

IMAGINING THE HOLOCAUST

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Among the aspects of human life to which the imaginative genius of the Greeks applied itself was the torment of eternal punishment. Notably, in Homer's 'Odyssey', when Odysseus visits Hades (to learn from Tiresias of his destiny), he glimpses first Tityos, then Tantalus, then Sisyphus. Tityos is spread on the ground where he is powerless to stop two vultures plucking at his liver; Tantalus stands in a pool, but each time he stoops to drink, the water drains away before his eyes, and each time he reaches for the sweet fruits over his head – pears, pomegranates, apples, figs and olives – the wind tosses them out of his reach; Sisyphus keeps rolling a boulder uphill, but as he reaches the crest so that he can push it over, its weight causes it to roll backwards down to the plain below.

In his 'Inferno', its inspiration triggered by his reading of Homer, Dante likewise strains his imagination to devise perpetual torment, such as the icy rain forever falling on the souls in the third circle, the flatterers lying in excrement in the eighth circle, those in the fifth 'malebolgia' who traffic in public offices submerged in a river of boiling pitch and kept from escaping by a horde of demons, the hypocrites in the sixth malebolgia pacing the ground in copes of lead – "Oh in eterno faticoso manto!" – and in the ninth and bottom circle, the traitors frozen in the River Cocytus.

The human impulse to see crime and sin punished, if not on this earth by human agency then in the afterlife by divine sanction, leads us to imagine what might happen – and in the imagination so much more can be spoken: the unrealistically excruciating can become available to us, far beyond the humdrum laws of physical pain. Furthermore, a bleaker, more cerebral idea can be added: repetition.

When Primo Levi returns to Turin from his own season in hell, nine months in Auschwitz, the word that still rings in his ear is 'Wstavac, get up,' the command to start the day of labour, racked by fatigue, hunger and disease. It is one of the features of the Nazi programme to annihilate the Jews that before annihilation, the victims must suffer in a re-creation on earth of Dante's circles of hell. Only this reinvention is physical and material: the transports of Jews must be organized, camps and crematoria built, guards found, methods of gassing invented, and finally the ashes disposed of.

And after the camps are liberated, the programme halted, and the survivors dispersed, the event lives in their memories, and also beyond their memories, because the human race needs to come to terms with what has happened, to seek some future wisdom from the now-past catastrophe, and for this thinkers, writers and artists are needed. What is more, because it is a 20th-century catastrophe, and because in the 20th century film takes over the word as the means of mass communication, it is imperative that the new medium of film is used to express it. It is arguable that of all the ways of imagining the Holocaust for future generations, among them history, literature, painting, it is the cinema that has tackled the subject most persistently, sometimes crassly, often movingly. One can even now talk of a genre of Holocaust film, not just deriving from Hollywood (among other films, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *The Pawnbroker*, *Sophie's Choice*, *Schindler's List*) but also from Eastern Europe (among others, *The Long Journey*, *The Last Stage*, *Passenger*, *The Pianist*, *Fateless*) and from Italy (*Kapo*, *The Garden of the Finzi Continis*, *The Night Porter*, *Life is Beautiful*). Television too has been crucial: the American mini-series, *The Holocaust*, and British made-for-television non-fiction accounts (episode 20 of *The World at War*, *Kitty – Return to Auschwitz*, *Auschwitz - The Nazis and the 'Final Solution'*). In a class by itself stands Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, initially shown in the cinema, but reaching a wider audience still through television, the making of which is a key part in the whole process of testifying to the Holocaust both for our time and for generations to come.

There is of course a very substantial literature on the Holocaust, indeed one of the 20th century's key works, Primo Levi's memoir of his time in Auschwitz, 'If this is a man', was published within two years of his return to Turin from the camp. There have followed other memoirs and novels, major scholarly histories, poems, and not least the publication of diaries kept by Jews in extremis prior to their murder, and allowing their voices especially to be heard beyond the grave. All these words have been very important for the film-makers, for often the most striking stories, whether factual or invented, have been made into striking films, and their histories have informed the best television documentaries. The literature therefore underpins the cinema and television works, but the latter supersede the written word in giving the subject a presence and a reach that is new to history. This has been desirable, but it has not been without its

controversy and its risks: are the visual accounts true? What is the truth in a subject like this? What would the dead victims make of these works, were they to see them? The unease erupted in 1978 when Elie Wiesel attacked the NBC Holocaust series in the New York Times in words that recall the Jewish imagining of Yahweh in the Old Testament as transcendent and unique – and not to be represented in graven images: the Jews after all are a ‘people of the book’, for whom God has a name but no image. Does this therefore transfer into a general distrust of images when dealing with fundamental things? The question is an important one for anyone seeking to defend the magic of images made in a movie camera: do they put us in a dilemma, between desiring images for their richness, their newness, their extraordinary variety, and suppressing them because they bring the subject into such focus we cannot see beyond them? Hence, the prohibition on images of God, for the Almighty, the Eternal, the Infinite, and so on, cannot be represented in one image, or even a million images. Wiesel himself speaks as a survivor, with deepest feeling. And his plea in 1978 needs to be tempered with what he wrote in 1989 in the preface to Annette Insdorf’s ‘Indelible Shadows’ when he recognized that the film image might express, at least in part, what he felt in 1978 was inexpressible. In reaching this position, he was perhaps struck by the way the NBC series unlocked people’s consciousness, for it was watched by some 120 million viewers in the USA, and had a similar consciousness-raising impact in Germany in 1979. In an echo of the importance of this popular, commercial image-making, survivors in Britain who go to schools to talk about the Holocaust and what it means have remarked that *Schindler’s List* “put us on the map”. [endnote 1]

The truth is that cinema can be seen as the dominant element in the story of how the Holocaust has been received, if not the most subtle then the most forceful and widespread. This is a story that begins immediately the war ends, even if this initial period is characterized by a loud silence, for after the showing of newsreels on the liberation of the camps (Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald), the commercial film industries of the West do not engage with the subject, although two films are made in the countries where camps were located: *The Last Stage* in Poland (1948, directed by Wanda Jakubowska for Film Polski, with some scenes filmed in Auschwitz itself) and *The Long Journey* in Czechoslovakia (1949, directed by Alfred Radok for the Barrander Film

Studio). However, their impact is very local, a fate which also befell the three extraordinary published accounts which appeared soon after the war: Primo Levi's 'If this is a man' was published in 1947, sold poorly and was not republished until 1958.

Wladyslaw Szpilman's account of survival through the life of the Warsaw ghetto and then beyond its extinction was published in 1946, then withdrawn from circulation, only being republished 50 years later. Bela Szolt's 'Nine Suitcases', his story of forced labour in the Ukraine and then escape from the transports of 1944 from Hungary to Auschwitz, was serialized in his journal *Haladás* in 1946 and 1947, but never materialized in book form in Hungarian until 1980. It was published in English in 2004.

This period seems therefore to have the character of a false beginning, but there is a parallel story that emphatically sees the process of memorialization in hand. At the end of the war Simon Wiesenthal began working for the US Army gathering documentation for trials of Nazi war crimes, and helped found the Jewish Documentation Centre in Linz, from which his hunting of escaped Nazis began. In 1953, by an Act of the Knesset there was established the Yad Vashem Memorial Park for the Remembrance of the Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust. And it is memory that is the key concept, along with time, behind the film Alain Resnais makes in 1955, *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog*, an intelligent, poetic and philosophical short that first brings to the visual imagination the potency of Auschwitz as a place of mass annihilation. Inevitably the film generated its own controversy [2] but its currency in the late 50s and the 1960s had a significant effect in raising awareness of the Holocaust and how it might be represented in art.

The next phase is marked by the Eichmann trial of 1961, which is the event that transformed popular understanding of the Holocaust in important ways. Prior to it, a television version of *Judgment at Nuremberg* had been screened in the USA in 1959, and the interest it aroused led to Stanley Kramer producing and directing a film version for United Artists, in which the use of newsreels within the film as trial evidence harmonized closely with what was happening in the Eichmann trial. The film was released in December 1961, four months after it had ended. Because Eichmann had masterminded the deportation to Auschwitz of 437,000 Hungarian Jews in 1944 and then vanished at the end of the war, Wiesenthal and Israeli intelligence had tracked him down in Argentina, and Eichmann was brought to trial in Israel in 1961, when the testimony of some ninety

camp survivors was used to explain the detail of what had happened. The Israeli government allowed news programmes all over the world to broadcast the trial live, which meant that the detail of the Holocaust, and its costs to individuals, was becoming available to the public in new ways.

