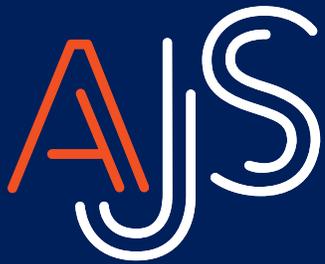


Reel Stories
Documenting the Jewish
Experience on Film

SUMMER 2023



PERSPECTIVES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES





Reel Stories

Documenting the Jewish Experience on Film

SUMMER 2023

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AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies

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Screenshots from *Meshes in the
Afternoon*, Maya Deren (1945)

Inside Front Cover

Screenshot from *Man with a Movie
Camera*, Dziga Vertov (1929)

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Join us for our first conference in San Francisco!

Conference highlights include:

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- **New! Day of Culture:** Extend your conference experience and explore San Francisco! Register now for one or more of our cultural outings. Families and guests are welcome, too!
- **Exhibit hall** of leading publishers of Jewish Studies scholarship
- **Welcome party** for all attendees
- **Evening receptions** sponsored by Jewish Studies programs and research institutions
- **Professional development** sessions, mentoring opportunities, and more!

Special reduced room rates: The AJS is pleased to announce that the San Francisco Marriott Marquis, located at 780 Mission St, San Francisco, CA 94103, US, has extended the AJS a rate of \$179 per room, single and double occupancy, not including taxes, with a limited number of rooms for students at \$169.

For best rates register before August 31. See the AJS website for registration information.

For information on exhibiting, advertising, or sponsoring at the 55th Annual Conference, please email advertise@associationforjewishstudies.org.

Can't join us in San Francisco in December? Next year, we're bringing the conference to you!

The 2024 Annual Conference will be online to allow all Jewish Studies scholars to register regardless of distance or other challenges.



Detail from Ori Sherman. The Creation, [Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden], 1986-1988. Gouache on paper. 2006.4.1.16.

The AJS is proud to partner with local organizations to bring 1.5 days of curated cultural outings to AJS conference attendees and their families.

TUESDAY AT THE MAGNES

The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life

The AJS is using San Francisco artist and illustrator Ori Sherman's work in the 2023 AJS conference materials. On Tuesday afternoon, the staff at the The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life will host conference attendees; together they will explore "In Twilight: Ori Sherman's Creation 1986-1988." Participants in this outing will also experience Jewish art and material culture through the Magnes' innovative approach to collection access and display.

WEDNESDAY TOURS OF THREE BAY-AREA CULTURAL GEMS

The Holocaust Center

Guests will have the opportunity to explore the material cultural items from their Shanghai Ghetto collection and the community archive. Additionally, the Center is a rich source of tools for those engaged in ethnic studies, American history, Jewish history in Asia, the Holocaust, and Pedagogy. Staff will discuss ways scholars might include these resources in their teaching and scholarship.

Sherith Israel

The tour will highlight the art and architecture of this 118 year old treasure of American synagogue design. Guests will learn about the craftsmanship of the sanctuary, the Judaic frescoes that line the ring of the dome, and the stained glass windows, including "Moses Presented the Ten Commandments to the Children of Israel" in which the Jewish people are gathered at the gateway to California.

Haas Lilienthal House

Built in 1886, the 11,500 sq. foot house embodies the spirit of San Francisco's pioneers and the grand architecture of the time. Guests will hear stories of life in this Victorian-era home, as told by descendants of the Haas and Lilienthal families, and will learn about the Jewish cultural experience on the West Coast.

To participate, please place the tour(s) in your shopping cart when you register for the conference. The tour fees, which on Wednesday include kosher lunch, will be added to your total at checkout.

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The Association for Jewish Studies congratulates recipients of the 2023-2024 AJS Dissertation Completion Fellowships.

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Department of History

"Mothering the Race: Racial Uplift and Motherhood in Interwar Detroit"

MATTHEW DUDLEY

Yale University,
Department of History

"Into the Anti-Archive: Jewish Law, Family, and Ottoman Imperial Administration in the Early Modern Cairo Geniza"

Honorary Fellows

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University of California, Berkeley,
Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures

"Women and Haskalah: Rethinking Women's Role in the Development of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures"

ELIAV GROSSMAN

Princeton University,
Department of Religion

"The New Mishnah: Rabbinic Literature Between Late Antiquity and Early Islam"

REBEKAH HAIGH

Princeton University,
Department of Religion

"Scripting Identity: (En)Gendering Violence in the War Scroll and the Book of Revelation"

Jordan Schnitzer First Book Publication Awards

The Association for Jewish Studies is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2023 Jordan Schnitzer First Book Publication Awards. This program has been made possible by Jordan Schnitzer through the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer Family Fund of the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation.

Esther Brownsmith

Three Biblical Metaphors of Women as Food: The Cutlet, the Dumpling, and the Vine

Rachel Feldman

Messianic Zionism in the Digital Age: Jews, Noahides, and the Third Temple Imaginary

Yaniv Feller

The Jewish Imperial Imagination: Leo Baeck and German Jewish Thought

Rachel Gordan

Postwar Stories: How Judaism Became an American Religion

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FROM CV TO RESUME: APPLYING TO NON-ACADEMIC JOBS

September 12, 2023

12:30 pm - 2:00 pm EDT

Online

In this webinar, we'll cover how to search for and find sustainable meaningful work outside of the academy. You'll learn to find jobs using LinkedIn, Indeed & Google Jobs and to read non-academic job ads for what they are really trying to say, cutting through the business jargon and cryptic marketing language to understand if you are qualified and what the job actually involves in the day-to-day. And then we'll cover some of the theory and practice behind translating your academic experience to a resume for the non-ac job search, honing in on the essential elements that nonprofit and corporate reviewers are looking for, plus the tricks to get past algorithms and recruiters and land an interview.

About the Presenter



Adrienne Posner received a BA in Art History from UC Santa Cruz and then took a detour into the museum world and non-profit sector. Returning to school, she received an MA in Art History from UCLA and then transferred to the Comparative Literature program where she received a second MA, advanced to candidacy, and began work on a dissertation before deciding to leave the academy altogether. She is currently a Program Manager at Google working on various internal and external educational initiatives. Her experience consulting began

over 10 years ago coaching grad students and faculty through researching, organizing, writing, editing, filing and publishing their dissertations, articles and book projects. She now primarily helps tenured and non-tenured faculty and grad students understand and navigate leaving academia for the non-academic job market. She assists with everything from resume development to deciphering job descriptions to interview practice. She also provides career and coaching services to non-academics, and has helped hundreds of people change careers, get raises, negotiate job offers, and more.

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The Association for Jewish Studies congratulates the recipients of the 2023–2024 Contingent Faculty and Independent Scholars Research Grants:

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DANIEL STEIN KOKIN

“Flying Horse: Perli Pelzig’s Life in Art and Architecture”

SARAH LIGHTMAN

“Dressing Eve and Other Reparative Acts in Women’s Autobiographical Comics”

YU WANG

“When Side Stories Become the Main Story: Listening to Illness and Aging in Holocaust Survivor Narratives”

DIKLA YOGEV

“Community Organizations – A Case Study of the Multiple Dimensions of Orthodox Community Leadership”

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For further information, please go to associationforjewishstudies.org or contact Warren Hoffman at whoffman@associationforjewishstudies.org or (917) 606-8250.

From the Editors

Laura Limonic &
Federica Schoeman



Welcome to the Summer 2023 issue of *AJS Perspectives: Reel Stories: Documenting the Jewish Experience on Film*.

We are delighted to serve as the magazine's new editors, and our promise to our readers is that, during our tenure, we will be open to all sorts of intellectual collaborations with you, and we will always welcome your input, ideas, and support.

For the first issue of 2023, we asked scholars, readers, and practitioners to share their knowledge, artistic practice, or in-class experience dealing with films. The responses were prodigious. As a result, "Reel Stories: Documenting the Jewish Experience on Film" brings you a wide variety of topics ranging from Holocaust memories to coming-of-age in America, to Japanese animation to feminist protagonists in Latin American television, including essays about teaching techniques to effectively use film in the classroom by our media editor Olga Gershenson, and our roundtable with Jason Schulman on antisemitism in film.

We wish to thank Chaya Halberstam and Mira Sucharov for their indefatigable service in producing some of the most thought-provoking issues of the magazine in the past four years.

As new coeditors, we will follow the path blazed by them. We will embrace and keep fostering a multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach to Jewish Studies aimed at both academic and mass consumption.

Each issue of the magazine, under our guidance, will emphasize the most pressing themes in the

academic world as well as in the Jewish social and intellectual landscape at large.

We come from two very different disciplinary fields and see in this a great potential for broadening the thematic and theoretical scope of *AJS Perspectives* moving forward. We share a strong feminist lens through which we examine and understand the world, an international and multilingual background, and a Jewish background that is rooted in Sephardic and Mediterranean cultures.

We are honored to be given a chance to build interdisciplinary, international, and cross-cultural bridges within and beyond the vast and diverse Jewish Studies cosmos.

Laura Limonic
SUNY Old Westbury

Federica Schoeman
University of South Carolina

From the Executive Director



Warren Hoffman

Engaging with the Public

This issue's *AJS Perspectives* theme is all about how filmmakers have used film to capture and document Jewish memory and the Jewish experience. Since the time of nickelodeons and early cinema, film has been not only one of the best ways to capture and preserve experience for posterity, but it's also been one of the most accessible mediums for the public to engage in conversations about identity, history, community, and so much more. While it's true that the visual side of film is not accessible to those with sight imparities, film is a format that typically requires neither specialized knowledge nor written literacy. It aims to be a true medium of the people, as witnessed in the overwhelming current popularity of videos on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms. In some ways, today, anyone with a phone can be a documentarian and share their work with a larger audience.

While I wish sometimes that the AJS had a film studio, that has not stopped the AJS from finding its own ways to engage with the public in the areas of Jewish history, religion, and culture. Most successfully, the AJS launched the fifth season of its podcast series *Adventures in Jewish Studies* this year. What began as a small effort with episodes getting just a few hundred downloads, has now rapidly grown to tens of thousands of downloads and growing every month. Geared for the public (but also used in many classrooms), *Adventures in Jewish Studies* has taken listeners on entertaining journeys all over the world and through a variety of time periods. The series has featured such diverse topics as the Jews of Iran, the history of Kol Nidre, technology and the future of kosher food, the many genders of Judaism, and Jewish honor courts in

Israel. Produced in an NPR-style format with narration, music, archival sound clips, and of course, the scholarly insights of AJS members, *Adventures in Jewish Studies* is able to make the scholarship of Jewish Studies accessible to a broad audience in ways that are both entertaining and educational. And to make sure that the content can be accessed by individuals with hearing issues, the AJS also includes transcripts with each episode.

The AJS also wants to help its members find ways of elevating their voices and scholarship in the larger public sphere. This June, with funding from the Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation, we were able to bring back the immersive Writing beyond the Academy program led by Columbia University Journalism professor Sam Freedman. Over the course of four days, a cohort of AJS scholars met in New York to learn how to write and pitch op-eds, how to create a book proposal for a nonacademic press, how to give a TED talk, and more. The AJS believes in developing these skills in its members to ensure that the expertise and knowledge of our members can be part of a larger conversation, especially in a moment when the most basic understandings of fact and truth have been questioned and dismissed by various social media sites and "news" outlets. This work, like the work of documentary film, aims to capture what is real, true, and accurate. Amid all the various outlets and noise in the world, the AJS amplifies the work of our members, whose research serves to document history, enlighten audiences, provide new insights, and educate others both inside and outside academia.

Warren Hoffman
Association for Jewish Studies

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Edited by Stefan Vogt, Derek Penslar, and Arieh Saposnik

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Joseph A. Skloot

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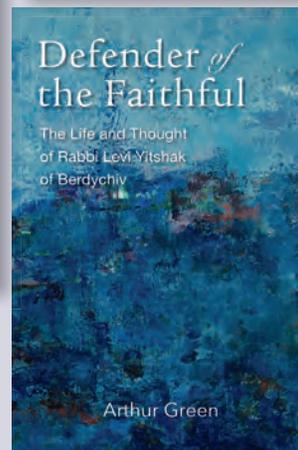
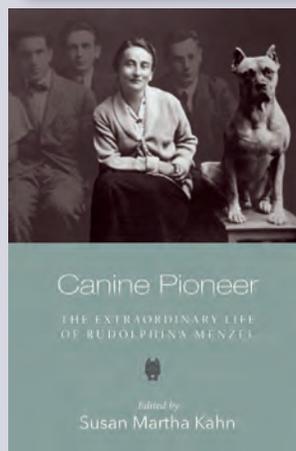
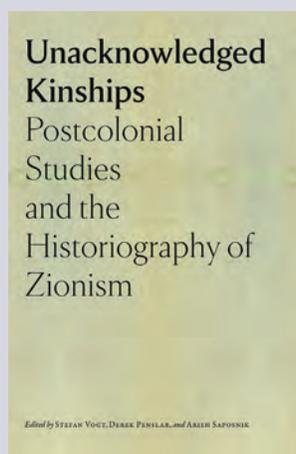
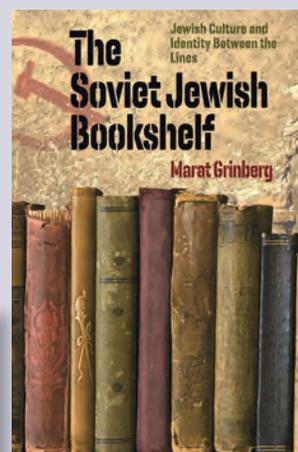
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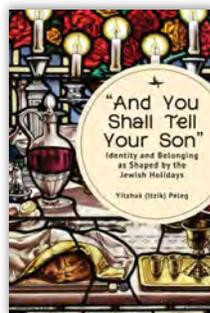
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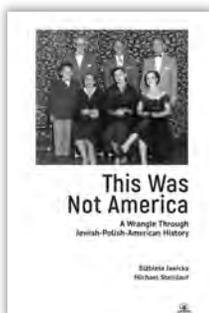
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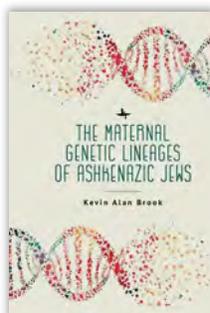
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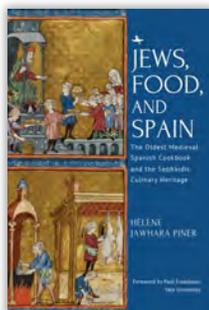
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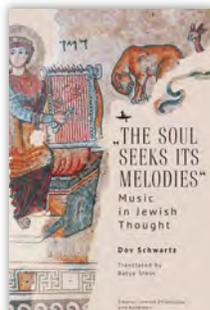
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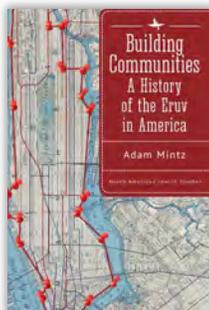
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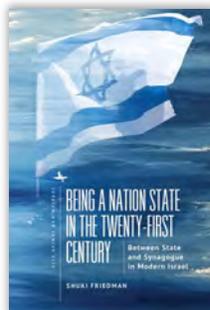
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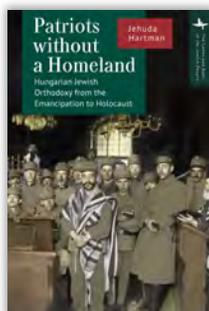
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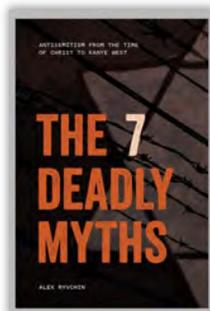
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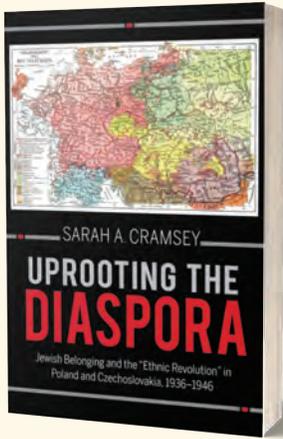
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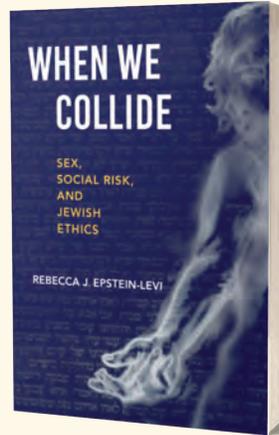


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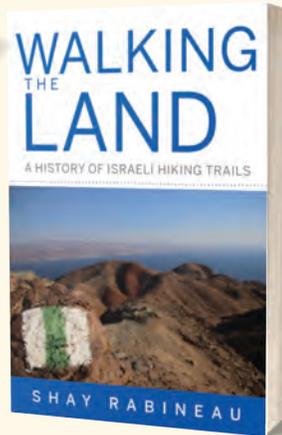


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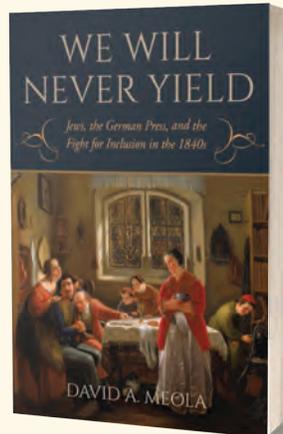
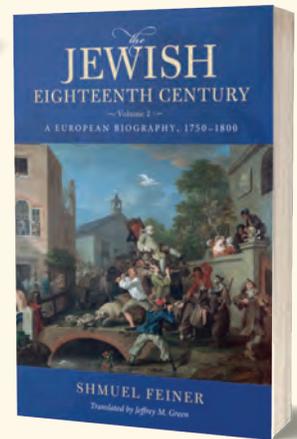


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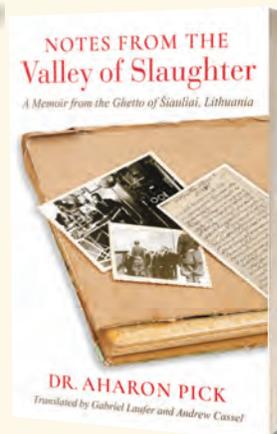
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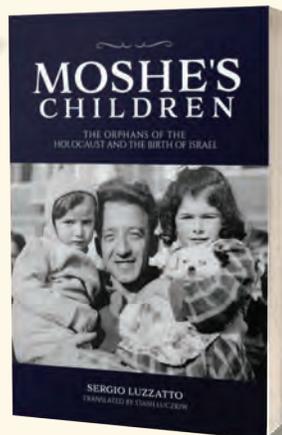


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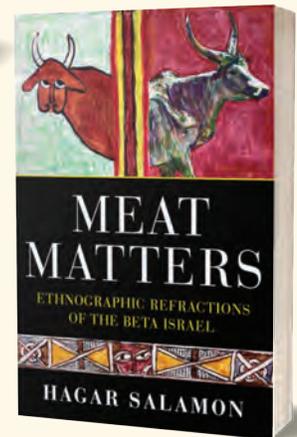


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Reel Stories

Documenting
the Jewish
Experience
on Film

From the Art Editor

Art Editor:

Douglas Rosenberg

Contributors:

Meredith Monk, Amy Greenfield, Mat Rappaport,
Howard Libov, Arie Galles, Susan Mogul, Shalom Gorewitz

The story of Jews and Hollywood is widely known. Various versions of the story cite Hollywood (and the movies) as a place to reinvent oneself on-screen through heroic characters and entertaining stories. There are a number of fascinating books focused on the subject, including Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own* and Lester Friedman's *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*. In these volumes and others, we learn how, in the early twentieth century, "the

moguls," a small group of Jewish immigrants from Europe, endeavored to bring often-transcendent stories to the screen while leveraging the technologies of Thomas Edison's late nineteenth-century production of kinetoscope reels into an industry that captured the imagination of American society in the twentieth century. Sarah Kozloff, writing in *Hollywood's Chosen People: The Jewish Experience in American Cinema*, notes Susan



Still from *Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov (1929)

Sontag's description of a certain "Jewish moral seriousness" in describing "how quickly narrative films [many made by Jewish directors and producers] took on social issues" in the early days of Hollywood. Kozloff goes on to say that "the postwar social problem films that tackled racism and anti-Semitism were heavily inflected by Jewish liberal moral seriousness."

The films of what is sometimes described as "Jewish Hollywood" made between (roughly) 1930 and 1950 often framed Jewish experience through the lens of a generalized immigrant experience. Such "social-conscience" films were often stories about the working class and people shackled by poverty or class, pitting themselves against various institutions and systems of oppression. However, Hollywood was not a place of altruism, rather, it was first and foremost a place of business that employed artists and creatives to flesh out its often-fictional narratives.

As an artist and filmmaker, I have long gravitated toward the historical avant-garde and the artists for whom film was a place of personal vision and somewhere to situate narratives of Jewish experience. Such work is often outside of mainstream cinema and a space that attracts a wide swath of artists working across numerous disciplines. For people of the Diaspora, Jews, women, and those for whom an academic training in film or the arts writ large was not a feasible option (for many reasons), film was a space that could be accessible without such training, or if one was able or lucky, such experience could be gathered on the job, so to speak.

