's exploits in Pfefferberg's well-preserved documentations, "Oskar was the improbable savior. His motives were hard to define, and there were ambiguities to be teased out. But his prisoners did not care. Neither did I."

Here was a tale that Pfefferberg a Schindler survivor from Auschwitz insisted that be told to the world.

I was saved, and my wife was saved, by a Nazi. I was a Jew imprisoned with Jews. So a Nazi saves me and, more important saves Misia my young wife. So although he's a Nazi to me he is Jesus Christ. Not that he was a saint. He was all-drinking, all-black marketeering, all-screwing, okay? But he got Misia out of Auschwitz, so to me he is god. Here's what I pointed out...he said in a usage he had made his own. I know a wonderful story. It is not a story for Jews but for everyone. A story of humanity man to man. I tell all the writers I get through here. Sitcom guys, reporters for the *LA Times* I get famous producers or their wives. Did you know Howard Koch? Howard Koch wrote *Casablanca*. A really nice guy. You see, everyone needs a handbag, everyone needs an attaché case. So I tell everyone the greatest story of humanity man to man. Some listen and write an article there, a news item here. A beautiful young man I know, executive

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<sup>3</sup> Keneally, *op.cit*

producer of Simon and Simon at Paramount...he does what he can. But it's a story for you, Thomas.It's a story for you I swear.<sup>4</sup>

This then, as Poldek pointed out to Keneally "is not a story for Jews but for everyone." Keneally tells it to the world at large. At the end of the story we are perhaps better human beings for having read it. In an interview conducted via email by this scholar Keneally's worldview while writing of Schindler gets clearer—" it was certainly, and probably above all, the paradoxical character of Oskar but also the light he cast on an extraordinary Northern European race hysteria. He was a lens through which one could see the entire process of the Holocaust – confiscation, ghettoization, concentration, extermination. But it also interested me as a post-colonial Australian that my betters, the metropolitan Europeans, had fallen for such an extreme form of race hysteria."

Keneally's literal retelling of this story of Oskar Schindler's finds its visual counterpart in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and it acted as quite a catharsis for him. Frank Manchel notes, after receiving the Directors Guild Award for it on march 15, 1994 Spielberg commented to a reporter about how making the film made him feel "liberated for the first time in my career."<sup>5</sup>

While Keneally's efforts to write such a story brings to mind an author's passion to deal with and give shape to unexplainable events, facts and the peculiarities of human nature Frank Manchel confesses:

In reporting these quotations, my intention is not to suggest that they necessarily represent Spielberg's true feelings. Who knows what agendas he had in mind to promote his picture, to change his image, or to curry favour with different award-granting organization? Spielberg's comments can therefore, be seen as a shrewd businessman's public relations strategy. He knew that to make his Holocaust film attractive to hesitant mass audiences it had to be a hit at the box office, and that required a special type of marketing approach guaranteed to produce major awards and public approval. One can see such an approach in the filmmaker's concluding remarks in his interview with the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, where he stated, "If the German reaction to my film should be shame,

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<sup>4</sup> Keneally, Thomas. *Searching for Schindler*. South Australia: Knopf, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Manchel, Frank. "A Reel Witness: Steven Spielberg's Representation of the Holocaust in Schindler's List" in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 83-100

then it is important to me that the viewers understand, that shame also motivated me to this film. Namely, the shame of having been ashamed to be a Jew.”<sup>6</sup>

More to the point, Spielberg’s comments suggest that in 1982 the Hollywood oriented director realized the immense problem of making a holocaust film, as well as his professional and intellectual limitations.

Having now established the point of why such a work was written and then adapted to the screen I now move onto to elucidating on strategies of narration etc. The book is third person narration again as Keneally notes in the Preface to the book,

This account of Oskar’s astonishing history is based in the first place on interviews with fifty Schindler survivors from seven nations-Australia, Israel, West Germany, Austria, The United States, Argentina and Brazil. It is enriched by a visit, in the company of Leopold Pfefferberg, to locations which figure prominently in the book-Cracow, Oskar’s adopted city; Plaszow, the scene of Amon Goeth’s camp; Lipowa street, Zablocie, where Oskar’s factory still stands; Auschwitz-Birkenau, from which Oskar extracted his women prisoners. But the narrative depends also on documentary and other information supplied by those few wartime associates of Oskar’s who can still be reached, as well as by the large body of his postwar friends. Many of the hundreds of testimonies regarding Oskar and deposited by Schindler Jews at Yad Vashem, The Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority, further enriched the record, as did written testimonies from private resources and a body of Schindler papers and letters, some supplied by Yad Vashem, some by Oskar’s friends. Sometimes it has been necessary to attempt to reconstruct conversations of which Oskar and others have left the briefest record. But most exchanges and conversations, and all events, are based on the detailed recollection of the *Schindlerjuden* (Schindler Jews), of Schindler himself, and of other witnesses to Oskar’s acts of outrageous rescue.<sup>7</sup>

Spielberg’s art of narration in the film takes off from the author –narrated onscreen through 3<sup>rd</sup> person narration again-this time through the director’s point if view. Critics of the film are not just a few and their criticism follows an astonishingly common pattern, Michael Weldt and Pamela Selwyn notes,

The most serious misunderstanding in the debate, however, seems to me the assertion that ‘*Schindler’s List*’ is a film about the holocaust as a whole. Spielberg himself has nourished this claim, and his critics have

