

SCHINDLER'S LIST

MYTH, MOVIE, AND MEMORY

Schindler's List: Myth, movie, and memory

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In an age when even children understand that the image of an event transcends the event itself, *Schindler's List* is obviously more than just a movie. As with *Platoon* more than a half dozen years ago, we are enjoined to see a film and understand—but understand what?

If nothing else, Oscar night demonstrated that the existence of *Schindler's List* justifies Hollywood to Hollywood. The day that *Schindler's List* opened, *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin declared that "Mr. Spielberg has made sure that neither he nor the Holocaust will ever be thought of in the same way again." That same week, in *The New Yorker*, Terrence Rafferty wrote that, with Spielberg dramatizing the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto, "the Holocaust, 50 years removed from our contemporary consciousness, suddenly becomes overwhelmingly immediate, undeniable." Since then, *Schindler's List* has been used to prove the extent of Jewish suffering—an object lesson for American school children, Nation of Islam spokespeople, and German dignitaries alike.

Why does it take a Hollywood fiction to make the Holocaust "undeniable"? Is it true that movies have the power to permanently alter history? Does *Schindler's List* refer to anything beyond itself? From the liberation of Auschwitz on, the representation of the Holocaust has always been understood as problematic. How does one recreate unprecedented atrocities? How are performers to reenact the brutal murder of thousands upon thousands? Given the euphoria surrounding *Schindler's List*, one wonders if Spielberg hasn't found some way to circumvent this problem. Indeed, given our tendency to confuse the representation



"*Schindler's List* puts me in touch with that is connected to the part of myself

with the event, the act of memory with actual participation, Spielberg himself has become a heroic and representative figure. (In a letter sent to many members of the National Society of Film Critics, he spoke for the totality of the Jewish Holocaust: "From the bottom of my heart, and on behalf of thousands of survivors and six million spirits, thank you for bringing honor and attention to *Schindler's List*.")

Over the past two decades, the Holocaust has become increasingly central to the identity of American Jews. *Schindler's List* appears at a moment when, as James Young



DAVID JAMES/UNIVERSAL

h the part of myself that is childlike, that is Jewish." — Richard Goldstein

writes in his catalogue for *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, the current exhibition at the Jewish Museum, "Holocaust memory has begun to find its critical mass in something akin to a Holocaust 'museum boom.'" Citing "the difference between avowedly public art and art produced almost exclusively for the art world," Young observes that "people do not come to Holocaust memorials because they are new, cutting edge, or fashionable. . . . Holocaust memorials are produced specifically to be historically referential, to lead viewers to an understanding or evoca-

tion of events."

Can we say the same for *Schindler's List*? Or do the movie's heightened presence and overwhelming immediacy suggest, perhaps, something else?

—J. HOBERMAN

"I think 'Schindler's List' will wind up being so much more important than a movie," Jeffrey Katzenberg, who runs the Walt Disney film studios, told me. "It will affect how people on this planet think and act. At a moment in time, it is going to remind us about the dark side, and do it in a way in which, whenever that little green monster is lurking somewhere, this movie is going to press it down again. I don't want to burden the movie too much, but I think it will bring peace on earth, good will to men. Enough of the right people will see it that it will actually set the course of world affairs. Steven is a national treasure. I'm breakin' my neck lookin' up at this guy."

—Stephen Schiff, "Seriously Spielberg," *The New Yorker*

JAMES YOUNG: There are a couple of gigantic institutions now, Spielberg being one and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum being another, which are defining a kind of public consciousness of the Holocaust.

How they do it is what we need now to address. But beyond that I worry about any single memory of the Holocaust becoming totally predominant. The critics all want to know of *Schindler's List*, "Is this the last word on the Holocaust? Is this going to come to stand for all other Holocaust films?" If it does, then it is a great tragedy.

especially if it wipes out 34 years of other really interesting films on the Holocaust.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has done a very good job at what it set out to do. I was one who wished it wouldn't be built because I was desperately afraid that this would become all that a Jewish American community would begin to know of itself, reducing a thousand years of European civilization to 12 terrible years. In fact, I'm still afraid. It is not the museum's fault, it was already happening, but it has affirmed that. In the case of *Schindler's List*, I hope that the great numbers that are going to see it will have their curiosity piqued about what was lost. But I fear that they will come away sated now that they have seen the last word on the Holocaust.

ANNETTE INSDORF: I don't really believe that *Schindler's List* is perceived as the last word or even the last image for filmgoers, especially in the U.S. In fact, a similar argument arose when *Holocaust* premiered on NBC and was then shown in other countries; but it turned out that *Holocaust* became a spur to more and better films about the subject.

Those who have seen *Schindler's List* are more likely to see other films that deal with the Holocaust. And Spielberg has demonstrated that it is possible to make a *marketable* film on this subject. I tend to be something of a Pollyanna in looking at films that deal with difficult subject matter, but I do believe that *Schindler's List* can function as a spur not only to historical awareness but to more cinematic expression.

