Understanding
Steven Spielberg
Understanding Steven Spielberg

By
Beatriz Peña-Acuña

Cambridge Scholars Publishing
This text is dedicated to Steven Spielberg, who has given me so much enjoyment and made me experience so many emotions, and because he makes me believe in human beings.

I also dedicate this book to my ancestors from my mother’s side, who for centuries were able to move from Spain to Mexico and loved both countries in their hearts. This lesson remains for future generations. My father, of Spanish Sephardic origin, helped me so much, encouraging me in every intellectual pursuit.

I hope that contemporary researchers share their knowledge and open their minds and hearts, valuing what other researchers do whatever their language or nation, as some academics have done for me. Love and wisdom have no language, nationality, or gender.
CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One ................................................................................................................. 3
Spielberg’s Personal Context and Executive Production

Chapter Two .............................................................................................................. 19
Spielberg’s Behaviour in the Process of Film Production
  2.1. Spielberg’s involvement in the pre-production phase .................. 19
  2.2. Spielberg's approach to shooting .................................................. 28
  2.3. Spielberg's involvement in the post-production phase .......... 29

Chapter Three ........................................................................................................... 35
Preferred Film Elements in Spielberg’s Direction
  3.1. Preferred elements in the iconic code .................................. 35
  3.2. Preferred elements in the sound design ......................... 52
  3.3. Preferred elements in the linguistic code ....................... 57
  3.4. Preferred elements in the non-linguistic code ............. 63

Chapter Four ........................................................................................................... 71
The Jewish-American Filmmaker’s Ethical Awareness

Chapter Five ............................................................................................................. 117
Reflections on the Filmmaker’s Cinematographic Resources

Conclusions .............................................................................................................. 123

References ............................................................................................................. 127
It’s not even about the career. I have shpilkes now and I have a career. I think it’s my fuel, basically—my nervous stomach. That’s what keeps me honest, right? And a little bit humble, in the sense that when I make a movie, I never think I have all the answers. I think I’ve stayed collaborative along my entire career because I don’t have all the answers. I come onto the set—whether it was my first movie, The Sugarland Express, or Lincoln—and it cuts me down to size. It’s a good feeling to have.

(Steven Spielberg in Entertainment Weekly, interviewed by Anthony Breznican, 2011)
INTRODUCTION

In 2011 there was a tribute by the Directors Guild of America to Steven Spielberg because he is beloved. His innovation in film language, his filmmaking, his heart, his hope, and his dazzling visual style have influenced many other filmmakers. He is a part of the permanent American identity. After dedicating so many years and hours to understanding this filmmaker, receiving an extraordinary doctorate prize for a PhD. about Spielberg in 2012, and having continued the investigation to this day, I can say that I think all these words about him are true.

This text presents audio-visual and documentary elements regarding the films of Steven Spielberg, and conducts a survey of biographical and sociological parameters that have affected his work and conception of values. In the second part of this work are the formal key resources that exhibit the personal testimony of the director, critical observations on the value of dignity, and other issues close to his filmography, which are reviewed up to the film *Munich* (2005). The following films—*Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011), *War Horse* (2011), *Lincoln* (2012), *Bridge of Spies* (2015), and *BFG* (2016)—coherently present the same treatment of the value of dignity as is described in this text. This section provides an assessment of the studies cited above, as well as the works of interest that the filmmaker has released so far.

In the first section, wherein lies the originality of our study as to what has been published about the filmmaker so far, I synthesize the existing bibliography on the topic, taking into account the doctoral thesis of David Caldevilla as an important contribution, and classifying, in an orderly and complete manner, how the director employs each film element that comes into play, adding a selection of examples.

In the second section, the study considers the statements from the filmmaker and other professionals who have worked with him, regarding dignity, the value of various issues, and the social commitment of their creative work.

This study focuses on the thematic treatment of his feature films, following the chronological order that is able to provide a view of the plot development and other preferences. Along with the introductory presentation of the evolution of values in his films, certain parameters
relating to the filmmaker's personal maturity and references to the sociological and historical factors that influence him are discussed. Naturally, I have also taken into account the existing critical contributions.

The third part of the text contains a careful analysis of the maturity of the filmmaker in terms of anthropological issues concerning the value of dignity.
CHAPTER ONE
SPIELBERG’S PERSONAL CONTEXT
AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCTION

This section describes the journey of Steven Spielberg’s filmography. I chose to study Spielberg’s film work because he is a filmmaker with a complete profile: on the one hand he combines popularity, commercial success, fame, and prestige acquired from awards (Oscars, among others), along with professional autonomy when he created his own production company DreamWorks. On the other, he has his own way of expressing human and psychological depth in the issues raised by his films, among which it is worth distinguishing dignity and, especially, tolerance.

