

Part 1

The Body and Ethnic/National Identities

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From Jesus to Jeremy: The Jewish Male Body on Screen

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I INTRODUCTION

Representations of the Jewish male body in mainstream Anglo-American cinema have traditionally fallen into four categories: invisible; idealised – replaced by the gentile body playing the Jewish one; stereotyped; and victimised and humiliated. Recently, however, representations of the Jewish male body on film have entered a new phase. Not only have they multiplied, they have also taken on different forms, marking a radical rupture with the past. Cinema and television have witnessed a shift towards more subtle, nuanced, playful and even outrageous representations of the Jewish male body. In contrast to earlier representations, the male Jewish body is not just as a site of suffering, humiliation, victimisation, stereotyping, idealisation and sexual inadequacy but has also become a site of identification, pride and sexual prowess where male Jewish bodies, in all their variety, are openly and proudly identified as Jewish. Although there has been a trickle of such representations over the course of the twentieth century, recently it has become a veritable flood, and the list of films is numerous and continuing.

Certainly, the Jewish male body has become almost ubiquitous on present-day screens. One need only mention Sandler and Stiller, as well as Jack Black and Steven Berkoff to prove the case. This essay will survey these changed and changing but recent representations of the Jewish male body in recent mainstream cinema. However, I propose not to look at Israeli cinema here. In

addition I will only discuss those *characters* (whether real or fictional) who are identified as Jewish in their films regardless of their *actual* ethnic status. This is because given that Ashkenazi Jews (those of Eastern and Central European descent) are now, in the main, considered *white* which, combined with the prevalence of circumcision, particularly in America, Jewish men are harder to identify, particularly in contrast to those who, by dint of their skin colour, cannot hide their ethnic and/or racial origins.

II A HISTORY IN BRIEF(S) OF THE CINEMATIC JEWISH MALE BODY

In general self-images of the Jewish male have fallen into two opposing categories: the 'tough' Jew, that is the idealised hyper-masculine, militarised and muscled, though not very intellectual, Jew of the Zionist project (Yosef 2004: 2; Brienes 1990) and the 'queer' Jew: the effeminate, gentle and delicate Jew of traditional Eastern European Jewish culture who devoted his life to the study of the Torah (Boyarin 1997: 23). Both models of masculinity were 'openly resistant to and critical of the prevailing ideology of "manliness" dominant in Europe' (Boyarin 1997: 23). Cinematic representations of the Jewish male body in American cinema have navigated distinct paths between these two dichotomous poles. As mentioned at the outset, these responses can be divided into four very rough categories since the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the different stages of Jewish life in America. Of course, these distinctions are not watertight and we see exceptions in every period. The first category is that of the 'Invisible Jews', c. 1900–47, the period, as described by Neal Gabler in his *An Empire of Their Own* (1988), in which Jews were hidden on screen both literally and figuratively. Jewish actors changed their names, as their Jewish bosses considered that their predominantly white and working-class audiences did not want to watch Jews on screen. This period encapsulated what Sander Gilman has called 'the desire for invisibility, the desire to become "white"' (1991: 235). The two major exceptions to this general invisibility were *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Crossfire* (1947). Yet, even here, in the former film's depiction of Al Jolson playing an Orthodox Jew seeking to assimilate into the wider American culture by rejecting the ways of his cantor father and adopting the profession of singing jazz in blackface, it is the desire to become hidden that is noticeable. While in the latter, the Jew is largely concealed: as a murder victim, his actual screen time is minimal since the film devoted itself to exposing the roots of racism and bigotry rather than its consequences.

The second category was that of the 'Idealised Jew', c. 1947–67. The post-war

period has been described as a 'golden age' in American Jewish history. Hitler had been defeated, overt and explicit anti-Semitism had been made unfashionable to be replaced by the more 'gentleman's agreement' type which itself was slowly being eroded. Restrictive practices in hiring, university entrance and the professions were being destroyed. Yet, this did not make Jews any more visible on screen. Instead, rather than being hidden, the Jewish body was idealised, de-Semitised and played by non-Jews. The major examples include Gregory Peck as Philip Schuyler Green in Elia Kazan's *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) – Hollywood's other post-war movie about anti-Semitism alongside *Crossfire* but ironically made by the only Jewish studio not headed by a Jew, Twentieth Century Fox – Charlton Heston as Moses and Ben Hur in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959) respectively and Paul Newman as Ari Ben Canaan in *Exodus* (1960).

