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Chapter 9

REPRESENTING RAPE IN HOLOCAUST FILM

Exhibiting the eroticised body for the camera's gaze

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Rape has been figured and refigured in Holocaust films since the cinema's first engagements with the subject of Nazi Germany. In an early scene of Charlie Chaplin's influential 1940 film, The Great Dictator, the Hitler-esque authoritarian ruler, 'Adenoid Hynkel' (played by Chaplin), summons his secretary into his personal office. A tall, 'Aryan'-looking woman obediently enters the room carrying a notepad and pen. Seconds after beginning to dictate a letter to her, Hynkel exudes a mixture of an animalistic snarl and snort, snatching the notepad from the woman's hands and throwing it to the floor. He grabs the back of her head, tilting her body downwards beneath his own and walks her backwards across the room in what almost amounts to an awkward dance to the light musical score in the background. The woman's forlorn cries of 'No, no!' are ignored as Hynkel snarls again with widened eyes and exhales as if snoring. The woman faints as Hynkel lowers her to the couch, the impending rape interrupted only by a ringing telephone. Summoned away, Hynkel seems to immediately forget the woman's presence and leaves the room, while the woman (who had apparently only feigned passing out) sits up to placidly watch her would-be attacker exit. After serving as a vehicle for demonising Hitler, the woman does not even seem to remember the assault when she dictates a letter for her Führer in a later scene.

In the present context of early 21st-century viewing (and perhaps even at the time of the film's release), this scene stands out awkwardly in Chaplin's humorous narrative. The threat of rape portrayed on the screen exhibits
a tension between the filmmaker's desire to criticise Adolf Hitler and the more pragmatic technique – common to Hollywood films at the time – of downplaying Hitler's importance and the danger he signified by implying to the audience that he should not be taken too seriously. In any case, with the joke and/or the 'message' being fulfilled, Hynkel's secretary makes no further appearance in the film. Importantly, The Great Dictator, already controversial at the time (and to this day) for breaking the taboo of using humour to depict the Nazis' persecution of Jews, was filmed and released prior to the mass exterminations of what is now known as the Holocaust. Nevertheless, many more portrayals of the sexual abuse of women in the context of Nazi Germany and the Second World War – and, more specifically, the Holocaust – have followed Chaplin's satirical work, with examples to be found in every decade since the war's end. As a result, the subject of rape has frequently intersected with eroticised images of female bodies, signalling a highly problematic trend in Holocaust films.

The increasing and important growth of Holocaust narratives – filmic and otherwise – that focus on women's experiences continues to qualify the established male-oriented 'canon' of Holocaust representation. However, the once – or even still – taboo issues of sexuality and sexual violence in this context still linger uncomfortably in the background. The most comprehensive study in this area to date, the collection of essays Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust (2010), reveals that many aspects of this subject remain marginalised in popular culture and in academic scholarship. Given the fundamental importance of films to both collective memories of the Holocaust and understandings of gender and violence more broadly, this chapter analyses the ways in which several Holocaust films eroticise the female body through the camera's gaze. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey influentially describes this gaze as encouraging male pleasure in objectifying the female form. While a diverse range of Holocaust-related films could be applied to this subject, the works selected for analysis here

2 Significantly, Chaplin expressed some regret after the war about The Great Dictator, noting in his autobiography that he may not have made the film had he been aware of what would soon take place in the concentration camps. See Charles Chaplin, My Autobiography (London: Penguin, 1974), 387–88.
3 Sophia Hedgepeth and Rochelle G Saidel, eds, Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press, 2010).
exemplify the often voyeuristic tendencies of many fiction films depicting events and experiences *during* the Holocaust, particularly those that provide sustained attention to the sexual assault and degradation of women. For this reason, we have excluded films relating to Nazi Germany that portray rape in other settings, such as the notorious anti-Semitic propaganda film *Jud Süß* [Jew Süss] (1940), which portrays a rape committed by the demonised protagonist; and the early Hollywood production *None Shall Escape* (1944), in which a Nazi officer on trial for war crimes is revealed by flashback to have raped (off-screen) one of his school pupils in Poland after the First World War. Likewise, the filmic representation of sexual violence against men in Holocaust films such as *Bent* (1997) and *The Reader* (2008) is an important issue that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Exploring the competing discourses and trends in how the female body is eroticised or otherwise treated in Holocaust fiction films, we argue that dominant modes of representation continue to reinforce this problematic representation of women in films, such as the recent mainstream production *Zwartboek* [Black Book] (2006). Nevertheless, we demonstrate that some Holocaust films subvert this trend, portraying sexual violence in ways that reject voyeurism, and reveal that film has considerable potential to represent rape in a nuanced and sophisticated manner.

