Jewish Experience on Film — An American Overview

by JOEL ROSENBERG

FOR ONE FAMILIAR WITH THE long history of Jewish sacred texts, it is fair to characterize film as the quintessential profane text. Being tied as it is to the life of industrial science and production, it is the first truly posttraditional art medium — a creature of gears and bolts, of lenses and transparencies, of drives and brakes and projected light, a creature whose life substance is spreadshot onto a vast ocean of screen to display another kind of life entirely: the images of human beings; stories; purported history; myth; philosophy; social conflict; politics; love; war; belief. Movies seem to take place in a domain between matter and spirit, but are, in a sense, dependent on both. Like the Golem — the artificial anthropoid of Jewish folklore, a creature always yearning to rise or reach out beyond its own materiality — film is a machine truly made in the human image: a late-born child of human culture that manifests an inherently stubborn and rebellious nature. It is a being that has suffered, as it were, all the neuroses of its mostly 20th-century rise and flourishing and has shared in all the century's treacheries. It is in this context above all that we must consider the problematic subject of Jewish experience on film.

In academic research, the field of film studies has now blossomed into a richly elaborate body of criticism and theory, although its reigning schools of thought — at present, heavily influenced by Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and various flavors of deconstruction — have often preferred the fashionable habit of reasoning by decree in place of genuine observation and analysis. Even so, the resources have grown immensely since the 1970s for developing a more sophisticated approach to the study of Jewish experience on film. This designation for the subject is preferable to the more colloquial term "Jewish film," for several reasons. First, film is not just the neutral instrument of various national cultures expressing themselves in art — it is a powerful creation of human imagination and technology that has, in some sense, drawn these cultures into its ongoing life. Then, too, film is a vastly collaborative art that is inherently multinational and multicultural in its practical operations. Scan the credits of any film and you will see that even the most nationally or culturally identified films are indelibly international, as are film's visual language and aesthetic choices.

Finally, the film of Jewish experience is intimately bound up with the non-Jewish world's use of Jewish experience for its own reflection. Jews in some sense participate in that reflection and have shaped it in significant ways — but we are dealing, in any case, with an intercultural realm, with the larger civil society in which Jews dwell, which has cultural claims of its own. Jewish film in the strict sense of the term is a component of that whole. But the representation of Jewish experience on film, which extends far beyond Jewish film as such, is an important subject of inquiry in its own right, which is only now gaining the serious attention of Jewish studies.[1]

Clearly, there is a need for widening our conception of "Jewish film" to mean more than simply a discourse of either Jews or Gentiles; more, let us say, than an "image" of the Jew, considered as a prepackaged object submitted for Gentile approval or disdain; more, even, than the cultural output of various Jewish societies. Rather, the presence of the Jew in film needs to be rethought in the context of cinema history as a whole and set against the major crises and disasters of the 20th century, especially the Jewish catastrophe in Europe.

Film grew up, as it were, as an older sibling of modern totalitarianism, and of the Holocaust itself. The ideological exploitation of film by Nazi Germany and, throughout the same era, by the Soviet Union, was only a more conscious instance of a process long in place in the cinema of the bourgeois democracies. In those societies, film worked, usually unconsciously, in harmony with existing social institutions, and the dictates of censorship (typically motivated by churches, schools, and civic and political groups) were fairly early internalized in film practice by the film industry itself. One can of course learn a great deal by studying the representation of the Jew in the cinema of Nazi Germany.[2] But cinema outside of Nazi Germany, and on other subjects than the Holocaust or Jewish life, must be studied as well — not so much to weigh the accuracy or inaccuracy, the degree of sympathy or hostility, in its representation of Jews (these issues have predominated in an older generation of Jewish film studies), but for its systematic connections to the unfolding of 20th-century history, to the development of the film medium itself, and to the broader problems of race, class, nation, and ethnicity in modern times.

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[1]See, e.g., Charles Berlin, ed., *Jewish Film and Jewish Studies: Proceedings of a Conference Held at Harvard University on November 13 – 14, 1989, on the Role of Jewish Film in Teaching and Research in Jewish Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); idem, ed., *Guide to Judaica Videotapes in the Harvard College Library* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Matthew Stevens, ed., *Jewish Film Directory: A guide to more than 1200 films of Jewish interest from 32 countries over 85 years* (Westport, Conn., 1992); Charles Lawrence Gellert, ed., *The Holocaust, Israel, and the Jews: Motion Pictures in the National Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1989). For general introductions to the subject in its American setting, see note 4.

[2]On the Jew in German film of the Nazi era, see, e.g., David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933 – 1945* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 238 – 306.

What one needs to study is immense. The subject encompasses the world output of cinema, and extends all the way back to the era of primitive cinema, when, in 1903, the image of a Jew first appeared on screen. It requires some familiarity with film theory, past and present — a vast and often daunting thicket of reflection that draws on linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, psychology of perception, optics, aesthetics, art history, and other disciplines. It properly requires a knowledge of several languages, and of film scholarship in those languages. It entails familiarity with particular Jewish film industries, such as Yiddish-language and Israeli film.[3] It involves examination and comparison of changing trends in fiction film, documentary film, and political propaganda film. It entails consideration of key junctures in film history when technological developments, economic and geopolitical realities, and changes in production methods, stylistic fashions, audience composition, and public tastes and moods decisively shaped what was seen on screen and how it was seen. It involves the concurrent histories of the film representation of other national, ethnic, and social groups. And, of course, it requires knowledge of modern Jewish and world history, of the history of anti-Semitism, of the rise and fall of Nazism, of the planning, enactment, and aftermath of the "Final Solution," of survivor experience, and the vast realm of postwar reflection and debate on the Holocaust and its representation.

Moreover, beyond the immense range of subjects and disciplines deployed, several *kinds* of understanding are required, including intuition. One must develop a feel for the nuances of individual films in their sensuous immediacy — of directorial style and gesture, of the impact of specific actors, of an era's peculiar visual and auditory patina. It is impossible, for example, to evaluate the meaning and satirical impact of Ernst Lubitsch's anti-Nazi burlesque, *To Be or Not To Be* (1942), without savoring the particular comic genius of Jack Benny, Carole Lombard, Felix Bressart, and Sig Ruman. It is impossible to separate the meaning of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) from specific choices in the casting and playing of it — Jolson's spiritedly flirtatious hyperactivity, May McAvoy's wide-eyed, nubile sweetness, or Eugenie Besserer's flustered stammers of maternal delight — and from the film's choppy interplay of orchestral theme music, sound performance, dialogue, and intertitle. It involves reconstructing what an audience might have *heard* when they were told by Al Jolson: "Wait a minute . . . wait a minute. . . . you ain't heard nothin' yet!"

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[3]These two important topics are beyond the scope of the present essay, which will focus on English-language American film. On Yiddish film, see J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds* (New York, 1991); Judith N. Goldberg, *Laughter Through Tears: The Yiddish Cinema* (Rutherford, N.J., 1983); Eric A. Goldman, *Visions, Images, and Dreams: Yiddish Film Past and Present* (Ann Arbor, 1983). On Israeli film, see Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin, Tex., 1987).

Some film theoreticians assert that intellectually rigorous work on film (of the sort purportedly introduced by the revolution in film theory that started in the late 1960s) is a fundamentally different labor from that of the cinephile — that is, the critic, historian, or film interpreter who proceeds chiefly from a love of film art and an interest in the *oeuvre* of particular filmmakers. But it is precisely the love of film art — in its full range and variety, in its historical specificity, in its susceptibility to the individual genius of particular directors, actors, scenarists, cinematographers, editors, and scorers, in its ability to foster enhanced perception and empathy in its viewers, to capture the minds and hearts of audiences, to epitomize the mood of an era, and to focus moral and ethical attention on the stream of human experience — that is vital to any informed writing about it.

Film Representation of Jews: The American Setting

Historical study of the film representation of Jews is indebted to two works in particular that have laid a useful groundwork, at least for understanding the American component of the subject: Lester D. Friedman's *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (along with its coffee-table counterpart, Friedman's *The Jewish Image in American Film*, an illustrated popular history) and Patricia Erens' *The Jew in American Cinema*.[4] Both authors cover a vast range of film examples from the silent era to the early 1980s and attempt to periodize the subject, largely by decades, at least for the latter half of this history. These works serve as a valuable inventory of historical examples and a useful compendium of conventional wisdom on the historical forces shaping cinematic representation of the Jew. The demands of comprehensiveness have led both authors to sacrifice much depth and specificity, offering little in the way of sustained analysis and interpretation of an individual film as text, and virtually no attempt at systematic correlation of their insights with the problematics of general film history and theory. Their studies, properly speaking, belong to an older trend in ethnic and feminist film studies, generally characterized as the "images of . . . " approach, which weighed the relative degrees of accuracy or stereotype in depiction of Jews, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, women, and others in given films and eras, usually animated by an informal partisanship on behalf of the group, class, or gender being studied.[5]

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[4]Lester D. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York, 1982); idem, *The Jewish Image in American Film* (Secaucus, N.J., 1987); Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984). See also Sarah Blacher Cohen, *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen* (Bloomington, Ind., 1983); David Desser and Lester Friedman, *American Jewish Filmmakers and the Jewish Experience* (Urbana, Ill., 1992); and the filmography of Stuart Fox, *Jewish Films in the United States: A Comprehensive Survey and Descriptive Filmography* (Boston, 1976), as well as sources cited in notes 1 and 7.

[5]On image studies and their premises, cf. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and*

The organizing premise of such studies is therefore somewhat simple and misleading, but their importance in the history of discourse about ethnicity in film, both in stimulating popular and scholarly interest in the subject and in providing a broad inventory of examples and trends, should not be underestimated. Moreover, in some situations it is indeed still vitally important to reflect on film images, provided the wider issues of cultural history are kept in view. In fairness to Friedman and Erens, it should also be noted that both authors are aware of the limitations of their format and the provisional nature of their conclusions.

Our indebtedness to both Erens and Friedman is, in any case, considerable, for both authors have articulated, for better or for worse, what could be called a consensus view of the Jewish presence in American film and filmmaking, as mapped out by numerous investigators in film history and media studies over the past several decades, and that view has proven thus far a reasonably durable one.[6] For a convenient overview, we may borrow, for the time being, Friedman's and Erens' rather simplified decade periodizations, which we shall have reason to qualify further on. Friedman divides his discussion into the following chapters with, it turns out, obligatorily alliterative names: "The Silent Stereotypes," "The Timid Thirties," "The Fashionable Forties," "The Frightened Fifties," "The Self-Conscious Sixties," "The Self-Centered Seventies," and (appropriately tentative for two years into the decade) "The Emerging Eighties." Erens' periodization is a bit soberer and more articulated, but in other respects similar: "The Primitive Years (1903 – 1919)," "The Silent Era (1920 – 1929)," "The Early Sound Years (1930 – 1940)," "The War and Postwar Era (1941 – 1949)," "The Fifties (1950 – 1960)," "The Sixties (1961 – 1969)," "The Seventies (1970 – 1979)," and "Recent Films (1980 – 1983)." Although more noncommittal than Friedman's in its characterization of decades, Erens' periodization by specific years at least shows that the notion of "decade" has a sliding definition.

From a film-historical standpoint, in any case, these categories are of merely provisional value. Major changes in film production, cinematic styles, ideological perspectives, and patterns of audience reception, among other factors, often cut across decade boundaries, and it is probably more accurate, though pedagogically messier, to reckon in five- to seven-year, rather than ten-year, cycles. Erens is justified in defining her fourth period in terms of World War II and its aftermath, even though that period

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Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 89 – 90; Robert Stam, "Bakhtin, Polyphony, and Ethnic/Racial Representation," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (Urbana, 1991), pp. 251 – 76, esp. 251 – 52.

[6]Much of the present discussion is indebted to the useful overview in Frank Manchel, *Film Study: An Analytical Bibliography*, vol. 1 (Rutherford, N.J./London, 1990), pp. 818 – 51 ("The Jew in American Film").

encompasses a major ideological reversal (as a consequence of events leading to the Hollywood blacklist) and even though the roots of the war itself, and its attendant cinematic expression, go back at least two decades earlier.

An even simpler schema than either Friedman's or Erens', though congruent with the substance of their analysis, has been offered by Stuart Samuels in his essay "The Evolutionary Image of the Jew in American Film," which correlates cinematic representation of the Jew with four specific stages in 20th-century American Jewish history: alienation, acculturation, assimilation, and acceptance.[7] This schema, or its substance, is shared, in one form or another, by a wide variety of investigators who regard the motion-picture industry as a central force in the socialization of immigrant Americans, virtually down to our own day, and it has influenced to some degree the present survey. But all existing paradigms require qualification and refinement, as we shall see.

Alienation and Its Pleasures

The earliest phase, which Samuels has dubbed a period of "alienation," corresponds to the period of New World immigrant life in the early decades of this century, when the mainly Yiddish-speaking East European Jews lived as a ghettoized minority among other immigrant minorities, in large urban areas, often in conditions of severe poverty, pursuing small-scale entrepreneurship and trades, and representing a bold contrast both to the Anglo-Saxon mainstream of American culture and to the largely assimilated and prosperous German and Sephardic Jews who had been absorbed into American life decades earlier. During this period, filmmaking was still in an experimental phase, an amusement-park or nickelodeon entertainment whose production was still largely controlled by the Edison trust, a monopoly tied to patents on motion-picture technology.[8]

In this earliest phase, stereotyped images of Jews, often borrowed from literature and theater, appeared frequently in the primitive narratives of one- and two-reeler diversions: the pawnbroker, the money-lender, the haberdasher, and the like. These Jews, obviously enough, were shown as "outsiders," but perhaps no more so than other ethnic types displayed in

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[7]Stuart Samuels, "The Evolutionary Image of the Jew in American Film," in *Ethnic Images in American Film and Television*, ed. Allen L. Wohl and Randall Miller (Philadelphia, 1978). Cf. Manchel, *Film Study*, p. 819.

[8]For discussion of the primitive period of American film history, see Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, vol. 1 of *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole (Berkeley, 1990); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), esp. pp. 23 – 59; John Fell, ed., *Film Before Griffith* (Berkeley, 1983); Larry May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 3 – 21.

the films, and to some degree *all* film characters in these early films were stereotypes.[9] The nickelodeons and exhibition houses, moreover, were often filled with immigrant audiences who eagerly devoured the entertainment fare, taking great pleasure in beholding the screen images of their respective ethnic kinfolk. While the notion of "immigrant entertainment" has often been overemphasized in descriptions of this period (primitive cinema was in fact already targeted as much to native-born, middle-class recipients as to an immigrant and working-class clientele),[10] the success of early films with immigrant spectators played a decisive role in shaping the ensuing phases of American film history.

