The Impact of the Film *Schindler's List* on German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

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Germans were still "sitting out their history" in the early 1990s. They had become experts in "suppressing" memories of the Holocaust, suffering chronic "amnesia" and "a split consciousness."[1] Fifty years of circumscribed commemoration had resulted in a culture largely unwilling to confront its past. Politicians preached "normality" and defended their position of selective remembrance as necessary for the "bigger" problems of economic, social, and geopolitical novelty that were facing the Berlin Republic.[2] Many historians were busy licking their wounds in the wake of the *Historikerstreit*.[3] But the German collective memory was jolted again in 1994. *Schindler's List,* a big-budget feature-film threatening conventions on authorship and representation, crystallized the acute pressures that Germany faced in the 1990s: generational change and reunification had drawn attention to fault lines that were also about memory.[4] The film illuminated a stale and yet still unresolved relationship with the Holocaust, and exposed a fraught relationship between the scholarly intellectual and the public citizen. In so doing it helped change the interpretation of "memory" from predetermined ritual into prospective resource.[5]

The film and its significance run against scholarship that imagines a progressive trajectory of German Holocaust memory. Susan Neiman's critique of America's memory-culture, *Learning from the Germans*, is based on a similar assumption that the extent of Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* offers guidance for dealing with "difficult pasts."[6] For Neiman, the relationship Germany had found with the Holocaust by the end of the

[1] Andreas Kilb, 'Warten, bis Spielberg kommt', *Die Zeit,* 21 January, 1994 („…die Deutschen, wahre Meister im Aussitzen ihrer Geschichte, schauen zu'); 197; Peter Körte, 'Sterns Liste oder: Die vergebliche Erinnerung', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1 March, 1994 („eine Öffentlichkeit an Amnesie und Bewusstseinsspaltung') (All translations are the author's own, unless stated otherwise).
[2] The prioritisation of addressing the GDR past in the early 1990s is explored in Andrew Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn Book, 2008).
[3] Jonathon Bach and Benjamin Nienass, 'Innocence and the Politics of Memory', *German Politics and Society*, 134, 39, 1 (2021), pp. 3-5.
[4] *Schindler's List.* Dir. Steven Spielberg. Prods. Steven Spielberg, Gerald R. Molen and Branko Lustig (1993).
[5] Andreas Kilb, 'Stichelei', *Die Zeit,* 25 March, 1994 („Spielbergs Epos ist nicht nur rein Schlag ins trübe deutsche Geschichtsbewusstsein, sondern auch eine kommerzielle Sensation').
[6] Most often translated as 'coming to terms with the past'. Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans* (London: Allen Lane, 2019).

twentieth century was the standard against which to compare other countries' relationship with their past traumas. This paper challenges Neiman's claim, and methodological interpretation of memory, that the self-reflective process of coming-to-terms with the recent past in Germany can be and has been completed.[7] It does this by exploring the reception of the film *Schindler's List* in Germany, thus building on the intimacy between cinema and commemoration that has guided memory studies since at least the 1970s.[8] However, the reception of the film illustrates a shift away from perceiving memory as an abstract, ahistorical concept, from Maurice Halbwachs's collective foundation and Pierre Nora's concretized narratives.[9] The reception of *Schindler's List* indicated the general orientation towards the performance of "memory work"—the active and ongoing process of *doing* memory—and manifested the German experience of it in relation to the Holocaust.[10] From the mid-1990s, the Holocaust was no longer a stain on the German conscience, but an implicating memory to be contemporarily instrumentalized.[11]

The evolution of what Holocaust memory work meant in Germany was a slow and troubled process and its own history hints at the importance of the socio-cultural context in which methodological change could occur. In West Germany, remembering the Nazi past involved an extended period of denial; preferential treatment of democratization over historic justice; and ceremonial regret, increasingly adopted as a strategic performance in a changing geopolitical world order.[12] In East Germany, remembering the Holocaust was essentially an avenue for consolidating the anti-fascist foundation myth of an insecure

[7] Eric Langenbacher, 'The Mastered Past? Collective Memory Trends in Germany since Unification', *German Politics and* Society, 28, 1 (Spring, 2010), pp. 42-68.
[8] G. R. Edgerton and P. C. Rollins (eds.), *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp. 8-12; Russel J. Kilbourn (ed.), *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art of Film to Transnational Cinema* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010); Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (Milton Park: Taylor and Francis, 2013).
[9] The idea of socially mandated memberships, and of memorialisation as focus for remembering, and the theorists themselves, are explored in James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 5-7.
[10] Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998), pp. 105-140.
[11] Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp. 198-203.
[12] Jean-Paul Bier and Michael Allinder, 'The Holocaust and West Germany: Strategies of Oblivion 1947-1979', *New German Critique*, 19, Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews (Winter, 1980), pp. 9-29; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, 'Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5, 1 (2002), pp. 93-97; Geoffrey H Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Lexington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 3-8.

satellite state.[13] But with time, the highly choreographed commemoration culture fell out of fashion, inappropriate for a reunified nation facing post-totalitarian and third-generation novelty.[14]

Parallel to this shift in what memory meant in practice was an accumulation of images visualizing the Holocaust, which incrementally broke down the injunction against representation that had been made by high-profile intellectuals in the immediate post-war period.[15] But this tradition of showing the Holocaust on screen had a delayed impact on the evolution of memory work. The films predating *Schindler's List* shared a subscription to the collective guilt thesis (the idea that the whole German nation should feel ashamed of the Holocaust and responsible for the war), which made them unpopular.[16] Managing Holocaust memory in much of the post-war period was understood to require a culture of regularized commemoration and cautious political policy, despite occasional reflexivity that efforts to implicate the public frequently failed.[17] But in the 1990s, the politics of guilt and rebuttal of innocence were challenged. In the pursuit of "normal nationhood," which was a generational as much a geopolitical project, the Holocaust evolved from an insurmountable burden to an applicable lesson.[18] It was conscripted for political and social purposes, progressive and problematic alike.[19] It was also a lesson practiced by a self-conscious public, contributing to a changed relationship between German people and the narrative and nature of Holocaust memory. For a matured post-war and hopeful post-wall people, the response to the Holocaust was to fight against the re-emergence of hatred. For a minority of

[13] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 167-207.
[14] Mary Nolan, 'The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Republic', *Radical History Review*, 81 (2001), pp. 113-124.
[15] Omer Bartov, 'Spielberg's Osar: Hollywood Tries Evil', in Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Lexington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 54.
[16] Karl Jaspers (trans. E. B. Ashton), *The Question of German Guilt* (NY: Fordham University Press, 2001).
[17] 'Public' debates about Holocaust memory were either badly received or barely received by the ordinary public, for much of the post-war period. Examples are explored in Thomas Berger, Daniel Levy and Julian Dierkes in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[18] The parallel interest in 'normalising' politics and familial memories of the Holocaust is theorised by Marianne Hirsch's term 'postmemory' in Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory,* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).
[19] This included the confrontation with the GDR past, the debate about NATO participation, and managing the effects of high levels of immigration. Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 230-270.

populist politicians, its legacy was manipulated as xenophobic rhetoric.[20] For everyone, Holocaust memory became a powerful contribution to contemporary agendas.

Into a changing historiographical and geopolitical climate entered the biopic film *Schindler's List*. The story is of Oskar Schindler, the real-life Nazi industrialist who saved the lives of over 1,000 Jews by employing them in his factories. The film follows his transformation from bon vivant womanizer to modern-day Moses, interested in making money before he embarks on a mission to save the Jewish people at the risk of his marriage, career, and personal security.[21] More than one critic called him a gambler.[22] The general evolution of Holocaust-narration would be that from abstract morality play to humanistic realism and personal intimacy, from ideas to human beings. Where once German audiences were expected to leave cinemas feeling ashamed, the heroization of Schindler provided German audiences with an exculpatory figure of identification, and it was in this depiction that the film offered Germany a changed relationship with its past.

My paper enters here, suggesting that the "memory turn" of the late-twentieth century, in which performative actions and democratized narratives were accorded primacy, qualifies our understanding of the way that German Holocaust memory was "done" in the 1990s.[23] To intervene in Holocaust memory-studies, to ask questions about the instrumentality of history, it examines the reception and legacy of *Schindler's List* in 1990s Germany. The film is testament to the collision of different registers of memory, an example of popular culture that qualified collective identities, and offers a way into thinking about the evolving role of the Holocaust in the context of the 1990s. This was a decade in which the Holocaust—as a memory and negative founding myth for reunified Germany—was supposed to have been surmounted, its diminishing significance the result of a political and generational shift towards new priorities. But rather than having overcome the Holocaust, the reception of the film showed that German audiences were still searching for a

[20] Co-option of Holocaust imagery for antisemitic purposes is covered in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [accessed at https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/misuse-of-holocaust-imagery-today-when-is-it-antisemitism] (viewed 25 May, 2023).
[21] Verena Lüken, 'Ein Gerechter', *FAZ,* March 3, 1994 (‚Der Krieg war seine Chance', ‚Schindler war ein zwiespältiger, bis zum Ende nicht ganz durschaubarer Mann der, ziemlich unerwartet, zur Menschlichkeit fand und die richtige Entscheidung traf').
[22] In Lothar Baier, 'Wir, die Judenretter', *Die Woche,* 21 April, 1994; Ruprecht Skasa-Weiß, 'Lebemann, Lebensretter', *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* 3 March, 1994; Timm Schumann, 'Die tiefen Eindrucke von 'Schindlers Liste", *Die Welt,* 47, 25 February, 1994.
[23] Günther Jikeli, 'A Model for Coming to Terms with the Past? Holocaust Remembrance and Antisemitism in Germany since 1945', *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 14, 3 (2020), pp. 427-446.

relationship with the Holocaust that satisfied a willingness to engage with its legacy, without shaming them for trying. *Schindler's List* was a moment in and microcosm of Germany's remembrance culture, manifesting the challenges faced in the 1990s, and the practice and presence of memory in the present. Its study is to explore the nexus between memory and meaning, and the role of cinema in democratizing and popularizing the way we think about historical narratives. Holocaust memory was not settled by the film*,* but established as an evolving aspect of contemporary consciousness. For this reason, as Frank Schirrmacher insisted on the night of its German premiere, "Everyone should see this film."[24]

The Reception of the Film

Schindler's List arrived in Germany on 1 March 1994. The premiere resembled a state ceremony, attended by President Richard von Weizsäcker, Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and Steven Spielberg himself. The guests gathered in the self-consciously chosen city of Frankfurt, the place of Schindler's birth and a central site of Jewish German life before 1933.[25] Matching the monumentality attached to its American showing a year earlier, which included President Clinton's instruction to "Go see it," the German premiere was projected as a powerful moment in the contemporary context.[26] Weizsäcker may have been "speechless," leaving "ashen faced with head bowed," but it did not take long for the German public to busy itself with the ethical implications and liberating potential of the film.[27] The arrival of St. Schindler was a media- and memory-event of national and international significance and its reception encompassed more than opinions on the artistic merit of Spielberg's story.[28] *Schindler's List* helped transform what remembering the Holocaust would come to mean for Germany in the 1990s, staging a historiographical intervention no less than a "historic event."[29]

[24] Frank Schirrmacher, 'Schindlers Liste', *FAZ,* 1 March, 1994 (‚Jeder sollte diesen Film sehen').
[25] Eva Hohenberger, 'German, German, Schindler!', *Stadt Revue,* 27 April, 1994 (‚einem Staatsakt ähnelnden Premiere').
[26] In Jürgen Koar, 'Grauen in schlichtem Schwarzweiß, *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* 18 December, 1993
[27] Cited in Christopher Weiss, 'Afterword' in Christopher Weiss (ed.), *Der Gute Deutsch* (St Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag) p. 155 (‚…mit *Schindlers Liste* sind wir vom *Holocaust* befreit'); Anonymous, 'Schindler's List opens to acclaim and shock in Germany', 3 March, 1994 [accessed at https://www.upi.com/Archives/1994/03/03/Schindlers-List-opens-to-acclaim-and-shock-in-Germany/1233762670800/] (viewed 4 March 2023).
[28] Jane Perlez, 'Spielberg Grapples with the Horror of the Holocaust', *NYT,* June 13, 1993, pp. 64-66.
[29] *Die Zeit* cited in Marjorie Miller, 'An American filmmaker ends German 'big silence': Schindler's List lets a generation talk about taboos', *The Toronto Star*, 9 March, 1994.