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Keneally, *op.cit*

judged the film on this assumption and found it too light. The two sides, the claim and the accusation of presumptuousness, construct the holocaust in congruent ways, though. Both view the murder of the European Jews as one entity. This is a construct the dimensions of which doom, and perhaps should doom, most attempts, even serious ones, to failure. The notion that an 'order from the Fuehrer' set in motion a gigantic and perfectly coordinated machinery, guided by the sole purpose of methodically murdering the European Jews is a misleading one. Raul Hilberg who has written probably the most influential book on the Holocaust, himself contributed to this mechanistic understanding by introducing such terms as 'the machinery of destruction'. More recent research on the Holocaust, in contrast, shows how problems created by the National Socialists themselves increasingly radicalized the search for a 'final solution'. With the beginning of the war, the countries to which the Jews were supposed to be evacuated as part of a 'territorial final solution' were closed. While the German Reich brought more Jews into its power with each successful campaign of conquest the plan to rush the Jews into the eastern part of Russia was foiled by the German army's failure to defeat the Soviet Union quickly. Not only in the Reich Main Security Office in Berlin, but also in the 'everyday' practice of murder in Poland, the Baltic and the Soviet Union, the will to exterminate was intensified into the systematic genocide we associate with the names Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Today, scholars have shifted the focus from an anonymous 'machinery of destruction' to the many perpetrators who used their zeal, commitment and improvisational talent to overcome obstacles and to set the unimaginable in motion.

Spielberg did not depict the Holocaust as a whole: he made a film about Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth. These two are the central figures, and their confrontation forms the dramatic focus. In the film the lives of the 'Schindler Jews' depend upon the outcome of their 'duel'. This personalization of history, which is produced very professionally, is surely one of the elements that makes the film fascinating, but is also one of its weaknesses.<sup>8</sup>

Eric Sterling in an appropriately named article of his systematically notes the critics' tendencies to write off the film because of Spielberg's reputation for making hugely popular yet substantial films and choosing the Holocaust as subject matter for a movie an inappropriate choice. They cite Spielberg's very attempt to create a historical representation of the Shoah, the director's alleged attempt to capture the entirety of the holocaust in a mere three-hour and seventeen minute movie, the choice of a gentile ( a Nazi, no less) as the central character and hero, the employment of a Nazi perspective, the

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<sup>8</sup> Wildt Michael and Pamela Selwyn "The Invented and the Real: Historiographical Notes on Schindler's List" *History Workshop Journal*, No. 41 (Spring, 1996), pp. 240-249.

lack of developed Jewish characters, the glorification of an ordinary man who exploited Jews and omission of his character flaws, deviations from Thomas Keneally's novel, the triumphant ending in a film about the most horrendous episode in the history of genocide, and audience manipulation in the shower scene involving the female *Schindlerjuden* in Auschwitz as nothing short of blasphemy.

He further notes that many critics prejudged the movie, expecting to dislike even before a first view. They based their judgment based on a preconceived notion that a director with commercial successes such as *Jaws*, *ET*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* could not create a sensitive, intellectually stimulating and insightful film about the Holocaust. Several movie critics he says, as well as people interviewed by the media, have complained about the Holocaust serving as a subject for a movie-especially half a century after the tragedy. Their argument follows the particular line that these incessant presentations of the Holocaust in books and films remind survivors of the horrors of the past and interrupt the healing process.

Detractors of the film disapprove of Spielberg's film because it attempts to be a historical representation of the Holocaust. Their argument is that Shoah being a sacred topic, there should be no attempt to portray historical accounts. Lanzmann claims that the Holocaust is "...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 that it is possible to do so is to be guilty of the most serious transgressions."<sup>9</sup> Lanzmann fervently believes that historical presentation—and even the showing of archival films – violates the memories of those who suffered. He is of the belief that the past should not – and cannot adequately-be shown on film, and that only the present, through interviews should appear-as he had done in his documentary-*Shoah*.

Yosefa Loshitzky prefers Lanzmann's film to that of Spielberg, arguing that *Shoah* is superior because it lacks the artifice that she believes is contained in Spielberg's attempt. "The conscious reliance of *Schindler's List* on the constitution of film as a collective memory thus weakens the link between public memory and personal experience, a link that

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<sup>9</sup> Sterling, Eric. All Rules Barred: A Defense of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in Film and History Vol. 32.2 (2002)

is so powerful in Lanzmann's *Shoah*."<sup>10</sup> As a movie, *Schindler's List*, claims Loshitzsky, is an artificial representation, removed from reality by its very nature as a film. Lanzmann remarks that Spielberg employs "no reflection, no thought, about what is the Holocaust and no thought about what is cinema. Because if he would have thought, he would not have made it-or he would have made *Shoah*." Some scholars agree with Lanzmann's opinions, disapproving of *Schindler's List* because it differs markedly from *Shoah* violating taboos such as creating a historical representation and focusing more on perpetrators than the victims.

Frank Manchel argues against all this as do several admirers of Spielberg's film, believes that "moving pictures might offer us something not possible in academic historical studies ...the movie and the filmmaker are inextricably intertwined and that an understanding of the bond is useful not only for appreciating the film but also for reducing misconceptions about representing the Holocaust in a commercial medium."<sup>11</sup>

Further, Eric Sterling points out in his article his thesis that the "the most important aspect of Holocaust studies, however is memory. The suppression, or the forgetting, of the Holocaust insults the memories of those who died and who lost loved ones during the tragedy."<sup>12</sup> In an interview Spielberg remarked, "I consider the biggest sin is to forget or to ignore the most barbaric act perpetrated by man in modern history." Sterling is also of the opinion that educating the masses about the holocaust is especially important now as survivors –the living witnesses to the atrocities grow old and die and also holocaust denials proliferates on the internet, unfortunately taking in the naïve and the gullible.