Fortunately for this research, it is about a filmmaker who likes to be interviewed, and there are many studies in several languages in existence. Moreover, there are Spanish theses by, in chronological order, Antonio Sanchez Escalonilla (1994), David Caldevilla Dominguez (2000), Beatriz Peña Acuña (2010), Jose Diez Cuesta (2010), Pablo Salvador Gomez Gil (2013), Federico Alba Figuero (2015), Francisco Javier Aviles Bariandarian (2016), Jose Ignacio Sanchez Quevedo (2016), and Israel Pardo Larrosa (2017), along with one in English by Timchia Tubuo (2003) and one in French by Xavier Depuydt (1993). There are also those in German and Czech, which I have not been able to access. There was also a monograph on him at a conference at the University of Lincoln (United Kingdom) in 2007 and a conference in Juan Carlos I University (Madrid, Spain) in 2012, indicating that the interest Spielberg raises continues to motivate international academic research.

I start by highlighting the hard work and professional experience of the director, evident from a brief tour through his films. For example, we see that, in the 1970s, when he was in his twenties, he made five feature films; in the 1980s, in his thirties, seven films; in the 1990s, when he was forty to fifty years old, he made six, and also gained recognition from the American Academy; finally, in the period from fifty to sixty years old, he made seven feature films. With maturity in the last decade, aged sixty to seventy, he has made five more. As of 2016, Spielberg has directed thirty
feature films. The Oscar nominations he has received for his works equal those of the great directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, and Fred Zinnemann, alongside the other awards and distinctions that have contributed to his recognition.

It is possible to note some landmarks in his career in order to help understand how his reputation has evolved. He was first nominated for an Oscar for best director for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). He was nominated again for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1984) and *E. T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). He was finally recognized by the Academy when he won two Oscars for directing *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). He was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Directors Guild in 2000, and other civilian honorary appointments like The National Humanities Medal, awarded by American President Bill Clinton, and a knighthood from the Queen of the United Kingdom. To sum up, he has been thoroughly recognized by the Academy, other filmmakers, and audiences, as can be seen from 156 awards and 126 nominations up to 2014.

When he talks about his style in general, Spielberg acknowledges that his way of directing is partly classic filmmaking, because it seems to have quality, along with using new technologies that enable him to achieve the illusions and magic that captivate the audience. He is very aware of his preference for attending to detail and having the best specialists in each field, such as special effects and stunts. He thinks that everything comes to life in the studio without needing visual effects, and that when he depends on all the departments, as in classical filmmaking, to materialize the vision of the producer, actor, and director, the result has to be a quality film.

Later, we will show how Spielberg can also be considered a postmodern filmmaker, having achieved a new synthesis of the classic and the postmodern.

Concerning his influences, Spielberg considers that: “Ford, technically, was, for me, the perfect filmmaker and Orson Welles the second. I have a strong preference [between Capra’s films] for *It’s a Wonderful Life*. I also admire Hawks, despite Ford. It is said that I am a fan of Hitchcock, but I have not seen anything more than a third of his films” (Friedman 2000).

He recognizes the merits of other directors of the 1930s and 40s, such as Michael Curtiz or Victor Fleming, for being chameleon-like and able to adapt to any story. He also shows a predilection for the British director David Lean, because his films are intimate stories told on a large scale, as well as admiration for the French Director François Truffaut.

The filmmaker is aware of classic cinema, and before shooting he inspires himself by watching certain films. For example, he states that in
Duel (1971) he made a road movie similar to High Noon (Zinnemann 1952). In Jaws, the death of Quint recalls the death of Ahab in Moby Dick (Huston 1956). Jean Pierre Godard says that Spielberg does nothing but collect Hollywood traditions (Godard 1987). For the realization of Saving Private Ryan, Spielberg admits to having seen many war films when he was young, particularly those featuring John Wayne. Spielberg cites some of these as inspiration: “Television had already appeared and there were films like The Fighting Seabees (Ludwig 1944), The Story of G. I. Joe and Back to Bataan (Dmytryk 1945), and Sands of Iwo Jima (Dwan 1949)” (Godard 1987).

Spielberg is part of a group of directors called the “movie brats” by coincidence of his generation, along with Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas, and Brian De Palma. This group provided mutual support and advised one another at the beginning of their careers when they were known at student film festivals, although their styles differed from one another. Some researchers and critics also emphasize the influence of Disney films and their moral burden of values on Spielberg.

Two outstanding talents can be highlighted in this filmmaker: imagination and creativity. When we talk about imagination, we mean Spielberg’s interest in the genre of fiction itself, triggered by alien creatures, spaceships, different sounds, and peculiar scenarios. Spielberg states that he enjoyed the magical stories told by his father (interview on Saving Private Ryan DVD extras), and he did the same with his friends when he was a boy scout, and recognized himself in this sense as a storyteller. He said that fiction provides great creative display by allowing him to play with the present, the future, and the past (interview on A. I. Artificial Intelligence DVD extras).