Schindler's List was not a wholly original film. It drew on established visual motifs and an aesthetic grammar that was almost fifty years old.[30] But the popularity of *Schindler's List* in Germany was unprecedented, the vocality of its supporters drowning out the minority who objected to its voyeurism and inauthenticity. Its success came down to the self-consciousness of its artificiality, and the self-confidence of its pedagogy. Where Holocaust memory once meant prostrating in self-flagellating shame, demonstrated by Willy Brandt at the Memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising twenty-five years earlier, the film initiated a changed conceptualization of what "doing memory" meant in 1990s Germany. In almost every review there is a reference to what the film could teach its audience and what the questions it raised might mean in the context of the 1990s. Underlining the positive criticism was its pedagogical power, behind its negative criticism was a sense that it failed to offer relevant lessons. In the context of the 1990s, when Germany sought to define itself as a normal, unified, and globally responsible nation, it was not about working through the past, but working on its behalf.

"It's just a movie! And one you don't necessarily have to see"

Having been received in America the year before to critical and commercial success, the arrival of *Schindler's List* was understood as more than "just a movie."[31] So extensive was its pre-emptive coverage across mainstream media that, weeks before its release, the German public could read of the "shocked silence" in Vienna, they knew of its status as Film of the Year in *Newsweek*, and felt the pregnant expectation that the film was "intended to break norms."[32] But anticipatory engagement also saw an injunction against the idea of a Spielbergised-Holocaust, his reputation symbolic of the "barbarity" of Hollywood.[33] For a critical minority, the tradition of cinematic representation that Spielberg stood in receipt of had not concluded the debate around whether the priority was rendering a truthful image on screen, or in making the memory available. This protectionism was established as the

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[31] Michael Berger, 'Deutsche Verwirrung', *Die Woche*, 21 April, 1994 (‚einen bizarren Streit'); Hamacher, 'Das Märchen'.

[32] Anonymous, 'Ovationen für Spielberg', *Berliner Morgenpost,* 18 Feb, 1994; Anonymous, 'Heute Deutschland-Premiere von 'Schindlers Liste', *Berliner Morgenpost,* 1 Mar, 1994; Jenny, 'Vom Großen Morden' (‚Der Film soll Normen sprengen').

[33] Henryk M Broder, 'Deutsch wie ein Lodenmantel', *Die Woche,* 21 April, 1994 (‚Sind die Amerikaner nicht überhaupt Barbaren?').

battle between authentic modernism and accessible mass culture, the former understood as respectful mourning, the latter as gross trivialization. For some critics, the fact that *Schindler's List* came from Hollywood was the extreme example of the trend towards simplifying the Holocaust in the name of accessibility.[34] But for others, especially the lay public, the film was an opportunity to change Germany's relationship with the Holocaust, and it was this interpretation that ultimately prevailed.

Before commentary on *Schindler's List* amounted to a political statement on one's position on Germany's memory-culture, there seemed to be some room for aesthetic criticism of the film, which hinted at an openness, if also a cautiousness, to alternative modes of remembering. Two days after the premiere, it remained acceptable to be offended by the "sleek-giant" that was Schindler, to believe European directors were capable of "denser" representation, and to find problematic Spielberg's tendency to "memorialize the film beyond the actual story."[35] In the earliest reviews, newspapers found the "indelible mark of Spielberg" in its "incurable sentimentality" which dressed the tragedy in "flattering tinsel."[36] The ending was a "pseudo-documentary" in its manipulative montages, even a "kitsch of horror."[37] The loudest critics, writing in highbrow papers like *Die Zeit*, took issue with everything from "extras hand-picked for thinness" to Schindler's heroization into a "1940s Hollywood ham."[38] In the beginning, these unsuspecting articles judged the film, though an impressive effort, "far from a great work of art."[39]

[34] Peter Buchka, ‚Der Schwarzmarkt des Todes', *Suddeutsche Zeitung,* 3 March, 1994 (‚Seit Dezember überschlagen sich die Medien im Lob für einen, den sie zwar stets als Wunderkind respektierten, aber eben auch als ewiges Kind missachteten').

[35] In Skasa-Weiß, ‚Lebemann, Lebensretter' (‚ein glatter Hüne'); 'Michael Brumlik, 'Ein Deutscher der dritten Art', *Die tageszeitung,* 3 March, 1994 (‚Europäische Regisseure inszenieren anders, dichter, mit mehr Sinn fürs Sympathetische', ‚Spielberg konnte der Versuchung, den Film über die eigentliche Geschichte hinaus zu einem Denkmal zu machen').

[36] Daniele Heymann, 'Ils furent si peu ceux que l'on sauva', *Le Monde,* 3 March, 1994 ('…la 'Liste de Schindler' exalte les vertus d'un 'héros' ambigu et habille l'indicible tragédie des oripeau flatteurs d'un mélodrame 'positif'', 'C'est la marque indélébile du génie spielbergian, de son incurable sentimentalisme, de son inguérissable optimise').

[37] Ruprecht Skasa-Weiß, 'Lebemann, Lebensretter', *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* 3 March, 1994 (‚Verzeihliches Finale?'); Marcus Hertneck, 'Wenn alles in einen Topf geworfen wird', *Suddeutsche Zeitung,* 8 March, 1994 (‚pseudo-dokumentarische'); Jörg Bremer, 'Ist der Holocaust in Bildern darstellbar ?', *FAZ,* 4 March, 1994 (‚Kitsch des Grauens').

[38] Löffler, 'Kino als Ablass' (‚hand-picked für Magerkeit'); Alaric Hamacher, 'Das Märchen vom Spielberg und den Sieben Oscars', *Medium,* July-September, 1994 (‚*Schindlers Liste* heroisiert die Gestalt Schindlers im Stil eines Hollywood-Schinkens im Stil der vierziger Jahre, was man ihm in Farbe wohl nicht abkaufen würde').

[39] Frank Noack, 'Darf ein Heiliger vulgär sein?' (‚Ein wichtiger, schockierender, aufwühlender Film ist noch lange kein Großes Kunstwerk').

But the escalation of the reception—to a tenor in which viewers wrote of their enthusiasm "without having seen it" and "whoever criticises is put against the wall"—was anticipated from the beginning.[40] Witness the last-minute documentary, "Search for the real Oskar Schindler," that was broadcast four days before the film premiered. The reviews that arrived three months in advance, promising a "History Lesson in the Cinema" for a nation, "Waiting for Spielberg to Come," and reports on the celebrity statements from multiple heads of state.[41] To the American press, such anticipatory anxiety was evidence of "German democratic structures" being "too fragile for public airings of certain controversial opinions."[42] Regardless of whether such critical (even geopolitical) commentary was fair, the reception of *Schindler's List* was overwhelmed by politicized positioning, the stakes raised from aesthetic grammar to the state of Germany's ongoing and unresolved struggles with its remembrance culture. Across the mainstream media, *Schindler's List* went from a "brilliant feat of craftmanship" to "a means of global political understanding."[43] Within two weeks Rainer Hoffmann declared it a "national event."[44] The next day the gun was fired: "After the melodrama, comes the debate."[45]

In the beginning, German critics revived the film's predecessors to illustrate the challenge they felt the film represented to established cinematic norms and public memory. Compared to *Holocaust,* the American miniseries that was broadcast fifteen years before, voices from across the media landscape found *Schindler's List* a better film, for its "courage and artistry," "far removed from the soap opera trivialization," and a "great film…worthy of all honour."[46] Others preferred them together, Michael Wolfssohn, historian and commentator, reflected that the two triggered a "voluntary willingness" amongst the

[40] Reginald Rudorf, 'Alles Schindler', *Rundy*, 8 February, 1994 (‚Ich…finde den Film gut, ohne ihn gesehen zu haben', ‚Wer kritisiert, wird an die Wand gestellt').
[41] Peter Heinlein, 'Suche nach dem wahren Oskar Schindler', *Die Welt,* 25 Feb, 1994; Christine Schöfer, 'Geschichtsstunde im Kino', *Freitag,* 11 Feb, 1994; Andreas Kilb, 'Warten'.
[42] Tom Shanker, 'Review of 'Schindler' Roils German Paper, *The Chicago Tribune,* 29 March, 1994.
[43] In Verena Lüken, 'Ein Gerechter', *FAZ,* 3 March, 1994 (‚eine handwerkliche Glanzleistung'); Georg Seeßlen, 'Shoah, or the Tale of the Untold', *Freitag,* 4th March, 1994 (‚…der Film wird gleichsam zu einem weltpolitischen Verständigungsmittel, Erinnerung an verlorene Humanität').
[44] Rainer Hoffmann, 'Schindlers Liste', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 15 March, 1994 (‚nationalen Ereignis').
[45] Julia Schröder, 'Nach dem Melodram die Debatte', *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* 18 March, 1994.
[46] Heiko Rosner, 'Schindlers Liste: Der definitive Film über das Grauen das Naziterrors', *Cinema* Issue 190, March 1994, (‚Weit ab von der Seifenoper-Trivialisierung der US-Fernsehserie *Holocaust*'); Anonymous, ‚Ein Leben lang auf ‚Schindlers Liste' hingearbeitet', *Berliner Morgenpost,* 57, 27 February, 1994 (‚ein grosser Film', ‚Das Filmvorhaben…ist aller Ehren wert').

broader German public to face these crimes.[47] But not everyone was so enthusiastic about the contributions the two Hollywood-Holocaust films made to German memory. Sabine Horst wrote in *konkret* that *Schindler's List* was still victim to the "logic of American narrative cinema" and just as "aesthetically inferior" to its European predecessors.[48] Rather than recognizing the productive contribution that *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List* represented in inviting popular engagement with Holocaust history, as Wolfssohn did, they were lumped together as evidence of the growing "Shoah business" that apparently deterred understanding.[49] Indeed, beneath criticism about historical inaccuracy and emotional manipulation was an attack on the culture from which the film came. Claude Lanzmann, appearing in right-of-center newspapers, assumed the aesthetic high-ground in claiming that his film was a turning point in Holocaust historiography, that there existed a "before and after *Shoah*" which saw him responsible for a "new form."[50]