The war against the Jews, not just the years of Nazi rule, was now in the public domain as it were: the opaque glass screen surrounding these events had now been broken. As a result, in 1964 Sydney Lumet is able to make *The Pawnbroker* an intense psychodrama about a survivor of the camps who runs a pawn shop in a poor area of New York. As he sees the violence around him, the pawnbroker gets flash memories of his time in the concentration camp (the influence of Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* and *Muriel* can be discerned here). These flashbacks, first as flash glimpses, then more sustained, are effective as a way of uncovering the memory in the brain, as if at first they force themselves to the surface of consciousness only to be shut out as quickly as possible, and then recurring and taking over the person they are living inside. This is an analogue for the way many survivors wished at first to black the past out, only for it to refuse to disappear until the survivor realized that he or she might come to terms with it by talking about it.

The historians began to publish their big histories as well: Gerald Reitlinger's 'The Final Solution' was published in an enlarged edition in 1961, followed by Raul Hilberg's 'The Destruction of the European Jews' in 1967, and Lucy Dawidowicz's 'The War Against the Jews 1933-45' in 1975. With these written works and the availability of newsreel film in the archives, at least on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, the episode on genocide in the *World at War*, produced by Jeremy Isaacs and Michael Darlow, was screened on commercial television in the UK in 1974.

The next milestone is *The Holocaust: the story of the family Weiss*, a mini-series screened on NBC-TV in America in 1977, which brought to the surface the debate as to how you bear witness being as important as the facts to which you bear witness. As mentioned, Wiesel expressed his concerns strongly, but his reservations can only be described as swept aside by the fact that one in two Americans watched the series and when it was shown shortly afterwards in Germany, its effect in educating a new

generation was enormous – “it had more impact than the original,” as Michael Berenbaum put it.

However, Wiesel’s point that only those who had survived the camps could speak about them had its echo: *sotto voce*, as it were, the voices of the survivors continued to speak and be heard. Diaries and testimonies were being stored at Yad Vashem, the Eichmann trial had brought the pain of remembering into the open. In the late 1970s, Peter Morley, a freelance producer/director, made for Yorkshire TV *Kitty – Return to Auschwitz*. Kitty Hart-Moxon, aged 12 in 1939, was on the run in Poland for four years before landing up in Auschwitz with her mother in 1943. Morley met her in 1978 and persuaded her to participate in a 90-minute TV documentary on the subject of her going back to the camp with her son. Of the first transmissions, Morley has said: “The word-pictures Kitty painted in people’s minds were far more graphic than old newsreel film. Extraordinary.” The remark echoes the way Resnais had made *Night and Fog*: description at one remove proves more powerful than unfettered revelation.

Morley’s technique had been to let the camera follow Kitty around the camp as she talked to her son David. The observer is an audience to what is being said, and this technique it appears allowed her to speak as much as she did. A similar challenge faced Claude Lanzmann in making *Shoah*, but his strategy is different. His motivation is a pure expression of Wiesel’s approach: only those who were there can speak of the camps, but he extends the testimony from survivors to those who drove the trains to the camps, those who farmed and lived nearby, even some of the Germans who had a role in running the camps. Its epic quality signals a high point in the process of remembering. Lanzmann seems to have wanted to have delivered the definitive statement on film of the Holocaust, and was openly dismayed by the appearance of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* in 1993. *Shoah* had embodied in pure form philosophical notions about the ‘limits of representation’ [3], so that *Schindler’s List*’s attempt to depict the totality of the event as the context of his story about Schindler and his Jewish workers was criticized by some as a “transgression”. However, it stood out as Hollywood’s most notable statement on the subject so far, and reached audiences in a way that other films had been unable to do. It initiated a new phase, both in encouraging other filmmakers to tackle the subject (for example Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and Tim Blake Nelson’s *The Grey*

Zone (2001)) and in causing agonized debate about the ethics of making films on the Holocaust: the proceedings of a symposium at Philadelphia in 1994 was published as 'Spielberg's Holocaust' in 1997 [4], which among other things deals with the polarization between *Schindler's List* and *Shoah*, between showing and witnessing, the wider question of filming history, and of the reception of the film not only in the USA but Germany, Israel and France as well. As a background to this was a rising realization that survivors of the Holocaust would not live forever, and since there was a risk of there being no remembrance because there were no survivors, and with the 50th anniversary of the ending of World War II coming up in 1995, plans were laid and brought into effect to create Holocaust museums. The Memorial Museum in Washington D. C. opened in 1993 after many years of planning and fund-raising, and the Jewish Memorial in Berlin, first proposed in 1988, opened in 2005, a monument that also contains a Visitors' Centre. In London the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition opened in 2000. In the meantime Yad Vashem in Israel continued to document the lives of victims, and had completed 3 million in 2005. The USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education, based in Los Angeles, and established in 1994 by Spielberg following the reception of *Schindler's List*, has now recorded more than 52,000 interviews with survivors and witnesses.

Shoah and *Schindler's List* stand either side of the ending of the Cold War, which opened up new archival material from behind the Iron Curtain, and gave a momentum to new publications, notably of Szpilman's 'Death of a City', which Polanski filmed in 2003 as *The Pianist*, another consequence possibly of *Schindler's List* in its expression that there are other stories to tell beyond *Schindler's List*, and in the fact that Polanski, himself a survivor, had the credentials to create something more fastidious, even with autobiographical touches in order to add to its authenticity.

There is now some excellent writing on Holocaust cinema, notably Annette Insdorf's 'Indelible Shadows', the collection of essays in 'Spielberg's Holocaust', and several of the essays collected in 'The Holocaust and the Moving Image'. My concern here is to carry out analysis of those films – *Night and Fog*, *Shoah*, *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist* – for which, although they have been extensively written about yet there are still points to make about how they work on our imagination.

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The French documentary, *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog*, made in 1955, had an emphatic cultural impact in Europe, especially on those too young to have participated in the war and on those born just after it. It was made by Alain Resnais, whose *Last Year in Marienbad*, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Muriel*, his first three feature films, caused sufficient of a stir among cinéastes (in distinction to the mass audiences of popular cinema) that they sought out the documentaries Resnais had made before embarking on these features and already notable in France, chief of which was *Night and Fog*. This film, like the three features, is an exercise in memory. It is not a straightforward account of the Holocaust, although it is structured in three chronological parts (the building of the camps, the functioning of the crematoria and the liberation), but an appeal to the memory through the showing of the death camp buildings at Auschwitz, the ‘shower’ rooms and the ovens, as they were 10 years after the end of the war, and by the remains, a pile of women’s hair, of spectacles, of shaving brushes. Jean Cayrol’s voice-over for the film culminates in a question, “Who is responsible?” implicating not just the executioners but a whole society, a whole culture in which such things could take place. A particular poignancy derives from filming the site in summer sunlight. The opening shot shows a pleasant rural landscape, in which the camera pulls back to reveal the barbed wire of the fences. It is from these remains that we have to conceive in our imaginations the conditions of living and dying in the camps. Resnais was a film editor by profession and juxtaposes the contemporary shots with documentary footage and photographs. On one view he dilutes the purity of his approach in seeking to stimulate the workings of our imagination by doing it for us when he includes newsreel of the near-dead inmates taken at the liberation of the camps. On another, it is impossible ultimately for us to imagine the event: we need to see in order to understand.

Night and Fog’s seriousness in recognising the elusiveness of its subject is a prelude to Claude Lanzmann’s desire to set clear parameters as to how the Holocaust should be represented, and like Resnais he uses the actual sites as a starting point, to create something epic and face-to-face with the nature of the deaths and of the survivals.

Shoah is nine hours long, the size and weight of it striving to match the enormity of the history it tries to recount, but the true impact of Lanzmann's work is yet to be assessed, for he shot an estimated 300 hours of film, from which two further testaments have been derived, one on the 'show' camp of Theresienstadt (*Un Vivant Qui Passe: Auschwitz 1943, Theresienstadt 1944/ A Visitor from the Living* (1997) [5] and *Sobibor, 14 October 1943, 16 hours* (2001) about the uprising there). No one has done more than Lanzmann to engage with the reality of what happened in the annihilation camps and yet it is only a small fraction of his material collected in *Shoah* that has any sort of currency.

