University of Massachusetts Amherst

From the Selected Works of kirby farrell

1998

The Economies of Schindler's List

kirby farrell, Prof

The Economies of Schindler's List

"The Age of Nerves of the nineteenth century
has found its close with us."

--Adolf Hitlerⁱ

I am chairman of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill. . . . When I suggested to the chancellor that we might build a whole department around Hitler's life and work, he was quick to see the possibilities. It was an immediate and electrifying success. The chancellor went on to serve as advisor to Nixon, Ford, and Carter before his death on a ski lift in Austria.

--Don DeLillo, White Noise

There is something bizarre about the recreated trauma and evil of the Holocaust "winning" seven Academy Awards. Protesting the honors lavished on Schindler's List, Jason Epstein argues that "A dramatic representation of Hitler's crime should leave us shaken and humiliated on behalf of our species, for the Holocaust raises the most serious questions about our collective sanity, to say nothing of our moral quality. . . . Schindler's List doesn't face these questions at all, nor does it ask its audience to face them."ⁱⁱ

To be sure, the film does focus less on Nazi atrocities than on the peripheral Oskar Schindler and a tale of rescue. But the critic's scorn may be justified and yet complacent too. After all, as LaRocheFoucauld says, no one can stare directly at death or the sun without going blind. Is it surprising that the idea of annihilation in a century of unprecedented mass murder compels us to blink? To put it bluntly: is it really possible to come to terms with catastrophic evil? We live by indirection, always compensating for what we finally cannot bear. As Ernest Becker maintains, every culture invests in immortalizing symbols--heroic values--that quiet the fear of extinction and energize creative motives.ⁱⁱⁱ Immersed in the rules and rituals of cultural perpetuity, we compulsively engineer systems of imaginative control.

One such system is of course the fantasy of heroic rescue from death and malice, one version of which is at the heart of Schindler's List. To give maximum meaning to Schindler's life-saving actions, the film has to frame the Nazi horror. In effect it subsumes indescribable evil trying to make it serve honorable narrative

ends while preventing anxiety and despair from paralyzing spectators. The problem, as Epstein understands, is that the effort to tame death may also domesticate evil, surreptitiously inviting audiences to deny dread through thrill-seeking voyeurism and even identification with the powerful Nazis. But however perverse the film, we can be sure it is trying to transform unmanageable terrors into heroic values, so that it makes sense for criticism to look for signs of that effaced terror, for what they may tell us about the Holocaust and also about the culture screening the film. Let me take an example from Epstein's protest.

"In a famous scene" from the film, Epstein writes, "a beautiful boy is up to his shoulders in a reeking latrine. His expression is troubled and angelic, an expression that denies the experience of being in a real latrine, as the film itself evades the real lesson of the Holocaust" (p. 65). Whether or not the Holocaust has a simple "real lesson," this summary catches the scene's denial and evasion. But the denial itself is eloquent. For one thing, the "reeking latrine" epitomizes our animal nature. It reminds us that we live by compulsively killing and devouring other creatures and expelling them as disgusting waste, even as we too must finally die and rot away as foul waste. Fabulous rules and rituals usually mask that reality from us, yet the Nazis force the child to "lower" himself into it for shelter. The moment is poignant because it evokes and also, in the child's "angelic" face, denies our animal mortality. And more than that: it is exactly a horribly perverse struggle for transcendence that fuels Nazi viciousness, since the racial fanaticism that scapegoats Jews imagines that by destroying all bestial "filth" the killers can confirm their own deathless purity.^{iv} This is only one of the symbolic inversions in the scene. The demonic alter ego of the "angelic" child in the latrine, for instance, would be the ideal blond Hitler youth immersed in an ideological realm of superhuman purity that is in fact a cesspool of evil motives akin to the excremental mire in Dante's hell.

Schindler's List sees everything self-protectively, not quite in focus. And the distortion applies not only to the things observed but to the observer too. In the moviegoer's imagination, through the "angelic" composure sentimentally contrived by the filmmaker, the Jewish child in the latrine achieves the symbolic transcendence of death which the Nazis think to achieve through futile violence. This is a sort of magical undoing, a fantasy familiar to contemporary audiences from, among other things, fairy tales and cartoons. When the camera repeatedly discovers innocent moppets hiding from the SS in every cranny of the barracks, including the latrine, the perversely comic effect alludes to the many Hollywood cartoons in which intrepid mice and other surrogate children hide out from snapping jaws--cartoons which acknowledge our animal nature while covertly celebrating a triumph over its death-ensnared devouring horror. The sequence

frames reality. The tacit presence of a Hollywood film maker assures us of a controlled, even happy ending: such children will survive.

The point is, culture disarms existential threat by turning it into familiar heroic forms, even as Schindler's List constructs its denial out of materials from Hollywood and American, sometimes specifically Jewish-American, life. To go through the muck and to survive by cunning is a comic commonplace in the movies, energized by anxieties about degradation and bad luck, and the source of countless jokes. Among other things, it reflects the nostalgic vision that has emerged among former immigrants who passed through humiliating poverty in America on their way to prosperity.^v

But the scene has another topical context as well: the distress over the wretchedness of many American children in the 1980s and -90s. Hollywood films such as Home Alone give comic form to a dread of abandonment which in Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush is terrifying and in daily newspapers routine copy. The "angelic," plucky child in the barrack fends for himself because the adults' Europe has degenerated into predatory horror. Like the shocking percentage of American children growing up in poverty, the child competes for life against others who have already staked out a niche to hide in, and he finally plunges out of genteel culture altogether, into the bestial mire. Conceived in these terms, the film's denial may evoke anxieties and sympathies for the young outside the movie theater. In dunking the "angelic" child and insinuating a sort of symbolic triumph, the film makers are deploying images that gesture toward, and moot, social responsibility. Is the film using a contemporary social crisis to support sympathies toward historical victims? Or, in not confronting the Nazis' sickening extermination of children, is the scene also quieting our concerns for living victims around us?

| 2 |

Like Schindler himself, then, Schindler's List in some ambiguous ways goes beyond its own intentions, recreating the past through present concerns. To draw out some of this latent meaning I want to ask this question: given all the stories which could be told about the Holocaust, why are we moved at this historical moment by an account of a factory boss saving people from death by making them slave laborers?

To begin with, Schindler's List invites us to see the German war machine as a business venture that uses conquest to produce land, cheap labor and raw materials, and warehouses of stolen treasure. The master plan puts German soldiers to work transforming other countries into factories where slave labor will produce foodstuffs and goods to feed German appetites, and soldiers will be bosses freed from drudgery and fear. The film's senior Nazis command the world

like executives, flaunting luxuries like the parvenue robber barons of the Gilded Age. Even the lowliest Nazis behave like venal proprietors and brokers and consumers. This economic role-playing follows the emotional logic of wartime, in which fantasies of mastery and forbidden pleasures buy off the dread of death and the guilt of killing. Put it this way, and the Nazis' profit is not just a sum in a ledger or even a mountains of goods, but a conviction of symbolic immortality.