Tom W. Smith observes, however that "Holocaust denial has diminished significantly, partly because of the popularity and the effect of Spielberg's film."<sup>13</sup> Eric Sterling thus concludes albeit triumphantly that movies such as *Schindler's List* ensure the preservation of the memory of holocaust victims and educate people so that they know the truth. Critics

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Manchel, *op.cit*

<sup>12</sup> Sterling, *op.cit*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

need to judge the film based on its own merits not on whether it conforms to their criteria or meets their expectations for a holocaust film.

Miriam Bratu Hansen wisely is skeptical of Lanzmann's argument too, "It is one thing to use *Shoah* for the purpose of spelling out the philosophical and ethical issues of cinematic representation in relation to the Shoah; it is another to accuse *Schindler's List* of not being the same kind of film."<sup>14</sup>

While Spielberg's detractors or critics are many he has his fair share of admirers too. While I have noted down both sides of the argument for which materials were plentiful, I was not quite so fortunate when it came to reviews of the book. Being considerably moved and subsequently so taken up by the book that I reviewed the book based on my own critical acumen. If I fall short in my attempt to analyse this delightful and yet moving tale of a man who dared to make a difference to an already crumbling decadent world I hope I will be forgiven for it. While exists numerous memoirs, academic studies and popular representations, fiction dealing with the Holocaust are few. In this I am reminded of William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* (1979) which too has been filmed. While Styron's novel is based in New York of the post war period Keneally's novel is based in Cracow, Poland –the scene of Nazi war crimes in the years 1938-right up to the time Russian and American forces move into German occupied territories to liberate the Jews and the others. Moreover it is based on a true story for history does talk of a real Oskar Schindler who actually did risk his life on several occasions to make things better for his fellow humans and ultimately in saving them.

If I were to ask myself what makes this work so different from the others I would say the truth of Oskar Schindler as well as the way in which it is represented. It also adds a whole new dimension to Holocaust studies. It is equally important to remember the printed screen statement after the final scene in the film that there are six thousand survivors and descendants of the 1100 *Schindlerjuden* living in the world today.

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<sup>14</sup> Hansen Miriam Bratu. "Schindler's List" Is Not "Shoah": The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter, 1996), pp. 292-312.



Keneally searched and researched across the globe while writing of Schindler's exploits. Based selectively on some of the events depicted in the book Spielberg uses black and white cinematography as well as avoids Hollywood crane and dolly shots. Monochrome photography is the result of his commitment to remaining "true to the spirit of documentaries and stills from the period." Frank Manchel puts forward the thesis that:

This ingenious filmmaker designed a self study program to discover what distinguished filmmakers like Alan Resnais (*Night and Fog*) Marcel Ophuls (*The Sorrow and the Pity*, *The Memory of Justice*, and *Hotel Terminus: Klaus Barbie*), Claude Lanzmann (*Shoah*), George Stevens (*The Diary of Anne Frank*), Stanley Kramer (*Judgement at Nuremberg*), Sidney Lumet (*The Pawnbroker*) and Alan Pakula (*Sophie's Choice*) had accomplished. His purpose presumably was to find a way to merge the documentary approach of Europe with the box office appeal of Hollywood.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of the opinions of the critics we see that the film does after all manage to effect a place in film a place in film history as not only a commercial success but also as Manchel notes:

Worldwide audiences applaud its seeming authenticity, they marvel at his visual virtuosity, they honor his storytelling genius, and they are inspired by his humanity." But then as Manchel continues, "These were all strengths that he displayed in 1982. For more than a decade, serious students of the cinema have known about Spielberg's artistry in creating worlds others cannot imagine and making them visually unforgettable. His emphasis has always been on the emotional rather than on the intellectual. He enjoys making the epic event personal."<sup>16</sup>

All such discussions of the film inevitably draws one back to the world of the literary text- Schindler is as human-as Pfefferberg tells Keneally, "all-drinking, all-black marketeering, all-screwing" type of a man who has his own quirks but who nevertheless is perhaps the only character in the book who lives up to what Itzak Stern had once told him by way of a wayward discussion-"He who saves one life saves the world entire" and Keneally portrays this hugely ambiguous character in all its finery as well as acts of debauchery. Keneally is not mean with his words nor his art-the book delves into great details not only of Oskar's personal history but also those of the times and also about also those people who came in touch with Oskar Schindler. And it is all written with so much of objectivity. Although it

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<sup>15</sup> Manchel, *op.cit*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

does fall into the category of biography as standard genre classification of novels would have it I would say that it follows a “documentary” approach of narration as do films. Keneally is unbiased while presenting his hero before us unlike Spielberg, who I feel, chooses to portray his protagonist in a certain light—the difference between the film and the literary text follows in greater details in the next chapter. But the films’ storyline is brilliantly carried forward and given shape by the actors portraying Schindler, Stern and Goeth-Liam Neeson, Sir Ben Kingsley and Ralph Fiennes respectively. To help make matters more appealing—especially emotionally to his world-wide audience of Jews and non-Jews alike Spielberg uses as background score Itzak Perlman’s compositions on the violin. He is helped further in narrating this tale by Janusz Kaminski’s deft photography as well as Steve Zaillian’s brilliant screenplay. By making visitations on the history of the film as it evolved and was received we see that the film as well as its protagonist continues to be open to very unusual and interesting interpretations.