There is a parallel history of film that can be traced back to the very beginning of cinema, in which Jews feature prominently within an avant-garde milieu that has informed the art world since the early twentieth century. Perhaps most important in the earliest days of cinema was the Russian filmmaker and theoretician David Abelevich Kaufman, better known under the pseudonym Dziga Vertov. Kaufman/Vertov was born into a Jewish book

dealer's family in Białystok, Russian Empire (now Poland), in 1896. As German troops advanced into Białystok in 1915, Vertov's family became refugees first in Petrograd and later Moscow. Around 1918, he took the name "Vertov," a futurist neologism meaning to spin or turn; "Dziga" is the Ukrainian word for a "(spinning) top," thus Dziga Vertov.

In 1929, Vertov made *Man with a Movie Camera*, a film intended "as a visual argument for the place of the documentary filmmaker as a worker, educator, and eyewitness in a proletariat society." As Brian Darr writes, "The film is an impressionistic view of urban daily life, seen from a purely cinematic perspective.... the son of Jewish librarians represented a pioneering band of documentary filmmakers he called the kinoks, or 'cinema eyes.' By making films to stir the masses, they hoped to change the world, and their most ambitious visual manifesto was Vertov's final silent film, *Man with a Movie Camera*." Vertov's work was decidedly political and his technical proficiency and imagination broke important ground in the nascent days of cinema.

As John Green notes in *Culture Matters*, "Vertov's driving vision, expounded in his frequent essays, was to capture 'film truth'—that is, fragments of actuality which, when organized together, contain a deeper truth than can be seen with the naked eye.... he focused on everyday experiences, rejecting 'bourgeois concerns' to film ordinary people, marketplaces, bars, and schools instead, sometimes with a hidden camera."

Vertov's early films later served as inspiration for the style of cinema vérité. Also called, observational or direct cinema, such approaches are largely concerned with the recording of events in which the subject and audience are not overtly aware of the camera's presence.

Vertov's younger brother, Boris Kaufman, who worked with Vertov and the Kinoks, served in the French army against the Nazis. After France fell to the Nazis, Kaufman escaped



Still from *A Study in Choreography for the Camera*, Maya Deren (1945)

to Canada and eventually the United States in 1942, where he worked in Hollywood. Kaufman's first job as a cinematographer was on the film *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando. He won an academy award for his work and was lauded for the intense neorealistic cinematography that he honed in the early days of Soviet cinema and later in Paris.

While the Hollywood narrative is well defined, less so is the story of a Jewish avant-garde throughout film history in which Jewish filmmakers have used the methods of storytelling and image making to illuminate the tenets of Jewish teaching, not illustrating but using the power of film to tell real, personal stories, to address social justice, and advocate for often-personal narratives that engage the particularities of the contemporary Jewish experience.

Maya Deren (born Eleonora Derenkowska) is often referred to as the Godmother of Avant-Garde Film. At the age of five, she and her family fled antisemitic pogroms in

Ukraine, arriving in the United States in 1922. After studying at Syracuse University and NYU, she earned a master's degree from Smith College. Deren trained in dance and photography and began making films in the 1940s, when it was exceedingly rare for women to do so. While she died at the age of forty-four, Deren's body of work, starting with *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), left an indelible mark on experimental filmmaking and, along with her writing, is often cited as a seminal reference for the contemporary history of dance on film, or *screendance*. Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945), featuring Talley Beatty, is perhaps the film that comes closest to such a genesis point. While Hollywood films featuring dance in the same era tended to neutralize the value of the individual, emphasizing instead the importance of the group, or using dance to simply move the story along, Deren elevates the individual to a place of dignity through her use of camera technique and editing. Deren both humanizes and articulates the dancing



Still from Meshes of the Afternoon, Maya Deren (1943)

through surrealist flights of fancy and establishes a female-to-male cinematic gaze that is completely at odds with the cinematic practice of the era. Deren's use of the camera to frame and sexualize the male body precedes by decades discussions about gaze theory and the gendering of cinematic space. The film breaks numerous taboos, transgresses stereotypes, and makes a distinctly political statement by featuring an African American man (Beatty), not as a servant or a butler as Hollywood might have cast him at the time, but rather as a fully formed human being, an elegant and talented dancer and the sole performer in Deren's four-minute silent film. Deren's editing amplifies the intimacy of the viewer's engagement with his image as we track him through both interior and exterior spaces. Deren uses the dancer as the constant in a shifting landscape of place and time, the flow of movement unbroken as location changes from scene to scene, questioning our relationship to the logic of chronology. In addition to the famous unbroken pan, in which we see

Beatty in the forest appearing and reappearing as the camera seems to turn 360 degrees on its axis, we also see the dancer begin a gesture in one space and continue it in another seemingly without interruption. In one moment, he moves into a sort of living room where above the mantle we briefly see a framed portrait of Frida Kahlo, a nod to Deren's own protofeminist identity. In another moment we see Beatty turning on his own axis as the camera frames first torso, then head, then feet, the turning speeding up as the cuts progress. At moments in Deren's silent film, Beatty seems suspended in mid-air for an impossible length of time. At other times, an unfolding of the dancer's arm begins in one location and seamlessly ends in another, the choreography literally "moving" the viewer into another place. Simultaneously, she creates a work of art in which dance, removed from narrative responsibility, is contingent on neither what precedes it nor what follows it in the frame, a phenomenon she describes as an anagram. As Deren herself explained:

In an anagram all the elements exist in a simultaneous relationship....Each element of an anagram is so related to the whole that no one of them may be changed without affecting its series and so affecting the whole. And conversely the whole is so related to every part that whether one reads horizontally, vertically, diagonally or even in reverse, the logic of the whole is not disrupted, but remains intact.

This statement describes a way for cinema to work as a nonlinear, deconstructed visual experience and allows for the body to speak for itself. This in a way extends the work of Dziga Vertov in situating the viewer as a witness rather than a passive recipient of the cinematic experience. Deren opened the door for generations of filmmakers who continue to build on her ground-breaking work.

Deren's subsequent film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), established her as an auteur and perhaps the most important filmmaker of her time. *Meshes of the Afternoon* features Deren herself as the solitary figure in the film (and director) and implies a surrealist, almost existential journey that is both psychological and temporal, transporting us through an ever-changing dreamscape. The critic Adrian Martin observes, "In Deren's vision, it is the terrain of the domestic everyday that lays the meshes that ensnare, complicate and traumatise a woman's life."

Somewhat low-tech, homemade, and personal, Deren's body of work bequeaths a kind of permission to generations of filmmakers, particularly outsiders and marginalized voices, women and visionaries to explore a version of film that is outside the mainstream. Deren's gift is film as art, film as a visual, mystical landscape. Indeed, academic texts on Deren often point to the seemingly undeniable link between Deren and mythology, specifically the mystical realm of magic. Deren had been exposed to Kabbalah earlier in her life, which seems to have been an animating factor in many of her films. Her unfinished film *Witch's Cradle* (a project in which she collaborated with Marcel Duchamp in 1943), was full of references to surrealism, magic, and the occult. Speaking about the film and its references, Deren said, "I was concerned with the impression that surrealistic objects were, in a sense, the cabalistic symbols of the twentieth century; for the surrealist artists, like the feudal magicians and witches, were motivated by a desire to deal with the

real forces underlying events ... and it seemed to me that the camera was peculiarly suited to delineate this form of magic."

Deren always denied that her films were "Surrealist," though given the relationship between Kabbalah and Surrealism that comes up time and again throughout the movements of the early twentieth century, especially in Dada, there are significant slippages in the way that such references are deployed. Certainly, from the earliest days of the modern avant-garde and the Dada movement, with its Jewish founders Tristen Tzara and Marcel Janco, to Deren's "mysticism," it is not much of a leap to see the connections that run through modern art generally, including film. In *Dada Judaism: The Avant-Garde in First World War Zurich*, Alfred Bodenheimer states, "For Tzara, dada was not a refuge from Judaism or a means to introduce elements of Judaism (like the Kabbalah) into art. Rather, it was a form of expressing Judaism, clearly not as an explicit form of identity, but in a way that visualized the paradoxical form and essence of being, an experience which could be described as fundamental for contemporary European Jews." In the interstitial spaces between seminal moments in the construction of modernism and the avant-garde, we find a subversive group of artists and theorists continuously framing their own cultural moment and imprinting Jewishness in the process. The author Milly Heyd considers Tzara, along with another ground-breaking Jewish artist, Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky), as "hidden Jew[s] in the Avant-Garde," and notes that such artists were unable to flee or to conceal their Jewishness, so palpable were the Kabbalistic and Hasidic influences still present, for instance, in the work and thinking of Dada founder Tristen Tzara (born Samuel Rosenstock, in Romania). For Tzara, and I suspect, and for many artists of the early modern period, the avant-garde was one form of expressing Jewishness in a way that, as Bodenheimer further notes, "visualized the paradoxical form and essence of being," which, of course, was fundamental for refugees, émigrés, and diasporic European Jews as well. Dada was one of the most radical of art movements of the twentieth century, and keenly focused on undermining bourgeois society. Its artists brought a particularly Jewish perspective to the insistence on justice and what might now be called *tikkun 'olam*, and it hardly seems a coincidence that a number of the Dada artists were Jewish.



Postcard for airing Meredith Monk's *Ellis Island* (1981) on PBS, Channel 13.
Video still captured by Bob Rosen. Cinematography by Jerry Pantzer

MEREDITH MONK, a composer and pioneer in what is now called “extended vocal technique” and “interdisciplinary performance” and a MacArthur Fellowship “genius grant” recipient, creates works that thrive at the intersection of music and movement. Her Jewish heritage and humanist concerns are particularly visible in two groundbreaking films, *Ellis Island* (1981) and *Book of Days* (1988). *Ellis Island*, shot before the restoration of the historic immigration facility, combines dance and performance in a haunting depiction of the immigrant experience.

In Monk's *Ellis Island*, a site-specific black-and-white film from 1981, dancers excavate the grounds of a decrepit and as-yet-unrestored Ellis Island, mining it for the

memory of the refugees and immigrants who passed through its portals. We see the characters in period dress, undergoing a kind of scrutiny and often humiliation that reminds us of the present-day crisis of other refugee populations. In the film, Monk moves large groups of people across the screen, many of whom are dancers or musicians and singers. There is a startling kind of diversity that we see in the way that she portrays the newly landed immigrants, not as a monolithic group but rather as global citizens.

In *Book of Days*, Monk gives us a glimpse into the Middle Ages through a twentieth-century lens. In a medieval ghetto, a child envisions a future of airplanes and television; to her grandfather, they are visions of



Meredith Monk on set for Book of Days (1988). Photo by Dominique Lasseur

Noah's Ark, and the ancient wisdom of the Jewish heritage is transmitted from generation to generation. Again, using dancers to portray some of the characters in her film, Monk is able to choreograph a nuanced language of gesture for the camera to record that which is intimate and heartbreaking. The film's visual language reminds us of the HIV/AIDS crisis that had taken hold of

creative communities during the time frame in which she made *Book of Days*, and suffering is seen as both random and universal. These films serve as a narrative by which to consider Monk's fluid definitions of identity, genre, and disciplinary boundaries both in her life and artistic practice.



Amy Greenfield, with camera

AMY GREENFIELD created new ways of seeing bodies in motion on screen with her pioneering work in the 1970s and beyond. This is particularly evident in her film *Element* (1973), in which Greenfield's naked body rises and falls from a sea of black mud until the body and the landscape are inseparable. We might also look to Greenfield's *Transport* (1970), made in the specter of the

Vietnam War, in which bodies—nonresponsive, limp as if wounded, in a sense “performing” death—are literally transported over harsh terrain. The other active and able-bodied performers carry and rescue the wounded ones while the hand-held camera provides a shifting point of view, oscillating between first and third person. Raised above the group, bodies fly through the air as if

launched by canon fire. It is an image that speaks of both trust and the necessity of saving or preserving the dignity of the damaged ones. The iconography in this work as well as in Greenfield's *Element* represents a foregrounding of content enabled by quotidian formal elements. These cine-dance works extend ideas from both the Judson Church Group and Yvonne Rainer's prescriptions against virtuosity. Greenfield's films are noteworthy for their destruction of linearity and the way in which the camera becomes a part of the community of

performers on screen. The bodies in Greenfield's work cannot be read as any bodies; they are specific and recognizable as bodies of an era politicized by war—bodies in crisis. In Greenfield's film *Element*, from 1973, shot in black-and-white 16 mm film, no such external narrative is present: no literary devices, no juxtapositions of the visual culture of objects or the kind of editing techniques that suggest a narrative outside of the body's experience with itself and its environment. *Element* is a performative dance film in which Greenfield's body



Still from Element, Amy Greenfield (1973)



Stills from Transport, Amy Greenfield (1970)



Still from touristic intents, Mat Rappaport (2021)

relentlessly collapses into a sea of dark mud, perhaps a reference to the existential crisis of the Jewish bodies of her parent's generation. The use of the close-up to contrast the wide shot in *Element* is always limited to the body and the site it inhabits. No other signifiers are present in *Element*; thus we are free to imagine our own metaphors for the engagement of Greenfield's body to the landscape and her performance within it.

Documentary filmmaking has always sought to expose hidden histories and veiled truths, often telling stories that are seemingly purposefully suppressed. Accounts of the Holocaust were first made visible through the US government's efforts to send combat cameramen into camps where they shot archival and documentary footage. Many of those images came to viewers in movie theaters inside of newsreels and later in documentaries. At the end of the war, the British Ministry of Information's Sidney Bernstein was commissioned to make a documentary that would provide incontrovertible evidence of the Nazis' crimes. He hired the legendary director Alfred Hitchcock to advise on the structure and formal approach to the film. Ultimately, the film was abandoned and shelved for some seventy years because it was deemed too

politically sensitive and has only recently been included in a new documentary for television called *Holocaust: Night Will Fall*, aired on the British Channel 4 in the United Kingdom. However, documentary filmmaking persists in telling important stories.

touristic intents is a feature documentary film directed by **MAT RAPPAPORT** that explores the intricate relationship between mass tourism and political ideology. Rappaport, an artist, filmmaker, and educator, is known for his works that delve into the built environment, habitation, and invisible infrastructures through video, photography, and initiatives such as the Range Mobile Lab, Video in the Built Environment (v1b3), and Side/Lot.

As Rappaport notes,

The film focuses on the captivating case study of Prora, an imposing and never completed Nazi resort located on Germany's Baltic Sea. Originally designed to accommodate 20,000 vacationing working-class Germans, this colossal three-mile-long structure served to solidify support for the Nazi party while promising leisure time to the masses. Despite the interruption caused by World War II, the construction of Prora resumed in the 1950s under



and the unity, the whole is missing.

Still from touristic intents, Mat Rappaport (2021)

the Socialist East German government. The site found new purposes as it transformed into a military training facility and housing for conscientious objectors coerced into construction work by the German Democratic Republic. After years of neglect, the massive structure was sold off in sections and is undergoing redevelopment, including Europe's largest youth hostel, apartments, condominiums, and hotels.

In an era where the significance of national monuments has become a paramount issue in preserving cultural memory, *touristic intents* grapples with notions of place and identity. Prora stands as a striking testament to how buildings become vessels for political ideology and mythmaking. The film provocatively raises questions about the ethical obligation to remember a building's dark past. The Nazi-developed resort served as a potent propaganda instrument and was part of the "Strength through Joy" initiative, which included cultural activities and one-class cruise ships. Prora aimed to forge a connection between the working-class vacationers and the Nazi party, although its intended purpose was never fully realized. Subsequently repurposed by the East

German government, the building became a significant site for military training and the housing of conscientious objectors.

touristic intents traces Prora's complex history over multiple regimes, exploring its varied uses and highlighting the contrasting and interconnected aspects of the Nazi, East German, and contemporary political identities while connecting the critical influence of American industrialist Henry Ford on Nazi ideology and the building economy. The film weaves contemporary interviews and observational footage with archival and propaganda materials dating back to the height of the Nazi movement. Interviews with individuals ranging from former conscientious objectors and historians to modern-day developers, architects, and designers provide diverse and multivalent perspectives.

The role of national monuments has become a defining issue for the selective maintenance of cultural memory. Prora stands as a lasting reminder of how buildings become vehicles for political ideology and mythmaking throughout their life cycles.



Still from *Fourteen Stations*, Howard Libov (2004)

Documentary filmmaking also offers us a chance to know more about the intentionality of artists and other thinkers and creatives. **HOWARD LIBOV's** film, *New Jersey 40.76N x 74.42W* (a.k.a. *Fourteen Stations*), focuses on the work of artist Arie Galles. In January of 1993, Galles walked out to his backyard studio to begin a series of new drawings he thought would take him one year to complete. Ten years later he had completed *Fourteen Stations*, a series of charcoal drawings based on surveillance photographs of German concentration camps. Directed by Libov, *Fourteen Stations* documents the effort, the time, the research, and the personal toll the project exacted on the artist, who slowly reveals an unlikely connection to the heart of his unique work as Galles painstakingly created fifteen large-scale drawings based on aerial views of some of the most infamous Nazi

concentration camps. In his epic response to the history that touched him as a Jewish child living in Poland after World War II, Galles offers the collected drawings as his Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for the dead. Each drawing contains a Hebrew phrase from the Kaddish embedded within it and then obscured by layers of charcoal. When mounted in sequence, the drawings compose the entire prayer. The accompanying poems by Jerome Rothenberg are based on gematria, a mystical Hebrew numerological system. The poem/drawings function as an integral component of the viewer's experience of *Fourteen Stations*. The drawings and poem/drawings present a disquieting, introspective, and respectful testimony to the atrocities of the war without demeaning those who perished or those who survived. Libov's documentary is both a record of Galles's work in visualizing these horrific



Still from Fourteen Stations, Howard Libov (2004)

spaces of death, and a portrait of the artist as reattempts to reconcile his personal history in the two-dimensional space of the drawings. In speaking about the documentary, Libov says, "I never intended to make a film that touched upon the Holocaust. It was not a conflict of my generation and was always conveyed to me in the context of "never again." I had also vowed, professionally, to steer away from documentaries that were 'issue' movies. Too many times, I felt, these films were 'speaking to the choir.'... What drew me back to the documentary form was an interest in creating films that contained cinema—some understanding the audience might glean from what is outside of the frame and from what hovers beneath the surface." For Libov, the documentary form allows for an engagement with the artist's actual life as well as the life of the work they are making. He stays

focused on his subject over years and records the process of contemplation, both his own and that of the subject of the film. This allows for a documentary to breathe, to come alive, and to represent its subject in the context of a full and focused life. He notes, "We were talking with Arie one night, the light was fading, and he began telling a story about something we had not asked about, and had not known to ask about. The story made it clear how his life was created in the dust of the Holocaust.... All the beauty and insight that Arie brings to us in these drawings ... rests on a kind of sadness that also illustrates a desperate search for that which will survive us, that which will outlive us."



Still from LAS (The forest), Arie Galles (1974)

In the late 1960s to mid-1970s, **ARIE GALLES** himself was making experimental films. In 1974, he made a black-and-white film called *LAS* (translated from the Polish, meaning “the forest”). Galles notes that *LAS* “is an exception to my other films. *LAS* is a Kaddish, a Prayer of Remembrance, for my father, Moshe Galles, who during World War II, while running from the Nazis and had to bury both his parents, and my two siblings, one of whom died from diphtheria and the other from hunger.” In the film, we see Galles, as his own father, making his way through a forest, carrying a shovel and solemnly digging a small grave. As the film is silent, it has a sacred and solemn air about it. It is a ritual perhaps of grieving, perhaps of putting such memories to rest, perhaps a way of sitting shivah, a way that an artist might use his practice as an evocation of shivah. The viewer is witnessing/experiencing/remembering along with Galles. He says, “My father alone dug their graves in a Siberian forest. I never knew my three-year-old sister or my six-week-old brother. I was born two years later. I conceived the film as a son’s special prayer for his father and for all other innocents who suffered.”

Galles, as many artists do, uses the materiality of film as a platform for personal healing and for exorcising the ghosts of trauma while memorializing the lost ones. In speaking about his process, he says,

In the film I imagined a poignant moment during which the viewer is transported to a silent snippet of time. We know nothing about the man and are thus compelled to conjecture his past and his future by our personal interpretation. The event is universal, but for those aware of the traditional Jewish burial practice, it is very specific as to the character’s ethnicity. I loved my kind, gentle father and made this film six years after his passing. I purposely used an old Arriflex 16mm camera and outdated DuPont 931 black & white film to achieve the grainy look of a 1940’s newsreel.... The film is silent, and the silence was meant to speak for itself.

Taken together with the documentary of the artist by Howard Libov, we feel that perhaps we know this individual as we know his story. And perhaps his story is our collective story.



Stills from LAS (The forest), Arie Galles (1974)



Stills from LAS (The forest), Arie Galles (1974)



Still from Mom's Move, Susan Mogul (2018)

The artist **SUSAN MOGUL** has been working with the moving image since the early 1970s. Mogul was part of the Feminist Studio Workshop, a radical feminist art program in Southern California led by Judy Chicago. Mogul's diverse body of work addresses topics of female identity, sexuality, and feminism, often situated within her Jewish American experience. In projects such as *An Artist of a Certain Time* (1972), Mogul grapples with her career as an artist, feminist, daughter, and a Jew. Many of her film projects reflect on her relationship with her (Jewish) mother, historically a particularly deep well of both

humor and pathos for Jewish artists. Mogul explains that "in 2011, I interviewed several female artists and asked them to expound upon their mother's creative influence upon them. My intention was to make a film on the subject." Working on this project ultimately led Mogul back to her own mother, as she observed, "I didn't know it at the time, that these compelling interviews were preliminary research. And just a year later, I would embark upon a large-scale interdisciplinary project about my own mother's creative impact on my private and public life as an artist."



