The Smile in *Son of Saul*: A Test of Différance

Abstract

This article investigates the smile that features in the climax of László Nemes' Hungarian Holocaust film, *Son of Saul* (2015). The smile, a happy response in the face of death, is argued as emblematic of the film's problematising of choice. The facial gesture re-presents the dilemma of choice in ways that expose the limits of Jacques Derrida's notion of différance.

In Holocaust discourse, Primo Levi and Lawrence L. Langer have spoken of death camps as sites of extreme coercion where choice was rendered inoperable.[1] This inoperability has been reflected on by Levi as a hindrance to accounting for acts of complicity committed by prisoners under duress.[2] This dilemma in Holocaust discourse is reworked in the Hungarian Holocaust film, *Son of Saul* (*Saul Fia*, Nemes, 2015), which problematises choice in an affirmative context. Events in *Son of Saul* unfold at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where a member of the Sonderkommando, known as Saul Ausländer, sets out to bury a boy he claims as his son. The resurrection of choice by means of burial (responsibility to the dead) is an uplifting premise. It re-presents death as that which gives agency and reflects redemptively on the Sonderkommando, a category of prisoners coerced – under threat of immediate death – into dispatching new arrivals to the gas chamber and dumping their dead bodies in ovens.

The mission, however, is potentially fatal on account of the ban on burial at Auschwitz. As such, burial represents a problematic choice on two accounts. One, the mission cuts into an uprising organised by Ausländer's fellow members. This bid for survival draws on the historic (but abortive) rebellion led by the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz-Birkenau in October 1944. In the film, the uprising is shown to be jeopardised by Saul who, in his fixation with finding a rabbi for his son's burial rites, misplaces the gunpowder required for blowing up the crematoriums.

Two, burial's intrinsic association with the possibility of afterlife heightens the tension between survival and death, which the dilemma of choice pivots on. The protagonist's insistence on an orthodox Jewish burial suggests that the possibility of afterlife (survival through death) underpins his commitment to the dead. This suggestion, borne out in the film's ending, foregrounds the indeterminacy that characterises Saul's choice to respond to the dead, which involves a sacrifice of, as well as a re-turn to, survival. In choosing to bury the dead, what is Ausländer responding to: death, survival, or both?

The inscrutability of Saul's choice is grounded in the notion of afterlife, which points to a co-implication of survival and death. The latter is embodied by Saul's "son", the boy who, miraculously, survives the gas chamber, but is promptly asphyxiated by a Nazi officer. The porous border between survival and death harbours a great deal of philosophical significance, in that it represents a rethinking of survival and death in the context of a death camp, where life and death manifest themselves in literal, physical terms. Although the value of survival applies, first and foremost, particularly in concentration camps, to physical existence, this basic level is shown to link up with bigger, unanswerable questions, such as what does survival involve? For survival can only be in relation to death, or that which compromises life; as such, it potentially reflects on living as that which involves enduring the death(s) that life gives.

Fig.1: Saul's "son" surviving death by gassing.

This article examines the survival-death co-implication, its problematizing of choice, in the context of the film's ending. The latter features a close-up of Ausländer, who gives a smile that coincides with his death and links up with a doubtful manifestation of his son's afterlife. Representing a heightened manifestation of the co-implication, the smile reflects subversively on afterlife and sheds light on the relation between choice and death. In so doing, the smile overlaps with and exceeds Jacques Derrida's reading of response-ability in *The Gift of Death* (1992/1995) and his unravelling of burial in the Third, Fifth and Sixth sessions in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2002-03/2011).[3] In *The Gift of Death*'s re-reading of Genesis 22, Abraham's unfathomable choice to sacrifice his son to God reflects on responsibility as an ability which, conditioned by mortal limitations, exposes the choicelessness that underpins a response the self chooses to give. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, the mortal inability to access death is shown to problematise the possibility of choosing between burial and cremation. Derrida's readings, in which the deconstruction of immortality is inextricably tied to the (un)making of choice, revolve around the problem of giving meaning to death. Saul's happy response to death gives an unforeseen slant to this problem. In so doing, the smile brings about a significant shift in the spectator's response to Derrida's grounding of representation in the otherness of death.