Lanzmann addresses the question of how you bear witness in as pure a way as possible, in doing so picking up where Resnais had left the subject. Eschewing all use of newsreel, he approached it only through the present day. We are shown the camp at Chelmno (now just an open space in a pine forest), Treblinka (made into a stark monument with its forest of rough-hewn stone slabs on which are inscribed the names of the places from which the victims had come) and Auschwitz-Birkenau, much of which still stands. We travel the railways on which the trains carrying deportees arrived. We see the Jewish houses and synagogues in Poland which now have other occupants, other uses. Above all, under Lanzmann's probing, torturing questions, witness is born from survivors, from railway workers, from villagers living adjacent to the camps, even from German S. S. soldiers involved in the running of the camps. It runs for nine hours and its story resists paraphrase: it has become the Everest that has to be scaled in order to embark on understanding. The most important testimony comes from camp survivors, whose factual account of life in the death camps is spoken not to a family, nor to a court, nor to a historian, but to the world. It is true that Lanzmann fully understands the poignancy of the visual memory such as the erased camp at Chelmno and the former Jewish houses now occupied by Poles, the railway lines snaking through endless fields and woods to the broken crematoria of Auschwitz, but it is the words of the survivors such as Simon Srebnik, Richard Glazar, Filip Muller and a number of others, rather than Lanzmann's images, that disturb the deepest emotions, and convert the intellectual imagining of the event into one of feeling, that might begin to create a proper authenticity, to address the question of how as much as what. Yet, to add a paradoxical twist, the most powerful moment is the account by Abram Bomba, a barber in

Czestochowa before the war, a barber in Israel after it, and a barber in Treblinka shaving the heads of deportees prior to their annihilation. Under Lanzmann's sympathetic but insistent questioning, Bomba tells us much of the horror of Treblinka (where 850,000 Jews died), but when he reaches the point where a friend and fellow-barber recognizes his wife and sister among the deportees, Bomba stops and when Lanzmann gently cajoles him with "Go on, you must go on," Bomba seems to be getting ready to do so, but remains speechless. For three minutes, we hear the sound of barbers at work, we watch Bomba at work, but no words are spoken. There is a rhetorical device called 'aposiopesis' in which speech stops and the listener must supply the rest. *The Pawnbroker* ends with it when the Jewish pawnbroker gives a silent scream, the shock expressed not in the sound put in the picture. In editing *Shoah*, Lanzmann had the artistic choice of whether to cut this section of Bomba's testimony, but he chooses instead to make use of this rhetorical device, recognizing that its unplanned, unscripted, unacted nature imparts a much greater force than Lumet and Steiger were able to achieve in *The Pawnbroker*.

Following *Shoah*, the filmmaker had to consider whether any story re-creating the circumstances of the Holocaust – be it a fiction or a true event from history – should be undertaken at all. The question has been set aside, judging by the number of narrative films that have been made since *Shoah*, and indeed it had to be: to veto all such efforts would be to act like the philosopher-kings in Plato's 'Republic', denying the necessary human response, amounting to a comfort of a sort, that art can provoke on the grounds of maintaining the mental health of the citizenry. A more significant result of *Shoah* was the fact that the filmmaker had to take more seriously than ever the how of portraying events from the Holocaust. It was at this point that Steven Spielberg made his remarkable intervention with *Schindler's List* (1993), slipped into his schedule after the huge financial success of *Jurassic Park*. *Schindler's List's* gross worldwide of \$321 million (against an estimated budget of \$25 million) is a crude indicator of its impact.

The real-life story of Oskar Schindler was a complex one, well reflecting the morally fluid nature of his character. Born a Catholic in Moravia, he grows up in the 1930s trying his hand at business and failing. By 1939, he is 31. The war brings him his chance to succeed: he buys assets for virtually nothing and employs his labour for

virtually nothing, because his workers are Jews in no position to contest the terms of their employment. As the war progresses and Schindler witnesses the plight of the Jews in Krakow ghetto, he sets up the Deutsche Emalia Fabrik to produce enamel goods for the German front. When the Nazis liquidate the ghetto in March 1943, depriving him of his work force, Schindler goes to the Plaszow concentration camp, to which they have been transferred, and negotiates the setting up of a factory for 900 Jewish workers in Zablocie, making (defective) bullets for German guns. It is there, in the latter half of 1944, that he compiles his list of essential Jewish workers, in a plan to rescue them from extermination. In October 1944 he relocates the factory to Zwittau-Brünnlitz in Czechoslovakia, by which time his wife Emilie is playing a key role in keeping the operation going. In this way, 1100 Jews are saved. Yet the contradictions of his life do not end there: at the end of the war, aware of the accusations that would be levelled at anyone collaborating with the Nazis, he leaves Brünnlitz to evade Soviet justice, and travels to the American-occupied zone in Germany, surviving there in part on the gifts from the Jews he had saved. From there he emigrates to Argentina with Emilie in order to start a new life, but it does not work out: his businesses fail and his marriage breaks down. He returns to Germany in 1958 where he survives on some pensions from Schindler Jews in Israel, and small pensions from both the German government and the Israeli government. He dies in 1974 and is buried in a Catholic cemetery in Israel.

This richly dramatic life became history when a Canadian journalist, Herbert Steinhouse, stumbled on the story in Germany after the war, and met Schindler in Munich in 1948, holding four interviews with him and six with Schindler's accountant, Itzhak Stern. After sending it to his agent in New York, he found that no one was interested in printing it, another example of the amnesia concerning the Holocaust that settled on the immediate post-war world. It is only when Thomas Kenneally turned the story into a historical fiction with his book 'Schindler's Ark' published in 1982 that this piece of history, now distilled as story with reinvented characters and dialogue, took on a wider currency, especially with its capture of the Booker prize in that year. This was how it came into the hands of Steven Spielberg, who purchased the film rights soon after publication and then waited for the right moment to make the film, in order to give himself time to mature as a film-maker and thus allow the production to have full impact.

Nor is there any doubt about that impact: possibly no single document about the Holocaust – whether it be memoirs, fiction, newsreel or film, even Lanzmann’s *Shoah* – has brought home to people around the world the enormity of the event, enlarging horizons and provoking journeys towards understanding.

This commercial success, based on Spielberg’s attunement in his own sensibility to popular desires and expressions, has attracted particular opprobrium, that he has ‘Hollywoodized’ the subject -- as if in so doing he had indulged in a particular display of bad taste, which in view of the subject is in a way harmful. But this is unjust: Spielberg is a story-teller by vocation and has been drawn to telling the essential story of Schindler’s life because it is a compelling drama of good and evil, of horror and salvation. The ‘Hollywoodian’ contribution is to reduce the ambiguities involved, to print the legend replete with hero and happy ending – or as near to it as the story would allow. But the film does retain its ambiguities: 1100 Jews may have been saved but the film does not flinch from the annihilation going on around them; the heart of the story is the relation between Schindler and Hauptsturmführer Amon Goeth, S. S. commander of Plaszow, the truth of which has surely been quite lost, and replaced by Spielberg and his screenwriter, Steven Zaillian, with something possibly much more complex and interesting.

Despite his Hollywoodian faults – not felt to be such, I am sure, by the masses of people who saw the film – Spielberg is a gifted filmmaker. Four points can be made on this score: firstly, he made the bold decision to film in black and white, a decision brilliantly executed by the cinematographer, Janusk Kaminski. The choice was successful, partly because audiences associate black-and-white film with the 1940s, but it is more. Chiaroscuro is appropriate to the darkness of the story, and the ambiguity of Schindler: when he rescues his female labourers from Auschwitz, Schindler sits opposite Rudolf Höss, the camp commandant, and bargains with diamonds. Why should these women be preserved? “Allow me to express the reason,” says Schindler, against the dark background his face painted in light from a single overhead source, who then spreads a set of diamonds on Höss’s desk , even more seductive in black and white than in colour, Spielberg and Kaminski investing the cliché of *film noir* with new meaning.

Secondly, this choice allows for several pictorial coups de cinéma: the remarkable re-creation by set designer Allan Starski of Plaszow, in which the drabness of the factories and of the concentration camp is conveyed in newsreel greyness so that the filming uncannily recreates the banal monotone of the surviving photographic documents. By the use of colour at the end to show the surviving Schindler Jews honouring his tomb, when the fiction suddenly becomes documentary, Spielberg signals that the story is in the past, that the world has changed, that survival even of such events as these is possible.

Thirdly, the ‘red coat’ of the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto is an imaginative leap of a high order. As the mayhem goes on around her, a little girl lost wanders through it all, and we follow her from afar, our eyes caught by the fact that her coat has been tinted red. Her final fate is then revealed later in the film when the bodies of the massacre are exhumed at Chujowa Gorka (in order to be cremated, as the Nazis take a further step to eliminate these people from physical existence), and we see her dead body, still in her red coat. To the accusation that Spielberg’s film of the Holocaust focuses on two Gentiles, Schindler and Goeth, thus missing the point, this piece of fiction is surely a rejoinder. He knows he is up against the ‘limits of representation’ but that the imagination can convey something of what happened, for one corpse focusses the reality of death for “a world entire”. That it is a child’s death adds poignancy to the horror.