KEN JACOBS: Well, I have never seen a good movie, or a drama with actors, that I respect as a worthy depiction of the genocide of Jews. So this is another movie.

But in terms of its long-range hold on the public mind, I think it is much too soon to reckon that. I don't think in the long run it will have any more bearing than *Gone With the Wind*. One looks at *Gone With the Wind* now as a movie made in 1939, and eventually people will look at this picture as a movie made in 1993.

HOBERMAN: I think the implication of what Maslin was saying is that the Holocaust will be changed by this movie, because people will perceive it differently forever after. I wonder if that isn't a sort of longing. People say that now that the subject has been done, and is very successful, there's no need to think about it further.

ART SPIEGELMAN: Janet Maslin, like Jeffrey Katzenberg, like Spielberg, lives in such close proximity to the movie screen that she confuses it with reality. Of course, considering that America spent billions on a defense system named after *Star Wars*, she may be tragically correct.

WANDA BERSHEN: I was struck with how so many leading film critics are totally fudging the difference between a dramatic movie, which is a re-presentation, and historical reality. One of the few places it came up was in Philip Gourevitch's *Commentary* piece, where he finally toward the end says, "Oh, there is a difference." I'm wondering, why this insistence upon making this movie into something real, rather than one representation, one powerful monument, as in the exhibit here at the museum? What's going on here? My concern is that this critics' chorus will make it almost impossible for the general audience to make that distinction themselves.

JACOBS: Well, it is probably things like Terrence Rafferty confusing *Schindler's*

heroism with Spielberg's.

YOUNG: Actually, what Rafferty has done is unpack something interesting, because it was Schindler's hunger for power which partly led to his goodness. And this in the movie is very interesting. That is, I would have expected Spielberg to take a hero of the Warsaw ghetto uprising or one of the great heroes or one of the great villains, but instead he has taken somebody whose goodness is very ambiguous, what Saul Friedländer once called the ambiguity of good. There seemed to be something interesting about how wanting power leads to a certain kind of goodness which leads back into and feeds his power.

I think this was the parallel that Rafferty was trying to make between Spielberg and Schindler, which wasn't altogether complimentary. Spielberg's need to make the film may not have to do completely with altruism; it also had to do with hunger for power: the greatest film ever made, the greatest Holocaust film ever made. They don't need to negate each other—goodness and badness—they might come intertwined.

SPIEGELMAN: You are being very generous. Rafferty's laurels are unequivocal. He begrudgingly admits that Spielberg's accomplishment "is less inspiring than his hero's only because art is less important than life." He then goes on to compare this film's achievement to D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, without even acknowledging the central moral and ethical problems of either film.

Maybe it's naive to ask film critics or Hollywood moviemakers to be morally sensitive. After all, Spielberg's value system was formed by a world that originally brought us Auschwitz. The true moment

for weighing the implications and consequences of the genocide was 1945. If the world didn't slow down then, why should we expect it to be capable of sorting things out after 50 blurring years have passed?

GERTRUD KOCH: Wanting to have the last word means wanting to be the summarizing speaker. And I think what the film is doing is pretending that Spielberg has a kind of master narrative of the events and emphasizing that it is a so-called "realist" film. By using all the quotations from European films, it posits itself at the end of film history. I think he recycled every little slip of film that was made before to produce this film. It presents what we seem to know—because we have seen so many of the images—as a higher depiction of reality. And, therefore, the whole film has a kind of authoritarian quality to it.

I don't believe that Spielberg will have an educational impact that will diminish what happened or something like this. The film itself intentionally raises a very authoritarian voice, giving us an impression that we should now believe that it happened like this. That's the rhetoric of the film. Spielberg makes a truth claim for historical times and events when he can only make truth claims on an aesthetic level. I think he mixes the levels; he uses realism as a form to make strong truth claims for history.

YOUNG: As all realists do.

KOCH: But people think they can just speak about Schindler and not about Spielberg's Schindler.

JACOBS: It is a movie, and movies are made like this. I don't think there is any point during this movie when you are not aware of watching a movie. It is all done in movie terms and clichés, music. . . . It's sat-

urated with movieness. But people don't go to see the other films that deal with these events without trying to represent them. And they don't speak about them, they don't get together to discuss them. Those movies are left in limbo, they're ignored.

Janet Maslin titles her review "Imagining the Holocaust To Remember It." She expects moviemakers to create, in the common terms of realism-kitch, a graspable picture of intractable reality. I'm not defending the film. I don't care for the film. I don't respect it. But I think that he is doing what people are asking him to do, they are asking him to make a movie that is comprehensible, that works in movie terms, works in a language they understand, and he has given it to them. It seems a little strange to me to attack him for fulfilling that function, where if he did something else you would be ignoring him.