Architects of Acculturation: The Studio Moguls

A second phase, which Samuels has dubbed a period of "acculturation," corresponds to the beginning of a long period of upward social mobility for the offspring of immigrant Jews, from about 1907 onward, and it seems inseparable from two important developments in the entertainment industry: the rise of Jewish entertainers in vaudeville, theater, film, and radio (these eventually included Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, Fanny Brice, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, George Burns, and the Marx Brothers);[11] and the rise of a small group of ambitious Jewish entrepreneurs who helped to break the grip of the Edison trust and created a powerful system of film production

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[9]Cf. Lester D. Friedman, "The Conversion of the Jews," *Film Comment* 17, no. 4 (July–Aug. 1981), p. 42; Manchel, *Film Study*, p. 823; Charles Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy: From *Chinese Laundry Scene* to *Whoopee* (1894 – 1930)," in Friedman, *Unspeakable Images*, pp. 39 – 81, esp. 47.

[10]See Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, pp. 68 – 70.

[11]See, among others, Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York, 1976), pp. 556 – 73; Stephen J. Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau: Jews in American Life and Thought* (Hamden, Conn., 1984), pp. 115 – 39; Stanley Green, *The Great Clowns of Broadway* (New York, 1984); Darryl Lyman, *The Jewish Comedy Catalog* (Middle Village, N.Y., 1989); Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Cinema* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981); William Novak and Moshe Waldoks, *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* (New York, 1981); Jack Benny, with Joan Benny, *Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story* (New York, 1990); Herbert G. Goldman, *Fanny Brice: The Original Funny Girl* (New York, 1992); Barbara W. Grossman, *Funny Woman: The Life and Times of Fanny Brice* (Bloomington, Ind., 1991); Martin Gottfried, *George Burns and the Hundred-Yard Dash* (New York, 1996); Eddie Cantor, *The Way I See It*, ed. Phyllis Rosenteur (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1959); George Jessel, with John Austin, *The World I Lived in* (Chicago, 1975); James Fisher, *Al Jolson: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Conn., 1994); Herbert G. Goldman, *Jolson: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York, 1988); Wes D. Gehring, *The Marx Brothers: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York, 1978); Kyle Samuels Crichton, *The Marx Brothers* (Garden City, N.Y., 1950); Michael Friedland, *Sophie: The Sophie Tucker Story* (London, 1978). For the impact on American film, see Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? American Sound Film and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York, 1992).

and distribution through the founding and running of the great Hollywood studios.[12] These included MGM (Marcus Loew, Joseph Schenck, Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer), Paramount (Adolf Zukor, Jesse Lasky, B. P. Schulberg), Columbia (Harry and Jack Cohn), Warner Brothers (Jack and Harry Warner), Universal Pictures (Carl Laemmle, and his celebrated underling Irving Thalberg), and 20th Century (Joseph Schenck), later merged with Fox (William Fox). These founders were immigrants or children of immigrants, and all were Jews. One other major studio formed in this period, United Artists, was the creation of non-Jews: Charlie Chaplin, D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and the half-Jew Douglas Fairbanks — performers whose role in both studio and cinematic history was similarly crucial, especially as a force for shaping the film star system.

Possessing little formal education but a vast amount of experience as entrepreneurs (Goldwyn had started as a glovemaker and salesman; Mayer as a scrap-metal and junk dealer; Zukor and Harry Cohn as furriers; Jack Warner as a cobbler, butcher, and bicycle merchant; Laemmle as a bookkeeper and clothier; Fox as a sundries peddler and, later, as a clothier; Schenck as a drugstore-chain owner and amusement-park impresario; Schulberg as a reporter and trade publisher), the studio pioneers were quick to sense the mass appeal of films, and they correctly understood that the success of the industry depended on building a viable system of distribution, through firm links between studios and theater chains, as well as important financial links, largely with Jewish-owned banking houses — among others, Warner Brothers with Goldman Sachs, Paramount with Kuhn and Loeb, and Universal with S. W. Strauss.[13] In the heyday of the studio system, from the 1920s to the 1950s, the studio heads maintained a legendarily despotic control over the careers of actors, directors, and screenwriters, severely reining in artistic freedom and retaining an often fatal final say about what survived on screen.

Much has been made of their boorish sensibilities and Philistine tastes (Harry Cohn was notorious for his ruthlessness, vulgarity, and lechery;

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[12]See, among others, Jan-Christopher Horak, *Dream Merchants: Making and Selling Films in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Rochester, N.Y.: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1989); Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, 1988); Bernard F. Dick, *The Merchant Prince of Poverty Row: Harry Cohn of Columbia* (Lexington, Ky., 1993); A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn: A Biography* (New York, 1989); Diana Altman, *Hollywood East: Louis B. Mayer and the Origins of the Studio System* (New York, 1992); Samuel Marx, *Mayer and Thalberg: The Make-Believe Saints* (New York, 1975); Bosley Crowther, *Hollywood Rajah: The Life and Times of Louis B. Mayer* (New York, 1980); Jesse Lasky, *What Ever Happened to Hollywood?* (New York, 1975); Irwin Will, *The House That Shadows Built* (Garden City, N.Y., 1928); Roland Flamini, *Thalberg: The Last Tycoon and the World of MGM* (New York, 1974); Bob Thomas, *Thalberg: Life and Legend* (Garden City, N.Y., 1969); Cass Warner Sperling, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: The Warner Brothers Story* (Rocklin, Calif., 1994). See also Manchel, *Film Study*, p. 820ff.

[13]See Manchel, *Film Study*, p. 821.

Samuel Goldwyn, a Polish Jew who never mastered English well, spawned a vast folklore of "Goldwynisms," often apocryphal malapropisms such as "Include me out," and "Anyone seeing a psychiatrist should have his head examined").[14] But it is also true that the studio pioneers played a crucial role in defining and refining the storytelling function of film, which, prior to 1907, had been mixed with such nonliterary amusements as travelogue and natural-history lectures, live musical entertainment, circus performances, vaudeville acts, and the like. Zukor, for example, traveled to Europe to survey filmmaking art and explored the potential of film to adapt theatrical and literary classics.[15] Recent research on American film history has placed strong emphasis on 1907 to 1915 as the years of transition from primitive to classical narrative film, to that crucially influential form of film expression known as "the classical Hollywood style," and this period coincides with the rise of the Jewish film moguls and the studio system.[16]

During this period, two-reelers became three-reelers. Film entertainment was disengaged from live entertainment and largely constrained to single- and double-feature exhibition in darkened theaters before (mostly) quiet, attentive audiences, and later supplemented by newsreels, cartoons, and short subjects. Film editing was refined to facilitate narrative continuity and to preserve unities of space, time, and action. Film music (at first an improvised art of skilled theater organists and other musicians; later, in the transition to the sound era, a formally composed score as a fixed part of the soundtrack) was developed to underscore carefully movements and moments in the plot. In general, film spectatorship as such, in familiar contours that have persisted to the present day, was born. The methods of film production as a complexly collaborative art, and film distribution as a mass-market enterprise, were decisively shaped. It was during this period that Hollywood, California, became the capital of the American film industry, and, indeed, a world capital of film art. It was the seat of a highly coordinated system ruled by the mostly Jewish studio moguls; in a certain sense it was an industry ideally susceptible to the genius of ambitious immigrants, Jewish and otherwise, and later of other European émigrés of many nationalities, who populated all echelons of the film-production system.[17]

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[14]These examples are from Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York, 1979), s.v. "Goldwyn, Samuel," p. 491.

[15]Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, p. 28.

[16]The most comprehensive overview of the classical Hollywood style is David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, 1985). On the period of transition from primitive film, see Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907 – 1915*, vol. 2 of *History of the American Cinema*, ed. Charles Harpole (Berkeley, 1990), and the sources cited in note 8.

[17]On European émigrés in Hollywood, see Graham Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922 – 1931* (London, 1985); John Russell Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise:*

It is highly misleading to see in this phenomenon merely the formation of a Jewish cabal of ruthless and powerful business interests acting, as it were, in a vacuum — sealed off from broader currents in American history of the time. It should be seen in the context of the Progressive Era and against the background of European immigration to America in the great age of open doors between the 1880s and the early 1920s.[18] Film art fortuitously coincided with the complex formation of bourgeois ideology in Europe and America in this period — it was in some sense its inevitable harvest.[19] The birth of the film spectator was an integral part of this process, and, in the United States, bespoke the formation of a genuinely cross-cultural (though surely also distorted and problem-laden) American identity. The rapidly maturing film theater, soon to blossom into the ornately architectured and furnished "film palace," became a great leveler of race, ethnicity, and gender — creating an audience mostly invisible and anonymous to one another, set into a kind of temple where light shone in the darkness, where people went, as they continue to do today, to escape the prisons of identity and constraints of reality, to forsake their bodies and merge themselves with screen idols in tales of romance, adventure, comedy, and tragedy.

Clearly, film catered to fundamental human yearnings, to the power of fantasy as such. In this manner, it was a potent vehicle of acculturation in an America undergoing an intolerably rapid pace of economic development and urbanization, with inexorably painful ethnic, class, and familial dislocations and proximities. Film entertainment in this sense was surely a medium of escape, but also, to be fair to its premises, potentially an arena of healing, of mediation, of consensus, of ideological experimentation, empathizing and ethical reflection, and, at times of confrontation — a place for the articula-

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The Hollywood Emigrés, 1933 – 1950 (London, 1983); John Baxter, *The Hollywood Exiles* (New York, 1976).

[18]See, among others, Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, pp. 31 – 34, 50 – 57, 395 – 413; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1955), pp. 174 – 86; Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880 – 1920* (Baltimore, 1992); Maldwin A. Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1992); Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York, 1992); George E. Pozzeta, ed., *Assimilation, Acculturation, and Social Mobility* (New York, 1990); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1990); Moses Rischin, ed., *Immigration and the American Tradition* (Indianapolis, 1976); Leonard Dinnerstein, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York, 1975).

[19]See, among others, Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience from Victoria to Freud*, 4 vols. (New York, 1984 onward); Carolyn Howe, *Political Ideology and Class Formation: A Study of the Middle Class* (Westport, Conn., 1992); Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, 1992), esp. pp. 15 – 106; Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle" and "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in idem, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, 1978), pp. 3 – 60, 146 – 62.

tion, as philosopher Stanley Cavell has suggested, of a democratized "poetry of the ordinary," which Cavell equated with the noblest tasks of philosophy.[20]

That the Jewish film moguls sensed this possibility in its wider intellectual and cultural ramifications is highly unlikely, but they did sense it instinctually and devoted their life energies to its realization. As talented immigrants who had dissolved and rebuilt their own cultural identity, they were optimally suited to be the Promethean shapers of this newest art, and they were situated at an appropriate *distance* from American culture that enabled them to manipulate, usually with extreme caution, its prevailing symbols and myths. It is in this context that we must understand their profoundly assimilationist stance. The America created by the Jewish movie moguls was, especially in the sound era, a WASP/Yankee paradise of small towns and picket fences, of milk bottles on doorsteps, of crowing roosters and friendly neighbors, of cantankerously upright justices of the peace, of Horatio Algerish boys with slingshots in their back pockets, of soldiers marching off to distant war — an America of Norman Rockwell paintings, of *Life*, *Liberty*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Whatever non-Anglo ethnicity was portrayed — and it *was* extensively portrayed — throughout Hollywood film's formative period, from the Golden Age of the silent screen (1915 – 1928) through the great classic era of talkies (ca. 1928 – 1960), it was usually as counterpoint to a mainstream, or, more properly, Main Street, American type, whose fabled decency triumphed over all obstacles and toward whom all identities flowed and merged. The material capital of American film was Hollywood, but its spiritual capital, as Cavell has suggested for screwball comedy, was a mythical land known as Connecticut,[21] that Eden of the Yankee social register. In the same era, a comparable aura surrounded Kansas, the American heartland, most memorably in the 1939 classic *The Wizard of Oz*.[22]

Still, American film, particularly of the silent era, was deeply preoccupied with the tale of the immigrant — of Cohens and Kellys, of Abie's Irish Rose, of industrious street urchins and sweatshop maidens, of ruthless landlords, enterprising marriage brokers, and hand-wringing *balabustas*, and above all, of the ambitious seeker of prosperity, the parvenu in the making, the urban newcomer who by pluck and providence crosses ethnic

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[20]Stanley Cavell, "The Thought of Movies," in idem, *Themes from Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco, 1984), pp. 3 – 26, esp. 14 – 19.

[21]Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 49.

[22]Cf. Paul Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow: The Wizard of Oz as a Secular Myth of America* (Albany, 1991).

and class lines to realize the American Dream. A classic example of this story is *The Jazz Singer* (1927), usually remembered as the first sound film (sound and dialogue were in fact used only for the musical numbers, though memorably in one semi-improvised exchange of talk), but whose engrossing tale of the rise of a cantor's son to show-business stardom captured the hearts of American audiences just as the Jew was largely about to disappear from the American screen.[23]

An interesting evolution in the tale of the Jewish immigrant seems to have occurred from 1920 to 1928 — it can be seen by contrasting the remarkable 1920 film *Hungry Hearts* with *The Jazz Singer*. In the former, a Jewish immigrant mother, living in a squalid New York City tenement, is gouged repeatedly for rent money by her cruel, stony-faced landlord, who threatens to evict her. In a gesture of stark despair, the woman goes berserk and destroys her apartment, chopping the walls into pieces with an axe. She is later arrested, tried, and acquitted, but the haunting power of her despair lingers, and her strikingly Luddite form of rebellion (here directed not at the machines of production but at property) cannot be erased from mind. Acculturation clearly had its price, and this story was meant to show it. In *The Jazz Singer*, entertainer Jake Rabinowitz (Al Jolson) is torn between appearing in the opening night of a Broadway show on Yom Kippur (his first and best chance at stardom) and filling in for his dying cantor father by singing *Kol Nidre* in the synagogue. The film solves the dilemma by having him do both: first cantoring and, on a subsequent night, resuming his role in the Broadway show. The film seems to say that one can have it all, that America is willing to cut some slack for the assimilating Jew as long as he or she gets the overall priorities straight — namely, an appropriately proportionate wedge of the American Dream. Between the desperate ambience of *Hungry Hearts* and the sunny affirmation of *The Jazz Singer* is a crucial eight years of burgeoning American prosperity — and with it American immigrant prosperity. But, as we know from hindsight, that circumstance was rapidly headed for a time of crisis.