In this economy SS bosses superintend the new factory-states using terror as a management tool to wring greater productivity out of conquered people. By mass-producing death, the war machine manufactures as a byproduct invaluable escape from death--life--which can be used to create willing slaves who can in turn produce more for the war machine. Of course to the extent that the machine is only redistributing existing goods through conquest, the idea of production is a semantic trick and the economy may eventually weaken or fail. But in existential terms the Nazis are producing for themselves a conviction of infinite vitality and mastery. For them, even apart from the mystical hocus-pocus of the "thousand year Reich," conquest is a vast immortality project.

The film shows this economy at work in the behavior of masters and victims. As the stormtroopers close in on the ghetto, the camera inventories cherished possessions in Jewish homes, and shows us desperate people evaluating their belongings to choose those which have the highest practical and symbolic survival value. Belongings substantiate us in the world; they may command respect and even facilitate command over other people. Facing annihilation, terrified people reveal the magical potency they attribute to their valuables. The Nazis corroborate that magic in their greed for plunder. Once in possession, the war machine continues the process of intensifying value by further appraising the goods, as we see in the endless lists--invoices, manifests, vouchers--which the Nazi regime uses to sort its loot. The same process evaluates newly acquired human property too, repeatedly ranking and classifying captives for destruction or living slavery.

The center of the Nazi economy is the death camp. As factories, parodies of industrial process, the camps manufacture death with an illusion of total control and superhuman purpose.^{vi} In Otto Rank's words, "The death fear of the ego is lessened by the killing, the sacrifice, of the other." In a metaphor that points to the underlying economy Rank adds, "through the death of the other, one buys oneself free from the penalty of dying."^{vii} As a form of group behavior, death-anxiety can be epidemic, releasing synergistic rage and panic, and tightly regulated killing may create a conviction of godlike mastery.

"By victimizing another group and establishing it as death-tainted," Robert Jay Lifton says, "one's own collective existence or symbolic immortality can seem to be affirmed."^{viii} Once associated with death, the victims "can be more readily

killed, which makes them still more death-tainted. . . . Since they are historically and psychologically already dead, one may kill them arbitrarily, without the feeling one is taking a life."^{ix} In business terms, the Nazis expend "inferior" human lives to manufacture a healthier, superior society, and their profit is a sense of immortality. In this mentality the application of mass-production technologies seems natural, for the more you kill, the more profit you earn. Until it runs out of living raw material or is shut down by hostile competitors, as it were, the "system" seems superhuman.

Rather than distance this economy from us as "aberrant," it would be better to remember that most cultures sanction some predatory economic behavior. Historically the great city-states of the near east and mesoamerica were grounded in sadistic triumphalism, perpetually warring against neighbors, exacting tribute and slaves and exterminating captives. Mayan city-states produced more life for themselves through the sacrificial slaughter and ritual cannibalism of rival warriors, literally consuming the life-blood of rivals.^x Our own benevolent economy euphemizes as healthy "competition" the ruthless economic behavior documented in Michael Moore's Roger and Me (1989), which smashed neighborhoods in Flint Michigan as surely as any Blitzkrieg.^{xi}

The Nazi economy evolved within existing cultural forms, intensifying violent economic and military precedents. After all, the First World War had acted out convulsive competition as neighbors sought to seize prosperity by force. Not only did the antagonists struggle for monopoly and markets--including colonies--but the war itself caricatured industrial process. Once set in motion, mobilization in the west rolled on complex interlocking railroad timetables, beyond any possibility of executive second thoughts, and industrial weapons like the machine gun annihilated combatants on a dehumanized, corporate scale. Once underway, the hostilities increasingly tested each adversary's capacity to produce munitions and materiel on an unprecedented scale, so that defeat finally meant traumatic exhaustion.

In this perspective the Nazi economy--like other value systems--functioned as an enabling fantasy, a means of energizing the will. Dreams of a master race and a prosperous millennial reign ministered to the trauma of German collapse in World War One: to the extraordinary futile slaughter at the front and the ghastly destitution of the early Weimar years. Nazi behavior can be understood as a form of post-traumatic violence: a compulsive repetition of an overwhelming breakdown, reenacted against others in an effort to undo it. Hitler and Goering personally suffered the terror of combat and the death of the old Germany--Hitler wounded, both men decorated for bravery. In their subsequent lawless rage on behalf of a transcendent Reich they acted out a desperate attempt to force the world and self into a safe "new order." Much of the haunted feeling of the Nazi

era, including the inclination to speak of Hitler's "magnetism" and "spellbinding" oratory, registers the pressure of that all-consuming, unconscious struggle for conviction. The nonentity who survived senseless death in a lost war and economic death in postwar flophouses projected a corporate self in the Germany ordained "lord of the earth" on the last page of Mein Kampf.^{xii}

And yet such a project is finally self-confounding. Sooner or later everybody dies. At every moment we are unthinkableably vulnerable. The work of killing reminds even the most ecstatic killer of death. Violent dispossession may unsettle as well as exalt the conqueror, since the sight of victims stripped to a doomed nakedness may also reveal the pitifully ephemeral nature of all immortalizing cultural props, not just quotidian clothes and "everlasting" gold and diamonds. Like the heaps of futile eyeglasses and shoes at the extermination depots, suitcases stuffed with belongings insinuate that all our lives are improvised out of shreds and tatters.

As a result of this instability, sadistic aggrandizement tends to be self-intoxicating, and leads to an ever-expanding economy. Grounded in delusion, helplessly obsessive, Nazi persecution demands constant reinforcement--meaning ever more conquests and victims. Because the drive toward triumphal annihilation has no logical closure, it represents a form of suicidal and apocalyptic imagination.^{xiii}

Accordingly, individual Nazis have to struggle to stay enchanted at all times. Schindler's List emphasizes the irrationality of the persecutions. The film's Nazis confidently invoke blueprints, rules, and rituals, yet again and again their behavior falters in caprice. Like their victims, they are creatures driven by wishes and fear, at the mercy of the baffling obstinacy of the real world, as when the SS officer Amon Goeth capriciously judges one of Schindler's workers incompetent and tries to execute him, only to be defeated by not one but two malfunctioning pistols: at which point he strikes his prisoner in frustration and then walks away to save face, implicitly routed, leaving his would-be victim to go back to work. Goeth suffers tormenting ambivalence toward his Jewish housemaid, and depressive anxiety about the future, as we see during a medical examination. At Schindler's persuasion, he experiments with mercy, sparing some lives only to expose to himself and to us the appalling instability and emptiness of his convictions.

To emerge from a delusional system like the Nazi economy would mean facing long-repressed terror and psychic death. Little wonder the Nazis labor at self-intoxication. The officers revelling in stolen champagne and baubles are battenning on gorgeous trash that cannot save them. Of course their greed becomes obsessive: no one can ever get enough. Like the mania moralized in medieval paintings of the miser despairing on his deathbed, and like the "undead" vampire's insatiable thirst, the Nazis' appetite for life paradoxically takes them into the

shadowy margins of death. If Hitler was indeed traumatized in the First World War, then even his timing of the extermination campaign takes on unexpected logic as a form of berserking, since the Wannsee conference (January 1942) coincided with the Army's terrifying losses in Russia and the first death-throes of the Reich.

| 3 |

Schindler enters this evil economy as a cheerful opportunist. Like the Nazis, he is reacting against lifelong failures. But where the Nazis are trapped in their predatory obsessions, the film's Schindler is a playful parasite. He improvises expansively, fashioning precious *bon vivant* camaraderie out of materials--wine, women, and song--saved from the Nazis' bleak world. When SS bosses hold business meetings, they display the totems of sociable luxury, but the spirit is missing. Since goods and pleasures always threaten to grow stale, Schindler is a valuable practitioner of enchantment. Where the Nazis numbly heap up valuables, Schindler gives them away with carnival abandon. As cynical as his gifts to the SS bosses may be, they are also a form of largesse, presented in shows of affectionate play that momentarily relieve the sadistic grimness of the war.