On further introspection we find that a film like *Schindler’s List* finds its kin in the war film genre. These movies important as they are to the country shape the worldview of the people. Geoffrey Perret puts it as,

America is a country made by war. War is a factor as important as geography, immigration, the growth of business, the separation of powers, the inventiveness of its people, or anything else that contributes strongly to its unique identity among the nations of the earth. It is therefore not surprising to find then that it contributes a significant amount to the creation and growth of American culture. It also contributes to its perception of America’s uniqueness and its cult of endless victories, Hollywood has played quite a substantial role in this—for the average American’s knowledge of the wars stem from these movies.<sup>17</sup>

In their article Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli note that the vast majority of “The Greatest Generation” was to come to know about the Second World War through the movies produced by Hollywood and not by any direct contact with it.

One is immediately reminded of Spielberg’s film *Saving Private Ryan* in this context. He had already demonstrated his interest in World War II themes with a film such as

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<sup>17</sup> Wetta, Frank J. and Martin Novelli. “Now a Major Motion Picture”: War Films and Hollywood’s New Patriotism in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No.3 (Jul.,2003), pp. 861-882.

*Schindler's List*—this story again is based (though loosely) on the real life story of the Niland brothers.

It focuses on a squad of soldiers sent to retrieve a fellow soldier from the battlefield after his brothers are killed. Their mission involves an examination of the way in which different lives are weighed against each other. This film enjoined upon Spielberg that he apply all his filmmaking skills to the fullest extent. The early sequence, depicting the amphibious assault on Omaha beach, is as gut wrenching and deglorifying a depiction of war as has been ever filmed. This is realized through a careful sieving of a wide range of visual and aural techniques. It is particularly noteworthy that Spielberg did not rely on any one single approach. The camera held in hand does create a disorienting effect—but Spielberg employed this effect judiciously and selectively and only to depict and highlight certain crucial moments.

The film is finely balanced between patriotism and the determination to downplay the glamourising of war. This is effectively and brilliantly captured in the exposition: the camera is placed in a close up of the American flag but backlit by the sun so it appears faded. This idea proved to be quite a success with critics and Hollywood in general.

Jeanine Basinger who is a leading scholar on war film genre says that such “stories...can be used both to celebrate and to denigrate war. In days of patriotism and pride, combat movies are like recruiting posters. In the days of shame and fear of further national involvements, they are powerful antiwar messages. One of their primary purposes is to show those who stayed behind and do not fight what it is like to be involved, and this purpose remains valid for moviegoers generation after generation.”<sup>18</sup> It sounds uncannily like a defence of a film like *Schindler's List*.

Tim O'Brien in “How to tell a real war story” says, “A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, it does not encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behaviour. Do not believe it. If at the end of a war story, you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have

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<sup>18</sup> ibid

been made the victim of a very old lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.”<sup>19</sup>

Another interesting example of a war movie would be the *Battle of Algiers*. It is an Italian war movie directed by Gilio Pontecorvo. It is a combat film based on incidents in the eight year Algerian war which lasted from 1954-1962 which was against French colonial rule in North Africa. This was later to be called the Algerian war of independence.

The narrative illustrates the ruthless tactics adopted by the FLN (National Liberation Front) guerrilla insurgency, and the uglier incidents of the war. Pontecorvo and Solinas have several protagonists based on historical war figures. *The Battle of Algiers* was made in a manner similar to Italian neorealism. The film is inspired by *Souvenirs de la Bataille d'Alger* by Saadi Yacef, an FLN military commander.

The film has been praised for its stunning realism, especially in its depiction of scenes of Algerian city life and large scale public protest and rioting which had actually taken place. The handling of crowd scenes and capturing the passion of the actual events is masterful. There is an influence of newsreel footage on Pontecorvo's style. Again like Spielberg and his cinematographer Kaminski, Pontecorvo and Marcello Gatti, his cinematographer decided to shoot the film in black and white. They experimented with various techniques to give the film the look and feel of newsreel and documentary film.

The film has been praised for its technical merits and its even handed portrayal of both sides. The film does not demonise anyone and the atrocities committed by both the FLN and the French are portrayed honestly.

Samuel Fuller had said something in this vein too, “A war movie is just like a man doing an autopsy on his own body. It is impossible. You cannot make a real war movie. You can make a real love story. You can make a real mystery. You can make a real dramatic story about unemployment, socialism, optimism, communism. You can make a story about anything like that, but you cannot, absolutely cannot, make a real war movie. The closest I

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<sup>19</sup> ibid

can think of making a real war movie is to have a couple of riflemen behind the screen and during the firefight in the movie, people in the audience are shot at. Not killed, but wounded. Seeing the picture, going to it, you might be shot. That's about the only way I can see you make a legitimate movie about the war."<sup>20</sup> In this regard war films share a similar fate with that of a film like *Schindler's List* with Lanzmann its severest critic talking about the sheer futility of such a project because as he argues, the Holocaust is unrepresentable.

However the genre of war films was put to effective use by the Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. They were all conscious of the motion picture as a tool of propaganda. It was also used by the British and Americans in the Second World War. The Nazis followed trends set by such directors as Eisenstein who helped Stalin recreate the sense of Russian historical destiny so essential in the early days of the Second World War.

