AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SEEING: A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF POPULAR CINEMA

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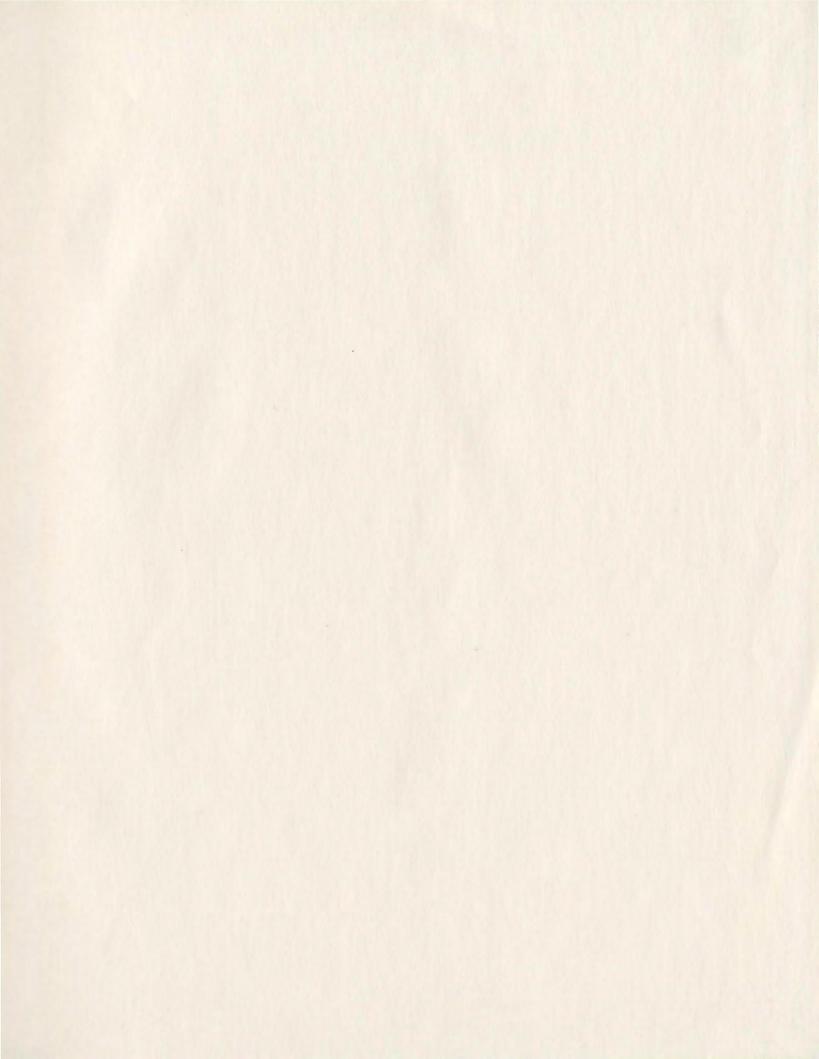# INFORMATION TO USERS

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An Ethnography of Seeing: A Proposed Methodology for
the Ethnographic Study of Popular Cinema

by

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partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT:

Cinema is a symbolic manifestation of cultural identity based on the experience of that identity. Generally, social scientists have relied on the ethnographic documentary tradition in film to explore issues related to cultural experience. Film studies scholars have tended to emphasize issues surrounding the representation of ethnic individuals rather than the construction of ethnic identity in popular film. This study will bring together the advantages of social science and film studies approaches, while focusing more intensively on the development of a culturally responsive approach to film.

As a case study, this thesis focuses on an exploration of Jewish cinema. Through fieldwork at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, I examine the participatory nature of Jewish film culture. By interviewing some of those members of the Toronto Jewish communities attending that festival. a characterization of Jewish cinematic aesthetics was constructed based on the narrative motifs. demands of verisimilitude, and their vernacular taxonomies. Taken holistically. these aspects create an ethnographically informed study of a group's popular cinema.

If we can deconstruct films. which members of specific communities have produced. and examine the ways in which those films are then reincorporated back into their respective communities. we have made a crucial step toward understanding cinema from an emic perspective. What this thesis asks is whether gaining access to a community's worldview is possible. to describe the cultural vitality of the community, by means of the group's popular cinema.

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I would also like to thank my mother, Beverley Koven, for getting me access to many films discussed in this research, films which are not readily available on video. I thank Tim and Lainie of Capitol Video in St. John's, who also helped me acquire other films, and for not necessarily charging me for the rentals. I also thank Arnold Bennett who was determined to make me understand the concept of "Jewish content."

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Dr. Diane Goldstein has been a constant source of encouragement for me, challenging my research and thinking in ways she knew I could achieve, even if I did not. It was her leadership that gave me the strength to persevere. *Academically*, she gave me

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the focus and drive with which to complete this task.

Personally, my focus and drive to complete came from another source: my wife, Gian Fazey-Koven. My thanks to her is where I wish to end these acknowledgments. Not even she is fully aware of how much her love, support, encouragement, and her endless patience in sitting through Jewish movies has meant to me (she tells me that she even *liked* some of them). Gian, it is to you that I dedicate this work.

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INTRODUCTION: POPULAR FILM AND FOLKLORE

Academic arguments are usually built, constructed, or even woven; choose whatever metaphor you like. For me, in the argument that I am now putting forth, none of these metaphors accurately reflect the process by which I make my point. Instead, the appropriate metaphor might be macramé: I am taking a variety of theories from a great many approaches and tying them together. What I would like to demonstrate is that in folklore's neglect of popular cinema not enough scholars have addressed what one can learn ethnographically from the kind of movies that people go to for entertainment. To do this one must begin by accepting the position that movies can inform folklorists' understanding of cultural production. The methodology I propose here is one step forward in understanding how popular cinema can inform folkloristics.

Muriel Saville-Troike characterized Dell Hymes's development of the "ethnography of speaking" as "focusing on the patterning of communicative behavior as it constitutes one of the systems of culture, as it functions within the holistic context of culture, and as it relates to patterns in other component systems" (Saville-Troike: 1). Popular cinema, along with language, material artifacts, and customs, is communicative behavior. This current study looks at the patterns of popular cinema within their cultural context, and asks how popular cinema functions within the holistic context of culture, and how it relates to other systems within that culture. In this respect, the current research is

analogous to the Hymesian sociolinguistic project, but with a difference.[1]

If we deconstruct certain films, which members of specific cultural communities have produced, and examine the ways in which those films are then reincorporated back into their respective communities, then we have made a crucial step toward understanding cinema from the "folk" perspective, that is, approaching an *emic*, or insider's, understanding. If these films have meanings different for group members than they do for outsiders experiencing the films, as suggested by Jansen's esoteric-exoteric factor in folklore (Jansen: *passim*), then the deconstruction of the film texts needs a methodology that elucidates a range of emic and etic readings. What this thesis asks is whether one can enter a community's worldview and describe the cultural vitality of that community by means of the group's popular cinema.

In this first chapter, a survey of the existing literature on folklore and popular cinema, I begin with a discussion of the methodologies and approaches that folklorists have utilized when discussing the feature film, and the problems inherent in those approaches. Then I discuss how Film Studies, as a discipline, approaches the issue of ethnic popular cinema. This current work reflects the juxtaposition of these two

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[1] Nor is this project exclusively limited to cultural differences in cognitive perception. I had originally intended to focus this work with much more textural analysis, along the lines of the Worth and Adair project. But the data generated with the Jewish communities I was working with did not allow for such textural analysis to be done. Working from a ground up approach, as this project demands, I limited myself to those aspects of culture that were salient to the communities I studied. That being said, I begin to address some textural issues in Chapter Six with my discussion of coding.

perspectives.

FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CINEMA

For many of the dominant generation of American folklorists, film is *not* folklore.

In 1976, Roger Abrahams noted, quite explicitly, that

> *folklore* is meaningful as a term only insofar as it designates artistic
> expression in which there is a certain degree of personal interrelationship
> between performer and audience. When a performer loses this
> interpersonal approach but still attempts to entertain the populace at large
> . . . , then we call this performance 'popular' (Abrahams, 1976: 212-213).

I do not disagree with the substance of Abrahams' statement, but with the implication by

which he rejected popular cinema into the realm of popular culture, and *ipso facto*, denied

its appropriateness to be called "folklore." Abrahams was vague in what he determined

was a "personal interrelationship" between performer and audience; the implication is

that it is primarily a face-to-face relationship. Face-to-face relationships do not

automatically guarantee a necessarily "personal" relation, but merely that it is "face-to-

face"[2]. Regarding popular cinema and television, even within the canon of Hollywood

cinema, a film that is going to reach beyond any particular "group" may be aimed for, but

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[2] Interestingly enough, film scholar Paul Cowen has noted almost the opposite: that unlike
other forms of mass mediated entertainment, film and television have a closer affinity to
the face-to-face context than mass-produced music, theatre, or even popular fiction, due
to the cinema's direct appeal to the individual in the audience rather than to a "mass"
(Cowen: 353).

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its achievability is "the stuff that [corporate] dreams are made of." Hollywood has yet to

produce a movie that everyone will go and see, regardless of class, race, gender, ethnicity,

or education[3]. The point is that people make movies and go to movies, and people have

localized interests, experiences, and desires. As folklorists, we must begin to situate

popular cinema within those groups who both produce and consume popular culture texts.

The other major objection to the inclusion of mass mediated popular texts as

folklore came from Robert Georges's classic "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling

Events." Postulate #3, in his holistic conceptualization of storytelling events, noted that

"every storytelling event is unique" (Georges: 319). As I shall demonstrate, mass

mediated popular texts, in many ways, correspond to Georges's postulates. Georges

elaborated:

> A. Every storytelling event occurs only once in time and space.
> B. Every storytelling event occurs only once with a particular set of social
> interrelationships.
> C. Every storytelling event generates its own unique system of social and
> psychological forces. which exert pressure on the social environment and
> upon those whose interactions create that ideal environment (Georges:
> 319).

This postulate becomes problematic when applied to popular cinema, since it sees film as

having a "fixed text". Such a perception sees cinema as a mechanical recording of that

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[3] Although, at the time of writing. James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) seems to be the
anomaly on this – a movie that everyone went to see, and now must own on video
cassette. And this trend of the mega-film seems to be continuing with the 1999 release of
Star Wars: The Phantom Menace.

which has occurred temporally and spatially elsewhere (on the set where they filmed the action), and the documented performances were static. However movies, as artifacts, perform whenever they are run through the machine and projected onto a screen (or electronically monitored on a television set). Although they had captured one performative event for posterity in the mechanical reproduction of activity (the filming), a new performative context emerges whenever we screen the film. Each screening becomes a new storytelling event, each with its own set of particulars, and it is at this site where temporal and spatial variation occurs. Each performance context, when we screen the film, will be a unique event for those attending: it will only occur the once (Georges's point "A"), each with a different audience (point "B"), and these factors will effect "the social environment" itself (point "C").

As far back as 1946, Stith Thompson recognized that cinema was a marvelous channel of tale dissemination, and that it was a kind of storytelling event.

> The cinema, especially the animated cartoon, is perhaps the most successful of all mediums for the presentation of the fairytale. Creatures of the folk imagination can be constructed with ease and given lifelike qualities. Undoubtedly the best of these performances up to the present time [1946] is the Walt Disney production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [1937]. Many adults who had long ago dropped their interest in the fairytale unexpectedly found great pleasure in this old product of the folk imagination (Thompson: 461).

For Thompson, the "mass media" did not herald the death of the oral tradition; on the contrary, tale dissemination via cinema would, he felt, encourage viewers to rediscover these tales. Thompson marveled at the fact that one single text could reach so many

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people at the same time (Thompson: 124). Within Thompson's approach to filmed

Märchen was the implicit recognition that the Disney text would be considered but one

text among countless other variants.

Ceding Thompson's implicit recognition, later theorists, folklorists and non, saw

the cinema, especially the Disney texts, as an attempt to become definitive. Peggy Russo,

as recently as 1992, observed that traditional narratives "can . . . be replaced by *bogus*

visual versions of themselves" (Russo: 19, emphasis added). Russo traces the attack

against Disney at least as far back as 1965, when

> In a ... letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, Frances Clark Sayer criticized
> Disney 'for his debasement of the traditional literature of childhood.' Sayer
> accused him of: 1) lack of respect for the 'integrity of original creations'; 2)
> 'manipulation and vulgarization' of text for his own ends; 3) lack of regard
> for the 'anthropological, spiritual, or psychological truths' of folklore; 4)
> 'fixing his mutilated film versions in books which are cut to a fraction of
> their original forms'; and 5) 'illustrations of those books with garish
> pictures, in which every prince looks like a badly drawn portrait of Cary
> Grant; every princess a sex symbol' (Russo: 21).

Although Sayer's point number four, the Disney corporation's fixing of their variants into

book form (and her point number five: the low quality of that form, in Sayer's opinion)

clearly implicated Disney in assuming ownership of folk narratives by the creation of

hegemonically "definitive" texts, and it was this perception which coloured how

folklorists saw the role of cinema. They perceived that the movies fix traditional

narratives into single "definitive" texts, which replace the more fluid oral versions.

This view, that mass mediated narratives, like the movies, were responsible for

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the decline in orally transmitted narratives, caught on with folklorists, and to some extent became the standard to which later studies alluded to. In her chapter titled "The Variant and the Folklorization Process in the Basic Forms of Narrative," Linda Dégh gave a useful summary of the concepts of "the mass media" and its position within folklore studies.

> In the global village (to use the apt term of Marshall McLuhan) created by the media, a new communality has formed on the basis of the homogenizing effect of uniform information and the mass-marketing of stories to a mass society structured into occupational, ethnic, age, sex, religious, and other population groups, also identifiable as folk or folklore-transmitting communities. The even flow of identical information systematically enculturates the citizens of the world, turning them into the consumers of identical cultural goods by creating a symbolic egalitarian social order that supersedes segmentation by national boundaries (Dégh, 1994: 23)

Based on Dégh's useful summation, folklorists mostly felt that popular culture, especially through such media as film and television attempted to homogenize culture into a single, unified system of consumerists. Local cultures and regional variants, it was felt, were in jeopardy of being taken over by this juggernaut[4].

Such was the position of Gerald Thomas in his article "Other Worlds: Folktale and Soap Opera in Newfoundland's French Tradition". In that article he noted the role television soap operas played in the Franco-Newfoundland storytelling tradition. Thomas recognized that the same word. *contes*. was used to refer to both soap operas and to orally

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[4] It should be noted though that other folklorists and cultural scholars (see below) argued against this idea that the mass media homogenized culture (cf. Narváez and Laba).

told traditional folktales (Thomas: 343), in much the same way that my own grandmother refers to the soap operas she watches as her "stories". Thomas ascribed "enough similarity between the real life of French Newfoundlanders (and others) and the soap opera plots to suggest a high degree of personal identification" (Thomas: 347). What Thomas focused on is the similarity between the two media along traditional narrative formations: specifically Alex Olrik's "Law of Two to a Scene" in soap opera cinematography and narrative structure (Thomas: 347). What prevents Thomas' article from being merely another pointing out of the similarities between the two, however, is that he addressed, albeit briefly, that soap operas influenced oral Märchen performance in the community: prior to widespread television reception in the region, storytelling performances were more heavily gesticulated, and Thomas hypothesized that the more static style of current Märchen performance was due to the influence of television drama and its static performance style (Thomas: 348).