The Jazz Singer should not be seen in isolation from other comparable approaches to ethnicity in films of the period. The ancient Judean prince Judah Ben Hur, in the 1925 *Ben Hur*, is arrested and sold to a slave galleon but gains his freedom after rescuing a Roman general. He subsequently rises to stardom in Rome as a champion charioteer in the Roman games, who then challenges his Roman ex-friend and enemy in a chariot competition, which he enters as "the Unknown Jew." He arguably anticipates Jake

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[23]Cf. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, pp. 50 – 52, 57 – 85; Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, pp. 101 – 107; for a good overview of the literature on *The Jazz Singer* (in an otherwise dreadfully wrongheaded article), see Michael Rogin, "Black Face, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1982), pp. 417 – 53. Still more useful is Robert L. Carringer, *The Jazz Singer* (Madison, Wis., 1979).

Rabinowitz's metamorphosis into Jack Robin. *The Jazz Singer* can also be meaningfully compared to the portrait of a San Francisco Spaniard among American Anglos in the film *Old San Francisco*, directed by the same director, Alan Crosland, in the same year (the latter film even uses the same snatches of Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" that are present in *The Jazz Singer*); to the portrait of an assimilated Chinese man ("Chinaman," in the era's parlance) in San Francisco, played by Jewish actor Edward G. Robinson, in *The Hatchet Man* (1932); and to evocations of black life in the South in King Vidor's 1930 film *Hallelujah*, as well as to the whole industry of "race movies," films tailored for black audiences in the '30s and '40s.[24]

The lives and careers of the movie moguls have been engagingly chronicled by Neal Gabler in his book *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*.[25] Despite its unfortunate subtitle (which, much to Gabler's later dismay, seemed to bolster the anti-Semitic canard that "Hollywood and the media are controlled by Jews," thus lending his book to considerable misuse), this is an absorbing account, drawing on numerous prior sources but greatly enriched by archival oral-history material. It covers the history of American film into the 1950s, when the studio system began to come apart. The book is perhaps justly criticized for its overemphasis on an *ad hominem* approach to American film history, its minimization of the vital influence of non-Jews, and its general lack of scholarly method, but the book's richness of anecdote and fluency of narrative make it an indispensable resource for one pursuing the subject. It contains an especially illuminating account of the political conflicts between left and right that developed in Hollywood in the 1930s and '40s, in the struggle of writers and directors with censorship by studio heads and by the Hays Office regulations (a code of censorship adopted by the film industry as a form of self-policing to ward off boycotts by conservative political and religious organizations).[26] Alongside these events Gabler recounts anti-

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[24]On African Americans in American cinema, cf. Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film* (New York, 1993); Nelson George, *Blackface: Reflections on African Americans and the Movies* (New York, 1994); Chris Vieler-Porter, *Black and Third World Cinema: A Film and Television Bibliography* (London, 1991); Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures* (Boston, 1975); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York, 1973). On Hispanics in American cinema, cf. Gary D. Keller, *Hispanics and United States Film: An Overview and Handbook* (Tempe, Ariz., 1994); Alfred Charles Richard, *The Hispanic Image on the Silver Screen: An Interpretive Filmography from Silents into Sound, 1898 - 1935* (New York, 1992). On Asians in American film, cf. Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley, 1994); Eugene F. Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures* (New York, 1978).

[25]See note 16.

[26]On the Hays Office and American film censorship, see Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono* (New York, 1991); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D.

Semitically motivated attacks on Hollywood by congressional investigators, which began in 1940 – 41 and were interrupted, but not quelled, by the war years.[27] But to understand these events properly, we should turn our attention to a third phase, that which Samuels has termed a period of assimilation.

Assimilation and Its Discontents

In truth, assimilation, and with it ethnic self-denial, was an integral premise of American film from its beginning — at least from the start of its development under the studio pioneers, and earlier, in implicit ways, through the whole of the preceding primitive period. Film producers in the era of transition discovered fairly quickly the penalties for overly blatant or stereotypic ethnic representation, and thus the Jewish image, like the Irish image, was often muted or placed in disguise.[28] Some films rewrote Jewish stage characters as Anglo-Saxons. Others put Jewishness into soft focus by using non-Jewish actors for Jewish roles, a practice that has persisted well into our own time.

A more interesting strategy, made possible by the star system, was Charlie Chaplin's use of the Tramp as the quintessential newcomer — and thus as a kind of allegorization of ethnicity. Chaplin, himself a non-Jewish émigré who never became a naturalized American, created a semantically plastic antihero, one who precisely eluded firm ethnic identification but still was dark-haired, curly-haired, mustachioed, and arguably Mediterranean or Jewish — easily at home among the hordes of Ellis Island arrivals and a conspicuous oddball when set against Main Street.[29] It would be a mistake, however, to overlook the equally convincing Englishness of Chaplin's performance, its rootedness in the vaudeville of Liverpool and London — an essentially stage performance whose contours were to become more apparent in the late, post-tramp Chaplin, in the sound era. Chaplin thus softened, allegorized, and universalized the newcomer, made him applicable to the experience of many immigrant groups while claimable by none. Still, Chaplin's image went out to the world as an *American* image, which, by virtue of its improvised invention during a lunch break on a Hollywood set, it was in fact. The tramp was surely as American as Ellis Island, and soon became, as had Ellis Island itself, a logo for America. When the tramp became a

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Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (London, 1987), esp. pp. 1 – 47.

[27]See Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, pp. 311 – 86.

[28]See Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-playing, and American Film Comedy" (see note 12), pp. 52 – 54.

[29]Cf. Musser, p. 54.

Jewish barber in *The Great Dictator* in 1940, it was a believable permutation of the tramp's long-familiar image, but still the tramp *as* Jew (in this case, as Jewish barber), a self-consciously allegorical statement rather than a truly Jewish tramp. And, of course, it was a tramp who talked.

Assimilation, at any rate, was an actively touted ideal throughout the silent era, and stories often portrayed entrepreneurial zeal, upward mobility, intermarriage, show-business fame, and similar apotheoses of the remade self. The late silent era was the beginning of the age of radio, and radio's golden era, in the 1930s and 1940s, underscored this trend by featuring a bevy of increasingly Americanized Jewish stars such as Molly Goldberg (speaking in dialect), Fanny Brice, Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, and, as noted earlier, George Burns, Eddie Cantor, and the Marx Brothers. Benny, in particular, was, like Chaplin, a figure of semantic plasticity. He embodied a kind of Everyman, an American Main Street type, but was also the classic schlemiel — the carping, debunking, worldly-wise hero of Yiddish folklore — as well as the preener, the pretender to highbrow culture, the hideously out-of-tune violinist, and often, in a wryly self-deprecating parody, the Jewish miser. In *To Be or Not To Be*, Benny was a reassuringly American presence in a Nazified Europe while playing a Pole of ambiguous ethnicity and remaining implicitly an assimilated American Jew throughout.[30]

The Marx Brothers, for their part, represented, as an ensemble, four stages of Americanization: the mute, wildly gesticulating newcomer (Harpo), the dialect-speaking street vendor/entrepreneur (Chico, in this case using an Italianized English), the fast-talking urban con artist or crackpot professorial pretender (Groucho), and the wholly Americanized youngest brother (Zeppo), who was invariably the straight man of the act. The zany, anarchic energy of the Marx Brothers, their subversive wordplay and dizzying nonsequiturs, suggest a kind of Melting Pot meltdown, a carnivalesque transformation of the American (and, in *Duck Soup*, fantasized European) landscape that was to have important reverberations in American comedy and satire far beyond its era. Its roots perhaps go back to the centuries-old tradition of the *Purimshpiel*, itself a parody of assimilation, which grew from the great biblical tale of assimilation, the Book of Esther.

It is in this context that one should examine the contributions of Ernst Lubitsch to American film.[31] A German Jew born and raised in Berlin,

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[30]I deal with this matter at length in a forthcoming article in *Prooftexts*: "Shylock's Revenge: The Doubly Vanished Jew in Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be*."

[31]On Lubitsch's rootedness in the *Purimshpiel*, cf. Sabine Hake, *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 29 – 30. The best studies of Lubitsch are James Harvey, *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood from Lubitsch to Sturges* (New York, 1987),

Lubitsch left his father's haberdashery business while still a teenager and made his mark initially as a player in Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater, the foremost German theater company in the first third of this century. Soon he was directing one- and two-reelers, and eventually feature-length films, often featuring a Jewish schlemiel character (played by Lubitsch himself) who went by such names as Meyer from Berlin, Sigi Lachmann from Rawicz, and Sally Pinkus. As Enno Patalas notes of Lubitsch's Jewish antihero: "Like Charlie [Chaplin], he is hungry, counts his pennies and chats up the ladies. The roots in popular art, the slapstick origin in vaudeville films, remained alive in Lubitsch's later films, too, as they did with Chaplin, Keaton, the Marx Brothers, and [eventually] Jerry Lewis."[32]

By the early 1920s, Lubitsch had become an internationally distinguished director, "the European Griffith," whose grandly costumed historical spectacles (*Madame Dubarry* in 1920 is a key example) easily alternated with wry satires and bittersweet domestic chamber-dramas. He lived in the United States from 1922 onward and became one of Hollywood's foremost directors. Almost all of his films were portraits of Europe, a fanciful, dreamlike Europe of the past or present, mixed with pointed hints of the impact of modernity.

Lubitsch wore his Jewishness unselfconsciously, and he had direct or indirect ties with various classic films of Jewish experience. One filmography lists him, perhaps apocryphally, as an uncredited director of certain scenes in *Der Golem* — which is not implausible, given Lubitsch's close association with the film's co-director, Paul Wegener, another Reinhardt alumnus, during Lubitsch's period in Germany (Wegener starred in several Lubitsch films).[33] Lubitsch also had a strong interest in Samson Raphaelson's story "The Day of Atonement," prototype of the stage play of *The Jazz Singer*. (Lubitsch was a close collaborator with Raphaelson on other films.)[34] He wanted to direct *The Jazz Singer* on film, and almost had the opportunity, but he left Warner Brothers when the film was still in the planning stages.

Most of the films of Lubitsch's American period lack identifiably Jewish characters, but they are present, I think, as "implicit Jews" in many of the

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pp. 3 – 59, 367 – 401, 477 – 508; and Hans-Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, eds., *Lubitsch* (Munich, 1984), in German. A useful biography is Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York, 1993).

[32]Enno Patalas, "Ernst Lubitsch: German Period," in *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Roud (New York, 1980), pp. 639 – 43; remarks quoted are on p. 640.

[33]On Lubitsch's possible connection to *Der Golem*, see the filmography in Robert Carringer and Barry Sabath, *Ernst Lubitsch: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston, 1978).

[34]Raphaelson's remarkable memoir of his association with Lubitsch, "Freundschaft: How It Was with Lubitsch and Me," is found in Samson Raphaelson, *Three Screen Comedies* (Madison, Wis., 1983), pp. 21 – 47.

non-Jewish characters of his films: one thinks of Jean Hersholt's Dr. Jüttner, the kindly, bespectacled, and mustachioed tutor of Prince Karl Heinrich in *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* (1926), and the portrayals by Felix Bressart in *Ninotchka* (1939) and *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940). Bressart, an East Prussian Jew, was part of the stream of Jews and liberals who emigrated from Central Europe in the 1930s, many of whom settled in Los Angeles and worked on Hollywood films. Lubitsch himself was active in campaigns on behalf of European Jewry during this period, and he eventually cast Bressart as the first unambiguously Jewish character in Lubitsch's American period, the unforgettable Greenberg in *To Be or Not To Be*. Greenberg, the Polish Jewish stage extra who yearns to play Shylock, represents (alongside Chaplin's Jew in *The Great Dictator*) one of the few truly bold uses of a Jewish character in American films of this period, and himself presents an eloquent plea, entirely through the words of Shakespeare, for mobilization against Hitler.

All of the above examples suggest that the alleged era of assimilation (which includes Friedman's "Timid Thirties") was in fact marked by at least some subversive approaches to ethnicity and Jewishness in film at a time when it was a highly sensitive matter. Audience interest in ethnic characters had, to be sure, waned considerably with the onset of the Great Depression, and the wave of nativism that hard times brought on made the studio moguls very timid indeed. During the same era, the Hays Office regulations, known as the Motion Picture Production Code, exercised tight censorship over the sexual, political, and moral content of American films, prohibiting film images of nudity, profanity, adultery, homosexuality, and even married couples in the same bed. Portrayal of ethnicity was tightly reined in by the stipulation that "[t]he just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment."[35]

In practice, this last regulation was not as fair-minded as it purported to be. Blacks, Asians, and decidedly non-Anglo foreigners (Slavs, Hungarians, Turks, Arabs, Gypsies) were continually stereotyped in American film of the 1930s, and the plight of European Jewry was largely ignored during a time when some attention to it might have made a difference.[36] Studio heads were reluctant to invite the ire of the U.S. Congress, where diatribes against Hollywood, and especially against Hollywood's Jews, were becoming fashionable, and where a spirit of isolationism on American foreign policy

[35]Leff and Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono*, p. 292; for a full text of the Code, see ibid., pp. 283 – 92.

[36]Cf. Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, pp. 84 – 85; Manchel, *Film Study*, pp. 828 – 30. Also see Harry Popkin, "The Vanishing Jew of Our Popular Culture: The Little Man Who Is No Longer There," *Commentary* 14, no. 1 (July 1952), p. 52.

prevailed. The political and economic consequences of alienating Nazi Germany were carefully — indeed, too carefully — weighed in Hollywood, and the strongly conservative, isolationist, and perhaps anti-Semitic personnel of the Hays Office often sent back for revision film scripts critical of the Third Reich or identifiably pro-Jewish in outlook. Hollywood's middle echelon — the writers, directors, and some producers who often did battle with the Hays Office and studio heads over the representation of Nazi Germany — were by and large a markedly liberal, antifascist, and pro-Jewish element, many of them émigrés and refugees, and of course many of them Jews themselves.