By 1967 the 'golden age' had come to an end and, if *Commentary* magazine is to be believed, then it had been replaced by an age of anxiety, stirred by Jewish reactions and non-Jewish reactions to the Six Day War which led to the respective growth of what has been called a 'Holocaust consciousness', as well as anti-Zionism often allied with anti-Semitism. The result was the period of 'Stereotyped Jews', c.1967–89, in which representations of Jews, according to Elliot B. Gertel, 'became more aggressive, more pointed. There was a determined and concerted effort to stand up for Jewish identity and to throw Jewish practices back into the face of a film culture that had ignored them or shunted them aside' (2003: 2). But this 'explosion of Jewish references, associations, and even ambivalences' (Gertel 2003: 2), betrayed a contradictory impulse: a retreat into affectionate nostalgia as symbolised by *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), versus neurotic, anxious stereotypes as mastered by Woody Allen whose richest period was from 1971–89, or a combination of both as depicted by the films of Mel Brooks.

Overlapping with all of these previous periods and reaching its zenith in 1993 with *Schindler's List*; is that of the victimised and humiliated Jew, the site of suffering most usually during the Holocaust. In direct contrast, however, stood the criminal gangster and killer. Rarely, however, were these Jewish male bodies presented as spectacle or erotic. Furthermore, underlying these visual characterisations of the male Jew on screen were certain recurring stereotypical physical tics, particularly in American cinema, which David Desser has listed as fast-talking intelligence, physical weakness small stature and sexual entanglement with non-Jewish female bodies (2001: 269, 275, 276).

Since 1990, however, representations of Jews have not only multiplied but also taken on a new form, which, within the context of a century of Anglo-

American cinema, marks a radical rupture with the past. There had been a trickle of such representations hitherto but from 1990 onwards, it became a veritable flood. It is marked by the advent of *Seinfeld* in 1990 – which, according to the Nielsen ratings, was the most popular sitcom of the 1990s – a show about nothing which featured four nasty, selfish, self-serving, venal characters. Since then, the list is numerous and continuing. These representations both play with and debunk the underlying stereotypes listed by Desser, as well as the poles of the East European/Zionist Jewish self-image.

III SOLITARY, NASTY, BRUTISH AND SHORT

Since *Seinfeld* the number of mean, nasty and venal Jews has proliferated on screen. These Jewish bodies are often also represented as physically unattractive and un-erotic: short, ugly, fat, balding, frequently with brutish, self-serving and selfish characteristics to match. Such physical drawbacks are not ameliorated by wit, intelligence or sense of humour. Walter Sobchak (John Goodman) in *The Big Lebowski* (1998) is a complete reversal of the previous stereotypes, Sobchak is not only a slightly deranged Vietnam veteran (most likely suffering from undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder), he is – atypically – a convert to Judaism, having done so at the request of his wife; and even though he has since divorced from her he still maintains his religious identity and is very proud of it: he claims insistently, 'Three thousand years of beautiful tradition, from Moses to Sandy Koufax...[shouting] You're goddamn right I'm living in the fucking past!' and 'I'm as Jewish as fuckin' Tevya!' He quotes Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism. He even maintains a level of Jewish Orthodox practice. He explains that he can't bowl ('roll') or drive on Saturdays because he is '*shomer shabbos*' and absolutely refuses to do so unless it is an emergency. Walter is proud of his Jewishness and does not mind shouting about it. At the same time, however, he is a physically unattractive figure both physically and mentally. He is overweight, given to frequent profanity ('This is what happens when you fuck a stranger in the ass,' he frequently warns) and is close to unhinged – he waves his gun in the face of an opponent whom he believes is cheating at bowling. The irony here is that is that size and beard apart, he couldn't be farther from *Fiddler on the Roof's* cute, cuddly, kitsch, aphorism-spouting Tevya, itself merely a fantasised, Americanised image of *shtetl*-dwelling Jewry.