Although Thomas' was an important observation, the real point of his article was the loss of so-called traditional performance styles, and this was in keeping with the folkloristic perception of the devolutionary influence of the mass media. In the same vein, although much more recent, was Elizabeth Tucker's "Text, Lies, and Videotape: Can Oral Tales Survive?" From the title alone, Tucker's position was obvious: that she viewed the influence of mass-mediated versions of narratives as replacing the oral

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variants previously in circulation[5]. This coincided with Sayer's point that Disney versions of traditional Märchen replaced the original orally circulated text and thereby created a sense of canonicity. Tucker's research was geared to demonstrate that children today were allowing video narrative texts to predetermine their own storytelling performance styles. "None of them [the children she studied] used anything but video versions as starting points for narrations; to this extent, I can assert that videotape is overshadowing traditional print versions of stories" (Tucker: 25).

Tucker's article can be contrasted with Sylvia Grider's research: Grider noted that children frequently reiterated plot narratives from their favourite television shows and movies, but that these reiterations were highly complex and original storytellings. Grider called these narrations "media narraforms": "the media narraforms thus embody a symbiotic relationship between the media and oral tradition: the media provide the content, and oral tradition provides the situations and format for the performance of these contemporary, hybrid narratives" (Grider: 126).

As Thomas observed the impact of television performance styles on Franco-Newfoundlanders' Märchen performance styles, so too did Tucker comment that children incorporate their video-viewing into their "verbal art". She noted a narrative variant of Cinderella told to her by a four-year-old informant which she fused with a vampire story.

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[5] Kay Stone, on the other hand, felt that Disney's filmed versions of traditional Märchen, by the retention of the fantastic elements in these stories, allowed the child's imagination to be developed (Stone: 236-237).

There was no conflict in her mind between the plot structure of Cinderella'
and the plot of a typical vampire movie, which seems to be the other
model for narration here; she simply took what she wanted from both
sources and put them together into her own story. While at least one child
in the audience wanted to make sure that the name 'Cinderella' was clearly
mentioned, Emily knew what she wanted to do and had the confidence in
her own skills as a storyteller (Tucker: 28).

Tucker warned, polemically, that

while we should keep an eye on children's involvement with VCRs, we
needn't be too concerned about creativity being wiped out by repeated
viewings of stories on video tape. At *present* there seems to be a
productive interdependence between the TV screen and that old-fashioned
storytelling device, the mouth (Tucker: 31, emphasis added).

Tucker noted that although both the mass mediated and the orally transmitted narrative

were currently able to survive concurrently, she felt, and other folklorists agreed, that

such a coexistence was temporary. Both could not survive, and the oral would die out so

the mass mediated could live.

Studies, such as those by Tucker, Thomas and Russo, debate whether or not mass

mediated texts can be considered as folklore, primarily because of their medium of

transmission. Elizabeth Bird, conversely, does not see the means of transmission as

problematic. She commented:

we need to forget about whether or not popular culture 'transmits' folklore.
Rather, we begin to consider that certain popular culture forms succeed
because they act like folklore. To some extent they may have replaced folk
narratives, but not with something completely new. Thus popular culture
is popular because of its resonance, its appeal to an audience's existing set
of story conventions (Bird, 1996: n.p.).

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It is this development, of the ways in which popular culture can behave like traditional

folklore forms, that this current study builds upon.

In a 1989 issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*, Bruce Jackson published "A

Film Note"; two pages outlining why feature film and television are important for

folklorists to study. In the piece, Jackson noted,

> Film is the dominant narrative mode of our time. Film and television
> provide much of the sense of community in a mobile and electronic world:
> the verbal and imaginative referents we utilize in ordinary face-to-face
> encounters are as likely to come from our separate-but-shared media
> experience as anywhere else. Film and television are far too important to
> be left to the media studies and literature scholars (Jackson: 389).

Jackson commented that, by and large, folklorists have neglected examining feature film

and television as an area of study, even to the extent that Dorson's *Handbook of American

Folklore* "ignores films entirely" (Jackson: 388). "The assumption seems to have been

that since filmmaking is a highly technical occupation, one [that] results in a fixed text,

the 'folk' don't have a chance to influence it" (Jackson: 388). Jackson concluded: "the

assumption isn't useful; neither is it valid" (Jackson: 388).

There are two areas that folklorists have explored, folklore *in* film and the ethno-

graphic film. But, as Jackson notes, neither of these areas were really sufficient in

understanding popular cinema:

> With ordinary film, it's usually a matter of folklore *in* film, the equivalent
> of Folklore in Faulkner or Folklore in Shakespeare ... things to be plucked
> out of a context otherwise lacking folkloric moment. *JAF* [*Journal of
> American Folklore*] regularly reviews films about folklore events or folk
> processes or folk performers, but it has never published a review or article

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dealing with feature films or television narratives (Jackson: 388).

The ethnographic film falls outside of the purview of this study, but folklorist Sharon Sherman, one of the discipline's authorities on "folklore and film," in her article in Jan Brunvand's comprehensive *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, focused almost exclusively on a particular manifestation of the ethnographic film, what she called the *folkloric* film: "Any film having folkloric content might be of use to us, but those films called folkloric films ... are ones which deal primarily with topics folklorists study and whose intent is to meet the dictates of folkloristic research and teaching" (Sherman, 1981: 16). We might potentially call any film folkloric, but true folkloric films are made by trained folklorists, or were made in close consultation with folklorists (Sherman, 1996: 265). It is important to recognize here that Sherman was talking exclusively about the documentary film, not the fiction film:

> Many folklorists who use film are tied to the models adopted by their documentary-film forerunners and to the conceptual premises of past-folklore scholars. Thus, in folkloric films, the rural often takes precedent over the urban, and the past assumes greater importance than the contemporary (Sherman, 1996: 264).

Sherman might have taken issue with a conventional definition of "the folk," but unproblematically confirmed the discipline's privileging of the documentary film as the sole medium for academic communication.

Sherman noted with surprise the existence of folkloristic and ethnographic detail within non-academic (i.e., non-documentary) films (Sherman, 1996: 265).

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A *unique* twist to the study of film and folklore is the popular use of
folklore as the primary plot line or unifying thread for commercial feature
films. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), for example, exploits the
practices of voodoo. The urban legend about a baby-sitter frightened by a
telephone caller is the basis for *When a Stranger Calls* (1979). The film
Avalon (1990) plays upon family and ethnic narratives to structure the
larger narrative of family and ethnic-neighborhood dissolution in the
America of the 1940s through the 1960s, using one family as exemplar.
When Harry Met Sally (1989) relies on the courtship narratives of many
different couples as a transition device (Sherman, 1996: 265).

Sherman's surprise at this discovery, as evidenced by her use of "unique," seems naïve,

but is explained by the bibliography to her Brunvand contribution: she did not cite any of

the research folklorists had done on popular narrative cinema, including those cited here.

Her entire bibliography consisted of works on the ethnographic, that is, documentary

cinema (Sherman, 1996: 265).