The otherness of death, which the smile bears a complex relation to, is constructed in *Son of Saul* through an innovative use of sound design and framing techniques. As demonstrated in my reading of the climax, in order to convey death's inaccessibility, the film relies heavily on sound because it is challenging to locate and difficult to shut out in the context of audio-visual works. Encompassing "all of the senses",[4] not merely the visual sense, which gives the viewer the illusion of mastery,[5] *Son of Saul* keeps the otherness of death in focus by excluding death visually but keeping it within the frame through sound.[6]

The inside-outside feature of death also applies to the film's use of the first-person point of view. For the camera stalks Saul, leaving the viewer no choice but to witness events at Auschwitz-Birkenau from the perspective of the protagonist's "self-imposed" mission of burial.[7] Yet this enforced intimacy, compelling the spectator to "fixat[e] on" the "*X*" printed on the back of Saul's jacket,[8] gives no access as such to the protagonist's mission, which is said to bear an "air of solipsism".[9] The viewer finds it challenging to make sense of the mission because burial represents a response to *death*, which is off-limits to Saul and the viewer. These challenges are set up through "immersive" techniques, which, via their maze-like effect on the spectator,[10] bring home how "disorienting the camps would have been to actual prisoners".[11] The film's "subjective point of view", which gives the viewer access to a "person lost in the maze",[12] "keep[s] Saul in focus as an object of study".[13] In *my* reading of the smile, the "object[ive]" focus on the problem of subjectivity shifts from the protagonist to the viewer. In light of Derrida's readings, this shift is shown to heighten the film's deconstruction of the first-person point of view. The latter, which, throughout the film, gives "access" from the perspective of mystification, disorientation and detachment, comes undone on account of the smile, in a manner that leaves the viewer feeling conflicted.

Although critics have overlooked the smile's critical impact on the spectator's response-ability, what they have commented on is the bias that is built into the facial gesture. Amir Ganjavie regards Saul's smile as "delusion[al]".[14] Nemes gives a more nuanced reading, which represents the ending as "hopeful", [15] yet does not negate the deluded status of the smile: "[A]ny way, any means, and path to the inner voice is a good way".[16] Margaret Gibson and Amanda Howell, who look into the figure of the child, with respect to the void it represents in Holocaust discourse,[17] fail to spot the deluded dimension of the smile. As illustrated in my analysis, due to

this failure, the study loses sight of what is singular about the climax, its laying bare of the smile's biased condition and the drastic shift this brings about in the first-person point of view. Lastly, I build on Stuart Liebman's reading of the blind spot that constitutes the smile. In responding to the gaps in this reading, I flesh out a vital dimension to the smile, namely its performance of the bias intrinsic to signification. This fleshing out draws on Derrida's readings of response-ability and burial, both of which are underpinned by his notion of différance (his reading of representation).

Derrida's Readings of Life-Death

In *The Gift of Death* and the sessions, the mortality that conditions representation is brought to bear on responses to immortality, with respect to what they imply about "choice". In these readings, immortality emerges as an involuntary response conditioned by our subjection to death. From the perspective of *Son of Saul*, which probes signification via the survival-death co-implication, what is noteworthy is that these readings revolve around the unstable border between life and death.[18] This problematic border is at the heart of Derrida's writings, which deconstruct the mortal condition in terms of "life-death, or else survival, living on".[19]

The implication that death sustains life is exemplified by différance, which demonstrates that death is put to work – in the form of exclusionary violence – to give meaning. The exclusionary violence of signification takes place through difference and deferral, forces that are embodied by différance. For Derrida coined the notion from the French word différence, meaning to differ from something, or to defer something, depending on the context. In substituting "a" in place of "e", he highlights that difference and deferral take place simultaneously in signification. Via this simultaneity, the differential relations between signs,

which give rise to meaning, are accounted for from the perspective of the delay and detour they involve.

Differing and deferring wreak an effect of instability – what Derrida terms as undecidability – within all forms of representation, linguistic and non-linguistic. Undecidability, an effect of exclusionary violence, suggests that a given sign, or meaning owes its presence to the absence of countless others. The term accounts for the excess of meaning that is sacrificed in the process of representing a word or concept. Because this excess is never fully excluded, that is, is on the inside *and* outside of a concept, the latter's identity remains haunted by instability. In *Son of Saul*, survival, in the form of "afterlife", is on the inside of Saul's choice to bury his son at Auschwitz-Birkenau, yet his mission, simultaneously, involves a sacrifice of survival (the uprising). The smile, which is both gifted by and excludes the inaccessibility of death, has an inside-outside relation to death's otherness. In my reading of the climax, this relation is shown to bear on the inside-outside (de)construction of the first-person perspective.