RICHARD GOLDSTEIN: I think that most works of popular history, maybe most works of popular art, if they are reality-based at all, have an authoritarian aspect that is inherent in the process of taking dramatic forms that are very accessible, almost so that they are transparent, and applying them to situations that are inevitably more complicated than the forms. I think, for instance, of *And the Band Played On* as a work of popular history that distorts the AIDS crisis and imposes a point of view upon it in a way that some people would consider authoritarian and yet the power of the work lies outside of that process and in its ability to communicate and commemorate.

I'm not sure that *Schindler's List*, therefore, ought to be indicted on those terms, especially because they are so loaded.

INSDORF: *Schindler's List* has to be seen in at least two contexts. The first is political, and reminiscent of Andrzej Wajda's *Korczak*: it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival right after Jewish cemeteries were desecrated at Carpentras, and the critical

response in France focused on the missing anti-Semitism in the film. Similarly, *Schindler's List* opened on the heels of studies like the Roper Organization Poll, which revealed how at least 22 per cent of the U.S. doubted that the extermination of the Jews ever took place.

Second, I think there was a bit of surprise among critics that Spielberg had pulled it off—that he made an adult work of art! Many of us were expecting him to simply apply the techniques of *Jurassic Park* to the Holocaust, but were pleasantly surprised that he transcended his reputation for a glib, feel-good approach.

HOBERMAN: Well, to come back to what

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you said, and this is something you had to deal with in your book: Right from the start, right from the moment that Adorno made his all-purpose pronouncement that poetry was impossible after Auschwitz, there has been a problem with representation. How do you show these events?

I wonder if the reason why *Schindler's List* is so pleasing—I mean this is not a movie that is causing people anguish—is because Spielberg somehow circumvented this problem of representation.

KOCH: I'd like to go back to my first remarks, that I think there is something authoritarian about the film, which I wouldn't link to the question of the autonomy of art. I meant it much more in terms of political theories. One of the things the film deals with is the idea of sovereignty. The film establishes a discourse of sovereignty but misses some points in the historic events, especially that there were very clear orders who had the sovereignty.

Who has the power? Who has the power to give life or death? That's what the film's about. I think the film is very friendly toward the concept of sovereignty, in the sense that Spielberg is always reproducing it. Everybody has a part in a deal; it's a pattern in the film, but the deal is about life and death. I was a little repulsed by the idea that the victims were depicted as children, and therefore not able to deal the right way. Instead there's always someone to go make the deal—somebody's beautiful daughter to go apply for the parents. This is a problem in the film: he gives us the idea that if you had been smart enough, you could have survived. The film is so pleasing because of the idea that you can be redeemed just by taking your own sovereignty back. And while it's a very nice idea, it doesn't fit the historical ends.

GOLDSTEIN: But my own image as an American of how Jews and Christians communicated in Europe before the Holocaust is very much like the one you just described. And when I saw those scenes, I regarded them as the traditional way that

Jews were able to function in the oppression that they faced in Europe.

I come equipped with a view of European reality as being distinctly different from American reality. And involving these hierarchies that, in my own mind, with all of its parochialism, don't correspond to my experience as an American. If the Holocaust exists in this movie for me, it was an American view of the Holocaust. For me, they were the other Jews, they were the Jews that we got out in time to avoid being. And when I watched the film, in my mind, in the kind of dreams that I had after it, in the nights following, they were the Jews that I wasn't. And I didn't really regard them, I think either as they were or as I was, but as some kind of figment of imagination I had before I came in to see the movie. Now, I don't think this is a problem for the film, I think it is part of its resonance. And I would argue that.

SPIEGELMAN: Well, the problem for me is there weren't any Jews in the picture, were there?

GOLDSTEIN: Well, I thought there were.

SPIEGELMAN: I didn't see any.

GOLDSTEIN: Well, we don't have the same dreams. Obviously we don't, we are Americans, we have individual Jews. You didn't see them as Jews and that is very interesting to me.

SPIEGELMAN: Kingsley is an oddly deracinate choice for the central Jewish character in the movie. Actually, these Jews are slightly gentrified versions of Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* caricatures: the juiceless Jewish accountant, the Jewish seductress, and, most egregiously, the Jews bargaining and doing business inside a church. It's one of the few scenes where the Jews become vivid, a scene that wasn't even borrowed from the novel.

Spielberg has long had a Jewish problem. The Jewish "magic" that leaped out of the Lost Ark at the end of his first *Raiders* movie was all the wrath of hell melting down the villains with a supernatural nuclear bomb.

Schindler's List refracts the Holocaust through the central image of a righteous gentile in a world of Jewish bit players and

extras. The Jews function as an occasion for Christian redemption.

Incidentally, in the spirit of full disclosure, as someone pointing out Spielberg's Jewish problem, I must confess that I have a Spielberg problem. It dates back to his producing *An American Tail*, the animated cartoon about Jewish mice who escape the Cossacks/catsacks in what I perceived as a horrible appropriation from *Maus*. That said, I feel secure that my unhappiness with this film would remain intact if I thought it had been made by Martin Scorsese or anyone else.