Part of Lanzmann's criticism represented the recurrent tension over the "rules of representation," the idea that sentimentality and fictionalization are inappropriate vehicles for remembering the Holocaust.[51] *Schindler's List* was a threat to the authors of public memory in its self-conscious appeal to subjectivity and affect. It challenged the modernist aesthetic that resists the insufficiency of representation by being a dramatic reconstruction, adding to established images with all that a $22-million budget could bring.[52] For Lanzmann, a fictional film was as false as soap opera, a "quick-fix" to the question of catharsis.'[53] In his criticism, in the parallel protectionism maintained by Martin Walser, and in the comparative commercial success of the two films, it is possible to see the importance of an accessible message and popular medium in the evolution of memory work, an intimacy that challenged but also illuminated the impasse produced by the intellectual critique.[54]

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[47] Michael Wolfssohn. Telephone Interview. 2 May, 2023.
[48] Horst, 'We couldn't show that' („*Schindlers Liste* ist Resnais' Behandlung des Sujets bei aller Finesse zwar ästhetisch unterlegen', 'Es ist nach wie vor die Logik des amerikanischen Erzählkinos').
[49] Henryk Broder in Körte, 'Sterns Liste'.
[50] Lanzmann, 'Ihr sollt nicht weinen' (‚…dass es ein vor und ein nach *Shoah* gäbe', ‚Ich glaube, eine neue Form gefunden zu haben').
[51] Eric L. Santner, 'History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma' in Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation,* pp. 143-153.
[52] Brian Ott, 'Memorialising the Holocaust: *Schindler's List* and Public Memory', *The Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 18, 4 (1996), p. 444.
[53] Cited in Margaret Olin, 'Lanzmann's Shoah and the Topography of the Holocaust Film', *Representations*, 57 (Winter, 1997), pp. 16-23.
[54] Hansen, "Schindlers List' is not 'Shoah", pp. 306-310; Edo Reents, ‚Nichts mehr zu sagen', *FAZ,* 9 August, 2023

Shoah and *Schindler's List* were often compared, the two films set up as binary opposites of narrative forms, and the ongoing struggle over the vehicles of public memory. The challenge made by *Schindler's List* to the discipline of history and the doing of memory especially troubled the group of critics that Mariam Niroumand calls the "aristocrats," the defenders of an aesthetic encirclement of the Shoah who had quasi-religious judgements on how to "tell" the Holocaust.[55] It is in their commentary that we most often read of European filmmakers, the "spokesmen" on representation against whom Spielberg is always found wanting.[56] Sigrid Löffler preferred *Shoah*, chastizing the "emotional quickie" of *Schindler's List*, the cinema visit becoming a "convenient indulgence ticket" for a nation interested in closure rather than confrontation.[57] The "encirclement" of what counted as appropriate representation was maintained by Egon Günther, who evoked *Shoah* as "a film of great conscience" where *Schindler's List* "entertains, shocks and cleanses."[58] In contrast, Gabrielle von Armin preferred "accessible cinema," her review spoiling nothing about the plot because she was so enthusiastic about the film's challenge "in the German election year of 1994" with its display of "history that concerns us today."[59] These two versions of viewership defended themselves across the mass media, a process that Peter Körte elevated the film to "a political event."[60] The reception incrementally outgrew the film, becoming a meditation on ways of doing history and treating memory and the role of the professional historian in that process.[61]

[55] Mariam Niroumand, 'Der Widerspenstigen Führung', *Die tageszeitung*, 3 March, 1994 (‚Wenn es um Holocaust-Ikonographie geht, kann man inzwischen getrost von zwei Lagern sprechen; wäre man bösartig könnte man sie die 'Aristokraten' und die 'Sozialdemokraten' nennen').
[56] Fritz Göttler, 'Bilder töten die Imagination', *Suddeutsche Zeitung,* 5 March, 1994.
[57] Löffler, 'Kino als Ablass' (‚Der Film funktioniert als seelische Schnell-Reinigung, als Instant-Absolution, als Gefühls-Quickie', 'Da wird die Kinokarte zum bequemen Ablasszettel').
[58] Egon Günther, 'Spielbergs Juden', *Neues Deutschland,* 23 March, 1994 (‚Einkreisung'… ‚Es ist ein Film, der unterhält, erschüttert, reinigt, in dieser Reihenfolge').
[59] von Arnim, 'Vom Handeln' (‚Schindlers Geschichte ihre eine Herausforderung und ein Politikum in deutschen Wahljahr 1994', ‚Schindler ist Geschichte, die uns heute angeht').
[60] Körte, 'Sterns Liste' (‚Fast jeder kennt den Film, bevor er ihn gesehen hat', 'Im Kino zelebriert man die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten als politische Veranstaltung').
[61] Andreas Huyssen cited in Hansen, "Schindler's List' is not 'Shoah", p. 306.

Entangled in this tension between the media public and critical intellectuals, Spielberg navigates a treacherous course between showing "enough" to do justice to the suffering and showing "too much" and risk charges of disrespect. In an interview, Spielberg insisted that whilst he was desperate not to "water down" the Holocaust, he respected a "sensitive line" beyond which some truths were "much too impossible and obscene to picture."[62] These truths included the babies thrown out of windows by Nazi soldiers (which he refused to recreate "not even with puppets").[63] But for Niroumand's "aristocrats," Spielberg's self-censorship overlooked the "shower-scene," in which the female prisoners are forced into a chamber, anticipating death, only for water to come out of the taps instead. The problems with the scene rested on two charges, aesthetic and ethical. Certainly, the camerawork contributes to a perverted gaze, lingering on the naked women

Figure 1: The transformation of Zyklon B into water, the 'shower scene' as a special effect

with soft lighting and fluid movement, eroticizing them from the perspective of what would only ever have been that of the SS-soldiers responsible for their dehumanization (Figure 1).[64] Jim Hoberman (colleague of Lanzmann at *The Village Voice*) was translated into the German press, calling this scene almost pornographic.[65] Hiring beautiful and healthy women

[62] Cited in Weissman, 'Fantasies of Witnessing', p. 167.
[63] Jim Hoberman, 'Spielbergs Oskar', *Die Tageszeitung,* 3 March 1994 (‚Das konnte ich unmöglich zeigen, nicht einmal mit Puppen').
[64] Still from 'Schindler's List', Author's own.
[65] Anonymous, 'Verschleierter Antisemitismus', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 4 June, 1994; especially in Hanno Loewy, 'Der Spieler', (‚Spielbergs bisher gewagtester Special Effect') Harald Martenstein, 'Zehn Oskars', *Der Tagesspiegel,* 23 March 1994.

betrays the condition that Jewish victims suffered, but it represented an appeal to an accessible aesthetic, if at the expense of an authentic one.

Still, behind the sensitivity to Spielberg's "violation" of the taboo on representation seemed to be an unwelcome recognition that he had done what no "aristocratic" effort had ever done: made the memory meaningful, and the narrative timelessly important. The headlines condemning "Notes on an obscenity," asking "Can a saint be vulgar?" concealed a different question: why had the academy and its discipline failed?[66] In retrospective self-awareness, Wolffsohn remembered an "academic arrogance" in the film's reception, betraying an "implicit recognition that we as academics haven't been as successful as these other actors who have a much stronger impact on the general public's awareness and willingness to deal with these topics."[67] As Wolfgang Benz, head of the Center for Anti-Semitism Research in Berlin, pointed out, every dramaturgical criticism of *Schindler's List* was an attack on the man and his medium for providing the means through which the German nation could finally face, and think differently about, its past.[68]

"Hollywood comes to terms with Germany's past. And we?"

The earlier criticism exposes an elite concerned about the ownership of Holocaust memory but divided about its evolution. Within weeks of the film's release, public intellectuals descended into a "bizarre argument" about each other's historiography more than the film itself, betraying a fretfulness—if not jealousy—about the function and success of Hollywood in "coming to terms with Germany's past."[69] This reached a head when Will Tremper's commentary, "Indiana Jones in the Krakow Ghetto," was labelled a "pamphlet" by Artur Brauner for whitewashing the SS.[70] Tremper's review was met with similarly inflated commentary elsewhere in the media landscape. Sarah Silberstein jeered that Tremper's criticism stemmed from an envy that "this Jew lout from the USA gets more recognition with

[66] Peter Buchka, 'Ein Böses Zeichen: Anmerkundgen zu einer Obszönität, *Suddeutschr Zeitung,* 18 April, 1994; Noack, 'Darf ein Heiliger?'.
[67] Wolffsohn. Telephone Interview.
[68] Wolfgang Benz, 'Bilder statt Fußnoten', *Die Zeit*, 3 April, 1994.
[69] In Kilb, 'Warten' (‚Hollywood bewältigt die deutsche Vergangenheit. Und wir?').
[70] Will Tremper, 'Indiana Jones im Ghetto von Krakau', *Die Welt*, 26 February, 1994; Artur Brauner, 'Ein Pamphlet, das zum Skandal wurde', *Die Welt,* 2 April, 1994 (‚Mit der versuchten Reinwaschung der SS hat sich Will Tremper politisch disqualifiziert').

a single film than you do with your entire life's work."[71] The scale of the reverberations of this tit-for-tat was illustrated in its reportage in media across the Atlantic: Tremper's take-down was described in the Chicago Tribune and Washington Post.[72] The anxiety amongst the academy about their inability to dictate the narrative and nature of Holocaust memory was stark. Just two days before Spielberg promised to fund a Schindler Youth Lodge in the Jewish Community Centre in Frankfurt, Tremper was accused of "sacrilege."[73]

Nevertheless, Tremper was right to recognize the tension in Spielberg's celebration of a German who wears a Nazi pin until the very end of the film because it went against the accusations of guilt that had defined German Holocaust memory since the immediate post-war period. To implicate the German audience in self-reflective spectatorship, Spielberg challenged the "conventions" that had so far dictated Holocaust representation. He does this primarily in his presentation of a "Good Nazi." Certainly, nearing a towering 6'4" tall, Liam Neeson casts a godlike figure, which is exaggerated by low-angle shots and back lighting. How far his framing in cross-like imagery was deliberate, Schindler is the Chosen One, driven to rescue his Jews and dupe his Nazi colleagues (Figure 2).[74] Spielberg omitted the more problematic aspects of Schindler that appear in accounts of those who knew him personally—minimizing his life-long struggles with alcoholism and gambling—which leads to a hagiographical presentation of Schindler's transformation.[75] Rather than following his entrepreneurial and marital breakdowns after the war, the film celebrates and finishes with his redemption.[76]

[71] Sarah Silberstein, 'Ziemlich Schlau, Will Tremper!', *Die Woche,* 17 March, 1994 (‚Klar, es muss Sie wurmen, dass dieser Judenlümmel aus den USA mit einem einzigen Film mehr Anerkennung einheimst als Sie mit Ihrem ganzen Lebenswerk').
Tom Shanker, 'Schindler's List' Review Sparks Uproar', *Chicago Tribune,* 30 March, 1994.
[73] Jan Gympel, 'Das Kino ist keine moralische Waschanlage', *Tagesspiegel,* 20 March, 1994.
[74] Jose Siaz-Vuesta Galian, 'Man as Rescuer and Monster in Steven Spielberg's Film Text *Schindler's List*', *Journal of English Studies,* 5-6 (2005-2008), pp. 63-71; Still from 'Schindler's List'.
[75] Several comments in Ruvik Rosenthal, 'Ein Mann wie Noah: *Schindlers* ‚Kinder' erinnern sich', *Frankfurter Rundschau,* 26 March, 1994; Herbert Glossner, '"Spielberg hat Enormes geleistet": Der frühere Frankfurter Propst Dieter Trautwein war einer seiner Wegbegleiter', *Deutsches Allg. Sonntagsblatt,* 11 March, 1994 (‚Zunächst ist es nicht der Schindler, den ich gekannt habe'); Janusz Tyener, 'Bei Schindler's Polen', *Die Zeit,* 11 March, 1994 (Interview with survivor, ‚In Wirklichkeit floh Schindler aus seiner Fabrik in einem mit Gold und Juwelen vollgeladenen').
[76] Jeremy Maron, 'Affective Historiography: Schindler's List, Melodrama and Historical Representation', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies,* 27, 4 (2009) pp. 85-90.