Spielberg appreciates imagination as a quality of children, and knows that this part of the cognitive capacity is maintained in adults. A clear example is his 2016 film The BFG, a story for kids which won the Truly Moving Picture Award. This capacity of imagination is applied in other cases. He also has a facility to see the possibilities for an actor to adjust to a role. He can even create new scenes in the middle of a shoot thanks to his capacity for invention.

For example, in Duel (1971) he chose the lead actor (Dennis Warren), whom he had seen on television, because he imagined that he would be able to perform the last act (when he breaks out in euphoria following the end of the truck that has been intimidating him throughout the film). In Empire of the Sun he unites imagination and reality: the child Jim Graham, disguised as Sinbad, lets a toy airplane fly with the wings of his imagination. Spielberg searches for technical solutions for special effects
by inventing events in the script wherein such effects could appear. In
*Empire of the Sun*, since he was unable to buy explosives, he invented a
system with a table where the actors would step on it and jump off,
causing dust to rise like an explosion. In *Duel* he came up with the scene
where the truck attacks the protagonist while he is phoning for help,
knocking down the cabin in a scene of great dramatic tension.

In *Jaws* the shark is seldom shown, but its presence in the water
implied by the addition of the music while a girl swims achieves a
terrifying effect and frees the imagination of the audience. In another
moment of the film, creativity is born of necessity: it was impossible to
shoot with the mechanical shark because it was damaged, so the actors
pursue some barrels that suggest the presence of a large fish. Here, Carl
Gottlieb, Spielberg, and the actors reworked the script in the middle of the
shoot. Another example of this is the scene where the zoologist who is
diving finds the head of a dead fisherman in a sunken boat, adding another
dose of terror.

Regarding *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), Spielberg
wanted the cubes to appear before the extra-terrestrial ships in order to
check the danger of the situation and give clearance for landing. Also, he
wanted the shape of the ships to be familiar so that the aliens would be less
frightening. At the same time, he made the clouds the hideout of the ships,
which was possible because one of the technicians used a tank containing
saltwater and added fresh water, so that their different weights and the
densities stopped the white paint from mixing with the saltwater, and so
simulated the formation of clouds.

In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) he included the scene
of the room with spikes that Indiana and his two friends manage to escape
from. In *Always* (1989), Spielberg visualizes an angel embodied in a
woman, Hap (Audrey Hepburn). Hap appears to help and instruct Pete
Sandich (Richard Dreyfuss), who has died and whose spirit is assigned to
mentor a pilot, Ted Baker (Brad Johnson), recalling with these two
characters the same situation created between George Bailey and the angel
in *It’s a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946), one of Spielberg’s favourite films.
In the pursuit of John Anderton in *Minority Report* he was inspired to use
hovercrafts, which he had liked when the Olympics came to Los Angeles
in 1984. He was able to get the precog visions (predictive pictures) to look
real through a sign language that unfolds as if Anderton is conducting an
orchestra. In *The Terminal*, to bring comedy to the situation he included a
scene of Gupta slipping on a wet floor.

I will now review the evolution of Spielberg’s filmmaking in general,
along with the genres and central plots of his films. In order to introduce
Within science fiction we can create six new divisions. First are films about aliens, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E. T.*, and *War of the Worlds*. Second are those inspired by old television series, such as the *Indiana Jones* trilogy. Third are remakes (*Always*) or the recreation of a popular story (*Hook*). Fourth are adaptations of novels like *Jaws*, the first two *Jurassic Park* films, *Schindler’s List*, and *War of the Worlds*. Fifth are scripted films derived from original works: *Minority Report* (by Philip K. Dick) and *A. I. Artificial Intelligence* (by Brian Aldiss). Sixth are those films based on comics (*Tintin*), and seventh an original script written by Robert Rodat (*Saving Private Ryan*).

With respect to those works we can establish two classifications: those based on their own script editors and writers, or those from a biographical background: *Duel*, *The Color Purple*, *Empire of the Sun*, *War Horse*, and *Catch Me If You Can*; and those based on a real event, a news story, or a historical fact: *The Sugarland Express*, *1941*, *Amistad*, and *The Terminal*, and two biopics, *Lincoln* and *The Bridge of Spies*.

There are other classifications from the thematic point of view, like those made by Xavier Depuydt (1993) and Antonio Sanchez Escalonilla (1995) in their doctoral theses, or that suggested by Philip M. Taylor about the journey of Ulysses.