JACOBS: This thing in the church happens early in the film when the Jews are relatively free to operate. And they desecrate the church; they desecrate the holy water; they give all the reasons why Christian Europe has to get rid of Jews, again cast out the money changers. The incident operates, in the logic of the narrative, to bring on and justify all that follows.

HOBERMAN: I am struck by the fact that at the same time that Spielberg introduces the scene in the church, he represses the real Schindler's actual interaction with the Jewish underground. I mean Schindler took a trip to Budapest in 1943, where he contacted various Zionist agents. There's even a suggestion that Jewish organizations were funneling him money.

After all, the outcome of the war was still in flux. Schindler himself has been simplified in such a way to make him a figure of tremendous comfort, and also to minimize whatever connection he would have had with other forces, including Jewish forces, that were in play during the war.

JACOBS: What's bothering some of us is that this is a trendy movie—it's sexy psychopath season—about a kind of Jekyll and Hyde character split between the two major male characters. It is finally a movie about styles of manhood, and how one deals with one's lessers. Jews function as background and pawns of this dramatic contest. Apparently the film is being shown to kids as a way of making them feel more for Jews, right? I rather expect that what many kids will get from this is another example of a

glamorous guy with a perfect complexion consuming screenspace and attention... a commandant, who does what he wants and gets what he wants and goes to his end standing tall.

GOLDSTEIN: Actually what we have been presented with are examples of teenagers seeing the movie and regarding the Nazis as the men. The teenagers laughing in the theater in Oakland, and egging the Nazis on... maybe there was a reaction to their horror at seeing images of abjection that are in their souls, that are in their collective memory as well. Maybe the the minimalization, the colloquialization of the Holocaust, makes it possible for people outside the experience historically to connect with similar experiences.

Of course, then you could have the reaction formation of identifying with the aggressor. And so you can have actually an anti-Semitic reaction to that memory, which is, of course, a big problem and a horrible specter, but maybe what is going on is the film touched them too closely.

JACOBS: This movie is like *New Jack City*, you pop away who is in your way, you're on top of it, and swim in women.

KOCH: Well, that's very interesting, because the film links together in a very old-fashioned way issues of sexuality and manhood. I mean, always the mistresses all around the place. And before violence breaks out, you almost always have some love scenes. It becomes very clear with the mistress and the Nazi commander Goeth, who are depicted as a kind of presentation of sexuality and violence.

INSDORF: I don't think we are remembering other aspects of the film. It is easy to simplify *Schindler's List* into merely the aggrandizement of the Goeth character. But for me the most devastating moment in the film occurs in the ghetto when a little Jewish boy working for the Nazis sees an older woman and blows the whistle on her; only when he realizes that he knows her does he show the Jewish woman where to hide.

Now, that moment struck me as the most emotionally violent one in the film. Spiel-

berg was suggesting that the capacity to go from thoughtless cruelty to decency or heroism is not limited to Oskar Schindler. If, in your opinion, this film is about a rite of passage to manhood, I can't forget that scene. Why is it in there, if not to expand on the notion of heroism?

SPIEGELMAN: That is probably why Spielberg changed the scene from the book in which the Jewish boy is a teenager or young man, and not a seven- or eight-year-old kid. The savior is an innocent child.

BERSHEN: I think Gertrud's point was very interesting, because she was articulating in a very clear way that both the Jews and Schindler appear to have this option of controlling, deciding, their own fate in history, as if all the chaos of war and history, which we know too well, isn't really as bad, isn't really going on.

That bothers me. It is very American, at least in the movies, to see a single person, usually male, singularly conquer events.

GOLDSTEIN: A characteristic of Spielberg movies is that they tend to make you feel like a child while you are watching them; they are fairy tales basically. And this film does that with the Holocaust. It puts you in touch with the emotions of a child. And I am not sure that that is a bad thing.

I think that some of the more primitive responses that I have to an experience that is, in fact, extremely exotic to me, and bears no resemblance in my own life to anything that I could call memory, those feelings have to do with helplessness, abjection, being completely outside of any social structure, being beyond any kind of salvation. Feelings that every child has as part of their nightmares. I think the movie puts me in touch with the part of myself that is childlike, that is connected to the part of myself that is Jewish. And, therefore, I get an image of the Holocaust that brings those elements together.

And then there is the question of the righteous Christian in the movie, the superman figure, who flies in and saves Lois Lane, the Jew. You have to remember 50 per cent of American Jews marry non-Jews. I am living with a Christian, and that is my

most intimate relationship. It corresponds on a primal level to my expectations of what this person would do for me, and I see my own lover as a Schindler.

YOUNG: The image of the child in Holocaust literature and film has been very common. And it is also very common, as it turns out, in memorials around the world. Mostly because the victim often needs to be represented as a child, that is somebody without a past, who can't be blamed now for his or her own murder.

BERSHEN: So, it is like the perfect victim?