At this point, it is necessary to discuss the other dominant voice in "folklore and

film" studies: those scholars who used popular cinematic texts as compendia for folklore

materials – the "motif-spotters".

"Motif-spotting" takes its methodology from the debates surrounding "folklore

and literature." It has been suggested that the most direct way for individual fiction films

to be considered as "folklore" is to follow some of the theoretical writings which tie

folklore studies to literature. Neil Grobman, for example, proposed that one must assess

"how authors use folklore in their writings" (Grobman: 17). To follow this procedure

requires the scholar to identify the author as being in direct contact with folklore and its

scholarly debates. (Grobman: 18). The problem with applying the "folklore and

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literature" debates to discussions about folklore and popular cinema, is that literary texts

are produced by individual authors whose connection with "folk culture" is more readily

provable. Cinema, and television, are much more collaborative communicative media,

and therefore, if one is required to make a connection between the text and "legitimate"

folk culture, whose connection is to be considered authoritative?

James Hodge, in "New Bottles - Old Wine: The Persistence of the Heroic Figure

in the Mythology of Television Science Fiction and Fantasy" outlined his position that the

structural opposition of binaries which underlie mythology, good and evil, solar and

chthonic, was evident in contemporary science fiction television shows and children's

fantasy cartoons. Hodge left his remarks at the level of identifying that they, in fact, were

present and did not attempt an analysis of meaning.

When folklorists looked at popular mass-mediated texts, they did so in order to

identify traditional tale types and motifs *in* films. Diverse scholars like Leslie Fiedler and

Harold Schechter noted the similarities between Vietnam War movies and traditional

hero narratives. Both authors saw in movies like *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and

Apocalypse Now (1979) (Fiedler), *Rambo* (1985) and *Platoon* (1988) (Schechter and

Semeiks) similarities between these "original" texts and the expression of the American

"Frontier Myth," to use Schechter and Semeiks's phrase. The myths expressed in those

films, as Fiedler noted, "represent a symbolic effort to bring back home again what we

hope can be recuperated in imagination if not in fact: a not ignoble part of us all

squandered in an ignoble war [the Vietnam War]" (Fiedler: 399). Schechter and Semeiks

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likewise noted that in the Vietnam War film, the American hero myth was regenerated for the 1980s movie going audience (Schechter and Semeiks: 24-25). Schechter and Semeiks argue that *Rambo* and *Platoon* engaged American audiences with traditional hero narratives. *Platoon* was an initiatory rite while *Rambo* was a captivity-escape tale. This appeal to traditional narrative patternings accounts for the films' success, and not the critical assumption of a decline in the audience's taste. If history was unable to appeal to a cultural perception of the self, so their arguments went, then through the medium of popular cinema, the culture could regenerate its own sense of worth by righting the wrongs it was unable to in "reality." This was a highly functionalist argument: one which posited that cinema played itself out for a cultural audience that needed to see its own self-perceptions reified.

Other folklorists had been concerned with the identification of Märchen tale-types and motifs in popular cinema. For some scholars, the Disney-effect, taking traditional tales and turning them into mass-mediated and authoritative texts, as Peggy Russo and Frances Clark Sayer noted above, could have a potentially detrimental effect on the transmission of these tales. In this light, Thompson's affection for Disney movies seems overly optimistic: as a trained and professional folklorist, Thompson was in the ideal position of recognizing that Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, for example, was but one variant of the narrative tradition, but he gave no recognition that children, or adults, would see these cinematic texts as anything other than authoritative. Another point Sayer raised was that these films frequently sanitize the narratives to be so inoffensive as

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to be almost meaningless. "Sayer argued that Disney 'sweetens' or removes the conflict in folklore that allows children to learn the 'tragic dimension of life, the battle between good and evil, between weak and strong ... [and] ... all that is good in the human spirit'" (Russo: 21)[6].

Another interesting study in Märchen in popular film and television texts was with regards to television advertising. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vazsonyi, in "Magic for Sale: Märchen and Legend in TV Advertising" asked a stimulating question: given their assumption of a "decline" in the magical worldview, why do TV ads appeal frequently to magical aspects of the products they are flogging? The authors have understood Märchen as a fictitious genre, and the "realistic" setting of TV ads are mere facade (Dégh and Vazsonyi: 61). The television commercial is the American adult equivalent of the folktale — for example, magical assistance, and promise of riches beyond our dreams. They also discussed how beliefs were manipulated under the fictitious surface of TV advertising.

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[6] A point which folklorists seem to forget is that the Disney canon was not originally intended as "children's" entertainment. Film scholar David Forgacs noted: "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* [1942], and *Bambi* (1942) were all designed as films for both young and old – clean, nonviolent, fantasies with songs and happy endings. They were not targeted at a 'family audience' in the modern sense of the term — adults accompanying children as the primary spectators — but over time they helped bring such an audience into being. *Fantasia* [1940] was something of an exception to this pattern, an odd hybrid of light entertainment, a would-be cultural movie and an experiment for the Disney artists in abstract animation suggested by music. In terms of its reception it had a strange reincarnation in the 1960s as a hippy film. Now it is being marketed as a children's/family film" (Forgacs: 366-367).

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The dominant area for the identification of traditional tale-types and motifs was the horror movie. This genre appeared to be the one place, next to television advertising, where the magical worldview that the Märchen purports could exist without being questioned in a secular context. Of course different forms of magic exist within any number of sacred belief traditions, but for the *secular* world, the horror film's population of monsters, devils, and psychotic killers allowed the "suspension of disbelief" of their existence to function based on the verisimilitude of this genre to the folktale.

For example, Alex Alexander noted the similarities in *Carrie* (1976) (both the novel by Stephen King and the film by Brian De Palma) and the "Cinderella" story. This horror story about a young girl who discovers her telekinetic abilities on the eve of her high school prom, was told as a modern variant on the traditional Märchen. Alexander made the easy equation between prom and ball, and the between her evil mother with the evil stepmother of the folktale. There is even a motif from the "Ugly Duckling" folktale, where the ugly duckling turns into a beautiful swan in Carrie's movement from gawky adolescent to beautiful young woman at the prom — a motif also present in some of the Cinderella versions.

Harold Schechter also addressed de Palma's *Carrie*, noting the film's similarity to folktale-like narratives he was familiar with. In particular, Schechter dealt with the final image of the film. where Carrie's arm. as he describes it. "suddenly erupts from the grave" (Schechter, 1988: 27). Schechter noted the same motif, of an arm emerging from the grave (or similar surface) also appeared in such films as *Friday the 13th* (1980) and

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Deliverance (1974) (in both cases, the arm breaks the surface of a lake) (Schechter, 1988: 27-28), and was used to advertise the film *The Evil Dead* (1984) (Schechter, 1988: 33-34). He traced this single motif back to the Brothers Grimm, and a motif which occurs in one of their stories, "The Willful Child" (Schechter, 1988: 29)[7]. The significance of this observation was that regardless of a film's sophistication or its technical complexity, the images a filmmaker uses to tell his/her story are often analogues to traditional Märchen. Schechter took these analogues even further: "to look once more at *Carrie*, however — what we see there ... is an even more intriguing phenomenon: a pop entertainment which does not simply project nightmares and dabble in dangerous fantasy, but which contains precise parallels to particular and widespread primitive taboos, specifically ones dealing with ... the dead" (Schechter, 1988: 32).

