

In this report I will be studying the American Director and Producer Steven Spielberg who commenced his career in 1969 and is still working to this present day. He has a plethora of films to his name including *Jaws* (1975), *Schindler's List* (1993), and *Jurassic Park* (1993) to name but a few. The themes running throughout many of his films are related to ordinary people encountering extraordinary beings finding themselves in extraordinary circumstances. The themes seen throughout his films include interactions between characters and the relationship and tensions between parents and children. Whilst looking at these three films, I will examine how his films challenge the existing conventions through concentrating on narrative, genre, subject, cinematic form and the industry.

As we look at the iconic films *Jaws*, *Schindler's List* and *Jurassic Park*, it is evident that Steven Spielberg is a filmmaker who works in a variety of genres such as thriller, historical drama, science fiction adventure rather than adhering to one particular genre (Stephens 2010). Stephen's (2010) states that Spielberg is different to other directors who frequently push a specific genre therefore his films appeal to a wider audience. Spielberg is seen as a Director and Producer who has paved the way with his action and special effects movies for a new generation of movies to follow using big budgets and even larger special effects. The types of films he has produced has also encouraged the move into the growth in merchandise that now go hand in hand with these blockbuster movies.



Spielberg's film *Jaws* was a huge success in 1975 as it was so unlike any other film that was produced before. It is now seen as a template of the blockbusters that followed (Kermode 2015). *Jaws* is seen as the film that became the first summer blockbuster (McCormack 2011) but unlike the glossy look of the films that followed, aesthetically Spielberg used a naturalistic gritty style which reflected Hollywood's 1970 cinematic style (Rowley 2006). Indeed, Rowley (2006) states that this film far from ruining the cinema, set a benchmark for future blockbusters which he feels has rarely since been successfully achieved. Movies are now seen as being a success or failure due to their audience figures and the financial success achieved. *"If it's not a hundred-million-dollar movie, it doesn't get the kind of support it needs from the studio"* – (Kermode 2015). *"Clearly investing vast sums of money into a film is a popular concept in Hollywood in the hope"* that a *"large budget"* hopefully means a substantial profit. Spielberg's *Jaws* is an example of this states Roebuck (2016).

Although blockbusters have resulted in film franchising which initially can be very successful in audience sizes and financial gain. However, the commitment to the franchise is not based on passion of the material but how well the merchandise can do. It can also result in failure as sequels do not always live up to the initial success of the first film. Huls (2013) states that *"great movies can beget great change in part by inspiring a generation of not so great movies"*. Furthermore Huls (2013) comments that Spielberg cannot be held responsible for blockbusters being a cinematic form that can on occasions represent movies as bombastic and vacuous but more it is the result of Hollywood taking a lucrative formula to use time and again to reap monetary reward.

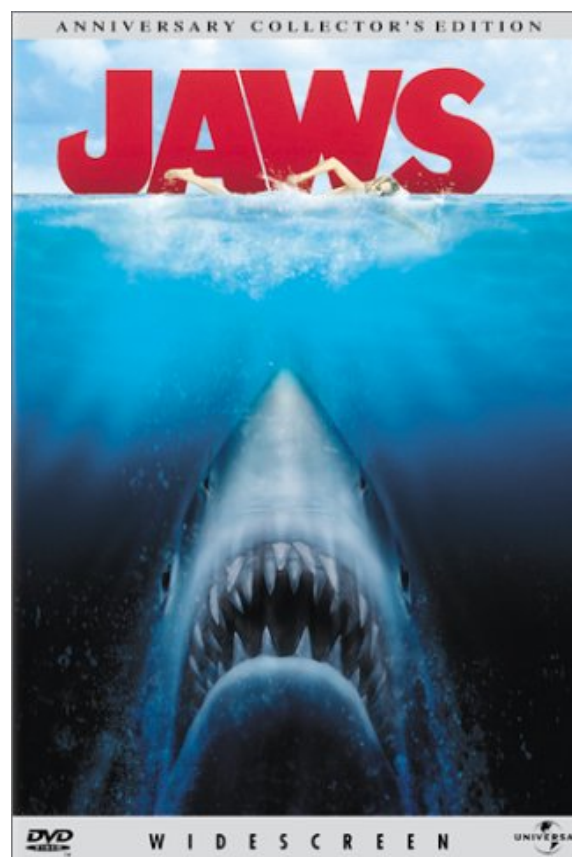
According to Fisher (2015), *Jaws* is seen as one of the most influential movies in film history. In 1975 *Jaws* was the top spot at the box office. This film was a start of a trend where blockbusters were released in the summer season previously seen as a time when fewer people went to the cinema. Spielberg changed how movies were produced and released when he started advertising the film through marketing using trailers, talk shows and test screenings (McCormack 2011). He spent over 2 million dollars in the promotion of the film and also decided to undertake wide opening where the film was screened in over 465 theatres which flooded the market from day one. This format of marketing resulted in the public going in droves to see the film resulting in its blockbuster status and this format is one that is still being used in today's films. Therefore, *Jaws* was pioneering in revolutionizing the movie industry marketing format (McCormack 2011).