YOUNG: In a way. It is the victim ideal. And often Jews as victims in the Holocaust are remembered in memorials, museums, literature, and emblemized by the child, the historyless child. That is, there is no explanation yet for the death of the child.

SPIEGELMAN: This is one of the reasons it was imperative for me, in making *Maus*, to portray my father "warts and all," as a central figure enmired in reality, not reducible to being an innocent. Survival mustn't be seen in terms of divine retribution or martyrology.

JACOBS: Spielberg says the SS threw babies out of windows and shot them like skeet. But he wouldn't show so terrible a thing, not even stage it using dolls. So this unpleasant truth doesn't reach the audience. But why not for a moment stop turning out these crazy-making counterfeit-reality movies, and do it with dolls, obvious stand-ins for the real thing. Like Art's drawings of mice, alluding to, indicating, without attempting to re-present.

SPIEGELMAN: I have difficulty understanding where he draws his aesthetic lines, why he categorizes that image as taboo even though he comfortably re-creates scenes of Jews being crowded into gas chambers and shows naked actors paraded by for a selection. The problem of re-creation for the sake of an audience's recreation is a fundamental one that he's never worried about.

JACOBS: For instance, the Jewish girl that Goeth takes in as his housemaid. Out of nowhere, for no reason—who needs it—we

have this scene where he circles around her, we circle around her, we look at her, her wet nipple against the cloth. We are drawn into this thing, into the sadistic scene, circling for what? I mean, these are kicks, these are psychopathic kicks, okay, that the film is offering people.

The reactions at the end were tears, stunned silence, and a smattering of applause that was cut short as if somehow out of place. "It needed you to do it," [German President Richard] von Weizsäcker told Mr. Spielberg when the lights came up.

—Craig R. Whitney, *The New York Times*

KOCH: To go back to this question of where the film asks us to identify. When it comes to a highly emotional film like, let's say, a horror film, it's often shot from the sadistic—the killer's—point of view. For example there are problems with the Goeth character and its link to a negative image of Jewish women. I mean, you have a sequence where a Nazi gets attracted to a Jewish woman, and another where

Schindler kisses a Jewish girl who brings a birthday cake. It is a kind of mirroring, and it refers to the phantasmagoric danger of being seduced by a Jewish woman.

HOBERMAN: Annette, in your book you pointed out that American treatments of the Holocaust are typically simplistic and emotionally manipulative. I don't know if one could consider them the *Schindler's List* of 1959, but I remember from my childhood that the *Diary of Ann Frank* and *Judgment at Nuremberg* got a tremendous amount of attention. These movies were taken very seriously.

INSDORF: Ultimately it hasn't changed that much. After defending *Schindler's List*, even I have to acknowledge that it is simplistic, that it is emotionally manipulative. I take exception, for example, to a scene like the burning of the corpses being accompanied by intrusive music—with the addition of choral voices. It falls into the same traps I discussed in my book vis-à-vis *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *The Diary of Ann Frank*: when you have images bursting with emotion, schmaltzy music is, at the very least, redundant.

On the other hand, Spielberg chose a very particular story to tell, and that story carries with it an invitation to certain conven-

tions. Oskar Schindler himself was a larger-than-life figure, who did indeed save over 1100 Jews. How? By manipulation. By a showmanship (not unlike Spielberg's) that knows—and plays—its audience, but in the service of a deeper cause. Spielberg grounds his version of this true story in details that convey not only Schindler's heroic stature, but what he was protecting.

I read Steven Zaillian's script and it begins quite differently from the film. Spielberg added the Jewish sabbath candle whose smoke moves us into the past. The film tells us from the outset the context in which we will watch Schindler's tale—Jewish ritual, continuity, and survival—and true to his terms, the last shot has the title "Fewer than 4000 Jews are left in Poland. More than 6000 descendants of the Schindler-juden exist today." He set his terms and fulfilled them.

SPIEGELMAN: Actually, the last title is "For Steve Ross."

INSDORF: You're right. But his choice of detail goes beyond some of the choices made in films like *Diary of Ann Frank* or *Judgment at Nuremberg*, which were a bit more primitive in terms of observing melodramatic conventions of the 1950s.

For example, in Zaillian's script, you see

Schindler almost immediately in the mirror of his hotel room. But as I watched the beginning of the film, I couldn't see Schindler's face. In the hotel, it's not shown at all; in the nightclub his face is covered, and it's not till the very end of that sequence that we finally get to see him.

I choose to interpret this as narrative strategy. It insists upon the mystery of this man, which will never be unveiled in the course of the film. *Schindler's List* never purports to explain why Schindler did what he did. To Spielberg's credit, he doesn't try to offer a simplistic explanation of this rather transcendent decency.

Instead, his strategy tells me that the hero will reveal very little, including his motivation.

HOBERMAN: I just want to ask why does it strengthen the movie that Schindler's motivations are never speculated on?