In short, far from being merely an era of "timidity," the period from 1928 to 1942 was an arena of intense ideological battle, in which a few confident dissidents, such as Chaplin and Lubitsch, as well as a number of performers popularly associated with explicit or implicit Jewishness, occasionally scored significant victories. But the overall effect on American public opinion, let alone on American officialdom, was, unhappily, minimal. It took the Pearl Harbor attack, on December 7, 1941, and the consequent U.S. declaration of war, to spark a partial reversal of this trend in film of the time; even then, a true breakthrough to honesty about European Jewry was not possible.

The War and Its Aftermath

Identifiably Jewish characters began reappearing in American films in the war years, usually alongside, among others, Irish, Swedes, Italians, Polish Americans, and Anglo-Saxons in sanitizedly multi-ethnic "platoon" films — members of the "Melting Pot" dutifully serving abroad in the struggle against the Axis.[37] In addition to those mentioned already, two films of this period deserve somewhat closer attention by film historians: *The Man I Married* (1940), the story of an American woman (Joan Bennett) whose husband, a German émigré (Francis Lederer), becomes increasingly pro-Nazi when the couple visits the German homeland, only later to learn of his own mother's Jewish identity; and *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (1942), the story of a romance between an American reporter (Cary Grant) and a former American burlesque queen (Ginger Rogers), who is at the outset married to a Nazi ideologue (Walter Slezak). The film features a brief, remarkable scene in a concentration camp where the Hebrew prayers of Jewish inmates are overheard. Again, in both films, these were rare expres-

[37]Cf. Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, pp. 170 – 73; Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, pp. 95 – 96. On the relation of American war policy to Hollywood filmmaking, see, in general, Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War* (see note 26), and Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York, 1993).

sions of candor quite out of key with mainstream ideology.

It is symptomatic of this entire period that Al Jolson, star of *The Jazz Singer*, never established a successful film career.[38] It was Jolson's life and public image that had inspired Raphaelson's story in the first place (Jolson was himself a cantor's son), but Jolson was picked for the film role only after George Jessel was dropped over a contract dispute. After Jolson's successful film portrayal of Jake Rabinowitz, he rarely appeared in films of the sound era, though he continued to perform live to enthusiastic theater and night-club audiences throughout the same period and entertained troops during the war.

The great drama of assimilation portrayed in *The Jazz Singer* (although it likewise traces a journey of return to the Jewish fold, in however qualified a way, and is all too often ignored as such) acquired a special poignance in occurring at the threshold of sound film. Sound, after all, made English rise to a new prominence in film art. "Garbo talks!" was a cause of hullabaloo among film fans, and in her case it proved as beneficial to her image as silent film had been. In the case of many other foreign-born stars of American film, it had the reverse effect. Sound exaggerated both foreignness and homeborn ethnicity, and this coincided with the other forces of the 1930s that made ethnicity a sensitive matter. Although it had been Jolson's privilege to declare "You ain't heard nothin' yet!" Jolson himself was heard very little on screen from then on. Perhaps by way of tacit atonement, the film *The Jolson Story* was released in 1946, four years before Jolson's death, with Larry Parks as Jolson. Jolson himself, his voice dubbed into the musical numbers throughout, appeared in blackface in one performance within the story. The film also generated a sequel, *Jolson Sings Again* (1949).

The postwar years brought certain important changes in Hollywood — most notably, as a consequence of the Cold War, the withering effects of renewed congressional investigation into alleged Communist subversion in the film industry. The issue divided Hollywood bitterly, and the most notorious effect was the Hollywood blacklist, which ended or interrupted the careers of a significant number of producers, directors, screenwriters, and performers, many of them Jews.[39] (The non-Jew Chaplin was likewise hounded into exile.) Simultaneously, the revelations of Nazi war crimes, through the Nuremberg trials and widespread media attention to the death camps (including newsreel film footage of the piles of bodies and the emaciated survivors) evoked a new soul-searching about the fate of the Jews,

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[38]See Herbert G. Goldman, *Jolson: The Legend Comes to Life* (New York, 1988), pp. 211–27.

[39]Among other sources on these events, see Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York, 1980); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Garden City, N.Y., 1980), esp. pp. 478–504. Cf. note 27.

at least for a time, and some of this concern found its way into cinematic expression.

Films like *Body and Soul* (1946), the tale of a Jewish prizefighter who defies his gangster promoters, *Crossfire* (1947), a film-noir tale portraying an investigation into the murder of a Jewish civilian by an anti-Semitic war veteran, and especially *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), Elia Kazan's film based on Laura Z. Hobson's novel about a Gentile reporter (Gregory Peck) who disguises himself as a Jew in order to investigate anti-Semitism in American life, focused attention on anti-Semitism in a manner not possible in previous years. The last-mentioned film won several Academy Awards, including Best Picture. But these films are notable as well for their absence of any endorsement of ethnicity. Jews are portrayed as participants in an American civil religion, whose members attend either the church or synagogue of their choice but are not otherwise marked by great differences of appearance, speech, custom, or behavior. The Holocaust, not yet widely known by that name, was almost totally ignored. Only later did European imports, such as the landmark 31-minute French documentary by Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (1955), attempt to deal honestly with the legacy of the European death camps.

Jews were about to become, in any case, far more visible on the American screen than in the previous two decades, both as Jewish actors playing Jewish or implicitly Jewish roles and as Jewish roles played by Gentile actors. As if in belated tribute to the legacy of Jolson and *The Jazz Singer*, the show-business bio-pic flourished, often dealing with Jewish performers — including, as noted earlier, *The Jolson Story* (1946) and *Jolson Sings Again* (1949); plus *The Eddie Cantor Story* (1953); *The Benny Goodman Story* (1956); and, inevitably, an updated remake of *The Jazz Singer* (1953), this time featuring Lebanese-American Danny Thomas as Jake Rabinowitz. Although a significant market for these films was American Jews, who were by now moving to suburbs in large numbers and were quite happy to see Jews universalized as American success stories, a comparable interest in the subject among American filmgoers at large is equally significant. Films about Jewish refugees in Palestine, *Sword in the Desert* (1949) and *The Juggler* (1953) — the latter starring Kirk Douglas, a Jewish-born actor who was an "implicit Jew" in several films (see below) — drew some attention to the legacy of the war and to Israel's battle for independence. (Douglas would eventually portray Gen. David D. "Mickey" Marcus, American war hero turned Haganah soldier, in *Cast a Giant Shadow*, in 1966.) Sinister Jews made notable appearances here and there — Alec Guinness's Fagan in the British import *Oliver Twist* (1948); Kirk Douglas's implicitly Jewish "bad boy" roles in *Out of the Past* (1947) and *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953); and Rod Steiger's memorably ruthless film mogul in *The Big Knife*

(1955). All of these films warrant close analysis of their style, outlook, and preoccupations.

The late 1950s and early '60s brought about some change in the predominant silence on the Holocaust, with the release of such films as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), which focused attention on the Nazi occupation of Holland through the viewpoint of its posthumously renowned Jewish victim; *Exodus* (1960), which celebrated the formation of the State of Israel and began to confront realities of Holocaust-survivor and refugee experience; and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), which dramatized, albeit in a fairly schematic and bowdlerized fashion, the war-crimes trials in Germany. (The capture and Jerusalem trial of Adolf Eichmann between 1960 and 1962 was a further stimulus of interest in these matters.) These three films in particular helped to inaugurate what could be called, according to Stuart Samuels' schema, an era of "acceptance," although a full-blown confrontation with the Holocaust was still far from realized, and, properly speaking, as with the era that preceded, it is the evasions and circumlocutions of these films that are as interesting and illuminating as their good-faith efforts. Still, it is all too easy to sit in judgment of cinema and far more useful to understand the halting return of ethnicity to American film (whether it was ever absent in the first place is, to be sure, a legitimate question) in the context of the larger history of the medium and broader developments in international cinema as a whole.

It is impossible, for example, to understand the period of the 1940s and '50s without examining certain pivotal films, such as Frank Capra's memorable *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Here ethnicity is not explicitly an issue, but a clash between mainstream American optimism and more pessimistic, essentially film-noir conceptions of the world (more or less the artistic parameters of *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire*, respectively) is allowed significant attention.[40] It is also useful to explore foreign films of the period that reflect on American identity and its relation to ethnic cosmopolitanism. I have in mind, for example, the films of British director Michael Powell and his Hungarian Jewish co-director and scenarist Emeric Pressburger, who in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *Stairway to Heaven* (1948) explored Anglo-American relations and the multi-ethnic heritage of both Britain and America. Films such as these could be meaningfully compared with, say, French films of the National Front era and its aftermath; or of the Occupation and postwar periods, where issues of French identity in an era of tyranny, or of life and collaboration under fascism, were dealt with, usually metaphorically. The film output of many other countries and regions during the era of fascism and its aftermath — including the former

[40]Cf. Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency in the Hollywood Cinema, 1930 – 1960* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 179 – 215.

Soviet Union, Japan, China, India, the Middle East, Australia, Africa, and Latin America — is all highly relevant to the situation of American film, as well as of Jewish experience on film, and comparative study of this sort could prove immensely useful. The experience of each film-producing nation with the conflicting claims of civil society and ethnic unity, and of ethnic unity and national unity, as these shaped film art, bears close examination, as does the experience of individual peoples within nations.[41]

Ethnicity Comes of Age

As we come closer to the present era, we find a period marked by revolutionary changes in American film, beginning in the 1960s and '70s. The breakup of the studio system and the consequent expansion of independent production companies played a major role in this transformation, as did the wider changes in American politics and society. It is widely acknowledged that ethnicity as such gained a new respectability in the '60s as the freedom marches in the South, the worldwide decline of European colonialism in Africa, the Black Power movement, four major political assassinations (including that of Malcolm X), the growth of New Left student politics in Europe and America, and the U.S. entry into war in Vietnam began to reshape American life and culture. A widespread respect for Israel marked that country's sweeping victory in the Six Day War of 1967, and most American Jews were proud to identify with Israel, which had already been shown favorably in film and other media since its early years of Arab besiegement.

A new acceptance of the textures and idiosyncrasies of Jewishness was reflected in films, including period pieces, that celebrated Borscht Belt humor and East Coast Jewish culture (*Hello, Dolly!*; *Funny Girl*; *The Night They Raided Minsky's*; *Bye, Bye, Braverman*; *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas*). Jewish and Holocaust motifs were drawn upon for black comedy (*The Little Shop of Horrors*; *The Fearless Vampire Killers*; *The Twelve Chairs*; *The Producers*); as well as for historical tales and literary classics (*Operation Eichmann*; *Freud*; *Judith*; *The Pawnbroker*; *Ship of Fools*; *Cast a Giant Shadow*; *Ulysses*; *Tobruk*; *The Fixer*; *Oliver!*). The biblical film and the Christian tale of Jewish antiquity continued in this period (*The Story of Ruth*; *Esther and the King; King of Kings*), following upon well-known

[41]See, e.g., Keith Reader, *Cultures on Celluloid* (London, 1981); Vieler-Porter, *Black and Third World Cinema* (see note 24); Teshome H. Gabriel, *Cinema in the Third World* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982); Duncan Petrie, ed., *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London, 1992); Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939–1990* (New York, 1991); Wimal Dissanyake, *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994); idem, *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections on Films from Japan, India, and China* (Lanham, Md., 1988).

examples of the '50s (*David and Bathsheba*; *The Ten Commandments*; *Samson and Delilah*; *Solomon and Sheba*; *Ben Hur*).

Toward the end of the '60s, the look of American movies began to change. The Production Code, as a consequence of Supreme Court decisions on obscenity and civil liberties, was revised in 1966 to permit a new frankness in language, sexuality, and story line in films. And the influence of certain European-born trends, such as classic French cinema, Italian Neo-realism, the French New Wave, and Eisensteinian montage techniques — some of whose stylistic hallmarks had previously influenced American film noir — began to register more powerfully on mainstream American filmmaking. The classical Hollywood style had long tended to simplify the screen image, to mute or neutralize background visual information, to set story lines into a tight, goal-oriented structure, and to portray clear-cut struggles of good and evil. Film art now became more steeped in hyper-realism, ambiguity, irresolution, skepticism, and spontaneity, and deepened these traits throughout the 1970s and '80s.

Along with a new frankness in language, sexuality, violence, and moral complexity came a similar openness in the representation of race and ethnicity. Interracial romance became more common in film stories, though still charged with meaning and mystique. Supposed ethnic traits that had once been considered impolite to discuss publicly were now embraced unapologetically — for example, notions of the Jew as rude, pushy, ruthless, or subversive became the model for certain Jewish "bad boy" types (Richard Dreyfuss in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*; Dustin Hoffman in *Lenny*; Mark Rydell's violent Jewish gangster in *The Long Goodbye*; even Ron Leibman's decidedly honorable union organizer in *Norma Rae*). Also, the Jew as oversexed, neurotic, narcissistic, or strung out found expression in portrayals by Woody Allen (*Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, among many examples), Richard Benjamin (*Diary of a Mad Housewife*; *Portnoy's Complaint*; *The Sunshine Boys*), George Segal (*Bye, Bye, Braverman*; *Where's Poppa?*; *Blume in Love*), Ron Leibman (memorably as Segal's older brother in *Where's Poppa?*), and of course Dreyfuss and Hoffman, as in the examples already cited and even in not explicitly Jewish roles (Dreyfuss, say, in *American Graffiti* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and Hoffman in *The Graduate*, and playing an Italian-American street person, "Ratso" Rizzo, in *Midnight Cowboy*).

Black comedy and parody continued, notably in the further work of actor/director Mel Brooks (*Blazing Saddles*; *Young Frankenstein*; *High Anxiety*; and, in the '80s, *The History of the World — Part I*, as well as Brooks's not wholly successful remake of Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be*) and Woody Allen. The Jewish gangster was played in notable depth and historical detail in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* and *The Godfa-*

ther, Part II, the latter featuring a crime boss (Lee Strasberg) somewhat modeled on Meyer Lansky. A much-neglected film of this era (indeed, not released until two decades later, then largely ignored), *The Plot Against Harry* (1970), is a puckishly jaundiced look at a Jewish gangster, Harry Plotnick (Martin Priest), who runs small rackets in New York City but also lives life as a parolee, an ex-husband, a father, a frequent attender and celebrator at family occasions like weddings and bar mitzvahs, while he copes with health problems, tax woes, and various family preoccupations. The film is played as a comedy and suggests the ultimate bourgeoisification of the Jewish gangster, in urban New York terms.