A classification that seems very appropriate is that by Professor Lester D. Friedman, who divided his work into fantasy and science fiction (*Close Encounters*, *E. T.*, *Hook*, *Always*, *A. I.*, and *Minority Report*); action-adventure melodramas (*The Sugarland Express*, the *Indiana Jones* trilogy, and *Catch Me If You Can*); monsters (*Duel*, *Jaws*, the first two instalments of *Jurassic Park*, and *War of the Worlds*), the Second World War (*1941*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Empire of the Sun*), and the social problems of ethnic minorities (*The Color Purple*, *Amistad*, and *The Terminal*). This researcher devotes a separate chapter to *Schindler’s List*, but I think that it can be included within the works of the Second World War. *Munich* is not reflected in the proposed classification, and I believe it to be similar to *Schindler’s List* in that it recounts a historical event in a way that could be encompassed in the genre of action-adventure melodrama.

Once Spielberg had earned a reputation as a director, he was carried away by his tastes and preferences when choosing a feature film, and above all by the attraction of the story. In this sense he is unpredictable and has worked in many genres, which makes him stand out for his versatility. However, there are some who single out science fiction, for example. Surprisingly, he has been honoured by the American Academy
as a director of two films based on actual events: *Schindler’s List* and *Saving Private Ryan*.

The scholars who mostly discuss his films from the point of view of film language are, in chronological order, Donald R. Mott and Cheryl MacAllister Saunders, Philip M. Taylor, and James Clarke. Another book about his work up to *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) is by Douglas Brode, and another specialist who has studied him in some respects is Ian Freer. More recent books are those by Warren Buckland (2006), who highlights his great empirical rigor when studying his style, and Nigel Morris, who makes a psychoanalytic study of his films (2006).

Kenneth von Gunden (1991) considers him a postmodern director alongside Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Brian De Palma, and Martin Scorsese, who share characteristics such as technical mastery, an encyclopaedic knowledge of the classic Hollywood canon, a considerable business sense, and the decanting of challenging narrative works. The new artistic synthesis that these filmmakers reach, respecting the canon but adapting the themes to the times, came to be called the New Hollywood. The other detail that they have in common is that almost all of them went to film school and were influenced by television, art, photography, music, film, serials, and classic filmmakers. Another feature repeated in many of Spielberg's films is the use of pastiche, and the inspired interpretation of an actor, such as the *Roadrunner* cartoons in *The Sugarland Express*. In other cases, it refers to any work that can have a parodic tone. John Williams acknowledges that in *A. I.* the music that appears when the amphibicopter reaches the city of lions is postmodern in its mixture of harmonic and discordant sounds.

An interview with Martin Scorsese in the Directors Guild of America about *Bridge of Spies* (2015) gives a clue to the strength of this film, in that it reproduces the emotional social climate of the Cold War so well, along with fear and insecurity because of the nuclear threat (we can understand these as similar to how terrorism makes us feel now).

Spielberg has always been conscious of his own evolution as a director. After shooting *1941* (1979) he stated: "Within ten years, I may have a clearer picture of the direction I take. And while I have the impression of change. I have the impression that my style will change" (La Polla 1978). And, indeed, in *The Color Purple* (1985) he decided to look at a more serious issue.

The professional beginnings of this filmmaker in the industry were difficult because he had to prove his worth, but he had a lucky start when a director from Universal Studios discovered and signed him as a young talent. Thus, before *Duel*, when he was hired by Universal they called him
Spielberg’s first project, *Duel* (1971), was a television movie. The plot concerns a truck driver harassing a car-driving sales representative. He produced an action road movie that surprisingly captured a large audience, and was the true beginning of his career.

In Rome, in order to present this work, he became interested in the problem of the class struggle in Europe, evident in *The Sugarland Express* (1974) which presents a social portrait of the working classes. From the beginning, Spielberg demonstrated great sensitivity for his audience and their tastes. At this time, he defended his abstract ideas, but through *Duel* he learned that each viewer could create their own interpretation. He himself considered that he started to shoot an action road movie again in *The Sugarland Express*, where the police chase a young criminal couple who are trying to get back the child they have given up for adoption.

Spielberg acknowledges that he would not do something like *Duel* now because it was a product of his being in his twenties. He thinks that he has changed, because before he was innocent and ambitious and not prepared to make something like *Schindler’s List* (1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). He admits that several of his works are entertaining, while others aim to make the viewer think a little, but in any case he takes his job seriously (interview in the *Duel* DVD extras).

Next he filmed *Jaws* (1975) and then *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), which were blockbusters. With *Jaws*, he was confirmed as a successful director with several award nominations who was capable of helming million-dollar projects. It is considered the most successful film work of the New Hollywood cinema period (1967–77), and gave him enough recognition to be considered a director with a very promising future.

The plot of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* concerns communication between humans and extra-terrestrial beings, another form of intelligence. This was a change of style from his previous works because it added a touch of sweetness and warmth. Again, the film performed very well at the box office.