INSDORF: Because it is an honest acknowledgement that we cannot penetrate the mystery of this man's decisions. Neither Zaillian nor Spielberg claims to know any more about Schindler's motivation than Orson Welles and Herman Mankiewicz explained Rosebud in *Citizen Kane*.

HOBERMAN: Well, there is the documentary that was made for British television in

which a number of the Schindler Jews, interviewed in the British TV documentary, are not reticent about speculating about Schindler the man.

INSDORF: But that speculation is kaleidoscopic. It does not all point to the same factors. I think that documentary is superb, and in many ways superior to *Schindler's List*. But even after it brilliantly juxtaposes the voice and faces of the survivors, one remains with the same enigma—which is ultimately the mystery of human identity.

We can all speculate; sure. Keneally talks about the fact that Schindler as a child had a Jewish best friend. Well, I could imagine a lesser filmmaker saying, "Aha," and reducing motivation to one incident.

JACOBS: In terms of giving us an understanding of why this guy goes through whatever he goes through, the girl in the red coat, and we're put through the emotional wringer. I doubt that any critical shielding could protect us from being reached into and twisted. When we see Schindler's witnessing face we ascribe to him all that we're feeling. We understand his conversion to caring and rescuing. It is very easy from that point on to understand his conversion, because we have gone through something. It was crazy-making to go through that—to pick out this little girl and put us through that number. I really felt violated by that. I don't want to be tapped in that way, I don't want to be put through emotional paces in that way.

GOLDSTEIN: And that was the moment when I realized that the film wasn't realism, in fact, in the movie sense that it was dreamlike, it was actually a dream of the Holocaust, and that what I was going to experience was my own dreams of the Holocaust. And the scene in Auschwitz, everybody talks about the gas chamber and the sexuality which I didn't really experience as sexuality, I experienced as a kind of an oversized crudeness and horror. But what I remember about that scene is the image of the people moving down the staircase and their faces being encased in shadow. I had this incredible feeling that these people had

been completely stripped of an identity. That the whole process had made it impossible for them to conceive of any resistance whatsoever. And I had this profound rage at that moment that stayed with me for almost a day after.

I am willing to admit it is not a great movie. I am willing to admit it is a bad movie in many ways. But how to account for that feeling, that is, in fact, what Zionism could never do for me, which is the feeling of we mustn't allow this to happen.

SPIEGELMAN: The main dream image the movie evokes for me is an image of 6 million emaciated Oscar award statuettes hovering like angels in the sky, all wearing striped uniforms.

INSDORF: I watched the film with my mother, a survivor of Plaszow, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen. She was not one of the *Schindlerjuden*, but she was working in the Plaszow office and managed to get her cousin, her cousin's husband, and their little boy onto the list. She could not save herself in the same way, so she ended up in Auschwitz.

My mother is a professor of literature and cinema. She has seen just about every Holocaust film, and is conversant with the imagery as well as the conventions. After seeing *Schindler's List* she was grateful. She was grateful that the story was told by a popular filmmaker who could get the audience into the theater. She was happy that it was going to be commemorated.

Even though she didn't know Schindler personally, she knew Goeth. She had told me about how Goeth shot her girlfriend point blank. She told me how she used to rehearse what to say to Goeth if he ever came near her.

I can't forget her feelings of gratitude at the same time that I allow my critical judgments to enter the picture.

HOBERMAN: The night *Schindler's List* opened, Channel 5's news team found the one Schindler Jew who lives in Jersey and interviewed him. And like all the Schindler Jews who have commented on the movie, he was extremely positive about it.

He had in a matter of seconds gone on to

discuss his own experience of the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, during which he said he saw his entire family killed before his eyes. He was not criticizing the film at all. But he mentioned one detail not in the movie, that, for me, demolished Spielberg's re-creation. He just happened to mention that the Nazis hanged Jews at random—that there were Jewish corpses hanging from all the trees and lampposts. Which is not something that I think, for a number of reasons, Spielberg wanted to stage. And yet the Spielberg movie kind of created a backdrop for this illuminating detail.

BERSHEN: If you read what survivor response seems to be so far, it seems quite consistent.

SPIEGELMAN: I feel compelled to point out that survivors aren't necessarily effective art critics. They are often reduced to feeling grateful that anyone is interested in their story, they're relieved simply to have the burden of telling lifted from them.

BERSHEN: I think survivor's response leads to a lot of issues that are in this exhibition. As there are many monuments and many films, there are many different kinds of memory responses. Maybe that is a discussion that can't happen yet, because the film is too recent.