Still from Mom's Move, Susan Mogul (2018)

Mom's Move, the film that Mogul completed in 2018, tells the personal story of assisting with her mother's move from the family home in 2012. Mogul describes her mom, Rhoda Blate Mogul, as a housewife and mother of six, and a lifelong, avid amateur photographer. Her creative drive—though confined to the home—had a major influence on Mogul's public life as an artist and filmmaker.

She says, "When Mom sold her house in 2012 at the age of 88, it was both a closure and a point of departure. Mom's loss of both home and memory was my loss as well.... Part bio, part memoir, *Mom's Move* portrays the relationship between two artists: an unconventional fifties housewife, and myself, her boomer feminist daughter."

In the course of the documentary-style film, Mogul tells the story of rediscovering her mother's inner creative life as they pack up her possessions. Through a series of personal self-portraits that her mother had made, Mogul discovers that she was not the only renegade in the family; her mother had her own method of self-expression, albeit often sacrificed to her role as mother and wife. In the film, the story of mother and daughter intertwines like the proverbial tree of life.

In a recent conversation with Mogul, she told me that while helping her mother move,

"I went through her entire photographic archive. I examined her proof sheets, negatives, and photographs. I saw photographs I had never seen and images on proof sheets Mom never enlarged. These 'new' photographs from the fifties and sixties enabled me to examine and ponder my childhood, my relationship to my mother, and the home I grew up in, from a slightly different vantage point."

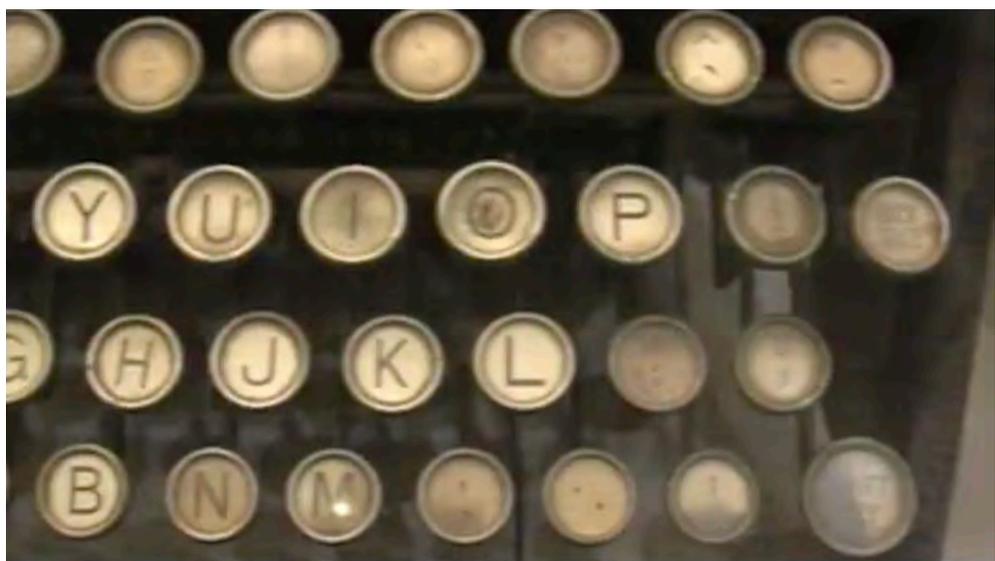
As the keeper of her mother's legacy, Mogul's film tells a story that is at once familiar and yet enlightens us about inner life of her subject. Mogul witnesses her mother's aging through both the lens of a daughter and also the lens of a camera, a particular relationship that both subject and filmmaker acknowledge throughout the film. As her mom's health worsened over the course of the film, Mogul recalls, "Mom may have had dementia, but her visual acuity was perfectly intact. Over the course of the last few years Mom repeatedly said, 'You are my



Still from Mom's Move, Susan Mogul (2018), self-portrait by Rhoda Blate

curator.' And that was all I needed to hear. I was unable to be the caretaker of my mother in the last years of her life. But, I did become the caretaker of her work."

Film (and the personal documentary genre in particular), allows for a posthumous understanding of the nuance of a subject's life. Such films have the capacity to elevate their subject to a space of dignity, illuminating larger truths about humanity in general. Thus, the film lives on as both a record of a life and also as a work of cinema, poetic, moving, and quietly illuminating.



Stills from The Rabbi in Berlin (How My Father Helped Destroy Modern Art), Shalom Gorewitz (2006)

SHALOM GOREWITZ is a filmmaker whose work in the early days of video art plays like a poetic imagining of a conscientious objection—to war, to social injustice, to the negation of history. It brims with a sense of faith, devotion, and the spiritual all within a profound sense of Jewishness.

In a recent conversation, Gorewitz talked about his work with the renowned artist and teacher Allan Kaprow, who was his advisor at California Institute of the Arts and inventor of the “Happenings” in the 1960s. Gorewitz recalls how one of Kaprow’s Happenings echoed the “nomadic experience when the tribes moved their disassembled homes across the Sinai as well as the plight of refugees.” Kaprow’s work was seemingly quite attentive to the more mystical and ritualistic nature of Jewish life. As Gorewitz noted, “Kaprow’s work was always communal. He didn’t have a purpose beyond the experience. The events were defined by duration, location, and physical activity. These are also the elements of home-based rituals, public prayers, and meditation.”

He goes on to say, “Mysticism is baked into Jewish liturgy and observant life.” This, of course, resonates with my own observations earlier in this text about Maya Deren’s interest in Kabbalah and the presence of a strand of Jewish mysticism throughout the historical avant-garde of the twentieth century. It is also true of Gorewitz’s own work in film and video.

Gorewitz plays a distinct role in the Jewish avant-garde of the late twentieth century via his cinematic exploration of personal identity, history, and the post-1960s trauma that his generation was left to navigate after World War II, Vietnam, and their aftermath. This corresponds with the era of the Havurah movement and the birth of the Jewish counter-culture, focused on social justice and a kind of Jewish place-making that often coalesced around the arts. Gorewitz’s early work is emblematic of the way in which many Jewish artists wrestled, through the arts, with the ghosts of the Holocaust and with Adorno’s proclamation that after the Holocaust, poetry (or the arts) would be impossible. Writing about his films, the poet Jessica Greenbaum noted, “In Gorewitz’ mirroring of the traumatized mind, ‘The war never stops,’ and ‘everything is

filtered’ through a montage of Nazi warfare and familial loss. The past has so little regard for its place that Nazi soldiers continue to march—a march of time that doesn’t go anywhere and keeps the horrors stomping at the back—and sometimes the front—of the speaker’s mind.... This liminal space might be dreamlike, but as Gorewitz says, the haunted person becomes ‘an exile to dreams.’”

In Gorewitz’s film *Damaged Visions* he juxtaposes dreamlike visions with the landscape of his mother’s home in Romania and a voiceover that asks the questions he ponders about his family, himself, and others. He wonders “whether his grandfather’s death was a suicide or a murder, and whether part of his grandfather lives in the filmmaker, and whether part of the filmmaker has been buried with his grandfather. Through this barrage of conscious and subconscious knowing, Gorewitz asks, ‘Are others feeling this?’” The answer is yes, many Jewish artists then as now asked the same or similar questions through their work in film, leaving us with an ever-expanding Jewish cinematic archive.

Douglas Rosenberg

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Dziga Vertov: www.openculture.com/2014/09/eight-free-films-by-dziga-vertov.html

Maya Deren: www.bfi.org.uk/features/maya-deren-meshes-of-the-afternoon

Meredith Monk: meredithmonk.org

Amy Greenfield: film-makerscoop.com/filmmakers/amy-greenfield

Mat Rappaport: touristic-intents.com

Howard Libov, *Fourteen Stations*: vimeo.com/831656545

Arie Galles, *LAS*: youtu.be/-dctLPTw-J4

Susan Mogul: susanmogul.com/work/#moms-move

Shalom Gorewitz: gorewitz.com and rachelandshalomshow.com

Why Is Yiddish on Screen Funny?

Rebecca Margolis

Yiddish humor on screen often involves incongruity and creatively plays upon the gap between our expectations and how reality unfolds..

Is Yiddish inherently funny? Many American cinema-goers over the last century would answer in the affirmative. However, explaining why Yiddish loanwords and inflection (Yiddishisms) on screen evoke laughter is fraught. We could assume that the answer lies in the phonetics of Yiddish. For example, comic scenes draw humor from the fricative *kh* sound, which is unfamiliar to English speakers (see “The Nuchshlep” from *The Nanny*, season 1, episode 4, 1993). However, the same sound also appears in German, where it is not coded as funny. The reductionist claim that Yiddish is inherently more emotive or funny than other languages disregards its functions across social contexts, from rarified avant-garde verse to the lingua franca of contemporary Hasidim.

The distinctive sing-song cadence, which has become a source of humor due to its usage by Jewish comedians, originally formed part of the tradition of Talmudic argumentation and served as a rhetorical device in spoken Yiddish. The *shm*-reduplication in Yiddish (fancy-shmancy) signals dismissiveness, sometimes funny and sometimes not. And yet the *Oxford English Dictionary* contains hundreds of borrowings from Yiddish that underwent semantic changes in their passage into English slang to be deployed to humorous effect in popular culture. For example: *farkakte* (inferior, of poor quality), *kvetch* (to criticize or complain), *plotz* (to burst, explode), *putz* (a stupid or worthless person), *schlep* (to drag), as well as the interjections *oy* to express surprise or dismay and *meh* to express indifference.

A more adequate answer, then, can be derived from analyzing the social attitudes that have formed around Yiddish in America. Recent studies on Jewish humor by Ruth R. Wisse and Jeremy Dauber point to its prevalence in Yiddish folklore and literature. Popular books such as Leo Rosten’s bestselling *The Joys of Yiddish* (1968) and *The Joys of Yinglish* (1986) framed Yiddish language as funny for a broad English-speaking American public. Jewish immigrants and their descendants have joked in Yiddish and Yiddish-inflected English on stage and on

screen, or as writers for American sitcoms and comedies. Meanwhile, as the language became a less widely spoken vernacular in the American mainstream, Yiddish took on increasingly symbolic, or postvernacular, nostalgic associations. The sounds of Yiddish have become synonymous with ethnic, working-class New York as well as with a set of gendered stereotypes: the self-deprecating *nebbish/schlemiel/schlimazel* and the overbearing *Yiddishe Momme* Jewish mother. The popular sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989–1998) cemented metalinguistic associations between Yiddish-inflected speech patterns and comedy, even though actual words of Yiddish were rarely uttered.

Yiddish humor on screen often involves incongruity and creatively plays upon the gap between our expectations and how reality unfolds. This, for example, is the humor behind the popular Yiddish folktales about Chelm, the imaginary village of fools, who spied the moon in a barrel of water and were devastated the next morning when it had gone missing. Incongruity on screen can stem from the unanticipated inclusion of vulgar Yiddish slang into polite conversation, an abrupt shift to a sing-song intonation, or the surprising turn to Yiddish by an unexpected speaker. The humor can take the place of veiled Yiddish “nods and winks” aimed at audiences knowledgeable in the idiom. The language can be used to both signal and subvert stereotypes associated with its speakers.

The current age of streaming and postnetwork television has changed the role of Yiddish on screen. I offer a scene from the comedy series *Grace and Frankie* (Netflix, 2015–2022) as one example from the last decade. The series follows the sophisticated and savvy Grace Hanson (Jane Fonda) and new-age artist Frankie Bergstein (Lily Tomlin) as they forge an unlikely friendship after their husbands, Robert Hanson (Martin Sheen) and Sol Bergstein (Sam Waterston), reveal their decades-long romance with each other. In “The Vows” (season 1, episode 13, 2015), Sol confesses to Grace



A mensch? Or a schmuck?

Screenshot from *Gracie and Frankie* (Netflix, 2015)

that he slept with his ex-wife Frankie on the eve of his wedding to Robert. Sol, the Jewish man, is marked as a stereotypical *nebbish* by his Yiddish-inflected English and self-deprecating and overly spontaneous emotionality, whereas non-Jewish Grace is his emotionally reserved antithesis. When a furious Grace grapples for a term to define Sol—"You are such a sh ..."—he draws on his Yiddish repertoire and interjects: "*Schmuck*, is that the word you're looking for? Cus that's what I am. You know what it means? Contemptible person, from the Yiddish for 'penis.' A long time ago, I used to think I was a *mensch*. That's a person with integrity." Grace—who used the term *mensch* earlier in the episode to describe an ex-boyfriend, to both her and Frankie's surprise—interrupts, "I know what it means." She frames Sol's conflicted moral compass as a dichotomy between the two terms: "So what are you going to be for the rest of your life: a *mensch* or a *schmuck*?" The juxtaposing of the Yiddish terms adds levity to a dramatic scene, as does the humor that stems from Grace instrumentalizing Sol's Jewish linguistic repertoire to make him accountable for his actions. The use of Yiddish in this season finale signals a narrative turning point: Grace's turn to Yiddish signals her becoming a more emotionally expressive and loyal friend, whereas Sol

becomes more decisive and accepts responsibility for his actions. To the seasoned comedy audience, *mensch* and *schmuck* may be inherently funny words, but the humor is far more nuanced.

The scene points to a twenty-first-century shift in the alignment of Yiddish with humor on screen. As in other movies and TV shows, the episode's writers no longer assume that contemporary audiences are familiar with Yiddish borrowings, and so explain the Yiddish terms intradigetically within the scene. An increase in subtitled Yiddish spoken dialogue in noncomedic screen genres, including drama and horror, is destabilizing the assumption that Yiddish is funny. Yiddish borrowings and intonation form part of a diverse American Jewish linguistic repertoire, both off and—increasingly—on screen. Yiddish on screen is going far beyond *mensch*es and *schmuck*s.

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An Exorcistical Film: Archives, Sounds, and the Haunted Present in Gastón Solnicki's *Papirosem*

Débora G. Kantor

Papirosem, Argentine filmmaker Gastón Solnicki's second feature-length film, premiered in August of 2011 at the sixty-fourth Locarno International Film Festival. After that, the film was screened at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, at the Viennale, at Jeonju, Thessaloniki, and Prinzen, at the Jewish Film Festivals of New York and San Francisco, and at the Buenos Aires International Film Festival (BAFICI). The huge success of the feature at BAFICI was followed by screenings at the Buenos Aires Museum of Latin American Art's (MALBA) theater, where it was watched and praised for months.

A peculiar promotion strategy accompanied those screenings of this intimate seventy-minute portrait of a wealthy Jewish Argentine family. Postcards with imprints of family photos (such as a picture of Solnicki's sister Yanina posing in a bathing suit, or a fake magazine cover of him and his father posing as professional skiers) welcomed hundreds of already-acquainted spectators, driven to this art house cinema theater by word of mouth. Those photos—images that are not part of the film—bolstered a fascination that not only emanated from a voyeuristic drive to peep into this family's intimacy, but

Screenshot from Papirosem, Gastón Solnicki (2011)



*But you can never
erase the sad past.*

*This “montage of disaster”
... is as much about
destruction, starvation, and
horror as it is about
survival, tradition, and love.*

also from the deep universal resonance that can be found in this peculiar depiction of a Jewish family.

In this film the universal and the particular flow in permanent exchange and draw from one another: this is a film about the Solnicki family, about the thickness and depth of this family’s ties; a family, as we rapidly find out, bound to the biggest tragedy of Jewish life in the twentieth century. And yet it is ultimately a film about the roles, conflicts, joys, and tragedies of any family. The link between the history of the destruction of Europe’s Jewry (and with it the collapse of European Modernity) and this family story is ciphered in the intimate resonance of that past in the present, captured and rearranged in the images and sounds that attest to the way in which this family lives with its specters.

The two hundred hours of video shot for more than a decade (since the birth of Solnicki’s first nephew Mateo in 2000, up to 2011) that, together with a phenomenal collection of home movies and other recollections of family events, shape this film, compose a huge archive containing a compilation of memories and events. But this is not simply an assembling of home movies, rather, this is a system of signs—a *consignation*, to quote Derrida—that finds its unique configuration (or form) through a very acute process of film editing.

In this direction, as Argentine film critic Gustavo Cerdá has pointed out, a decisive element of *Papirosen* resides in its montage. It is through this work with the footage—in absence or very marginal presence of inscriptions of his voice and body in the film—that he is inscribed in it as an “authorial” self: the work on the film’s materials—home movies and film footage that are “personal” by definition—is the place where the director’s self finds its residence in this film.

This authorial mark is expressed in a fragmentary approach to “the real” that is everywhere in this film: in its nonlinear structure, organized in chapters that drive us deeper into the narration instead of forward; in the heterogeneity of its sound and visual footage, which complicates time linearity with its own “dispersion”; in its observational, expectant, distant, and yet very proximate approach to its objects; and, fundamentally, in the diversity of subjects—family members, to be accurate—who are closely exposed and portrayed. This approach is less the perspective of a “domestic ethnographer,” as Michael Renov would put it—that is, it’s not about “illuminating the familial other while refracting a self-image”ⁱⁱⁱ—than it is the work of a sort of “family archeologist.”

This *consignation*, this particular system of signs that Solnicki puts at service of his family’s cinematic portrait, is arranged elliptically in the film so as to address the present by expanding it, or, in other words, by provoking a contemporaneityⁱⁱⁱⁱ between past and present, instead of nostalgically putting it at service of remembrance.^{iv} In this respect, one could say, along with philosopher Giorgio Agamben, that, by working all of its materials as “contemporary,” this film finds an entry point to the present in “the form of an archaeology that does not regress to a historical past but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living.”^v And isn’t that, one might add, what is specific about film itself?

Papirosen opens with an *acousmatic*,^{vi} low-pitched, strident sound over a black screen. A few seconds later, we see a man and a child on screen; they are on a ski lift. The sound emanates from the machine, but it seems distorted: it is too low, too prominent, too autonomous



Screenshot from *Papirosem*, Gastón Solnicki (2011)

from what we find on screen. Suddenly, we hear a contrasting, warm voice; it's Solnicki's grandmother Pola. The *presence* of her voice (a mixture of Argentine Spanish, Yiddish, and Polish) and her knowledge as "witness," gives new meaning to the images and sounds. *That* experience—his grandmother's experience of the Holocaust—and the historical events attached to it are now inscribed on the film and will reverberate phantasmatically, from this moment on, in every frame.

Meanwhile, the sound of the ski lift, a sound that will turn into the film's leitmotiv, keeps going, as if emanating from something or somewhere other than the lift, from a sort of unreal (not sinister, but) *eerie* force,^{vii} a force whose origin we cannot exactly place. This sound, that will repeatedly burst into the film, bringing in the unsettling and random nature of trauma, its fundamental dislocation of space and time and the *haunting* complexion of its persistence, together with "the voice"—Pola's voice—make for a sensorial sound device that creates *passages* into the intimate "ruins" of this family's past. These *passages* provoke an equivalence between past and present, events and images, that grow increasingly tense as we go deeper into the film, and find a climax at Pola's final intervention in the voice-over mode.

But life, as this film, goes on. And this "montage of disaster," to quote Hubert Damisch (2010), is as much about destruction, starvation, and horror, as it is about survival, tradition, and love. The author here is a *medium*, both instrument and interpreter, a *medium* who reclaims

the power of cinema as a device to invoke ("bad" as well as "good") ghosts and, as Solnicki has repeatedly declared: "rearrange trauma."

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i The expression "exorcistical film" belongs to Hans Hurch, the late film critic and director of the Viennale, who was a dear friend of Gastón Solnicki.

ii Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

iii Following Giorgio Agamben's notion, contemporaneity means not only a measure of time but a relation with time.

iv Archive footage, as we find in Jamie Baron's *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History*, is often related to affects like nostalgia and melancholia. In this respect, it is important to note that the device here puts the archives at service of other emotions and affects, like fear and curiosity.

v Giorgio Agamben. *Nudities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

vi The concept of *acousmatic* in the terms of Michel Chion is a sound that we hear without knowledge of its cause or origin.

vii According to Mark Fisher (2016), the difference between the Freudian concept of *unheimlich* and the concepts of *weird* and *eerie* is related to the relation between the "outside" and "inside." The *eerie*, in particular, is mostly related to open spaces that are usually ruinous, absent of human presence. The *eerie* is always about the nature of what caused the kind of destruction of a place or, in this case, of life.



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2024-2025 Fellowship Opportunity Jewish/Queer/Trans

In this theme year, we aim to explore in the broadest possible ways how queer/trans studies intersect with studies of Jews, Jewishness, Judaism, and indeed Jewish Studies itself, from the full range of humanistic, artistic, activist, and social science perspectives. We thus intend to assemble a group of scholars, writers, and artists that will allow us to explore this set of fundamental issues across the temporal gamut of ancient to the present and in Middle Eastern, African, Asian, European, and American societal contexts.