A newly visible type of feisty, aggressive Jewish woman was brought to the screen at star level chiefly by Barbra Streisand in her many variations on a tough, unabashedly ethnic New York Jew in many films, including *Funny Girl*, *Funny Lady*, and *The Way We Were*. Though often schmaltzy and sentimental, often in some sense confessional, Streisand's persona was a welcome change from the Jewish American Princess featured in films of the '50s and early '60s, often portrayed by non-Jewish actresses (Natalie Wood in *Marjorie Morningstar*; Ali McGraw in *Goodbye, Columbus*). Her emergence to prominence, as in the case of the Jewish male comedian in the '50s and '60s, should be seen in the context of comparable emergences of self-assertive Jewish women in television and live entertainment — one thinks, among others, of Selma Diamond and Joan Rivers on TV talk shows and the pop concert career of Bette Midler. No less interesting on screen in the same period is Melanie Mayron's understated New York Jewish photographer in *Girl Friends* (1979), a version of her later television character in *thirtysomething*, and the muted self-assertion of Carol Kane in *Hester Street*.

One would welcome, in any case, more systematic study of the situation of Jewish women in American film — with regard both to Jewish and Gentile actresses playing Jewish roles and to the roles themselves and the narrative and cinematic strategies that give them meaning. (In theory, the ethnicity of an actor or actress should be irrelevant to the role — acting, after all, is just that: acting — but broader ideological factors influence casting decisions, and these in turn become relevant to the film depiction of ethnic experience.) Integrating these and comparable areas with the broader issues of feminist and gender-oriented film studies is an important task, on which meaningful work, at the time of this writing, is only just beginning.[42]

The way toward a more unvarnished sense of Jews and Jewish life had in truth already been paved by films of the late classical era — one thinks

[42]See, e.g., Sonya Michel, "Jews, Gender, American Cinema," in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, ed. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven, 1994), pp. 244 - 69.

of Kirk Douglas's "bad boy" roles and Rod Steiger in *The Big Knife*, both mentioned earlier. But a more fundamental measure of this change is that, to a degree not seen since the 1920s, it had become possible to show something more like Jewish *experience* rather than simply *images* of Jews. This is not to suggest that the category "Jewish experience" is irrelevant to the intervening eras. Often it is there by its absence: silence, disguise, implicit Jewishness, allegorization, sentimentalization, the soft focus of Gentile actors in Jewish roles — all such evasions of Jewish realities are likewise part of Jewish experience, even when it is the larger society that has dictated or encouraged the evasion.

But the situation is not as monolithic as it may seem. If Jews were scarce or merely counterpoint presences in classical American sound film, they were plentiful in radio and television in the same period, media that thrived on the continuous productivity of theater and nightclub venues, and they were present *as Jews*, not concealing (though not always announcing) their Jewishness: Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Sam Levenson, Henny Youngman, Danny Kaye (himself a film star), and many others, including Jerry Lewis, whose fame abroad, especially in France, was of the legendary proportions accorded Chaplin and Tati. On the other hand, when non-Anglo ethnicity became more visible and popular as a film subject in the 1960s, it was by no means free of stereotype, nor of a certain labored earnestness — a glitzy, at times candied Hollywoodization of Jewry and other groups that did not always add up to a genuine effort to view Jewish or other ethnic experience on its own terms. Friedman's notion of "The Self-Conscious Sixties" thus rings true for this period.

While this trend continued well into the '70s (*Fiddler on the Roof* was perhaps its culmination), other approaches during this period promised a more unassuming but also more focused gaze on actual cultural and historical experience. Joan Mecklin Silver's *Hester Street* (1975), mentioned earlier, brings alive realities of New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century and includes segments in subtitled Yiddish. Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972), based on Christopher Isherwood's 1935 double novel *Berlin Stories*, captures the early days of the Third Reich via the life of émigrés in Berlin, and has, as a subplot, the tale of a pair of star-crossed Jewish lovers. The whole is assembled with a pungently Brechtian evocation of cabaret satire. Like the other characters in the film, the Jews here are stylized representations, but Fosse's gift for creating discontinuous alternations of story and music showed that classical narrative was not the only available structure for framing Jewish experience. A similar vision informs Fosse's *Lenny* (1974), where the life — and later the disintegration — of "bad boy" comedian Lenny Bruce is intercut with the work, Bruce's nightclub act, and the film includes a powerful portrayal of Bruce's mother by Jan Miner.

In Herbert Ross's film version of Neil Simon's play *The Sunshine Boys* (1975), two aging Jewish vaudeville comedians (Walter Matthau, George Burns) call a truce in an ongoing estrangement to rehearse their act for television. The film is, in a sense, an admirable sequel to *The Jazz Singer* (far more than the 1980 remake of that film), in its rounding out of the historical destiny of the vaudeville entertainer. Burns represents that segment that found its way to the suburbs and to placid respectability; Matthau the resplendently shabby remnant that remained in the urban backwater to ply the theatrical trade. Jews are never identified as such in the film, but this is no evasion, for Jewishness of a sort is everywhere present in the story. Like the Jewish comic tradition to which this film is a tacit tribute, Matthau and Burns seem to capture opposed alternatives of character formation in ghetto tenements of a former era, where privacy was impossible, and where people grated on one another because they knew each other too well. Matthau's Willie Clark had learned to yell and be aggressive; Burns's Al Lewis to shrink from yelling and be passive-aggressive. Their combination here is the same typical match of contrasts — in truth, a form of biblical sibling battle — that shaped the classic vaudeville act, Jewish and Gentile alike, with its perennially self-debunking presentation of self.

The act's comedy, however, like the story as a whole, masks a more serious underlying theme: that of growing old, which was to become a frequent topic of Jewish experience in films of the ensuing years — notably, *Going in Style* (1979), which likewise featured Burns, here alongside Lee Strasberg, as two elderly Jews with their Irish-American cohort (Art Carney), in an unusual version of the "heist" film; and *Tell Me a Riddle* (1980), Lee Grant's film version of Tillie Olson's acclaimed novelette, which explores the experience of an elderly Jewish couple (Lila Kedrova and Melvyn Douglas) who leave behind their suburban East Coast home and travel to the West Coast in a state of failing health.

Bob Fosse's use of camera and story discontinuity, noted earlier, points to the impress of European filmic models — say, of Eisenstein, Lang, Truffaut, Fellini, and Bergman — on many American directors of the '70s. This trend was markedly influential on Woody Allen.[43] Allen's satirical comedies of the '60s had revived the spirit of Lubitsch, Benny, the Marx Brothers, and Sid Caesar of television's *Your Show of Shows*, injecting a distinctive blend of parody, fantasy, and schlemiel in such films as *What's New, Pussycat?* (1965), *Take the Money and Run* (1969), *Bananas* (1971), *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* (1972), *Sleeper* (1973), and *Love and Death* (1976). Starting

[43]On Woody Allen, see Sam B. Girgus, *The Films of Woody Allen* (Cambridge, 1993); Eric Lax, *Woody Allen: A Biography* (New York, 1992); Maurice Yacowar, *Loser Take All: The Comic Art of Woody Allen* (Oxford, 1991).

with *Annie Hall* (1977), Allen began to experiment more boldly with cinematic styles, including neo-realist and surrealist modes, and increasingly playing a version of himself. He interspersed Felliniesque, surreal fantasy, in parts of *Annie Hall*, *Zelig* (1983), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), *Radio Days* (1987), *Oedipus Wrecks* (part of the 1989 triptych *New York Stories*), and *Alice* (1990); parody, in *Zelig* and *Shadows and Fog* (1991); and Bergmanesque preoccupations, in taut chamber dramas such as *Interiors* (1978), *September* (1987), and *Another Woman* (1988); in *Stardust Memories* (1980), *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982; a tribute to Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), and, more recently, *Husbands and Wives* (1993), which recalls Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (one should also remember Paul Mazursky's 1990 film, *Scenes from a Mall*, which co-starred Allen with Bette Midler). Many of the above titles, as well as the critically acclaimed *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), represent a focus of Allen's creative energies on bittersweet, urbane comedies of yuppie life in contemporary New York. But Allen's more experimental forays into nostalgia for the past — specifically, for America of the '30s and '40s — are something of a personal obsession, especially successful in films like *Zelig*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and *Radio Days*. One should also keep in mind Allen's portrayal of a friend of a group of blacklisted screenwriters during the McCarthy era who allows them to sell their scripts under his name, in Martin Ritt's *The Front* (1976).

Zelig, in any case, is perhaps Allen's most explicit reflection on Jewishness and ethnicity, one that in recent years seems to have left a significant impression, both positive and negative, on ethnic film studies.[44] Leonard Zelig, Allen's persona in this film, is a Jazz Age Jewish misfit who undergoes a form of psychosis causing him to metamorphose into a copy of whoever he converses with — taking on, in the course of the story, the physical appearance and dress of cigar-store Native Americans, black jazz musicians, Chinese opium smokers, Republican presidents, Babe Ruth's team, a Mexican mariachi band, and Greek restaurateurs, as well as the behavioral characteristics of his Gentile analyst (Mia Farrow).

The film, as one can see, does not present ethnicity so much as icons of ethnicity. Its tale is audaciously narcissistic, combining Allen's own nostalgia for a simpler America, his then-flourishing romance with Farrow, and a quite thoughtful parody of the style and structure of historical documentary, including nearly poker-faced filmed commentaries by such pundits as

[44]See, e.g., Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, "*Zelig* and Contemporary Theory: Meditation on the Chameleon Text," *Enclitic* 9, nos. 1 – 2 (1985); Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 196 – 209; and cf. my own article, "Xeroxosis? A Review of Woody Allen's *Zelig*," *Moment* 9, no. 1 (December 1983), pp. 42 – 44.

Irving Howe, Saul Bellow, Bruno Bettelheim, and Susan Sontag (all playing themselves) on what made Leonard Zelig an American Melting Pot phenomenon. Zelig's most extraordinary adventure is his brief and near-disastrous identification with German National Socialists during Hitler's rise — which essentially happens when he skips therapy. But he is summarily rescued, then turns rescuer, flies upside-down across the Atlantic, is eventually paraded in ticker tape down Broadway, and marries his analyst. Throughout his career as a standup comic, actor, and filmmaker, Allen took impressively big risks by making his inner life seem so central to his public persona and film stories. It is rooted in the way that nightclub comedians habitually make themselves a part of their jokes, and, as in the case of Lenny Bruce, it is subject to the normal occupational hazards of this most dangerous of professions. Comedians are gadflies and typically invite public ire. Jewish comedians invite Jewish ire, and Allen has often been accused, I think wrongly, of being a "self-hating Jew." This conception jars with Allen's wholehearted willingness to make his Jewishness an issue, to present, like Benny, the classic schlemiel in American idioms, and, going beyond Benny, to declare it Jewish, and specifically New York Jewish, openly and explicitly. All his other preoccupations — old jazz, old movies, classic radio, baseball, New York life, yuppie morality, European cinema, and the unfinishable *Moby Dick* — flow from that emphatic claiming of New York Jewish home ground. What it excludes is a legitimate matter for reflection, but what it encompasses is important.

What most of the foregoing film examples from the '70s onward have in common is a tendency to make a character's (or actor's) Jewishness something other than the main point of his or her presence in the story. We savor a character's Jewishness not because it explains Jewishness but because it helps to explain the character. While such a strategy would seem to deemphasize Jewish experience, it can also enhance it by rooting it in complexities of character and circumstance. Jewishness is not a problem but rather a natural component of a wider social landscape. In this way, these films anticipated the present era's consciousness of multiculturalism, of a multiethnic America, of difference without otherness. Whether they also anticipated an era of cultural struggle and rivalry is less clear, but the multi-ethnic America of these films is in any case not a Garden of Eden, and Jewishness is neither evaded nor trumpeted.

At times, however, where the Jew is portrayed in mortal struggle with enemies, as in *Marathon Man* (1976), *Black Sunday* (1977), or *The Boys from Brazil* (1979), it is part of a cameo ("Jew vs. Arab" in the second example; "Jew vs. Nazi" in the first and third) that has itself become an American cultural icon. Dustin Hoffman is once again a Jew in *Marathon Man*, this time not as a "bad boy" but as a kind of Kafkaesque antihero

battling forces he does not comprehend. This film and *Black Sunday* are both gripping thrillers, but in all the foregoing cases there is an implicit reminder that the struggle of Jew vs. Nazi, or of Jew vs. Palestinian could threaten the peace of civil society even when the Jewish cause is sympathetically portrayed. In *Black Sunday*, the one potential victim that perhaps inspires the greatest emotional identification is the annual Super Bowl game. The film's Israeli protagonist (Robert Shaw) saves the game's spectators from disaster, but he is unable to head off postponement of the game itself, which may, within the film's ideological horizons, be considered the greater loss. Friedman's rubric of "The Self-Centered Seventies" may be most applicable to this film, but it has some validity, often at an implicit level, for many other films of the period, including those not specifically dealing with Jewish experience.

Paradoxes of the 1980s

By way of introducing certain films of the early 1980s, attention may be drawn to a barely noticeable moment in Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic *Blade Runner* (1982), a film that portrays, with extraordinary detail and sense of style, life in a futuristic Los Angeles of the 21st century. This film, whose depiction of the future as a time of squalor and chaos is a hallmark of the style and vision we have come to call "postmodern," presents Los Angeles as an economically stratified, multi-ethnic, and multi-tongued Babel whose street life includes such familiar sights as Asian food stands, a downtown Casbah district, "Hare Krishna" chanters, and, notably, a Hassidic Jew going about his daily business. Jews are otherwise not explicitly present in this film's story, but the image of the Hassid is a familiar cultural icon of a multi-ethnic, urbanized America, one that could serve equally well an ideology of tolerance (as a sign of the thriving vitality of American urban life) or intolerance (as part of the cultural detritus of a "mongrelized" America, of an imperial nation in decline).

This ideological ambivalence is itself a hallmark of the postmodern outlook, but the film, in any case, positions the Hassid at a key moment in the unfolding of the plot, when the protagonist, police detective Dekkard (Harrison Ford) is about to hunt down and "retire" (i.e., execute) an escaped "replicant." The replicants are exceptionally intelligent and gifted humanoids, outwardly indistinguishable from ordinary humans, possessing emotions and existential angst, who have been ghettoized in off-world colonies and are forbidden to live on earth. In its way, then, *Blade Runner* has clearly absorbed the legacy of the era of European catastrophe — when forbidding an entire people to live on earth was perhaps first definitively conceived.