Another figure who fits into this category is Ron Jeremy. Although Jeremy is known predominantly as a porn star, he has made a number of crossover appearances into mainstream cinema such as *52 Pick-Up* (1986), *Killing Zoe* (1994) and most significantly *Pornstar: The Legend of Ron Jeremy* (2001). If his

viewers did not already know it, the latter film outted Ron as a proud Jew. His longevity in the adult industry aside (he began his porn career in the 1970s), Jeremy is a highly unusual porn star in that he is not conventionally attractive: described in *Pornstar* as 'small, fat and very hairy', his overweight and unkempt body has earned him the nickname 'the Hedgehog'. Although presented in erotic scenarios, his body is the obverse of the normative models of masculine sexual attractiveness. One scholar has gone as far as to describe him as 'repulsive' (Shelton 2002: 119). Nonetheless, this very repulsiveness has helped Jeremy's cinematic Jewish body to achieve iconic status. In part this is due to his positioning in erotic filmic texts, his longevity in the industry as well as his above-average penis (this will be discussed in more detail below), but no doubt it is mainly due to his collapsing of the boundaries between porn's hyper-masculine excess and the average, everyday male physique. As Gill's film states, he is 'a hero for the common man'.

IV JEWS IN SPACE

At the end of his *History of the World, Part 1* (1983) Mel Brooks offers up a humorous sequence depicting an alleged sequel to his preview of 'Hitler on Ice' entitled 'Jews in Space', a sci-fi spectacular featuring Star-of-David-shaped spaceships, flown by obviously Orthodox Jews, singing of the glories of 'defending the Hebrew race' (Desser 2001: 267). But where Brooks offered up such a vision for parody, recent cinema has actually realised such visions seriously. In *Serenity* (2005), Mr Universe (David Krumholtz), is a reclusive techno-geek who lives alone on a moon with his love-bot 'wife', Lenore. He has a great affinity for data, and is capable of intercepting nearly any transmission or recording in the universe. He is also identified as Jewish when seen stepping on a cloth-wrapped glass while wearing a yarmulka in a video clip of his wedding and after his death, stones are placed on his grave in the Jewish tradition. Likewise *Independence Day* (1996) features what Rogin calls a 'neurasthenic hysteric' Jewish character (Rogin 1998: 48) in David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum). Stereotypically, like Mr Universe, and building upon his previous roles in *The Fly* (1986), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Lost World* (1997) Goldblum is an intellectual, a scientist, a 'Jewish computer whizz' (Rogin 1998: 49). He is a talker or 'Jew is mouth as nervous brain' as Rogin has put it (Rogin 1998: 49) who marries his non-Jewish wife not once but twice (the Jew-shiksa relationship is a key part of Desser's typology). Thus, both films feature smart nerdy, weak, Jewish bodies, defined only by their intellectual rather than

physical capacities – both are scientists. Neither is shown nude which stands in clear contrast to *Independence Day's* Captain Steven Hiller (Will Smith), the fast-talking, wise-cracking black fighter pilot, whom we first meet semi-naked in bed. It says much that Hollywood has not yet considered reversing the roles that Goldblum and Smith play so that we see the Jewish fighter pilot and the black scientist.

Goldblum and Krumholtz are both still 'queer Jews', whose bodies are reinforced by the presence of further 'queer' Jews. David's father, Julius (Judd Hirsch), is a Yiddish-speaking male hysteric Jewish mother stand-in and Harvey Fierstein is Levinson's panicked and somewhat effeminate sidekick, Marty Gilbert, who not only calls his mother from under his desk but also his psychoanalyst 'Dr Katz' from his car phone. Indeed, 'queer' Jewish male intellectual rather than bodily values are valorised by both films, as it is '*Yiddische kopf*' or 'Jewish brains' that brings salvation (Gertel 2003: 132). This is most notable in *Independence Day* for it is Jewish hypochondria – a key device of Jewish cinematic queerness – that becomes a key plot device as when David's dad asks him if he's getting a cold, he gets the idea for using a computer virus as a weapon (Rogin 1998: 57). Yet, the sense of the 'tough Jew' also creeps in, for as David and Steven prepare to go into orbit together, a black lab assistant rushes up with a yarmulke and prayer book for the religious ceremony that will consecrate their journey into space, and some of the warplanes which help to destroy the alien invasion bear not only the American flag but also the Star of David, consequently invoking the State of Israel and its alliance with America. Incidentally, brief shots of Israeli fighter pilots standing in front of an Israeli flag and jets invoke the 'tough Jews' of the Zionist project. Furthermore, ultimately, a shift has taken place for while both Mr Universe and Levinson are contemporary incarnations of Dr Spock they, unlike him, have come out of the ethnic-religious closet to unashamedly assert their Jewish ('queer') values. Where William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy could only refer to their Jewishness by submerging it into allegory (see Shandler (1999) for more on this), Goldblum and Krumholtz are open about theirs.