Fourthly, while it seems that the Schindler-Goeth relationship is what most intrigued Spielberg the story-teller (as well as Zaillian), it is the Holocaust story as a whole that captures his soul as a Jew. Hence he opts for an epic dimension for the film – giving it a duration of 195 minutes – as if the subject demands no other choice. Yet epics always pose a challenge to the preservation of temporal unity, especially for a subject which has been so well documented by historians. While the film works spatially because Spielberg concentrates on the ghetto/camp world of Krakow, Plaszow, Auschwitz and Brännlitz, all in comparative close proximity, and refrains from the distraction of showing events on the Russian front or the western invasion of Europe, yet time is dislocated. The events in the film run from 1939 to 1945, but spectators need to keep their own awareness of the passage of time, that we are seeing the highlights of the story, and not the grind of hunger and suffering in between. For example, after the creation of the Krakow ghetto in March 1941, we are shown scenes of how the factory

operated, how Schindler bribed Germans, how he treated his wife Emilie (preserving the cake of marriage while eating it by a stream of mistresses). There follows a sequence showing the rescue of Itzhak Stern from deportation to South Russia which is given no date but must have happened about a year later (well after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941). And then in the next scene, we are shown the arrival of Goeth at Plaszow in winter 1942. This criticism may seem pedantic, but if you film a historical subject, you face the problem of the truth of history getting out of harmony with the truth of the story. I believe there was a solution, that despite the difficulties in doing so, the film could have explored some of the month-in month-out suffering of those in the ghetto. There would even be scope for irony: was the rescue of Stern from deportation for the agony of life in the ghetto really a blessing?

Rightly or wrongly, Spielberg is striving in his epic to deliver the conclusive, definitive viewpoint. To aid him in this, he wants to create archetypes: Goeth embodies all Nazi evil; Helen Hirsch, Goeth's Jewish mistress, is Biblical Judith before Holofernes, Jewish feminine beauty as the victim of Gentile lust; the evacuation of Krakow ghetto stands for all such evacuations; Stern is the repository of Jewish patience and intelligence in the face of tyranny; Schindler is the man of action whose righteousness redeems the world -- the film's slogan, "Who saves one life saves the world entire" is a triumphalizing of what Schindler has achieved, just as he beats his breast that he has not saved more.

Archetypes risk becoming stereotypes, reducing complexity rather than increasing universality. In a film like this, too, a part must stand for the whole, yet the encompassing of the Holocaust as a whole required a further effort of imagination to preserve complexity. While the spectator needs to understand the context of Schindler's and Goeth's actions, the opportunity for deepening them is missed. For example, Schindler was brought up as a Catholic, and buried as one, and while he appears to reject this upbringing entirely, both his attempt to honour his marriage to Emilie and his guilty breast-beating at the end reflect an ingrained Catholicism, which gives greater piquancy to his actions.

A bigger hole yet is the portrayal of Stern, played with as much subtlety as he can muster in an underwritten part by Ben Kingsley. Stern was in a powerful position in Schindler's factories, and must have been faced with multiple dilemmas of whom to save

and whom to decide he could not save. The Judenrät set up by the Nazis in the ghettos, to do their dirtiest work of arranging who lived and who died, found themselves excoriated for collaborating: their efforts were largely brought to nothing both in the fact that those whom they preserved were later annihilated – and they too themselves. One of Primo Levi's most compelling reminiscences [6] is of Chaim Rumkowski in the Lodz ghetto and his relationship with the “shady German industrialist”, Hans Biebow, a connection that does not save him from the gas at Auschwitz. Rumkowski lives in Levi's ‘grey zone’ of survival, indeed revels in it, for his presidency or eldership of the ghetto was “an amazing tangled megalomaniacal dream of barbaric vitality and real diplomatic and organizational ability”. The echo is uncanny, for in Krakow and Plaszow, Schindler supplied the barbaric vitality and Stern the organizational ability. *Schindler's List* cries out for a portrait of Stern that is as revealing as Rumkowski's, even though at the end he was saved from death.

Because Spielberg wants a totality to his story, and because of the many camps in the Nazi Reich (for imprisonment, for slave labour, and for annihilation) Auschwitz is perceived as the most notorious, he cannot refrain from showing it, even shooting sequences outside the gates of the camp [7]. The rescue of Schindler's female workers from Auschwitz comes as a penultimate climax to the story, and makes for compelling cinema – but also for a signal failure of aesthetic choice, and possibly an offence against the truth of what actually happened. I have already referred to the scene between Schindler and Höss that so deftly reveals the sordid circumstances of Schindler's operations and of his perilous role. But the decision to show the women naked in the showers bathed in water when the spectator is brought to the edge of the horror of seeing death by gas, even if it is through the illusory lens of the camera, is a violation of respect. If ever at any point in the film circumstances required a witness to the scene, rather than the scene itself, it is here.

The episode is made more problematical still by the possibility that it did not actually happen. Kenneally acknowledged that the whole affair is clouded with uncertainty, and Herbert Steinhouse, when talking to Schindler and Stern just after the war, understood that the women had been sent to Gross Rosen, a concentration camp in East Germany, rather than Auschwitz.

If it is legend rather than fact, Spielberg is true to his Hollywood milieu in seeking to print the legend. As a climax it provides a fitting prelude to the operatic showpiece he stages at the end when Schindler addresses both his workers and the German guards as well. This is factual, because a transcript taken by his secretary appears to exist of what he actually said. There is a special irony here because the grandiose sentimentality of the episode rings as false as anything in the film, and yet it certainly appears to have taken place.

Despite these criticisms, the film will continue to compel audiences for a long time to come. One final aspect should be mentioned that turns the film into something more philosophical and universal. It is in effect a critique of capitalist enterprise, and it is revealing that Spielberg said that in portraying Schindler he was thinking of the head of Warner Brothers when he first went to Hollywood. Schindler's business is bad because it sustains the German war machine; good because in doing so it chose to make defective munitions; it is bad because war profiteering is repellent; good because it creates the surplus necessary to bribe Germans and thus gain work and life for his Jewish work force. Ultimately it is good because it saves a portion of the world. Schindler's enterprise is focused on money, because he needs an experienced accountant, Itzhak Stern, to make it survive, but Schindler changes during the film to the point where money is only of value inasmuch as it saves life. The bottom line ceases to be profit but life. At the very end, Stern tells Schindler that his business is bust, but Schindler has achieved a moral purity, a literal redemption of 'buying back' his Jews from death, even as we know that the suitcases of marks Goeth receives from Schindler will not deflect the retribution of arrest and hanging for crimes against humanity.

Since the Holocaust is a key event for all Europeans, not just its Jewish members, the global impact of *Schindler's List* is important. But if it is conceived of as unique, and only to be interpreted by Jews who survived, then from this viewpoint the credentials of *The Pianist* are impeccable, for the story of Wladyslaw Szpilman's survival through six years in a Warsaw crammed with Jews then finally cleansed of them was recounted by Szpilman himself in a book, and filmed by Roman Polanski in 2002, Polanski himself as a young Jew having experienced at first hand life in the Krakow ghetto.

Again, how the details of Szpilman's life came to be known sheds remarkable light on the way the Second World War and the Holocaust in particular came to public consciousness. Before the war, Szpilman was an accomplished pianist in Poland, and indeed had experienced German musical culture at first hand during his time at the Berlin Conservatoire in the early 1930s. Aged 27 when the war broke out, he and his family stayed close to each other through the successive torments of the imposition of racial legislation against the Jews, confinement in the ghetto, and its painful shrinking in size, until finally he is separated from them in the Umschlagplatz, the place from which the rounded-up Jews were sent for extermination in Auschwitz. In the second half of the war he escapes from the ghetto and survives outside it until Warsaw is finally liberated by the Russians. He resumes his career as a pianist and composer, playing on Polish radio and composing many popular songs. Like Levi's and Szolt's his account of his survival was published in Warsaw in 1945 but does not seem to have made much of a ripple, certainly not outside Poland, and in any case the new Communist government quickly suppressed it. Szpilman's son tells of how his father did not talk about what had happened, and it was only after the fall of Communism that the book saw the light of day again. Its fame then began to spread. When exactly it came to Polanski's attention is unclear, but in filming it, he made one of the subtlest of narrative films about the Holocaust, and as with Schindler's List created a huge wave of interest in what had happened at the heart of the Nazi extermination process. So far it has grossed \$120 million worldwide.

Why subtle? In part because of its detached tone, which is well transferred from the book to the film. While Szpilman's account does not match the profundity of Primo Levi's 'If this is a man', which poses so insistently the question of why one was saved while another was drowned, probing the behaviour of men in extreme conditions, and agonizing that he survived, the questions are implicit in Szpilman's account. He writes simply with occasional flashes of sardonic humour and warmth about individuals, fellow Jews and the Poles who help him. The book also has an extraordinary absence of anger. Every great story needs a climax too. As it turned out, Szpilman did not need to engineer one. He, seemingly the last Jew in the city after the murder of half a million, meets the one Nazi among a host of murderers with sufficient compassion to help him with food and a coat, and the news that the Russians would shortly be coming.