Figure 2: St. Schindler, The Great Redeemer

The virtuous characters of previous representations had been many things, including Germans. But they had never been a Nazi. This was significant in enabling the evolution of Holocaust memory in Germany away from the narratives based on collective guilt towards inspiration for conscientious action. Spielberg's Schindler, for Baier, was a "magical act," in which "everything comes together…the monstrous administrative crime and Hollywood, the good in the German protagonist and the coping."[77] But Schindler was a real Nazi who did rescue 1,200 Jews.[78] The representation of the story is taken from the genuine empirical enquiries of Thomas Keneally and professional historians employed to advise production.[79] Of course, there was a desperate search for "other Schindlers," with articles and talk-shows "discovering" hidden heroes of the Holocaust.[80] But this effort, rather than exonerating the German responsibility and sense of guilt, exposed further a historic indifference to the minority amongst those who did act. After all, Schindler himself died penniless, his pension provided only after pressure from abroad and his name remembered (on the eve of the film's release) in just one, small, cul-de-sac.[81] Instead, the overwhelming conclusion in this heroization of Oskar Schindler, made everywhere from *Die Woche* to *FAZ*, was that decency was possible in dictatorship, and it didn't take moral purity to demonstrate it.[82] *Der Spiegel* clearly thought as much when it placed Neeson's face on

[77] Ibid., (‚…und auf einmal schnurrt in einem magischen Akt alles zusammen, das monströse administrative Verbrechen und Hollywood, das Gute in der deutschen Hauptfigur und die ausstehende Bewältigung').
[78] Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark* (New York: Touchstone, 1982).
[79] Thomas Fensch (ed.), *Oskar Schindler and His List: The Man, The Book, The Film, The Holocaust, and Its Survivors* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).
[80] A call for an expanded memory in Anonymous, 'Schweij, Spieler und geliebter Menschenfreund', *Stuttgarter Zeitung,* 24 Feb, 1994; Alfred Biolek hosted a TV show with Joachim Gauck and Christina Roth with a discussion about 'other Schindlers' in Michael Berger, 'Deutsche Verwirrung'.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Sylke Tempel, 'Handeln im rechten Moment' and Henryk M. Broder, 'Deutsche Ausreden'.

the cover of its magazine, behind its headline, "The Good German."[83] And in action-oriented interpretation, the film was a call to consider the German responsibility beyond the Holocaust, in light of—not in spite of—its memory.

This confrontation with complicity, and underlining message of resultant responsibility, was troubled further by the film's function to remind German audiences of a double-fault. *Schindler's List* suggested that something had not been done in preventing the Holocaust. But it also reminded Germans that something had not been done in telling the Holocaust. The Germans were, for Kilb, expert at "watching" films rather than making them.[84] Günther was even more cynical, suggesting that the reason "we didn't make the Schindler film" was because, deep down, one "longed for failure and rejection of funding."[85] But this was not necessarily true for everyone. One among them had tried to tell Schindler's story, but institutional and cultural blockages guaranteed he failed. The Polish Holocaust survivor Artur Brauner had struggled for two decades to make a film about Schindler but was repeatedly refused funding in Germany. Despite being a successful director, regularly featuring in the top ten of annual box office charts for West Germany, this particular memory was not one that the German authorities had been willing to endorse. A concern that "others will have to tell us our story" haunted the reception of Spielberg's film and sat uneasily with attacks that someone else had.[86] This disquiet came close to accusations against the character and capacity of Steven Spielberg himself, as critical voices looked for ever more defensive ways to justify the state of German Holocaust memory half a century after the event itself.

Some criticism was levelled at Spielberg, the "unbeatable entertainment virtuoso" who bled "Hollywood sunshine."[87] Not a few critics referenced his filmic failures in sentimental subjects: *The Color Purple* (1985) and *Empire of the Sun* (1987) meeting disappointing commercial and critical success. And almost every review mentioned *Jurassic Park*, "the favourite enemy of all European film politicians," as evidence of Spielberg's

[83] 'Der gute Deutsche', *Der Spiegel,* 8, 20 February, 1994.
[84] Kilb, 'Warten' ('…die Deutschen, wahre Meister im Aussitzen ihrer Geschichte, schauen zu').
[85] Günther, 'Spielbergs Juden' ('Warum haben 'wir' den Schindler-Film nicht gemacht? …man ganz unbewusst insgeheim und hinter dem eigenen Rücken das Scheitern und die Ablehnung der Forderung herbeisehnte').
[86] Kilb, 'Warten' (‚Solange das so bleibt, müssen uns andere unsere Geschichte erzählen').
[87] Jenny, 'Vom Großen Morden' ('der unschlagbare Unterhaltungsvirtuose mit Kindergemüt und Midas-Touch'); Hoberman, 'Spielbergs Holocaust' (‚noch mehr von Hollywoods Sonnenschein ist darin geblieben').

inappropriateness in representing the Holocaust.[88] While the critical media could never associate the film's faults with the director's Jewishness (although the more liberal were disturbed by the accusation of Jewish profiteering), references to his biography suggest a defensiveness around the Holocaust narrative, as a story that belonged only to Germany, "owning" the tragedy protection against criticism for its perpetration and problematic commemoration.[89] No matter that prominent Jewish figures in Germany had endorsed the film, the "aristocratic" argument was that Spielberg had stolen the story, even solved the question, of what Holocaust memory meant for German audiences. But if the role of the intellectual was in crisis, the responsibility of the public was clarified. Spielberg had made a film that shocked the intellectual elite for its emotive, affective grammar, and stimulated the ordinary public for the same reason. The form of the film—with its accessible and inspiring characters—was as important as its function. *Schindler's List* challenged Germany's memory-culture by demonstrating that the didacticism of remembering was more important than concerns about the appropriateness, and the authorship, of its representation.

"On the battlefield of art, resistance against the rulers is required"

Removed from the arbitrators on the "artistic battlefield" was a public enthusiastic about Spielberg's film, discussing its aesthetic quality much less than its contemporary relevance.[90] Germans in the number of 3.7 million saw the film in the first eight weeks of its release, and another million bought the book.[91] Perhaps most interesting about the academic mud-slinging was not its superfluousness to the film, but that it was so removed from the popular relationship with the film. Whilst Tremper drew on "Key Witness Himmler" to rewrite the narrative of National Socialism, he was left behind by a public more interested in present politics, and in the process of doing memory.[92] Standing next to Spielberg in Frankfurt, before an 800-strong crowd, Weizsäcker urged Germans to open their "eyes" and

[88] Seeßlen, 'Shoah' ('dem Lieblingsfeind aller europäischen Film 'Politiker").
[89] Defensiveness explored in Klaus Kreimeier, 'Spielberg, Schindler und die deutschen Fundamentalisten', *epd Film,*, 7 July, 1994.; The ownership of Holocaust memory is explored in Linke, 'The Limits of Empathy' pp. 147-181.
[90] 'Jan Schluz-Ojala, 'Challenge to the Imagination', *Der Tagesspiegel,* 1 April, 1994 (‚Da ist, auf dem Schlachtfeld der Kunst, der Widerstand gegen die Herrschenden gefordert').
[91] Michael Berger, ‚Deutsche Verwirrung'.
[92] Elisabeth Bauschmid, 'Kronzeuge Himmler: Der neue Relativismus der geistigen Welt: Schindler, Spielberg und die Ziumutung des Erinnerns', *Suddeutsche Zeitung,* 3 March, 1994.

"hearts."[93] Spielberg himself admired an audience "ready and willing and waiting," not to overcome their past, but to "bring it with them throughout their lives."[94] In this ascription, *Schindler's List* assumed a contextually specific power. The impact of the film was to transform how German memory work was done by a specific and self-conscious German public.

Schindler's List struck at a propitious moment, amongst a receptive public who had grown up in familial silence and geopolitical stress. With time, the film was examined as part of the socio-political climate of the 1990s, in which historic and familial fault lines were simultaneously interrogated. Hanno Loewy, historian and public intellectual, explained that *Schindler's List* was thus interpreted as a "reconciliation plot" in which Germany would approach the past by "being particularly good memorial activists."[95] Schindler offered the Germans an example—that there were choices, and that many of them had lied to themselves that nothing had been possible. The lay response was euphoric. Importantly, it was also inspired.

In one series in *Deutsches Allgeimeines Sonntagsblatt*, readers were invited to contribute their reflections on the "Hollywood Holocaust," revealing a nuanced engagement with the film and with its implications for the culture that consumed it. Sebastian Gaiser was grateful that the film "doesn't impose itself as a moralizer" by speaking "on our wavelength." Oliver Koch deconstructed the argument of intellectuals in asking, if the "real shame" was "why did we, the descendants of the perpetrators, fail to make this film?" Qualified interpretations of the film were made by Martha Rabenschlag, who found the film "so overwhelming" as to deny collective forgetfulness.[96] Popular responses like these expose a public critically engaging with the film and its implications for German memory work. At almost every premiere in major German cities, the press reported on the confrontation the film represented to the established memory of the Holocaust, with many reflecting on the public appetite for this debate. In Berlin, on 4th March, *Die Welt* reported that people were "Unable…to articulate their own feelings," but were individually reflecting

[93] Cited in Goldberg, 'Schindler's List'; Hohenberger, 'German, German, Schindler!'.
[94] Cited in Miller, 'Breaking the Silence'.
[95] Hanno Loewy. Telephone Interview. 4 May 2023.
[96] 'Der Holocaust aus Hollywood', *Deutsches Allg. Sonntagsblatt,* 25 March, 1994 (Sebastian Gaiser, 'Außerdem ist der Film auch auf unserer Wellenlänge, er stellt sich nicht wie ein Moralapostel über uns'; Oliver Koch, 'Latet die eigentliche beschämende Frage nicht: Wieso haben wir, die Nachkommen der Täter, es unterlassen, diesen Film zu drehen?'; Martha Rabenschlag, 'so überwältigend').

on, "endless questions about human nature."[97] In Cologne, from 14 March, the film was booked out in advance for school visits.[98] That Germans flocked to the film but were then able to locate it within the context of a contested culture of memory is evidence of an engaged viewing-public. The audience asked themselves why they were "still sensitive to any intellectual or artistic contribution to the Holocaust." Without the "help" of high-profile intellectuals, they concluded that constant reflectivity could only be a good thing.[99]