Schechter had likewise done an similar study on the "bosom serpent" motif in American folklore and drawn parallels to popular cinematic representations. Schechter summarized the bosom serpent story thus: "through some unfortunate circumstance or act of carelessness ..., a snake ... is accidentally ingested by, or grows inside the body of, the unlucky individual, where it remains until it is expelled or in some way lured out of the victim's body" (Schechter, 1985: 105). The classic sequence in Ridley Scott's film, *Alien* (1979), most clearly demonstrates this motif, where an unlucky crew member of a space mining expedition is impregnated with an alien lifeform in his chest, which bursts out at

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[7] Schechter also notes that the story, "The Willful Child" contains little but this single motif (Schechter, 1988: 29).

dinner time. As Schechter noted "like the traditional, oral versions that have been popular for hundreds of years, [the sequence in *Alien*'s] only purpose is to produce emotional response: shock, revulsion, morbid fascination" (Schechter, 1985:107).

In recent years, perhaps due to the "public domain" copyright laws on orally transmitted lore, horror movies, and series of horror movie franchises, have emerged based even more explicitly on Märchen than the *Carrie* example. Over the past decade horror movie audiences have been presented with adult-oriented versions of *Snow White*, sub-titled *A Tale of Terror* (1997) and *Rumpelstiltskin* (1995). As well, fans of the genre would be familiar with *The Leprechaun* series (1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996), or even *Pinocchio's Revenge* (1996). But this tradition of making adult-oriented films out of Märchen is not new: Jean Cocteau, the French surrealist poet, filmmaker and artist made in 1946, *La belle et la bete*, an adult reworking of "Beauty and the Beast". Cocteau's *La belle et la bete* is also noteworthy for it blends the genre of Märchen with the horror film, and as I demonstrate below, *that* genre's connection is also to the legend. Cocteau filmed the Beast's castle in such a way as to be familiar to anyone who has grown up on the haunted house movies of the 1930s. In many respects, what Cocteau has done in *La belle et la bete* was to return the folktale to its adult audience by appropriating the visual iconography of the contemporary horror movie[8].

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[8] Ironically, in 1991, when Disney brought out its version of *Beauty and the Beast*, it utilized many of the surreal *visual* motifs that Cocteau had initiated.

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Finally, special mention should be made of Frank Hoffmann's research, as we move in this survey from adult-oriented Märchen to *Adult* Märchen. In his 1965 article, "Prolegomena to the Study of Traditional Elements in the Erotic Film," Hoffmann notes that pornographic and "stag" films utilized a number of traditional tale-types and motifs. Basing his study on the collection of films held at the Kinsey Institute of Sexual Research, the author noted that:

> I have seen and taken notes on approximately 280 of the Institute's collection of 400 [pornographic films]. Of these, close analysis reveals that 175 – or better than 60 percent – contain recognizable folkloristic elements. Many of these can be related directly to existing motifs in Stith Thompson's Motif-Index of Folk Literature, whereas others relate to new motifs which I have developed out of my analysis of collections of erotic folktales (Hoffmann: 145).

Moving directly to how legend scholars have examined popular films, the best place to begin is Julia George's "The Horror Film: An Investigation of Traditional Narrative Elements." She noted that "many non-ethnographic fiction films seem to exhibit elements of folk narrative, transposed into a visual rather than primarily an oral mode of transmission. The structure of film, as well as the themes, present often parallel traditional storytelling methods" (George: 159). George also noted that the horror film in particular shares "components of structure and function" of contemporary legends (George: 159), although she did not explore this beyond the motif-spotting. She applied Alan Dundes' three steps of legend narrative structure to the horror film: interdiction - violation - and consequences (George: 175), and concluded that "horror stories function

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to scare and to warn; the same seems to apply to horror films" (George: 176). The problem with George's analysis is that she did not engage the similarities between contemporary legends and horror films in any other way except to point out that similarities exist.

Larry Danielson's "Folklore and Film: Some Thoughts on Baughman Z500-599" notes the utilization of contemporary legend motifs in horror movies, specifically John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). He noted that many horror movies drew heavily on what Ernest Baughman classified as motifs Z500-599, "stories which are not ghost or witch stories — they usually do not deal with the supernatural — which are told because of the effect of horror they produce in the listener. Usually the emphasis is on the grisly or strange rather than on the supernatural" (Baughman quoted in Danielson: 211). This is in addition to those horror movies about the supernatural. Significantly, Danielson noted at the very beginning of the "mad slasher" cycle of movies in the late 1970s/early 1980s that these movies appeal to a variety of contemporary legends. Again he noted: "Folklorists, in order to understand the psychology of response to these similar themes and motifs, would gain useful insights into meaning and function if their research nets were more broadly flung. We need to keep eyes and ears open for the appearance of the traditional horror story in film, television, and in print" (Danielson: 212).

Danielson made a number of further points: one was that movies, like TV or print media, are a major factor in legend transmission, as well as a reflection of it (Danielson: 219). A second point is that "these motifs are so vigorously shared by film fiction and

contemporary verbal art suggests their psychological potency" (Danielson: 219). But most important was his third point, wherein Danielson demonstrated his reluctance to jettison the contemporary wisdom of the discipline as exemplified by scholars like Abrahams and Georges. Danielson noted that movies were not folkloric art although a few dealt with folklore materials (Danielson: 219). On this latter point, Danielson cited the Japanese film *Kwaidan* (1964), a cinematic retelling of three (in the American theatrical release; the international release available on videotape contains four) Japanese ghost stories. "The movie is difficult to deal with in folklore classes because its highly refined film art is based on an equally refined literary treatment of Japanese legends in manuscript, which, in turn are based on oral traditional narrative. ... *Kwaidan* can confront students with the problems of defining text, of the transmission of traditional narrative in modern media, and of the drastic and subtle consequences of media shifts on folk narrative content" (Danielson: 210).

As *reductio ad absurdum*, this motif-spotting could also be expressed in folkloristic bibliographies/filmographies. Paul Smith's and Sandy Hobbs' "Films Using Contemporary Legend Themes/Motifs" was an annotated bibliography which noted a variety of legend themes and motifs, described them and then noted at least one film reference per citation. Given the overwhelming response to this document, they began a column in 1992 in *FOAFtale News* (which has so far only produced a single entry) which takes a specific legend and all of its cinematic appearances are then annotated.

Beyond specific folkloristic genres like myth, Märchen and legend, Tom Burns

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attempted to develop a methodology for identifying any expression of folklore in popular

film and television texts. When an item of folklore is identified in the mass media, Burns

proposed a rather rigid paradigm for distinguishing the item's *validity* as folklore. Burns

recognized that mass media uses a variety of folkloristic materials ("traditional music and

song" (Burns: 91-93), belief (Burns: 93-97), gesture (Burns: 97), narratives (Burns: 97-

99), proverbs (Burns: 99-100), custom (Burns: 100-101)), but it was only when they have

contextualized these items within a framework of ethnographic verisimilitude could they

be considered "true" folklore. From this point of view, a "true" folklore item consists of

1) a traditional text (whether composed of verbal, non-verbal, or mixed components), 2) a

traditional performance of that text in 3) a traditional (customary) situation in response to

or in conjunction with 4) a traditional audience" (Burns: 90). Other than specific films

intended for a specific academic (folkloristic) audience (i.e., "ethnographic" or

"folkloric" films), very few popular films could maintain this schema.

Contemporary models are likewise challenging the idea that film texts are "fixed"

(Jackson: 388). With the video release of many "directors' cuts" and "restored versions"

these "fixed" texts demonstrate a high degree of variation. In addition to these variants,

different national film boards require different degrees of censorship and editing to films

for public display, based on the community standards of the groups where they will

exhibit the film[9]. In addition to these multiple versions of film narratives, as Jackson

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[9] In the United States, for example, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)
is an internal form of censorship. If a film wishes to receive a specific film classification

notes, we can tell narratives *about* films (Jackson: 388). I have already noted Sylvia

Grider's "media narraforms," but beyond this coinage, Narváez (1986) studied how

changes in technology, like the availability of television, generate new folkloric forms,

specifically narratives *about* technology.