The next work, *1941* (1979), is a comedy that was received poorly by critics and gained few awards. It is a change of direction for the filmmaker in his treatment of genres and themes. It’s about how the people of Los Angeles and Hollywood were alerted to a possible war with the Japanese attack on the US coast. This is a patriotic parody, with one gag after another. It is complicated by the appearance of many subplots, and there
are no main characters because it focuses on collective comic reactions. It is attractive for its constant action, but despite this Spielberg did not achieve his expected success.

The film demonstrates one of Spielberg’s recurring themes: the veneration of aircraft, such as when the character of Donna comes over and touches the plane before the pilot invites her to get in. This is repeated in later works, such as the launch of aircraft in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Jim's fondness for planes through living so close to the runway in *Empire of the Sun*, or the actual occupation of the protagonists of *Always* as pilots dedicated to putting out fires.

After this bump at the box office, Spielberg had to bet heavily on a good story to continue working as he wanted. Allied with George Lucas he directed *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), following which he confessed that the script and the film came out better than expected, and that he would do it again.

Philip D. Taylor says that the central argument is the discovery that archaeologist and adventurer Indiana Jones makes of the sacred ark, rescued from the evil Nazis who want to use it as an instrument of power. The issue of the non-growing adult appears and seeks an adventure that becomes emotionally enriched. The ark represents the force in the world of the unknown and invisible. The genre is miscellaneous; this is a work combining action, adventure, thriller, and romance. The success was overwhelming and the film made billions of dollars. According to the statements from Spielberg, it is based on b movie adventures made for television in the 1930s and 40s, action movies that take place in exotic locations with a multitude of stunts (Taylor 1994, 102). The Indiana Jones character has been reviewed twice by the Spanish Historian Roman Gubern (1993).

Thereafter, Spielberg had the confidence and experience to go for a more personal project—*E. T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, a science fiction film that was also very successful. E. T. is an alien with good intentions towards humans, but is abandoned on planet Earth when his fellow aliens feel persecuted and flee. E. T. tries to communicate with his family to pick him up because he may die as a result of his bad reaction to the environment or because of the scientists who seek to experiment on him. His unconditional comrade, a boy named Elliott, helps him. Spielberg manages to humanize E. T., an animatronic doll, and bring it to life through movements controlled by digital systems. The director made the alien into a Hollywood star who gained the sympathy of the public. With this film, Spielberg again experienced success and a multimillion dollar revenue.
The producer Kathleen Kennedy proposed that he film *The Color Purple* (1985) because she knew that Spielberg wanted to venture into new experiences. This was a social justice drama in which an African American woman is the victim of tyranny and abuse from her partner, with the addition of forced separation from her family, until she regains her freedom and independence in an act of rebellion. The story is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Alice Walker.

On watching his film two years later in 1987, the filmmaker affirmed that he had matured as a director. At this point he was thirty-eight years old and had just had Max, his first child. He admits that at that time there was a turning point in his biography and filmography. He recognized the maturity and serious treatment of an adult theme in this film, which he had done before in some scenes of *E. T.* only. The box office reception of *The Color Purple* was satisfactory, although it provoked controversy and social debate in America.

*The Empire of the Sun* (1987) is a drama full of adventures in war, based on an autobiographical novel by J. G. Ballard (1984), which creates a different view of war. Upon declaration of the Second World War in Shanghai, Jim, an English child, is separated from his parents and has to survive in harsh conditions as a prisoner of war until returning to find his parents after the conflict.

This work was not appreciated, despite its refined aesthetic and tragic child's story. It picked up the recurrent Spielberghan theme of returning home after a trip or an adventure (as in the mythic tale of Ulysses). Another constant that appears is the theme of redemption of the lost son, as in *The Sugarland Express*. His parents have to wait for the end of the war to rescue Jim, who in the meantime tries to resuscitate a patient and then his Japanese friend. It is a historical drama, an adventure in the Oliver Twist style, but set in the Second World War. This film, which David Lean asked Spielberg to direct (Silet 2002, 109), was not well received and a box office disaster. Nonetheless, Spielberg acknowledged that this story gave him the opportunity to express himself in a symbolic mode (Timchia Tubuo 2003, 209).

The filmmaker continued with another dream project: directing the recreation of a romantic film, *A Guy Named Joe* by Victor Fleming (director of films such as *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*), and finally titled *Always*. It is a romantic melodrama: the protagonist is an airman who dies and returns as an angel to help his girlfriend rebuild her life. Having this opportunity, Pete Sandich can finally reach the heart of Dorinda Durston and convey what he really feels. But he eventually realizes that he has to let go to make it easier for her to fall in love with
another man and start a new life. The film had a reasonable reception, not making a great impact on audiences.