We invite applicants to consider the ways in which Jewish Studies might thicken queer and trans studies. At the same time, we wish to inquire into how queer and trans studies might aid the interrogation of foundational categories deployed in Jewish Studies. In doing so, we seek to challenge social hierarchies, notions of sacred/profane, religious conceptions, political movements and structures, knowledge paradigms, and communal boundaries: all key elements in the history of studies of Jews and Judaism. That is, how can insights from queer and trans studies enrich and complicate our understanding of the dispersed, diverse, and shifting histories of Jewish sexual cultures and gender systems, as well as social, cultural, and racialized formations of Jewishness more broadly. We are particularly interested in approaches that create dialogue among the sub-fields of Jewish Studies, queer and trans studies that go beyond merely applying theoretical models to Jewish Studies.

The “Jewish/Queer/Trans” fellowship year will promote a tighter integration of queer/trans perspectives and methodologies into Jewish Studies, and contribute to the ongoing softening of boundaries between analyses focused on racial, sexual, or gendered difference.

What forms of analysis might queer and trans theory enable in the study of Jewish texts, cultures, and history?

How might non-Ashkenazi or non-contemporary forms of Jewish ritual, theology, textuality, domesticity, kinship, or musical arts decenter Eurocentric defaults in queer and trans studies?

How might queering and trans-ing our understandings of key concepts like “archive,” temporality, historiography, and data allow for expanded inquiries within Social Science-based and Humanities-attuned subfields within Jewish studies?

What happens to Jewish Studies methods and archives when Queer of Color critiques are deployed to its sources and subjects?

The cohort will place an emphasis on collaborative projects and outputs; building support and mentoring networks; and public-facing scholarship.

Applications due November 6, 2023

For more information, and complete application materials go to
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AAJR

AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

Congratulates Its Graduate Student Summer Funding Recipients

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winners of its grants for graduate student summer research funding.

AAJR provides stipends for up to \$4,000 to promising graduate students in any field of Jewish Studies at a North American university who have submitted their Ph.D. Dissertation prospectus and have a demonstrated need for materials from archival, library, or manuscript collections or for ethnographic research.

Jake Beckert, University of Washington Seattle

Profit in the Holy Land: American Capital and Development in Mandatory Palestine

Hadas Binyamini, New York University

A 'Torah-True' Urban Agenda: Orthodox Jews in New York, Religion and Conservatism from 1964 to 1991

Daan de Leeuw, Clark University

The Geography of Slave Labor: Dutch Jews and the Third Reich, 1942-1945

Ludwig Decke, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Antiracism after Hitler: Jews, the State, and the Fight against Racial Discrimination in Western Europe, 1940s-1980s

Ethell Gershengorin, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Healthy Bodies, Upright Citizens: The OZE, Jewish Women and Children, and Inter-War Medical Humanitarianism, 1914-1939

Jacqueline Krass, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Vu iz dos alte hoyz mayn zaydns?": A Yiddish Counterhistory of Jewish American Poetry

Matthew Shih, University of Toronto

Recovering the Musical Lives of Jewish Migrants in Shanghai

Lelia Stadler, Columbia University

The Road to Trans-South American Divorce: Jews, Family, and the Rise of the Immigrant Nation (1853-1955)

The American Academy for Jewish Research (www.aa jr.org) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Composed of the field's most eminent and senior scholars, it is committed to professional service through this initiative and others, including the Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish Studies and workshops for graduate students and early career scholars.

AAJR

AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

CONGRATULATIONS

Salo Baron Prize Winner

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winner of its annual Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish studies published in calendar year 2022. The prize honors:

Tzafir Barzilay, *Poisoned Wells: Accusations, Persecution, and Minorities in Medieval Europe, 1321-1422* (University of Pennsylvania Press)

In *Poisoned Wells*, Tzafir Barzilay engages his readers in a fascinating and multi-layered discussion of how the myth of poisoned wells emerged and developed in medieval Europe. Jews and other minority groups were often accused of poisoning wells with the supposed aim of harming their neighbors, saving their own lives, or both. Barzilay sets on to study the origins of the story of well-poisoning, the mechanism by which it spread through Europe, and the reasons why the accusations directed at minorities emerged. Meticulously researched, and beautifully written, the book is based on sources that are both difficult to find and analyze, among them chronicles, official correspondence, and interrogation records in four languages, from archives of France, Spain, Germany, and Switzerland. The book pays close attention to the context of the Black Death as the turning point for the persecution of Jews in Europe, but focuses, for the first time in scholarship, on the content of the actual accusations.

The American Academy for Jewish Research (www.aa jr.org) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Its membership consists of senior scholars whose work has made a major impact on their field.

The Baron Prize honors the memory of the distinguished historian Salo W. Baron, a long-time president of the AAJR, who taught at Columbia University for many decades. It is one of the signal honors that can be bestowed on a young scholar in Jewish Studies and a sign of the excellence, vitality, and creativity of the field.

“Leave the Family Mishegoss at Home”: Shame, Passing, and Jewish Assimilation in *The Fabelmans*

Jordan Z. Adler

Steven Spielberg’s semi-autobiographical drama *The Fabelmans* (2022), cowritten with Tony Kushner, marked the rare high-profile Hollywood release to examine themes of Jewish integration and upward mobility in mid-twentieth-century America. For much of its running time, the drama follows the teenage protagonist, Sammy Fabelman (Gabriel LaBelle), as he pursues the technical mastery of Super-8 moviemaking and struggles to reconcile familial love with his creative passions. The drama is a tribute to Spielberg’s parents, Leah and Arnold, who are memorialized in the end credits. In *The Fabelmans*, their names are Mitzi and Burt, and they are played by Michelle Williams and Paul Dano. The title is an obvious twist on the name Spielberg, as *shpiel* in Yiddish means “performance,” or “tale.”

Sammy Fabelman’s Jewish upbringing is represented cinematically through Hanukkah celebrations, Yiddish phrases, and brisket dinners. But the narrative’s most fascinating section in terms of Jewish themes comes in its final third, set in the mid-1960s, as high-school senior Sammy confronts his Jewish identity at a mostly gentile academy, following the family’s relocation from Phoenix to Northern California. Sammy and his older sisters just want to fit in. As Reggie Fabelman (Julia Butters) puts it, “Let’s just leave all the Fabelman *mishegoss* behind us ... let’s be normal kids in an ordinary, normal school.” The use of Yiddish here is witty, a sign of the Jewish heritage they will have to conceal. Nevertheless, Sammy’s senior year contains numerous reminders of his Jewishness. Athletic, blond bullies Logan (Sam Rechner) and Chad (Oakes Fegley) tease Sammy for being Jewish, taunting his surname (“Bagel man”) and stringing a bagel from a rope in his gym locker. Concurrently, Sammy experiences a streak of Jewish pride when he snags a girlfriend, Monica (Chloe East).

In this crucial time of Sammy’s teenage and artistic development, these encounters between Jewish and gentile kids are richly layered, inviting us to view Sammy’s story—as well as Spielberg’s—as symbolic of impending cultural changes in Hollywood. The romantic desires of Sammy’s non-Jewish girlfriend subtly point toward the emerging eroticization of Jewish men onscreen, and slightly predate the arrival of numerous Jewish-gentile couples in mainstream American cinema. (Dustin Hoffman and Elliott Gould rank among the Jewish screen heartthrobs of the late 1960s and early 1970s.) Monica’s initial attraction to Sammy comes when, after Logan brutally punches him, she tenderly touches Sammy’s bruised nose. Sammy sheepishly admits to her that he has been Jewish since “the day I was circumcised.” A smash cut to the next scene, set in Monica’s bedroom, reveals she adores Jesus. Images of a prettified prophet are centered amid a shrine of other handsome pop icons. Monica’s caress of Sammy’s nose indicates an affection for Sammy’s ethnic features, while the amalgam of celebrities (religious and otherwise) adorning her walls, which Spielberg sets Sammy against, is a temporal reminder that the Jewish male sex symbol would soon arrive.

Sammy’s first kiss with Monica, set adjacent to her Jesus shrine, ranks among *The Fabelmans*’ most disarmingly funny sequences. Eroticism is linked to spiritualism: Monica insists that they pray together, with their faces a close distance, before they first kiss. Monica tells Sammy, “Open your mouth, and take the spirit of Christ into you.” A high-angle shot of Sammy and Monica embracing, nearly replicating the spot of her Jesus pinup, overlooks their initial romantic encounter, as if from a heavenly source above. Their kissing is accompanied by jovial piano music, in contrast to John Williams’s melancholic *Fabelmans* score. The music is a tonal admission of lightness and acceptance for a Jewish-Christian coupling, one that would become symbolic within the New Hollywood of the 1960s for progress and pluralism. The exuberance of the music is then matched in an adjacent scene, when Monica occupies a seat at the Fabelman dinner table, indicating that Mitzi and Burt have embraced that their son is dating a non-Jewish girl.

That scene’s comic touch is counterbalanced by a moving final encounter between Sammy and jock bully Logan. The impetus for this fateful meeting is the Jewish teen’s decision to film the school’s “ditch day,” for which he captures the seniors’ beach shenanigans with a 16mm



Gabriel LaBelle as Sammy Fabelman in The Fabelmans (2022), co-written, produced and directed by Steven Spielberg. Photo by Merie Weismiller Wallace/Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment. © Storyteller Distribution Co., LLC. All Rights Reserved

Arriflex camera. The footage, screened on prom night, portrays Sammy's main bullies in different lights. Chad, the most outwardly antisemitic bully, is revealed by Sammy's film to be clumsy and inept around women. The bully becomes enshrined, on film, as the hapless schlemiel. On the other hand, Sammy presents Logan as the school's luminary, all wavy, golden hair and chiseled masculinity—a flattering portrayal that erases the way Logan harmed and socially ostracized the budding filmmaker. However, instead of basking in these moving pictures, Logan gazes, stiffly, at a grandeur that makes him feel empty. In a nifty cinematographic choice, a mirror, initially set up for seniors to check their coiffed selves during prom, enables us to see Logan's apprehensive face as his screen double is reflected behind him. The next cut reveals a shot of Sammy, hiding behind the film reel, gazing nervously at Logan.

Is Sammy's vision of Logan in sun-dappled hues a strategy for assimilation? This beach-drenched document of mid-century American life does not contain any footage of Sammy; he is happiest to be unseen, orchestrating the action behind the camera. Although the

"ditch day" premiere ends with mighty applause, its maker and star are soon arguing in a school hallway. Logan demands that Sammy reveal why this cinematic portrait of him is so gleaming. Sammy answers: "You are the biggest jerk I have met in my entire life.... I made you look like you could fly!" Logan fights back tears and briefly assumes the same anxious position (sitting on the floor, with his back against a locker) where we had originally found Sammy at the start of this scene. "Life's nothing like the movies, Fabelman," Logan mutters, offering the budding director his first negative review. As Spielberg knows—and his younger version also realizes—learning how to integrate your Jewish sensibility into art so that it can become accepted by mainstream audiences is a vital part of the storyteller's journey. In Yiddish terms, Sammy Fabelman is slowly becoming his namesake.

JORDAN Z. ADLER is an educator and PhD candidate in English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His doctoral research focuses on representations of millennial Jewishness in film and television.

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Named for historian George L. Mosse, and offered through the Mosse Program in History, the Graduate Exchange Program allows graduate students from a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences at UW—Madison and the Hebrew University to spend an academic year at the respective partner university in order to advance their studies and to broaden their intellectual and international horizons.

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Provides programming and supports scholarly inquiry into Yiddish language, literature, history, and arts. The program is named for Sherry Mayrent, an avid supporter of Yiddish culture.



Stills from *Once I Entered a Garden*, Avi Mograbi (2012).

Erasing Borders: The Ottoman Dream of Avi Mograbi

Rocco Giansante

The impersonation of a Palestinian by an Israeli character and vice versa is a device employed by Israeli filmmakers to explore the relationship between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Films like *Fictitious Marriage* (1988) or *A.K.A. Nadia* (2015) portray characters who relinquish their original identity to become the Other. Although this exchange sets the conditions for an encounter between the two national identities, these films, in fact, confirm the negative interdependence that links Israeli Jews and Palestinians in a zero-sum game in which the “fulfillment of the other’s national identity is experienced as equivalent to destruction of one’s own identity” (Kalman 1999, 589).

Avi Mograbi’s *Once I Entered a Garden* (2012) suggests a way to overcome this negative interdependence by imagining an identity placed beyond the Israeli Jewish/Palestinian binary: an identity inspired by the memories of the late Ottoman Empire conceived as a shared homeland for Jews and Arabs alike.

Once I Entered a Garden is a documentary born out of a dream in which Mograbi meets his grandfather, an Arab Jew living in Damascus. Unable to talk to him—because one speaks Arabic and the other Hebrew—Mograbi introduces in his film the Palestinian Ali Al-Azhari, a teacher of Arabic. Al-Azhari will assist Mograbi in retracing the memories of his grandfather and retell the story of an Arab Jewish family who lived in Damascus and, later, between Beirut and Tel Aviv.

Throughout his documentary—connecting together photos, personal memories, reenactments, and a rich soundscape composed of Arabic songs and words, Hebrew, and French—Avi Mograbi reconstructs the image of a lost world in which people of different backgrounds lived side by side. Moreover, the photos of Jews in Damascus and Beirut visualize, for a moment, the

possibility of coexistence between Arabs and Jews that today seems a dream, like the ones that intersect the film, producing flashes of an alternative reality in which past mistakes are addressed and the present is more just.

The insertion of sequences of modern-day Beirut, nostalgically shot with a Super 8-mm camera and accompanied by a voiceover reading the touching letters of an unnamed Lebanese Jewish woman constrained to leave her homeland following the Arab-Israeli conflict, speaks about Jews as victims, forcibly uprooted from Muslim lands. But the Nakba photograph portraying Mograbi’s own father posing with a pistol visually suggests a clear departure from the victim status.

In accepting this historical evidence, Mograbi dreams of telling his grandfather not to leave Beirut for Palestine but to stay where he is, thus following the example of the Lebanese Jewish woman who writes: “I am, as the Lebanese State defines it, Israelite. I don’t want to become Israeli. I’m an Arab. I’m from Lebanon and Syria, Beirut and Damascus, I’m from here and I don’t want to be subjected to a population transfer with the Palestinians. I don’t want anyone to make room for me in the home of another after they have been expelled.”

And so Mograbi’s film/dream about his Arab Jewish ancestors is also the film of the Al-Azhari family’s displacement. The evocation of the Ottoman borderless space is followed by the recollection of the erased location of Saffuriya, the Arab village from which the Al-Azhari family fled after the war of 1948, today renamed Tzipori.

Like the traces left behind from the time of coexistence—the family stills, the abandoned architecture, the love letters—in present-day Tzipori, Mograbi and Al-Azhari find the remains of the old family house and of the Arab village, thus recovering the lost memory of Saffuriya.



Still from Once I Entered a Garden, Avi Mograbi (2012).

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, historian Dominick La Capra distinguishes between loss involving particular events and thus specific and historical, and absence intended as transhistorical, abstract, evacuated, disembodied. In the occurrence of post-trauma such distinctions are conflated: loss is converted into absence and the individual “faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted.” This very conflation, La Capra further notes, “attests to the way one remains possessed or haunted by the past, whose ghosts and shrouds resist distinctions.”

These words aptly describe the state of Al-Azhari, who, despite his biography, continues to be haunted by the past. Having fled from his own father, from Nasserism and Baathism, having lived as a Palestinian among Jews in Tel Aviv and having even married one, Al-Azhari dreams of a life as the *mukhtar* of Saffuriya, a pure existence lived on the land of his ancestors, uncontaminated by non-Arabic cultural and ideological structures.

Encouraged by the televised images of the 2011 Egyptian revolution announcing the beginning of a new Middle East, Mograbi and Al-Azhari start to think that their dreams might come true. But for the moment, while one longs for his lost village and the other for a time with no victims and perpetrators, both are condemned to live together, as suggested by the final sequence of the film where the viewer finds them symbolically stuck in the middle of a Tel Avivian traffic jam. Sitting next to each other, the characters escape the narrow confines of the car and of their present by looking back into the past to create an endless kaleidoscope of stories that inspire the construction of a new identity. Echoing Ottoman patterns, this identity permits the coexistence of multiple national narratives together with the acknowledgment and responsibility for each other’s traumas.

ROCCO GIANANTE is head of educational programs for Italy, Estonia, and Malta at Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies. He is coeditor with Luna Goldberg of *Imagined Israel(s): Representations of the Jewish State in the Arts* (Brill, 2023).

Fellowship Opportunity for the 2024–2025 Academic Year

Application Deadline: October 18, 2023

JEWS AND HEALTH

The Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania is pleased to announce that its 2024–25 fellowship year will be devoted to supporting new research at the intersection of Jewish studies and the study of health, medicine, and the body. The Center encourages applications from scholars aiming to illumine any aspect of health, health care, illness and/or embodiment as these relate to Jewish history, culture, and life experience, encompassing any period ranging from antiquity to the present.

The Center invites applications from all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including social and cultural history, the history of science and medicine, anthropology, literature, gender studies, bioethics, public policy, legal studies, and other relevant fields. The fellowship is meant for scholars who are open to pursuing their individual research projects in a collaborative and interdisciplinary setting built around seminars, conferences, and other forms of intellectual exchange.

The fellowship is open to scholars across the globe and the spectrum of academic life, from newly-minted early-career scholars to senior scholars, and its aim is to promote intellectual community across disciplines, ranks, and national borders.

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Maryan's *Ecce Homo* and the Performance of Trauma

Oren Baruch Stier

The Polish Jewish artist and Holocaust survivor Maryan S. Maryan (Pinchas Burstein) recently emerged from obscurity due to a major retrospective of his work, *My Name Is Maryan*, curated by Alison Gingeras. Pinchas Burstein was born in 1927 in Nowy Sącz but fled to Baranów Sandomierski when the German army invaded Poland. In 1940 his family was separated, and Pinchas never saw his mother and siblings again. He and his father were interned in the Biesiadka, Dębica, and Huta Komorowska Nazi labor camps, where Pinchas's father was murdered. In the winter of 1942, he was transferred to the Rzeszów ghetto, where he survived a mass shooting despite bullet wounds to his face and neck. In 1944 he was transferred to Auschwitz, to the Zigeunerlager, and then to Gleiwitz, where he worked as a welder. In 1945, on a death march fleeing advancing Russian troops, he was shot multiple times in his right leg; liberated by the Soviets, he recovered in Częstochowa, where his leg was amputated. He worked until 1947 in DP camps as a stage designer for Jewish theater groups, whereupon he emigrated to Israel, hoping to study fine arts. But, upon arrival, he was labeled "handicapped" and placed with elderly refugees in a settlement "where he was only allowed to study applied arts" (Gingeras). Nonetheless, he soon enrolled at the Bezalel Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Jerusalem and had his first solo show at the Jerusalem YMCA in 1949. During the early years of his career, he changed his name and produced his most explicitly Jewish works. He moved to Paris in 1950, where he met his future wife Annette, who had survived the war in hiding in southern France. After his first solo exhibition in the United States in 1960, at the André Emmerich Gallery, the couple moved to New York, where the artist lived and worked for the rest of his life. In the grip of frequent emotional breakdowns beginning in 1974, he died of a heart attack in 1977.

Maryan powerfully transformed his wartime traumas into a distinctive artistic style, particularly in the development of his *personnages* (art critics have generally retained the French term)—grotesque, lurid, carnivalesque personae

that were staples of his mature oeuvre—and his drawing- and text-filled notebooks, which attest to his encounters with and memories of atrocity. According to Grace Glueck, when Maryan began to exhibit his *personnages* in the early 50s, "they had overtly Jewish themes; then, they became more generalized. For a while, they were brutal, exaggeratedly Piccasoid forms.... In the early 60s they were mocking, clownish zombies with masklike faces and lolling tongues.... Later, they got wider and more gestural, with maybe a touch of de Kooning, winding up as slobbering, almost illegible bundles of mouths, flailing limbs, and flying organs.... Some even have targets painted on various parts of their bodies, as if to say, 'Shoot me here'" (Glueck). Furthermore, as Gingeras observes, "Almost all of the figures have something happening around their mouths; they're emitting something, or taking something in, there's a technicolor sort-of-streams coming from their mouths." She links this representational theme to the centrality of the Holocaust experience in Maryan's work (*Art & Pop Culture*). Indeed, although Maryan resisted the label "Holocaust artist" throughout his career, it is clear his own wartime experiences as a Jew under Nazism profoundly influenced his work.