Another example of this kind of film oriented narration is worth noting, especially

since it coincides with Hoffmann's work on the pornographic film. Apparently stories

circulated in Hollywood during the filming of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) about the adult

actors playing the Munchkins:

> Because [the *Wizard of Oz* filmmakers] thought of them [Munchkin
> actors] as like children, the average-sized adults working on the picture
> could not think of sexual relations between them as anything other than
> 'unnatural' and stories circulated about orgies among them at the Culver
> City Hotel. The Disney artists were capable of imagining similar kinds of
> sexual excess in the seven dwarfs. 'Suddenly, near the end of the picture',

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(i.e., an "R" rated film, instead of an "NC-17" film, or a film released without a
classification, the difference is whether or not the cinema will permit even accompanied
children to see the film), the studio will re-edit the film themselves. Many distribution
companies refuse to handle "unrated" or "NC-17" films, for fear of community censure.
They will distribute these cut-down, "R" rated films, domestically, but not necessarily
internationally. In 1986, I saw a horror movie in the United Kingdom, *The Re-Animator*
(1985), which has an external film board that both classify and censor films according to
community standards. I subsequently re-viewed the film on video cassette back in North
America. The film I saw theatrically in Britain was the "unrated" version (in the UK the
film received an "18 Certificate" which requires that one must be eighteen years or older
to see it), whereas the North American video release was the "R" rated version. The
difference between the two versions is clearly noticeable with regards to the depiction of
gore (the "R - Rated" version being substantially less gory), but furthermore, the humour
in the film was based on these gory images, and therefore with the cut-back version, they
also lessened the humour of the film. This may seem like a minor point to make, but it
demonstrates that in fact these so-called "fixed" texts do exist in multiple versions.

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one of the animators later recalled, 'the tension in the studio was too much.
To relieve it, there was a spontaneous avalanche of pornographic drawings
from all over the studio. Drawings of Snow White being gang raped by the
dwarfs, and mass orgies among the dwarfs themselves. Even the old witch
was involved. Some of the drawings were about comic sexual aberrations
that Krafft-Ebing would never have dreamed of. The mania went on for
about a week, and as suddenly as it started the whole thing stopped. It
must have been a form of hysteria brought on by fatigue and the relentless
schedule. As far as I know, Walt [Disney] never heard about it (Forgacs:
371).

These kinds of "media legends," which are legends and stories *about* the media, need to

be identified in non-academic sources by folklorists, like Hollywood biographies and fan-

culture sources.

Jackson also recognized that technical sophistication was in no way "less folk"

than more traditional methods of construction.

... the complexity of an event or operation has nothing to do with the
folkloric interest: absent nostalgia and sentimentality, a trip by stagecoach
is inherently no more folksy than a trip in the Concorde, and bread
kneaded by the hand is no more folksy than bread kneaded in a Cuisinart.
The folkloric interest is determined by the relation of people to the
technology, not the presence or absence of technical sophistication
(Jackson: 388).

Robert McCarl's highly influential "The Production Welder: Product, Process and the

Industrial Craftsman" is also applicable to the film industry. McCarl proposed a "study of

product and process as a means of communication" (McCarl: 244) within the industrial

manufacturing context. We can similarly attribute the relationship between product and

process to popular filmmaking[10]. Narváez, also saw the popular culture industries as engendering their own forms of folklore (Narváez, 1992: 19).

Thirdly, there is an area which has been emerging as a major area of study for folkloristics within popular culture, the audience ethnography. Jackson noted, back in 1989, that "the folklore of audiences" was an area needing to be examined. Jackson subdivided this area into specific subjects: "the information the audience brings to the experience of a film, the social behaviors adopted while in the screening place, and the ways the contents of films enter general consciousness and style" (Jackson: 389). As far back as 1970 though, David Riesman noted: "... in America people do not attend to the media as isolated atoms, but as members of groups which select among the media and interpret their messages ... Similarly, people go to movies in groups — especially teenagers who make up such a large proportion of the audience — and formal and informal fan clubs are of course a way of organizing these groups ... People do not read in groups ..." (Riesman: 256). Although Riesman was looking at how non-literate cultures used mass media as a surrogate for oral culture, we may point to this article as the beginning of the kind of audience ethnographic studies which are becoming popular in folklore studies.

Peter Narváez noted that one of the interstices of folklore and popular culture was "the expressive use of communications media, mass produced goods, and mass-mediated

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[10] See Gitlin for an example of an ethnographic study of the mass mediated entertainment industry.

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texts in small group contexts" (Narváez, 1992: 20). Fan culture is just such a "small group context". One of the areas that fan culture emerges around is that of individual personalities. Studies, such as those by Tye, Byrne, and Ladenheim document how fans of particular musical performers organize their enthusiasm in creative ways within their fan-based contexts. For example, Diane Tye observed that:

> The significance of these artifacts might be lost on the uninitiated, but for Sean [a Beatles fan] they lessen the social distance that usually separates fan and star. The bootleg album made by somebody who actually attended a Beatles concert or rehearsal, and correspondence from a man who knew the group members personally, offers Sean a more direct experience than, for example, the photocopy of a microfilm of a newspaper clipping that is also in his collection (Tye: 44).

Elsewhere, Narváez rejected the perception of the popular culture fan as a passive "victim" of the mass-media. He commented that

> Fans engage in complex manipulations of mass mediated culture for purposes of status and communication ... There are those who display or present signs of favorite performers, and the simulated performances of those entertainers, out of emotional involvement and love, hoping to convert their peers to fandom or at least an appreciation of meaningful cultural events. In communicating and appreciating similar popular performances friendship networks and cultural scenes develop and are reinforced in multifarious domestic and public contexts (Narváez, 1987: 38).

Fan culture is also emergent around specific popular culture genres like supermarket tabloids (Bird, 1992) and romance literature (Radway), or even around specific mass-mediated texts like the television series "Star Trek" (Bacon-Smith) or movies like *Gone with the Wind* (Taylor). Elizabeth Bird summarized the interest fan culture has for

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folkloristics: "If audience members are seen as active in helping to shape the way popular

culture is created, they become much more comparable with folk 'audiences'" (Bird, 1996:

n.p.).

Working ultimately from Marshall McLuhan's understanding that television, as

medium, is "cool" (McLuhan: 36), Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers: Television Fans &*

Participatory Culture argued that television audiences must supply their own

interpretations of the content, and that these interpretative strategies are highly creative.

Beyond the highly creative and original interpretations that television audiences

experience, Jenkins noted that enclaves of fans group together, and these fan-groups

emerge as distinct cultures. "Far from syncopathic, fans actively assert their mastery over

the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural

productions and the basis for their social interactions" (Jenkins: 23-24). Jenkins laid

down a theoretical model of fan culture, which later ethnographies should follow in

interpreting fan cultures: he referred to television fans as "poachers"[11]:

> Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural
> marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack
> direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have
> only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment

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[11] Jenkins acknowledged Marcel de Certeau with the idea of "poaching": "fans become a
model of the type of textual 'poaching' de Certeau associates with popular reading. Their
activities pose important questions about the ability of media producers to constrain the
creation and circulation of meanings. Fans construct their cultural and social identity
through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often
go unvoiced within the dominant media" (Jenkins: 23).

industry's decisions. Fans must beg with the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualize our celebration of strategies of popular resistance (Jenkins: 26-27).