Spielberg got out of his box office slump with the third Indiana Jones film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), co-starring Sean Connery, a recognized and revered star. The film again takes on the issue of resurrection (or resurrection) when Indiana Jones’s father gets injured and his son uses water from the Holy Grail to heal him, thanks to the miraculous effects of the holy object. This latest instalment, like its predecessors, did very well at the box office.

After this came *Hook*, a recreation of the history of J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan, which appears to underscore the need to preserve the magical imagination and willingness shared by children and adults. For the first time he dealt with the casting of famous stars—Dustin Hoffman, Robin Williams, Julia Roberts, and Bob Hoskins—and also directed children, a process he enjoys and at which he is especially good. The reception at the box office was good, but the critical reactions were not favourable. It is not well understood that the intention of the work was to entertain children when parents lack the time to do so; it is therefore a film for a family audience.

Spielberg’s next film was something spectacular: *Jurassic Park*, based on Michael Crichton’s 1990 bestseller. It deals with a theme park with prehistoric creatures that have been scientifically recreated according to their original DNA together with some experimental variation. The DNA has been extracted from the blood of the dinosaurs and preserved in amber-encased flies.

The new creatures display overly aggressive behaviour so that what looks like a multimillion dollar business becomes a nightmare for the group of scientists who visit the park. This is a complex genre that combines adventure, thriller, horror, and science fiction. The result is a film with the innovative imagery of a Jurassic wildlife habitat. The director re-emphasizes his skill in special effects and the staging of the dinosaurs that acquire credibility through sound, movement, and interaction with humans, and that were, until then, known only through plaster models and photographs in museums.

The success of this work was extraordinary and led to the next instalment of the series, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), which took advantage of improvements in visual effects for its evolution in the accuracy of images. For example, Spielberg improved the visual effects in the design of the muscular movement of the dinosaurs, creating a complex computer program that offered greater possibilities. This film also made millions at the box office.
The third instalment of the series, *Jurassic Park III* (2001), was directed by Joe Johnson. It maintained unity with the previous two, and there was a remarkable merit in the direction that added, if possible, even more excitement in the dynamics of the action to the previous two.

After many years of wondering whether he should direct it or not, Spielberg set out to make *Schindler’s List*, a historical drama based on the novel *Schindler’s Ark* by Thomas Keneally, a Booker Prize-winning witness to the events of the Holocaust. The story is of an Austrian businessman, Schindler, who runs a factory apparently benefitting from the labour of Jews, while his true purpose is saving the lives of thousands of them.

This is a special film that plays with the theme of creative maturity wherein Spielberg, taking on a serious issue with historical significance, confronts his own Jewish identity. He himself makes an analysis of the realism he sought to achieve with this work:

> My goal was to offer a testimony of the Holocaust through the story of that man. I wanted the film as close as possible to the reality. Many of my previous productions, of which I am very proud, were imaginative products entirely dedicated to entertainment. Instead of that, my intention was to shoot this film almost like a documentary. (Interview on *Schindler’s List* DVD)

*Schindler’s List* is the crest of Spielberg’s wave in Hollywood, deserving of recognition. In the Academy Awards it was nominated in thirteen categories and received a total of seven awards, including best film, best director, and best adapted screenplay. It achieved a good revenue and proved controversial.

In 1997 he made a historical drama titled *Amistad*. However, this work was not very successful and made only modest money. It is based on a historical event that occurred in 1839 when African slaves on the North American coast mutinied aboard the Cuban boat *Amistad*. The slaves arrived at Long Island and were taken to prison in Connecticut. A lawyer defended them in their attempt to get out without charge as free men thanks to the help of the speech of former president John Quincy Adams at the trial. Spielberg was prepared to describe a historical event on a clear theme of human dignity and tolerance because he had previously worked in African American history with *The Color Purple*. Since then, he had enjoyed the confidence of his audience on this issue.

His next work was another film on a historical topic and which is now honoured in the United States, and with which he somewhat redeemed himself after the travesty of *1941*. The war drama *Saving Private Ryan*
(1998) received an Oscar nomination for best movie. Spielberg says he decided to do *Saving Private Ryan* because the story was connected to *Schindler’s List*, but deals with rescuing a single person for a good cause. It is another work of stylistic and thematic maturity if one looks at the psychological and ethical complexity of the characters under the pressure of war. The plot concerns a group of soldiers following the traumatic invasion of Normandy in the Second World War with the heroic mission of saving Private Ryan, whose brothers have been killed in action while crossing French soil between Nazi lines. The film was very successful and earned several million at the box office.