Many readers will have embarked on the book knowing that Szpilman survived. As with Bresson's account of Devigny's escape from the Gestapo prison at Montluc in *A Man Escaped* (1956), the fact of his salvation is not in doubt, only the means. Furthermore there is a shadow story behind the personal one. When first published, Szpilman's book was called 'The Death of a City', since it is an inside account of how Warsaw was stripped of its Jews, how the Jewish Uprising led to the physical erasure of the ghetto, and how ancient, historic, beautiful Warsaw was then devastated by the Nazis during and after the crushing of the Polish Uprising in 1944. Towards the end he reflects on the six Christmases and New Years he had lived through during the war. "And now I was lonelier, I suppose, than anyone else in the world." On the final page of the book, two weeks after his rescue by the Russians, clean and rested, a free man, he walked towards the Praga district of Warsaw, now all that was left of the city. "I was walking down a broad main road, once busy and full of traffic, its whole length now deserted. There was not a single intact building as far as the eye could see."

In lesser hands, the film might not have done justice to the book, but in Polanski who had been looking for a suitable subject from wartime Poland, the time of his childhood, the book finds its inspired interpreter. He puts it into the hands of the playwright Ronald Harwood to sharpen the dramatic detail. For example, after his escape from the ghetto, Szpilman stays in a flat where he only learns of the Jewish Uprising in 1943 through the sight of smoke rising from the direction of the ghetto and what he reads in the Polish underground papers. In the film, on the other hand, his flat has a narrow but direct view of the ghetto, and through this eye-piece he and the audience receive glimpses of what is happening, enough to allow us to imagine the rest. The film creates a relationship with the Polish woman he meets in 1939 when the Polish Radio building is evacuated during the blitzkrieg, which is not in the book. When the retreating Germans occupy the house in the attic of which Szpilman is hiding, in the film, but not in the book, he hears the sound of Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' coming from below in a perhaps too obvious evocation of German musical culture, which he will counterpoint by performing Chopin when the German officer Wilm Hosenfeld confronts him.

The finished film also eschews certain visual details in the book which might have been profitably added: Mrs Szpilman in the ghetto scrutinizing her children for lice when

they come in from outside, Szpilman kissing the first Pole he meets after being liberated. On the other hand at the Umschlagplatz, the film (but not the book) shows Henryk Szpilman, Wladyslaw's literature-loving brother, reading Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice' and quoting Shylock, "If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

Both book and film have this unusual two-act structure: act one up to the separation of Wladek from his family as they are herded into trucks for 'resettlement' in the death camps; act two is Szpilman's new life, first working outside the ghetto and then living and surviving outside it. The first part ends in despair with a scintilla of hope because he has survived by the intervention of a member of the Jewish police who chooses to save him, and the second in hope of a devastated kind: he is alive and able to resume his career as a pianist, but his family and his Jewish background have been rubbed out.

Neither book nor film dwells on the philosophical questions the story raises, but they are there for all to read and see: why were the Jews singled out for this treatment? What could they have done to save themselves? What hand had Szpilman had in his survival? As Clive James has pointed out [8], we need to eliminate the idea that Szpilman's will to survive was sustained by 'music', whether understood as an abstract ideal to which he was committed, or as something much more specific, his desire to carry on playing and composing. If those were motives for him to carry on, they are articulated neither in the book nor the film itself. And yet there was scope to make something of this idea, which the film shies away from. For example, the piece Szpilman plays for Hosenfeld is Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, in an abridged version for the film. In the book, what Szpilman plays is the Nocturne in C Sharp Minor, which is what he is playing in the radio station on 23 September 1939 when he is interrupted by the German bombardment of Warsaw, and the piece Szpilman chose to play when Polish Radio reopened after the war. Why the change? Perhaps the Ballade is Polanski's favourite piece of Chopin. Yet for a production team who seem to have convinced themselves that it was Szpilman's desire for music that helped him to stay alive, the playing of the Nocturne would have offered a neat link between what Szpilman played in the studio in 1939, what he plays for Hosenfeld, and what he plays on the radio when it reopens in 1945. (The film further dislocates the truth by ending with Szpilman and orchestra

playing Chopin's Grande Polonaise Brillante. Is the choice of a Polonaise Polanski's assertion of his Polishness?) Although the idea of Szpilman drawing the instinct for survival from a love of music seemed to have been a significant element in the film's publicity at its launch, it seems to me a diversionary and unhelpful piece of marketing.

So why does he survive? On more than one occasion it is his intuition that saves him. Or perhaps it is the decision taken in freedom of the man who engineers a contact for Szpilman with a safe flat outside the ghetto, or of the Poles who chose to shelter him (for which the penalty on being discovered was death). Or was it his reputation as a pianist that gave him a special role that people wanted to preserve, for his divine playing of Chopin was as much an expression of Polish patriotism as anything? Or was it all really blind chance at virtually every turn? Compare the book's (but not the film's) account of Goldfeder, with whom Szpilman played concerts in the ghetto. He too managed to escape the ghetto and to survive in hiding for two years, except that "a week before the Soviet army invaded, he was shot by Germans in a little town not far from the ruins of Warsaw". Goldfeder's fate is a brisk reminder of how ill chance might have ended Szpilman's life too.

There are two particular differences in Polanski and Harwood's handling of the film as opposed to *Schindler's List*. While details of the story may have changed, they are very close to Szpilman's version of his narrative, namely that all the events are filtered through his involvement with them. Whether a spectator comes to the film knowing something of the historical background or being ignorant of it, the film points them to the larger context, either illuminating what is known already, or posing urgently the necessity of learning more. As I have argued, Spielberg's film on the other hand takes a cosmic view, seeking to recount the whole Holocaust through one story, while the film of *The Pianist*, like the book, displays a certain modesty in this regard.

Schindler's List has been praised, rightly, for its bold use of black-and-white cinematography at a time when colour film had become the universal medium for commercial cinema. Many spectators commended this choice, as if almost to dare any subsequent film-maker to re-create, to 'imagine' a Holocaust story in anything but black and white. If so, Polanski proves them wrong. While there is a deliberate intention by Polanski and his costume designer, Anna Sheppard, to create a monochromatic

atmosphere in the ghetto scenes, using not just browns and greys but colours with the brightness washed out of them, yet through the film colour helps to give life to the story, whether it be the yellow armbands forced on the Jews to wear, the flames of the burning ghetto, or the moonlit winter streets of a devastated Warsaw with their other-worldly blue-toned quality. Like *Schindler's List* the sets and costumes pay effective attention to how the ghetto and Warsaw looked. Another contributory factor is the performance of Adrian Brody as Szpilman. His face remarkably preserves if not the 'letter' of what Szpilman looked like, then certainly its spirit. A photograph taken for his identity card in 1942 (at the age of 31) shows a man with refined features, a high forehead, a finely sculpted mouth serious at the corners but ready to break into a smile. Brody's face is similarly striking and suggestive of a certain distance between him and the spectator, while real sensitivity of expression is achieved through the piano. This allows Brody to give a muted performance, which is more eloquent than a loud, showy one.

Finally, it is worth criticizing *The Pianist* for failing, like *Schindler's List*, to convey the passage of time. A whole year passes in the ghetto, marked by nothing more than a title with a new date; months are spent in hiding in different flats with little or no attempt made to convey the fact. Yet if the temporal dimension is not fully fleshed out, the physical aspect is superbly realized. Although old Warsaw was erased almost completely by the war, Polanski's production designer Allan Starski, something of a specialist in Holocaust films for he had been designer on *Schindler's List* (on which Anna Sheppard had done the costumes) and before that on Jack Gold's *Escape from Sobibor*, made use of the Praga District of Warsaw, on the east side of the Vistula, which still has streets and buildings from the period. In addition, modern buildings were dressed as old ones. Secondly, the Babelsberg studio near Berlin was used to create other streets. Thirdly, to show the devastated Warsaw of the final sequences, a former barracks of the Soviet Army near Berlin was used. Since it was scheduled to be destroyed, a deal was made with the company that owns the site whereby the buildings were 'wrecked' to look like a war-torn city. Making a film requires creative collaboration at many points, and while it is clear Polanski had definite ideas about how the film should look, the director has to rely too on the work of designers to realise those ideas, to 'imagine' them on the director's behalf. Polanski, Starski and Sheppard made extensive use of photographs and

newsreel footage, to which Polanski brought his childhood memories as well. Just as Carné, Prévert and the set designer Alexandre Trauner made their version of *Le Boulevard du Temple* (also known as ‘*Le Boulevard du Crime*’) in *Les Enfants du paradis*, recreating in a Nice studio a particular corner in 19-century Paris, their masterpiece of ‘poetic realism’, so Starski can take a significant credit, along with Polanski and Sheppard, for his contribution to the film’s overall atmosphere. When Szpilman escapes from the former hospital building being torched by Germans with flame-throwers, he clammers over the wall at the rear. As he does so, the camera, mounted on a rising crane, lifts itself to reveal him stumbling away down the deserted street, lined with houses half-derelict from burning and shelling. The scene is eloquent of the death of a city and Szpilman being “lonelier, I supposed, than anyone else in the world,” sans food, sans family, sans city, sans people.