Further folkloristic studies need to be done on this kind of poaching; for example, the influences of fan culture in popular cinema genres like the action or horror films – film genres which have huge fan bases and often those fans become filmmakers themselves within those genres. Postmodern studies, which see *bricolage* in the creation of artistic texts, is needed to do an "archeology" of influences on these films, even to the point of identifying potential "oikotypes" in film genre history.

Audiences also follow other forms of traditional, and tradition-like, behaviours. Film lecturer Walter Evans noted

> that the adolescent who squirms and perspires his [sic.] way through a good monster movie participates in an imaginative experience in many ways incredibly close to the complicated and detailed initiatory practices of premodern peoples around the world. Indeed, the complex initiatory pattern echoed in these films lends tremendous power and significance to their otherwise largely incomprehensible grab bag of formulaic motifs (Evans: 135).

Although I take issue with Evan's assertion of verisimilitude between traditional rites of passage and the images in monster movies, I do agree that horror movies *function* as initiation rites within our post-industrialist culture. We can see the action of going to a "scary movie" as ritualistic, calendrically (at Halloween) or as a rite of passage. This area,

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the social dynamics of specific film genre attendance, needs to be explored more.

James McClenon and Emily Edwards recently offered another interesting use of film texts within a folklore context. Within the rubric of belief studies, the authors were trying to assess the belief tradition of incubus and succubus attacks. They argued that given the vast number of incubus-themed movies, and noting those movies' demographics, then incubus-related memorates should be available from those groups who go to the movies. They were not; thereby disproving the idea that exposure to incubus films sparked incubus attacks. What few incubus narratives were collected fell outside of the films' demographics: those people who claim incubus experiences did not watch incubus movies. Movies, in this instance, are expressions of cultural beliefs which experience has informed, and not the other way round. What is fascinating about their findings was their unproblematic use of film to discuss culture. For McClenon and Edwards, film is the dominant medium for cultural transmission in contemporary Western culture (i.e. where most people get their ideas from). But by studying the belief traditions as expressed in contemporary cinema, and their discovery that the mass media do not inform belief traditions, so much as they artistically communicate the belief traditions *via* the mass media, that is, *transmitted* through media like cinema, demonstrates that feature films can therefore be used also as a means of accessing cultural worldviews.

To summarize, folklore studies have examined, or at least recognized the importance of examining, popular film from a number of perspectives. At one level folklorists are able to observe and trace the process of homogenizing cultural expressions

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through the mass media. On the other hand, a great deal of folklore scholarship has explored those traditional narrative types and motifs when they appear in popular film and television. Yet, still other folklorists have noted further areas for fruitful exploration of popular cultural texts: areas like how popular culture texts reflect contemporary belief traditions, ethnographies of fan culture, the rituals involved with popular cultural consumption, narratives about technology and technological industries, and the existence of multiple versions of seemingly fixed texts. All of these areas of scholarship are open to further folkloristic exploration, but still other areas need to be explored; in particular, the relationship between ethnicity and cinema.

FILM STUDIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF ETHNICITY AND CINEMA

Before folklore studies fully embraces popular film and television, it must recognize that it is encroaching on an already established academic discipline, film studies. Folkloristics can learn some things about the operation of popular cultural texts within vernacular contexts by listening to some of the arguments film scholars have made, specifically with regard to the topic of ethnicity in cinema.

Film Studies' approaches to the subject of ethnicity and film focuses its attention on an individual audience member, frequently an ideal type of spectator, and is concerned with his/her individualized *reading* of the cinematic text (cf. those studies contained in Friedman, 1991). Folklore studies on the other hand, by trying to engage with a *living* audience, a group of real human beings who shared the experience of a cinematic text,

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must try to understand the groupness of that cinematic experience.

Lester Friedman noted that ethnic identity, or gendered, racial, sexually oriented, or the national identity of the filmmaker would, in part, determine the cultural text in question.

> Although I would not contend that the ethnic component of an artist's identity represents the only determining factor in his or her work, I would argue that such elements have been insufficiently acknowledged and understood by film scholars, historians, and critics. ... As a female director does not stop being a woman even when her film is not about overtly feminist issues, so one's ethnic identity and sensibility do not disappear when he or she makes a film about non-ethnic issues (Friedman, 1991: 31).

Scholars like Friedman recognized the need to approach popular cinema by understanding the cultural aspects which created the filmmaker. By a process of textual analysis, the scholar would deconstruct the images of a film (or any cultural text) and then discuss them in terms of the filmmaker's own ethnic background[12]. Within the following case study on Jewish cinema, this was the assumption I went in with: that any Jewish filmmaker would make a "Jewish" movie. It was the job of the cultural scholar to deconstruct the texts in order to find the "Jewishness" of any film made by a Jewish filmmaker. This is a position which film scholars, like Friedman, would support, but which ultimately proved untenable.

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[12] Such an approach is problematic in that it privileges the film's director as "author" of the film, and ignores the contribution of producers, actors and writers — in film studies this is known as "the *auteur* theory."

One of the common sites which folklore and film studies share is with regard to phenomenology: in particular how popular film reflects the experience of, in this case, ethnicity. In the ethnographic film, for example, the issues surrounding "truth" were highly problematic — films, even ethnographic films, are beginning to be recognized as culturally constructed texts. Robert Stam noted that the same issues surrounding "truth" are equally applicable to the fiction film. "Although it is true that complete realism is an impossibility, it is also true that spectators themselves come equipped with a 'sense of the real' rooted in their own social experience, on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representations" (Stam: 254). Lester Friedman also agreed: "what the individual spectator brings to the movie theater will greatly influence how he or she reads and interprets what is projected onto the screen" (Friedman, 1991: 28). What we see in both Stam and Friedman's sense of the experiential aspect of cinematic meaning is individualistic: that the individual spectator, although particularized, is the locus for meaning, however idiosyncratic. Phenomenology, and in hermeneutic studies, reader-response theory, begins to present a real audience member in that amorphous category, "the spectator," and that recognition of the audience member's own experiences in interpretation demands a recognition of difference (ethnic, gendered, racial, sexually oriented, or national).

The movement between individualized experience and group/cultural experience is ultimately the gap in approaches which needs to be bridged. When we conceive the ethnic group as a "subculture" within the hegemonic purview of a dominant culture, the

cultural behaviour of that group, as well as its cultural texts, becomes central.

> Looking at the ethnic composition of a viewing group and its reception of a given text, then, can be examined as an aspect of the ethnic subculture. This approach foregrounds the complexity of the interaction between text and culture. No film exists in a vacuum and, for any understanding of a text to take place, a definite audience — gendered and ethnically, racially specific — must be taken into account (Marchetti: 284).

Marchetti's is the only voice within film studies I have found which recognizes the "groupness" of ethnic film-going audiences. More studies need to be done on exploring what it is about a specific film, series of films, or genres which appeals to particular groups beyond the idiosyncratic tastes of an individual.

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SEEING

Perhaps, the methodology which I propose here is one way of developing our understanding of the interrelationships between "text and culture," particularly when those texts are cinematic, and that culture is ethnically bounded. I propose, by this methodology of an "ethnography of seeing," a marriage between the two disciplinary approaches: film studies' textual and folklore studies' ethnographic approaches. At its most basic level, an "ethnography of seeing" asks how a textual analysis of popular film can be approached as ethnographically informed.