Concern with the memory-politics in Germany troubled younger viewers of the film especially.[100] Victoria Aarons traces the changing receptivity to different forms of narrating the Holocaust, suggesting that "third-generations" have a compelling impulse to understand historic events that they did not experience, while still sensitive to the sense of "abyss" between then and now. In practice, this translates to an obsessive pattern of "contemporising the Holocaust," turning its history into a measure of their own experience. Although she is interested in third-generation survivors, her interpretation applies to the third-generation Germans, who were also living "after-knowledge," but aware of their "cosmic responsibility" to honour Holocaust memory.[101] Indeed, because the film was recognized as pedagogical, *Schindler's List* was shown to groups of school children. The heightened context saw these events examined in the public press. Ignatz Bubis himself invited 400 pupils from Martin Buber High School in West Berlin to watch the film. The event was politicized further by the presence of Senator Jürgen Klemann, whose party, the CDU, was under parallel scrutiny for its anti-foreigner agenda, a connection not lost on the students who heckled him into confessing, clumsily, that his politics "don't belong in the context of the event."[102] But for the students, present prejudice was magnified in the wake of a film about virtuous action in the face of a hostile context. It was on generational fault

[97] Tim Schumann, "Der Film ist auch ein Teil meiner eigenen Geschichte', *Die Welt,* 4 March, 1994 ('Unfähig, doch auch nicht willens, ihre Gefühle zu artikulieren'; "Schindlers Liste' hat…'unendliche Fragen' nach dem Wesen des Menschen ausgelöst').
[98] 'Es ist unsere Geschichte', *Der Spiegel,* 20 March, 1994.
[99] Johannes Wendland, in 'Der Holocaust aus Hollywood' (‚Immer noch reagieren wir sensibel auf jeden intellektuellen oder künstlerischen Beitrag zum Holocaust. Das wird noch lange so bleiben, und das ist gut so').
[100] Herf, 'Legacies of Divided Memory', pp. 25-27.
[101] Victoria Aarons 'On the Periphery: The "Tangled Roots" of Holocaust Remembrance for the Third Generation in Victoria Aarons' and Alan L. Berger (eds.), *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), pp. 29-36; Friederike Eigler, 'Engendering Cultural Memory in Selected Post-Wende Literary Texts of the 1990s', *The German Quarterly*, 74, 4, Sites of Memory (Autumn, 2001), pp. 392-406.
[102] Matthias Zuber, 'Viel zu erschüttert', *Berliner Zeitung,* 17 March, 1994 ('Ich glaube nicht, dass dies in den Rahmen der Veranstaltung gehört').

lines that the reception of the film exposed the challenge it represented to Holocaust memory.

Figure 3: Finding meaning in the Holocaust: The self-evident logic of Zionism, and Spielberg's Big Finish

The film's ending is a microcosm of the pedagogy of the film, and its prescription for self-conscious commemoration. For that reason, it attracted attention from the film's advocates as much as its adversaries. After Schindler's final speech, the film moves into documentary-mode, the actors appearing on screen with real-life survivors to place stones on Schindler's grave (Figure 3).[103] While the captions do not deny the immensity of the number of Jewish victims, they fade to the number of *Schindlerjuden* who owe their survival to *Schindler's List*. This scene, for Lutz Koepnick, rests on a celebration of Jewish and German affinity, a unified tone for the victims and a conscious reclamation of German identity.[104] And yet the coda is also a bigger plea to remembrance, to the presence of memory in the 1990s. Fading to color from the historicized monochrome palette bridges the past and the present, insisting on the inability to forget by challenging the viewer to deny what they have witnessed on screen. Viewers in Berlin reflected that it would take "some time to process the film."[105] But rather than dismiss it as they had done with earlier Holocaust cinema, the public appeared more interested in acknowledging the memory as

[103] Still from 'Schindler's List'.
[104] Lutz Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s', *New German Critique*, 87 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 47-82.
[105] Viewer in Schumann, 'Der Film ist auch ein Teil meiner eigenen Geschichte' (Ich brauche sicherlich einige Zeit, bis ich den Film verarbeitet habe').

"part of [their] own history," appropriating the implicating complications such engagement demanded. It is by blurring the boundaries of modes of representation that Spielberg broke down the tension between authenticity and accessibility, infusing his film with the emancipatory, didactic role of a new memory work.[106] He anticipated and followed scholarship that insisted on historiographical narratives that lend the Holocaust a "moral purpose" and thus "emplot" its importance for contemporary cultures.[107]

Spielberg insisted that he made his film as a present-oriented tool, to teach on the subject of "tolerance and just getting along."[108] In an interview in *Der Spiegel*, he suggested that "the eternal theme" was that "Our children must learn that ours is a history of intolerance which has in no way been overcome."[109] In this ascription, he and his enthusiastic audience were leaving some intellectuals behind. Raul Hilberg rejected the "learning from the Holocaust" interpretation crystallized in *Schindler's List*, insisting that "There is *nothing* to be taken from the Holocaust that imbues anyone with hope or any thought of redemption."[110] But Hilberg's defensiveness spoke of an old-fashioned conceptualisation of memory that was being challenged by the popular consumption of Spielberg's film. Spielberg made clear that his lesson was universal, for all those who could and should act. *Schindler's List*—as product and provocation—was part of the transformation of Holocaust memory, an evolution being driven by a self-conscious audience demanding active and didactive memory work, and indifferent to the resistance of a diminishing intellectual elite.

The 'Schindler Effect' and its Impact on Holocaust Memory

By the 1990s, the Holocaust was on its way to becoming a universal lesson and applicable resource, institutionalized as pedagogical instruction for the various crises that troubled the geopolitical order. A newly European "cosmopolitan memory," the thesis of Levy and Sznaider, considered the Holocaust in comprehensive terms: a decontextualized symbol

[106] Explored in Gabriel N. Finder, Natalia Aleksiun, Antony Polonsky and Jan Schwarz (eds.), *Making Holocaust memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).
[107] Dan Stone cited in Theodor Pelekanidis, *How to write about the Holocaust: the postmodern theory of history in practice* (Milton Park: Routledge), p. 172.
[108] Cited in Roger Ebert, 'Spielberg Masters Subtlety in Film' in Fensch (ed.), 'Oskar Schindler and His List' p. 233.
[109] Interview cited in Steven Spielberg (ed.), *Testimony: the legacy of* Schindler's List *and the USC Shoah Foundation* (NY: Newmarket Press for IT Books, 2014), p. 184.
[110] Cited in Ebert, 'Spielberg Masters Subtlety' in Ibid., p. 221.

with timeless relevance.[111] In Germany, the end of the twentieth century involved academic angst about the "direction" of modernity, political concerns about the effects of reunification, and personal reflexivity about the memories that had been cultivated in family narratives.[112] These concerns converged in *Schindler's List*: action had been possible then and was possible now, in an increasingly self-conscious form of globalized memory. Schindler became a new figure of identification, his story a counterpart to the breach of civilization represented by Auschwitz, enabling different questions to be asked of civilization after Auschwitz. And the "Schindler Effect," here understood as a long-standing public interest in the global relevance of the Holocaust, was palpable in a host of cumulatively important memory-events, all of which illustrate the democratization and popularization of Holocaust memory in the German context.

This section argues that the reception of *Schindler's List* changed Holocaust remembrance and established its ongoing relevance in a new socio-political environment, a legacy measurable in subsequent interventions into Germany's memory-culture. By 1994, the public was primed to revise its relationship with the Holocaust. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the anniversary of Hitler's birth in the same year, questions of remembrance had arisen in a different way as the consequences of the Second World War and the division of Germany appeared to have been overcome. As Sandra Nuy, cultural commentator, remembered: "At the beginning of the 1990s, a unified Germany was in search of a new political identity."[113] Willy Brandt's declaration on the fall of the Wall, "Now that which belongs together grows together," signalled a shift in the German relationship with its past, away from the tragic narrative (governing pre-1989 films and feelings alike), towards what Loewy terms an "appeal of reconciliation."[114] In what Christian Meier calls the "cluster" of Holocaust debate that occurred in Germany in the mid-1990s, the responsibility

[111] In Marek Kucia, 'The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe', *Eastern European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 30, 1 (2016), pp. 97-119.
[112] Pluritemporalities are examined by Aleida Assmann, *Is Time out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), pp. 176-195 and by Allegra Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities', *Past & Present*, 243, 1 (2019), pp. 285–98; the legacy of reunification is critically examined in Jenny Wustenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 237-293; generational confrontation is examined in Christopher A. Molnar, 'Asylum Seekers, Antiforeigner Violence, and Coming to Terms with the Past after German Reunification', *The Journal of Modern History,* 94, 1 (March, 2022), pp. 102-122.
[113] Sandra Nuy. Written Interview. 12 May 2023.
[114] Loewy. Telephone Interview.

towards Holocaust memory was queried.[115] But this time, the contributions came from a newly engaged public, third-generations questioning first-generations, and the whole country buffeted by constitutional and geopolitical novelty. And this time, the film they saw offered inspiration more than castigation, insisting on a didactic, pedagogical interpretation of Holocaust memory.

The relationship Germany had with the Holocaust evolved throughout the twentieth century. The 1950s, in West Germany, had been plagued by a recognition of the failures of denazification, crystallized in the appointment of Hans Globke, former secretary to the Minister of the Interior in the Third Reich, as the Chancellery Chief of Staff in 1953.[116] The 1960s had seen the recruitment of the memorial industry as a mechanism of political power, with CDU politicians fashioning themselves as the guardians of the memory of German victimhood during the post-war expulsion from Central and Eastern Europe.[117] The 1980s involved the posturing of innocence, with conservative intellectuals obscuring the distinctiveness of the Holocaust by comparing it to Stalin's Gulags, and moderate ones resisting the memorialization of the Nazi past in museums.[118] The 1990s, however, was a decade defined neither by denial nor defensiveness, but an increasingly democratic and didactic engagement with the past.[119] This section examines two more contributions to the conceptual evolution of Holocaust memory, in which the "Schindler Effect" was supplemented. The first *Wehrmachtsausstellung* that ran between 1995 and 1999 showed Germany that its self-assured myth of the "clean Wehrmacht" was inaccurate.[120] But it also inspired "ordinary Germans" to face this lesson and act as responsible citizens according to the geopolitical pressures of their present.[121] The "Goldhagen Debate" in 1996 was

[115] Christian Meier in Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, pp. 160-196.
[116] Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 237-247; Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998), pp. 107-110.
[117] Gregor Thum, *Traumland Osten: deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 199-202.
[118] Ernst Nolte's historiography is explored in Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, *Dresden: Paradoxes of Memory in History* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2001), pp. 35-42; Politicized blockages to the creation of a Holocaust museum in Munich is explored in Aline Sierp, 'A Contested Latecomer: The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism', *History & Memory*, 32, 1, (Spring/Summer 2020), pp. 9-33.
[119] Mark A. Wolfgram, *'Getting History Right': East and West German Collective Memories of the Holocaust and War*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010).
[120] Karl Heinrich Pohl, 'War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-1944 – Reflections on an exhibition from a didactic perspective' in Pohl (ed.), 'Wehrmacht und Vernichtungspolitik : *Militär im nationalsozialistischen System* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1999), pp. 142-160.
[121] Samson Madievski, 'The War of Extermination", *Rethinking History*, 7, 2 (2003), pp. 243-246.

triggered by the publication of a thesis by Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which indicted these "ordinary Germans" with the specific psychological precondition that made the Final Solution possible.[122] But as with *Schindler's List*, the book was used as reason to craft a new "national psychology," one that remembered the Holocaust and responded with moral agency. These memory-events reflect the transformation of Germany's Holocaust memory, a change instigated by the film and established by its legacy.