* * * * *

Immediately following the war, it was a devastated Berlin rather than Warsaw that must have imposed itself on the imagination of the Allied forces who were involved in administering post-war Germany. The city’s destruction is intimately linked to Hitler’s last days in his bunker. Again, the historical details have been in the public record ever since the publication of Trevor-Roper’s meticulous account in ‘The Last Days of Hitler’, first published in 1947, but it took the making of *Downfall* by Olivier Hirschbiegel in Germany in 2004 to create for a mass audience a memory of that time. The layout of the bunker is well-documented and comparatively easy to fabricate in accurate terms. But the film interweaves the claustrophobic scenes in the bunker itself with a different kind of claustrophobia, the physical and moral chaos on the streets of Berlin as the Russians close in on the Chancellery, and Hitler, refusing to surrender, insists on the collective suicide of the German nation as the only end to the war. The film’s designer (Bernd Lapel) recreates the necessary patina of buildings shelled and burnt, and the landscapes of rubble in the streets. This artifice, creating the illusion of ruin, is a physical counterpart to the collapse of the Third Reich. Compare Roberto Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero*, made in 1946, and filmed in the open air of Berlin’s streets and the ruined Chancellery: no set

designer was needed for these scenes. The flat ‘documentary’ lighting of this cityscape has a different effect from the re-created, studio-lit images of *Downfall*: here Rossellini is not obliged to persuade us to believe that Berlin look like this, for its appearance is incontrovertible. [9] But like *Downfall*, *Germany Year Zero* has a purpose to communicate, a moral judgment to make, pressing with some urgency, for the question of German guilt for what was done by the Nazis in their name is typically asked by Rossellini as crucial, as requiring an examination that does not flinch. His humanism makes him focus on the struggle for survival by a 12-year old boy seeking to support his family, including a father who is ill and an elder brother who, having served in the Wehrmacht, is now in hiding.

The film is the third in Rossellini’s (unintended) war trilogy and represents a philosophical impasse for him. After the cruelties but also the heroic martyrdoms in *Rome Open City*, the vividness of the sketches of Italy in *Paisa*, the bleakness of the partisans’ life in the Po delta tempered by the episode in the Franciscan monastery, *Germany Year Zero* pitches Edmund into an ethical hell which is beyond his years to understand. Encouraged by the adults around him who keep referring to the burden placed on them by having to feed their sick father, Edmund administers poison in order to bring about his death. In its subtle way, this echoes what the Nazis confronted the German people with: the mentally and physically ill, homosexuals, gypsies are all useless parasites who need to be exterminated if society is to be healthy, and above all the ‘Jewish infection’ must be eradicated once and for all. The citizenry responded impassively in moral ignorance, and like Edmund, some actively translated this theory into action.

Edmund’s action so troubles him that the story in progressing to its bleak conclusion – for in the final sequences, we see Edmund wandering through the shell of a tall building and then suddenly killing himself by leaping off it – does achieve a troubled redemption, that the only response to murder by the perpetrator is his suicide. Only in this way can time, history and civilization begin again from the Year Zero.

Rossellini is an Italian addressing the question of German guilt. How would German writers and filmmakers come to terms with the enormity of the years 1933-45? The most monumental film to try and do so has been Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat*, comprising

some forty-eight hours of film, and divided into three distinct sections. The second section, *Die Zweite Heimat* (hereafter referred to as *DZH*) covers the lives of a group of music students and their friends in Munich between 1960 and 1970, a period of musical experimentation, radicalism in student politics, and above all the coming to maturity of a generation born after 1940, innocent of the Nazis today but feeling its presence in the lives of their families and in their history.

DZH has a rich gallery of characters, with Hermann and Clarissa central to all 13 episodes, while a number take centre-stage in particular episodes, with even more coming in and going out of the story. While *Heimat 1* and *Heimat 3* are family sagas, certainly of very great accomplishment but with several antecedents in European literature, *DZH* is much more original: the portrait of a generation linked not by family but by friendship and acquaintance. *DZH* has a strongly autobiographical feel to it, even if the particular events and stories which Reitz narrates are fictitious. One of its most striking qualities is the way the full history of the characters only emerges by the most careful watching of the film. It is like a palimpsest. Indeed re- and re-viewing are essential to appreciating its weight, perhaps most of all in the way it deals with the Nazi past. It is worth looking at biographies of five characters in particular.

The first forms a particular link with the past, since she is 20 years older than the others. Elizabeth Cerphal is in her forties during the 1960s but is both the ‘eternal daughter’ of her father who keeps the family history from her so that she exclaims, “Everything loathsome and bloody has passed me by”, and the eternal student who responds without hesitation to the new generation of artistic students coming to Munich to the extent that she opens up her villa, the Fuchsbau, in the smart Munich suburb of Schwabing for them to use as a place for meetings and for parties. The deep, dark something in her family which Juan (see below) surmises is that one of the partners in Verlag Cerphal founded by her grandfather and father in 1910 was a Jew, Herr Goldbaum. The Fuchsbau is the original property of Goldbaum: when, in 1935, the firm helps him to leave Germany for Haifa, it is Elizabeth’s father who takes over the villa with a written promise to restore it to Goldbaum in due course. Elizabeth calls Goldbaum ‘uncle’ because her great friend is his daughter, Edith, a friend now lost because Edith was ‘betrayed’ by her husband, Herr Gattinger (see below), and imprisoned in Munich.

From there she went to Ravensbrück from which Gattinger and the Cerphal family got her moved to the work camp at Moringen. When the camp is closed in 1944, she dies in some unknown way, in some unknown destination.

She survives in her daughter, Esther Goldbaum, who makes a vivid appearance in parts 10 and 11, when she has an intense affair with Reinhard, a young film-maker, and when she and Herr Gattinger, her father, look for traces of her mother in Dachau – only for her to learn from him that Edith was never in fact in Dachau. Reinhard is Reinhard Dörr, born in 1943, whose father was a fighter pilot who had helped bomb Guernica. He has had a rootless youth, moving five or six times when young. He is as burdened as any of the student group by Germany's Nazi past, and his film script on Esther's life is his way of trying to understand it. He becomes the main story himself when he disappears on the Ammersee near Munich, missing presumed drowned, presumed by his own will.

Reinhard especially distrusts Gattinger, who has become Elizabeth Cerphal's chaperone, a man apparently without character, which has enabled him to slither through the murky depths of Nazi racial ideology even while fathering a daughter by Edith Goldbaum. Even Elizabeth Cerphal calls him "a bed cheque, like the Third Reich". His defence to his daughter is that he has admitted what he has done.

Finally, there is Juan, a mystery himself, capable of discerning mysteries in others. Juan is Juan Ramon Fernandes Subercasseaux, born in Chile, to (I think we are to imagine) a Catholic mother, whose surname he adopts, while his father is a 'Protestant from Virginia' and his grandfather a Russian Jew. Juan is gifted – multi-lingual, gymnastic, highly musical. He is refused entry to the Hochschule because his music is too 'folkloric': he plays Bach on the marimba. He befriends both Hermann and Clarissa, and as a result of his charm befriends Frau Cerphal and Herr Gattinger and through this familiarity learns that the Fuchsbau originally belonged to Uncle Goldbaum, and makes the fact explicit to Elizabeth: "Your father got the house from Goldbaum in order to return it after the war. He took his fortune and gave nothing back. A great injustice." Juan is the outsider, fascinated by Germany but detached from it. When (in episode nine), Elizabeth is taken to a police station (as a result of a misunderstanding about her presence one evening in her father's publishing house after it has closed for the day), on her release she remarks to Juan, "I owe everything to my father, including this house.

Can you imagine that they took me for a criminal?” To this Juan replies without pause, “Yes.”

There is then in *DZH* a direct engagement with the Holocaust in the person of Esther Goldbaum’s mother, Edith, and with the results of Nazi racial ideology in the expropriation of the Fuchsbau from the Goldbaum family. This act brings home to the German middle-class the deep ambiguity of the Holocaust, for while it was carried out under a reign of terror, so opponents were frightened into not acting or acting only in secret – arranging for Goldbaum to go to Israel, rescuing Edith from Ravensbrück (only to lose her), and secretly arranging for Esther to be looked after in Switzerland – when the war ended, and Elizabeth’s father holds a written promise to return the Fuchsbau to the Goldbaum family, he does not do so (despite being in written communication with another Goldbaum daughter in Israel), and on his deathbed gets Elizabeth to tear up the written contract promising to return the villa, and urges her not to countenance any outside claims to ownership.