In the United States which was soon began to be troubled by the developments in Europe whole series of films began to be churned out from Hollywood. Some of these films were openly siding with the communists while still some others were preparing America for the inevitable scenario of the war. On the other hand, the British with their penchant for and mastery over documentary were busy directing films like *Target for Tonight* and *Desert Victory* to uplift the morale of its combatants.

The US army made specialized use of these films—these were hard core documentaries with balanced portrayal and the flavour of the actual task at hand. These were training films and propaganda too. Films like the “Why we fight” series were used to give the background information to trainees, or even a classic film such as *Late Company B*. These were also used to stimulate the men to real battle conditions in areas where ordinary military training had never been able to achieve it. For all the imperfections of films especially war films it was soon to be reckoned as a force and as a document of the times.

A discussion on *Schindler's List* would remain incomplete without a complete examination of the auteur Spielberg, and his works. Stephen Rowley's article in *Senses of*

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<sup>20</sup> ibid

*the Cinema* traces Spielberg's cinematic--which is in a way his personal journey as well, beautifully. He helps delve into the cinematic odyssey of such depth and variation with his masterful criticism of the entirety of Spielberg's oeuvre. Rowley says,

A quick shot of anti-elitism is almost a necessary prelude to a serious critical appreciation of Steven Spielberg. He is in box-office terms, the most successful director ever, and there are few things quite so damaging to the reputation of an artist than extreme popularity. The sheer success of Spielberg's way of making movies, starting with his second theatrical feature *Jaws* in 1975, has led to a lasting critical wariness that has impeded the recognition of him as a truly great filmmaker.<sup>21</sup>

Rowley is open and frank in his admiration of Spielberg. He believes that:

Spielberg- an interesting and skilful director- has been engaged in a three decade long struggle for artistic validation. In this quest, Spielberg has taken on more "adult" subject matters, and many of these films—most notably *Schindler's List* (1993) have been impressive. Yet he should never have needed to wage such a fight. The films from Spielberg's first, most interesting period of creative activity (from *Duel* in 1971 to *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* in 1984) alone represent a remarkable work of work, and he has followed with another two decades of interesting and varied projects. His films have done what Hollywood cinema has always sought to do—thrill, uplift, scare, delight—more consistently than anyone's. Unless we are willing to dispense with all our recognized masters who worked wholly or largely with genre material (the Hawks, Donens, Hitchcocks and so on) this should be enough, and that he has also done so much else besides simply making the point arguable.<sup>22</sup>

Rowley has traced the growth in Spielberg the director and along with that noted the director's growth in terms of vision, artistry and execution. He has named these stages in Spielberg's career graph aptly and with a lot of precision.

*Duel*, *The Sugarland Express*, *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* forms what Rowley terms as "Transcending the Mundane" stage. *Duel* could hardly be calculated any more perfectly to show off the talents of an ambitious director on the rise, and Spielberg seized the opportunity. The scenario—reworked by *Twilight Zone* veteran Richard Matheson from his own short story—is a tightly constrained battle of wills between a salesman travelling by car through the countryside, and the apparently homicidal driver of a truck that he overtakes on the road. The minimalist plot means that the film is, apart from Dennis

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<sup>21</sup> Rowley, Steve. "Steven Spielberg" in archive. senses of cinema.com/contents/directors/.../speilberg.html

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

Weaver's impressively frazzled lead performance, virtually all Spielberg's, and the film works thanks to the tight grip of his shot selection and editing. Spielberg's compositions are very deep—the film almost too efficient: spare and machine like. He would expand on his ideas to a greater extent in his next two projects.

*The Sugarland Express* was to follow next—released in 1974 it echoed *Duel* in the staging of its drama in and around moving vehicles. Based on a true story, and developed as a script by Spielberg's friends Hal Barwood and Matthew Robbins, it follows the fate of Lou Jean Poplin and her husband Clovis after Lou Jean breaks Clovis out of jail just months before his release. Given Spielberg's reputation as a master of spectacle, it is easy to be distracted by the dizzy choreography of the many vehicles in the film, and overlook the assurance with which he handles the character drama. It is a nuanced and richly textured film.

For his second feature, Spielberg chose another project with echoes of *Duel*: the suspense thriller *Jaws* (1975). In later years, Spielberg has played down the quality of his work on the film, dismissing it as being purely manipulative and a coldly mechanical exercise in working over an exercise. Directed at *Jaws* it suggests insensitivity to the qualities of his own work. *Jaws* remains the most perfectly realized of Spielberg's movies, and its deft combination of different elements makes it satisfying at levels well beyond that of the mere suspense thriller. The film uses a naturalistic gritty style that is very much in keeping with the new Hollywood cinema of the 70's. His facility for shot composition and editing is at its most sure-footed, with the editing rhythms having an instinctive, musical quality.

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) is a curious blend: a domestic drama; a thriller about a government coverup; a light horror film with a creepy science-fiction menace; and a menace; and a globe-trotting, quasi-epic portrayal of the first contact between human and alien. It cemented Spielberg's reputation as an upbeat, sentimental filmmaker.

Spielberg's work from *Duel* to *Close Encounters* is grounded in a very real world, unlike many Hollywood films. Having established this strong foothold in reality, they then take their heroes into a heightened level of existence that is more exciting, more spectacular,

more emotional than the dull lives they live out each day. Then comes the change that permanently changes Spielberg's work and which was to be noticed in the next couple of films.