V JEWS AS JAWS

In contrast to erstwhile depictions of the Jew as victim, recent cinema has represented the Jew as assassin. Although this is not a new development, in terms of Jewish manhood such films present contradictory sentiments. In *Munich* (2005), Spielberg's dramatised reconstruction of the Israeli

government's response to the murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games, three of the five members of the assassination team sent to exact revenge – all but one of whom are played by non-Jews – are killed. On the other hand, the team reverses the traditional paradigm of the Jew-as-victim in having the Jews as killers driven by bloodlust (Jews as Jaws perhaps), as well as vengeance. Steve (Daniel Craig), the South African driver, articulates these sentiments unambiguously: 'Don't fuck with the Jews.' The team is seen killing in cold blood and sometimes taking intemperate and undisciplined revenge. Jewish violence is presented as brutal, heartless and methodical, not the expression of individuals willingly sacrificing themselves for a just cause but the coldly mechanical and calculated product of the intelligence apparatus of an aggressive state. While some of the individual agents on the team may have moral qualms about their task, their bosses are presented in no such way. Jewish officials are shown to be zealous, chilly and clearly using the team who are instructed 'You'll do what the terrorists do. Do you think they report back to home base?' At the same time, the film taps into enduring ethnic slurs concerning Jews and their relationship to money, for they are presented as nearly obsessive on the subject, suggesting a cavalier attitude towards human life. The team leader Avner (Eric Bana) needs to obtain receipts for every expenditure no matter how trivial and his fellow team members fret over such things as the price per kill; their first target, one of them notes ruefully, 'cost us, by my calculations, \$352,000'. They are thus clearly the 'tough Jews' of the Zionist project.

Furthermore, the assassination team and the larger organisation of which it is a part are not simply represented by intellectual values as they are not as efficient as its global reputation suggests. Mistakes, blunders and errors recur throughout the movie. The bomb maker played by Mathieu Kassovitz is recruited without anyone realising that his actual skill was in *dismantling* such devices. One bomb he makes is so large that an Israeli honeymooning with her Lebanese husband in the next room to the target is blinded by the explosion. He later dies when a bomb he is creating (accidentally?) explodes (although, interestingly, we never see his dead body). Throughout the film, Avner and his team show an undue reliance on a shadowy French outfit for their logistics, weapons, intelligence and safe houses which leads to one mix-up when both Israeli and Palestinian share a room for the night. Undoubtedly, this sequence was deliberately engineered by Spielberg and the screenwriter Tony Kushner in order to produce an (artificial) meeting between the two sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But, it serves to undermine the competence of the Israelis. Finally, only two of the original five members survive and one of those is killed

by a female mercenary. The death of a male at the hands of female not only problematises his masculine identity but also in death his body is represented as passive and hence feminine, submissive and impotent.