Or has it? The universalization and metaphorization of the Holocaust is another feature of postmodern vision (although, in this respect, the film does not differ significantly from earlier films such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Pawnbroker*), and it bears directly on our assessment of Jewish experience on film in more recent times. This film's brief, incidental, almost hieroglyphic use of the Hassidic image is the hint of what Fredric Jameson has called "a new depthlessness" in the culture of the postmodern,[45] reflecting a cybernetically saturated era when one can effortlessly change decades or nations by inserting a different cassette into a VCR, and therefore when one no longer perceives time, history, or geography in the hitherto customary ways. The film's image of the Hassid is arguably no different in depth from its overall implicit analogy between replicant retirement and Hitler's Final Solution. To some degree, such transfer of meaning is praiseworthy. Many Holocaust survivors, notably Elie Wiesel, have argued that the lessons of the Holocaust must apply today in places like Bosnia and Rwanda, and the broader question of the Holocaust's historical uniqueness is still far from settled. What is suspicious here is the ease of iconographic ascription by which the analogy is effected. Is this admirable restraint or callous fudging? It is hard to tell, precisely because the film depicts a world in which historical memory as such is no longer possible.

And yet, paradoxically, this newly laid-back sense of historical and cultural relativity has as often worked to the advantage of Jewish experience on film as to its detriment. Films of the 1980s and '90s have essentially continued the 1970s trend of unselfconscious representations of Jewishness, while also occasionally making possible deeper and more nuanced treatments of specific themes. This has coincided with the prominence of a new generation of Hollywood or sometime-Hollywood Jews (directors like Steven Spielberg, Barry Levinson, Lee Grant, Barbra Streisand, Paul Mazursky, Rob Reiner, and David Mamet; performers like Streisand, Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Silver, Mandy Patinkin, Billy Crystal, and others), many of whom, unlike the Hollywood moguls of a former era, have openly identified with Jewishness and have repeatedly portrayed Jewish themes and characters. These developments by no means freed Hollywood from classical paradigms of Jewish experience, nor from the continuance of stereotypes, evasions, and banality in the representation of Jews. But they call into question any hastily conceived litmus tests of authenticity in evaluating this output, such as Patricia Erens' faulting of *Tell Me a Riddle* (1980) for its absence of "specifically Jewish issues,"[46] or of Alan Pakula's 1982 film version of William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* for its "Christian solution

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[45]Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C., 1995), p. 6.

[46]Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, p. 368.

of a Jewish problem."[47] *Tell Me a Riddle*, on the contrary, brings alive Jewish experience precisely by not making it an issue, by allowing it to emerge in a natural and unforced manner as part of the landscape of character and historical memory. And although *Sophie's Choice* allowed a Gentile survivor of Nazi concentration camps (Meryl Streep) to occupy the focus of its survivorship theme, it dealt with the psychological scars and moral complexity of survivorship in a newly direct and unvarnished way that eventually proved fruitful in stimulating other film treatments dealing more directly with the Jewish survivor. Films of the early 1980s that deal with Jewish experience, at any rate, manifested somewhat of a new historical depth and psychological resonance, which were to undergo further maturation later in the decade and into the present.

Jeremy Paul Kagan's 1982 film version of Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* has been cited by Lester Friedman as "one of the most interesting pictures of Jews ever to emerge from Hollywood."[48] This is perhaps a bit overstated, but the film certainly deserves mention in the present context. It deals with the friendship, in Brooklyn of the 1940s, between a young man of Orthodox but otherwise liberal upbringing (Barry Miller) and a Hassidic Jew (Robbie Benson) who is the son of a local rebbe (Rod Steiger). The film is especially interesting for the chunk of historical time that it isolates (wartime and early postwar New York), for its ability to capture the awakening of American Jews to the birth of the Jewish state, and for its close look not only at Hassidic life but at a liberal Orthodox milieu rarely, if ever, portrayed on film. Intellectually open but traditional in religious practice, this milieu has been a significant historical presence in American Jewry. The film's drama covers otherwise fairly obvious ground in obvious ways, but the fact that a story set almost wholly within the parameters of the traditional Jewish world was now possible in American mass entertainment was itself significant.

Part of the same trend is Barbra Streisand's *Yentl* (1983), a musical version of Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story "Yentl the Yeshivah Boy." Streisand had long sought to do a film version of this story, and her production spent some $20 million realizing this goal. It eventually earned her an acerbic denunciation from Singer himself for what he held to be its schmaltz and self-promotion, and it was not, in any case, a box-office hit. But it has, perhaps, aged well. The film reflects Streisand's own genuine respect for Jewish tradition, and the loving camera attention to the artifacts of Jewish domestic and religious life, often in honey-colored lighting, is especially striking. Two back-to-back musical numbers, one set in the yeshivah, the other in the well-furnished home of a prosperous Jew, effectively take apart

[47]Ibid., p. 381.
[48]Friedman, *The Jewish Image in American Film*, p. 243.

the differing worldviews of men and women in traditional Jewish life and belong to the history of reflection on that issue. Streisand has a good-humored sense of paradox, which inhabits this meditation from start to finish. The much criticized final scene of the film, showing Yentl in transatlantic passage to New York, belting out a traditional Streisand number, is at least significant as offering a cultural, spiritual, and ideological genealogy of Barbra Streisand. It is simultaneously deeply personal and resoundingly public. It points from the East European shtetl westward toward Ellis Island, and by pointing westward also points to California and the West Coast. That a Jewish theme could become a mass-market filmmaker's personal obsession was not new, if we take note of Lubitsch's deep emotional investment in *To Be or Not To Be*. But its scale was new and served perhaps as a precedent for Steven Spielberg's eventual obsession with *Schindler's List*.

Other films of this period that touch on Jewish experience include Richard Fleischer's flaccid 1980 remake of *The Jazz Singer*, which stars Neil Diamond and Lucie Arnaz, with Sir Laurence Olivier as the cantor father; Ralph Bakshi's animated feature *American Pop* (1981), which traces four generations of a Jewish immigrant family alongside the development of American popular music; Peter Yates's *Eyewitness* (1981), an international thriller that features a villainous Israeli diplomat (Christopher Plummer), perhaps the first such portrayal of its kind in American film; Henry Hudson's *Chariots of Fire* (1981), a British film that won the 1982 Academy Award for Best Picture, portraying two athletes — one a Scotsman, the other a Jew — who ran in the 1924 Olympics; Sidney Lumet's *Daniel* (1983), a well-wrought film version of E. L. Doctorow's novel *The Book of Daniel*, whose story is loosely based on the trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; Martin Scorsese's *King of Comedy* (1983), whose protagonist, Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro), clearly an implicit Jew, is an autograph hunter and aspiring comedian who contrives a desperate but fiendishly clever scheme to convince a late-night TV talk-show host (Jerry Lewis) to feature him on his program (the film features a memorable performance by Sandra Bernhard as his acid-tongued, floridly wacko, and explicitly Jewish co-conspirator); George Roy Hill's *The Little Drummer Girl* (1984), based on John Le Carré's novel, which explores moral ambiguities of Israeli antiterrorism activity in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Francis Ford Coppola's *The Cotton Club* (1984), which deals with the multi-ethnic scene of American gangsters in 1920s Harlem and includes a memorable performance by James Remar as the Jew, Dutch Schultz; Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), which again brings Jewish gangsters into focus, this time in an epic tale that runs for over three hours in its unabridged version; and Bruce Beresford's *King David* (1985), a

disappointingly shallow effort at a biblical period film.

What do these examples have in common? For most of them, historical distance; for some, geographical distance, or the social marginality of their characters (spies, gangsters, losers). But one should not make too much of this phenomenon — as suggesting a distancing or marginalization of the Jew, for it is likewise a way of incorporating the Jew, writing the Jew into a collective history. Assimilation, in a sense, moves in two directions. Just as newcomers assimilate to a mainstream culture, the mainstream assimilates its component cultures by incorporating their historical experience and in this way gradually comes to look more like them.

The Impact of "Shoah"

1985 is a watershed year in one important sense. It is the year that Claude Lanzmann's monumental nine-hour documentary *Shoah* was shown to American audiences. Film on Holocaust themes had been relatively dormant for some time, and now a French film was opening up the realities of the death camps and their survivors in an unprecedented manner. Though the film did not have a widespread popular impact (one comparable, say, to the 1977 TV miniseries *Holocaust*), it did have an effect on filmmaking. Here again was the filming of an obsession, which explored the memories and after-effects of the Holocaust through the eyes and words of its survivors and onetime bystanders and perpetrators.

Filmed chiefly in Germany, France, Poland, and Israel, *Shoah*, unlike traditional documentary film on the Nazi era, contains no archival newsreel footage, no images of bodies or newly liberated death camps, no Hitler orations or marching troops. Instead, it reads the Holocaust in the faces and voices of survivors, in the often self-serving and self-incriminating anecdotes of Polish villagers and German war criminals, in the shabbiness and desolation of the undismantled Auschwitz barracks and death factories, in the disarming beauty of the Polish countryside, and in long, hypnotic takes of the camera as it surveys railway lines, rivers, forests, and unmarked grave sites. It is an intensely and unsettlingly quiet film, single-mindedly focused on issues of moral responsibility, remaining steadfastly focused on the irreparable damage of the Holocaust, to its victims and to the wider world. And yet it likewise captures the ever-present reality of silence and forgetting, both for the survivor victims and for the one-time perpetrators and bystanders — captures it in motion as a yawning void that threatens to swallow every conversation, every testimony, every remembered anecdote. The film insistently asserts a rational standard, measured in the Holocaust's toll in human lives, civility, sanity, and peace of mind. And yet, in showing the pain and ethical difficulty of uncovering dormant memories, it know-

ingly displays the insanity at the heart of the investigative process itself.

It is hard to calculate the effect of this film on popular filmmaking, but some register of its impact can perhaps be detected in films from the late '80s onward — most notably, on *The Wannsee Conference* (1987), a German film, first aired on German television, which dramatized, through a tautly written 90-minute tale, the original 90-minute meeting of Nazi high officials that resulted in approval of the Final Solution. Far from a mere effort to duplicate that meeting moment by moment, the film presents a freely roving narration as it moves in and out of conversations, zeroes in on individuals and their mannerisms, portrays backroom political maneuvering, and allows dramatic tensions to emerge unconstrained by a documentary or docudrama format. The film, in its way, was an important testimony of public reflection in Germany on the war, emphatically declaring German responsibility for the death camps and acknowledging those events as crimes.[49] In addition to the film's implicit debt to Lanzmann's *Shoah*, it should be seen as a partial reply to Hans Jürgen Syberberg's seven-hour surreal fantasy *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1975), which set Nazism into a distinctly "postmodern" aura, embracing irrationality as a fact of life and providing a disturbingly quietistic normalization of German experience in the context of an inhumane world. Lanzmann's *Shoah* itself had very likely been mustered, in part, as a reply to Syberberg.

Echoes of Lanzmann's film are perhaps discernible in a different way in Paul Mazursky's seriocomic *Enemies, a Love Story* (1987), based on Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel, which placed the experience of Holocaust survivors into a newly intimate context. This is possibly Mazursky's best film, exploring the tragicomic domestic entanglements of a Holocaust survivor, Herman Broder (Ron Silver), living in the New York City of 1949. The foreground of this film — Singer's tale itself, respectfully rendered into a tautly competent screenplay by Mazursky, and well acted by a superb cast (which includes Mazursky himself in a key supporting role) — is perhaps less interesting than the re-created setting of midcentury New York's bustling Jewish life: a world of kosher dairy restaurants, religious-articles merchants, ubiquitous Orthodoxy, thriving Yiddish presses, bus trips to spare but *heymish* Catskill resorts, and the vast thicket of personal ads from survivor refugees seeking family members. This is a Jewish New York that appeared, as if out of nowhere, in the late '40s, unique by its complicated blend of newly arrived refugees and long-settled homeborn. This extraordinary commingling would be witnessed only once in this century and within a few years would lose much of its form and presence. This would be an

[49]On postwar German cinema's relation to the Nazi years, see, in general, Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), and Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).

intriguing subject for a documentary film to explore in depth, but Mazursky's selective and stylized treatment of it is well crafted, respectful, and a perfect foil to the story.

A major accomplishment of the story itself was to demonstrate how realms touched by the Holocaust could be approached through comedy. Lubitsch had already shown this in 1942, in *To Be or Not To Be*, before the world knew fully of the destruction under way, but Lubitsch's film was a flop in its time, and humor related to the Nazi era was thereafter largely quelled or confined to black comedy (as in Mel Brooks's *The Producers*) and cabaret satire (as in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*). But Singer wrote extensively about survivors, and his peculiarly mordant vision of the world translated surprisingly well to their experience. As a disciple of Gogol, Dickens, and other 19th-century masters of storytelling, Singer knew how to universalize his characters without departing from his own cultural universe, and Mazursky preserved the Singeresque rhythms. *Enemies*, at any rate, is a tale in which tragic and comic are inseparable, a storytelling and filmic ideal, and Mazursky's thoughtful creation of the midcentury New York milieu allows the film to say a great deal, not just about survivors' experience as such but about the historical setting of their survival.

Film on the Holocaust and survivor experience should, properly speaking, be set in the context of a now vast harvest of discussion on the representation of Nazism and the Holocaust, discourse that amounts to a virtual cultural explosion, which has grown notably intense from the late '80s onward: explorations of the Holocaust's historical uniqueness;[50] literary and artistic dimensions of Holocaust writing and art;[51] problems of historiography and historical comprehension;[52] consideration of the task of remembering and the nature of memorials;[53] the history of acknowledgement and

[50]See esp. Steven T. Katz, "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust," in idem, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York, 1985), pp. 287–317; idem, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1 (New York, 1994); Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago, 1990).

[51]See, e.g., Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago, 1980); Saul Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1984); Janet Blatter and Sybil Milton, eds., *Art of the Holocaust* (New York, 1981); Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven, 1975).