YOUNG: You have brought up two really nice issues. The first has to do with how this Jewish Museum exhibition, "The Art

of Memory," came about in the first place. On the one hand as a scholar rooting around in archives, I would find a little human diary that maybe eight people have read. At the same time, I'd look outside these archives—often these archives are located near museums or a place like Yad Vishom, where thousands and thousands of people come by every day. Maybe 10,000 people in a day going to Yad Vishom, all of them going through, their memory being very much organized, being very much manipulated. And this little tiny diary being read by 100 people maybe. I write a book that is going to be read by, if I am lucky, 5000 people, you know, out of this. And on a single day in Washington, 8000 people will go to the Holocaust Museum. At that point I had to step back and say, I must begin now to organize or to examine very critically and very skeptically the kinds of memory being shaped on both sides. And then I need to step back one step further and ask, what it is, in fact, that drives scholars to take films like this and to spend the time we will spend on them. What is it that asks us to turn it into so much grist? Is it just our skepticism or is it also our own sense of self-aggrandizement, trying to come out and to make our positions on it very, very clear?

I think we need now to examine all motives of memory, not Spielberg's only but

ours also, as journalists and as critics.

KOCH: What bothered me was that *Schindler's List*, like *Europa, Europa*, sets as an ideal the survivor. Surviving itself became a very prominent idea. And I see there a shift, let's say in topics: surviving itself now has, let's say, a new quality. In *Shoah* for example nobody speaks about the way they survived; they speak about those who died in front of them.

The discourse for the last 20 years was more or less marked by survivors' narratives about the death camps and not so much about their own escape. The survivors know that it was merely an accident that they survived while so many died. It is even a well-known psychological fact that they suffered from a kind of guilt complex, which for many even made the fact of having survived a psychological problem.

And I think there is a shift now in emphasizing different narratives, which are based on the kind of very close links between the victims and the Nazis. So, you have to construct a kind of new narrative for this and I wonder if this doesn't have to do with generation shifts. That the kids of survivors have different memories; they start restating these memories in which the Holocaust has a kind of happy end, because at least one of the parents survived.

JACOBS: Let's remember the almost saving

grace at the film's end that to a degree frames the movie illusion as such. There is this shocking color scene of people coming up and placing memorial stones. Too often, seeking the historical event, we get lost in the study of actors' faces, decoys, that take us off the track. But here we have the actual

Here are Jews as the SS invade their apartments. Are they consoling their children? No, they are making them eat jewels wadded in balls of bread. Are they praying? No, they are trying to pry the silver mezuzah from the door. . . .

The mindless critical hyperbole which has greeted Schindler's List suggests that powerful spectacle continues to be more beguiling than human and historical authenticity—and that the psychology of the Nazis is a bigger draw than the civilization of the people they murdered. It is profoundly disheartening that Steven Spielberg's Holocaust may be the only example of "Jewish culture" seen by millions. . . .

—Philip Gourevitch, *Commentary*

Schindler Jews. We can learn something from these faces, these bodies. Also, the scene in color doesn't have the same sleek cohesion and cleanliness mentioned before, all that satisfying organization. You get more of the uncontrollable world. In this scene I felt he was making a movie for me. If only throughout the film, he had shown these people guiding and instructing the dedicated actors, placing their hands, "Okay, now you do this, as was done when I was young, this happened this way." But how many people will turn out for a Pirandello cinema?

I wish Spielberg would have trusted the audience's capacity to feel and understand. But there's little trust of that sort throughout the movie. For instance, the "three minutes of silence" was not allowed to play in silence. I was hoping the screen would go silent and black for three minutes. Instead

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the impossibly sweet-faced rabbi begins to keen. Not only does Europe corral the Jews, the movies corral the Jews again and again depicting them en masse in religious terms.

Not true now or then. On exhibition here is a model of the Anne Frank house. On the wall of her actual bedroom in Amsterdam one sees pictures of Deanna Durbin and Ginger Rogers. Not of her rabbi. She's a 20th-century kid, a contemporary person. And this stuff, again and again, makes these people a kind of archaic relic. It is a deep wrong. They are being killed as personalities.

HOBERMAN: Why is it, do you think, that in a film that is three hours long, that so little time is devoted to what exactly it was that was lost—namely the Jewish civilization that existed in Poland. There was a tremendous variety among Polish Jews, not to mention the other European Jews who were deported to Poland? Why it would be that the film could spare so little for that?

I'm not suggesting that he show everything, I'm saying that, in a three-hour film, he didn't show anything.

SPIEGELMAN: It goes back to the central fact that the film is not about Jews or, arguably, even the Holocaust. Jews make people uncomfortable. It's a movie about Clinton. It's about the benign aspects of capitalism—Capitalism With a Human Face. We're in Ayn Rand country: the Businessman as hero. Capitalism can give us a health care program, and it can give us a Schindler.

HOBERMAN: There are two films which I wanted to just bring up, which have not really been mentioned. Annette right at the beginning mentioned the precedent of *Holocaust*, which, of course, is very interesting. Well over 200 million people, maybe far more than that, saw *Holocaust*, the *Miniseries*. Many more people so far than *Schindler's*. And many saw it at the same time, so that it had the power of television. It was subject to many of the same criticisms.