From *1941* to *Indian Jones and the Temple of Doom* films, Spielberg would be known as the wunderkind. *1941* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* form an intriguing pair on Spielberg's resume. The former is famous—to the extent that it is hardly remembered at all. It was going to prove to be Spielberg's big budget flop. The latter is of course a classic of the action-adventure genre, still much loved. Both are lavish period pieces constructed around a series of elaborate set pieces. Both are pretty impersonal projects, stepping away from the real world.

His next project was going to be *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*. It worked out superbly because of the intimate portrayal of its child protagonists. Spielberg's fascination with childhood is much commented upon and frowned upon as a sign of immaturity. He creates a real portrayal of the lives of the lives of pre-teens. The film is full of perceptive details about life at that age; Elliott's animation of his toys; the older boys' teasing of their sister; the gulf in understanding between children and adults; and the helplessness and frustration that this gulf provokes. It is perhaps Spielberg's most sincere and heartfelt film.

The next set of films like *The Color Purple*, *Empire of the Sun* are vastly different from the works that precede them. In *The Colour Purple* Spielberg seems to have responded to the emotional drama at the heart of the story, but in trying to bring that out, he overcooks the film visually and turns it into melodrama. Walker's novel is written in a rough, earthy first-person style that matches with the harshness of the material. Spielberg on the other hand adopts a lyrical, sweeping visual style. For the first time *The Colour Purple* demonstrated that as Spielberg tried his hand at newer things he would have to adopt a new stylistic voice as well.

Where *The Colour Purple* was betrayed by its visual style, in *Empire of the Sun* he was able to able to harness his visual ideas appropriately. The beautiful dreamlike photography



is to suggest the child-protagonist Jim's imaginatively heightened view of the world. In terms of marriage of style and theme it remains one of Spielberg's most successful films.

Spielberg's next couple of films like *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, *Minority Report*, *Catch Me If You Can*, *The Terminal*, *War of the Worlds* and concluding with *Munich* showcase his maturity. While they lack the innocence of the first few films, nevertheless they are able to show his serious and audience pleasing sides of his art. They are not marked by any rigidity to separate the important from the frivolous. There is an intermixing of complexity of tone and approach in these latter films. They also show him handling shades of grey comfortably with thematically as well as stylistically, with his body of work continuing to be more impressive and ambitious.

## Conclusion

Relatively unknown compared to its more popular counterpart--the film, the book *Schindler's Ark* has also done quite a lot in commemorating the memory of the Holocaust victims. But for the book, the film which Spielberg made and which got him honours from the Film Academy would have never got made. In fact as Doneson notes, "Public officials throughout the country told Americans that seeing *Schindler's List* was their civic duty."<sup>1</sup> Noteworthy also is the fact that had the book not been written a story not only valuable for its dramatic qualities but also for the fact that it is unique in an era where death with its scythe was so very active in the form of Nazis and one lone man so very effective in staving it off for 1100 would-be victims of it would be lost to mankind forever.

Judith Doneson in her article argues about these very issues that are at the heart of Holocaust studies--in representing the Holocaust through popular mediums such as the television and cinema is the Holocaust and its significance getting undermined? Or do they act as preservers of memory and even act as informants for a public ignorant of it?

A film like Spielberg's *Schindler's List* attains special importance in the face of detractors who say that the Holocaust is nothing but politics interwoven to weave together a Zionist state. Still some others are of the opinion that the Holocaust never took place at all. In his article Sterling notes of this very claim when he writes, "Several groups in the United States, such as Bradley Smith's committee for open debate on the Holocaust, are waging a vigorous campaign, often in village newspapers, to convince people that the holocaust never occurred and that the films, pictures, personal testimonies, and artifacts exist as part of an elaborate hoax."<sup>2</sup>

Yehuda Bauer a Holocaust scholar is of the belief that the increasing preoccupation with the holocaust is not "very logical". He believes that it is more than fifty years since the Holocaust happened and that other public events and crises are on the public agenda and that whatever is newer ought to push into the background things of the remote past. He

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<sup>1</sup> Doneson, Judith E. "Holocaust Revisited: A Catalyst for Memory or Trivialization?" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 548, *The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future* (Nov., 1996), pp.70-77.

<sup>2</sup> Sterling, Eric. *All Rules Barred: A Defense of Spielberg's Schindler's List* in *Film and History* Vol. 32.2 (2002).

argues that there are no preoccupations with World War I or even the storming of the Bastille—both events which had helped shape or re-shape mankind. And even if one wants to talk about genocide why in particular pick on the holocaust? He notes of other genocides in the history of mankind- Biafra, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, the Amazon Indians and even Biharis in Bangladesh.

It is perhaps a rhetorical question for he answers in the very next paragraph. He says, “it seems that the Holocaust has become a code that signifies evil in human society, that stands for the negation of the value of human life, and most of the contemporary dealing with it relates to the almost desperate desire to fight against the increasing threatening crisis in world civilization: mass murders, ethnic conflicts, hatred of the other, potential or actual genocides, and so on.”<sup>3</sup>

With the popularity of Holocaust Studies growing, Judith Doneson notes that Eastern Europe has become a major tourist attraction for Jews. There are among them many who seek to find their roots or a lost culture and for those whom Poland remains as a hot tourist spot for holocaust sights. Since the appearance of *Schindler's List* it seems there's a tour called “Schindler's List” that has become a part of the polish landscape.