In an echo of the 1950s the film resorts to using non-Jews in the lead roles. At least one reviewer described the team as handsome, scrupulous, exceptionally well-mannered Jewish agents and, as played by Eric Bana, Avner is certainly a fine-looking and loving husband (even if he does abandon his family and home for the greater cause of his homeland). As the only member of the team depicted naked, he is the fulfilment of the Zionist project of a 'Jewry of muscles'. His body is toned, taut and fit. Yet, in general, *Munich* shied away from revealing the musculature of its protagonists, with the exception of Avner on rare occasions. He is virile and shown having lovingly flushed sex with his beautiful pregnant wife (Ayelet Zurer) and even endangering himself by flying home illicitly from his secret mission to see the birth of his child which, in itself, proves his potency as a father even while he is not so proficient as a killer. Ultimately, Avner is presented as a good father (he takes his family to the relative safety of pre-9/11 Brooklyn), but a bad killer (although one wonders if he was cast for his previous incarnations as psychos and killers from *Chopper* (2000) through to *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *The Hulk* (2003) and *Troy* (2004)) – in the end he and his team are ineffectual against the hydra-like rise of terror – and a bad Israeli as he abandons his homeland for the United States.

Another tough Jew is the antagonist in a completely different genre of film. Ian McKellen plays the mutant leader Erik Magnus Lehnsherr, aka Magneto, in the *X-Men* trilogy (2000, 2003, 2006) and is presented as both victim and victimiser. The opening scene of *X-Men* (2000) depicts him as a young boy being separated from his parents at a Nazi death camp in Poland during the Second World War. Via this sequence we are then led to believe that like many others his entire family was murdered. He is thus scarred and seemingly no different from the millions of other Holocaust victims. His status as victim/survivor is reinforced both in narrative terms ('I have heard these arguments before. It was a long time ago') and visually/physically by a glimpse of the tattooed number on his arm. At the same time, however, Lehnsherr/Magneto is a mutant who possesses special powers – in his case, as the name implies, a telepathic ability to generate a magnetic field which can bend or deflect metal objects such as guns and bullets. While the mutant powers is a new twist on the representation of the Jewish male body, particularly as the protagonist superhero is openly Jewish and not hyper-masculine (unlike say Superman or Spiderman), he confirms existing stereotypes by having his mutant power derive from his mind rather than his body which, in contrast is physically weak.

Furthermore, Magneto is superficially represented as an evil body (although by no means in a stereotypically anti-Semitic way). He grows up with an obsession to supplant humankind with a race of mutants like himself. In the trilogy's diegesis, as the leader of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants whose aim it is to overthrow mankind, he is seemingly the villain, positioned against the hero, Dr Charles Xavier, who, in contrast, founded a school to teach mutant teenagers 'to learn to use our powers for the benefit of mankind'. As Lawrence Baron points out, in its representation of a man confined to a wheelchair whose special power is mind-reading, the film has created 'a Gentile hero who fit the traditional stereotype of Jewish males as intellectuals with weak bodies' (Baron 2003: 47). Furthermore, it is Xavier, and not Magneto, who is pursuing the traditional Jewish social justice agenda of *Tikkun Olam* (healing the world). However, a subtler reading of the film suggests that both are heroes who, like contemporary Jewish Democrats and Republicans in America, use Jewish tradition and religion to achieve their different political objectives. While Dr X is unequivocally 'good', using his powers for the benefit of mankind, Magneto is not his binary opposite nor represented as unequivocally 'evil'. Indeed, in its insistence on depicting events from his childhood in 1944 and constantly reminding us of the Holocaust through a series of visual and aural signifiers, the film gives Magneto genuinely understandable motives, summed up by the words 'Never Again'. Magneto wants to prevent another Holocaust, albeit this time against mutants. In this light, then, it is the non-mutants who are evil in their desire to locate, categorise and demonise others simply because they are different. Furthermore, perhaps it is Dr X and his optimistic Panglossian naiveté (for which he pays the ultimate price) that is the true albeit unwitting villain of the films, for he seeks to protect humanity. Overall, then, Magneto presents an interesting combination: the queer Jew with tough values.