Schindler's revelry with the Nazis tacitly constitutes a form of therapy that briefly relieves their obsession with death. With his bonhomie and his bankroll he creates play space and encourages his Nazi clients to act out fellow feeling. The therapy succeeds because Schindler can be an actor-dramatist and use adventitious props to create scenarios of communal harmony. He can wheel and deal effectively because he is an entertainer and showman manipulating the wishes and illusions of his audience. Yet Schindler himself remains almost wholesomely disenchanted. His own conviction of immortality comes not from the sadistic investment of the SS but from amassing a bankroll and improvising social and erotic pleasures on a heroic scale. As the war goes on, he becomes increasingly aware of his therapeutic influence and its power to save lives.

Which brings us to the fascinating conundrum at the center of the film: that slavery saves lives. "Slavery," says David Brion Davis, "is preeminently a relationship of power and dominion originating in and sustained by violence. It is a state of 'social death' substituting for a commuted physical death from war, capital punishment, starvation, or exposure."^{xiv} To redeploy Lifton's term, as "social death" slavery is living proof of a given person's or group's "death-tainted" being. By dramatizing the master's power over mortality, the slave may allay, or substitute for, homicidal fantasies which, once aroused, have no logical stopping point.

Slavery can also be understood as a prosthetic aggrandizement of a master's will. In effacing their own volition, slaves become tools that express the master and extend his reach. They give the master many eyes and hands, magnifying his physical strength and stamina and resistance to pain. In turn, the master becomes pure agency, an executive self that transcends his own vulnerable biological body, able to accomplish superhuman deeds. Yet even when slavery is stabilized as domesticity or sexual intimacy, the master remains a predator and lives by consuming other people's energy and spirit. Disguised in the figure of the vampire, this prosthetic relationship fascinated nineteenth century European culture, perhaps in part because the great era of emancipation aroused humanitarian sensitivity to slavery yet--until the First World War--left untouched so many other forms of exploitation, from oppression in Russia to widespread domestic service in the west. Whether as a monstrous folkish revenant or Bram Stoker's supremely patriarchal Count, the vampire dramatizes not only fear of death but also a fear of becoming infected by death in the desperate effort to stay alive by feeding on others.

A slave economy also substantiates immortality fantasies. In creating wealth, slavery creates extra, "free" time for the master--which is to say, more life. Working "for nothing," slaves produce "plenty" as if from thin air. They turn out goods which themselves, like slaves, aggrandize the owner by signifying more life. The suppression of individuality in slave labor led to rude versions of mass production as far back as late antiquity.^{xv} In Schindler's Polish factory virtually anyone can learn on the spot to run the machinery. Ironically the anonymity of the industrial process enables it to shelter any number of technically unqualified workers. From this dehumanized energy comes the factory's stock of military mess kits that supports the Nazi project of conquest. Later in Czechoslovakia, Schindler's workers actually produce artillery shells. Part of the magic of slavery is that it can be used to create the conditions for still more slavery, in a dream of infinitely available energy.

Captive sexuality likewise serves immortality fantasies. Although Jews are officially contaminated untouchables, Amon Goeth's anguished ambivalence toward his Jewish housekeeper dramatizes the cost of grounding personality in sadistic mastery. Throughout the war economy, dominance gives the SS elite access to pleasure through control over desirable bodies--youthful, "undying" bodies. Yet even as glimpses of pretty young women and breasts repeatedly evoke life and nurture in the film, they also expose the numbness in the conquerors. Hoping to be selected for survival, women in a labor camp use drops of their own blood to rouge their cheeks to a stronger semblance of vitality. Playing desperately at makeup, parading naked as at a slave or livestock market, they endure a nightmarish industrial parody of mate-selection, hoping to be selected for

life by men crippled in their sexual feeling. Slavery tends to deform and subvert the social categories devised to control it, as in imperial Rome, where slaves played an astonishing variety of roles. A quality of theatricality may evolve in social relations as a means of stabilizing fundamental contradictions. Schindler's Jews impersonate skilled craftsmen to satisfy Nazi rules. When a real construction engineer reports a real technical problem to her SS boss, by contrast, he has her shot on the spot for stepping out of her assigned role as witless slave.

Predictably enough, the longer Schindler associates with "his" workers, the more fully they emulate his theatricality. Stern, for instance, uses his self-effacement to move through protean guises, including accountant, foreman, and advisor. The film imagines Schindler's factories gradually turning into play spaces in which Jews fool the SS to preserve life. From backstage, as it were, the workers equip Schindler the master thespian with props and even sexually beguiling actresses to keep his Nazi audience spellbound. Like a harried but resourceful stage manager, Stern provides indispensable lists of gifts and bribes, and sets the stage for Schindler's wily comic scripts.

By the war's end Schindler himself has taken a moral stand against the regime and begun to use theater strategically. His business operations become more and more brazenly fictional. Following his lead, the workers in his Czech munitions plant are paradoxically able to restore healthy meaning to labor by deliberately turning out trash: dud artillery shells that will harm nobody. Like their boss, the businessman-playactor, the workers too become artists of a sort, creating a parodic arsenal and facsimile weapons for a script that will ultimately triumph.

| 4 |

Sympathy and cinematic art make it easy to forget that Schindler's List is not simply an opening onto the past but also a product of the Hollywood "dream factory" in post-industrial America. Of all the possible stories about the Holocaust, why invest so much in this one?

To begin with, the film's Schindler wishfully magnifies Hollywood's own virtues. His skill at illusion and entertainment creates a factory in which Jew and gentile cooperate to outwit tyrannical repression and foster brotherhood. This Schindler is at once noble and self-serving. Indirectly the film is a nostalgic tribute to the actual role of the entertainment industry during World War Two, when it deployed patriotic scripts and stars like Ronald Reagan to overcome Fascism's threat to morale on the homefront. In wartime scenarios little guys--usually including "ethnic types" like the film's Jews--invariably survive oppression through courage and cunning, team spirit and cooperation with their leadership.

But the film also plays out a more direct version of Hollywood's structural situation in American culture today. Schindler's life-giving theatricality combines idealism and the profit-motive as the entertainment industry does in its equivocal restaging of actual catastrophes as uplifting (and profitable) docudramas and sitcoms. Sooner or later nearly every nightmare of American life shows up onscreen, on the premise that inspired entertainment may indirectly serve crucial humane ends. This analogy can be strikingly particular, as in the misery of America's black inner cities. Like Jews in the ghetto, poor urban blacks suffer "social death." Facing high rates of infant mortality, homicide, unemployment, and health problems, the poorest Americans these days are supposed to be grateful to be chosen for the marginal jobs available to them: jobs which--since the minimum wage is not really a living wage--resemble slave labor. When rage and despair ignite uprisings like the Los Angeles riots, the cameras roll. Before long the screenwriters have recreated the struggle against social death as a sitcom called "South Central" set in the riot zone and featuring a winsome single black mother who relies upon maternal magic and Schindlerian compassion to redeem her teenage sons from drugs and crime, since she has no resources to buy their safety.