Maryan made his only film, *Ecce Homo* (1975), with filmmaker Kenny Schneider and at the recommendation of his psychiatrist, in part as a method of working through his traumatic experiences. The experimental film expresses what is otherwise unarticulated in his many other artistic works: part performance art, part survivor testimony, and part social commentary, it was inspired by 478 autobiographical drawings in nine sketchbooks the artist created in 1971–72 at his doctor's advice following one of his breakdowns. The film was shot in black and white on 16mm over a year (Seymour) in Maryan's studio, a room at the famed Chelsea Hotel, a center for artistic creativity, where the artist worked and periodically lived from the early 1970s until his fatal heart attack in 1977. Nearly the entire ninety-minute work features medium and close-up shots of Maryan—sometimes in a straitjacket, sometimes wearing a Star of David badge or



Screenshot from *Ecce Homo*, Maryan S. Maryan (1975)

a tunic with a Jewish star or a Nazi swastika on it, sometimes bound with ropes—narrating and reflecting on his wartime experiences nonlinearly. Occasionally, his testimony is overlaid with photographs of wartime and postwar political and religious leaders as well as depictions of twentieth-century atrocities collected by the Black Star Photo Agency (such as images of Yasser Arafat, Moshe Dayan, Pope Pius XII, members of the KKK, and victims of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam), along with samples of his own paintings and drawings. At other times, he uses toy guns to punctuate his narration, and, notably, he uses a toy machine gun to play out revenge fantasies against his persecutors. The use of toys, I would argue, is a nod to a lost childhood and to the fact that Annette and Maryan never had children, and it also highlights the fact that Maryan is playing a role in his own artistic creation. Throughout the film Maryan’s testimony addresses topics like death and resurrection and expresses “survivor’s guilt,” inner torment, and anger at the world for doing “nothing”—as he states—during the Holocaust.

The film’s title recalls the original name of Primo Levi’s 1947 Holocaust memoir, *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man). It is derived from the Latin Vulgate translation of John 19:5 (in English, “Behold the man”), where, following an interrogation, Pontius Pilate presents Jesus to the crowd prior to his crucifixion. Here Maryan compares himself to Jesus and refers to a well-known figurative theme in fifteenth- through seventeenth-century Western Christian art that typically depicts Jesus bound, scourged, wearing a purple robe or loin cloth, and crowned with thorns. In 1975, Maryan linked his evolving *personnage* style to the *Ecce Homo* scene in a series of crucifixion paintings that “feature singular *personnage* figures in exaggerated states of distress and suffering ... and explore the complex themes of victimhood and sacrifice that preoccupied Maryan deeply at the end of his life” (Gingeras).

Ecce Homo predates the rise of Holocaust survivor video testimony as a genre of memory and representation, generally understood to have begun in 1979 with what is



Screenshot from *Ecce Homo*, Maryan S. Maryan (1975)

now Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. It was made not long after Claude Lanzmann began filming interviews in 1973 to be used for his epic documentary *Shoah* (1985). However, *Ecce Homo* matches neither of these examples and resists classification. I understand this work as an early act of cinematic witnessing to the Holocaust outside the established and canonical boundaries of the genre. Maryan's own performance and self-representation in *Ecce Homo* suggest that he turns himself into one of his tortured *personnages*, while his staged play-shooting of cardboard Nazis allows him to act out his outrage and anger at the world and anguished words emerge from his mouth in a dramatization of his painted images. At the film's core, his strained, quizzical, and accusatory testimony suggests that Maryan's voice, heretofore overlooked, needs to be rediscovered and heard.

OREN BARUCH STIER is professor of Religious Studies in the Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs at Florida International University. His research addresses Holocaust testimony, Jewish memory, Holocaust education, and the material and visual culture of the Shoah and its remembrance.

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From Home Movie to Cinematic Self-Realization

Bernard D. Cooperman

Jessica Sharzer's *Nomi's Bat Mitzvah* (2000) is a beautifully conceived coming-of-age tale, a gentle and touching delineation of a Jewish girl's entry into self-consciousness as she flees suburbia's superficial conformity and lays claim to her own place in Jewish ritual space. The intimate cinematography comfortably and smoothly captures the late twentieth-century world of American Jewry, without resorting to immigrant dialect or Hasidic rabbis for authenticity and without cheap shots at crass materialism to establish its own credibility. Beginning with all the conventions of a home movie celebrating a life-cycle milestone, this thirteen-minute short film turns into a keenly drawn portrayal of a bat-mitzvah girl who realizes the religious imperatives of Judaism by turning her family's simcha into a fiasco.

Sharzer builds on the literary trope of the young boy or man who leaves the stifling Jewish world to discover the true expression of Jewish values in the outside world. Henry Roth's classic, *Call It Sleep* (1934) is arguably the

most intricate tracing of this process as it follows the young David Schearle on his path to revelation not from a biblical angel but from the electric power of New York City streets. In Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*, the hero, Neil Klugman, celebrates the true meaning of Rosh Hashanah by showing up on that day for work as a librarian serving the poor African American youth of Newark. The tale of modernization and Americanization can easily trivialize Jewish identity, for example, through gendered stereotypes like the self-indulgent, fanatic father of Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925), or the demanding Cantor Rabinowitz of the *Jazz Singer* (1927). Women, too, can be caricatured embodiments of Jewishness; we think of the floating head of Woody Allen's mother (*New York Stories: Oedipus Wrecks*, 1989) or Alex's emasculating mother, the essence of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). But the most successful of such stories perform the delicate balancing act—ultimately reaffirming Jewish moral claims through the liberating experiences and terminologies of “modernity.”



Jessica Sharzer, courtesy of the filmmaker



Nomi (Ronet Levenson) sings her haftara to the empty synagogue. Screenshot from *Nomi's Bat Mitzvah* (2000).

She has become an adult, and a Jew, on her own terms.

Nomi's Bat Mitzvah, written and directed by Sharzer while she was still a graduate student in film school at NYU, gives the trope renewed significance and impact by focusing on a young female protagonist (Ronete Levenson) whose first awareness of her body and of her tentative, emerging sexuality becomes the basic plot device and moral driver for the tale. It is Shabbat morning, and Nomi is doing her last-minute reviewing. She has the blessings and Torah reading down pat, but her mother (Brooke Johnson) and bubbe (the late Joyce Feuring) are fussing over her lipstick, her dress, and whether or not she needs a bra. The women decide, over Nomi's objections, to stop at Victoria's Secret on the way to the synagogue. The self-conscious teenager, mortified by their domineering invasion of her privacy, ends up fleeing the store, setting off loud alarm bells, and roaming the suburban streets somewhere outside of New York City (perhaps Long Island, or, judging from the names of the malls, New Jersey).

Spoiler alert: Nomi "comes on" to the non-Jewish repairman (Peter Byrne) working in the family house and he, the honorable working-class savior, dismisses her advances. But the scene does not become tawdry. Sharzer gives us a chance to come along as a young girl learns what it's like "when a girl becomes a woman in the Jewish tradition." It is the repairman who gets the best line in the film. He responds to her formulaic declaration by asking Nomi: "Does it hurt?" And of course, it does.

In the end, Nomi doesn't make it to her bat mitzvah service, her mother has to apologize to the guests, and we have to watch her school friends leaving the synagogue still holding the gifts they had brought. But Nomi herself will eventually find her way to the synagogue and recite her portion to the empty room, flawlessly ending by "sanctifying the Sabbath." She has become an adult, and a Jew, on her own terms.

I have used this film for years in a course about the Jewish urban experience. The film's evocation of suburban Jewish life at the end of the twentieth century is flawless,

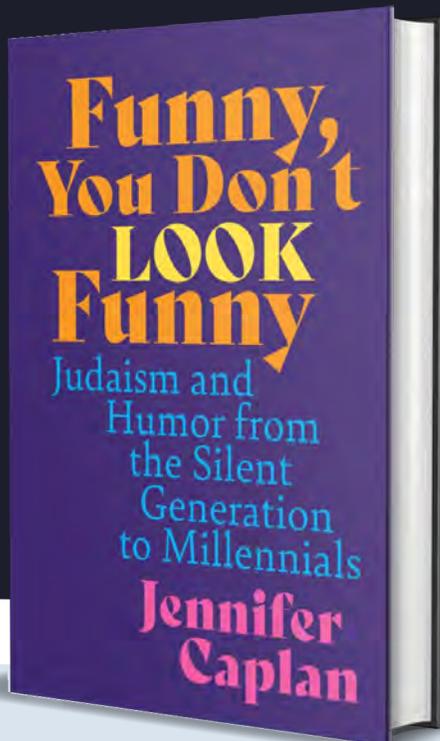
the writing is tight, and the actors never overact, handling their characters deftly and without condescension. This refreshing film about a teenager is also a good way to start discussions about how Jewish women and urban geography are linked, as in Herman Wouk's relegation of *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955) to uptight suburbia or Susan Sandler's advice to a Jewish woman that happiness lies in leaving uptown Manhattan and marrying a pickle man from the Lower East Side (*Crossing Delancey*, 1988).

Since 2000, Jessica Sharzer herself has gone on to a career in writing, directing, and producing, drawn especially though not exclusively to the horror genre. But the themes of *Nomi's Bat Mitzvah* continue to interest her. In 2017 she wrote the script for the television remake of *Dirty Dancing*—another classic evocation of the liberation of the Jewish woman from (and within) American Jewish conformity.

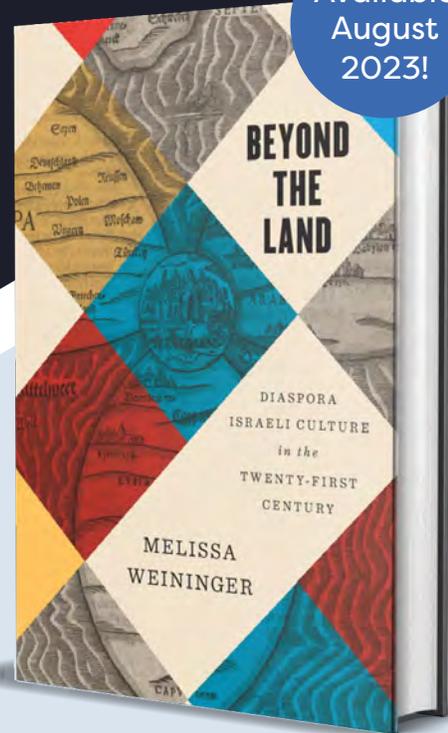
Coming of age is a well-known motif in Western literature generally, no doubt because it provides a narrative framework for the dangers and challenges of crossing borders. In Jewish writing, such crossings can lead to funny observations about where we come from, and where we end up. (Think of Sholom Aleikhem's *Motl the Cantor's Son*.) They can also be tragic, as in Israel Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*. In Israeli literature, who can forget Hanokh Bartov's *Whose Little Boy Are You?* (1970). And for Canadians, there is the wrenching drama *Lies My Father Told Me*, directed in 1975 by Jan Kadar. *Nomi's Bat Mitzvah*, with its gentle humor and sensitive portrayal of young womanhood, deserves a prominent place on this long list of notable books and films.ⁱ

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ⁱ *Nomi's Bat Mitzvah* had a brief run at Jewish film festivals and on the Sundance Channel, and was marketed by Hypnotic, a firm that now seems to have closed. Sharzer has told me by phone that she would like to see it widely distributed once more, and she is currently hoping to interest a distributor. Perhaps this article will be a step in that direction.



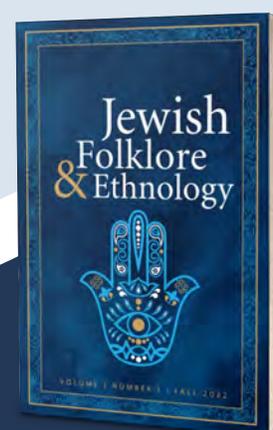
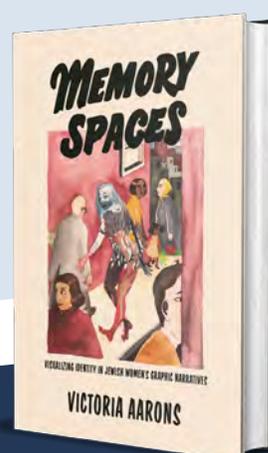
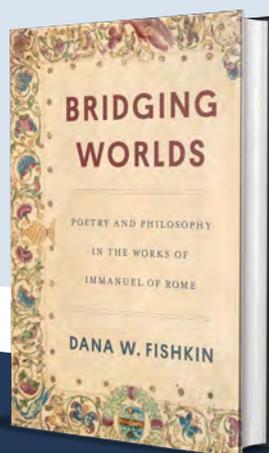
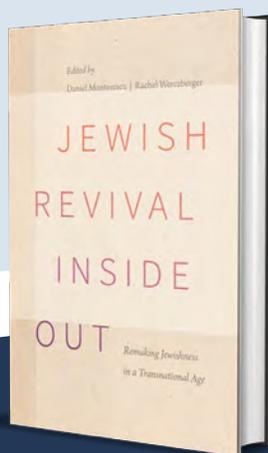
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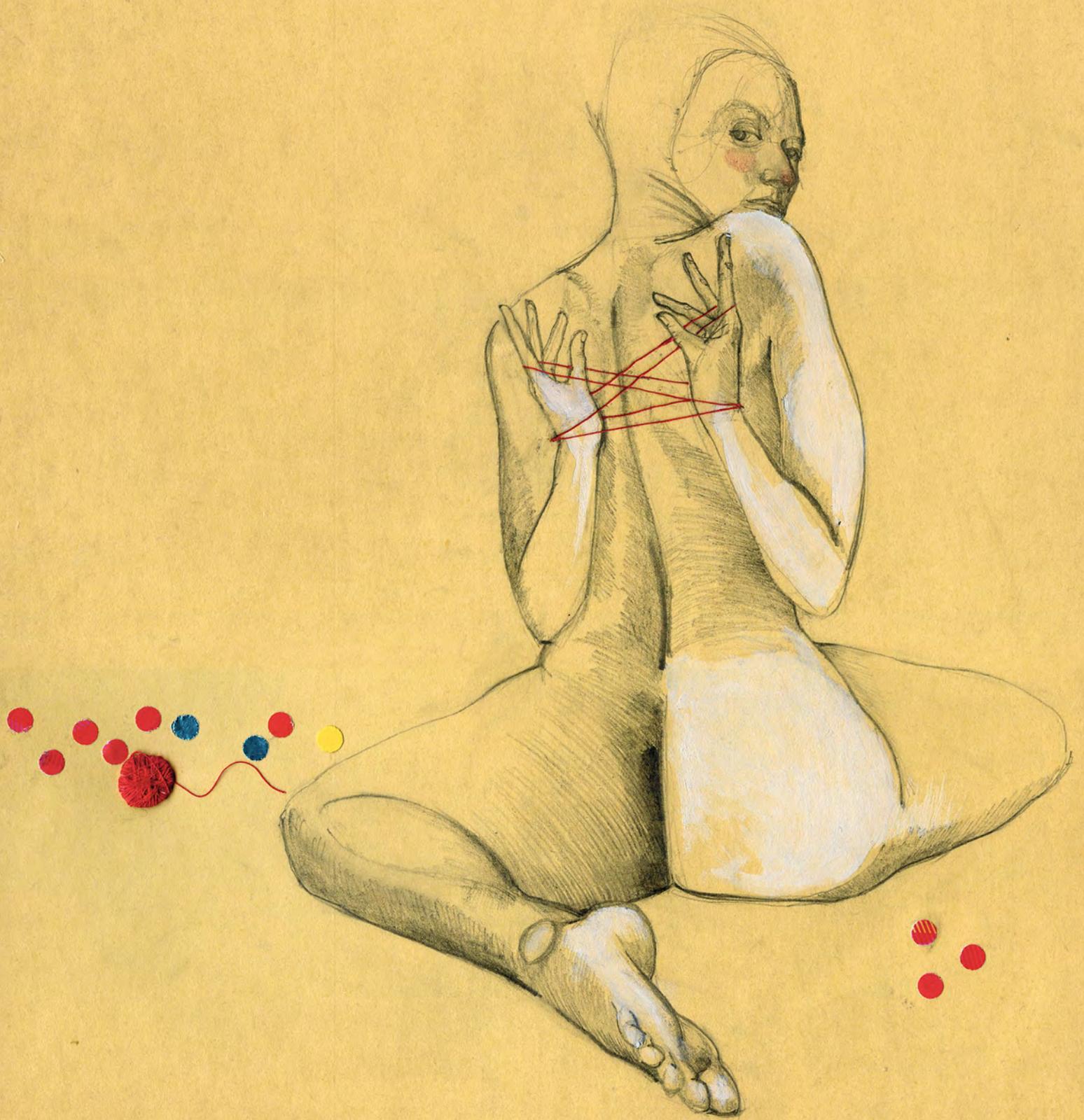
(Un)Orthodox Jewish Woman in Latin American Visual Representation

Daniela Goldfine and Mirna Vohnsen

Today, the Latin American Jewish population consists of approximately 400,000 people—a tiny number in a region of almost 700,000,000 inhabitants (Della Pergola, 2021). In spite of this, Jews have always played a significant role in the generation of culture in Latin America. Throughout the twentieth century, the Latin American film industry benefited enormously from Jewish directors, producers, theater owners, and screenwriters, yet on-screen representations of Jews were few. It was with the fall of major dictatorships in the 1980s that the number of Jewish themes and characters increased on the big screen. Portrayed mainly as victims of authoritarian regimes, sexual abuse, and persecution, Jewish females on screen began to gradually move from the margins to the center of cinematic narratives in the second half of the 1980s. While they remained seriously underrepresented until the 2000s, Jewish women took center stage during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The communist militant who is sent to a German concentration camp during World War II in the Brazilian film *Olga* (Jaime Monjardim, 2004), the adventurous photographer who discovers her Jewish roots in the Chilean-Mexican co-production *El brindis* (Shai Agosin, 2007), and the self-effacing mother who ends up abandoning her family in the Argentine-French film *La cámara oscura/ Camera Obscura* (María Victoria Menis, 2008) are at the center of cinematic narratives that disclose the multiple experiences of Jewish females in Latin America. This upward trend led to the rediscovering of a slightly different female protagonist in the 2020s, the Latin American Orthodox Jewish woman.

In recent years, the entertainment industry has popularized representations of Orthodox Jewish women as main characters by juxtaposing the

suffocating atmosphere of a religious life and the liberation offered by secular society, a contrast deployed in films such as *Felix et Meira/Felix and Meira* (Maxime Giroux, 2014) and *Disobedience* (Sebastián Lelio, 2017), as well as in the Netflix miniseries *Unorthodox* (Anna Winger, 2020). A common trait in these fictional depictions is that the female protagonists challenge patriarchal authority by transgressing the boundaries of their Orthodox Jewish communities. This is true for the protagonist of the ten-episode Argentine television series *El fin del amor/The End of Love* (Erika Halvorsen and Tamara Tenenbaum, 2022), the first show to cast a Latin American (un)Orthodox Jewish woman as the lead. Loosely based on the eponymous essay by the Argentine journalist and writer Tamara Tenenbaum, the show premiered on Amazon Prime Video in November 2022 to audience acclaim. Following its release, it became one of the most watched shows on Prime Video in Argentina and in twenty-one other countries (Marinone, 2022). *El fin del amor* tells the story of the twenty-nine-year-old journalist and college professor Tamara Tenenbaum (Lali Espósito), who, despite living a secular life as a millennial in Buenos Aires, is constantly confronted with her Orthodox Jewish past. She chose to leave the Orthodox world in her late teens but still keeps a connection with her family and friends. By blending the past and the present as well as the private and public life of the main character, the series shapes the image of Tamara as a transgressor and rebel. Through the use of flashbacks, the show features several instances of her rebellious nature since she was a child. In the first episode, a flashback takes the audience back in time to Tamara's childhood: while she is playing with her childhood friend, Sara, a sheitel catches the girls' attention. Sara, who can guess Tamara's intention, cautions her against



VERÓNICA
FRADKIN 2022

Verónica Fradkin. Punto de vista, 2022. 9 in. x 10.3 in. Courtesy of the artist

trying it on, explaining that only married women are allowed to wear a sheitel, but Tamara defies her friend and proudly puts it on. The flashback suggests that Tamara has been breaking down boundaries and challenging norms since childhood.

Sassy, intelligent, empowered, irreverent, rebellious, and assertive are attributes of Tamara's personality. The opening scene of the first episode offers a window into her life and personality, immersing the viewer in Tamara's world. The first images show Tamara at Ladorada—a nightclub to which she often goes clubbing with her two non-Jewish friends—while she is talking to an acquaintance she has just met. Their conversation leads them to discuss the topic of religious symbols, like the cross and the Star of David, and ends with Tamara trying to persuade her interlocutor that these symbols change their meaning according to the context in which they appear. Her strong convictions on the topic discussed expose her assertiveness but also her Jewishness, which she is not very keen to talk about. Ofelia (Mariana Genesio Peña), the bartender who also left her Orthodox Jewish community, overhears the conversation and accuses Tamara of shying away from her Jewish roots, an accusation that makes her uneasy, but one which she does not accept nor reject. By wearing a green bandanna around her wrist—a symbol of abortion rights in Latin America—Tamara is portrayed as a feminist activist. Once she is left on her own at the bar of the disco, she checks her WhatsApp messages and reacts with a deep sigh to a caring but inquisitive message from her male partner, a reaction that indicates her irritability and her unwillingness to be controlled. Tamara is starting to realize that she and Fede (Andrés Gil), her non-Jewish partner, fundamentally disagree on how to sustain a relationship where both have different ideas of how to be a companion. While Tamara feels suffocated by the attention her boyfriend gives her, her approach to their relationship is more *laissez-faire*, with ample room for outings that do not involve him and freedom to come and go without explanation.

From the beginning, then, Tamara is portrayed as a transgressor who not only rebels against her Orthodox upbringing like Esty (Shira Haas), her counterpart in *Unorthodox*, but also defies heteronormativity, motherhood, victimhood, romantic love, and desire.