DZH, in all its 13 episodes, provides a deep insight into the philosophical, cultural and moral nature of the new generation maturing after the war. The film has two principal begetters, one in Edgar Reitz who wrote and directed its 26 hours, and the other the composer Nikos Mamangakis, who has broken new ground in using music constantly through its whole length to illuminate the cultural background in a country where classical music has always reflected German ‘seriousness’, both having the music arise internally as it were from all the rehearsed and improvised performances we hear in the film, and as an external element to add an atmosphere to the film. He also makes musical links between episodes, binding the events together in the same way as the characters do.

This is not to detract from the fact that Reitz is the major author of *DZH*. While assisted by Mamangakis and Robert Busch, responsible for casting the film (achieved with extraordinary aplomb) and credited as co-director, it is the brilliance of Reitz’s epic narrative conception, of his scripting, and of his visual imagination that make *DZH* one of the masterworks of 20th-century European culture. Reitz does several things to give the narrative cinematic depth: he is always showing us visual things that enlarge the narrative, whether it is the non-verbal communication that enlarges what the characters say to each other, or the portrait of Munich that provides the setting for so much of the

film, or the addition of a visual sensuousness at so many points. For example, when Reinhardt meets Esther in Venice and they have an intense affair, it is embroidered by Reitz's pleasure in the sight of the backstreet canals that punctuate the episode, especially a tracking shot along the canal into the sunlight, and as Reinhard and Esther probe each other's characters on the bed, the sight of the half moon at night waxing over the canal. Venice is a much filmed city, but it has never been made so romantic and yet so disturbing. [10]

A bare account of the characters' biographies makes *DZH* sound like a novel, and indeed Reitz has the novelist's gift for characterization, but his film manages to interweave and to layer these stories as only the cinema can do so well. The whole 26 hours is a miracle of cross-cutting that does not just take the viewer from A to Z, but from G to N, from R to W, and indeed from P to B and so on, because the film works backwards as well: earlier episodes are more fully appreciated by the knowledge gained in later ones. This lends depth at both the visual and verbal levels, and it is especially powerful in changing our perceptions of events. Episode nine is particularly devoted to Elizabeth Cerphal's story. When she goes to Verlag Cerphal and is officially welcomed by the firm's staff one says to her, "Your family's history would be an incredible record of our times." As spectators we quickly realise the unconscious irony of this remark for the fate of the Goldbaum family would make it a disturbing one. Then later in the episode, we are taken aback that Elizabeth's generosity in letting the new artistic generation use her house is abused by its enforceable 'occupation' by a group of radical students, this being 1968. Their leader says to her, "You're probably very nice, but you are perforce propertied class," while not realizing (as we realize) that she owns the property by her father's own act of occupation, different from that of the students but more lasting.

Reitz manages to turn this building, the Fuchsbau, into a major character, which like the human ones, changes its role through the story. In letting the students use it, Elizabeth shares its handsomeness with others but as Hermann guesses early on, "The generation with houses like this were Nazis," so its qualities are therefore polluted. Elizabeth's dreams of creating a cultural community centred on the villa are both realized and then shattered when she feels she has had enough and is moved to drive them out,

commenting that the Fuchsbau years are over. She allows Gattinger to arrange a deal for the site to be sold for redevelopment as a block of flats, which at a stroke greatly enlarges the ex-Goldbaum fortune, and leaves the students to lament its destruction in a requiem composed by Hermann and performed in the grounds, now a building site: the loss of the house becomes a metaphor for the breaking up the group, as they change, grow up, move on.

Because the characters are artistic (film-makers, actors, composers, musicians), they are motivated to express themselves in stories, to realize their imaginations. This adds a background dimension which the audience has to imagine for itself, namely that in telling all these stories, Reitz is telling his own as well as someone of that generation seeking to come to an understanding of Germany. Like Reinhard ‘becoming a story’ after he disappears, Reitz does as well in completing the film. This is something which in itself provides hope. When Reinhard and Esther try to confront their history, Reinhard writes his script and falls into despair, while Esther, searching for her lost mother, visits Dachau and, finding no trace either of her or of “all the people mercilessly tortured to death here”, but that it is a sight merely for tourists photographing without understanding, exclaims that she is giving up photography. Reitz is prepared to recognise the argument that an artistic account of the Holocaust is an impossibility, that knowledge can only bring silence, while being ready to continue getting inside it himself, to seek an understanding that does not shirk the truth while humanizing the people taking part in its history, in the belief that the effort must be made to enlarge the spectator’s imagination of this fact of 20th-century history through creating a monument of extraordinary complexity, deploying in multiple layers character, images, sounds and music. The scale of this artistic enterprise is proper to the questions it explores.

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The purest reaction to the Holocaust, the reaction of the purists, is philosophical: What happened? Why did it happen? How was it allowed to happen? But the human brain works in many different ways, and it is the medium of the story, rather than of the philosophical or metaphysical essay, that for many people manages to convey knowledge,

even partial, and a portion of understanding. For this reason, we need memoirs, and not just memoirs but fiction as well: the former give us a glimpse of the real, but fiction, for all the risks it offers of being unreal, can show us truth even if it is not real. The extraordinary stories of survival can help to redeem the event for us, give us something to cling onto in the wreckage and take us through the turbulence. Those of the Jews protected by Schindler and of Szpilman the pianist are two of them, but there could be others.

Primo Levi died before he could see those two films, and indeed his own account of survival in 'If this is a man' offers some crumbs of comfort too, but I doubt whether he would have accepted that there could be any sort of true redemption to be found in stories about the Holocaust. The tone of his writing is at all times modest and strives always to observe with detachment, but there is evident too a constant distress right up to 'The Drowned and the Saved', the last book he published before his death in 1987. It is certainly the case, I feel, that a film worthy of his book is an impossibility. Its simplicity and lucidity are sufficient in themselves, and could be marred by a conventional transposition to the screen. It would run the risk, as do all narrative films that seek to portray Auschwitz, of creating a synthetic grimness compared with the actual, of a false understanding of behaviour and motive. The film by Lajos Koltai, *Fateless*, illustrates these pitfalls: the film recreates Auschwitz (briefly) and Buchenwald in an honourable manner, but the point of its source material, Kertesz's memoir – what did it mean for me to be a Jew and so chosen for deportation, and to be a Jew and survive, and return to Hungary as a surviving Jew? -- is philosophical, which gets mostly lost in the re-created agony of the camps.

But Jack Gold, initially reluctant to make a film about the uprising in Sobibor death camp which brought it to an end, in the end did so in *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), because it was a story that needed to be better known. Unfilmed still is the story of Rudolf Vrba's and Alfred Wetzler's escape from Auschwitz, their contact with the Jewish Council in Slovakia, and the creation of the Auschwitz protocols which were instrumental in creating pressure on Miklos Horthy to stop deporting the Hungarian Jews. There is also Bela Szolt's account in 'Nine Suitcases' of his escape from those same deportations, which has that quality of blind chance to be found in *The Pianist*, with the opportunity

too of conveying Szolt's macabre humour. One could conceive of the two narratives – of Vrba and Szolt – being told in parallel, and posing at the end the urgent question: was enough done to save the Hungarian Jews from deportation?

Is there a story woven into the massacres of the Jews at Babi Yar in the Ukraine? Dramatization in film form runs a tremendous risk: in showing bodies being stripped naked, then beaten and herded to the edge over a ravine and shot, reminds us of the fact of the event, but at the same time casts doubt, as we are brought face-to-face with the illusion of film-making, with the act of re-enactment: is the whole thing just an illusion? As we have seen, the same problem applies to the death camps themselves, for it may be possible to draw the spectator into the grimness of the camp, but to show what happens inside the gas chamber is to cross a line beyond which re-creation is impossible. The massacres of Jews in the Ukraine needs to be approached circumspectly, to be told off-screen, revealed in other ways than direct telling. In *Schindler's List*, as I have mentioned, Spielberg was on the mark in not showing the death of the little girl in the red coat.

Because films and television have the widest reach of all artistic media, it is important that they are used to create an understanding of the Holocaust. The graphicness of the cinema can convince audiences, it can make the intellectual, the abstract and the rarefied concrete and immediate. Its very crudity, the way it can do the imagining for a person, alleviating him or her from the trouble of active thought, is for once an advantage in helping them confront the seriousness of what happened. To help others understand wrote Primo Levi we have to simplify. "A certain dose of rhetoric is perhaps indispensable for the memory to persist." [11] But Levi was always troubled in a particular way, whether anyone but survivors could deal with the subject, and not even survivors because only "the worst survived, the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the 'grey zone', the spies. . . The best all died." [12] Reference to the 'grey zone' gives a twist to Levi's reticence. It was the phrase he used to describe the ambiguity of relationships inside the lager, an ambiguity you had to adopt to have a chance of survival. Without making it explicit, he proposes a hierarchy: those who died, those who survived, those who had not been in the camps or the ghettos.