Hitler's terror-factory was far more horrific than America in the 90s, yet we can recognize the same symbolic logic at work. Unwittingly the film provides a lens through which audiences can explore in a safely disguised form the distressing situation of working people in post-industrial America. In its series on the "traumatic" effects on downsizing, The New York Times (March 4, 1996) used the metaphor of warfare in references to "battlefields," "casualties," and the subheading "War Stories" (A14). For the majority of workers real wages have been falling since the early 1970s. Despite high profits, business has systematically undermined job security as well as retirement and health benefits. By contrast, the typical chief executive officer of a large American company earned about forty times as much as a typical worker twenty years ago, whereas "Now he earns a hundred and ninety times as much."^{xvi} Since Schindler's List debuted, anxiety about the social violence of economic injustice has begun to surface--as in the title of the article just cited, "Who Killed the Middle Class?" and its subtitle, "The economy is fine, but most Americans are not--and the ideal that once defined how we lived is gone."

The film's victims resemble superfluous workers in a world increasingly dominated by a powerful elite that hoards not only material wealth but also the scarce jobs that can give people a sense of primary worth. Automation and marginal service jobs have displaced skilled workers, even as corporate muscle has deliberately destroyed organized labor. Without compunction Chrysler can

announce a bonus worth millions of dollars for its chairman Lee Iaccoca and then, several days later, the export of its K-car production to Mexico. As Roger and Me records, such decisions have gutted whole neighborhoods in places like Flint, Michigan and in effect deported the refugees to other parts of the country to beg for work.

In Schindler's List as in post-industrial America, people menaced with social death equate jobs with survival. But there are always more people than adequate jobs. In the film superfluous labor becomes a ghastly threat when prisoners in the Plaszow labor camp are divided into two groups, the weaker group to be killed to make room for new arrivals from Yugoslavia and Hungary. The selection process dramatizes the use of surplus labor to terrify workers into more and more desperate productivity.^{xvii} The new inmates function like cheap labor in other countries recruited to cheapen labor costs and extract maximum--frightened--productivity out of employees in America today, even as the SS boss plays the role of executive "hatchet man."

The Plaszow sequence has a number of disturbing topical associations. Like the arriving Yugoslavs and Hungarians in the camp, new immigrants to the U.S. arouse fears of lost employment. In the early 1980s the Reverend Jerry Falwell used a fascist discourse to argue that unless Americans supported the Reagan Administration's undeclared war against Nicaragua, we would suffer an invasion of displaced "foot people" from Central America who would take our jobs. More concretely--and only one of many examples--an analysis of the Los Angeles riots finds that because recently arrived "brown" Mexican immigrants arouse less racial prejudice in white employers, they have been taking over many jobs blacks once held, with serious consequences for blacks and also for race relations.^{xviii} "Illegals" generally have to work cheaply, submissively, and in the least desirable jobs.

The process of weeding out weaker inmates at the Plaszow camp could suggest the increasingly common use of selective layoffs to get rid of older and less robust employees who are more likely to draw costly health and retirement benefits. It also epitomizes Nazi dreams of eugenics as a pseudo-scientific means of breeding a perfect human type. Eugenics itself is a mutation of crude nineteenth-century Darwinism, where slogans like "survival of the fittest" link it to the "natural law" of capitalism that justifies unrestrained competition, whatever the individual human cost.^{xix}

In American business culture, executives justify the "termination" of "redundant" employees by appeals to "the bottom line," supposedly the measure of corporate "survival." And downsizing transfers survival terror to employees such as one quoted by The New York Times referring to a "'Schindler's List' of employees who've got jobs with our new parent corporation."^{xx} However realistic

or self-justifying it may be in any particular instance, this survival angst pervades the corporate world today as it did during the Great Depression, when it helped shape the war machine of the corporate fascist state. Even the Nuremberg race laws of 1935 construed the German people as a fragile community engulfed by a Zionist conspiracy of vast international might. In all-out competitive capitalism, survival dread justifies a paradoxical drive to expand while zealously streamlining production. As corporations expand they relentlessly force down the cost and status of labor, so that a widening gulf between rich and poor may seem inescapable.

The deep systemic irrationality of this behavior surfaced in the middle of the Great Depression when, as the editors of Consumer Reports warned, "Nazi pile-drivers [are] pounding the German workers into serfdom," while "in some of the large corporations of this country the techniques of Der Fuehrer and his cohorts are followed with avidity and approval and a feeling of 'why can't we get away with that too.'"^{xxi} Henry Ford's paternalism, for example, had evolved toward a corporate police state of spies and enforcers, which became clear in 1932 when company and city police fired at laid-off workers demonstrating outside Ford's Rouge plant, killing four. But even in the late 1920s Ford was already facing economic setbacks that baffled his naive theories and contributed to the fulminations about an international Jewish financial conspiracy which earned Ford's photo a place on the wall of Hitler's office in Munich and his newspaper, the Dearborn Independent, a space on Hitler's coffee table. Ford reacted to the shock of the early 1930s by intensifying his prejudices, flogging the "lazy" workforce to produce more for less pay. Drive down the cost of labor far enough, he and other leaders insisted, and prosperity would return. It goes without saying that not this deflationary elixir but Keynesian stimulation--justified by a world war--is what finally revived economies. Not increased executive control but wider participation in the creation and rewards of economic life.

Seen from this angle, the crisis in the Plaszow labor camp models a grotesque form of the "downsizing" which has become a commonplace survival strategy for business in the 1990s. Management slogans such as "lean and mean" project the values of an elite military force toughened by punishing training and selection in order to insure the triumph of top brass and stockholders. We focus on the Nazis' malice, but the Plaszow sequence also dramatizes the inability of Depression-era capitalist cultures to imagine means of comprehensively enlarging spheres of economic participation. Industrial economies needed either more customers for more workers or reduced costs--such as slave wages--for fewer customers. In a contracting economy fantasies of "getting more for less" make some people nothing so that others can be exalted. When some of Schindler's workers are mistakenly routed to Auschwitz, Schindler rescues them by bribing an

SS officer who cannot understand Schindler's refusal to substitute other workers for his group.

The SS man expresses the industrial principle that workers are merely interchangeable parts in a machine that serves an all-important executive will. They are supposed to be absorbed into their task to the exclusion of all other awareness and feeling--German slang calls this Fachidiotie. When the woman engineer at Plaszow interrupts construction to point out a serious flaw in the design of the barracks, she is summarily put to death. The woman acts as if her professional training gives her autonomy and responsibility, whereas the command system finds her insubordinate. Such problems of self-effacement and subordination are painfully vivid now when new workers living in highly individualistic American culture need to submit to the authority in the workplace. In the words of the supposedly fresh philosophy of "total quality management," "The unwritten standard . . . is that if all personnel were suddenly replaced[,] the new people could continue making the product or providing the service as before."^{xxii} As various studies have shown, the total number of new jobs in the U.S. may roughly match the number of people entering the workforce, but the quality of jobs--the amount of autonomy and freedom offered--is declining.