The female body, voyeurism and the camera's gaze

Problematically, mainstream cinema still has a tendency to eroticise the rape victim's body. Indeed, many films depicting rape, such as Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused* (1988), have been criticised for encouraging voyeuristic attitudes towards rape, despite the filmmaker's apparent attempts to critique such attitudes.\(^5\) In her influential essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', Laura Mulvey argues that the viewer's perspective is aligned with that of the male protagonist, hence positioning the woman as the object of a voyeuristic male gaze. Mulvey argues that women's 'appearance [is] coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.\(^6\) She argues that this is the case because 'man is reluctant to gaze on his exhibitionist like',\(^7\) and must therefore control the

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6 Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', 11.
7 ibid., 12.
'look'. This is particularly problematic when the body is eroticised during a rape, as it therefore positions the viewer to derive pleasure from watching rape. Indeed, Sarah Projansky highlights the 'paradox of discursively increasing (and potentially eliciting pleasure in) the very thing a text is working against'. While it might appear counterintuitive to suggest that violent rape might be a source of pleasure, it is important to remember that meaning is subjective, and feminist theorist Susan Faludi relates that many young men who watched The Accused 'booted and cheered' during the rape scene.

These problems also apply to Holocaust films. While intrinsically difficult to depict, we by no means suggest that subjects such as the exploitation of women and sexual violence should not be represented. Such issues are crucial, yet as with the broader contemporary debates over Holocaust representation, and the representation of rape more generally, the question is not if they should be represented, but how. An ever-expanding literature on Holocaust film has contributed much to legitimising it as an important field of research; however, little substantial attention has been given to the representation of women, sexuality, rape and the voyeuristic tendencies of filmmaking at issue here. While some feminist scholars have discussed Holocaust films using Mulvey's concept of the cinematic gaze, the number and variety of films examined have unfortunately been limited.

8 loc. cit., 96.
11 See, for example, Marguerite Waller, 'Signifying the Holocaust: Liliana Cavani's Portiere di Notte', in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferr, eds, Feminisms in the Cinema (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 206–19. Other examples by Cottino-Jones and Scherr are cited below.
Many films have contributed to what Holocaust historian Saul Friedländer has characterised as 'a vast pornographic output centred on Nazism'.\(^\text{12}\) The infamous (semi- or fully) pornographic films *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS Special Section* (1975), *Salon Kitty* (1976), *Deported Women of the SS* (1976) and *SS Hell Camp* (1977), among many other Nazi (s)exploitation films of the 1960s and 1970s, have been criticised as encouraging a perverse voyeurism. Lynn Rapaport argues in her analysis of *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* that 'the Holocaust is not just being sexualized, but it is also being gendered – a woman in power is evil, a Nazi, a feminazi'.\(^\text{13}\) In these and other films, any attempt – if there is even an attempt – to critique the fetishistic aspects of Nazi ideology and practice can potentially, and problematically, reinforce these ideas. Of course, we are not attempting to draw parallels between these kinds of films and more authentic attempts to engage with World War II history on film, but the common intertwining of themes of sex, death and 'moral compromise' in films about the Nazis makes for a problematic cultural context for any filmmaker who attempts to represent women's experiences.

Liliana Cavani's controversial film, *Il portiere di notte* [The Night Porter] (1974), still prompts vigorous debate over the intersection of sex, the Holocaust and film. Exemplifying the trend of eroticising the female body in order to symbolise the apparently amoral environment of wartime Europe, *The Night Porter* portrays the tormented sexual relationship between a former Nazi officer and the camp inmate he repeatedly raped and sexually abused, who renew their destructive and fatal relationship after the war. Marga Cottino-Jones strongly criticises *The Night Porter*, arguing that the camera's 'voyeuristic effect and its subtle manipulation of the spectators' gaze and reactions' reveals the power of the image 'to overwhelm and ravish, to enlist a voyeuristic pleasure of almost any subject, no matter how monstrous'.\(^\text{14}\)