While scholarship more typically treats the memory-events of the 1990s in isolation, they tend not to consider them as part of a progressive contribution to Holocaust historiography.[123] In a reunified Germany, the 1990s saw the gradual erosion of the exceptional status of Holocaust memory. Lawrence Baron suggests this was encouraged by an exponential increase in the availability of Holocaust representations (220 films employed the Holocaust as a primary or secondary plotline in the 1990s).[124] But this was also a decade in which historiography was under pressure more generally: the "popular turn" had insisted on a self-conscious democratization of narratives, post-modernism was increasingly interpreted as an "ethical" imperative to avoid betraying the past, and memory itself was the subject of comparative and generational enquiry.[125] In examining the context of *Schindler's List*, as well as its contemporary interventions into Germany's Holocaust memory, we can understand the processes that determined the democratization of doing memory, to anticipate the cosmopolitan-ization of this memory, and to speculate about the instrumentalization of all memory by the end of the decade.

[122] Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners; Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust,* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
[123] David Brenner, 'Working Through the Holocaust Blockbuster: *Schindler's List* and *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Globally and Locally', *Germanic Review*, 74, 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 296-316; Cesarani, 'Holocaust Controversies in the 1990s', pp. 78-90; Regina Feldman, 'German by Virtue of Otherness: The Search for Identity in Three Debates', *Cultural Studies*, 17, 2 (2003), pp. 250-274; Suzanne Kirkbright, 'Temperamental Accountability?: Dilemmas of Debate From Goldhagen to Walser', *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 8, 2 (2000), pp. 199-208.
[124] Lawrence Baron, 'Holocaust and Genocide Cinema: Crossing Disciplinary, Genre, and Geographical Borders: Editor's Introduction', *Shofar*, 28, 4 (Summer 2010), p.3.
[125] Gerd Bayer, 'After Postmemory: Holocaust Cinema and the Third Generation', *Shofar*, 28, 4, (Summer 2010), pp. 116-132; Elisabeth Domansky, 'A Lost War; World War II in Post-war German Memory' in Rosenfeld (ed.), *Thinking about the Holocaust*, pp. 234-256; Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2017).

The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* (1995-1999)

In Jonathon Bach's reading, the combination of the memory-events of the 1990s disturbed the "claims of innocence" that had "saturated" the German psyche since the Second World War.[126] For decades, the myth of the *Mitläufer* (the passive follower) had exonerated individual guilt for the crimes committed during the Nazi regime, enabling every German citizen to claim a mantle of purity.[127] In 1995, Bach's "innocence" was contested by the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, a travelling exhibition stylized as the "demythologization" of the self-satisfying "two-wars" theory that separated the "clean Wehrmacht" from the crimes of the SS. If Spielberg refuted the claim to powerlessness, the exhibition added further provocation by focusing on three "examples" to demonstrate that the war waged by the Wehrmacht was a war of annihilation, driven not by military duty but by a "transcendental ideal of the fatherland."[128] The treatment of the partisans in Serbia, the 6th Army on its way to Stalingrad and the three-year occupation of Ukraine were shown in photographic, testimonial, and thus irrefutable detail. German visitors saw their fathers and grandfathers killing victims—and enjoying it. One soldier wrote in a letter home: "Today we set a new record! This morning in Belgrade we shot 122 communists and Jews!"[129] So affective was the material, and the implicit challenge to second-generation silence behind it, that visitors were offered psychological counselling.[130]

But as with the audience for *Schindler's List,* this traumatized reception of the exhibition hardly paralyzed the public. Critical figures again weighed in on its "authenticity" and efficacy—its documentation, "insulting" for Bavaria's Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber, but "very successful" for historian Manfred Messerschmidt.[131] Bill Niven argues that the exhibition triggered more debate than any other historical exhibition in Germany, much of it

[126] Bach and Nienass, 'Innocence and the Politics of Memory', pp. 1-14.
[127] Helmut Donat and Arn Strohmeyer, 'Vorbemerkung der Herausgeber' in Donat and Strohmeyer (eds.), *Befreiung von der Wehrmacht? Dokumentation der Auseinandersetzung über die Ausstellung, 'Vernichtungskrieg – Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944' in Bremen 1996/97* (Bremen: Donat Verlag, 1997), pp. 11-12.
[128] Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (Taylor and Francis, 2001), p. 154.
[129] Cited in Ibid., p. 142.
[130] Christine R. Nugent, 'The voice of the visitor: Popular reactions to the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941−1944', Journal of European Studies,* 44, 3 (2014), p. 250.
[131] Anonymous, 'Sühne am Untermenschen', *Der Spiegel,* 2 March, 1997 ('beleidigend' for Edmund Stoiber, but 'angesichts ihrer Flächentreuen für sehr gelungen' for Manfred Messerschmidt).

only tangentially related to its content.[132] But the exhibition was significant for its public consumption, echoing the democratization of memory that *Schindler's List* had helped initiate. Within its four-year run, 900,000 individuals saw the material in thirty-two towns across Germany and Austria. Had the reception not been so divisive, it would have arrived in New York in December 1999.[133] But the exhibition, like *Schindler's List*, had consequences beyond its curatorial intentions which were inextricable from its popular reception. As Walter Manoschek, one of the curators, reflected, "We had expected to hit a nerve in society with this topic, but we had not expected to hit a nerve center."[134]

For many visitors, as much as a challenge to the politicized narrative of national innocence, the exhibition was a moment of immense personal confrontation. The exhibition thus reflected the reception of *Schindler's* List, which also focused on the capacity for individual action and the "code of silence" that protected family histories from the detail of collective guilt.[135] In the exhibition visitors' books are entries that express an intimate and interested engagement with the history of the Wehrmacht. From Hamburg, one person was disturbed by the reality of ideologically driven militias, writing, "My father told me shortly before his death, 'we all went to war enthusiastically.' Thank you, now I know why." Another visitor had their ancestral myth challenged by the exhibition: "Now I see what it meant when my father talked 'proudly' about his 'war experiences' and when there was talk about 'destroying nests of partisans' or 'smoking them out'…Thank you for this long overdue lesson."[136] Such affective implication broke down the constructed, vindicating images of an older generation. And as with *Schindler's List,* the consequence was neither the denial nor defensiveness typical of provocative representations earlier in the post-war period, but argumentative change. In moments of individual enlightenment, especially for a younger audience whose understanding of the Holocaust had been stymied by a culture of silence and tradition of shame, the German public saw in the exhibition, as they had in Schindler, that guilt and agency "can only be measured individually, even when it arises collectively."[137] In response, their interpretation of Holocaust history amounted to the

[132] Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 150-158.
[133] Anonymous, 'Streit verschärft sich', *Der Spiegel,* 24 October, 1999.
[134] Walter Manoschek. Written Interview. 7 May 2023.
[135] Georg Seeßlen. Written Interview. 29 May, 2023.
[136] Both cited in Nugent, 'The voice of the visitor', p. 251.
[137] Hans-Gunther Thiele, 'Millionen Kriegsverbrecher', *Weser-Kurier,* 16th November 1996 ('Schuld kann nur individuell gemessen werden, selbst wenn sie kollektiv entsteht').

"doing" of its memory in meaningful ways, understood as sensitivity to contemporary injustice, "so that it will not happen again in the future."[138]

This release of Holocaust memory into an active resource was nonetheless a contested process. According to the "tradition" of "outrage and denial" that had defined the German establishment's reaction whenever "the Shoah bell is rung," the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was "infected" by politics, in the meandering and occasionally controversial manipulation of Holocaust memory by vested parties.[139] In ways similar to the reception of *Schindler's List*, the exhibition was recruited in political debates. This was especially clear in Bremen. Following its successful showing elsewhere in Germany, its anticipated arrival in Bremen in late-1997 caused a much-publicized uproar. In what Niven calls a "rejective position" shared by the CDU on a national level, the CDU members in the *Bremische Bürgerschaft* endorsed the exhibition in carefully argued "principle" but systematically tried to prevent its showing in the Town Hall. They announced their objection on November 9, fearful that such implicit government "endorsement" would "give the exhibition a certain authority and seriousness that it does not deserve."[140] Accusing the exhibition organizers of "forgery," "conscious defamation," and a "demagogic mis-en-scene," (in language not dissimilar to the conservative criticism of *Schindler's List*) the exhibition was elevated to a coalition-crisis.[141] Such an outright political intervention prompted vocal counter-protest, including a petition to the Mayor, insisting that the exhibition should be shown in the Town Hall.[142] Again, public participation in the controversy hints at a politically engaged audience. The CDU eventually capitulated to this pressure but insisted that a board was placed outside, stating that the "individual soldier had no chance of preventing Hitler's war of annihilation."[143] Nonetheless, as with *Schindler's*

[138] One visitor cited in Balkenohl, *Die Kontroverse um die Ausstellung*, p.44.
[139] Dominick LaCapra in Caroline Gay, 'The politics of cultural remembrance: The holocaust monument in Berlin', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9, 2 (2003), p. 160; Explored in Donat and Strohmeyer, ‚Vorbemerkung der Herausgeber', pp. 11-12.
[140] 9th November is the 'Schicksalstag' ('Day of Fate') in Germany, a public holiday during the Third Reich, the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* and of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Niven, *Facing the Past,* p. 159; CDU state association in Bremen, press release, 18 November 1996, in Donat and Strohmeyer (eds.), *Befreiung von der Wehrmacht?,* p. 161 (‚Aber das Rathaus wurde…der Ausstellung eine gewisse Autorität und Seriosität verleihen, die ihr aufgrund der Bewertungen vieler Fachleute nicht zukommt').
[141] 'Aktuelle Stunde' – Debatte der Bremischen Bürgerschaft in Ibid., p. 132 (‚Vielmehr ist diese Ausstellung eine demagogische Inszenierung'); Gunda Wobken-Ekert, 'Nicht im Rathaus', *Die Zeit,* 22 November 1996.
[142] Anonymous, 'Ausstellung gehört in Bremer Rathaus', *Bremer Nachrichten,* 23 January, 1997.
[143] Cited in Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past,* p. 160.

List, those offended by the attack on a specific German memory-myth were drowned out or overcome by a public interested in confronting memory rather than selecting its expedient elements.

Certainly, as in the self-consciously didactic discussions following *Schindler's List*, the political panic and right-wing protest of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was met with insistence that the exhibition, according to Benz, provided "food for thought, and that's where it's important."[144] Manoschek was defensive about the pedagogical importance of the exhibition. In an interview in February 1997, he contended that "The exhibition itself is not a provocation. The provocation is what can be seen in the exhibition."[145] Eventually, this progressive interpretation of the exhibition won out. As with *Schindler's List*, the exhibition became a project that included the publication of a series of research papers and lecture series, and school visits were organized.[146] Strohmeyer, writing in *Kurier am Sonntag*, insisted that "young people" must not be "deprived of dealing with it, so that it becomes clear: something like this must never happen again!"[147] One teacher acknowledged their gratitude for the combination of the exhibition and the film, as "a stimulus for reflection."[148] The stakes were high, and the exhibition appreciated as a valuable contribution to the connection between remembering the Holocaust and working in its wake.