As in other areas of conflict between labor and management, when processes of negotiation and renewal break down, extremes of individualistic and authoritarian behavior are likely to follow, with a likely resort to force. From the perspective of management, it may be desirable to export jobs abroad not simply because labor is cheap, but because authoritarian political culture and economic deprivation may make some foreign workers more tractable than their American counterparts. Instead of difficult negotiations with labor, corporations can pay a foreign manager who will contract to deliver labor in a cheap and trouble-free package, sometimes in the form of company dormitories, as in Taiwan, in which the level of control, by American standards, may evoke a labor camp. Logically enough, in this country labor camps usually house the most vulnerable, punishingly driven members of the labor force, migrant workers.^{xxiii}

The industrial mentality also surfaces in the film's parody of time-motion studies when the extra foreign prisoners are about to arrive. The SS boss Amon Goeth clocks one of Schindler's workers as he makes a hinge, and the penalty for inefficiency is death. The scene dramatizes the mania of competition and the fantasy that efficiency can be endlessly increased. At the same time Goeth is also unconsciously playing out his own predicament, inasmuch as he labors under tyrannical commands in the SS hierarchy--for him no less than his victims, disobedience would mean death. Like an angry adult once abused as a child, he abuses others, compulsively reenacting his own domination.^{xxiv} In the culture of corporate downsizing, says the New York Times (March 4, 1996), managers who

must layoff workers are colloquially termed "executioners" and become prone to post-traumatic symptoms (A14).

Schindler's Jews challenge the Nazis' industrial ethos through their solidarity and adaptability. In the enamelware factory, for example, experienced workers quickly teach newcomers the necessary skills to qualify as essential to the war effort. This is the classic liberal democratic credo: that education and cooperation create a wholesome community. While the screenplay shows some Jews trying to survive in the ghetto through black-market connivance and collaboration, once Schindler's factory provides a means of escape, we see that the Jews have organized a system of self-government which helps them to make wise and compassionate executive decisions about who among them will survive.^{xxv}

As dramatized, Stern's recruitment for the factory creates no conflict over favoritism or corruption. Stern himself is impeccably selfless, and the Jews seem instinctively to cooperate in a life-saving network. Fifty years later, just such networks turn out to be crucial to political refugees seeking asylum in the U. S., but also in a less drastic way to people seeking employment. According to labor economist Paul Osterman, "an overwhelmingly large fraction of people find their jobs through contacts," and employers rely a great deal on this informal network, especially if the contact is a relative. The lack of such contacts helps to explain the shocking unemployment rate among young blacks in America's inner city ghettos.^{xxvi}

As for Oskar Schindler: in the context of American fears about employment, it is as if the callous Roger Smith in Roger and Me has wrestled with the angel of death on behalf of GM's auto workers and emerged a redeemer. In its symbolic logic the film celebrates a reconciliation of labor, management, and ownership. In this scenario Jewish victims bring about through their sacrifices a rehabilitation of labor and a mystical union with the once-predatory boss. The union is consecrated by the gold band--very like a wedding ring-- which Schindler's workers cast from gold teeth they have personally sacrificed for the purpose. It is easy to forget that neither Schindler nor the film makers ever challenge the assumption that lives are exchangeable for gold and money. Equally easy to overlook is Schindler's extortion from rich Jews of the money necessary to open the factory in the first place. At gunpoint, as it were, the self-appointed boss rescues Jews from their stereotypical tight-fistedness.

In the actual postwar industrial world the marriage between labor and the boss has been a troubled one. After the bitterness of the Depression, American workers underwent a purgative initiation rite, as it were, in World War Two, after which a grateful nation rewarded them with a steadily enlarging share of postwar prosperity. Now those decades of job security and optimism are gone. As in Roger Smith's Detroit, automation and hostile management have routed organized

labor, and once again business culture is shockingly dividing society into the poor and the very rich.

During the same postwar period management progressively usurped stockholders' control over companies, and a new myth of executive genius flourished, aggrandizing power at the top and bringing with it grossly bloated compensation. This fantasy of the entrepreneurial executive resonates in strongly in Hollywood and especially in Hollywood's *Schindler*. John Kenneth Galbraith sees this fantasy figure disguising "the bureaucratic tendency in the modern private corporation"--a term which might recall the supremely bureaucratic Nazis. The entrepreneurial executive is imagined to be "Original, self-motivated, innovative, welcoming risk, [and] a creature of the market," the market he himself is often assumed to have discovered. "His counterpart, in fact, is the army general operating with a large and compliant staff behind the lines, who pictures himself as leading the tanks in fierce and unrelenting combat." In this atmosphere of fantasy, Galbraith concludes, "an entrepreneur can, indeed, fail, but he can do no wrong."^{xxvii}

At the same time, with the end of the Cold War, the master myth of the postwar period has disintegrated. In this context *Schindler's List* has powerful ideological resonance. It celebrates a humane and all-too-human capitalist who teams up with willing workers to help defeat a totalitarian enemy that could be the Soviet "evil empire" of Stalinist atrocities and Siberian labor camps. In this scenario democratic, American-style business overcomes a rival economy paralyzed by dictatorial planning and contempt for labor. And yet this triumph pays off like a military conquest inasmuch as the demise of the enemy magnifies the virtue and vitality of the survivor. In reality living standards for ordinary Americans appear to be slipping, and slipping far more drastically in the old Soviet world, where entrenched governmental corruption, wearing new masks, now routinely participates in "free market" business, and has earned the label "mafia" from a cowed citizenry.^{xxviii}

In reaction to economic trauma the newly independent states have begun reenacting versions of the Nazi selection process, driving out minorities and seizing their jobs. The Bosnian Serbs have committed forthright atrocities in the service of "ethnic cleansing," fueling their self-righteousness with memories of the Croats' cooperation with the Nazis. At the same time, as Jason Epstein protests, capitalist trade representatives eagerly shake hands with the despotic rulers of the new quasi-capitalist China.^{xxix} In this light *Schindler's* image of workers wedding the boss amplifies propaganda emanating from corporate headquarters and governmental agencies throughout the industrial world. Toil selflessly and trust the boss and someday all will be well.

Yet as usual, Hollywood is equivocal about established power, offering the working poor a sympathetic wink too. Schindler finally owes his success to his canny and responsible Jewish employees. When he is cavalier about profits, they chide him. A vision of partnership begins to emerge. Yet no sooner do slaves and master ritualize their bond at war's end than the master vanishes, leaving behind a fleeting scene of brotherhood and moot questions about ownership and economic justice in the future. What could be a populist or quasi-socialist partnership ends up characterized not by assertive solidarity but by escapism. The capitalist Schindler finally redeems himself by choosing harmless failure over profits. In the last months of the war he creates a subversive anti-factory, deliberately manufacturing dud artillery shells. The epilogue tells us that after the war Schindler failed twice more in business. His inability to exploit working people tacitly vindicates the critique of acquisitive business that is implicit throughout the story. The victims eventually thrive, presumably through some sort of business, but that of course takes place offscreen.

| 5 |

Schindler's List celebrates evil's defeat and the vitality of the survivors. But the film's affirmation depends on a rich network of subliminal supports, and like the unarticulated emotions that suffuse and motivate the Nazis' behavior, some of those supports can be teased out. Foremost among them is the screenplay's use of magical undoing to coax its storm of meanings and emotions toward closure. When the camera follows some of Schindler's workers into the gas chamber, under the shower nozzles, for example, the screenplay has fate deliver not death but water: not industrial poison but the biblical symbol of life. On most audiences the effect is probably more complex than simple escapism, but the reversal does tame or contain the vision the camera sets out to discover.