Representations of the Holocaust have also given rise to debates among college faculty members who question notions of literature and what dictates its quality. In the centre of this controversy is the question whether the classics of the literary canon appeal to the culture and concerns of the minority communities. It also revolves around questions of mass taste versus the elitist taste—which of course cannot be adequately concluded.

Doneson further argues that the only link leading up to the events of the Holocaust is a plethora of research materials, books, diaries, survivor testimonies and even surprisingly, films. There are many survivors who have praised the cinematic efforts of Lanzmann in *Shoah* and Spielberg in *Schindler's List*. Jeff Greenfield of *Night Line*, a late night news program Doneson notes, admits that a simplification of matters of the extremity of the Holocaust is essential sometimes because of the limitations of time set upon a subject.

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<sup>3</sup> Bauer, Yehuda. The Impact of the Holocaust in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 548, The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future (Nov., 1996), pp.14-22.

Primo Levi notes of this tendency, "Have we-we who have returned—been able to understand and make others understand our experience? What we commonly mean by 'understand' coincides with 'simplify': without a profound simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions. In short, we are compelled to reduce the knowable to a schema."<sup>4</sup>

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* did after all establish a framework of knowledge of the Holocaust for the viewing public. People throughout the United States Doneson notes, were initiated into this world of Nazi genocide against the Jews. It helped audiences with a storehouse of information that helped them confront numerous dramatizations of the Holocaust which in turn helped sustain memory of an event that had not touched the lives of Americans directly.

In the last section of her article, Doneson talks about memory. Films such as Lanzmann's *Shoah* she says, leaves behind an impact in its ability to enlighten an uninformed audience and to provide it with a memory about the Final Solution. She notes however that it is far more important to guard against the blotting of memory than creating it.

Doneson records that Professor Shlomo Avineri of the Hebrew university writing in the *Jerusalem Post*, expressed that building a National Holocaust in Washington DC is a mistake since the Holocaust is not tied to American history nor to its people. This memorial rightly belonged in Jerusalem. Or as he generously adds perhaps it could be Europe. Those who would honour such sentiments Doneson states are not to be found in Europe and she states certainly not in Warsaw, Prague or even Berlin. In Europe she says memory was obscured for many years. While in America serious efforts were undertaken to honour the memories of the Holocaust victims. Primo Levi believes the "exemplary" nature of the Holocaust is beyond the grasp of the average individual. People with their own difficulties and burdens of various sorts are apt to forget and hence are circumscribed by their environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Doneson *op.cit*

Doneson notes with a finality and some sort of vengeance against the detractors of a representation of the Holocaust that this representation by various artists, academics are compelling and commercial representations through television or film have succeeded beyond expectations in spite of having been risky ventures. Rank Stanton of CBS television she notes is of the opinion that , “the ultimate use of all man’s knowledge and his art and his science cannot be locked up into little compartments to which only the initiate holds the key...the advancement of the human lot consists in more people being aware of more, knowing more, understanding more.”<sup>5</sup>

She pleads that even in the light of the holy uniqueness of the Holocaust we as human beings might become more generous and receptive and tolerant and even indebted to films such as *Holocaust*, and *Schindler’s List* in particular for rather than trivializing Jewry they have instead helped to defend memory.

In American popular culture *Holocaust* and many other films she says have offered awareness to millions of people who were uninformed about the Holocaust. She particularly points out Carl Baker’s words in this regard who had said that without knowledge there is no memory.

There is also another kind of fear—the fear that the film medium could ‘steal’ the readers away from actually reading literature. It has long since proved to be baseless and unfounded. There is research enough on television and films tie-in titles to prove that a successful literary adaptation on TV and film comparatively bolster up sales of the novel. Another assumption—largely interrogated though is the preoccupation of cine-goers with the notion of fidelity and the authenticity of the original text. They also recognize that the visual interpretation cannot do justice to the depth, substance and essence of the novel. The question is what if the readers find the text a pale shadow of the film or television series?

McFarlane notes that in spite of the frequent references to the Dickens-Griffith connection, and apart from the historical importance of parallel editing in the development of film narrative, the influence of Dickens in the history of film adaptation has perhaps been overemphasized, overestimated and remains largely under-scrutinized. one gets the

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<sup>5</sup> ibid

impression that critics steeped in a literary culture have fallen back on the Dickens-Griffith comparison with obvious relief—perhaps as a way to account for cinema’s respectability. He argues, that on the other hand a film-oriented writer would look at detailed questions of enunciation, of possible parallels and disparities between the two different signifying systems and of the range of ‘functional equivalents’ available to each within the parameters of the classical style as evinced in the two mediums.

And although comparisons between the two mediums continue paradoxically, the modern novel has not shown itself very adaptable to film. It can also be persuasively shown that writers like Joyce, Hemingway and Faulkner have drawn on cinematic techniques to write their books into being.

Brian McFarlane argues further in his book that there is also this fear that English lit. Departments will soon be renamed departments of “culture studies” because of the cine onslaught and that Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare will soon be replaced by the more popular batman comics, Mormon theme parks and television series. This ‘crisis’ in English studies which emerged in the late 1970s still continues today but till date no one has been able to gauge the depth of this ‘rot’ nor has anybody been able to account for ‘doing’ English and been able to decipher its boundaries.