In his essay on the 'grey zone', prominent Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi strongly condemned the filmmaker's (intentional) blurring of the fundamental distinction between victim and perpetrator. Levi wrote that Cavani's film was 'false', a sign of 'a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all, it is precious service rendered ... to the


\(^{13}\) Lyn Rapaport, 'Holocaust pornography: Profaning the sacred in *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, Fall 2003, 63.

negators of truth’. Scholar Rebecca Scherr sums up many of the issues at hand, arguing that in Cavani’s film,

eroticism emerges as the central trope for examining the difficult subject of Holocaust experience and memory ... repl[ac]ing the absence of sexuality characteristic of memoirs of camp experience with an over-abundance of erotic imagery, a sign that indicates a general discomfort with the historical facts or with the methods one can employ to represent the Holocaust. Moreover, it is the female body that becomes the site for displaying this erotic impulse. The authors project a kind of sexual paranoia, and as readers/viewers watch these sexualized bodies they share the experience of navigating between sex and violence, and sex and death, in a fictional Holocaust universe.16

The problematic appropriation of the female body is part of a much broader phenomenon in Holocaust representation, with themes of perversion, sadomasochism, rape and nymphomania figuring in several films.

Reiterations of a familiar theme: Problematic portrayals of sexuality and rape

Most depictions of rape in Holocaust films are fleeting. To take one example, the implied rape of a young girl in NBC’s highly influential television miniseries, _Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss_ (1978), is briefly used as a metaphor for the ferocity of the Nazis’ persecution of Jews on _Kristallnacht_ ['Night of Broken Glass'] in 1938. The traumatised girl, who can no longer speak, is then murdered as part of the Nazis’ ‘euthanasia’ program; thus the rape is ultimately subsumed within the seven-and-a-half hour narrative that seeks to touch on ‘all’ aspects of Nazi persecution. On the other hand, some representations of the (actual, planned or potential) degradation and assault of women form major points around which a film’s plot pivots. The variety of representations is aligned with the diversity of ‘uses’ to which the device or trope of rape is put in filmic terms.

Emphasising the ‘silence’ that has formed in historical writing and testimonial narratives around the subject of rape during the Holocaust, Zoë Waxman writes that ‘when writing rape into the Holocaust, historians and other custodians of memory also need to ensure that they are not imposing on survivors their own concerns and preoccupations’. This point can readily be applied to the appropriation of rape by filmmakers to generate meanings of various kinds and for various agendas. A brief survey of Holocaust cinema reveals that films represent acts of rape and eroticised images of the female body in a number of ways: as a means of signifying a male survivor’s trauma; a way to construct binaries between a narrative’s (male) ‘hero’ and ‘villain’; a tool for engaging in sheer comic absurdity; or a vehicle for exploring the apparently amoral environment viewed as a byproduct of Nazism and its atrocities.

Sidney Lumet’s film The Pawnbroker (1965) is as much concerned with contemporary ‘race relations’ in the United States as it is with the Holocaust, intertwining the traumatised back story of Holocaust survivor Sol Nazerman with the social tensions of 1960s America. In one of the film’s most pivotal scenes, an African-American prostitute attempts to use her body to entice the pawnbroker to give her a better price for her locket. While the woman strips off all her clothes in front of Nazerman, she repeatedly tells him to ‘Look’, arguably reinforcing the racialised and sexualised stereotype of the ‘Othered’ Black woman. At the same time, the camera cuts to images of Nazerman’s experience in Auschwitz, including a panning shot of several women forced to be camp ‘prostitutes’. Juxtaposing the African-American woman’s exposed breasts in the present day with the naked body of Nazerman’s wife just prior to his witnessing a Nazi officer raping her, the female body serves as a conduit to Nazerman’s repressed memories, which are ignited by the woman’s physical provocation. Nazerman orders the woman out of his store, and his enraged groan and clenched fist serve as a prelude to the well-known ‘silent scream’ at the end of the film, which signals the release of his repressed trauma.