And so in an inversion of the death camps' selection process, the epilogue marches victims past the grave of the dead Schindler in solemn tribute. Instead of ordaining doom the now-empowered survivors give memorial life to the dead. Although Schindler remains personally as unknowable as ever, this ceremonial hero-worship undoes the threat of Nazi annihilation by testifying to the importance of the individual. The story argues that a single resourceful imagination can prevail against the cold hatred of an entire nation. A lone voice can withstand the fury of the horde. As in lowly adventure tales, such a scenario can enable a moviegoer to convert a source of terror into a celebration of heroic vitality. Where Edward Lewis Wallant's The Pawnbroker (1961) takes for granted that survivors are likely to be suffering classic trauma symptoms long after the war, some recent studies report a high rate of healthy adaptation among the aging survivors.^{xxx}

In its cultural context the epilogue mourns the lost leader it praises. In an era when American business executives make more grossly disproportionate salaries than executives elsewhere in the world--40% more than their Japanese counterparts, for example--the business leader is an ambivalent figure. In Michael Moore's documentary corporate brutality toward "GM families" leaves Flint Michigan looking ransacked, so that business culture more readily evokes Schindler's Nazis than its rescuers. Hence the need for a flawed but generous Oskar Schindler, enigmatic and comic messiah, who can restore some faith in leaders without raising serious questions about any established power structure.

Schindler's workers, the film reports, have not only survived but multiplied, producing some thousands of offspring. Ancient and seemingly natural as this reverence for increase is, it also directly undoes the traumatic loss of life, making it possible for audiences to forget that the dead cannot really be replaced. On another level, this numerical prosperity onscreen could be taken as an eerie echo of the drive to produce and quantify that appears everywhere in industrial culture. In this respect it amplifies Schindler's last-minute lament that if he had only made more money, he could have saved even more lives, as if money or numbers are the key. Like other economic fantasies, the posterity-count assumes that more means better--and more--life.

If magical undoing promises wishful prosperity, it also promises to satisfy righteous wrath. And so Amon Goeth tries to execute a victim at Plaszow, only to find that not one but two pistols will not fire. Lest the moviegoer miss the hint of uncanny providence at work, the epilogue invokes a magical, talionic inversion when it reports that Goeth was executed as a war criminal--and then shows us the hanging, a botched affair in which the hangmen have to kick a chair out from under him not once but several times, each kick comically splintering the chair. The theatrical ironies contrive a cosmically sanctioned punishment leavened with comic vindictiveness. In economic slang, Goeth is paying his debt and being paid back.

Finally magical undoing attempts to reunite the cultural meanings that disintegrated under Nazi assaults. Through the sacramental ring, the screenplay tries to stabilize the meaning of Schindler's union with "his" people. After all, Schindler himself is both criminal and hero, predator and guardian angel, monstrously selfish and altruistic. "His" people had reason to hate as well love him. In freely giving gold teeth for the ring, the survivors undo the coercion of slavery. Slaves and gold teeth are both prosthetic entities: one substitutes for another. Through the ring the laborers undo the hideous death camp slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei"--work will make you free--gladly giving from their own bodies to marry their wills to the redemptive leader. At the same time the ring is meant to protect Schindler from punishment as a war criminal, so it rescues him as

he rescued "his" people. The transformation of body parts into a symbolic ring also undoes the Nazis' murder for body parts--hair, gold teeth, glasses--that can be scavenged for reuse. The ring is a pledge of mutual faith in a tragic and chaotic moment, yet it also exists within a larger cultural economy of obligations, rewards, and wishes. The screenplay makes it a final, magical product of Schindler's factory, a device meant to bring closure to the horrors, and faith in the future--and not only for those who suffered and were there.

6

Jason Epstein wants Schindler's List to educate us about "the real lesson of the Holocaust." He deplores the way some "educated and humane" people cried out against Hitler's crimes and yet tolerated Stalin's crimes for ideological reasons. But Epstein goes on to lambaste American culture, with special ire for "the literary theory of deconstruction" in the universities, because "the plain fact is that we have taught ourselves and our children to regard the conventional discourse of our civilization with the utmost skepticism, so that from high culture to low--from Plato and Shakespeare all the way down to the White House . . . we now, as a matter of habit, dismantle everything, leaving only the most fragile spiritual and cultural ground beneath us" (65).

This indignation is as eloquent and moving as it is self-contradictory. Goethe and Beethoven are among the noblest of voices in "our civilization," and yet as Spielberg insists by having a stormtrooper play a famous scrap of Beethoven on the piano as his squad is liquidating an apartment in the ghetto, it is a commonplace to lament that not even the highest cultural values stopped the Nazis' predatory frenzy. Goebbels' image-managers were able to warp all sorts of cultural discourse to Nazi ends, from the arts to philosophy.

But then, even the most venerated Great Books of western civilization can be dangerous guides to conduct. In his study of combat trauma Jonathan Shay comments "that the modern cultural habit of dehumanizing the enemy originates in biblical religion."^{xxx} The text is forthright. God promises to reward Israel's conquests with plunder and slave labor. Pharoah's erstwhile victims become righteous predators reflexively validated by their god. "As he announces his plans for the ethnic cleansing of Canaan," says Jack Miles, "the Lord does not, to repeat, seem angry with the Canaanites, but the effect is genocidal all the same, and there is no escaping it."^{xxxii} Here is the Deuteronomic prescription:

When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor. If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; and

when the Lord your God delivers it into your hands, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town--all its spoil--and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you.

Thus you shall deal with all the towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must proscribe them--the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites--as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God. (Deut. 20:10-18)

The disturbing truth is that there is no neutral "conventional discourse of our civilization" guaranteed to be benign. Christianity was used both to condemn and to justify the Vietnam War, even as the courts have been used to oppose and to foster slavery and racial equality. Nobody can trust any particular package of values to make a reliable First-Aid kit for all moral emergencies.

But Epstein's complaint about skepticism also masks a false solution. Do people tolerate a Stalin because they are uncritically committed to the wrong principles? or because "utmost skepticism" prevents them from acting? The painful truth is that evil thrives as readily on misguided noble commitment as on skepticism. It is possible to sympathize with exhortations to cherish particular heroic values--the unspecified "real lesson of the Holocaust"--and simultaneously to recognize that radical existential motives such as death-anxiety and compensatory cultural chauvinism also greatly determine our ability to hear and to be taught. In this spirit it seems important not just to regret that Schindler's List blinks at evil and death, but also to try to understand that reflex so we may be a little less compulsive. Granted, the film is a particular structure of denial and consolation: what can that structure tell us about our behavior?

Let me put Schindler's affirmation in the historical context of Conrad's turn of the century heart of darkness, where European business culture strives to enslave and reap. "Exterminate all the brutes!" Kurtz cries,^{xxxiii} echoing the biblical command that "You shall not let a soul remain alive." Colonialism in the novel is nothing less than a precursor of the Nazi war machine, fueled by racism, greed, and a fear of the incomprehensible darkness that can be assuaged by feeding on the vitality of others. Kurtz's remote camp even suggests the death camps in its obsession with hoarding the precious body parts of slain elephants and, impaled on stakes, men.^{xxxiv} Like Conan Doyle's "Small," Kurtz's name

("short") in German suggests inadequacy, and his mania for treasure, compensation for inadequacy.