The undecidability of life-death dominates Genesis 22, in which God, who epitomises eternal life, orders Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. The patriarch, choosing to obey the death-giving command, journeys to the top of Mount Moriah in order to carry out the sacrifice. Just as he is about to slit his son's throat, God revokes his command and sends an angel to restrain his knife-wielding hand. In *The Gift of Death*, this life-death dynamic stems from the relation between representation and the otherness of death (différance), which is said to give the Biblical instance the secrecy it is known for. More specifically, God's privileged inaccessibility, stressed on in Søren Kierkegaard's reading (1843/2006) of Genesis 22,[20] is deconstructed in *The Gift of Death* as the secrecy of death that all mortals are subject to. In effect, immortality is deconstructed as the self's awareness of its mortal limitations.[21]

The shift from immortality to (im)mortality is inseparable from the deconstruction of choice, in that the latter is given on the basis of the self's lack of access to its own death. The stress on mortality, implying that we have no control over the process of signification, imbues choice with implications of no choice. The choicelessness that conditions the possibility of choice highlights the film's relation to Lawrence L. Langer's discourse of "choiceless choices" in *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*.[22] The paradoxical phrase "choiceless choices", cropping up in Langer's discussion of the Sonderkommando, reflects how choices "imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing" do not qualify as "decisions".[23]

Responding out of choice emerges as radically other in *The Gift of Death,* in which response-ability derives from our subjection to death and is contingent on mortal needs. The text represents response-ability as exclusively mortal, [24] a context that is tested by burial (responding to the dead), which has an inside-outside relation to mortality, much like (im)mortality. Although taking responsibility for the dead is only tenable in a context of mortality, the ability to respond comes up against death's otherness, which is beyond the reach of mortals.

The sessions unpack the inside-outside burial in the light of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In the Third Session, Robinson Crusoe's "fear" of being "buried alive",[25] posited as a *mortal*, reductive response to death's otherness,[26] is said to reflect on how "inhumation" is driven by our inability to picture the End of our "story".[27] The Sixth Session, in which life after death is said to be an illusory meaning given to us by our mortality, corroborates the main argument in *The Gift of Death*, namely death's resistance to meaning.[28] The sessions underscore the (im)possibility of giving meaning to death, for choosing between burial and cremation is shown to come up against the limitations of response-ability (our inability to access death). This

mortal failing reflects subversively on immortality, which is exposed as a possible projection of survival onto the otherness of death.

Making Sense of the Undecidable Smile

Like *The Gift of Death* and the sessions on burial, *Son of Saul* posits immortality, which is traditionally thought to transcend representation, on the inside of signification. In Nemes' interview with Leonard Quart, the director alludes to the inscrutability of Saul's choice from the perspective of "an inner God": "It's difficult to judge [Saul's] actions from a distance, a theme very central to my film […] whereas there is no hope in the camp, and there's no more God, for Saul there might be an inner voice, an inner God, which would still allow a person to have a choice".[29] This statement, which underscores the difficulty of being on the inside of Saul's subjectivity, harks back to the non-access at the heart of the first-person point of view.

In the climax, the gap within "first-person" is brought to bear on the spectator, who is brought face to face with his/her subjectivity. In bringing forth an added dimension to the positioning of the viewer, the ending stands apart from the rest of the film. Michael Posner notes the discrete character of the climax, which he describes as a "coda",[30] a term traditionally used in the context of music to denote "[t]he concluding passage of a piece or movement, typically forming an addition to the basic structure".[31] The ending is set apart from the rest of the film in terms of setting, for the action shifts from Auschwitz, with its ghastly gas chambers and dimly lit corridors, to the leafy woods surrounding the camp. Along with focusing on nature, this change in setting features the Polish peasant boy whose mystifying presence brings a smile to Saul's face. Although ostensibly a move from death to survival, this shift uses features redolent with life to heighten the deaths of both missions. The lush greenery, suggestive of irrepressible life, coincides with the rebels desperately trying to flee from the Nazi officials with their bloodthirsty

hounds. The shed, where the rebels seek refuge, also unfolds in terms of images that reflect on how hope excludes what can no longer be redeemed. Saul's sitting on his own, silent and utterly despondent because his mission of burial is "dead", contrasts starkly with the rebels coming up with plans to make contact with the Polish resistance. (Place fig.2 here) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhuelUWoFL8 Caption: The climax.