Transgressiveness is embodied not only by the Orthodox-born (and raised) female protagonist but also by the cohort of women who accompany her

Tamara has sex with males and cis and trans females; has rejected the idea of being a mother since she was a child; never identified as a victim although her father died in the 1994 AMIA bombing (a terrorist attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association that killed eighty-five people); breaks up with Fede, her partner of four years; and prioritizes attraction in fulfilling her sexual desires. Tamara's experiences, beliefs, and actions serve a double purpose: they destabilize the underpinnings of patriarchy by inverting male power and domination while also challenging long-standing film and television stereotypes of Latin American Jewish women as passive.

El fin del amor speaks to a movement in Latin America that centers on empowering women at all levels, including those portrayed in film and television. As a result of the feminist mobilizations that have swept across Latin America in the past decade, scriptwriters of films and television series began to question traditional patriarchal gender norms and shifted the focus to representation of strong female characters through controversial themes that disrupt the status quo. This disruption is key to understanding the success of the show and its quick turnaround to develop the second season. The show, its creators, and its actors seem to speak to an audience that has been waiting to see transgressive female characters. Transgressiveness is embodied not only by the Orthodox-born (and raised) female protagonist but also by the cohort of women who accompany her, among them her widowed mother who is also a victim of terrorism; a trans female who embraces Jewish rituals; and the protagonists' friends, who in their quest to find themselves in twenty-first-century Buenos Aires with all its freedom, hit a wall.

The patriarchal rules that hung over generations of women before these young protagonists, lingered, and even though the grip is not as strong, these women feel the weight of the restrictions imposed on their antecessors. The new player in the field is social media, which can asphyxiate the attempts at reaching that absolute freedom. How to navigate these new, unpredictable, and turbulent waters is a learning curve for the younger generations. Tamara and her cohort can only aspire to do their best and keep fighting to not just stay afloat, but to rise above the murkiness like many other women did before them.

El fin del amor turns the inherent patriarchy that prevails in Latin American culture on its head, yet the show also brings a sort of voyeuristic thrill in watching someone “lose their religion.” Tamara and her friends awaken such a fascination in the audience that is hard to ignore. In showcasing a variegated portrayal of transgressive females led by an (un)Orthodox Jewish woman, the show emboldens its female characters by putting them at the forefront of cultural, religious, and societal changes.

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In Chapter 86 (“On that Day”) of the original *Attack on Titan* comic, readers see the discrimination suffered by Eldians as Eren’s father narrates his early life. Above, the dominant Marleyans assault a group of Eldians doing forced labor while wearing identifying armbands. Panels right to left read “I was ignorant and foolish” and “The world is an irrational and crazy place.” Isayama, Hajime. *Attack on Titan*, Volume 21 (2016): 165. Tokyo: Kondansha.

The Ambivalence of Jewish Representation in Japan: *Attack on Titan* and Antisemitic Conspiracies in the Internet Age

Dylan J.H. O’Brien

In Japan, understanding of the Holocaust has been shaped by the experiences of different generations, as well as how various media have communicated the Holocaust to Japanese audiences. For instance, David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa (2000 [1995]) note

that when Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* was translated into Japanese in 1952 and became a bestseller, reviews and discussions of the book “reflected the Japanese imagination at this time far more than it reflected the Jewish experience” (167). Connectedly,

Rotem Kowner (2012) contends that the reasons for the rise (and fall) of Holocaust denial in Japan are best understood through the lens of the role Japanese Holocaust denial played in right-wing projects of historical revisionism about Japan's wartime culpability.

Since the 1950s, myriad books for popular audiences and of academic research about the Holocaust have been translated into Japanese, as well as many volumes of survivor testimony. But as Ran Zwigenberg's (2014) work explores, in Japan—as elsewhere—other historical events and experiences, such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have been compared to the Holocaust. These comparisons, Zwigenberg argues, have downplayed the historical singularity of the Holocaust, and lack discussion of what led up to the Holocaust. Instead, such analogies have at times cast the Holocaust as an event of massive human suffering beyond comprehension, largely separated from its root causes and aim of genocidal ethnic cleansing. In such analogies, the line where drawing a parallel to a specific aspect of the Holocaust ends and where equivocations and relativizations begin to muddy Holocaust memory is not always clear.

A popular Japanese multimedia franchise has left its viewers grappling for the past several years with a difficult question: Just when is something that *seems like* a depiction of the Holocaust actually about the Holocaust?

With total sales of over 110 million copies of its comic version alone, the science fiction fantasy series *Attack on Titan* has become a gargantuan media franchise in Japan. Like *Star Wars* or *Batman*, the series now spans a host of media, from video games to movies. *Attack on Titan* first became a household name in Japan when an animated television adaptation of the comic began airing in 2013 (now slated to conclude in 2023).

Attack on Titan's narrative centers around the perpetual conflict between the last bastion of human civilization and towering beings known as "titans," who mindlessly devour any humans they find. The story follows a trio of young cadets—Eren, Mikasa, and Armin—as the conflict escalates, moving inside cities surrounded by what humans believe to be an impenetrable series of walls.

After a series of dramatic battles claim the lion's share of the walled cities' special forces, the main characters and their allies learn that humanity hasn't, in fact, died out.

The discovery of Eren's father's diary begins an extended flashback that reveals that both the residents of the walled cities and the titans they have been at war with are part of a race known as the "Eldians." Viewers learn that the Eldians' female ancestor, Ymir, had gained the power to transform into a nearly omnipotent titan, and passed this ability on to her descendants. Using the ability to transform into titans, the Eldians then created an oppressive empire, earning resentment from humanity.

This plot twist also reveals that humanity, rather than confined to the walled cities, is actually thriving across the ocean as a technologically advanced civilization (the Marley Empire), and is draconianly persecuting an Eldian minority. This leads to a shift in the conflict—from humans versus titans, to Eldians versus the Marleyan Empire.

Like other successful Japanese animated series, the various seasons of *Attack on Titan* have been made into feature films, all enjoying time at the top of the Japanese box office. Subsequently, the international release of these films has introduced foreign viewers to the franchise.

Yet, amid this success, the series has generated global controversy, as viewers of the films and television series have perceived that *Attack on Titan's* narrative draws on the Nazi persecution of Jews for its plot. For example, when replica armbands were offered for sale in November 2021 like those that the series' persecuted group the "Eldians" are forced to wear, the film and television series' producers, facing international backlash, issued an apology for their "act without consideration to commercialize what was drawn as a symbol of racial discrimination and ethnic discrimination in the work." (Shibata, 2021)

While the producers' apology for the armbands offered that selling replicas of a tool of racial oppression in the original story was simply bad judgment, viewers' online protest problematized the incident differently. Various Internet think pieces and social media posts used an image that juxtaposed a scene from an *Attack on Titan*

comic with a photo of a Jew in the Polish city of Rzeszów wearing a Nazi-mandated Star of David armband (Vergara, 2017). The armbands, like elements of *Attack on Titan's* narrative as a whole, raise a question: What is simply a parallel between elements of the Holocaust and how *Attack on Titan* portrays racial discrimination, and what elements of the series might have actually been shaped by its creators' ideas and understanding of the Holocaust?

Since the "Eldians are titans" plot twist that the animated television series' third season (2019) and its theatrical cut (2020) was revealed, commentators have hotly debated whether *Attack on Titan's* narrative world simply bears striking parallels to Nazi persecution of Jews, or whether the series liberally borrows facets of the Holocaust experience to tell its story. In the series, Eldians wear badges denoting their heritage, and are confined to interment areas eerily reminiscent of Jewish ghettos under the Nazi regime. Beyond aesthetic similarities like European architecture, Nazi-esque uniforms, and German-sounding names, the Eldians are unable to travel outside their interment area except for limited reasons (such as working for the government), and the accusations against them (as well as branding them as a separate "race") have led critics and fans alike to argue that *Attack on Titan's* story of good versus evil has used the experience of the Holocaust and perhaps misrepresented it.

Some have been troubled by how the Eldians—who are understood by some to be analogues for Jews—are cast in the series as being led by a shadowy cabal, being a separate "race," and even having gained their power from a "devil." Thematically, the series stresses the cyclical nature of violence, and whether the Eldians' ancestors truly did or did not dominate humanity is left ambiguous to a degree. Some have worried the series blends facets of the Holocaust experience with antisemitic tropes (Haime, 2023), whether it is the notion that Eldians are a "race," or that they are culpable for their own persecution.

Beyond the Internet speculation about the relationship between *Attack on Titan's* world and its creators' knowledge of the Holocaust, the series offers a chance to observe how difficult it can be to distinguish among equivocations about, misuses of, and parallels to Holocaust experience and facts. This situation in and of

... the series offers a chance to observe how difficult it can be to distinguish among equivocations about, misuses of, and parallels to Holocaust experience and facts.

itself is a distinctly modern and global predicament. While the Japanese context has undoubtedly shaped the way its creators understand the Holocaust, questions of how the Holocaust is depicted and remembered in *Attack on Titan* have not been resolved. This widespread debate about the series speaks to a global issue facing Holocaust memory.

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Tragic History in Peak Tourist Season: On Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*

Ohad Landesman

Is it fair to infer that this culture of tourist photography prevents visitors from truly understanding the historical importance of these locations?

A crowd of people gathers next to the sign Arbeit Macht Frei (work sets you free) at the entrance to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Everyone seems to be taking photos, each with his or her own personal camera, sometimes even using a selfie stick. What are they all looking at? We cannot see, as the frame excludes it. What are they trying to capture? We cannot understand, as they all seem to be lost, as we are, in a futile attempt to seize the essence of the place and record it. Is there really anything to watch here? Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* (2016), a festival stunner that premiered at Venice, went on to Wavelengths in Toronto, and finally grabbed the most prestigious award at Dok Leipzig, is a movie that looks at how other people are looking. Loznitsa's digital camera remains static, placed at eye-level vantage points, to restrainedly observe tourists visiting sites of concentration camps. While not essentially a hidden camera, it is cleverly concealed from the sight of the visitors, or at least they do not seem to notice it. The shots last several minutes, exclude the use of an authoritative voice-over or talking heads, and quickly make clear that *Austerlitz* is not a movie that aims to instruct or to even guide us how to think.

The discrepancy formed between the mundane activities in the present and the historical gravity of the past is quite disturbing to watch. People walk around those sites in shorts and T-shirts, and carry their cameras as if they were visiting a museum exhibition or a theme park. At one point, we notice a man wearing a *Jurassic Park* T-shirt on his visit to a death camp, and another using a selfie stick in an inventive manner. After all, it is a nice sunny day outside and the tourist season is at its peak. Are we allowed to embrace a self-righteous take, and to suspect that the tourists may be taking those horrific memorial sites too lightly, perhaps even humorously? Would we behave differently if we were there? "Ok, a five-minute break for toilets or a sandwich," announces one guide,

quickly depriving the site of its original context by turning it into an ordinary location for sightseeing in the present.

Watching *Austerlitz* induces feelings of restlessness and concern. The rich sound design by Loznitsa's long-time collaborator Vladimir Golovnitski amplifies the noise of the crowd, making it louder as the shots linger. Both synchronic to the image and diegetic, by emanating from reality, the soundtrack is frightening and overwhelming in its intensity. We hear the crowd on many of its layers, but cannot grasp any concrete sentences. Not only is there no voice-over to guide us, even the location sound is not helpful for comprehension. The voices of the tour guides, on the other hand, are dubbed and overlapped on top of the images. Their different intonations—whether extremely earnest, way too emotional, or even ironic: "don't worry, this isn't the last time you're ever going to be able to eat," says one of them—often strike us as simply inappropriate. Occasionally, *Austerlitz* may seem like a sociological, or even an anthropological study on Shoah tourism on film—the longer Loznitsa stays at a site, the more people pass in front of his camera, and the better we believe to understand the motivation of their actions.

However, as a philosophical provocation full of paradoxes and enigmas, Loznitsa's film leaves us with more questions than concrete answers. Is it really possible to understand how people relate to the culture of mourning and death nowadays by ethnographically witnessing how they use cameras or take selfies in a concentration camp? As tempting as it may be, is it fair to infer that this culture of tourist photography prevents visitors from truly understanding the historical importance of these locations? If this is part and parcel of what has recently been termed "the pornography of



Still from Austerlitz, Sergei Loznitsa (2016)

the Holocaust,” on what moral ground exactly are we expecting those tourists to behave differently? Loznitsa is never condescending toward his subjects, and his indifferent and often fixated camerawork keeps us at a distance and invites contemplation rather than pedagogy. This is an essay film that prefers we engage in reflective meditation on these questions rather than provide us with ready-made answers.

By framing the shots according to the architectural logic of the places (the shape of the buildings or the locations of the gates), people’s behavior is often guided by the space they inhabit. Loznitsa’s is a carefully composed meditation on how we experience a site scarred with traumatic moments, and how photography and film can register such presence. *Austerlitz* is shot by Loznitsa and Jesse Mazuch in black and white, an aesthetic decision that lends everything in the frame an abstract quality. It also produces the effect of an archive, without including one shot of archival material, thus making the footage seem like it is excluded from a specific timeframe. Like *Victory Day* (2018), another observational film by Loznitsa that focuses on the Treptower Park monument in Berlin, this is an attempt to explore how a traumatic past reverberates through the present.

When the film ends, though, the past resonates strongly, even more ironically than before. A crowd of visitors is slowly departing from the same Arbeit Macht Frei gate with which the film opened. Those masses of tourists, leaving the site on one sunny day in the midst of the peak tourist season, inevitably make us contemplate other masses of Jewish victims, crammed through the same gate and extinguished like cockroaches with assembly-line efficiency. If this is what Shoah tourism is all about, sometimes we need cinema to invite disturbing analogies without explicitly stating them.

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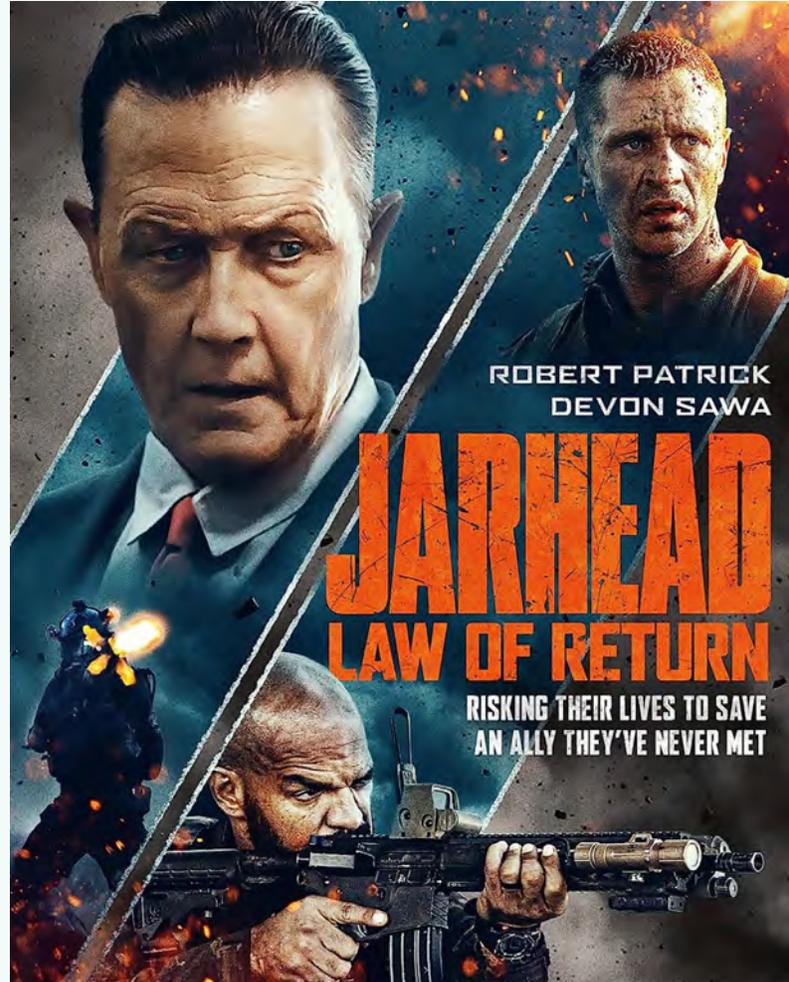
*A different version of this review appeared on the FIPRESCI (The International Federation of Film Critics) website, as part of a report on the 59th International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film (December 2016).

In Praise of Bad Movies

Melissa Weininger and Shayna Weiss

Way back in 2005, the film *Jarhead* depicted the experience of a US marine during the Persian Gulf War. In subsequent years, three direct-to-video sequels were released, none of which with any real relation to the original, other than that they all featured marines and referenced the War on Terror and America's seemingly never-ending quagmires in the Middle East. The final of these, released in 2019, was titled *Jarhead: The Law of Return* (yes, that Law of Return) and has a convoluted plot in which an American 'oleh (immigrant to Israel) and elite Israeli fighter pilot named Ronan Jackson (played by former 90s teenage heartthrob Devon Sawa) is captured by terrorists in Lebanon. To complicate the matter further, Ronan is the son of a dearly departed Jewish mother, and a non-Jewish American senator, making him an even better hostage as well as a useful symbol for the American-Israeli relationship. (Let's hope the terrorists don't find out!) It just so happens that a team of American marines is on a training exercise with Israeli soldiers in the Golan Heights at the time of Jackson's capture, and the mixed IDF/marine team is sent in to rescue Jackson. Hijinks ensue. The film also features some of the biggest male Jewish Israeli film stars, including Tzachi Halevy, possibly the only bright spot in the film.

Let's be clear: this movie is terrible on pretty much every level. The plot makes no sense, the action scenes are boring, and the dialogue is laughably bad. The attempts at humor are either racist or misogynistic—and sometimes both. So what's the point of watching a movie like this? Well, as art historian Meyer Shapiro teaches, kitsch is chic spelled backward. Bad movies are mirrors of our values. *Jarhead: Law of Return* has quite a lot to say about Zionism, and especially a version of Zionism popular with



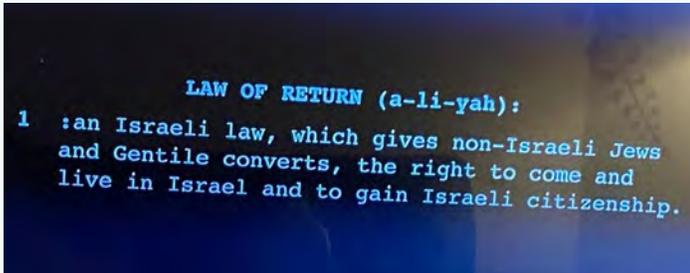
Jarhead: Law of Return (2019) publicity poster

the American and Israeli Right. And like *Exodus* (1960), the best-known American movie about Zionist heroes, *Jarhead: Law of Return* both reflects contemporary political currents and tendentiously advances its own narrative about Israel and Zionism.

We often write about Israeli pop culture in our newsletter, *It's No Ibiza*, as a way of analyzing its often-overlooked role in politics and society. We highly value collaborative scholarship as feminist praxis, but typically what readers see is only the final result, not the process. In recognition of the value of creativity and collaboration in our scholarship, as well as a way of drawing back the curtain on our thought processes and methods, we wanted to share the raw materials of our analysis, in the form of real-time text messages sent to each other while we watched the movie in unison (thanks, Amazon watch party!) on opposite coasts of the United States.

S: Ready, go!

M: OK, here's my first issue. This is not the Law of Return.



Screenshot from Jarhead: Law of Return (2019)

Note: this also seems to equate the Law of Return with aliyah, which is just the word for immigration. 2/10 for research.

The film's politics are not subtle. In an early scene, Senator Jackson comments to the media, "I think diplomacy will fail. Assad, for all political purposes, has won the civil war. Damascus will fall into the hands of Moscow and the Iranians, which will be a total nightmare for the Jewish state and, by proxy, the United States. We have to prevent this at all costs." Then, of course, some archival news footage appears on screen.

S: OMG Bibi. This is an anti-Iran-deal movie. Propaganda.

M: This whole thing is a psy-op.

S: Iron Dome mention!! Thanks Obama!!

M: If we were really doing due diligence, we would research the funding of this film. I'm sure it's some shell company linked to the Israeli government. Probably financed by the U.S.

We hear very, very clunky dialogue linking American and Israeli foreign policy, a classic George W. Bush-era move, one lovingly embraced by the Israeli political Right as well.

S (quoting movie dialogue): "This isn't your war."

M (also quoting from the movie): "We've got no choice."

S: No choice! War on terror is "the same" as Israeli wars?

The film, in an homage to a Zionist notion of the melting pot, features an unrealistically diverse group of elite Israeli soldiers working with the marines, which include an Ethiopian Jew, a Yemenite Jew from Haifa (who seems to be the archetype of the New Jew—he refuses to wear a helmet or protective gear, and survives unscathed), a Penn State grad working on a start-up, and an Ashkenazi kibbutznik. And, of course, Ronan Jackson himself, Zionist immigrant, matrilineal Jew with a Catholic father, Israeli hero. He's married to Avigail, a very attractive Israeli woman, who also happens to be pregnant with their first child.

S: He's a matrilineal Jew!

M: Part of the psy-op. All Jews welcome!

S: Law of Return for a *sabra* girl, ok.

S: LOL at this Israeli rainbow.

M: So multicultural!