In the ‘Republic’ Plato criticises painting and art in general of being at two removes from ideal reality, proposing a hierarchy of Perfect Form (the ideal table), the table existing before us (a copy of the ideal) and the painting of the table (a copy of a copy of the ideal). One can get a sense here of Levi’s strictures on the inauthenticity of representation of life in the camps in which an analogous hierarchy could be created: description of the grey zone by those who observed it but were detached from it, and hence died; a compromised description by those who were part of it and yet died; and representation in literature and film of this compromised description, itself compromised when its creators were not themselves survivors.

But the construction is surely perverse. Fiction allows identification between audiences and participants, with cinema offering a special route into the physical, more ‘real’ reality, so that imagination is made concrete. This is a further argument that Holocaust stories should be filmed. And even the ambiguities of the grey zone can be brought home through fiction, presenting its audience with the viewpoints of victim, executioner or bystander. In particular the moral dilemmas can be explored in a way that turns the observer into a participant. If human beings can truly learn from history, then the identification may help us to understand how we should act.

Leon Wieseltier has written a striking commentary to do with a story of a pious Jew from the Warsaw ghetto who in his last act before the final annihilation of the ghetto after the Uprising concluded that God had hid his face, and delivered to Him an admonition that this had happened rather than conclude from it that He did not exist. This brief fiction by Zvi Kolitz – initially received as having actually happened rather than being a fiction – is entitled ‘Yosl Rakover talks to God’. Emmanuel Lévinas had published a short commentary on it in 1963, and it was of this commentary, as much as Kolitz’s story, that Wieseltier had offered a critique. In it, he touches on the question of the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust to argue that it is specious. He sees in it a continuity with the “fate of the Jews in other European times and other European places”. It also, as he puts it, “has the consequence of ripping the disaster so far out of history that it becomes incommensurable, in the way that the sacred is incommensurable.” One is reminded of Elie Wiesel’s distress as expressed in 1978 at the NBC television mini-series. Wieseltier argues that imprecision is not necessarily false, and may be useful as a

means of stimulating moral thought and moral action. Jews are human beings, and their history is not precluded from being universal by being unique. “Let us avail ourselves,” he writes, “of all the faculties of the mind and the heart. Let us hear all the theories and all the stories. . .”

Kolitz’s story touches on what I think is the most troubling question raised by the Holocaust: if He exists, why did He allow it to happen? This metaphysical dimension is not something that film has been able to capture at all, and may never do so, since it may only take a verbal argument, not a visual depiction, to elaborate and explore what is at stake. And yet a cinematic way of doing it may yet come to fruition. Consider Bach’s musical Passions: most originally his music does not just dramatize the story, but interleaves it with musical passages reflecting on what has happened. Something similar might be possible on film.

In general, four barriers to filming the Holocaust can be listed, and ways found to overcome them. First is that while film can reproduce the surface grimness of the ghetto or of the camp, the ‘interior’ grimness for the victims can only be glimpsed: the physical cruelty of torture by starvation, the moral cruelty of saving oneself at the expense of another, the mental cruelty of knowing your family has been killed, of witnessing the suffering of children, and so on. Yet great writing and film-making must give us a route, even an imperfect one, into understanding.

Second, it is desirable that only survivors should create these accounts, and this means that only Jews should write and direct the films. Yet survivors are dying off and we shall still need stories to help us remember. It is one of the dimensions of W. G. Sebald’s novel ‘Austerlitz’ about displacement and memory, key themes to a Jewish understanding of the Holocaust, that it is written by a (non-Jewish) German. This novel is a Chinese box, discussing architecture and history, and describing a variety of places (the countryside of mid-Wales, the east end of London, Paris, Marienbad, and so on), but at its climax is the story of the concentration camp at Teresin /Theresienstadt, and the disappearance of Jacques’ Austerlitz’s parents, his mother to Teresienstadt and thence on a transport east, his father to Paris where all trace of him is lost. Jacques himself only survives on the *kindertransport* to England in 1939. This poetic, melancholic, almost comfortless book by a German seems perfectly in tune with the deep and lasting pain that

the Holocaust inflicted on the Jews and, by extension, on non-Jews seeking to understand the events.

Thirdly, the Jewish prohibition on images in the second commandment should not be used to sacralize the Holocaust, as Wieseltier has pointed out in the passage already quoted. The imagination is “an indispensable instrument for the consideration of tragedy” and we need to recognise that it can go wrong. To give an example: Primo Levi, in his courteous way, is harsh about Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1973) about a hotel porter and a hotel guest in 1957 re-creating their relationship from the camps, where he was an SS officer and she was an inmate as a child. Caviani felt that we are all victims or murderers, on which Levi comments that to confuse the German murderers with their victims is a “moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity”. [13] One could call it therefore a failed Holocaust film, but it is a failure that still contributes to understanding, even if only in the rebutting of it.

A fourth reason to make films starts with a question: what if the films and television works I have been discussing were the only documentation left of the event? It is true that any historical version of the events constructed from such works would be riddled with imperfection, and we would still need proper histories. But while Shakespeare’s history plays are an inadequate guide to what actually happened in late mediaeval England, they offer a brilliant insight into the political turbulence of the times and their consequences for individuals. Films of the Holocaust still allow us to construct a version of the historical events that would contain omissions but also many truths. We need further creations therefore to fill in the gaps in our understanding and to assist in preserving a memory of this event. Such a reflection brings us back to Sebald’s ‘Austerlitz’. This book of words is intensely visual, not just for its prose so full of images, but for the photographs he uses in the text which both ground the reader’s understanding of what is being described, and also set in train their own sense of what is poignant and inexplicable about the lost past. What is more Sebald writes about the darkest sort of Holocaust film, the one that denies the event, one that makes the darkness darker. At the climax of the book Austerlitz encounters the fragment of the film made by the Nazis of the camp at Teresienstadt. Following a visit by the International Red Cross in 1944 when the Nazis blinded the Red Cross representatives to the fact that it was not just a cruel

place in which to survive but a staging-post for deportation to annihilation, they followed this up by making a ‘documentary’ of the camp under the heading *Hitler Presents a Town to the Jews*. The film disturbs us for the circumstances of its making, and we need its emphatic contradiction in literature and film. But Sebald is still able to make something consoling from it. Jacques Austerlitz watches the film desperately searching the faces of the inmates in the hope of seeing that of his mother Agata. Because of the “the impossibility of seeing anything more closely in these pictures” [14] Austerlitz has the idea of having a slow-motion version of the fragment made, lasting an hour, in order to “reveal previously hidden objects and people, creating, by default as it were, a different sort of film altogether, which I have since watched over and over again”. This is a radically new way of watching film.

We should not therefore regret what films have been completed, recognising that there is more to be written and more to be filmed, that the potency of some of the films discussed here has by no means been exhausted. Understanding of the past is a journey from a little knowledge and a little learning to a stage where we realise that we have learnt much but still know very little, yet the less we know, the wiser we get.

Sept 2006 / Feb 2007

ENDNOTES

- 1 Harry Fox in ‘The Survivors’ right to reply’ in Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (eds) ‘Holocaust and the Moving Image’ (Wallflower Press, London and New York), p. 249.
- 2 The controversy is chronicled in detail in Ewout van der Knaap (ed.) ‘Uncovering the Holocaust: the international reception of *Night and Fog*’ (Wallflower Press, London and New York 2006).
- 3 The phrase ‘limits of representation’ comes from the title of Saul Friedlander’s book ‘Probing the limits of representation: Nazism and the Final Solution’ (Harvard UP, Cambridge USA 1982).
- 4 Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.) ‘Spielberg’s Holocaust: critical perspectives on *Schindler’s List*’ (Indiana UP, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1997).

- 5 For this Lanzmann is reported to have filmed twelve hours of interview with Bernard Mermelstein, a member of the Judenrat at Theresienstadt.
- 6 'The Story of a Coin' in Primo Levi 'Moments of Reprieve' (Michael Joseph, London 1986).
- 7 Spielberg was not allowed to shoot inside the camp.
- 8 Clive James 'Chamber Music of Horrors' in the *Times Literary Supplement* 31 Jan. 2003.
- 9 A devastated Berlin was also the effective setting of *Berlin Express* (1948, d. Jacques Tourneur) and of *The Man Between* (1953, d. Carol Reed).
- 10 For other Venice films, see for example *Death in Venice* (1971, d. Visconti), *Don't Look Now* (1973, d. Roeg), *Comfort of Strangers* (1990, d. Schrader) *Monday Morning* (2002, d. Iosseliani).
- 11 Primo Levi 'The Drowned and the Saved' (Michael Joseph, London 1988), p.8.
- 12 Levi, *ibid.* p.62.
- 13 Levi, *ibid.* p.62
- 14 WG Sebald, 'Austerlitz' (Penguin Books, London 2001), p.345.

Another valuable source for this essay was a television feature 'Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust', an Anker production for amc in association with the BBC and Films Transit International 2004.