Spielberg's clever use of a subject that although obviously fiction was rooted in science and something that people think that could happen resulted in audiences staying away from beaches and water. This shows how powerfully this film

influenced individuals at the time the movie was shown. Spielberg also credits the music for "half of the success" of *Jaws* at a time when the use of big orchestras had been abandoned by the industry when producing film scores.

The use of this format was as integral to the movie as it heightened the suspense and fear for the audience (Juul 2015). By using a simple but terrifying score that even 40 years on is now inseparable from the film and is now seen as part of the *Jaws* legacy. Furthermore,

McCormack (2011) stated that John Williams score played an important role in the branding of *Jaws*. The lasting effect of this score on Hollywood and the film industry was the introduction of improved sound systems in theatres and encouraging composers and studios to approach film scores in a different way (Juul 2015). Jack Freeman, Professor of film scoring states that *Jaws* raised the perception and expectations for future movie scores. The way *Jaws* branded the music and graphics was impactful and consistent resulting in the film still being iconic to the present day (McCormack 2011). *Jaws* challenged conventions not only with its marketing and blockbuster status but also with its music and narrative.

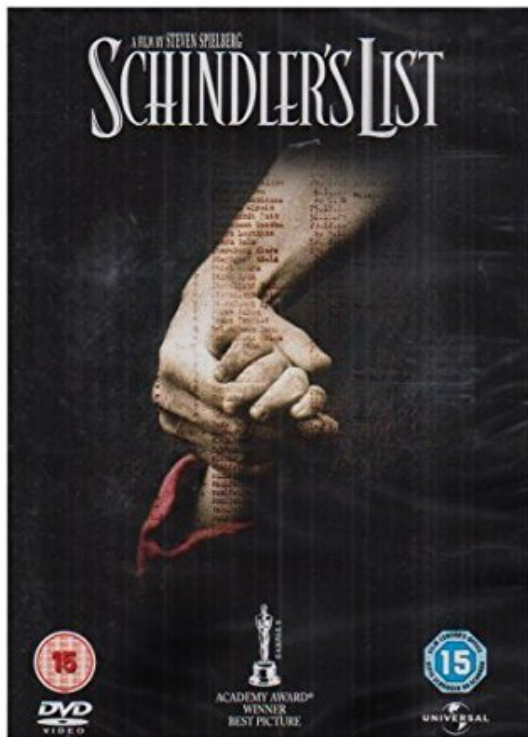


Schindler's List stands apart from his previous films as it has an importance and quality as unlike anything else he's made, as his subject matter is grounded in the reality of history (Rowley 2006). The film received seven academy awards and can be seen as one of the "greatest film of all time". According to Stephens (2010) *Schindler's List* wasn't a blockbuster movie, however it showed the Holocaust in a different perspective as the narrative used was that of Schindler, a complicated hero

and how he in a hostile environment succeeded in helping some of the Jews survive the war. Some say that Schindler's List is the most successful film about the Holocaust as it's a true authentic story that has taken real life accounts from people who survived this experience. However, it has its critics and Claude Lanzmann and J. Hoberman had both voiced their criticism as the film being that described as

"a feel-good entertainment about the ultimate feel bad experience of the twentieth century" (McBride 1997). Rowley (2006) feels that this is an unfair criticism as the film by focusing on the stories of the survivors never attempts to gloss over the horror of the Holocaust.