Next came *A. I. Artificial Intelligence*. After the death of the legendary director Stanley Kubrick, Spielberg took up the idea from an outline by the late filmmaker, whom he had known for many years. This is a film made with a very personal approach and is a tribute to his colleague. It preserves the artistic design work, some notes on the characters, and some music that had been selected. Spielberg adapts Bryan Albiss’s story and includes one of the best-known fairy tales, *Pinocchio*, applied to a futuristic theme, with an experimental robot endowed with the qualities of a real boy who desires to be loved by his adoptive mother in place of the wooden puppet. The film was not as well received at the box office as the director wanted, but still had a cultural impact. The historian Roman Gubern relates the two characters of David and Pinocchio, and presents a list of characters grouped together in his book *Masks of Fiction*, in which one of the groups listed alongside David Swinton is the character of Pinocchio (Gubern 2002). In this film, genres like science fiction, drama, and action are mixed together in the recreation of a classic tale.

In *Minority Report* Spielberg again combined different genres. The producer Bonnie Curtis believes that Spielberg creates a different style for each new film. In this film, it is a combination of the detective thriller *The French Connection* (1971) and old comics in a story set in the future. Three visionaries (precogs) supply information about crimes yet to be committed so the police can prevent murder. However, the system shows its weaknesses when Anderton, the chief of police, is charged with murder. He runs away from his police unit and succeeds in exposing the human factor that causes the predictive system to fail. With this futuristic approach, the filmmaker challenges himself and the audience, exposing the progress and social consequences of major scientific advances and consumer products. *Minority Report* had a high budget and achieved acceptable success, showing that Spielberg was now a director who, whatever he did, could guarantee a high-grossing picture.
Spielberg admits that he occasionally likes to make a radical change in his work, such as in the move from *Jurassic Park* to *Schindler’s List*, and likewise from *Minority Report* to his next film, *Catch Me If You Can* (2002). He took the latter as a pleasant creative break because he wanted to work with Leonardo DiCaprio. He found that very few films had been made about scammers, and that Frank Abagnale Jr. was one of the most significant, so he made this comedy with a dramatic touch about a real-life character who, after the divorce of his parents at age seventeen, becomes a swindler wanted by the FBI, with even Interpol following charges made against him in different countries. He changes his true personality and passes as a flight pilot, doctor, and lawyer. At the end he is caught and ends up helping the police in their fight against counterfeiting. This film did well at the box office.

The next film, *The Terminal* (2004), is a dramatic comedy about a real event: a person from Eastern Europe travels to a Western country, but during the journey his country breaks down and his passport is no longer valid. He is held in the terminal and waits for the political situation to resolve itself, but this will take months, during which time he needs to survive and cope with his imprisonment. This film made only a modest amount of money.

Spielberg said that *The Terminal* was a reaction to the darkness of the films of the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s, which were characterized by a kind of seriousness. After shooting *Catch Me If You Can* he did not want to make a historical project or something that dealt with an important issue, but to go back to a work that would make him and others smile. He said that we live in an era in which Hollywood should give people a “smile” at particularly painful times (referring to the 9/11 2001 attacks in the United States).

In 2005 he returned to science fiction, thriller, and action with a contemporary recreation of the classic 1898 novel by H. G. Wells, *War of the Worlds*. According to Philip M. Taylor, it looks like director Byron Haskin’s (1953) adaptation wherein invaders are perceived as settlers and murderers, and are not overcome by technology but by microorganisms (1994, 128). This is the future of humankind through the eyes of an American family struggling to survive.

Tom Cruise plays a dockworker, a divorced father who is far from perfect. After his ex-wife and her new spouse bring his two children to spend the weekend with him a strange thunderstorm begins. The father is a witness to some kind of device with a tripod form that emerges out of the ground and starts to disintegrate things and people, so he decides to take his two children by car to Boston in order to save them and return them to
their mother. This film was so successful that it became the second highest grossing film of 2005.

Munich (2006) raised a lot of controversy before its release, as it is a recreation of the events after the attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Spielberg only gave one interview about the film before the premiere. This is a film that raises the need for peace and shows that responding to violence with violence only weakens both sides, and the worst consequence is not death but the internal imbalance caused in people. The film did not do well at the box office and was attacked by both pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis.

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull (2008) reactivated the Indiana Jones character, now a father with grey hair.

In 2011 the film War Horse presented a story about Albert, a young master of a horse who fights in the First World War and whose horse is sold to the cavalry. Albert’s and his horse’s adventures takes them out of England until they meet again. Revert (2012) states that the highlight of this film is its fabulous final stretch that demonstrates a director freer than ever to provide his humanist approach whilst celebrating the vision of John Ford in his location references and the final panorama.

In this same year, Spielberg directed the animated film The Adventures of Tintin: the Secret of the Unicorn, adapting Hergé’s Belgian comic. Spielberg said about the process of this film:

Nobody made a movie like this before … We didn’t know what this was until we got in the middle of making it. The learning curve was a collaboration between sixty amazing animators and another three hundred illustrators and artists, Peter, three writers and me. What happened during those two years of preparation was trying to figure this thing out … Then it was three years of pure animation. But figuring it out was the learning curve. I looked forward to those broadcasts (via satellite) more than anything else. (Nepales 2011)

In 2012 he directed the deep and patriotic film Lincoln, a biopic about the almost-mythic president who defended values that Spielberg thinks are fundamental: social justice, freedom, and tolerance. It starred one of the best actors working today, Daniel Day Lewis.