Ultimately, behind this politicization was, as with *Schindler's List*, a public processing of Holocaust memory, using it to inform, and inspire, its contemporary context. One visitor wrote with gratitude: "Thank you for the effort and hard work involved in researching and setting up the exhibition. Without remembrance and acceptance of the past there is no more humane future."[149] This was the same humanity that was found in *Schindler's List*,

[144] Wolfgang Benz in Arn Strohmeyer 'Die Provokation ist das Aufbrechen des Schweigens', *Bremer Nachrichten,* 27 February, 1997 (‚Er verstehen sie als Denkanstoß, und da sei sie wichtig').
[145] Arn Strohmeyer, „Direkt und indirekt am Holocaust beteiligt': Interview von Arn Strohmeyer mit Walter Manoschek', *Bremer Nachrichten,* 27 February, 1997 (‚Die Ausstellung selbst ist ja keine Provokation. Die Provokation ist das, was in der Ausstellung zu sehen ist. Das unterliegt aber doch nicht der Verantwortung der Ausstellungsmacher, sondern der Täter, die das angerichtet haben').
[146] 372 were organised in Münster alone. Gerhard Spörl, Fritjof Meyer and Klaus Wiegrefe, 'Die Wucht der Bilder', *Der Spiegel,* 18 July, 1999.
[147] 'Arn Strohmeyer, 'Geist der Provinzialität', *Kurier am Sonntag,* 20 October 1996 (‚Sich damit auseinanderzusetzen, darf auch jungen Bremern nicht vorenthalten werden, damit klar wird: So etwas darf es nie wieder geben').
[148] Cited in and translated by Balkenohl, *Die Kontroverse um die Ausstellung*, p. 108.
[149] Cited in Nugent, 'The voice of the visitor', p. 256.

recognized in *Die Zeit* as a "dramatic contribution to historiography and enlightenment."[150] Despite the inaccuracies uncovered in the original exhibition, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* continued to be popular in its revised return in 2001. With fewer theatrical display techniques and a greater provision of contextual information, the revamped version was understood as "useful and necessary," overcoming "polemics" while deferring to "serious specialist criticism."[151] This negotiated attentiveness to history, according to contemporary sensitivities, reflected the evolution of German memory work as something done in and for a democratic context.

The Goldhagen Debate (1996-1997)

If the public was showing itself increasingly willing to confront Holocaust memory in the wake of *Schindler's List*, this receptivity would be tested by a more direct implication. In 1996, Harvard-scholar Daniel Goldhagen revised the accusation of collective guilt in his prize-winning dissertation, "Hitler's Willing Executioners," and thus attracted considerable critical attention. Its most significant predecessor in aggravating scholarly circles, the *Historikerstreit* ten years before, had seen the well-established pattern of denial and apology disable serious public involvement in Holocaust memory. But two years on from *Schindler's List,* frenzied disquiet about the location of the Holocaust in the German past was the preserve of a diminishing minority. For an increasingly vocal majority, Goldhagen's work was embroiled in the changing way of thinking about Holocaust memory in the present, and it was thus appropriated for its pedagogical utility rather than its psychological importance. The *Historikerstreit* had failed to inspire this same public echo, not least because neither side provided a positive reconciliation of the German identity with its history. According to Regina Feldman, the *Historikerstreit* hinged on an academic effort to normalize or overcome the Nazi past.[152] But Goldhagen's book, in the wake of *Schindler's List,* was popular for the applicability of his central message of future-focused action. Questions were about a responsible, rather than deficient, German identity. And despite its

[150] Wolfgang Benz, 'Bilder statt Fußnoten', *Die Zeit,* 3 April, 1994 ('Der Film ist über den Appell an die moralische Sensibilität des Betrachters hinaus ein dramatischer Beitrag zu Geschichtsschreibung und Aufklärung').
[151] Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944; Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut, 2002) p. 728.
[152] Regina Feldman, 'German by Virtue of Otherness', pp. 254-258.

empirical faults, heightened tone, and provocative argument, the book was read intelligently rather than rubbished impulsively by a public interested in demonstrating that Germans were responsible, level-headed citizens. The trajectory of the Goldhagen Debate can thus be understood after Schindler, illustrating the contemporary evolution of Holocaust memory into a democratized, didactic resource.

In Goldhagen's reading, the Germans "hated the Jews with a passion that simmered into a national psychosis."[153] So aggressive was his argument that he was read in the beginning as a "public prosecutor more than a historian," staging a "second Nuremberg…against an entire people."[154] With the "arrogance of youth," Goldhagen charged the German psyche as uniquely capable of carrying out the genocide of the Jews, attaching to them a nationally-specific "eliminationist" antisemitism that made the Holocaust possible only as a German crime.[155] Stunned by this revival of "old hatred," conservative commentators initiated a trans-Atlantic attack on Goldhagen for "distortion," "nonsensical claims." and "illogical conclusions," before the popular appeal of the book had convinced them of its didactic value.[156] A near-identical set of charges had been levelled at Spielberg, including, disturbingly, a suggestion that his Jewishness problematized his ability to be objective.[157] But the initial reception of Goldhagen appeared to be the habitual hysteria triggered whenever Germany's remembrance culture was troubled, divorced from the popular consumption of the book. The first printing of 40,000 copies sold out in three days and 160,000 copies were sold in four months.[158] Ten years on from the *Historikerstreit,* the mood had changed, with an appetite for active engagement overwhelming concern about commemorative correctness. While conservative historians were expressing anxiety

[153] Rudolf Augstein, 'Der Soziologe als Scharfrichter', *Der Spiegel,* 14 April, 1996 (‚die Juden wirklich mit einer Leidenschaft gehasst haben, die sich zu einer nationalen Psychose hochschaukelte').
[154] Norbert Frei cited in Saul Lerner, Wendy Stallard Flory, Robert Melson and Rolf Theen, 'Reacting to Goldhagen', *Shofar*, 15, 2 (Winter 1997), pp. 77-99; Fritjof Meyer, 'Ein Volk von Dämonen?', *Der Spiegel,* 19 May 1996 (‚Er inszeniert einen zweiten Nürnberger Prozeß, nun "gegen ein ganzes Volk"').
[155] Axel Körner, "The Arrogance of Youth': A Metaphor for Social Change?: The Goldhagen-Debate in Germany as Generational Conflict', *New German Critique,* 80, Special Issue on the Holocaust (Spring - Summer, 2000), pp. 59-76.
[156] Anonymous, 'Die Zukunft soll vernichtet werden', *Der Spiegel,* 5 April, 1999 (‚…die These vom "alten Haß" ist falsch'); Norman Finkelstein, 'Abschwächung und Verdrehung' in Johannes Saltzwedel, 'Goldhagen – ein Quellentrickser?', *Der Spiegel,* 10 August, 1997; Johannes Saltzwedel, 'Alles und michts erklärt', *Der Spiegel,* 17 August, 1997 (Finkelstein, '…über eine Flut von unsinnigen Behauptungen, Verdrehungen, Widersprüchen und unlogischen Folgerungen bis hin zu dem trivialisierenden Schluß…').
[157] L. Rensmann, 'Holocaust Memory and Mass Media in Contemporary Germany: Reflections on the Goldhagen Debate', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 33, 1 (1999), p. 68.
[158] Jonathon C. R., 'Holocaust Book Hot in Germany', *The Washington Post,* 31 August, 1996.

about the threat Goldhagen posed to a self-confident national identity, their liberal opponents were awarding him the Democracy Prize in Bonn.[159] Habermas himself thanked Goldhagen for his "corrective potency," applauding his contribution to "the consciousness of the German public" as a result of its "moral power."[160]

As an American, preferring "political jargon rather than political science" and flooding his prose with crimes "unspeakable," characters "murderous," and conclusions "horrific," Goldhagen's self-confident tone and profile was a challenge to the conservative academic elites protective of their public authority and defensive about their Holocaust historiography.[161] Where Spielberg had represented a popular "break in" to the way the Holocaust was represented, Goldhagen made it seem as if "the previous literature had never existed."[162] Again, the debate around the book was indirectly related to its content and illustrated the contested trajectory of Holocaust remembrance. Just as *Schindler's List* was deconstructed in the press before it was released, the media had a pre-emptive struggle with Goldhagen in April-June 1996, publishing extracts of his theses alongside critical commentary. *Die Zeit* opened the debate, asking on its front page on 12 April, "Were All Germans Guilty?" Beneath was published the prefigured summation made in the American press: "How his provocative and disturbing book is received, by that measure much will be gauged about the historical consciousness of this republic."[163] The newspaper then ran eight subsequent editions devoted to reviewing the book, joined by commentary in *FAZ, Der Spiegel,* and *Die Welt*.[164] As with *Schindler's List*, this was about more than the objects themselves, but about the relationship Germany had with its history, the impossibility of overcoming Auschwitz, and the diminishing role of the public intellectual within that nexus. In all four papers, public contributions were printed in substantial

[159] István Deák, 'Holocaust Views: The Goldhagen Controversy in Retrospect', *Central European History*, 30, 2 (1997), p. 209.
[160] Amos Elon, 'The antagonist as liberator', *NYT,* January 26, 1997; ('das Bewusstsein der deutschen Öffentlichkeit'); Jürgen Habermas, 'Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie. Warum ein 'Demokratiepreis' für Daniel Goldhagen," Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, *Die Zeit,* 4 April, 1997 ('moralischen Kraft').
[161] Marouf Hasian Jr. & Robert E. Frank, 'Rhetoric, history, and collective memory: Decoding the Goldhagen debates', *Western Journal of Communications*, 63, 1 (1999), p. 104.
[162] Deák, 'Holocaust Views', p. 295; Ash, 'American and German Perspectives on the Goldhagen Debate', pp. 396-411.
[163] Cited in Ulrich Herbert, 'Academic and Public Discourses on the Holocaust: The Goldhagen Debate in Germany', *German Politics & Society,* 17, 3, Special Issue: The Dilemmas of Commemoration: German Debates on the Holocaust in the 1990s (Fall, 1999), p. 44.
[164] Ibid.

numbers. S. Aschheim positions Goldhagen within a progressive wave that "worked to delegitimate the academic discipline," culminating in the late-1990s as "the post-modern problematization" of witnessing the Holocaust.[165] Goldhagen, driven by *Schindler's List,* called into question the cancellation of memory and the "rhetoric of silence" that the conservative elite maintained, speaking instead to a public "tired of being beaten" by the "cudgel" of Holocaust shame.[166] Together, these events illustrate a public reinvigorated by the Holocaust Question but ready for an active and didactic solution.

This willingness to confront the Holocaust was a cumulative process. Even Goldhagen's loudest critics found value in the fact questions were being asked of the specific history and the way it was commemorated.[167] But it was the public—shadowing his book tour in ways reminiscent of a "pop star or visiting statesmen"—who seemed especially interested in the moral dimension he ascribed to Holocaust memory.[168] Tickets sold out at all five of the venues Goldhagen visited. Standing room only in the Kammerspiele theatre in Hamburg still left 300 people waiting outside. Thousands queued in Berlin in vain, and in Munich it was only with a changed venue to the Philharmonic that 2,000 people could be accommodated.[169] This popular consumption of the text was interpreted in *Die Zeit* as specifically tied to the contemporary context. Over and over, Goldhagen forgave post-1945 Germans of the "innate" prejudice he ascribed to German history. The editor, Volker Ullrich, speculated that "Goldhagen's firm confidence in the democratic capacity of the Germans to learn" was one reason so many found him sympathetic. But Germans accommodated his provocation, and for this they were "praiseworthy."[170] The reception of Goldhagen reflected the reception of *Schindler's List*, illustrating further the popularization of Holocaust memory in the public sphere.