The themes seen in this film is of hope and innocence in the face of adversity. This is shown by Spielberg through the use of sound, lighting and colour. Spielberg wanted Schindler's List to be shot



in black and white, as he states *"all the photos of the holocaust are in black and white. In colour, it looks Hollywoodized."* His intention by using this technique was to make the film feel and look in parts like a documentary (Rowley 2006). Spielberg quoted *"Colour is real to the people who survived the Holocaust. But to people who are going to watch the story for the first time, I think black and white is going to be the real experience"* (Bullock 2017). Frank Capra who directed *'Why We Fight'* for the US Army shot footage of Dachau and Duben and *"opened the world's eyes to the monstrosity of the Holocaust"* this documentary style footage inspired Spielberg stylistic choice (White 2017). Furthermore George Stevens, another director also involved in filming for the US Army in World War Two realised on entering the camps that he was not there to shoot newsreels or for propaganda but to document *"history in the deepest sense"* (White 2017). Rowley

(2006) mentions that Spielberg instinct in storytelling is very much in evidence is never dull and has been shot impeccably resulting in showcasing in a simple style the horrors of the Holocaust. This emotionally devastating film brought the horrors of the holocaust alive to the audiences of the time and still stands as an important film to this day. At the time of Schindler's List, Spielberg is challenging the Hollywood elite by moving away from the blockbuster sensational money-making film to one that challenges the audiences to look at the Holocaust and understand the horrors of this period of history.

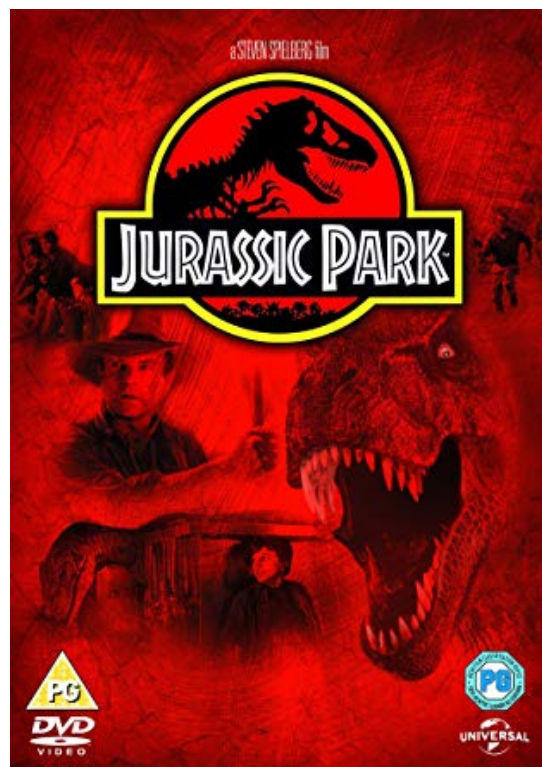
Haskell (2018) felt that this was a watershed movie for Spielberg, Holocaust and Judaism. She discusses it is a *"magisterial"* movie in which Spielberg was able to depict a horrific period in history. Spielberg feels this film isn't just good for those who suffered but for all humanity as it tells the story of the Holocaust and gives people the opportunity to see how such horrors occurred in order to prevent them happening in the future. As the old adage says, *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"* (Bullock 2017). Spielberg used the accounts of former victims of the

concentration camps to portray the truth accurately, however this took its toll on all those who were involved in the film.

As a result of the making of the film, Spielberg was responsible for establishing The Shoah Foundation which utilized and recorded for posterity the recordings of Spielberg's encounters with numerous Holocaust survivors whilst filming *Schindler's List* in Krakow Poland. *Schindler's List* was very successful, and Spielberg used the profits from this film to set up Shoah which is a non-profit foundation that archived the Holocaust survivors' testimonies (Cohen 2014). This foundation was set up in order to preserve the Holocaust survivors' testimonies to educate the future generation. This is a very important legacy and one that had personal reference to Spielberg as he himself is a Jew. Stephen Smith, executive Director of Shoah expressed the belief that Spielberg is the only person that he knew who had the vision and integratory to set up the foundation (Cohen 2014). This film challenged existing conventions as it was a true reflection of history (Abrams 2003) by educating people of the horrors that some people to this day deny as having occurred (Lipstadt 2011). It gives a realistic first-hand experience as Spielberg recorded real life accounts from survivors he met to build up a narrative that only shows the truth of what happened in the Holocaust. Spielberg's intent was not that of making money and entertainment but to help make a living historical legacy one that in spite of its subject the film is one of hope as it sees some survive even amidst mass slaughter.