Conrad was reporting on the economy of death at the same time that artists and governments were redefining heroic values at home, cultivating the serenely organic forms of art nouveau in a campaign to humanize industrial society. Government buildings and apartment houses dressed in conspicuous decorative motifs--voluptuous lilies and beautiful young women. Yet in the iconography of art nouveau, fecundity and desire play out familiar immortality themes, as in the State Opera House in Budapest and the concert hall of the Liszt Academy, in which bare-breasted black maidens form the pillars that support the balconies. In these lovely interiors, removed from the sordid streets, beauty ennobles the craftsmanship and brute labor expended on it. European art, so to speak, transformed lethal slave-labors into images of sexualized immortality. The admiring patron rarely appreciates that the artist's achievement actually depends on the anonymous laborers who mine raw materials, dig foundations, and have brick and stone into place. The exotic colonial maidens epitomize fertility and pleasure and primary meaning not unlike the "magnificent" keening black woman who has been Kurtz's lover and the "passionate soul" of the Congo's "fecund and mysterious life" (p. 60); they celebrate women's life-giving mysteries and the social dream of mastering those mysteries.^{xxxv} For the turn-of-the-century artists and patrons who devised those women, the project almost certainly had some life-giving and redemptive motive of its own. Yet however removed in time and circumstance, those literally uplifting black women, frozen in their laboring repose as architectural "pillars of society," are also not unlike Kurtz's faithful fiancée and even the young Jewish woman in Schindler's List whom Amon Goeth culls from the assembly line of death to become his symbolic housekeeper, mother, wife, and lover.^{xxxvi}

In Weimar during the summer in which Germany was reunited, in that banal, fabled shrine touched by Goethe and Schiller and Bach, a short drive from Buchenwald, I was astonished to find a street of perfectly preserved Jugendstil houses from Conrad's day, their wrought iron gates and window grilles floral, in their stucco facades the bas relief faces of maidens, lifelike and yet idealized as theatrical masks. It was, I thought, an impossible moment to sum up. The artistic urge had not stopped the Nazi mania, neither had it been destroyed by it. Hitler's propagandists shamelessly used aesthetic ideals to rationalize their extermination of "degenerate" lives. Guards in the death camps presumably felt a tug of piety when Goethe's name flitted to their attention. In Weimar I had no way of knowing what responses those sublime stucco faces now evoked in the neglected streets just awakening from the prolonged aftershock of the war. Not that art transcended the rampage of history: not at all. What struck me was the incalculable fluidity and

fullness of meanings in those illusory faces--meanings which only exist, after all, if there is an observer to construe them. At that supercharged moment in German history you could say those dissociated sphinxlike faces--those meanings--were potentially sublime or barbaric as carved stone in a desert, poised between renaissance and oblivion, depending on what the living imagination will make of them.^{xxxvii}

What I want to suggest is how sublime--or treacherous, if you will--the connections are between horror and denial, hearts of love and of darkness. It measures Conrad's achievement that he was able at least to sketch the complicity of the "pillars of society" in the exterminating economy of the Congo. As if in a premonition of Hitler, Conrad has a journalist praise Kurtz as potentially "a splendid leader of an extreme party," a party "on the popular side" (p. 74), even as the episode of the French cruiser anxiously bombarding the African coast expresses "the heart of a conquering darkness" (p. 75).

But Conrad also patiently unfolds the delusions in genteel, stupefied Brussels that keep the heart dark. When Marlow brings the news of Kurtz's death to his fiancée, she is possessive of Kurtz and inflates love to make it a heroic value that can sustain a life deadened by gentility. "Ah, but I believed in him more than any one on earth," the woman cries, "more than his own mother, more than--himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance" (p.78). Love here is economic, a matter of "treasuring": of value-making. In the fiancée's innocent and ruthless hero-worship, Kurtz, like Hitler, becomes the means to the followers' apotheosis. Through their superhuman, criminal appetites the rest of us seize our immortality.

But there is something else. Conrad's Marlow has seen the dying Kurtz "on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (p.74). Marlow could be looking into the open abyss of Nazi greed for life. But what is startling is less the brilliant evocation of that devouring rage than Marlow's reluctance to turn away. That need to witness and understand is itself a form of heroic value: a willingness to bear evil and the horror of death long enough to question it and, through it, ourselves. All too often a reflex condemnation of "others" turns out to be self-excusing. In culture, strange to say, that tolerance of dread and unknowing is as rare as it is crucial--even as I write those words I have a defensive urge to protest that I am in no way apologizing for Nazism. Like any other value, that tolerance can be perverted. It is no consolation for the enormity of real personal suffering, and no guarantee that wise judgment and resolute action will follow; yet it is finally the only way to connect the deep motives of the economy of death with living imaginations and moral will--which is, after all, the task before us.

ⁱ Hitler's proclamation at the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremburg, Sept 4, 1934, in William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York, 1960), 318.

ⁱⁱ Jason Epstein, "A Dissent on 'Schindler's List,'" in The New York Review of Books, April 21, 1994, 65.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York, 1973) and Escape from Evil (New York, 1975).

^{iv} This is a connection Wilhelm Reich espied as early as 1933 in The Mass Psychology of Fascism (rpt. New York, 1970), 334ff.

^v See, e.g., Maus: A Survivor's Tale, Art Spiegelman's comic book saga of the Holocaust (New York, 1986, 1991) in which the Jews are clever mice, Poles are pigs, and the Nazis cats. Even apart from its sentimental origins and implicit expectations, the imagery is disturbing insofar as it unintentionally confirms Nazi notions about the "reality" and separateness of racial categories.

^{vi} In Modernity and the Holocaust (Cambridge, 1989), Zygmunt Bauman sees the death camps as "a mundane extension of the modern factory system . . . the raw material was human beings and the end product was death" (8). See also Daniel Pick's War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age (New Haven & London, 1993, rpt. 1996) .

^{vii} Otto Rank, Will Therapy (New York, 1936), 130.

^{viii} Robert Jay Lifton, Home from the War (New York, 1973), 213.

^{ix} Lifton, 198. "The pattern goes back at least as far as the ancient Egyptians: in the Pyramid Texts, the pharaoh's eternal life is repeatedly acclaimed, and (as Breasted puts it, 'the word death never occurs. . . except in the negative or applied to a foe'

. . . . Victimizing others can thus be understood as an aberrant form of immortalization" (Lifton, p. 199). Lifton's word "aberrant" is poignantly wishful in this definition, since whole cultures have been founded on institutionalized slaughter and sadistic triumphalism.

^x See, e.g., The Blood of Kings, ed. Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller (Fort Worth, 1986), and Octavio Paz's incisive essay on the book's findings, "Food of the Gods," in The New York Review of Books (February 26, 1987), 3-7. In The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster (Princeton, 1993) Carlin Barton demonstrates how murderous competition was complexly assimilated to the contradictory values of Roman culture.

^{xi} When Moore shows an unemployed woman slaughtering a rabbit from a crowded hutch, he dramatizes the dog-eat-dog mentality of the new economic order. The analogy between rabbit cage and concentration camp speaks for itself.