What happens to Saul's mission? Firstly, the rabbi who helps Saul dig a grave in the woods turns out to be an impostor. His inability to recite the Kaddish verses gives rise to a silent rage in Saul, who, undeterred, continues to dig furiously. That is, until the sound of approaching Nazis brings it to a halt. Corpse flung over his shoulder, Saul follows the other survivors across the river. But he loses his grip on the corpse, which falls to the bottom of the river. The irony is that Saul's mission falls through because of him! However, this comes up against the irony of the body falling into water. Surely the latter's life-giving connotations are a worthwhile substitute for a burial that has no choice but to take place without its accompanying sanctifying rites. Perhaps not for Saul, who, in the wake of losing his son's dead body, loses the will to live and tries to drown himself in the same river. The failure to bury his son is, for him, a monumental one, one that cannot be salvaged by resorting to traditional readings of greenery and water, which, in any case, are played on in an idiomatic context in the film: "we are not out of the woods yet".

"We are not out of the woods yet" applies to Saul's smile and the predicament it puts the viewer in. The smile is given to a Polish peasant boy, who, on peeking into the shed where the rebels are hiding from the Nazis, makes a point of looking in the protagonist's direction. Sitting with his head hanging, Saul looks up, gazing back at the child and then, out of the blue, smiles.

The close-up of smiling Saul is our last glimpse of him and, judging from the gunshots that immediately follow it, the last of him. We do not witness his death because the camera switches to the boy. Escaping from the shed in a panic, the child is grabbed by an SS official and released once the armed officers have passed through, presumably, to the shed, where they carry out the execution. The film closes with the boy running through the woods in the midst of piercing gunfire, an image that, in line with the co-implication, gives relief to, as well as weighs the spectator down with sadness.

Fig.3: Peasant boy looking at Saul.

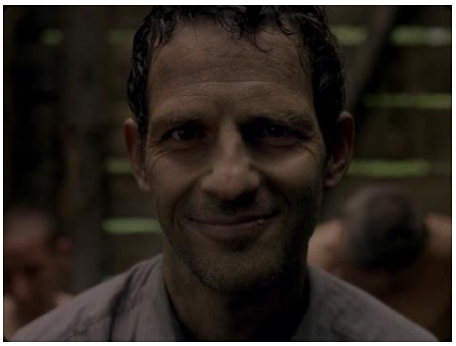

Fig.4: Smiling in the face of death.

The final shot of the boy's survival communicates Saul's death solely through sound. This gesture is in accordance with the film's strategy of employing sound to impart the otherness of death, yet this conformity represents a disruption of visual style, that is, the first-person perspective. From the point of view of conformity, the final shot exemplifies the "tension" that *Son of Saul* creates between "onscreen" action and "off-screen" sound.[32] The effect of off-screen sound, a "'natural' continuation" of events "taking place onscreen",[33] is employed specifically in scenes to do with death. For instance, the atrocities of the Holocaust are excluded from the frame, making their presence felt only through sound. Saul's standing outside the gas chamber,

listening to the screaming and wailing going on inside, is another instance. (Place fig.5 here). https://www.youtube.com/embed/EqNhXFInFBQ?start=161 Caption: Saul outside the gas chamber.

The use of off-screen sound, which unsettles what falls within the frame: "The invisible, the absent, makes the presentation of the visible continuously fissured",[34] links up with the viewer's implication in the problem of representation. This implication, initiated through the first-person point of view, undergoes a radical overhauling in the climax, on account of the peasant boy's run-in with the SS officer. For this fleeting encounter establishes the boy's reality, which is an important feature because it represents a complete break from Saul's perspective. This break goes unnoticed by Gibson and Howell: "Is this [peasant boy] an apparition of the dead child reborn […] a ghost who has sought Saul and we, the viewers, out? Is this child an angel of death come to release Saul and bring a sacred moment before final execution?".[35] Presumably, the boy's physicality is misread as insubstantial because the Holocaust film is examined from the perspective of the "anonymity" that dominates "iconic images of the child victim",[36] such as the image of the Warsaw Ghetto boy (1943). But the blind spot that constitutes this focus not only leads to a negation of the boy's reality but shortchanges the film's ending by representing it as an instance of (unproblematic) grace.

