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Published version

FENWICK, James, FOSTER, Kieran and VICE, Sue (2024). Introduction: Unmade Holocaust Films. Journal of War and Culture Studies, 247-253.

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Introduction:

Unmade Holocaust Films

James Fenwick, Kieran Foster and Sue Vice

The Holocaust has been a major subject of concern for filmmakers and screenwriters for over 80 years. A notable number of films centring on the wartime murders have received critical acclaim at the film industry's most prestigious events, such as the Academy Awards. *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) was nominated for eight Academy Awards, including Best Motion Picture; *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) was put forward for ten Awards, including Best Motion Picture; and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) was nominated for twelve, winning seven, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay.

Yet, this list of award-nominated and award-winning films does not necessarily indicate that the full horrors of the Holocaust have been accurately realised or comprehensively represented on screen. Indeed, in a conversation reported by the screenwriter Frederic Raphael, the filmmaker Stanley Kubrick said in response to a question about Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, 'Think that's about the Holocaust? That was about success, wasn't it? The Holocaust is about 6 million people who get killed. *Schindler's List* is about 600 who don't' (Raphael 1999: 105).

Kubrick, who had been working for many decades to try and produce a Holocaust film and failed (as examined by two of the articles in this special issue), seems to have been insinuating that the Holocaust was unfilmable within the conventional codes of visual narrative and genre. Claude Lanzmann, director of *Shoah* (1985), the nine-and-a-half hours long and eleven-years in the making documentary about the Holocaust, shared similar sentiments, suggesting it was almost impossible to produce a film that would do justice to the violence and unprecedented nature of the mass murder committed by the Nazis and their

accomplices (Brody 2012). For *Shoah*, Lanzmann chose not to use archival footage from the Nazi era, but instead filmed interviews with survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators, interspersed with contemporary landscape footage. It was a documentary that offered 'a contemplation of that subject [the Holocaust] using specifically cinematic means to do so' (Vice 2011: 2). These two directors, both of whom had an overriding preoccupation with the Holocaust as a subject of their filmmaking, were engaged in a decades-long exploration of how to tell the story and how to represent it on screen. And while Lanzmann succeeded (although with hundreds of hours of footage going unused and unreleased – see Vice 2020, and Dominic Williams in this special issue), Kubrick failed, with his attempts remaining unmade.

This special issue about unmade Holocaust films and television stems from the conference *Unmade, Unseen, and Unreleased: Shadow Histories of Film and Television* (2022), convened at Sheffield Hallam University in collaboration with the University of Nottingham. The conference was one of the first major international gatherings of academics studying the phenomenon of unmade and unreleased film and television. Many of the papers took a case-study approach, highlighting particular film projects that remain unmade. But it was one subject more than any other that repeatedly came up as the focus of these case studies: the Holocaust. In contrast to the rollcall of 'successful' Holocaust films mentioned above (in the sense that they were produced and released), archives around the world contain evidence of the drafted, abandoned, and thwarted Holocaust projects that have been attempted by filmmakers or written by screenwriters, with differing contexts and rationales for remaining unmade. This special issue brings together a selection of case studies to examine in closer detail why the Holocaust as a subject for film adaptation has remained so difficult to represent on screen and why there are so many examples of unmade Holocaust films.

Academic interest in unmade films has been growing momentum over the past two decades. The first major interventions came from Dan North, editor of the collection *Sights Unseen: Unfinished British Films* (2008), which examines the history of unmade films in the context of the British film industry; Simone Murray, who analyses unmade films through the context of the 'adaptation industry' (2008); Peter Krämer, who considers the wider implications of the unmade on the American film industry via a case study of Stanley Kubrick, a filmmaker who is a key focus in this special issue (2015); and Peter Kunze, who focused on the media labour involved in unmade films and coined the term 'unproduction studies' (2017). What these initial forays into the field of the unmade indicate, as argued in the edited collection *Shadow Cinema*, is that 'across the globe and across history, filmmakers and cinema industries have typically invested more time, money and creative energy in projects and ideas that never get produced than in the movies that actually made it to the screens' (2020: 5). As case studies about unmade films accumulate, the scale of the phenomenon across film history becomes ever more apparent, with a whole shadow workforce geared towards the development of films that were never made and quite often were never even intended to be made.

The study of the unmade typically, though not exclusively, involves archival research, examining production files, scripts, synopses, treatments, outlines, correspondence, contracts, and artworks, test footage, audition reels and outtakes (Fenwick 2021: 5). These archival fragments allow projects to be reconstructed, or at times resuscitated in new forms and brought to life through script readings, artwork, or even rewritten and successfully produced as feature films (see Foster 2023 for an examination of these innovative and immersive approaches to bringing the unmade to life). This process of revival is clear in relation to Kubrick's unmade *Aryan Papers*, the archival material for which was used by the artists Jane and Louise Wilson to produce a 20-minute film, *Unfolding the Aryan Papers* (2009).