Spielberg’s most recent film in 2015 is Bridge of Spies starring Tom Hanks, his close friend, as a brave American lawyer who defends a Russian spy and saves him from death, and who is then recruited by the CIA during the Cold War to help rescue a pilot detained in the Soviet Union.

In the analysis presented below I intend to find out how the filmmaker is defined by his personality at different points in the filmmaking process.
(preproduction, filming, and post-production) and his repeated use of some elements in his works.

Studies have been conducted on the style of the filmmaker that greatly illuminate his work. For example, David Caldevilla analysed five elements of his filmmaking: sound, space, time, characters, and action in the *Indiana Jones* trilogy. Another author, Warren Buckland, made an analysis of the formal elements of Spielberg’s filmmaking. Benedict (2013) produced a documentary highlighting the poetry in his plots though dominating visual elements like image, sound, movement of the camera, rhythm, interpretation, and emotion. Schnickel (2012) looks at twenty films from his prolific career with observations and commentaries from interviews with the filmmaker himself.
CHAPTER TWO

SPIELBERG’S BEHAVIOUR IN THE PROCESS OF FILM PRODUCTION

This section will describe the role of Spielberg as a filmmaker throughout the production process to investigate his working style and discover which activities influence a film, later extending this to all of his films.

Through the systematic study of literature and documentaries about Spielberg’s work, we have tried to detect patterns or constants of content in the film language to describe it in order to see his intervention and how the director gets involved in it, and thus make a judgement using appropriate and specific language.

This section is divided into three phases of film production: preproduction, shooting, and post-production. Examples for each claim will be given, and the rest of the cases that exist and occasionally show other variations will not be reflected (so as to not dwell on them for too long). It also includes the three stylistic features identified in the thesis of David Caldevilla: first, a unique and recognizable touch, second, a balance between the technical and the artistic, and third, a little imaginative imagery used throughout to infuse plasticity.

2.1. Spielberg’s involvement in the preproduction phase

First, I will attend to the use of research as a preliminary step because it seems vital that Spielberg reviews the subject in the sources as a specialist in the field. He is interested in stories as wisdom and individual experience, and his own experience is given to the actors and other members of the production, which has a greater suggestive power. The documentation is in service of credibility in the same way as the atmosphere and realism that this thorough and detailed filmmaker tries to give to the actor, with the primary objective of giving their role a credible interpretation, because the viewer becomes involved in those same emotions and feelings. The following provides an example that illustrates the use of research by the filmmaker.
In order to recreate the social environment of *Minority Report*, Spielberg met several specialists, scientists, and inventors of technology, as well as criminologists and physicians for information on health issues, social services, transportation, and computer technology which would inform the advances shown in the film and provide a variety of information about the many features that surround us in our daily life.

Besides research, the filmmaker has three strengths that support the development of a well-planned film. The first is to stick to deadlines and production budgets through the storyboard, meticulous script work, the preview of the story development, and provision for the placement of cameras, all of which achieves high-speed shooting. The second is the selection of good professionals in the production, taking care in the casting, and using friendly management and social skills in order to create a climate of confidence and relaxation that is also demanding and efficient. The third is the intuitive and skilled narrative which is vital to understanding how effectively it conveys values, as discussed below.

Spielberg uses planned sequences and scenes throughout the development of storyboards, and, if it fits, he alternates with improvisation from the actors, but in a narrative-temporal calculation and with control from his part, meaning that it is balanced against the time available. For example, he factors in preproduction and when he is convinced that there is a realistic feasibility and cost, and then he directs. He sets up the production and, once rolling, the equipment requires that the pace is fast, and it always ends well before the deadline and saves on production over the initial budget.

Spielberg dictates the development of the action in conjunction with the storyboard in action films. Having this provision allows room for improvisation in calculating the expected linear narrative, as can be seen in *Duel*, which used a forty-yard long and five-foot high storyboard, allowing him to plan the exact location of the cameras during the course of filming and the necessary shots. With such a thorough job in the preproduction, filming was done quickly, reducing the costs. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* also had a detailed storyboard for its complex scenes, such as Indiana fighting on the tank, which allowed Harrison Ford to understand what moves had to be performed. This can also be seen in *Minority Report* with Anderton’s escape in the mag-lev, his being chased in the alley by a hovercraft, and the fight between Anderton and Witwer in the car factory.

In both *Minority Report* and *War of the Worlds*, the director benefited from a computer software tool that animates storyboards in three dimensions. This resource provided the location, scenery, locations of actors, cameras,