During Jackson's captivity, the viewers are titillated by an unexpected series of homoerotic shots, especially during the torture scenes. These involve "The Ghost," a supposedly Syrian terrorist from the fictional Golan Freedom Brigade who is played by a Bulgarian actor. (A lot of the film was shot in Bulgaria—budget woes!)

M: Underwear shot.

S: Raz Yosef time. The sexy mutilated soldier body.ⁱ

M: This is also quite erotic.

S: Yep. Who is your "daddy"?

M: Why does the Ghost sound like Batman?

S: Everyone breaks, except the New Jew!

M: I doubt he would understand Semper Fi.

S: The "Ghost" keeps asking Ronan "Who is your dad? He should say, "My Dad is *Avinu shebasha-mayim* [Our Father in Heaven]."

Despite its glorification of Zionism, the film manages to utterly misunderstand basic things about Israel. Some of our favorite implausible moments: Ronan watches

Is it a fascinating window into the way film acts as cultural soft power? Absolutely yes.

American baseball on Israeli TV (an impossibility—Israelis barely know what baseball is, let alone broadcast it on television); the Israeli soldiers who won't give their names because "Our names like God are not to be spoken"—a thing no Israeli has ever said ... ever; Israeli mission control speaks English to pilots and soldiers, and allows an American general to just walk around unsupervised in IDF situation rooms; and last but not least, a giant menorah that sits on the counter in Ronan and his wife Avigail's apartment.

M: Menorah time!

S: Who owns that? A giant menorah.

M: Literally no one. It's like a museum gift-shop menorah.

S: She knows how to make sweet tea!

M: If this were accurate it would be Nes [Israeli instant coffee].

Yet, even this film has bright spots—two, to be precise. The first is the Druze source for the Mossad whom the team visits to get intelligence on the whereabouts of Jackson, who has the hilarious code name of "The Package." Israel often points to its Druze population, who are overrepresented in the IDF and police forces, as an example of its fair treatment of Arab citizens, so it's not surprising to find a sympathetic Druze character in the movie.

S: Oh yeah sexy Druze lady.

M: Love her.

S: She's the best. Don't cross her.

M: Honestly the best character.

M: "I always come with a flower in my hand, but I always have a big fucking Colt .45." Best line!

S: Same honestly.

Second bright spot: the Israeli actor Tzachi Halevy, who plays Reza, a polylingual, ethnically ambiguous American soldier. We've been fans for a long time, and he's best known for his role on *Fauda*. In Israel, he might be better known as the husband of news anchor Lucy Aharish, with whom he has also collaborated musically. (He's also a songwriter! We love a Renaissance man.) What we discovered through watching *Jarhead* is that he also speaks English with a perfect American accent,

so well that apparently the casting director thought he was more believable as an American soldier. He's also one of the few who makes it out of the whole mess alive.

S: Love of my life



Screenshot from Jarhead: Law of Return (2019)

M: I love that Tzachi is American in this movie.

S: I wonder if Lucy makes fun of Tzachi for doing this movie. Because I would.

M: You know what, it's a paycheck. Probably a big one.

Do we recommend this movie? Absolutely not. Is it a fascinating window into the way film acts as cultural soft power? Absolutely yes. Ronan Jackson, the Ari Ben Canaan of our time.

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Together they write the Israel pop culture newsletter "It's No Ibiza."

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A Holocaust Experiential Lesson

Gabor Kerekes

When we talk about cinema as a pedagogical tool, most of us think about watching a movie. I would like to show the educational power of cinema from a different angle.

I was a high school student during the 1980s in Budapest, Hungary. As part of my daily afternoon routine, I would take a trolley bus home. I used to stand in the crowd, looking out the bus window, observing the surroundings. One day, after a few stops on the boring route of everyday scenery, suddenly, I saw a newly erected wall blocking one of the small cross streets. It was about seven to eight feet of red bricks with barbed wire on top. As a curious young person, I decided to check it out and got off the trolley at the nearest stop.

When I got closer, I discovered that the wall was not real brick, but rather it was a painted movie prop. Walking behind it, I found real trucks and a tank with Nazi symbols parked on the street. There were also Yiddish posters all over the walls of the prewar apartment buildings. We are talking about a Hungarian, not particularly Jewish neighborhood. That was the area where Budapest's Jewish ghetto was located during the Second World War, but no crowds of Yiddish-speaking people were around anymore to read those posters.

It turned out, I was looking at a movie set—as one of the crew members informed me—about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It occupied a small square and the three or four surrounding little streets. The walls I had spotted from the trolley were supposed to be the ghetto walls. It was strange and exciting, and it made me even more curious: so, for the next few days, I checked in periodically to see what was happening there.

A few days later I had the fortune to pop in during filming. Actually, I arrived during a break. People were standing around in groups, some were wearing Nazi uniforms, others regular clothing from the 1940s with a

yellow star sewn on. They were surrounded by suitcases. There were also cameras and a movie crew. It was strange to see “soldiers” and “Jews,” men and women, standing together, smoking or engrossed in friendly conversation. Sometimes large pieces of luggage were moved with ease, making it obvious that they were empty film props. Until the loudspeaker called for action.

Cigarettes were thrown away, the “civilians” lifted their luggage, the “Nazis” grabbed their rifles and they all lined up in formation: Jews shlepping their seemingly heavy items, the cruel Nazi guards surrounding them, as they started to move toward the exit of the small square.

My stomach churned and twisted. My throat started to choke up and tears started to gather in my eyes. I knew it was not real, I knew that these people were actors and that I was watching the making of a film. No one approached me to ask why I wasn't in the line or to order me to step between the guards. Nonetheless, the scene was frightening. It made a deep impression on me. I do not know the title of the movie or if it was ever finished and screened anywhere, but the emotional response it created stayed with me for decades.

I do not know the title of the movie or if it was ever finished and screened anywhere, but the emotional response it created stayed with me for decades.



Jews captured during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising are marched to the Umschlagplatz for deportation..United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Par

Why was this experience so powerful? Did it affect me because, by nature, I am a sensitive person? Or perhaps, because my parents are Holocaust survivors? Maybe the stories I heard from my grandparents, relatives, and family friends, and at community gatherings about the Budapest ghetto—which existed close to the area where I and the film crew were standing—suddenly came alive, surrounded me, and caused my strong reaction.

Maybe the reason is less personal and more general. Finding yourself in a staged situation, despite one's awareness that it isn't real, can be enough to trigger a strong emotional response.

Mine was a rare experience. "Watching the film from the inside" was a kind of unique experiential learning. I wish

this teaching tool could be reproduced with students. However, I understand that the chances of bumping into a film crew on the street shooting a Holocaust movie are very small and suggesting that teachers recreate historical scenes in the classroom could lead to highly problematic situations.

As for me, finding myself surrounded by the movie set was an unexpected and memorable experiential lesson about the Holocaust. I wish I could share it with the younger generations.

GABOR KEREKES *is assistant professor of Mathematics at Touro University.*

Rountable

Antisemitism in Film

Roundtable Editor:

Jason Schulman

Contributors:

Lawrence Baron, Valerie Weinstein,
Margaret D. Stetz, Lisa Silverman,
Gábor Gergely

Introduction

Jason Schulman

In March 2023, the Anti-Defamation League reported that 3,697 antisemitic incidents occurred in the United States during 2022, the highest total since the ADL began keeping such a tally in 1979. Given the recent resurgence in antisemitism, both online and in real life, many scholars in and around Jewish Studies are also reconsidering the nature and history of antisemitism.

For this Roundtable, we asked five scholars of cinema to help us understand antisemitism on the silver screen (and also in the film industry). Starting with the 1940s: Lawrence Baron introduces us to *The House I Live In*, a World War II-era short film, while Valerie Weinstein offers lessons about antisemitism from the films of the Third Reich. Then, turning to contemporary cinema: Margaret D. Stetz and Lisa Silverman explore antisemitism in the feature films *White Palace* (1990) and *Junebug* (2005), respectively, while Gábor Gergely familiarizes us with the film industry in modern Hungary.

While the participants cover different periods—from the Holocaust era to our contemporary one—a common thread does emerge. Antisemitism on film, unlike in much printed material over the centuries, has been consistently subtle and slippery; we rarely see overtly negative depictions of Jews. For this reason, it is often up to the audience to “read” the film and thereby decipher the antisemitism on screen. As scholars—and as trainers of the next generation in our classrooms—it’s important that we are well practiced in spotting these often coded messages and tropes.

***The House I Live In* (1945): Making Room for Jews**

Lawrence Baron

According to public opinion polls, antisemitic attitudes in the United States peaked during World War II, with 58 percent of respondents in 1945 believing Jews wielded too much power.ⁱ Despite the Jewish backgrounds of many Hollywood studio owners and screenwriters, depictions of American antisemitism had rarely appeared in feature films before the end of the war. This absence can be ascribed to the expectation that Jewish acculturation would guarantee acceptance in American society, the Production Code Administration’s enforcement of the prohibition of movies ridiculing religious denominations after 1934, and fears that exposés of domestic antisemitism would paradoxically exacerbate it and trigger a German boycott of Hollywood productions. When antisemitism was portrayed, it was typically presented in early silent films as a foreign phenomenon in tsarist Russia or Nazi Germany (after 1939). During the war, a few motion pictures like *Keeper of the Flame* (1942), *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), and *Pride of the Marines* (1945) gingerly introduced subplots about American antisemitism.

The ten-minute short film, *The House I Live In* (1945), starring Frank Sinatra, which garnered a special Academy Award (Oscar) for promoting tolerance, arguably did more to draw public attention to how antisemitism was antithetical to American tenets of equality before the law and religious tolerance than its predecessors. The leftist songwriters Earl Robinson



Frank Sinatra in The House I Live In, Albert Maltz (1945). Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division.

and Abel Meeropol (writing under the pseudonym of Lewis Allan) composed the eponymous song around which the film is centered. When the song originally premiered in the Broadway revue *Let Freedom Sing* in 1942, its lyrics championed ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance for “neighbors white and black, the people who just came here, or from generations back.”

In the closing month of the war in Europe, Sinatra and producer Frank Ross floated the idea of making a short film promoting tolerance to director Mervyn Leroy and screenwriter Albert Maltz, who had penned *Pride of the Marines*. Sensitized by the harassment he had experienced as an Italian American and the discrimination

Black musicians faced, during the war Sinatra had manifested his outrage over reports of Nazi oppression of Jews in Europe by handing out medals at his concerts bearing a cross of Saint Christopher on one side and a Star of David on the other. Impressed by how *Pride of the Marines* discredited antisemitism, Sinatra praised Maltz in a letter for hitting prejudiced people “right in the kisser.” Maltz had been pleading with his communist comrades since 1939 to take the threat of domestic antisemitism as seriously as they did anti-Black racism. Practicing what he preached, Maltz wrote *The House I Live In*, in which Sinatra protects a presumably Jewish boy from being chased and beaten by young ruffians, chides them for

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acting like Nazis, and teaches them that Americans should respect diversity. His sermon culminates with a performance of the song, "The House I Live In."

Without describing the gory details of Germany's mass murder of European Jewry, *The House I Live In* ridiculed Hitler's biological antisemitism and how it blatantly contradicted American religious pluralism. When one of the casually dressed street kids blurts out that they are attacking the boy with black hair and black clothing because they don't like his religion, he starts calling him a "dirty ..." but stops short of calling him a Jew. Sinatra subsequently observed that the slur following "dirty" could either be "Guinea" or "Jew." The logic of the ensuing conversation, however, eliminates the possibility of the former. Sinatra labels the boys "Nazi Werewolves," referring to Nazi diehards who conducted attacks against occupying Allied officials and troops and sabotaged their operations. When a gang member acknowledges that his father had been wounded and received blood transfusions, Sinatra turns to the "Jewish" boy and asks if his father ever donated blood. After the latter answers yes, Sinatra queries the gang member: "Do you think maybe if your father knew about it in time, he would rather have died than to take blood from a man of another religion? Would you have wanted him to die?" This line of questioning only makes sense if the Nazi criteria for being Jewish as being grounded in "Jewish blood," rather than actually practicing Judaism, applied.

Sinatra then summarizes what he wants the boys to learn from his discussion with them. "Do you know what this wonderful country is made of? It's made up of a hundred different kinds of people and a hundred different ways of talking and a hundred different ways of going to church. But they're all American ways." He adds, "Wouldn't we be silly if we went around hating people because they combed their hair different than ours? Wouldn't we be a lot of dopes?" To illustrate the virtue of American heterogeneity, Sinatra recounts the story about the crew of the first American plane to sink a Japanese warship after Pearl Harbor. Its pilot was Irish, and its bombardier was

Jewish. Then Sinatra croons "The House I Live In" to his enthralled audience. This rendition omits the line about Blacks and whites and replaces it with "all races and religions, that's America to me."

The House I Live In was screened in 20,000 American schools and at theater chains owned by RKO, Warner Brothers, and Paramount. The American Jewish Committee and National Conference of Christians and Jews distributed it to their chapters. It prefigured a cycle of Hollywood films that tackled the thorny topics of antisemitic discrimination, stereotyping, and vigilante violence, such as *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), *Crossfire* (1947), and *Open Secret* (1948). And "The House I Live In" became a recurring song in Sinatra's repertoire and for other singers as well, including Paul Robeson, Mahalia Jackson, and Sam Cooke.

After 9/11 and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, websites featuring the film received a dramatic rise in hits from people seeking to combat the spikes of antisemitism, Islamophobia, nativism, and racism that followed those events. Though its message might strike contemporary listeners as trite, Sinatra explained at a concert in 1974 that the prejudices dividing Americans needed to be continually confronted: "It's a song about this great, big, wonderful, imperfect country. I say imperfect because if it were perfect, it wouldn't be any fun trying to fix it, trying to make it work better, trying to make sure that everybody gets a fair shake and then some."

i Leonard Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism Exposed and Attacked, 1945–1950," *American Jewish History* 71, no.1 (1981): 135.

Latent and Inferential Antisemitism on Film: A Lesson from the Third Reich

Valerie Weinstein

Of the roughly eleven hundred feature films produced in Nazi Germany, fewer than a dozen are overtly antisemitic. Most of them belong to a cluster of films intended to stir up anti-Jewish sentiment near the start of World War II. These films, among them *The Eternal Jew* (dir. Fritz Hippler, 1940) and *The Rothschilds* (dir. Erich Waschneck, 1940), depict Jewish people as degenerate and nefarious. Except for the popular melodrama *Jew Süss* (dir. Veit Harlan, 1940), audiences found such ham-handed representations distasteful, and brazen antisemitism did poorly at the box office. Nevertheless, despite the relatively small number of overtly antisemitic features, the Nazi film industry was profoundly antisemitic and promoted the regime's racial antisemitism.

What did antisemitism in Nazi film look like, beyond its most explicit manifestations? Whereas Jewish creatives had made major contributions to German cinema before the Nazis came to power, the Nazi film industry expunged people, themes, and styles that they labeled "Jewish." The Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment restructured the film sector, fired Jewish workers, and expanded censorship. With help from the trade press, bureaucrats encouraged filmmakers to abandon styles deemed too Jewish because they were either too intellectual or too commercial. They rejected irony, wit, tempo, and purported fluff and titillation. Jewish characters vanished from everything except explicitly antisemitic propaganda. Gentile characters who acted "Jewish" (by Nazi criteria) communicated antisemitic priorities. Third Reich films feature unscrupulous capitalists, manipulative media moguls, greedy shysters, and pretentious nouveaux riches, all characters with qualities that Nazi antisemites attributed to Jews and wanted to purge from the national community. Because such characters were not explicitly Jewish, scripts could mock, punish, or redeem them after disparaging their Jewish-

coded traits. I consider such films examples of latent or inferential antisemitism, meaning that, although the antisemitic connotations may not be apparent to all audiences, they invite antisemitic inferences from viewers primed to recognize them. Such inferential antisemitism can reinforce antisemitic beliefs.

Conditioned by my own research to think about not only overt but also inferential antisemitism, I wonder about the relationship between Hollywood cinema and the current surge in antisemitic violence and hate speech in the United States. Fortunately, there are more differences than similarities between contemporary Hollywood and the Nazi film industry, and those differences are massive: Hollywood is not controlled by the propaganda arm of a genocidally antisemitic regime, and contemporary Hollywood produces few films that are explicitly or intentionally antisemitic. Jewish creatives contribute plenty, and Jewish stories and characters are common enough that no one of them is burdened with representing all Jewish people. Even if we wish there were more, better, or more diverse representations of Jewish people in contemporary film, the significant Jewish presence in Hollywood means that we are not threatened by what the writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has called, in her TED talk of that name, "the danger of a single story."

Nevertheless, I worry that some contemporary US films unintentionally convey inferential antisemitism, which flies under the radar for many viewers, yet is activated by those most receptive to it. Characters who, although not necessarily Jewish, or even human, embody antisemitic stereotypes and inspire antipathy, resonate with such latent potential. For example, Magneto, a Holocaust survivor and the supervillain of the *X-Men* franchise, turns his history of persecution into justification for world domination. Magneto's machinations, superpowers, infinite resources, enthralled minions, and sinister agenda recall antisemitic conspiracy theories of all-powerful behind-the-scenes Jewish puppet masters, like some other film villains. As Jon Stewart and half the folks on the Internet will tell you, *Harry Potter's* gold-grubbing hooked-nosed goblin bankers are

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ripe for antisemitic inference. The other half of the Internet insists the antisemitic connotations aren't there. Similarly, fans debate Rapunzel's abductor from *Tangled* (dir. Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, 2010), the dark, curly-haired Mother Gothel. A typical Disney villain to some, Mother Gothel's voice, appearance, smothering behavior, and "Mother Knows Best" theme song fill my head with a long media history of overbearing Jewish mothers. Her abduction of a beautiful, blonde child to consume that child's magical essence comes awkwardly close to myths of blood libel.

Primed by a career studying Nazi dog whistles, I see antisemitically coded characters in all kinds of seemingly innocuous movies. They pop out at me from the ranks of supervillains; treasure-obsessed dwarves and goblins; tricky, hard-bargaining aliens; manipulative capitalists; pushy mothers and stepmothers; and others. Viewers who spend little time with overtly antisemitic materials may not interpret these characters as I do, and I don't think they generate antisemitic sentiment among the uninitiated. Yet, I worry about how such overdetermined representations, which invoke antisemitic stereotypes, strengthen antisemitic beliefs among those already prone to them, among those who consume overtly antisemitic media on the Internet and elsewhere, and among people who already identify as antisemites. I suspect the greedy goblins and wicked witches resonate strongly with antisemitic spectators who recognize them as Jewish. Decades of scholarship has argued convincingly that there's always a gap between artistic intentions and audience interpretations, and, as far as I'm concerned, the best movies invite multiple readings. Yet, the current resurgence of antisemitism in the public sphere suggests that our culture has not yet reckoned with latent antisemitism and fully recognized its potential for reactivation. In this context, it would behoove creators to be extra watchful for potentially latent antisemitism in their work and be more conscious of what some audiences could infer from it.

Whitewashing Antisemitism

Margaret D. Stetz

Antisemitism in Hollywood films is nothing new; the only surprise is how little usually happens when it is called out. Filmmakers and studios rarely have to apologize, and their reputations remain intact. Meanwhile, older films with blatantly antisemitic elements continue to circulate in a succession of formats and platforms, moving from theatrical release, to VHS tapes, to DVDs, to streaming services, reaching and influencing new audiences.

In September 1990, for instance, *White Palace* set off reactions touching on matters more serious than whether its subject had been depicted credibly or well. That subject was the erotically charged relationship of a fictional upper-middle-class Jewish white man in his late twenties ("Max Baron," played by James Spader) with a non-Jewish working-class white woman in her early forties ("Nora Baker," played by Susan Sarandon). With a Mexican-Jewish director, Luis Mandoki, and with a screenplay by Ted Tally and Alvin Sargent, *White Palace* might have been expected to portray Max's world sympathetically, or at least evenhandedly. Instead, what a number of critics picked up on was its overtly offensive representation of the protagonist's Jewish community, which he leaves behind forever—a decision that the audience is meant to view as a happy ending. As Hal Hinson put it in his review for the *Washington Post*, "Max's wealthier friends [are] . . . a gallery of Jewish grotesques . . . [who are] cultured, upper-class monsters"; the result is the equivalent of "an assassination, under the guise of class examination."ⁱ Although Hinson didn't refer directly to antisemitism as a driving force behind this portrayal, Stephen Hunter, writing shortly afterwards in the *Baltimore Sun*, made this subtext explicit: "Whether the movie means to be anti-semitic or not, it certainly manages to portray Jewish family life as a sucking bog of hypocrites and materialists."ⁱⁱ

One year later, reflecting on what he saw as “increasingly open antisemitism” both inside and outside of Hollywood, Walter Gottlieb returned to *White Palace* as an example of recent work “written and/or directed by Jews” that encouraged such a “climate” and that originated in internalized antisemitism: “But when Jews concoct stereotypes so ugly as to make a Jewish moviegoer slink down in his or her seat, it looks less like self-examination and more like self-hatred.”ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas E. Wartenberg expressed a more benevolent view of the film in *Movie Romance as Social Criticism* (1999), where he concluded that, though it might be “tempting” to read the protagonist’s rejection of his community “as a case of Jewish self-hatred, it is class and not Jewishness that is the focus here.”^{iv} To watch *White Palace* now, however, is to recognize not only its undisguised scorn throughout for Jews as “hypocrites and materialists,” but as loathsome and predatory exploiters. This venomous portrayal comes into even sharper relief when the film is juxtaposed with the text on which it was based, Glenn Savan’s 1987 novel of the same title. The filmmakers introduce plot elements, scenes, and dialogue not found in Savan’s work and that appear to exist merely to reaffirm antisemitic tropes of Jews as parasites who feed upon the labor of working-class women in particular.