Fig.6: Peasant boy's run-in with the SS officer.

Given the protagonist's obsession with burial, it is likely that the peasant boy, who elicits the enigmatic smile, ties in – for Saul – with the possibility of afterlife. Based on certain clues, the smile, triggered by the peasant boy, can be interpreted on a speculative basis. Stuart Liebman does a thorough job of showing how these clues point to a blind spot in Saul, one that is held responsible for the smile.[37] Building on Liebman's reading, I open up this blind spot to implications overlooked by him, for the sake of demonstrating how *Son of Saul* highlights the instability of making meaning when responding to the other.

First and foremost, Liebman's interpretation of the ending reflects on the co-implicating facet to the smile:

> It [Saul's death] is preceded by a curious moment. A young Polish peasant boy resembling his own lost son unexpectedly comes into view. Saul reacts and a smile slowly spreads across his lips. It is as if *his* Lazarus has just returned from the dead, reborn. That the boy has led the Germans to the hiding place, however, ironically transforms the beloved son into the iconic *malakh ha-mavet*, the Jewish angel of death. The ending is both troubling and strangely consoling. Saul's effort has come to naught, even as he, in his madness, believes he has succeeded in his mission.[38]

Lazarus, resurrected by Jesus from the dead, and *Malakh ha-mavet*, an angel who presages death, represent the relation between death and survival but from opposite ends. The juxtaposition of these two references, which accentuates the tension intrinsic to the co-implication, opens up two possible readings of the smile. One of them, pointedly said to belong to Saul ["his Lazarus"], yet attributed to him by Liebman, pertains to the resurrection of the dead son. The other meaning, to do with the Jewish angel of death, is held out as authentic, as one excluded by Saul's madness. The resurrection of the dead son, said to pivot on the resemblance between the living boy and the

dead son, is critiqued as a projection on the protagonist's part: "Saul's effort has come to naught, even as he, in his madness, believes he has succeeded in his mission". Liebman interprets Saul's "madness" in terms of his not knowing that he does not know ("believes he has succeeded in his mission"), but, given the intrinsic unreliability of Saul's claim to paternity, of which he is aware from the start (otherwise why would he seek confirmation of the corpse's identity?), it is doubtful whether the resemblance bears the kind of significance for Saul that Liebman is reading into it. In fact, resemblance, with its intrinsic instability, is at the heart of Saul's decision, which, beyond a point, commits itself to not caring whether the dead boy is his son or not.[39] Saul's "madness" has more to do with his embracing what cannot be known, be it in relation to the dead boy's real identity, or with regard to the peasant boy's entry on the scene.

To me, the smile does not suggest that Saul "believes he has succeeded in his mission". On the contrary, it puts burial in perspective. In the climax, the Lazarus possibility emerges despite Saul's failure to bury his son. This failure is acknowledged through action, for Saul attempts to drown himself in the same river that swallows up his son's corpse. Resurrection of the dead son turns out to be a default option that rears its head in the event of his irrevocable failure to complete his mission. This implies that survival of the dead is not contingent on a particular ritual but is, as Derrida's discussion of burial and cremation points out, a mortal's instinctive response in the face of death. Liebman represents the Lazarus possibility as that which Saul, in his blindness, chooses to project because it vindicates his mission of burial, but, based on Derrida's reading of immortality, one can read this projection as imposed on mortals by the void of death. The illusion of immortality that mortals are stuck with not only renders burial redundant in *Son of Saul* but suggests that it is conditioned by that, namely, the possibility of survival in death, which is not a choice. The possibility of no choice within Saul's choice is

touched on by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams on account of his "death-fixated desire": "It is an agency without mastery. In this sense, Nemes and Royer found a way of telling a Holocaust story, which relies on a character being able to act, whilst also staying true to the insight [offered in the diaries]: that the prisoners were essentially powerless".[40] Chare and Williams' unworking of choice by irrationality converges with the monolithic "phantasm" of survival in Derrida's seminars.[41]