Focusing on the pre-production photographs and scripts in the archive, the artists produced a creative response that mixed footage of archival material with footage shot in the present (see Langford 2012).

The articles in this special issue emphasize that, while the reasons for Holocaust-related films to stay unmade may include the practical and financial concerns that affect other unrealised projects, they also concern aesthetic and ethical questions particular to the representation of the genocide. Indeed, the history of Holocaust film could be seen as a series of negotiations between the impetus to depict events which are of such memorial and educational importance, versus the difficulty of doing so without producing a work that is either 'unwatchable' (Freedland 2023) or superficial and exploitative. While rediscovering lost films of this kind can make it seem that an aspect of Holocaust memory itself has miraculously been retrieved, the original reasons for such works going unmade are not so easily explained away. The widely discussed feature *The Day the Clown Died*, directed by and starring the American comedian Jerry Lewis, was due for release in 1972 but never completed. A rough-cut version was placed under embargo by Lewis himself, with a first-ever public screening scheduled for June 2024 at the US's National Audio-Visual Conservation Center (Salah and Mullally 2024). In addition to financial problems taking the film greatly over-budget, Lewis was said to have found the plot and process of filming, which included location shooting in Auschwitz and Dachau, emotionally overwhelming. Even unreleased, with only unsanctioned fragments and the script in circulation, the film has generated polarized critical responses to the combination of slapstick and tragedy in Lewis's portrayal of the eponymous clown, a political prisoner who is forced to lead Jewish children into the gas chambers. While the cinema critic Jean-Michel Frodon approved of the film's 'bitter' and 'disturbing' effect, praising its 'daring' plotline, others, typified by Harry Shearer,

judged the mixture of pathos and comedy to be 'wildly misplaced' (quoted in Handy, 1992, 2017).

As suggested by these starkly divergent estimates, even about a film that has never been publicly viewed, the crucial debates about the relationship between visual form and content that have taken place in the context of Holocaust cinema may also prevent their completion or release. This is the case in relation to documentary as well as feature films. Thus, in Sidney Bernstein's footage from 1945 of the newly liberated camp of Bergen-Belsen, the horror of the events was so great that they could hardly be believed, let alone filmed through the usual continuity modes of constructing a 'scenographic space' (Bordwell 1989: 113). Such a conundrum was addressed by Alfred Hitchcock in his advisory role on Bernstein's film, which included 'instructing the cameramen to film in long takes to avoid any accusations of fakery' (Parkinson 2016).

Yet Bernstein's planned documentary film based on this footage, to be called *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, itself went unreleased, for reasons relating to early-Cold War political considerations in Britain as much as its horrifying nature, as set out in André Singer's 2014 film-about-the-film, *Night Will Fall*. In an example of form's importance in a fiction film, Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapò* (1960), about the moral descent of a Jewish prisoner Edith (Susan Strasberg) into the titular role of a camp functionary, has been criticized for its use of cinematic techniques too 'beautiful' for its Holocaust-related subject (Daney 2020: 169). These include the use of a tracking shot to show the prisoner Thérèse (Emmanuelle Riva) ending her life in despair by throwing herself onto the camp's electrified fence, followed by a close-up on her hand. By contrast to Hitchcock's use of the long take, the aesthetic recognisability of the tracking shot in Pontecorvo's film was judged unsuitable for the bleakness of Thérèse's death in the camp.

Such instances of institutional and artistic concern, which might make planned projects remain unmade, are elements in a wider debate about Holocaust representability centred most paradigmatically, where realist depictions are concerned, on the gas chambers. While this method of 'industrialized' murder by gassing typifies the Holocaust and is the reason for the event's crucial status in cultural memory, its visual or literary portrayal remains a taboo (Dickson 2020, Langford 1999). This dilemma has been filmically acknowledged in recent works such as László Nemes' Auschwitz-set film *Son of Saul* (2015), where the cinematographer Mátyás Erdély filmed events in a way overtly addressing 'the challenge of "how to show what cannot be shown"' (Hilton). In this case, the tracking shots following the actions of the eponymous prisoner Saul (Géza Röhrig), forced into work as a Sonderkommando member in the camp, are filmed by a hand-held camera, with the background almost always out of focus. Although, as in *Kapò*, such a method accentuates cinematic technique, it does so by withholding the imagery of atrocity, which the spectator has to envisage for themselves.