19 It should be noted that the forced prostitution of women in the camps is better characterised as ‘rape slavery’, though the former term is more prevalent in Holocaust literature.
Several decades later, the depiction of eroticised female bodies and sexual abuse in the context of the Holocaust would take an entirely different form in Steven Spielberg’s Hollywood blockbuster Schindler’s List (1993), a film that has inspired a critical industry of its own.\textsuperscript{20} One scene in particular that has attracted considerable attention is the (in)famous ‘shower scene’, which takes place after a group of Jewish women are temporarily diverted from the promised safety of Schindler’s factory to Auschwitz. With subtle intertextual leanings to Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960), the building tension and emotional catharsis (when water bursts from the ceiling rather than the anticipated gas) rely heavily on a voyeuristic gaze on the female body, which is arguably eroticised, if only briefly, in the undressing room sequence shortly beforehand. Reflecting a widely held view, Barry Langford writes that the scene parallels the redemptive trajectory of the film’s overall narrative, and has the effect of “pornographising” genocide; that is, it issues an explicit “come-on” to the spectator, its exploitative address underlined by the naked female flesh on ample display.\textsuperscript{21} Scholars have also commented at length on the scene in the cellar where the threat of rape looms large over Helen’s eroticised body as Amon Goeth stalks and then beats her.\textsuperscript{22} Crucially, Helen’s character functions to make clear the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ men through the different ways that Oskar Schindler and Goeth treat her, rather than being a person in her own right.

An even more dubious representation of (attempted) rape can be found in a more unconventional ‘rescue story’, the Czech film Divided We Fall (2000), which focuses on a married couple who are generally indifferent to the plight of Jews being deported from their town, although they do secretly (and reluctantly) care for an escaped victim. In one scene, what could be portrayed as a chilling and callous attempt at rape is trivialised and mocked. A collaborator, Horst, attempts to rape the main female character, Marie; however, the event occurs in a brightly lit picnic setting and uses elements of slapstick. When the scene begins, Horst tells Marie that he is ‘preparing an offensive’, which seems to tally with early feminist arguments that rape

\textsuperscript{20} For a detailed account of the popular and scholarly reception of Schindler’s List, see Alan Mintz, Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 125–58.


is an act of violence rather than of sex, yet this sentiment is portrayed as ridiculous through Horst’s failure to complete the ‘offensive’. When Marie cries that Horst is attempting to rape her, Horst asks, ‘What rape? Nobody’s here. We’re here alone’, as if he could not possibly be a rapist. The comic absurdity of the scenario renders the attack titillating and a potential source of pleasure. Marie kicks her attacker in the groin before expressing genuine concern that she hurt him, showing how easily the rapist could be overcome and making light of the threat. In the film’s climactic happy ending, Horst, who is not even a doctor, helps deliver Marie’s baby, further marginalising and dismissing the threat of rape.

Images of rape and the voyeuristic gaze on the woman’s body serve a different purpose again in Lina Wertmüller’s 1975 film *Pasqualino Settebellezze* [Seven Beauties], which follows the comedic exploits of Pasqualino, whose journey encompasses his days as a roguish scoundrel and murderer in Italy, an inmate in an insane asylum, and a prisoner in Auschwitz. The adventures of the egotistical (and mostly unsympathetic) protagonist, who is determined to survive the war at any and all costs, are propelled by his various encounters with female bodies, which are portrayed by turns as erotic and grotesque. Invariably, the film’s camerawork invites the viewer to adopt the male’s gaze on women – from the obese Nazi officer who exchanges food for sex, to the woman tied to an insane asylum bed whom he rapes. While representations of sexual assault in any medium should legitimise the suffering of the victim and indct the perpetrator, the film’s portrayal of rape immediately shifts to the physical torture of the perpetrator (along with Pasqualino’s other suffering), thus effectively writing the victim of rape out of the narrative.

Eli Pfefferkorn writes that *Seven Beauties* presents ‘the painful ambiguities that derive from survival in extremities that shame man into hiding’, yet he does not take into account the eroticised (or grotesque) bodies of women, nor the exploitation of these bodies (by both protagonist and camera). Upon deserting the Italian army on the way to Stalingrad, Pasqualino stumbles across an isolated villa in the forest, peering inside to see the naked back of a woman playing the piano and singing. Signalling a tension between two (apparently insatiable) appetites, Pasqualino ceases to encircle the room like

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23 Susan Brownmiller was an early proponent of this argument in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 194–197.

a predator staring at the woman's body, and ventures into the kitchen to fill his mouth and pockets with food while engaging in comic banter with an old woman who cannot understand or stop him. The film's frequently voyeuristic gaze constructed around the semi-naked bodies of women, along with the comedic portrayal of rape, perhaps signals less 'a scathing comment on the breakdown of human compassion and moral responsibility by the civilized world', as Pfeferkorn contends,\(^{25}\) and more an ambivalent representation of an amoral wartime Europe left ravaged in the wake of Nazi Germany's destructive agenda. A similar representational agenda seems to be at work in the 2006 film *Black Book*, one of the most recent re-articulations of this voyeuristic trend in Holocaust film.