The failure of burial, tantamount to death (for Saul), reveals itself in terms of "survival ever after" to him. This unforeseen gain in the expectation of loss elicits an uncharacteristic smile from him, one that times itself in such a way with the gunshots that it simultaneously functions as an unprecedented response in the face of actual death. One could read the smile in terms of Saul giving death the meaning that is given to him by the void of death. That is, if a smile in the face of death cares if it is taking or giving, if it has to do with choice, or no choice. For being happy in the face of death might be an instance where meaning is not meaning "as such". This possibility is hinted at by Géza Röhrig, the actor who plays Saul in the film: "He [Saul] gets this purpose that is not so much a result of his thought process – it's more enigmatic than that. And that makes him happy. He's a very happy, fulfilled person to me in the movie – probably the only one".[42]

The timing of the smile is impeccable because its appearance just a couple of seconds before the execution renders it into an instance of "madness" that bears all the meaning in the world. In terms of the value that it gives to senselessness, the smile faces stiff competition from *The Gift of Death*, which teases out the possibility of unconditional giving from what Kierkegaard describes as Abraham's "instant of madness".[43] Whereas Kierkegaard uses "madness" to speak of what is unmistakably irrational about the near-sacrifice, Derrida reads it

in terms of what constitutes a "reasonable", "moral" decision: the (unjustifiable) sacrificial violence of signification. Decision-making acquires an aspect of "madness" on account of sacrifice, which cannot be accounted for, or justified, from the point of view of reason.[44] "Madness" also points to how the workings (the differing and deferring) of representation are not accessible to the deciding subject.[45]

For Derrida, the near-sacrifice lays bare the problem that, on an everyday basis, mortals face with respect to making sense of each other's demands and responses. The dilemma is that I can only grasp the other's demand and response by giving it a meaning that is accessible to me. The taking that giving invariably involves is applicable even in Abraham's case, for sacrifice is a means by which the self appropriates the otherness of death for itself.[46] Although Derrida is noticeably circumspect when it comes to attributing any possibility of calculation or gain to the near-sacrifice,[47] his contention that Abraham dies through his son's death gives Isaac's death a meaning that favors the father.

The taking involved in giving is borne out by the smile that Saul gives, just a couple of seconds before the film ends. The loaded facial gesture raises the question: What does giving to the dead give Saul and what does his smile give the viewer? If immortality is one's singular relation to one's own death, then Saul's intervention on behalf of his son is also an act of appropriation, one that, judging from the smile, opens onto a sense of fulfillment. The film's ending with a smile is a stroke of brilliance that upstages the emotionally draining effect of Abraham's performance as understood by Derrida in *The Gift of Death*. In Derrida's reading, the secrecy surrounding Abraham's decision does not harbour a sacred meaning but is said to lack content. That is, it gestures at the senselessness that arises from the excess of meaning (undecidability) that marks all instances of representation. *Son of Saul* uncovers the

groundlessness of making meaning, following it up with a smile that reflects on what can be had through giving meaning. The implications of this having, conveyed through the gunshots that accompany the smile, come home to the spectator. For witnessing this smile involves losing oneself to the possibility of being happy in the face of death. The viewer wants to be on the inside of the beatific smile, with regard to meaning but more so in terms of feeling. But he/she is only made privy to how his/her reading of the smile compromises death's otherness. This "inside" position is as much on the "outside" because the spectator, unlike Saul, witnesses his/her entanglement with representation.

Saul's giving of meaning, via a loaded smile, coincides with his death. The dilemma of making meaning no longer concerns him. From the viewer's perspective, the smile's infringing on the otherness of death confronts him/her with the unavoidable illusoriness of meaning-making and yet embodies this drawback of signification as its potential saving grace. The film gives the spectator the possibility of giving death to Saul's delusion. However, this gift, which has to do with the obligation of confronting what is unreliable about interpretation, turns out to bear a great deal of irony; for it neither gives nor takes anything away from Saul, but only reflects subversively on the viewer's responses to the film.