VI HARD JEWS

The modern (if retrogressive) religious epic *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) presents yet another version of the male Jewish body on screen. Replicating the Biblical films of the 1950s, Jesus is played by a non-Jew (Jim Caviezel) and within the terms of the film clearly does not derive from the same world as the first-century Palestinian Jews. In multiple sequences, he is visually contrasted with his co-religionists and even though he speaks the same language as them, he shares nothing in common physically. The gulf is further reinforced in that Mel Gibson's Jesus speaks Greek thus aligning him with the Greco-Roman world

in comparison to the male Jews who speak Aramaic and are clearly depicted, in dress, speech and mannerism as proto-Muslims. Furthermore, as Scott Bartchy points out, Jesus is a 'hunk', with 'abs', and essentially an amalgam of the director Gibson's previous roles in *Braveheart* (1995) and the *Lethal Weapon* series (1987, 1989, 1992, 1998) and more: a man who can 'take beating, flogging, flaying, even filleting, and finally crucifying' (2006: 80, 85). The film's use of lingering slow motion to capture the beating, flagellating, raking, ripping, dislocating and piercing of Jesus' flesh fetishises the Jewish male body and its ability to withstand torture. It is an irony here that Gibson, whose views of Jews are dodgy at best, has unwittingly produced a cinematic Jewish male body which fulfils the Zionist vision of a muscled Jewry.

VII GANGSTERS

From Jewish crime czar Hyman Roth (Lee Strasberg) in *The Godfather II* (1974) through to Abraham 'Cousin Avi' Denovitz (Dennis Farina) in *Snatch* (2000), there have been many extremely violent male Jewish gangsters, criminals, killers and corrupt bookmakers on screen such as those in *The Long Goodbye* (1973) *Lepke* (1975), *GoodFellas* (1990), *Bugsy* (1991), *Casino* (1995) and *Inside Man* (2006). But few present as interesting a take on the male Jewish body as *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006). The film presents much paradoxical juxtaposition which plays on the traditional cinematic representations of Jews. Shlomo 'the Rabbi' (Ben Kingsley), is the neurotic leader of a Hasidic criminal gang. He is a rabbi who would rather be a gangster and a gangster who would rather be a rabbi. Although he is a *soi-disant* 'bad man', like Walter he is also a practising Orthodox Jew who will not answer the telephone on Shabbat. Nor will he contemplate premeditated murder as it is proscribed by Jewish law, but he will act in self defence, as this is permitted, and as such is armed with a shotgun for his personal protection. The representation of the rabbi as Orthodox is not just signified in narrative terms but is reinforced by the film's use of mise-en-scene. Deploying the traditional symbols of Judaism, the rabbi is shown wearing a yarmulke and reading from the Torah. His office, which he never leaves, is adorned with the Star of David and its entrance gates are wrought from Hebrew lettering.

The rabbi's bodyguards are Hasidic Jews who wear the traditional garb of that sect: long black coats, hats, yarmulkes and side curls. Unlike traditional characterisations of that group, however, these Orthodox Jews are violent. Thus, the 'queer' Jewish scholar has paradoxically become hard and, within the film's

narrative, brutal, too. Although the concept of the male Jew as gangster is neither new nor innovative in either reality or art, the representation of an evil and *Orthodox* Jewish gangster is and one would be hard pressed to discover any similar vision elsewhere. Indeed, cinema rarely treats the male Jewish body in a religious sense, preferring to code it ethnically. Thus, in this respect, the film's depiction of religiously Orthodox Jews as cruel, which in the film they undoubtedly are, is a breakthrough cinematically.

Two further characters play on the depiction of the cinematic male Jewish body and code the poles of Jewish masculine self-image. The Rabbi's son is gay (a fact of which the rabbi is, presumably and therefore blissfully, unaware): Yitzchok the fairy is the epitome of the weak, effeminate, homosexual Eastern European Jew. He is unable to protect himself, is constantly accompanied by two ex-Mossad bodyguards and in a unique use of a traditional Jewish sign even wears a panic button around his neck in the shape of a Star of David. In direct contrast stands the protagonist, the eponymous Slevin Kelevra (Josh Hartnett). He is a cold, calculating and ruthless Jewish killer who, unusually, spends a good proportion of his screen time wearing only a bath towel, revealing, like Avner, his toned and muscled upper torso. Although he is superficially similar to the Mossad assassination squad in *Munich* in his profession, unlike them, he has no moral qualms about his vengeful actions *and* is completely and lethally successful, suffering no reverses or humiliations that he does not himself intend. Indeed, he is presented as a disciplined, controlled and ordered master fully in control of his destiny, as encapsulated in his very surname (*kelev ra*) which in Hebrew translates a 'bad dog'!