**The erotic and the abject in Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book* (2006)**

*Black Book* follows a similar thematic line to Wertmüller's much earlier production, focusing on the 'compromises' necessary to survive in an apparently amoral world. Unlike *Seven Beauties*, however, the flawed protagonist of *Black Book* is a Jewish woman, Rachel Stein, who takes the name Ellis de Vries when masquerading as an 'Aryan' to assist the local Dutch Resistance. The film's director, Paul Verhoeven, who also made *RoboCop* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Showgirls* (1995) and *Starship Troopers* (1997), is well known for his excess-driven plots, and *Black Book* is no exception. After her entire family is killed in a bloody massacre, Ellis joins the Resistance and is assigned to seduce a high-ranking Nazi officer, Müntze, with whom she soon falls in love. The film is clearly intended to work against the exploitation of women by Nazism and, more broadly, by men; however, the aesthetics employed throughout the narrative undermine this surface ideology, positioning the viewer to view the female body simultaneously as an erotic object and an embodiment of the abject.

While the female figure serves to varying degrees as a sexualised prop in the films already mentioned, Ellis functions as an agent in *Black Book*. Nevertheless, she only has her 'feminine wiles' to draw from - violence is left to the men. The film does consciously play on (and with) the idea of using one's body to subvert the perpetrators' goals; however, significant contradictions lie at the heart of the narrative. Her constant central positioning within the frame, and the way she stands out from any background and all other

\(^{25}\) ibid., 674.
people, encourages viewers to see her body as an erotic spectacle. Adopting an appearance not unlike Marlene Dietrich, Ellis sings for the Nazis and frequently wears transparent clothing (even on impractical occasions when spending time with the Resistance and not trying to seduce any Nazis). A close-up shot early in the film draws the viewer's gaze to her pubic hair while she dyes it blonde for extra 'Aryan' effect. Even more problematically, when Müntze realises that Ellis is Jewish as she tries to seduce him, she succeeds in winning him over by drawing his hands to her breasts and her hips, repeatedly asking him, 'Are these Jewish?' Although this may be intended to imply that she is — like all women — human, the question actually attaches very degrading connotations to the physique of Jewish women.

Torn between the Nazi perpetrator-occupiers and the Resistance (which are portrayed as equally brutal as the war ends), the figure of Ellis is emblematic of the film's depiction of wartime Europe: she acts as a metaphor to portray the aesthetic sheen of power and the powerful — the beauty that disguises a rotten foundation. In this sense, Ellis becomes the embodiment of not only the erotic, but also the grotesque and abject. At one point, she is shown as completely mired in the abject when she attempts to avoid detection as a spy by using a toilet to clean grease off her foot (ignoring the sink that stands alongside it). Although the audience is clearly positioned to identify and sympathise with Ellis throughout the film, the devices used to this end rely on a voyeuristic gaze that takes in a compilation of degrading images of women which the film, on the surface, seeks to critique.

Women's experiences are again brought to the fore after the liberation, with one disturbing shot portraying several women publicly humiliated by Resistance members who cut off their hair and label them 'Nazi whores' with a sign. However, the effectiveness of this image is undermined shortly afterwards by perhaps the film's most confronting scene, when the Resistance forces a group of imprisoned collaborators, including Ellis, to strip naked in a factory surrounded by concentration camp-like fencing. Ellis, whose naked body is foregrounded by the camera's gaze while the bodies of those around her are hidden, is singled out and, when she refuses to sing for the drunken crowd, she is bombarded with a barrel of human excrement from above. While a Nazi officer tells a resister early in the film that 'You are a pile of shit on the road to German victory', Ellis becomes a pile of shit in the wake of German defeat. To further the 'shock value' of the scene, one of the resister-now-perpetrators hoses her down as if he is urinating on her. As one scholar of Holocaust film has recently noted, 'filming for shock effect can transform a scene from a war crime to a kind of commercial pornography
that...[injures] the image of survivor women. In short, even though Ellis is clearly the victim in *Black Book*, the voyeuristic depiction of her body—as turns erotic and grotesque—is exploited by both characters and filmmaker, transforming it into a site of voyeurism to explore the dark natures of Nazism and humanity.