The argument of Goldhagen was significant beyond further provocation to the "golden silence" of the German historical discipline.[171] The "eliminationist mindset" (no matter Goldhagen's appendices that post-1945 Germans had become moral democrats "just like us") entangled the surviving generation in a quarrel about Germany's responsibility in its

[165] S. E. Aschheim cited in Hasian and Frank, 'Rhetoric, history, and collective memory', p. 107.
[166] Rensmann, 'Holocaust Memory', p. 69.
[167] Goldhagen, Browning, Wieseltier, 'The "Willing Executioners"/ "Ordinary Men" Debate', pp. 22-32.
[168] Elon, 'The Antagonist'.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Cited in Ibid.
[171] Herbert, 'Academic and Public Discourses', p. 46.

contemporary context.[172] Goldhagen, like Spielberg, was conscious of the post-modern impulse to apply the "lessons" of history. For Spielberg, this amounted to the establishment of the USC Shoah Foundation in 1994, an archive of audio-visual testimonies and center of genocide research. Included in the collection are interviews with survivors after watching *Schindler's List,* many of whom are grateful to "Mr. Spielberg" for encouraging them to "start talking."[173] Not only for survivors, the Schindler Effect was pivotal in the evolution of memory work. In 2013, the organization began to accommodate material from survivors of other genocides, as part of the principle of contributing to "the creation of a more tolerant world."[174] German institutions have long been collaborators, illustrative of a national enthusiasm for this interpretation of Holocaust memory.[175] Goldhagen was similarly interested in the contemporary application of memory. In one of several interviews, he spoke of a more general indifference: "In many genocides and mass slaughters that have occurred since the Second World War…the rest of the world has more or less stood by as it did then." Echoing Spielberg's campaign, in which Schindler became the model for moral resistance everywhere, Goldhagen finished his reflection suggesting that "not enough has been learned from the Holocaust."[176]

In ways illustrative of the changed interpretation of Holocaust memory as a "cosmopolitan" metaphor, Goldhagen applied his paradigm to modern parallels. In the context of the Yugoslav Wars, he wrote in the *New Republic* that Serbs "harbor the burning hatred of ethnic nationalism and are afflicted with delusions about themselves, their neighbours, and the rest of the world."[177] The German public shared this presentist pedagogy in relation to Holocaust memory, with an urgency unique to a nation desperate to demonstrate a reformed character. They called for governmental condemnation of the

[172] Daniel Goldhagen cited in Brenner, 'Working Through the Holocaust', p. 304; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ny0EzJ3L9mc; Kirkbright, 'Temperamental Accountability', pp. 200-202.
[173] Interviews available in the digital archive of the USC Shoah Foundation [accessed at https://iwitness.usc.edu/watch?searching=true&theme=33&clip=196&entry=0_bh6jpygw&search=schindler] (viewed 2 May 2023)
[174] Spielberg, 'Introduction' in 'Testimony: the legacy of *Schindler's List',* p. 13.
[175] In 2009, the USC partnered with Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, to organize *Looking at History: Incorporating Video Testimony across the Curriculum*. In 2015, fellows from the Humboldt University in Berlin and of the Maximilian Strand of the University of Munich gave lectures at the USC [accessed at https://sfi.usc.edu/country/de] (viewed 21 April 2023).
[176] Adi Gordon and Amos Goldberg, 'Interview with Prof. Daniel Goldhagen' (November 1997, Jerusalem) [accessed at https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/interviews/daniel-goldhagen.html] (viewed 18 April).
[177] Cited in Alan E. Steinweis, 'The Auschwitz Analogy: Holocaust Memory and American Debates over Intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19, 2 (2005), p. 284.

Serbian "Nazis" and for military action, with widespread support for intervention reported in the mainstream media.[178] Certainly, the Kosovo conflict in the late-1990s caused considerable debate about the lessons to be learned after Auschwitz, a shift away from defense-oriented military policy justified in rhetoric about a contemporary anti-Hitler coalition.[179] After the departure of the first German Tornadoes, newspapers reminded people of 6 September 1941, the day Hitler's pilots dropped bombs on Belgrade.[180] The instrumentalization of Goldhagen's message in the context of the military tension in the late-1990s is productively understood in the wake of *Schindler's List*, as part of a societal revision of what honoring the Holocaust should mean. And it was not unnoticed. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Israel's ambassador in Bonn, Avi Primor, reflected on the broader discussion prompted by Goldhagen's book, which showed to him that "the Germans are no longer suppressing" but "discuss publicly and honestly" the implications of their past, and the utility of its memory.[181] In progressive self-consciousness, Holocaust memory work was a way for the German public to agitate for action in the present, conscious of their shameful history but confident in their distance from it.

Ulrich Herbert argues that "The Goldhagen Debate" changed the "role" of public consciousness, the way in which the text was "processed" illustrative of a new, politicized public sphere.[182] The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was part of this development, instigating substantial public debate about the pedagogical and presentist potential of Holocaust memory. When asked about the "Schindler Effect," Seeßlen suggested that "the three events made clear that it could happen again. That every single person had responsibility, that history was not fate but made by men." In providing human beings, figures of identification, fascism was understood as a "social and psychological reality," and thus its memory an implicating imperative for all those living after Auschwitz.[183] The German public

[178] Featuring in several opinion pieces: Reinhard Mohr, 'Verlust der Normalität', *Der Spiegel,* 23 May, 1999; Carolin Emcke and Ulrich Schwarz, 'Tanz ums goldene Kalb', *Der Spiegel,* 19 December, 1999.
[179] Andreas Heineman-Gruder, 'Germany's Anti-Hitler Coalition in Kosovo', *Mediterranean Quarterly,* 12, 3 (September, 2001), pp. 42-45.
[180] Rossella Savarese, "Infofusian' in European Newspapers: A Case Study on the War in Kosovo', *European Journal of Communications,* 15, 3 (2000), pp. 372-374.
[181] Avi Primor in Dieter Wild and Gerhard Spörl, 'Die Wunde und die Narbe', *Der Spiegel,* 4 May, 1997 (‚Mir bewies sie abermals: Die Deutschen verdrängen nicht mehr. Sie diskutieren öffentlich und ehrlich, auch wenn sie mit Goldhagens zentraler These nicht einverstanden sind, dass die wichtigste Erklärung für den Holocaust der ‚eliminatorische Antisemitismus' der Deutschen gewesen sei').
[182] Herbert, 'Academic and Public Discourses', pp. 36-39.
[183] Georg Seeßlen. Written Interview.

watched the film, went to the exhibition, and read the book in large numbers, reclaiming the collective memory ascribed to them as a contextual memory practiced by them. In this progressive accumulation of self-conscious consumption, it is possible to witness the powerful contribution of *Schindler's List* in challenging German memory, cementing an action-oriented interpretation of working with, not through, the Holocaust.

Conclusion

In February 2023, Spielberg was awarded the Golden Bear prize at the Berlinale Film Festival, at which *Schindler's List* was shown to a 95% full auditorium.[184] In his acceptance speech, Spielberg referenced his Jewishness and implied the didactic foundation of his cinema: "This honour has a particular meaning for me because I'm a Jewish director. I like to believe that this is part of a small moment in a much larger, ongoing effort of healing the broken places of history: what Jews call 'Tikkun Olam', the repairing and restoring of the world." He received a standing ovation.[185] Nearly thirty years after *Schindler's List* arrived in Germany, neither the progressive, pedagogical power of Holocaust cinema, nor the enthusiastic appetite of the German public, has much diminished.

Schindler's List can be understood within a gradual evolution of Holocaust memory in Germany. In 1994, the film was enthusiastically received as contributory to the political demands of the present, rather than the psychological pressures of the past. This self-conscious *Zeitgeist* suggests a changed receptivity to Holocaust cinema and an evolving interpretation of its function, away from an association with shame and collective guilt, towards an inspired responsibility. The provision of a figure of courageous identification, Schindler himself, to an audience sensitive to their shared future more than their divided past, implicated 1990s Germany in a conversation about what honoring Holocaust memory in the present might mean.

Still, the evolution of the practice and conceptualization of Holocaust memory in and since the 1990s has not been an entirely progressive process. Loewy is cynical about the post-millennium inscription of Holocaust memory, suggesting that it is mobilized in ways "contradicting the story" by right-wing populists. In his reading, protecting the Jews is cover

[184] Annika Kaupts. Written Interview. 23 March 2023.
[185] Cited in Ben Dalton, 'Steven Spielberg delivers memorable Berlin speech', *Screen Daily,* 22 February, 2023.

for racism, prejudice, and persecution.[186] Certainly, the politicization of history underlines the narratives of the AfD and other self-declared NSDAP successors, which is a phenomenon true of stakeholders in the Holocaust legacy in Israel and the United States.[187] Still, within the academy, the Holocaust is the "starting point" for discussions about the "other problems" in the German past, defining how Germany remembers its colonial history as much as why it doesn't.[188] But the paradoxical manipulation of memory in the twenty-first century is confirmation of a global interest in the past that includes many more political and popular inscriptions of Holocaust memory with present-meaning, several of which suggest an engagement with the ethical imperative that must follow Auschwitz. Fischer interpreted Holocaust memory work as an obligation to protest human rights abuses committed by the Serbian government in 1999, declaring, "Nie wieder Auschwitz!" as a self-conscious rejection of the "Nie wieder Krieg!" slogan of the early 1990s.[189] The Holocaust has also become the foundational principle of the European community, article one of the Stockholm Declaration in 2000 institutionalizing its pedagogical potential.[190] Despite serving as a resource for objectionable politics, as in Loewy's reading, memory work can be and is proving an important activity to guard against a top-down commemorative culture that stymies reflexive action. Even the Stockholm Declaration itself has been the subject of heated enquiry.[191] The reception of *Schindler's List* was not without controversy, but its insistence that questions be asked, and that parallels be found, had consequences applicable for political, problematic memories beyond the Holocaust. This is not about

[186] Loewy. Telephone Interview.
[187] Explored in Alfred Kokh and Pavel Polian (eds.) *Denial of the Denial, or the Battle of Auschwitz : Debates about the Demography and Geopolitics of the Holocaust* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011); Victoria Nesfield, 'The Sacrosanctity of the Holocaust and its Influence on Judaism and the State of Israel', *International Journal of Public Theology,* 9 (2015), pp. 228-247.
[188] Reinhard Kossler builds on the 'multidirectional memory' concept of Michael Rothberg to call for a more rigorous exploration of postcolonial research and public memory debates in Germany in Böckmann, Matthias; Gockel, Matthias; Kößler, Reinhart; Melber, Henning (Hrsg.): *Jenseits von Mbembe. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Solidarität*. (Berlin: Metropol Verlag 2022), pp.
[189] Brockmann, 'Normalisation' in Taberner and Cooke, pp. 23-26.
[190] Article 1 of the Stockholm Declaration: 'The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning' [accessed at https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration] (viewed 1 May 2023).
[191] "Diese IHRA-Definition ist für Assmann an sich schon Auslöser einer sich verschärfenden Diskussion und hat "einen Prozess eingeleitet, dessen Ende noch nicht abzusehen ist" in Thierry Chervel, 'Wo der Hammer hängt' (4 March, 2021) [accessed at https://www.perlentaucher.de/essay/eine-antwort-auf-aleida-assmann-und-das-weltoffen-papier-der-kulturfunktionaere.html] (viewed 16 August 2023)

learning from the Germans, but rather learning with the Germans, in recognition of the negotiated and dynamic process that is memory work.