[52]See, e.g., Dominick La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York, 1989); Berel Lang, *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York, 1988); James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988); Hayden White, "The Politics of Historical Representation," in idem, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore, 1987); and Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

[53]See, e.g., Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995); Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Holocaust Remembrance: The*

denial of the Holocaust;[54] of the representation of disaster in Jewish and other literature, past and present;[55] and matters of theology and belief in the aftermath of the Holocaust.[56]

This trend has also spawned research and evaluation of film on Holocaust subjects, most notably, Annette Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, the most comprehensive overview of the area up to the 1980s.[57] Her wide-ranging essays on many topics, her willingness to consider certain individual films or themes in depth, her involvement with the international output of film, her engagement both with film's cinematic language and with the ongoing state of discussion and reflection on the Holocaust, and above all the compelling moral purpose that motivates her to write, make Insdorff's study a valuable resource. Also useful is Judith Doneson's *The Holocaust in American Film*, which confines its scope to certain representative films in the American milieu that marked what Doneson calls "the Americanization of the Holocaust."[58] Some helpful emphasis is placed on idioms of popular culture and on questions of ideology, public opinion, and historical reception.

Somewhat less successful than these works is Ilan Avisar's *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*,[59] which is marred by exceptionally awkward writing, by a seemingly random progression of topics, and by numerous questionable turns of argument. Even so, the book gets into some interesting areas, including chapters on Czech cinema, on the relation of modern and postmodern, and on Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*.

Shapes of Memory (Oxford, 1994); Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994); Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993); James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993); Sybil Milton, *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit, 1991).

[54]See, e.g., Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933 – 1945* (New York, 1986); idem, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, 1993); Walter Lacqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth About Hitler's "Final Solution"* (Boston, 1980); and David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941 – 1945* (New York, 1985).

[55]See, e.g., David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); idem, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, 1988); Alan L. Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1984).

[56]See, among many sources, John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (New York, 1989); Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (New York, 1982); Richard Rubinstein, *After Auschwitz: Essays in Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis, 1966).

[57]Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1989).

[58]Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (Philadelphia, 1987).

[59]Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988).

Avisar's overall thesis, in any case, should be evaluated in the light of the considerations of the preceding pages. In his own words:

> Genuine works on the Holocaust are rooted in the necessity to furnish truthful pictures of the unprecedented horrors, and they attempt to convey to the beholder the unsettling degrees of human suffering and human evil in the Nazi universe of atrocities. . . . [W]e need to define the critical principles which can contribute to the avoidance of inadequate representations in the form of compromising distortions or reprehensible falsifications.[60]

This is essentially a restatement of the old "images" approach, which, in truth, is impossible to expunge from any study of Jewish experience on film. Avisar's thesis, to be sure, is rooted in a special context, one influenced by the overwhelming flood of survivor testimony that began to reach a wide readership from the '60s onward. The writings of Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Jean Améry, and others have made "testimony" a principal imperative of postwar literature and film on the Holocaust, and Lanzmann's *Shoah*, which receives extensive and respectful comment by Avisar, is surely an act of testimony carried to its moral and artistic limits. But the fact that a film like *Shoah* cannot be seen out of the context of other important films with which it interacts, or which in turn it influences, means that one cannot address to these films the simple questions that Avisar asks: Is it "genuine"? Are its pictures "truthful"? Does it contain "compromising distortions" or "reprehensible falsifications"? This approach is in danger of making discussion of film on the Nazi era and the Holocaust into little more than a moral report card. In any case, given the close intertwining of the history of film with the history of 20th-century tyranny, there is virtually no film that *fails* to be a "genuine" Holocaust film. We can learn as much from a putatively reprehensible film as we can from an impeccable one.

Recent Trends

It is too early to evaluate the present, to assess the shape and direction of the films of Jewish experience in the past ten years. To some degree, we find a continuation of the trends toward unselfconscious representation of Jewish experience that have prevailed since the 1970s, with a deepening and expansion of their possibilities. In other ways, we find a continuation of the classical themes and preoccupations of a former era. These trends have affected both mainstream, mass-market films and the much broader tide of low-budget, independent, and foreign films that comprise the programs of Jewish film festivals. The festivals, which are now an annual event in major cities, have multiplied impressively around the United States and abroad in recent years and are themselves an institution worthy of study.

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[60]Ibid., p. 1.

Among mass-market films that come readily to mind as subjects for future study are Mazursky's *Enemies, a Love Story*, discussed earlier; Chris Menges' *A World Apart* (1988), a foreign import based on the lives of Joe Slovo and Ruth First, respected but embattled South African anti-apartheid activists of Jewish origin (this latter fact not mentioned by the film), seen from the vantage point of their daughter, Shawn Slovo, who wrote the screenplay; Paul Bogart's *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988), based on Harvey Fierstein's semi-autobiographical account of a Jewish drag-queen entertainer, superbly played by Fierstein himself; Bruce Beresford's *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), about the slowly developing friendship between a well-to-do Alabama Jewish widow and her black chauffeur, tracing their story from the 1940s to the recent past; *Avalon* (1990), Barry Levinson's saga of Jewish family life in Baltimore in the '40s; Barbet Schroeder's *Reversal of Fortune* (1990), based on Alan Dershowitz's memoir, detailing the Jewish attorney's defense of socialite Claus von Bulow, on trial for attempted murder of his wife; Billy Crystal's *Mr. Saturday Night* (1992), featuring Crystal as a Borscht Belt and TV comedian, whose career over several decades is recounted; Frank Pierson's HBO film *Citizen Cohn* (1992), based on Nicholas von Hoffman's biography of "bad boy" Jewish attorney Roy Cohn, famous for his role in the McCarthy era, featuring an extraordinary performance by James Woods as Cohn; Robert Mandel's *School Ties* (1992), about a Jewish kid from Scranton on athletic scholarship at a New England prep school, who encounters the anti-Semitism of his classmates; and most notably, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), based on Thomas Keneally's acclaimed docu-novel about Oskar Schindler, the Czech-German entrepreneur and war profiteer who sheltered over 1,100 Jews from deportation to death camps.

American films of the above list, which had separate destinies at the box office, provide, for better or for worse, a composite portrait of mainstream America's present-day attitudes toward Jewishness, or at least toward those themes of Jewishness that have attained a certain "classical" respectability: "bad boy" success stories; the Jewish presence in modern history; Jews seen through the lens of nostalgia; anti-Semitism in the cradle of Yankeedom, New England; and Holocaust survivors and near-victims. Again, the fact that most of these films deal with the period of the 1940s to the early '60s, and that the remainder (*Torch Song Trilogy* and *Reversal of Fortune*) are set in a recent past now seen in historical hindsight, is surely significant. While it could suggest that Hollywood is still uncomfortable about narrating the Jewish present, or that Jews are somehow seen as synonymous with "pastness," or with historical memory as such, the process likewise demonstrates a reverse assimilation, that of mainstream culture to its marginal components. Although this is a trend long rooted in Hollywood custom,

recalling the show-biz biographies in 1950s cinema, several of the above films, especially *Enemies, a Love Story*, *Avalon*, *Citizen Cohn*, and *Schindler's List*, are told with a deeper respect for the historicity of their subjects than was possible in a previous generation of cinema.

Schindler's List in particular represents something of a milestone in the depiction of Holocaust themes, as well as marking a distinctive turn in that director's output. Filmed superbly in black-and-white by cinematographer Janusz Kaminsky, *Schindler's List* is mostly quiet, respectful, and dignified, a genuinely moving film, solidly rooted in the wartime milieu of Krakow, Poland, and nearby Zwittau, Schindler's home town in Czechoslovakia to which he moved his factory after its Krakow operations were closed down. The enthusiastic reception of this film, however, should prompt caution in evaluating its cultural impact. Its visual sophistication, superbly crafted story, and fine performances do not conceal the fact that the film, in some respects, has more in common with the TV miniseries *Holocaust* than with, say, Lanzmann's truly groundbreaking *Shoah*.[61] It comes close at points to sentimentalization of Holocaust realities and an assimilation of the wartime milieu to idioms of the classical Hollywood style. On the latter grounds, the film can, and should, be savored and appreciated, but it would be a mistake to allow it to stand as the last word on the subject, as *the* Holocaust film par excellence. Were such a lionization to occur, *Schindler's List* could very likely recapitulate the fate of the 1927 *Jazz Singer* (with which it has much else in common): to be the preface to a long era of silence on Jews and Jewish experience.

Beyond the Mass Market

Schindler's List is a case where we must uncouple the excellence of a film from the problematic nature of its enthusiastic reception. In light of this problem there are grounds for arguing that mass-market film should not be seen as the sole, or even main, arena for the films of Jewish experience. One should look, rather, to low-budget and independent filmmaking, and to imported films, both domains that have manifested a richer and more variegated approach to Jewish realities. Among these films, some of which had their principal airings in the United States on public television or in

[61]Lanzmann's own criticisms of *Schindler's List* were voiced in an interview for BBC2 Television's "Moving Pictures," Dec. 4, 1993. See also Claude Lanzmann, "The Twisted Truth of *Schindler's List*," London *Evening Standard*, Feb. 10, 1994. Cf. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," *David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs*, 5 (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995), pp. 24 – 32. Rosenfeld, appropriately, concentrates less on the film's obvious artistic merits than on certain ideological presuppositions endemic to American understanding of the Holocaust. For an evaluation of the film and its impact in the broader context of film on Holocaust subjects, see the article by Thomas Elsaesser cited in note 69.

urban (not specifically Jewish) film festivals, one should keep in mind Eli Cohen's *The Quarrel* (1991), a Canadian film based on Chaim Grade's short story "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner," about two Holocaust survivors, one an atheist writer, the other a Hassid, who had been yeshivah students together in Poland and now meet by chance and argue about God's justice; David Mamet's *Homicide* (1991), about a Jewish cop in New York investigating the murder of a Jewish doctor; Anthony Drazan's *Zebrahead* (1992), the story of a Jewish kid in an interracial romance in Detroit's inner city; and *Fires in the Mirror* (1993), the public-television airing of Anna Deavere Smith's live one-woman drama about tensions between Jews and blacks that exploded in Crown Heights after a Hassidic driver fatally struck a black child in an auto accident and another Hassid was murdered in a revenge attack. While not, strictly speaking, a film, Smith's play is intercut with film and still-shot sequences and represents an important document on contemporary Jewish-black relations in an urban setting.

This is the place to mention the fine work that has been done in documentary films in recent years, some of which has been aired on public television. These include *Łódź Ghetto* (1989), Kathryn Taverna and Alan Abelson's extraordinary assemblage of rare footage, in color and black-and-white, of life in the Nazi-era ghetto, with narrative based on Lucien Dobroszycki's *A Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto* and on individual diaries from the ghetto; *The Partisans of Vilna* (1986), Josh Wiletzky's film about Jewish resistance fighters in and around the Jewish ghetto in Lithuania, including some interesting focus on the role played by the women fighters; and Martin Ostrow's *America and the Holocaust* (1994), a scathing indictment of U.S. immigration policy in the era of the European catastrophe, based largely on David Wyman's historical work. Although Holocaust subjects probably account for the bulk of the output of Jewish-related documentary film, there have been some worthwhile films on contemporary Jewish culture. Michal Goldman's *A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden* is an intriguing exploration of the contemporary art of Klezmer music, the Yiddish musical idiom that has undergone an impressive revival in recent years.

Documentaries have formed one important component of the Jewish film festival movement, which has burgeoned in the past decade in the United States and abroad. Jewish film festivals have become annual events in several North American cities, usually extending over a period of two or three weeks. The emphasis at these events is usually on lesser-known American and foreign films (from Canada, Latin America, Europe, Israel, North Africa, and other lands), and on independent filmmakers in several countries, including the United States.[62]

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[62]For a partial listing of films shown in such festivals, see Deborah Kaufman, Janis Plotkin, and Rena Orenthal, eds., *A Guide to Films Featured in the Jewish Film Festival* (Berkeley, Jewish Film Festival, 1991).

Here is a sampling from one such program held in the San Francisco Bay Area in July 1993. Among documentaries and short subjects, there were Connie Marks's *Let's Fall in Love: A Singles Weekend at the Concord Hotel* (U.S., 1993), a thoughtful and good-humored look at a thriving Jewish social scene in the Catskills; Jonathan Berman's *The Shvitz* (U.S., 1993), a richly textured study that features patrons, staff, and neighbors of the few remaining public Russian-Jewish steambaths in New York City, with reflection on the cultural meaning of this cherished but dying institution; Babak Shokrian's *A Peaceful Sabbath* (U.S., 1993), a dramatic short, set in Los Angeles's Iranian and Iranian-Jewish communities, that explores relations between the sexes in a particularly disenchanted light; Ruggero Gabbai's *The King of Crown Heights* (U.S., 1992), a 58-minute look at the Lubavitch community in Crown Heights and its charismatic leader, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (since deceased); and Steve Levitt's *Deaf Heaven* (U.S., 1992), a 29-minute film drama featuring a conversation at a health club between a young homosexual man whose lover is dying of AIDS and an elderly Holocaust survivor (played by David Opatoshu) who gives him a reason to go on living. Films more directly on Holocaust themes included Pavel Lozinski's remarkable *Birthplace* (Poland, 1992), a documentary chronicling Holocaust survivor Henryk Grynberg's trip back to Poland to find out who murdered his father during the war; and Jack Kuper's *A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto: A Birthday Trip in Hell* (Canada, 1992), a 35-minute display, with narrative commentary, of the extraordinary photographs illegally taken by a Wehrmacht sergeant during a visit on his 42nd birthday to the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941.

Among foreign-made feature films, there were Assaf Dayan's *Life According to Agfa* (Israel, 1992), an award-winning, if uneven, fiction film set in an all-night bar in Tel Aviv, whose staff and patrons bring with them the full array of social and political tensions in contemporary Israel; Jacek Bromski's *1968 — Happy New Year* (Poland, 1993), a fiction film about Communist Poland's anti-Jewish purges in 1968; Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land* (Poland, 1974), an epic film about the partnership of a Pole, a German, and a Jew who team up to build a textile factory in Lodz, Poland, in the late 19th century; Wajda's *Korczak* (Poland, 1990), a tender but unblinkeredly lucid portrait of Janusz Korczak, the Jewish physician who ran an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto and who perished at Auschwitz with the children under his care; and Jens Carl Eblers' *Republic of Dreams* (Germany, 1993), a surrealistic fantasy depicting a contemporary artist's efforts to commune with the late Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz by traveling to Schulz's hometown of Drohobycz, Poland.

There were, as well, two classic films in the festival program: a beautifully restored version (with live organ accompaniment) of Frank Borzage's *Humoresque* (U.S., 1920), based on Fannie Hurst's novel, the melodramatic

tale of a young Jewish man who is pressed by his mother to become a concert violinist, then is injured in World War I and later enabled, through his mother's devoted love, to resume his career; and Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (U.S., 1947), mentioned earlier, which starred John Garfield, the story of a Jewish boxer from the Lower East Side who must deal with the efforts of a local crime boss to fix his fight.