These examples of the tension between political and aesthetic concerns affecting Holocaust film show the obstacles to embarking on and the difficulty of completing such works, as well as the importance of detailed inquiry into their production background when they remain unmade. The articles in this special issue draw attention to the balance between these factors in examples which range from unmade television plays to Hollywood drama, art cinema to documentary, showing unrepresentability to be a multifaceted notion. In her article on Stanley Kubrick's *Aryan Papers*, Joy McEntee argues that this unmade adaptation of Louis Begley's 1991 novel *Wartime Lies* gives a new insight into the director's depiction of female characters which is apparent nowhere else in his oeuvre. McEntee's analysis traces the increasingly active role of the female protagonist Tania in Kubrick's screenplay drafts, arguing that the casting of the relatively unknown actor Johanna ter Steege in that role would

have been foundational to this portrait of a defiant yet ordinary woman in Nazi-occupied Poland. Nicholas Johnson's article 'Shadow Quality TV' takes a contextual approach in its analysis of the cancelled drama *Complicity*, intended to be the sequel to the highly regarded BBC/HBO *Conspiracy* (2001). As its title suggests, the cancelled work, with its focus on the failure of the 1943 Bermuda Conference to address the refugee crisis, uncomfortably implies an element of Allied responsibility for the terrible death toll of the Holocaust, in a way that is undoubtedly among the reasons for its going unrealized.

Caitlin McDonald's article 'Examining the legacy of Nazism in Emeric Pressburger's unmade films' unpicks a key archetype present in so much of Pressburger's work - the 'good German'. McDonald suggests that while figures of this kind are prevalent in many of Pressburger's produced projects, it becomes even more established in an examination of his unproduced works. Arguing that through a study of these works Pressburger attempts to come to terms with the moral implications of the Holocaust, McDonald utilises archival materials such as unfilmed screenplays, notes and personal diaries to demonstrate how Pressburger foregrounded these thematic sentiments throughout his work. James Jordan's article 'Holocaust Ghosts in the Archive' amplifies the theme of Holocaust-related works going unmade in the context of British television drama. Jordan's example is a play, 'A Cloth Cap and a Tuning Fork', written as early as 1952 by David Kossoff for the BBC, but never produced. The play's centring on the annual reunion of four camp survivors, all to be played by Kossoff, made its realisation too difficult to achieve, yet its focus on ghostly revenants makes it a fitting embodiment of British memory being haunted by disavowed traces of the Holocaust. Dominic Williams' article 'Placing the Location Outtakes of *Shoah*' looks closely at Claude Lanzmann's film, specifically the 30-plus hours of unedited location footage held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Foregrounding the challenge in analysing this footage, Williams brings together two contrasting modes of analysis. Firstly the radical

film-making practice of Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub (which allows discussions marked by film theory), and secondly the exploration of space and location through online maps. By using these two contrasting methodologies, Williams foregrounds the difficulties in trying to make sense of these outtakes in relation to the complex spatiality of the Holocaust.

Finally, Sue Vice's article 'Stanley Kubrick's Quest for the Heroic' on *Aryan Papers* shows the necessarily speculative nature of analysing reasons for filmic projects going unmade by offering a perspective that differs from McEntee's on the same work. Vice argues that Kubrick's efforts at filming Begley's novel foundered on the contradictory imperatives of cinematic narrative where the Holocaust is concerned. The more the director tried to make this story of survival in hiding dramatic and redemptive to suit Hollywood strictures, the less it was faithful to the very book that had inspired it, with its portrait of psychic damage and irreparable loss. While rescue and resistance might make for engaging cinema, such an emphasis risks betraying the essence of a Holocaust experience, as suggested by Kubrick's criticism of *Schindler's List* quoted above.

In a recent study analysing the historiography of the wartime genocide, Dan Stone describes its legacy as one that is likely to remain 'unfinished' (2023). This is certainly the case for Holocaust cinema and the significance of works that have remained unmade or unreleased. Films consisting of retrievals of abandoned footage continue to appear, in addition to tantalising reports of unused footage on Holocaust-related themes held in the archives of such filmmakers as Chantal Akerman and Ruth Beckermann, and dramas or reports commissioned but never broadcast by public institutions such as the BBC (Jordan 2021). Recent recoveries of documentary footage range from a home-movie fragment shot in 1938 by an American Jewish returnee to his Polish birthplace, analysed in *Three Minutes: A Lengthening* (Bianca Stigter 2021), to that taken in the Warsaw Ghetto by the Nazis themselves in 1942 for an unfinished propaganda film, as repurposed in Yael Hersonski's *A*

Film Unfinished (2010). As the instances of unmade films by Stanley Kubrick and Jerry Lewis show, unexpected Holocaust projects exist unseen in the back catalogue of filmic auteurs celebrated for their works on quite other topics. Michael Witt's forthcoming study of Jean-Luc Godard's abandoned projects, which include a significant number of Holocaust-centred works for cinema and television, will allow us to make better sense of the director's released works, such as *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1989-99), and the contretemps with his contemporary Claude Lanzmann about what such works can ethically depict (see Witt 2020, Saxton 2003).

The essays in this special issue attest that the shadow story of unmade Holocaust films is illuminating precisely because it might seem to be one of failure. The reasons for not completing or releasing particular works lay bare the extensive political, practical and artistic difficulties of making coherent cinema from an experience that, despite the presence of a salvatory arc in some such films, rather upends customary certainties about human virtue or progress and civilization itself. Unmade Holocaust cinema could therefore be seen as the event's most telling artistic expression.

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