**Performing history in/through film: Deconstructing the gaze**

In an essay published in 2010, Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan provides the most recent discussion of sexual abuse of women and girls in Holocaust cinematic memory, identifying the female body as ‘public property’ and contending that women are used ‘as a vehicle for conveying the Nazi/Fascist message, for carrying out their sex crimes, sexual exploitation, and pimping, and as a means through which pure evil works itself out in all its ugliness’. While this might indeed apply to many of the films noted previously, this is not always the case. Several recent Holocaust films engage seriously and sensitively with the traumatic experiences of women, and some arguably succeed in avoiding patriarchal objectification. Although Kozlovsky-Golan suggests that fictional dramatisations of rape ‘can often transmit the reality better than words can’, she laments that ‘the bounds of cinematic representation of sex and sexual abuse of women during the Holocaust’ have not been broken. However, through a self-reflexive emphasis on performativity and intertextuality, Michael Verhoeven’s *Mutters Courage* [My Mother’s Courage] (1995) and Audrius Juzenas’ *Ghetto* (2006) deconstruct the male gaze and, as a result, subvert the voyeuristic sexualisation of women common to other Holocaust films.

*My Mother’s Courage* offers a heavily ironic representation of the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in 1944. While the above examples of ‘Holocaust comedies’, *The Great Dictator*, *Seven Beauties* and *Divided We Fall*, demonstrate problematic tendencies in their combination of comedy and rape, which tend to belittle, marginalise or degrade the victim, Verhoeven’s film reveals that this is not an inevitable outcome of the

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27 ibid., 241.

28 ibid., 249.
genre. Verhoeven's sensitive engagement with the fraught issue of sexual assault is partly achieved through the employment of humour at various points throughout the film. Having claimed that 'we have no right to assert that this is reality precisely because it is a true story', Verhoeven privileges self-reflexivity over a conventional linear narrative. The narrator – played by George Tabori, whose real mother's story of survival is dramatised in the film – physically intrudes on the 'set', interacting with, and often making fun of, the characters or the actors who are playing them. This mode of representation repeatedly highlights the constructed nature of the film, but also subverts the potential eroticisation of the female body. The film is part comedy, part tragedy, and includes three instances of rape within its narrative, with the effectiveness of these more serious moments enhanced as they are preceded by scenes of comic banter.

While waiting to board the train, protagonist Elsa Tabori makes friends with another Jewish deportee, Maria, who tells Elsa how she was raped by several Hungarian collaborators. Flashbacks show the young girl being chased by several men, who hold her head down in a flushing toilet before forcing her onto a table as she struggles and cries out. One then starts to remove his belt. While the dramatisation ends there, opening up the possibility of the rape being elided, the portrayal of Maria's experience continues through her statement that she does not think she screamed (although the dramatised re-enactment suggests she did). The filmmaker uses shot-reverse-shot, moving back and forth between the characters' faces, which presents lingering views of the girl's traumatised visage and Elsa's sympathetic expression and comforting embrace. This technique encourages an empathetic understanding of the victim's trauma.

A similar validation and lack of eroticisation are employed when Elsa is raped in the cattle car by another deportee, shattering her previous flashbacks of pleasant family life and representing an experience that is seldom mentioned in discussions of deportation. The rapist's aggressive face is relegated to the edge of the frame, while the camera's gaze focuses primarily on Elsa's shocked, then horrified facial expression rather than on her body, as she attempts to fight the man off. This actively negates the potential for eroticisation. Afterwards, Elsa brushes herself down with the seemingly compulsive need to 'wash away the rapist' that many victims experience. This

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takes the place of the ‘showering’ scene, which Projansky argues is important in signalling to the viewer that rape did actually take place.\textsuperscript{30} Mulvey argues that denying the camera’s presence prevents the audience from being aware of it and is therefore crucial for naturalising the objectifying gaze.\textsuperscript{31} The self-conscious camerawork in \textit{My Mother’s Courage} actively disrupts this problematic effect. After the rape scene, the film immediately shifts to an explicitly intertextual connection with Claude Lanzmann’s paradigmatic film \textit{Shoah} (1985), recreating the well-known figure of the train conductor looking out from the locomotive. Once again exposing the artifice of the fictional narrative, \textit{My Mother’s Courage} implies that the ‘reality’ of this trauma can never be represented fully.