These images are tempered by more traditional ones, in particular, the Jew as victim. There is a body count of at least eleven Jews during the course of the movie and many shots depict these Jews either dead or dying. Yet, many of these Jews have been killed by one of their co-religionists and this proves to be a highly unusual development in the recent depictions of the Jewish male body on screen. Typically, Jews are shown as victims of non-Jews in cinema and rarely, if ever, are they victims of each other. Again, unlike much traditional and even recent cinema such as *Munich*, this Jewish killer is shown as coming out on top as he successfully avenges the murder of his parents, and not only has no regrets but gets the girl at the end, too. Thus, the film clearly takes sides in which representation it prefers as the secular tough Jew kills the transgressive, tough and queer 'Eastern European' Jews. It must be said, though, that the film cannot escape cinematic stereotyping in that not only is Kelevra played by a non-Jew and hence harking back to the era in which gentiles played Jews. The paradigm of the Jew-Shiksa relationship is maintained as it is highly implausible

that his girlfriend (Lindsey) played by Lucy Liu is in any way Jewish.

VIII THE SCHMOK¹

Ever since Abraham and Isaac, a key signifier of Jewish masculinity has long been the circumcised penis. It sets the male Jew apart as Jewishness is literally inscribed on his body (Gilman 1991: 91). And this is also true on screen. To take but two recent examples: in *Hostel* (2005) and *The History Boys* (2006), the Jewish characters in the films are identified by references to their circumcisions. In his extensive (albeit Holocaust-focused) survey of the Jew in film, Omer Bartov concludes that the circumcised penis is 'a focus of identity, danger, and fascination' (2005: 341, n. 33). Typically, as Peter Lehman and Susan Hunt (2006) have pointed out, the Jewish penis is the nub of suffering, and representations of male Jewish nudity, with particular reference to the Holocaust, have 'exposed' the Jewish penis in all its 'passivity', namely, 'femininity'. Often, the Jewish penis is the focus of this representation, as the site of suffering. Recent mainstream cinema, in constructing Jewish masculinity, can not help but allude to the Jew's genital organ; however, it has been played with (both literally and figuratively) in a number of contradictory ways. While films such as *Schindler's List* (1993) and *Sunshine* (1999) clearly maintain the equation of the Jewish penis as locus-of-suffering paradigm, these and other films seek to turn that notion on its head. Even as it depicts the Jewish male in death, *Munich* also symbolises almost the exact opposite: the reversal of the Holocaust paradigm from Jews who are killed to Jews who kill. Although the Mossad agent's death is depicted as humiliating, particularly given that he is seduced and killed by a female agent, the image stands against the narrative trajectory of the film which is a projection of Jewish potency. Indeed, the love-making sequences are clearly a vindication of the Avner's sexual prowess which, unusually for film, is endogamous.

What is more, Ron Jeremy's naked, sweaty, sexual body, in particular his penis which itself is renowned for its size, is displayed and celebrated in explicit, perpetually hard close-up on film. The Jewish penis is no different here either and hence it provides a contrast to those images of *the penis* which project male Jewish humiliation, vulnerability, suffering, victim-hood and death. And they clearly explode Hunt and Lehman's assertion that 'The Jewish penis is always shown in situations of humiliation, vulnerability, and death – never sexuality – never as potent; always as impotent' (2006: 5). Indeed, Jeremy in particular is celebrated across America by Jews and non-Jews alike for the use

of his penis. Although the prevalence of circumcision in the genre of pornography confuses the Jewish/non-Jewish penis distinction given its prevalence among gentiles there, such representations present a counterpoint to Lehman and Hunt's focus on the humiliation of the Jewish male.