Jurassic park although released in the same year as *Schindler's List* is a total departure from the serious subject of the Holocaust. Jurassic Park is a film based on visitors to a park populated by dinosaurs which escape with devastating effect.

This film started another franchise and was released in 1993 with a new film *Fallen Kingdom* being released in 2018 showing the longevity of the brand and its appeal to the audience continues with the latest film again being a summer hit. Jurassic Park took in the first ten days 120 million dollars states Sears (2018). The film is a mixture of the genres adventure, science fiction and thriller and required Spielberg utilizing animatronics Computer Generated Images (CGI) and special effects in order to achieve a spectacular action-packed film. This film was one of the first major picture to use CGI (Bailey 2015). Jenkins (2015) commented that on seeing the footage of the dinosaur George Lucas deemed it a *"lightbulb"* moment where a void had been filled *"and things were never going to be the same again"* in filmmaking. The revolution created by



Jurassic Park was technological as the audiences could actually believe the images that burst to life on screen. McBride (1997) states that special effects assist in the dynamism and the credibility to the film in a spectacular manner but rather than challenging ideas or forms it only resulted in making the

movies more spectacular for the audience. Furthermore, the use of technology special effect, sound and image now places a premium on sensationalism.

Jenkins (2015) notes that some critics dismissed the film as having bad scripts and bad acting however he felt that the imaginative effects outweighed all of this. Jenkins (2015) also extols the movie as being one that showcases its own production and was the beginning of a new era in film production. Steven Spielberg although seen as the architect of CGI and special effects does not believe that these should not be used in discriminatively but should only be used if it's relevant to a story. As Spielberg comments on the variety of tools, moviemakers now have available, it's their individual choice on how these are used as reported by Sunday Express (2010).

Today's audience see CGI in most of the major movies produced and can now be seen in some instances as the driving force rather than a moviemaking tool (Huls 2013) and the wonder the viewing public originally experienced in the film Jurassic park has faded a little. However, this does not detract from the importance of Spielberg originally being the architect in bringing CGI and special effects to the big screen. *"This brand of movie was to become the norm at multiplexes the world over"*- (Jenkins 2015). Spielberg massively changed existing conventions as the use of CGI and Special Effects as seen in Jurassic Park has made anything possible in today's film industry. This was a huge transformation that offered endless possibilities for future film makers. Spielberg's Jurassic Park *"changed Hollywood forever"* and although technology has evolved *"the CGI in Jurassic Park does not feel dated"* even after 25 years after its release quotes Rawat (2018) from the Indian Express.

Following the analysis of Steven Spielberg's three films, I have concluded that he is an inspiring Director and Producer who has honed his craft over many years. He has shown that it is possible to work in a variety of genres and become successful in changing existing conventions by reaching a larger audience. Spielberg is an iconic figure for future filmmakers as his work regularly challenges conventions as seen in Jaws, Schindler's List and Jurassic Park. However, this isn't limited to the films I've discussed. Spielberg has received many awards from Hollywood and his peers for his inspiring work and is an inspiration to new filmmakers. Spielberg's film Jaws opened up doors for some of modern-day blockbusters by also introducing marketing techniques that had never been done before. This resulted in the movie industry adapting his strategies in order to make films more lucrative. This technique is forever being used in today's society to capture audience's attention in which Spielberg's film Jaws plays an influential part of changing the conventions. Steven Spielberg has not only succeeded in making big blockbuster movies but has also achieved success with Schindler's List as a historical movie in order to educate future generations and to set up an organization to document remembrance of the Holocaust. He is no ordinary filmmaker as he has challenged the way films are made and how they influence society by also using his profits in a way to improve the world we live in. Spielberg is also responsible for using new techniques of CGI and special effects which has revolutionized the making of movies and is seen as a lightbulb moment where anything is possible in the making of a film. Steven has massively changed conventions in many of his films and will always be known for *"changing Hollywood forever"*.

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