Savan’s novel has, for instance, no equivalent of what happens in the film when Max, a still-grieving widower whose young Jewish wife has died in an accident, attends a bachelor party for his friend, Neil Horowitz. The scene opens with a white stripper performing for the bridegroom and his Jewish male friends, all of whom have white-collar careers (with one identified explicitly as a lawyer). Naked except for pasties, the dancer sports a police officer’s hat and jacket to reinforce the fantasy that well-to-do Jews delight in buying blue-collar sexuality. There is no such stripper figure in Savan’s narrative, where nothing but drinking and eating goes on at this party.

Similarly, only the film, not the novel, shows a white working-class woman in a maid’s uniform serving Thanksgiving dinner to the assembled company at the house of the newlywed Horowitzes, to which Max brings Nora. Savan’s version of this scene has Nora disagreeing with Neil’s father when he labels Reagan administration policies antisemitic, a word Nora claims only recently to have learned the meaning of. In the film, on the contrary, the Horowitz paterfamilias badmouths President Reagan’s appointees as “unmitigated tragedies for the working class”—a comment that enrages Nora, who insists that he knows nothing about being poor and uses as her weapon against him the example of the elderly, exhausted-looking domestic servant who stands by the table, while everyone else sits comfortably and eats: “Betty, here, she’s going to be carving your turkey for thirty bucks a day,” she tells him. Jews, it seems, blithely underpay and disregard the welfare of others, including those laboring in their households.

Jewish men are not the only villains in the screen version of *White Palace*. Throughout the film, Neil Horowitz repeatedly tells Max that he should be dating Heidi Solomon, a young woman of their own circle, who is well-to-do, accomplished, and beautiful, unlike the supposedly trashy Nora. The screenwriters create a scene set in Heidi’s house during a party to which Max comes alone after Nora has broken up with him. On the walls are a series of photos of African wildlife. When Max asks her about them, Heidi says they are images she took on a “photographic safari” and that, though she is merely an amateur, “I certainly felt like a professional.” To reinforce visually the idea that she is a *poseuse* and cultural appropriator, the camera pans across the room to show her lamp, the shade of which is decorated with zebra stripes, as though to underline her belief in her alleged African expertise. Max’s disdainful treatment of her, which involves making fun publicly of her clean and empty Dustbuster, is all of a piece with the disrespectful remarks of Neil Horowitz at his bachelor party. There the male guests are shown a photo of Rachel, his bride-to-be, as a

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little girl. Neil says dismissively, “She’s fat. And she’s always going to be fat,” as all the men around him laugh. In this film, Jewish men are cruel, while Jewish women deserve only to be the butt of jokes. Max’s mother, too, is stereotypically whiny, pushy, and overbearing, as well as nasty to Nora. The one Jewish woman whom the audience isn’t encouraged to view with distaste is Max’s late wife. Although this exception should be surprising, it isn’t. As Dara Horn points out in her study of antisemitism, “People love dead Jews. Living Jews, not so much.”^{iv}

To say that *White Palace* does not stand up well to scrutiny after thirty-three years would be a gross understatement. Its characterizations are mere caricatures, and its simplistic plot reproduces an insulting cliché that Christine Benvenuto has noted in many American pop culture narratives: “Gentile women lure Jewish men away from the Jewish family, Jewish women drive them away.”^{vi} This film has the gall to represent its protagonist’s flight from Jewish women in particular and from the Jewish world in general as moral heroism, as an escape from an appalling community. Its antisemitism is crude and obvious, yet *White Palace* continues to be widely available in an array of formats and shown on TV without cuts, disclaimers, or warning labels. As David Baddiel notes in *Jews Don’t Count* (2021), “Some racisms seem to be thought of as more important—more offensive, more troubling, more in need of being shut down—than others.”^{vii} And some films deserve to be left in the vault.

i Hal Hinson, “White Palace,” *Washington Post*, October 19, 1990.

ii Stephen Hunter, “Stereotypes and Fantasy Abound in ‘White Palace,’” *Baltimore Sun*, October 26, 1990.

iii Walter Gottlieb, “Stereotypes: Hollywood and Vile,” *Washington Post*, September 1, 1991.

iv Thomas E. Wartenberg, “White Palace: Dustbuster Epiphanies,” *Movie Romance as Social Criticism* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999), 104.

v Dara Horn, *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021), 1.

vi Christine Benvenuto, *Shiksa: The Gentile Woman in the Jewish World* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2004), 72.

vii David Baddiel, *Jews Don’t Count: How Identity Politics Failed One Particular Identity* (London: TLS Books, 2021), 24.

Antisemitism without Jews: *Junebug* (2005)

Lisa Silverman

Some of the best examples of the power and persistence of antisemitism occur in films where Jews are evoked but not featured as characters. In *Junebug* (2005), written by Angus MacLachlan and directed by Phil Morrison, Madeleine, a blond, British-accented owner of an art gallery in Chicago, travels to rural North Carolina to woo to her gallery David Wark, a white, uneducated, impoverished, self-taught folk artist. Madeleine and her North Carolina-born husband George use the opportunity to visit George’s parents, brother Johnny, and very pregnant sister-in-law Ashley, who live nearby. The film’s narrative focuses on the challenging relationships among Madeleine and George’s family, set against the beauty of North Carolina’s landscape and a celebration of its lowbrow, white culture—including hollerin’ (a local form of yodeling), church hymns, Cheerwine (cherry soda native to North Carolina), meerkats, birch trees, and junebugs (a type of beetle).

Given his advanced age, gender, race, lack of education, and impoverishment, Wark exhibits prejudices of many kinds, which surprises neither the characters nor the audience of the film. His approval of Madeleine’s “purty” legs and his obsession with painting male figures with enormous phalluses reveals his sexism. His racism is apparent from his graphic glorifications of Confederate soldiers shooting at “N***** slaves” whose Black bodies are topped with white heads. Yet Madeleine remains undeterred, in part because Wark’s racism is implicit and he tempers it by expressing sympathy for his painted slaves, whom he approves of for rising up against their “evil oppressors.” In fact, it is his racism packaged as ignorant benevolence that makes Wark’s folk art all the more attractive to Madeleine. The film also seems to indicate that racism has its historical context by showing scenes in which younger Black and white art collectors and factory workers interact amiably.

But implying that racism is waning with time is what sets the stage for an outburst of Wark's explicit antisemitism, which interrupts Madeleine's effusive admiration of him and his art. It turns out that Wark is being wooed by a rival gallery in New York owned by Mark Lane, who, Wark tells Madeleine, has called her Chicago gallery "small potatoes." Madeleine scrambles to reply that if it is New York he is after, she also has a colleague there who can show his work: Mimi Steinberg. Instantly recognizing the Jewishness of her name, Wark interrupts: "Jew? That wouldn't be what we would want to do." The camera lingers over Madeleine's face as she considers her next move. After a few seconds, almost reflexively, she mumbles: "Mark Lane is Jewish." Wark asks "What?" and she quickly replies "Nothing." But Wark heard her clearly enough: he decides to sign with Madeleine, allowing her to join him on his holy quest, as he puts it, because she believes in Jesus Christ—and also because she promises to gift him a fruit basket. The scene ends with Wark telling Madeleine: "Didn't no one say them people were Jews to me." We watch her observe him with fresh eyes as she gently lowers the signed contract into her lap, her hard-fought prize tempered by her knowledge of what she had to do to get it. If she hadn't told him that Mark Lane was Jewish, he wouldn't have signed with her. But in that split second, she had decided that the ends justify the means.

The film makes it clear that Wark hates Jews, but Madeleine doesn't. Compared to Wark it is hard to describe her as antisemitic and racist, and yet, her drive to show Wark's racist art in her gallery and her willingness to enable his racism and antisemitism perpetuates both. Madeleine's prejudices function at a more subtle, covert, and insidious level: they are powerful precisely because their advantages can remain unarticulated to the person who benefits from them. The scene illustrates how systems of difference function because of, not in spite of, a lack of intent; they maintain their power precisely because we are not aware of how they operate. She can talk herself into believing that she is not racist and that

Wark's drawings are not racist either. However, she can also reflexively deploy the power of antisemitism to deliver to her what she wants, like a trump card she can pull out of her pocket when she needs it, only to hide it again when it doesn't come in handy. She wins Wark as a client not despite, but because of, his hatred of Jews. Her antisemitism, like her racism, is the hidden, slippery kind.

Antisemitism on the Hungarian Screen

Gábor Gergely

Today's publicly funded Hungarian culture, promoted in palaces of the arts and state media, is modeled on the official culture of the Horthy era, named after the self-appointed regent Miklós Horthy, who ruled from 1920 to 1944. Now, as then, state-supported cultural spokespersons, such as National Film Institute Hungary (NFI) chairman and Government Commissioner for Film Csaba Káel, insist on the precariousness of autochthonous Hungarian culture, which, for this reason, must be actively supported—favored even—in a life-or-death competition against transnational secular culture. The latter, they claim, is a danger to what should thrive in its place: *Hungarian art*. In pursuit of the goals of this culture war, Káel, a film director whose Parliament-bestowed title of government film commissioner comes straight from the Horthy era, has overseen a funding regime that channels vast sums of money from the National Lottery into prestige productions about Hungary's official historical triumphs and tragedies: for example, the recent *Aranybulla*, a miniseries set in the context of the thirteenth-century power struggle between the crown and the nobility, and *Hadik*, a feature film celebrating the exploits of András Hadik, the eighteenth-century Hungarian general of the Austrian army.

Speaking in the voice of the state, the government explicitly promotes essentialist understandings of national culture via the so-called Basic Law, as well as statutes and executive measures empowering officials to

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protect Hungarian art. The often unnamed, but quite overtly identifiable adversary is internationalist culture, supposedly strategically and maliciously funded by Hungarian American businessman George Soros. In this sense, Hungary's state-sponsored culture is explicitly xenophobic and obliquely—yet discernibly—antisemitic. Nonetheless, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán time and again avers these charges are without basis and although he openly warns against racial mixing as a threat to the desired national homogeneity, he insists neither he nor his politics are racist or antisemitic. He points to his support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's politics and policies, and the formal designation of the Holocaust as a tragedy for Hungarians as evidence to the contrary.

Accepting the implicit challenge to look not for what isn't there, but what is, in these brief roundtable remarks, I look at what happens when Jews are put on the Hungarian screen. This happens so rarely that examples are thin on the ground. Director Áron Gauder's puerile riff on *Romeo and Juliet*, the animated film *The District!* (2004), is the only recent film I can think of to feature characters explicitly described as Jewish outside of the context of the Holocaust. (The two Jewish characters in the film are a cynical money-grubbing, sex-obsessed plastic surgeon and his physically frail, effeminate, but intellectually brilliant son.) If we look for a more recent example of Jewishness on the Hungarian screen, we have little option but to focus on a Holocaust drama, such as *Saul fia/Son of Saul* (dir. László Nemes Jeles, 2015) or *1945* (dir. Ferenc Török, 2017). This tells us that Jewishness in Hungary today is put on the cinema screen exclusively in the context of the Holocaust, the high point of European antisemitism, but not in more mundane contexts.

Török's multiple-award-winning drama *1945* tells the story of a small village in the Great Hungarian Plain, where the arrival on a hot summer day in 1945 of two men dressed in Jewish garb sends shockwaves through the local community. The two men slowly proceed on

foot from the train station to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the village. As they do so, they become the focus of the villagers' fears, resentment, anger, and guilt. We do not hear them speak, nor do we find out anything about their personal histories. They are silent Jews, who have come from elsewhere and who leave the village once they complete their mission. Their personality is subsumed into their Jewishness and thus they have no personhood. Their Jewishness, moreover, is signaled exclusively through their clothes, their physiognomy, their rituals, and the villagers' reaction to their presence. It is the villagers who name them as Jews. In this way, the Jews in *1945* stand for and embody the feelings and affects they prompt in the villagers. The two Jewish visitors come to embody antisemitism itself: fear, hatred, and rejection of the Jew who does not stand for an individual, is not identical to themselves, is not a self, but a surface, which is given meaning by the projection of someone else's imaginings. Indeed, the elder man, credited as Sámuel Hermann but whose name is unspoken during the film, is played by dancer, choreographer, teacher, and actor Iván Angelus who has no known Jewish origins. He just looks the part, and is employed to embody a figure removed from the Hungarian national body, who appears on the screen only as a fantasy body whose meaning, externally imposed, is the fear of the Jew itself.

This is Hungarian antisemitism on the screen. It is not necessarily an antisemitic representation, but it is a representation of antisemitism itself. It is a representation not of, nor by, nor about the represented. It is a representation of the representer's fantasy, which includes regret for the historical hatred and the untold suffering inflicted, but is commingled with a sense of victimhood, a sorrow for the responsibility of the pain inflicted, a focus on the community that rejected coexistence with the Jews, who are imagined equally apart from that community, before, during, and after the Holocaust.

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GÁBOR GERGELY is associate professor at the University of Lincoln. He has written extensively on Hungarian antisemitism, anti-Jewish legislation, and film industry regulation from the late silent era to the beginning of state socialism. Following an edited collection on European cinema, monographs, and a journal special issue on stardom in relation to national identity, he is currently working on state socialist and contemporary popular film culture in Hungary.

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Teaching with Film and Media

The Reel Issue

Curated by Olga Gershenson



Screenshot from A Hole in the Moon (1964, dir. Uri Zohar, Israel)

What can we change in this picture to rethink “the male gaze”?



Screenshot from Sh'chur (1994, dir. Shmuel Hasfari, Israel)

What is the relationship between the characters? When is this film set?
What do the costumes and the set tell us about the people in the picture?

Learning to See

Rachel S. Harris

Before you can teach students about film, you have to teach students to see. Many start out able to summarize a plot and identify characters, just as they have been taught in literature courses—but for many, films are just another way to encounter and interpret texts they’ve already read. Teaching students to see what is on the screen is how I spend the first class of every film course I teach. Using a PowerPoint entirely composed of stills from films we will watch later in the semester, I ask students to describe what is captured in the frame. We focus on the physical relationship between the characters, trying to identify who has power in a scene, where the point of view is, whether the camera angle is straight on or from a particular perspective and what impact that may have. We consider the color scheme of the location, the tones and hues on the screen and the mood they create, the time of day, the weather. We discuss costumes and sets—how they evoke time periods and what they can tell us about the situation or characters. If women seem objectified, I introduce Laura Mulvey’s concept of “the male gaze” as we discuss the gaze of the actors, the director, the cameraman, and the audience and consider what might be changed in a scene to shift the power balance. In the following class, we look at film clips without the sound to think about how movement impacts and reshapes what we see. Only then are students ready to learn about film.

RACHEL S. HARRIS is *Gimelstob Chair and Director of Jewish Studies, and Professor of Cinema and Multimedia Studies at Florida Atlantic University. She is currently a Fulbright-Hayes Senior Scholar at Tel Aviv University where she is working on a book on the early history of Israeli cinema, 1948–1969.*

Discussing Film in Class

Olga Gershenson

Most of us, film scholars or not, use film in our classrooms. Yet, there are so many questions we must ask ourselves when building the curriculum, starting with, should we include full films (and sacrifice limited class time) or just excerpts (which will necessarily be taken out of context)? How to structure the in-class discussion? Here is one approach that I offer in my workshop “How to Use Film in the Classroom” (available digitally on the AJS website).

Whether you are teaching film as an art form or to illustrate a particular issue, start by assigning the entire film to students to watch at home. You can choose something that is streaming on popular platforms or ask your library to scan a DVD and stream it through their services. Then select two to four clips, each about three minutes long, to focus on in great detail. Choose clips that are both key to the issue you want to raise and that are cinematically interesting—containing dramatic action beyond dialog. Prepare questions about each clip: for example, “How do you understand the character’s actions here?” “Which events or themes we are studying are reflected in this clip?” “How do you understand the conflict here in light of the readings?,” or “With whom do you identify here and why?”

Questions should be specific enough to help students analyze clips very closely while making connections with the readings, but also open-ended enough to allow maximum freedom of interpretation. Once in class, you have some options: you can screen each clip, let students work in groups on your questions, and then gather them for a class discussion. Or you can assign different clips to groups and ask each group to open a discussion of their clip. Once students grow accustomed to that mode of work, you can ask each group to select their own clip to analyze (but be prepared with a backup clip, in case they waiver). What you’ll get as a result is a specific discussion that results in rich understanding of the material, something that students will reference in later conversations time and again.

OLGA GERSHENSON is professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, and of Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her most recent book *New Israeli Horror: National Cinema, Local Genre* is forthcoming from Rutgers University Press.

Navigating Trigger Warnings

Dorit Naaman

Trigger warnings have become increasingly common in college classrooms. But the question of their efficacy is still hotly debated. How should we think about trigger warnings when teaching film? This is a particularly thorny question because almost all mainstream cinema perpetuates racist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic violence. Unless addressed in the plot (as in the film *Get Out*), we accept such violence as a natural, if not neutral, state of affairs, something I highlight in my pedagogy.

Knowing full well the recent statistics on sexual assault on our campuses, I’ve spent considerable time and thought in introducing films with gratuitous representations of sexual violence (e.g., when it’s shown front of frame, in wide angle, or just at length). As time went on, I also started self-censoring and removing difficult films from my syllabi. I felt that I am responding to the needs of my students, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the students returned to the physical classroom fragile, exhausted, and confused.

However, recently, my students got me to reconsider the issue. I showed *Night and Fog* in a documentary criticism course. The students were shocked and reported that their Holocaust education in high school was sanitized and did not include images of violence and death. They argued that the film should be shown in high school and when I asked about triggers, they responded that while people should be informed and prepared for the difficult content, as a society, we have to learn to face images of violence, so that we do not repeat it.

I do not have a golden rule about trigger warnings, but I now often have an open conversation with my students about the implications of trigger warnings, about wokeness, and about the misuses of the term “trigger.” Sometimes I even poll my classes about whether we should watch particular content. I learn with them, from them, and I acknowledge that I may make mistakes, and if I do, we can learn from those together.

DORIT NAAMAN is a documentarist and film theorist, and professor of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Queen’s University, Canada. She is the director of the interactive documentary *Jerusalem, We Are Here*, and the co-lead of the collaborative research-creation project *The Belle Park Project*.

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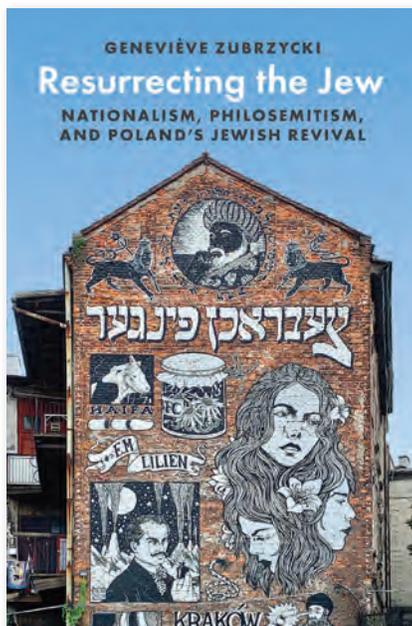
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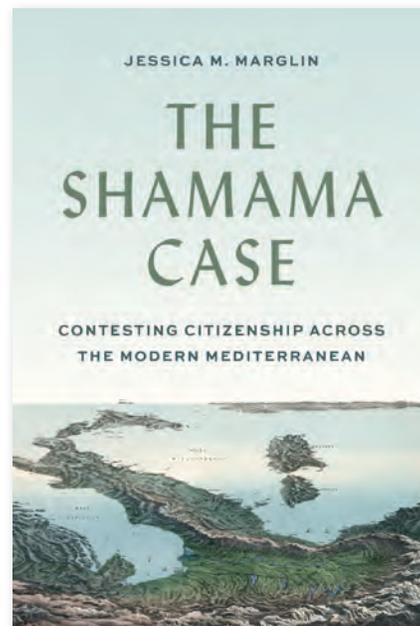
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An in-depth look at why non-Jewish Poles are trying to bring Jewish culture back to life in Poland today



How a nineteenth-century lawsuit over the estate of a wealthy Tunisian Jew shines new light on the history of belonging



The financial support from this [travel] grant enabled me to present at the AJS Annual Conference for the first time. Without it, presenting at the conference would have been extremely difficult for me, given my financial situation as a graduate student. Speaking at the AJS Annual Conference helped me forge connections between my research and other developments in the field, which will considerably strengthen my own work and foster my career.

—Hannah Zaves-Green, *visiting professor, Sarah Lawrence College*



At this stage in my career, the AJS gives me the chance to discover young, talented scholars and the newest frontiers of research. I also have the privilege of paying it forward both figuratively and literally, by mentoring others as well as by contributing financially to help ensure the AJS's future.

—Shuly Rubin Schwartz,
Chancellor and Irving Lehrman Research Associate Professor of American Jewish History, the Jewish Theological Seminary

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