Another area that remains largely in the shadows is the reason why film-goers want to see adaptations of novels, and filmmakers want to give them shape and whatever be the arguments there is just no denying of this fact. Morris Beja writing of the inception of the academy awards in 1927-28 reports of “more than three fourths of the awards for ‘best picture’” having been awarded to adaptations and that “the all time box office successes favour novels even more”.<sup>6</sup>

McFarlane is hopeful when he says that it becomes increasingly important to point out that effective textual comparison across the literature/media divide demands acute skills of

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<sup>6</sup> McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

close reading and narrative analysis and familiarity with the more general debates of 'high' culture versus 'low' culture. And this will perhaps result in encouraging audiences to become more critically aware of their roles as critics and about the activities of reading/viewing.

What then determines adaptation or even adaptability? Can one lay down stringent measures for a "good adaptation"? Does faithfulness to the original text render it as being a "good adaptation"? In this I'm reminded of translation. If one were to see closely, one would find that adaptation is also-(read) "cinematic translation".

Seymour Chatman in his article, "The art of film adaptation: *The Remains of the Day*" devotes an entire paragraph to this very adaptation of faithfulness to the original text versus a serious bit of artistic work. He says, "The discussion of film adaptation, both in popular and scholarly publications, has focused too extensively on the question of "fidelity," as if the sole task of the film were to render some precise replication of the novel. That sort of faithfulness, of course, is impossible because the two media are so different. A letter-perfect adaptation would be a simple reading of the novel by a voice-over blank screen -the real issue is not literal fidelity, but whether a film gives a good cinematic equivalent of the novel. There is a broad range of equivalences: a successful adaptation may stick quite closely to the details of the original or, at the other extreme, use the original only as a jumping point."

There is also this preoccupation with time-Chatman notes, "Every narrative whether novel, film, play, opera, comic strip, or ballet utilizes *two* kinds of time. One may be called "story- time," the time taken by the events in the plot and the other kind of narrative time is that required to "read" or otherwise experience the story events: a film typically lasts two hours, a novel much longer, depending on the number of pages and the reader's pace. This kind of time is often called "narrating-"or discourse time. Film adaptations almost always have a problem reducing discourse-time. Typically, they must squeeze the novel's reading time of many hours into little more than two hours of viewing-time. Fortunately, cinema's multiple tracks of information make such consolidation possible."

Chatman in his paper also discusses another problem besetting adaptation, "...because cinema is by definition an external art, an art of surfaces, the filmmaker's hardest task is to communicate in a visual way a character's inner life, his or her thoughts and feelings." Perhaps the only solution is to rely on the actor's performance to suggest the feeling-- "through facial expression, body language and movement, supplemented perhaps by lighting and mood music."<sup>7</sup> Cinema, as Metz argues, is after all a different language.

In this context Andre Bazin and his theory occupies a seminal position in an understanding of films. Dudley Andrew asserts, "He was without question the most important and intelligent voice to have pleaded for a film theory and a film tradition based on a belief in the naked power of the mechanically recorded image rather than on the learned power of artistic control over such images."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca : Cornell UP, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew, J.D. *The Major Film Theories : An Introduction*. London: OUP, 1976.



## APPENDIX

This interview in a way is very special because it took me months simply to get across to the author. Had it not been for Karen Reid of Random House, Australia this would have been but a brainchild, unborn.

This is an excerpt from an email interview with Thomas Keneally, the author of *Schindler's Ark*:

Do you see any resemblance between the history of Irish people and the history of Jewish people?

✚ An answer to a few of your questions, and I'll do more tomorrow.

Throughout the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century, the Irish were depicted in cartoons and other reportage as simian, prognathous and dangerous humanoids.

This made it possible to blame the Irish themselves for the debased state in which the denial of land and education had put them. Thus the famine was at the time, by politicians in the government of Lord George Russell and other commentators, passed off as the fault of the Irish themselves. All this was similar to the way Hitler depicted the Jews, as hook-nosed preyers on the human species, somehow

less human than Aryans yet at the same time superhumanly malicious, and to blame – on the basis of their crimes against European culture – for their own destruction. But these are not the only cases of

such representations. In all warfare based on race or in which race is invoked, the same efforts to render the supposed enemy less than human yet enormously cunning is a mental process which proceeds the first bullet.

What interested you the most-- was it the character of Schindler, or the story of the rescue of some Jewish people? What was your world view when you wrote a book like Schindler's Ark?

- ✚ To your second question, it was certainly, and probably above all, the paradoxical character of Oskar but also the light he cast on an extraordinary Northern European race hysteria. He was a lens through which one could see the entire process of the Holocaust – confiscation, ghetto-ization, concentration, extermination. But it also interested me as a post-colonial Australian that my betters, the metropolitan Europeans, had fallen for such an extreme form of race hysteria.

How much research did you have to do, and whether that was in libraries and archives or more with talking to people?

- ✚ The major research for the book involved three strands: interviews with survivors, individual archives of Schindler material (Poldek, Moshe Bejski, Mietek Pemper), and finally Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, which possesses a considerable archive of Schindleriana.

Whether you would write the story any differently now?

- ✚ As for writing the story differently, once one writes a book which achieves notoriety, other researchers and individuals come forward with new material – for example, information about the part Oskar played in Abwehr, German Military Intelligence, in conflict with the SS for possession of Germany's soul. I'd put in that extra detail.

Whether you felt the film distorted or changed your novel?

- ✚ Film cannot spend as much time or sub-plots or nuances as a book. But within those parameters I felt the film did as well as it could to deal with the moral ambiguity of Schindler. There were a few scenes towards the end of the film I would have quarreled with, but by and large, I think the capturing of that ambiguity was the film's strength.

I hope this helps.

Tom

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