Another self-reflexive film that engages with the complexities of rape during the Holocaust is the German production of \textit{Ghetto}, adapted from Israeli playwright Joshua Sobol’s stageplay. Portraying the vexed issue of Jewish behaviour in the Vilna ghetto\textsuperscript{a} prior to its liquidation, the film’s narrative focuses on the order to establish a theatre in the ghetto to ‘keep up morale’ by SS officer Kittel, who, in one of the film’s many subplots, has become infatuated with the theatre’s lead singer, Haya. Released in 2006, the film in many ways implicitly rejects the redemptory aesthetic of \textit{Schindler’s List}. Unlike the tension between Goeth and Helen in Spielberg’s film, the relationship (if it can be called that) between Kittel and Haya is not eroticised, even though her body is used at times to influence the Nazi perpetrator.\textsuperscript{32}

One instance of rape is depicted in \textit{Ghetto}, during a scene in which Kittel and other Nazi soldiers stage a kind of ‘celebration’ with the members of the theatre troupe. Throughout the scene, the artificiality of the situation is emphasised through the visibly uncomfortable expressions of the Jewish victims present (who have been ordered to ‘keep the Germans happy’), the frequent onscreen presence of a Nazi camera operator, and the black-and-white footage of the scene (apparently being filmed by the Nazi) that is

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\item[]\textsuperscript{30} Projansky, \textit{Watching Rape}, 109. The third (implied) rape in the film occurs in flashback, immediately following this scene, as Elsa remembers seeing her doctor-father with a woman in his surgery.
\item[]\textsuperscript{31} Mulvey, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, 17.
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intermingled with colour film. The fast editing and lively rendition of 'I am the Naughty Lola' nevertheless implicate the audience as spectators of the onscreen entertainment, until a sudden change in the soundtrack combines haunting sounds, an absurd speech about Jewish productivity by the film’s Schindler figure, and the screams of a Jewish woman who is violently raped by two German soldiers. The bloodied woman falls to the floor in front of the stunned and guilt-ridden group, confronting the Jews with their extreme situation. The blood arguably signifies that the rape was an act of violence, rather than sex, negating its eroticisation.

Connoting determination in the face of tragedy, another woman sings a song of survival and lament – 'We will fight and we will strive to carry on and stay alive!' – until she is cut off when Kittel forces a phallic cigar into her mouth and changes the song. This actually heightens the effect of the Jewish lament, because it disrupts the audience’s emotional response. Further, when an intoxicated Kittel informs the head of the Jewish Police, Jacob Gens, that he is to organise 2,000 Jews to be ‘selected’ and delivered to Lithuanian militia (evidently to be shot), the ambiguous figure of Gens exposes Haya’s breasts to the obsessed Kittel in order to ‘bargain’ him down to 600 victims. The image of Haya trapped between the two men who barter over her body is thus linked to the abuse of the woman who has just been raped. The use of the onscreen camera in this scene, like the self-reflexive elements of My Mother’s Courage, again disrupts rather than normalises the eroticising gaze.

Conclusion: Towards a new aesthetic?

Mulvey’s concept of the ‘gaze’ emphasises ‘the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning’.³³ In the area of Holocaust film, representations of female victims of Nazi persecution have frequently given history heavily gendered meanings, (re)inscribing patriarchal understandings of the event. Ever since the secretary of Chaplin’s ‘Hynkel’ was marginalised in The Great Dictator, the eroticisation of the female body and trivialisation of rape have permeated collective memories through the screen. Indeed, there are many more films that could be discussed in relation to this subject than could be covered here and further research on rape and the Holocaust is needed. It is clear that filmmakers have begun to confront social and cultural anxieties around rape in the unprecedented context of the Holocaust, although there remain considerable obstacles to this. The

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eroticisation of the female body is still a commonplace trope in mainstream films in particular, and this has informed much of Holocaust cinematic history. Nevertheless, films such as *My Mother's Courage* and *Ghetto* show that film can and does have a crucial role to play in mediating sexual violence, revealing the potential to disrupt the voyeuristic gaze and represent women's experiences during the Holocaust in a complex and nuanced manner.