^{xii} Hitler was produced by the tragic legacy of Kaiser Wilhelm, whose vainglorious posturing was a compensatory reaction to his traumatic humiliation as a poorly coordinated, "unmanly" child with an arm crippled during his breech birth. For more on Hitler's personal compensation for traumatic dread, see Rudolph Binion, Hitler Among the Germans (New York, 1976).

^{xiii} For the millennial ingredients in Nazi and Soviet ideologies, see Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium (New York, 1961).

^{xiv} Slavery and Human Progress (New York, 1984), 11.

^{xv} Roman slave factories, e.g., produced monotonously uniform pottery during the Empire. Scholars have debated whether the depersonalized use of slaves in late antiquity prefigures scientific management of the workforce or represents a regression, given the sacrifice of the individual slave's creative sophistication to demands for machine-like control. For a useful summary of the debate see Andrea Giardina, The Romans (Chicago, 1993), 147-49.

^{xvi} John Cassidy, "Who Killed the Middle Class?" The New Yorker (Oct. 16, 1994), 113-24. Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele survey some of the forces creating the new burgeoning underclass in America: What Went Wrong? (Kansas City, Mo., 1992).

^{xvii} Cf. the slogan on a bumper sticker I saw in Massachusetts in 1992: "More money makes the rich work harder; less money makes the poor work harder." Political and technological changes are bringing low-wage workers from countries such as China, India, and Latin America into the international labor market in staggering numbers, by some estimates as many as four billion people. According to The New York Times (June 10, 1996), the system that paid an Indonesian woman \$2 a day for a pair of athletic shoes it then sells for \$160 is now shifting plants to Vietnam, where wages are \$30 a month.

^{xviii} See Jack Miles, "Blacks vs. Browns," The Atlantic (October 1992), 41.

^{xix} Dignified as a "science," eugenics enjoyed considerable prestige in America in the first decades of this century. Its abuse in the U.S. has been widely documented. In a letter to The Boston Globe (May 14, 1994), Kevin J. Dotson, puts it succinctly: "The works of leading American eugenicists were translated into German and devoured by German academics. . . . Such 'scientists' as Charles Benedict Davenport, . . . professor Lothrop Stoddard of Harvard, . . . and Lewis Terman . . . were widely honored at German universities for their work in isolating the gene for pauperism and helping bring to worldwide attention the dangers of allowing the blood of what Davenport called 'beaten men from beaten races' to mix with pure, superior Nordic blood. . . . It may be difficult for us to face, but American science in the early '20s played a great role in the development of Nazi racial purification policies and practices" (14).

^{xx} Louis Uchitelle and N. R. Kleinfield, "On the Battlefields of Business, Millions of Casualties," The New York Times, March 3, 1996, A29.

^{xxi} Consumer Reports, 2:6 (July, 1937), 32. "It is a matter of utmost importance to remember that the wages of labor do not decline without a corollary decline in the conomic life of the entire nation (its fuehrers--for a while--excepted)" (32).

^{xxii} From a Du Pont manual, "ISO 9000 is here! The answers to your questions," from the Du Pont Quality Management and Technology Center, 1991. It may be worth pointing out the utopian- (or totalitarian-) sounding fantasies implicit in the rubric "Total Quality Management."

^{xxiii} In Part Two of Henry Hampton's PBS documentary "America's War on Poverty," a migrant worker named Hector de la Rosa describes a "terrible" migrant labor camp in Soledad California in 1966 which had been a prison camp during World War Two for German POWs. The apparent ironies are worth a moment's reflection.

^{xxiv} It is worth recalling the corporate state had evolved in Germany through murderous internal competition, such as the struggle to the death in 1933-1934 between the Army, Roehm's S.A., Himmler's S.S., and paramilitary forces such as Goering's personal police force, the Landespolicizegruppe General Goering.

^{xxv} Not surprisingly, the reality was less ideal: "Survivors testify to the importance wealth, for example, played in helping you survive." Anne Karpf, "My Mother's Story," The Guardian (February 17, 1994).

^{xxvi} Paul Osterman, Getting Started: The Youth Labor Market (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988).

^{xxvii} "In the early days of the great American S & L scandal, the principal official of the regulatory authority involved spoke in exculpatory terms of Charles Keating, the most notorious figure in this concerted attack on the public interest and pocketbook. He was, it was said, 'a very

entrepreneurial businessman." See John Kenneth Galbraith, The Culture of Contentment (New York, 1992), 75.

^{xxviii} "KGB generals and colonels now sit on the boards of commodity exchanges in Russia and on the boards of some of the largest financial and business enterprises."

Henrik Bering-Jensen, "Russian Spies: Lean, Mean, and Ready for Profit," Insight, 10:20 (May 16, 1994), 7.

^{xxix} The "admirers of Spielberg's film in their Academy Award chatter have said nothing about China, whose crimes are no less evil than Hitler's" (65). In the meantime Washington has altogether "de-linked" the issues of human rights in China and trade privileges, confirming Epstein's point.

^{xxx} See, e.g., William B. Helmreich, Against all Odds : Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America (New York, 1992).

^{xxxi} Jonathan Shay, Achilles in Vietnam (New York, 1994), 104.

^{xxxii} Jack Miles, God: a Biography (New York 1995, rpt. 1996), 117. The biblical passage below is from Miles, 144-45.

^{xxxiii} Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York, 1963), 51.

^{xxxiv} The Belgian commission of inquiry sent in 1904 to the Congo Free State confirmed the abuses that reformers had been bitterly deploring, yet in deference to business, the commission accepted forced labor as the only possible means of exploiting the country's riches. The first twentieth century concentration camps were probably the crude compounds the British constructed in the campaign against the Boers just as Queen Victoria was dying. Interned Boer families died of disease in scandalous numbers and caused an outcry in England and in Europe.

^{xxxv} In the context of European imperialism, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar summarize, "women = 'outlanders' / 'barbarians' = colonized peoples, and hence colonized peoples = women, a point that Freud emphasized when he defined female sexuality as a 'dark continent' and to which Ashley Montagu implicitly addresses himself when he reminds us of the 'Victorian saying that the last thing man would civilize would be woman.'" See Sexchanges, Vol. 2 of No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (New Haven, 1989), p. 36, also 44-46. Lewis Wurgaft details the British association of colonial India with sexuality in The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kipling's India (Middletown, CT, 1983).

^{xxxvi} The perversity is explicit in Huysmans' A Rebours (1884), which deeply aroused Oscar Wilde. The novel imagines the decadent des Esseintes staging a fabulous "funeral feast to mark the most ludicrous of personal misfortunes," the guests "waited on by naked negresses wearing only slippers and stockings in cloth of silver embroidered with tears" (27). Despite the decadent irony, the larger cultural fantasy is perfectly clear: exotic, degraded women comfort and heal morbid elite males. To observe the same formula in 1990s Hollywood films about executives rescued from death-anxiety by good-hearted hookers, see the following chapter.

^{xxxvii} To compound ironies, those art nouveau forms recall the peaceable Decadents of the 1890s, including of course Wilde, although in Fascism: Past, Present, Future (Oxford, 1996) Walter Laquer remarks on the transformation of world-weary dandies like Maurice Barres and Gabriele D'Annunzio into advocates of superpatriotism and antiliberal ideas "that came close to fascism" (234).