What is especially intriguing about this array, apart from the intrinsic appeal of the films themselves, is its relative freedom from classical film paradigms of Jewish experience, as discussed in the foregoing pages. In all but the last two festival films mentioned, Jews are comfortably "out" in a variety of senses: as urban singles, elderly, liberated women, gays and lesbians; as working-class, ultra-Orthodox, Yiddish speakers, immigrants, refugees, survivors; as seekers of vindication, of bodily pleasure, of messianic redemption. If the festivals themselves have an ideological underpinning it is that of multiculturalism, except that here multiple cultures are shown to thrive *within* Jewish life itself. There is, to be sure, preoccupation with the Jewish catastrophe of the Holocaust, but it is not permitted to engulf the life of the present. One way or another, the film festivals have resulted in a refreshingly varied and richly informative selection of films, a format that will, in time, prove influential to future film of Jewish experience and to study of the subject.

One should also mention here important archives and collections in Jewish film that have been founded in recent years, notably the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University in Boston, which has maintained a generally close connection with the film festivals. Under the direction of Sharon Rivo, the center has pursued restoration work on film materials in danger of disintegration, has amassed an important collection of films of Jewish experience (including silent film, Yiddish film, documentaries, and American film of the classical era), which it makes available through videotape and exhibition rentals, and has served as a valuable archive for researchers in film studies.

Also important in this context are the National Jewish Archive of Broadcasting, at the Jewish Museum in New York City, which has collected more than 2,000 television programs on Jewish subjects, and the closely allied Jewish Heritage Video Collection, a project of the Jewish Media Fund, sponsored by the Charles H. Revson Foundation, in New York City. The project has developed courses, programs, and video-library materials for Jewish community centers, Hillel organizations, the Jewish Y, family education curricula, public libraries, museums, synagogue youth groups, and adult education programs. This institutional maturation and productivity in Jewish media studies will eventually prove immensely helpful to the study of Jewish experience on film.

Conclusion: The Future of Jewish Film Research

The foregoing pages have aimed at providing a broad overview of films, film personnel, and trends that have played a major role in shaping American cinema of Jewish experience in this century. Some further reflections are in order on the tasks facing the investigator of Jewish experience on film, in the context of the disciplines of film studies and Jewish studies. It would be impossible to discuss in the present space the full range and depth of problems that await elucidation by the historian or theoretician of the subject, but a few brief suggestions can be offered.

First, much room exists at present for study in depth of particular films. This approach has, for good reasons, been called into question by some film scholars, both for its tendency to imitate slavishly the methods of literary textual study and for the film interpreter's frequent use of the individual film as a proof-text for some preconceived theoretical doctrine that the film is alleged to exemplify or confirm.[63] But close study of the individual film can, in fact, serve as a disciplining groundwork for understanding the full range of factors that create filmic meaning in a given historical era, and, as noted earlier, such study has been largely absent from existing histories of the Jewish image in film. Provided attention is given to the many dimensions that make up a film — its concrete devices of cinematic art; its historical and ideological context; its production and reception; its relation to other films of its era, genre, or subject; and the various philosophical and cultural problems arising from its interpretation — the individual film can serve as a vitally important focus for understanding the historical tensions and preoccupations that find their way to cinematic expression.[64] For Jewish film historians, this is true whether one is dealing with canonically momentous films like *Der Golem*, *The Jazz Singer*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Exodus*, *Shoah*, or *Schindler's List*, or with neglected or forgotten films like *Hungry Hearts*, *The Man I Married*, or *The Plot Against Harry*. Addressing the question of how it was possible for a particular film to be made and released (or withheld, or ignored) at a particular moment in history can shed light on important areas of Jewish history in the countries and environments where Jews have lived.

Second, the historian of Jewish experience on film will sooner or later have to confront the vast thicket of film theory and explore its usefulness for Jewish film studies.[65] As noted earlier, there is much that is wrong-

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[63]See, most recently, David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison, Wis., 1996), pp. 3 – 36, esp. 24 – 26; Noel Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment," ibid., pp. 37 – 68, esp. pp. 41 – 44.

[64]Cf. Tom Gunning, "Film History and Film Analysis: The Individual Film in the Course of Time," *Wide Angle* 12, no. 3 (July 1990), pp. 4 – 19.

[65]Major collections of essays in earlier and contemporary film theory include Gerald Mast,

headed about contemporary film theory, and many of its voguish postures, stale dogmas, and esoteric excesses well deserve to be called into question.[66] But the philosophical ambition of this body of reflection is praiseworthy nonetheless, and its contentions have thus proven immensely challenging and stimulating. Integration of film study with the insights and preoccupations of linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, economic and social theory, philosophy, aesthetics, literary criticism, gender studies, and so forth should continue to be encouraged, and many of the dubious and unquestioned contentions of contemporary theory should be polemically challenged. Moreover, there is a great deal to be learned from rereading earlier film theoreticians (Eisenstein, Balasz, Bazin, Kracauer, et al.), by way of illuminating the horizons of film practice in former eras and by way of discovering unresolved problems that contemporary theory has mistakenly declared solved or obsolete.[67] Special realms of film theory can help us to illuminate certain specific areas — such as spectator identification with screen characters and situations; film's role in the shaping or undermining of belief and prejudice; film representation of gender, family relations, childhood, adolescence, and elderly experience, ethnicity, and social class; and ways that the historical reception of a film mirrors larger social forces — that have direct relevance for understanding the film of Jewish experience.

Thirdly, study of Jewish experience on film must seek to place its insights in the context of ethnic film studies as a whole and the study of various national cinemas, both for comparative purposes and for the sake of under-

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Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 4th ed. (New York, 1992); John Ellis et al., *Screen Reader 1: Cinema, Ideology, Politics* (London, 1977); Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1976 and 1985); Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York, 1986); Pam Cook, ed., *The Cinema Book* (London, 1993).

[66]See esp. the articles by Bordwell and Carroll cited in note 63, and David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (see note 5), esp. pp. 249–74. More sympathetic critiques have been offered by D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley, 1994), esp. pp. 271–302, and Robert B. Ray, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 1–23. Cf. Robert B. Ray, "The Bordwell Regime and the Stakes of Knowledge," *Strategies* 1 (1988), pp. 142–81.

[67]See, among others, Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York, 1942, 1947), and idem, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York, 1949); Bela Balasz, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of the New Art* (New York, 1970); Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1967, 1971); Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford, 1960). A 1936 essay by Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in idem, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), pp. 217–51, has come increasingly to haunt contemporary film studies. Cf. Ray, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*, pp. 16–17. Contrast Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and . . . Grand Theory," pp. 9, 21, 33.

standing the broader relation of minority cultures to a cosmopolitan civil society.[68] Attention to the latter problem will enable ethnic film studies to escape the confines of narrow interpretive bailiwicks, defined by the life of a particular people, and will thereby unite specialists in individual cultures on questions of common interest. The problems America faces as a multiethnic society are not far different from those facing the bourgeois democracies abroad, and they must, as well, be evaluated in relation to the experience of various less bourgeois and less democratic nations that have recently come unmoored from their Cold War alignments. The ethnic and religious fanaticism that has shaken Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, for example, in the aftermath of the Cold War clearly demonstrates that the establishment of a viably cosmopolitan society is very much an open question for any nation, even for the most stable democracies. In such a context, current doctrines of multiculturalism, such as those popular at present in contemporary film studies, have been both a help and a hindrance. They have helped by widening the playing field, by insisting that the whole social tableau of a modern nation, and in particular its most marginalized components, be made relevant to that nation's cultural history. They have hindered by often reducing that history to a power game, to a scenario of subjugation and dominance; by failing to see a nation's mainstream culture as a flexible and protean organism; and by viewing films and other cultural artifacts as little more than ideological tracts. These difficulties can, I think, be transcended, and historians and interpreters of the film of Jewish, African, Hispanic, and Asian experience, among others, have much to teach one another.

This is true even where certain historical events, such as the Holocaust, have, as some might argue, placed Jewish experience beyond the pale of translatability. That very abyss of apparent incommensurateness puts the Jewish film scholar, more than ever, in need of common ground with other ethnic film studies specialists. Fortunately, film on Holocaust subjects has proven to be of interest to film scholarship at large, and forms a central subject for those interested in film's comprehension of 20th-century history.[69] Sooner or later, such study will prove useful for exploring the cine-

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[68]Useful (and often faulty) theoretical essays on the subject by various authors have been offered in Friedman, ed., *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (see note 5). See also Wohl and Miller, *Ethnic Images in American Film and Television* (see note 7). A fine theoretical discussion on the relation of minority cultures to civil society is offered by Louis Menand, "Diversity," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago, 1995), pp. 336 – 53.

[69]See, e.g., the recent important essay by Thomas Elsaesser, "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York and London, 1996), pp. 145 – 83.

matic response, if it exists, to the mass slaughter of Armenians, Gypsies, Kurds, Bosnian Muslims, Rwandan Tutsis, and other peoples, and for understanding the moral, ethical, psychological, and philosophical problems of comprehending atrocity-survivor experience in modern society at large. This could lead to firmer insights about the role of cinema in both jeopardizing and enhancing human rights and intercultural understanding.

Finally, the film of Jewish experience should be plumbed for its specifically Jewish historical meaning. Jewish peoplehood has long evolved according to its own internal dialectic. It is perhaps to the historian Gershom Scholem that we are most indebted for that insight, and Scholem spent his life elucidating the texts of Jewish mysticism that manifested this process. Scholem, however, was deeply interested in the material circumstances of Jewish history, in secular Jewish culture, in the interaction of Jews with their environment, and in the emergence of a post-traditional Jewish society in modern times. He advocated close attention to what he called the "basement" areas of Jewish experience, such as the life of the Jewish underworld and other areas banned from the "salon"-centered history of the major 19th-century Jewish historians. As Scholem observed: "Such matters were simply disregarded [by the historians]. Today, we have to collect them with the greatest difficulty in order to gain a reasonably complete picture of how the Jewish organism functioned in relation to its actual environment."[70] The film of Jewish experience is a rich register of such "nonofficial" areas of Jewish history, and Scholem would perhaps have welcomed it as a serious topic of Jewish studies.

Only a few themes of classical Jewish tradition and folklore have found their way to filmic expression. This very scarcity is a problem of historical importance, and the few themes that have appeared are thus, for better or for worse, magnified in importance and suggestiveness. In particular, the legend of the Golem and that of the Dybbuk have spawned several film classics (the 1920 German film *Der Golem*; the 1937 French film *Le Golem*; and the 1938 Yiddish film from Poland *Der Dybbuk*). Understanding the shared preoccupations of these films, and the ways in which their respective legends served as parables or metaphors of modern history and of the film medium, and generated permutations in more "secular" film stories of Jewish experience, is a vitally important task. The 1920 *Golem*, for example, makes the golem figure a parable of film art itself (a parable facilitated by the traditional belief that the Golem's inventor, the 16th-century mystic Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, was also the inventor of the camera obscura, predecessor to both photographic and motion-picture camera), and Paul Wegener, the film's co-director and star (who played the Golem), can be

[70]Gershom Scholem, "The Science of Judaism — Then and Now," in idem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971), p. 309.

shown to have exhibited a remarkable prescience, conscious or otherwise, about the relation of film to modern catastrophe. Wegener himself would later make films under Nazi aegis, during the years of the Third Reich, and in some sense he already foresaw film's troublesome servitude to demonic forces in *Der Golem*.

Both the Golem and the Dybbuk legends, and their filmed portrayals, manifest interesting uses of motifs of disguise and metamorphosis, and these have had meaningful reverberations in the film of Jewish experience generally. So many Jewish film characters undergo disguise or temporary metamorphosis that deeper factors seem to be at play: Ben Hur as "the Unknown Jew"; Jake Rabinowitz as Jack Robin, Jack Robin as blackface minstrel; the Golem as a household servant; Khonnon as the Dybbuk; the Marx Brothers as four variegatedly costumed facets of a single personality; Bressart's Greenberg as Shylock; Ari ben Canaan as a British colonial official; Streisand's Yentl as a yeshivah boy; Schindler's Jews as wartime munitions workers; Woody Allen's Zelig as everybody. This fascination with disguise is not unique to the film of Jewish experience — it has affected other ethnic films' affinity for tales of "passing" in an alien society, or, in the case of Yentl and much screwball comedy, an alien gender, and underlies, as well, science-fiction film's fascination with androids, changelings, and liquid cyborgs. The preoccupation could, I believe, if investigated with appropriate caution and skepticism, be meaningfully connected with Jewish mysticism's themes of messianic disguise and apostasy, and the closely related Hassidic theme of "the descent of the Tzaddik," motifs that prompted Gershom Scholem to associate the failed 17th-century messianic movement of Shabbatai Ṣevi with the dawning of Jewish modernity — to Emancipation, Reform, Zionism, historicism, revolutionary politics, and Jewish secular culture.[71] The broader issues of exile, catastrophe, and redemption that helped to shape early modern Jewish messianism, all major preoccupations of Jewish life and thought from the Middle Ages onward, have had, in their way, considerable impact on film history, both in general and in the film of Jewish experience, and more systematic and reflective attention to these connections is an important task for the Jewish cultural historian.

The early Hollywood moguls were themselves distant recipients of these vast historical tides. The East European immigrants who founded and shaped the studio system may not have known directly the stories and lore of a messiah's apostasy, the journey of disguise, or the exile of God. But they had it, as it were, in their bones. It was in the shrug of the schlemiel and in the haberdasher's trade; it was in their own assimilation to America, and ultimately it was in American film. It encompassed America's vision of

[71]See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941, 1961), pp. 287 – 324, esp. 306ff. Cf. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 78 – 175.

picket-fence respectability and small-town values, of Yankee decency, and, too, however muted, of Melting Pot harmony. These were messianic fantasies of a sort, but they were also a serious vision of America, and, more important, they helped open up a public space where fantasy, belief, and thought about America could thrive. The studio moguls were perhaps simply selling another kind of clothing, a clothing for the mind. But they had inadvertently helped to create something of incalculable value to civil society: a national cinema. Like Rabbi Judah Loew's troublesome Golem, however, it was a product haunted by catastrophe, and it did not weather innocently an era of catastrophe. These events, at a point of intersection between Jewish history, American history, and film history, form a significant part, though by no means the totality, of the complicated subject we call the film of Jewish experience.