The limitations of these responses bring the spectator face to face with his/her not-knowing. In giving the viewer access to the gap within, the first-person point of view takes on a radical slant, in which "first-person" acquires a great deal of irony on account of the blind spot's constitutive role in subjectivity. The opacity of "first-person" can no longer be projected onto the mission of burial, for Saul is dead. But the blind spot (the void of death) not only survives the end of the spectator-protagonist relation, but, via the smile, gets to have the last laugh.

This article has focused on Saul's smile in the face of death, which, through its manifestation of the survival-death co-implication, is shown to have a critical bearing on the constitution of choice and immortality. The smile is framed in such a way that it not only riddles choice and immortality with inscrutability but renders them violating towards the inaccessibility of others. The stress on inscrutability is looked into from the perspective of différance, or the otherness that haunts representation on account of its grounding in death. The implications of the smile are fleshed out with the help of différance, as it plays out in Derrida's readings of response-ability and burial. In these readings, the mortality that conditions responses to immortality is shown to reflect on the choicelessness that inheres in the possibility of choice. This perspective does a great deal of justice to the film's reworking of Holocaust discourse on the subject of "choiceless choices", which the smile re-turns to from the perspective of how we (mortals) have no control over the conditions that render choice a possibility.

Most importantly, the smile gives a new dimension to the dilemma of representation, one that is not accommodated by Derrida's readings. The joy that Saul derives from projecting meaning onto death puts the spectator in a bind. For his happy response to death is on the inside-outside of representation. That is, it is implicated in différance, yet his happy death signifies an end to his subjection to différance. But the spectator is saddled with the disquieting implications of the smile. He or she is left to ponder whether a smile in the face of death is as good as it gets for a mortal response.

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[13] Klawans, "Rounds," 36.

[14] Amir Ganjavie, "The Reality of Death: An Interview with László Nemes about *Son of Saul*," *Notebook Interview* (7 July 2015), para. 43, www.mubi.com

[15] Ganjavie, "Reality," para.40.

[16] Ganjavie, "Reality," para.44.

[17] Margaret Gibson and Amanda Howell, "*Son of Saul* and the Ethics of Representation: Troubling the Figure of the Child," *Cultural Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2018), 150-65, https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v24i2.6056

[18] Like *The Beast and the Sovereign*, *The Gift of Death* looks at immortality from a mortal perspective. The difference is that immortality in the latter is brought to bear directly on the elusiveness of death, whereas the seminars deal with the illusion of survival that the self cannot rid itself of in its relation to death.

[19] Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End*: *Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 10.

[20] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silentio*, Trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[21] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108.

[22] Langer, *Versions*, 72.

[23] Langer, *Versions*, 72.

[24] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 44.

[25] Derrida, *Beast*, 77.

[26] Derrida, *Beast*, 164.

[27] Derrida, *Beast*, 164.

[28] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 44.

[29] Leonard Quart, "A New Perspective on the Holocaust: An Interview with László Nemes," *Cineaste* (2015), 38-9, 39, www.jstor.org/stable/26356390

[30] Michael Posner, "On the Human Imperative," *Queen's Quarterly* 123, no.1 (2016), 79-87, 87.

[31] Coda. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved August 15 2020, from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/coda

[32] Vincze, "Phenomenology," 113.

[33] Vincze, "Phenomenology," 113.

[34] Vincze, "Phenomenology," 113.

[35] Gibson and Howell, "Ethics", 160.

[36] Gibson and Howell, "Ethics", 156.

[37] Stuart Liebman, "*Son of Saul*," *Cineaste* 41, no. 1 (2015), www.jstor.org/stable/26356393

[38] Liebman, "Saul", 48.

[39] Saul's claim to paternity cannot be verified in a death camp where all documents belonging to prisoners are destroyed.

[40] Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, "Questions of Filiation:From the Scrolls of Auschwitz to *Son of Saul*," *Mémoires en jeu/Memories at Stake 2* (2016), 1-20, 14, https://www.memoires-en-jeu.com

[41] Derrida, *Beast,* 164.

[42] Gregg Kilday, "Making of *Son of Saul*," *The Hollywood Reporter* (2015), 1-4, 4, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/how-son-saul-defied-dangers-838149

[43] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 66.

[44] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 66.

[45] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 66.

[46] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 12.

[47] Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 96.