The nebbish (an unfortunate simpleton; an insignificant or ineffectual person; a nobody; a nonentity) in which the Jewish male body is represented as a site of fun, laughter and most usually ridicule is also nothing new on screen but it is the use of sexual prowess and the penis as the locus of this laughter which is. Interestingly, cinematic depictions of circumcision as a source of laughter have been few and far between when compared to television. The distinctively Jewish protagonist of the *American Pie* trilogy (1999, 2001, 2003), James Emmanuel Levenstein aka Jim (Jason Biggs), is also the only character to feature in several sequences that focus (literally) on his (unseen) penis as the source of ridicule. In the first film, he fails (twice) in his public (they are depicted over a webcam) attempts to seduce the visiting student Nadia and he is caught red-handed by his father (Eugene Levy) while making love to the eponymous American pie. By the second instalment, Jim has graduated from tarts to women and is caught mid-coitus by his father again. In yet another sequence he manages to glue his hand to his member when he mistakes a tube of superglue for lubricant. Although these scenes superficially resemble those of suffering and Jim is indeed humiliated by his efforts, unlike the films identified by Bartov, Hunt and Lehman, we see no close-ups of Jim's penis; the genre is clearly comedic rather than serious and, in the final analysis, Jim always comes out on top and is clearly represented as the filmic hero. One only need to compare him to the quite obviously gentile Stifler to demonstrate this point: despite the suggestion implicit in his name that he is a symbol of hyper-masculine potency, Stifler suffers a series of humiliating reverses when he unwittingly drinks semen, eats dog shit and has to live with the fact that his mother was willingly seduced by his archenemy.

Likewise, Ben Stiller's various Jewish characters suffer in ways similar to Jim. In *There's Something About Mary* (1998), which replicates the older Jew-chasing-the-blonde shiksa pattern, he is so nervous that he catches his genitals in a zipper, and, later in the film, a dog, and a little one at that, attacks his crotch. In *Meet the Parents* (2000), his father-in-law (Robert De Niro) keeps bursting in on him and his girlfriend as they are about to make love, and, in the sequel (*Meet the Fockers* (2004)), it is still only his parents who get to make love and live up to promise of their surname. In doing so, we see a rare cinematic depiction of endogamous coupling as compared to both Stiller and Biggs, who maintain the filmic tradition of either sleeping with or marrying non-Jewish

women. Nonetheless, the cinematic depiction of their bodies occupies the interstice between the hyper-masculine Zionist Jew and the callow Talmudic scholar, being neither one nor the other.

IX CONCLUSION

'There is more than one way to be Jewish,' said Israeli novelist Sami Michael, opening a gay pride rally in Jerusalem in 2006. Nowhere has this been more convincingly demonstrated than in mainstream cinema's depiction of the Jewish male body since 1989 where we have seen nasty and brutish Jews, tough Jews, gay Jews, Jewish criminals, Jewish porn stars, Jewish assassins, rebellious Jews and Jews in space. Restrictions have not permitted me to mention every film or even every category. To the above can be added: Jewish cowboys, Jewish skinheads, Jewish transsexuals, Jewish superheroes and deviant and dysfunctional Jews. This shift towards more subtle, nuanced, playful and even outrageous representations signals that Jews feel more comfortable, particularly in America, that they have arrived. It says much that there are so many examples of this trend in recent film that not all of them could be listed or treated here. It is also in part a cinematic fulfilment of the dream of the first prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, who said 'We will know we have become a normal country when Jewish thieves and Jewish prostitutes conduct their business in Hebrew'.

Furthermore, many of these cinematic narratives are not marked by invisibility or the desire to become 'white', but rather celebrate the Jewish (albeit Ashkenazi) male body in all its guises. And in that many of these films include religious factors, namely Judaism, in their representation of the Jewish male body on screen, they break the predominant paradigm in the field of film studies, which has largely tended to focus on Jewish identity as an ethnic rather than a religious category. Yet, this essay must end by saying that although the use of non-Jewish actors or what is known in Jewish culture as 'the goy' – 'the hypermale gentile' (Yosef 2004:18) – only serves to reinforce the musculature of filmic Jewry by collapsing the real non-Jewish body with the imaginary Jewish one, Anglo-American Jewish cinema can only really perhaps be said to have succeeded when it can film Jews as Jews on screen. In this last respect, in its creation of a new paradigm, the Jew playing the Jewish character that falls into neither category of the tough nor queer Jew, this has been achieved.

NOTE

- 1 The *Yiddish Dictionary Online* defines schmok as 'jerk, fool, idiot, contemptible person; naive person, person easy to deceive; (vulg. penis, dick, asshole) (American Jewish)', <<http://www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com>> Last consulted in April 2007.