I remember Eli Weisel wrote a front-page article in the Arts & Leisure section. At the same time it seems to have had a verifiable effect, at least in Germany. One can't say if

Schindler's List has changed anything objectively in the United States or elsewhere, whereas *Holocaust* had an impact, despite being more crass than *Schindler's List*. Now 15 years later it is as if *Holocaust*, this great event, didn't happen. It, itself, has been somehow forgotten, it is embarrassing.

No one proposed that Claude Lanzman get an Oscar for having made *Shoah*, while Spielberg is being mentioned for the Nobel Peace Prize. I mean Lanzman spent 10, 15 years, whatever, and probably ruined his life working on *Shoah*.

BERSHEN: But he's not American. The role movies play in this culture in relation to history is utterly different than their role in European culture.

HOBERMAN: I think it might have something to do with the quality of the two movies. *Shoah* does not reassure us.

BERSHEN: In this country, people don't know very much history, especially of foreign countries, and have never lived through a war at home. Americans don't have occasion to pass by ruins or graveyards or traces of a war, in daily life—as is often the case in Europe. I am always programming films about history, and often think that history is perceived as something that happens in the movies and is not very real.

KOCH: I just want to tell something about the film's reception in Germany. On the front page of one of the most important conservative newspapers, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, was an article by one of the editors (the one responsible for the cultural page). In it, he wrote that *Schindler's List*, which he praised very highly, finally shows that all this bullshit the intellectuals tell about aesthetics after the Holocaust is just not true, because one can narrate it. What Spielberg has shown the world is there is nothing that can't be narrated. And, therefore, it tells us that aesthetics in general has to come back to

these kinds of conventional forms, you know, you have a nice beginning, you have a nice ending, and in between you squeeze the whole epoch and its horrors.

And it's very convenient, let's say, for a German audience to see it this way. So, if this is true, that you can make out of the Holocaust a historical film with a proper closure, then probably the events themselves were not so singular in their monstrosity; you just have to package them differently.

HOBERMAN: There's one sense that *Holocaust, the Miniseries* was more naturalistic than *Schindler's List*. As I recall, the central Jewish family has maybe six children and five of them die. These are characters who, if one watches, one is invested in. But in *Schindler's List* virtually every character in whom the audience has emotionally invested lives! So, it is not just a closure, it is a kind of triumph.

SPIEGELMAN: We've had 15 years to streamline our narratives.

GOLDSTEIN: Optimism is deep in American film. After I saw this movie, I read a

book by, I think his name would be pronounced Yoshi Vile, a Czech writer, called, *Life With a Star*, that was, in fact, a narrative of self-discovery around the Holocaust in which a cat is a major character and the life and death of this cat is very important. The hero is a Czech Christian—not the hero, but the person who enables the Jew to achieve the self-actualization.

And the final gesture is to go into hiding, and the book is open-ended about whether this person survives and he does survive. It is very different from *Schindler's List*, but it has some of the optimism, some of the ideology, some of the sentimentalization that that film has too.

HOBERMAN: What I got from that novel was the tremendous isolation of the protagonists, an unbelievable loneliness as a Jew in hiding in occupied Prague; it is overwhelming. There is no sense of that that I can see in *Schindler's List*.

BERSHEN: The narratives that resonate for many people always change over time. The differences Jim noted between the *Holo-*

caust-miniseries and *Schindler* (15 years apart) are similar to the iconographic shifts in the creation of memorials over time. For example, in Israel the Holocaust has long been linked to the birth of the state, while the iconography in German or American culture is very different.

SPIEGELMAN: That link is made in both the Holocaust movie and *Schindler's List*.

GOLDSTEIN: And in Baruch Goldstein's mind, since he called his victims Nazis.

HOBERMAN: Even in the TV documentary, half the length of Spielberg's film, when the issue of the list comes up, it is far more complex: people are buying or selling spots, a broker who is operating on his own, people sacrificing themselves or being vindictive. All of human nature comes into play. It is not the happy beatific ritual shown in the movie, which, of course, is in itself so profoundly disturbing—being the one good, joyous selection.

At the end of *Close Encounters* when the hero goes back into the mothership, it is not even that he is born again, he's reversed

the process of life. That's *Schindler's List*. This is a movie about World War II in which all the Jews live. The selection is "life," the Nazi turns out to be a good guy, and human nature is revealed to be sunny and bright. It's a total reversal.

SPIEGELMAN: It is just like Time's Arrow.

JACOBS: Regarding the critic in Germany, who said that Spielberg has shown the story can be told, obviously it was just a matter of time before someone far enough out of it would step into it. Somebody benumbed enough to consider using Auschwitz for a set. It's the power of tastelessness.

HOBERMAN: We are going to have to stop. Is there anything anyone is burning to say?

SPIEGELMAN: In the Passover Haggadah we're told of four sons, one wise, one wicked, one too young to ask why the Jewish exodus from Egypt is celebrated, and one too simple to ask. The Haggadah says the stupid son is to be told the short simple version of the story so he can at least grasp something of what happened. Clearly Spielberg has the simple-son market sewn up.■

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