In each of the following chapters I explore the variety of aspects which make up an ethnographic approach to popular cinema. Although the research I undertook was with attempting to identify and define "Jewish" cinema, I believe that we can apply the

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methodology itself to any defined group. The replacement of "Jewish" with any other group would reveal similar results at cultural definition; obviously the particulars (the experiences, genres, motifs and codes) would also be different, but the methodology for ascertaining them remains the same.

I intentionally hold off on allowing my informants to begin to characterize "Jewish cinema", until Chapters Three and Four, so that the production and distribution networks of these popular culture texts can be examined. First, the cultural scholar must find a culturally significant context. In "'You Don't Have to Be Filmish': The Toronto Jewish Film Festival," I discuss the Toronto Jewish Film Festival as a context wherein Toronto Jews gather to watch films *a priori* identified and labeled as "Jewish" in a Jewish context. As Clifford Geerz noted, "anthropologists don't study villages ... they study *in* villages" (Geertz: 22); I do not examine the festival itself as a phenomenon. but instead use the festival as a starting point from which to begin this investigation of what is meant by "Jewish" cinema. The festival was also a context wherein I made contact with a number of cultural practitioners (cultural producers and consumers) who were then able to inform me of the esoteric understanding of these particular voices in ethnic cinema.

Furthermore. both film festivals and ethnic cinemas are counter-hegemonic; that is they are in opposition to the mainstream. Hollywood film industry which is the movie-going norm in North America. Access to these texts. either finding an appropriate film festival, or searching out specialized video shops or libraries. requires some degree of effort on the part of the movie-goer. Understanding the cultural context of presentation of

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these films is important to understand what is different, or at least culturally significant, in these films.

Coming to folklore studies with a film studies background, I had some preconceived notions about what makes a film "Jewish." My informants at the festival quickly squashed these notions as inaccurate and "exoteric" – they pointed out that I could interpret the material any way I wanted, but if I wished to come to a *Jewish* understanding of these films, than I'd have to change my approach. Chapters Three and Four work together, in Janice Radway's words, to schematically represent the cultural geography of this kind of popular film as it is articulated by my informants themselves (Radway: 13). "'Theory Happens': Vernacular Theory and the Movies Themselves," examines the processes by which cultural practitioners categorize cultural texts in culturally meaningful ways. Drawing upon Thomas McLaughlin's use of "vernacular theory," which revisits many of the arguments from ethnoscience and ethnomethodology, a vernacular taxonomy emerges by which the cultural practitioners themselves understand and categorize Jewish cinema, and by extension, the cultural narratives themselves.

In "'Smelling Right': Reader Participation and the Creation of Texts," I discuss the phenomenological and reader-response theories of meaning creation. Using comments from my festival informants, I note how essential a reflection of group experiences of that community is for ethnic cinema.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven begin to move away from what my informants say about these films, to a more textual approach — examining the films my informants

actually cited to me as culturally significant in one way or another. In "*Yiddishkeyt* and

Mentschlekhkeyt: The Yiddish Language Cinema," I undertake both a phenomenological

and text-based approach to a specific body of "Jewish" identified cinematic texts. the

Yiddish-language cinema. By noting that these particular films are exclusive to Jewish

culture, I bracket off the narrative motifs which occur in these films. Many of the

informants I spoke with during the Jewish film festival noted the importance of "Jewish

content." This analysis is an attempt to ascertain exactly what that "content" consists of.

In "Encode This: Coding as Esoteric Communication in Jewish Cinema," I take a

slightly different approach. The underlying premise here is that an esoteric understanding

of ethnic cinema is potentially different to an exoteric understanding of those same

cinematic texts. This difference between insiders' and outsiders' understandings is a

direct result of the codes working with the films. codes which ultimately exclude non-

members from penetrating.

And. in "An Ethnography of Seeing." I draw these threads together. Although the

case study I use to develop this methodology is on Jewish cinema. the replacement of

"Jewish" with any other ethnic signifier would reveal different particulars. obviously. but

the methodology remains the same: by beginning with an *a priori* cultural context,

understanding the vernacular taxonomies by which cultural practitioners categorize their

cinematic texts. the relationship between their films and the experience of being from that

culture, the narrative motifs the culture recognizes. and the encoding which occurs within

their films, any culture's films can be examined.

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Finally, in my conclusion, I restate the connection between popular cinema and folklore, but this time by way of cultural identity. If cultural identity, as diverse scholars such as Lauri Honko, Alan Dundes and Elliott Oring have noted, is the basis of folklore scholarship, and films emerge from particular cultures, then they should also reflect that identity. If so, then popular cinema has for too long been neglected by folklorists[13].

The primary difference between film studies and folklore studies is that the former privileges the cultural producer while the latter privileges the cultural consumer. However, what this current study seeks to demonstrate is that the relationship between cultural producer and consumer is much more symbiotic. As a folkloristic study this work begins with the cultural consumer: by understanding the group the resulting textual analysis' aim is to understand a film text from an insider's view (obviously this is an

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[13] In many respects this research is similar to the work of Jo Ann Koltyk among the Hmong, but with certain differences. Koltyk's work involves examining Hmong produced home videos with particular attention to how the Hmong construct images to esoterically present themselves to one another. Likewise, my own project among the Jews of Toronto was to explore their esoterically produced cinematic images. Unlike the research on the Hmong, North American Jews are a much more diverse people, and therefore this study lacks the homogeneity of Koltyk's study. A further difference is that the Hmong Koltyk was working with were recent immigrants to the United States, and the Jews of Toronto have lived in North America for most of this century. Many of my informants are third and fourth generation Canadian, and therefore their relationship to a "homeland" is very different. Furthermore, the cinematic texts Koltyk was working with, primarily home video "movies" of family *rites de passage* and amateur travelogs in South East Asia, are very different texts to those popular cinematic texts I am dealing with here. Had I been working with the home movies my informants created for intra-family use, my methodology would be very different, and yet those aesthetics would not necessarily be replicated in their popular cinema. When Koltyk does deal with Hmong popular cinema, her few paragraphs note the narrative types and motifs from Hmong folklore (Koltyk: 444-445).

impossibility, but it is the aim we strive to). But conversely, when cultural producers (in this case, filmmakers) are enculturated within a specific culture they are already in a privileged position as insiders to that group and therefore the group's own cultural reading strategies are expressed in that filmmaker's work.

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CHAPTER TWO
"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FILMISH": THE TORONTO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL[1]

> "... a friend forced me to come ... we like this friend..."
> -comment on survey form as to why they come to the Toronto Jewish Film Festival

In this chapter I shall be discussing the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, a one-week

celebration of Judaism and Cinema that occurs in downtown Toronto, at the Bloor

Cinema, early every May. I was fortunate enough to act as "festival ethnographer" during

the 1997 Festival, which enabled me to be a participant observer as survey coordinator;

data generated by this survey both helped the Festival organizers maintain and improve

their services, and generated data for this present research[2]. Throughout the sections of

this chapter, I shall be discussing the contextual aspects of my research. To begin with, I

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[1] "You Don't Have to be Filmish" was the Toronto Jewish Film Festival's 1997 advertising slogan. The slogan itself is a parody of the cliche "you don't have to be Jewish", which Neil Rosenberg noted was first used as an advertising slogan for Flieshman's bread in the 1970s (Rosenberg, personal communication). Sections of this chapter were presented at the annual meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada, Ottawa, May 27, 1998.

[2] I had heard about the Toronto Jewish Film Festival since 1993 when it first started. At the time I was living in the United Kingdom and was unable to attend this festival. I was able to contact Helen Zukerman, executive director of the festival, in 1996, as I was beginning this research. I explained to her my interest in the festival as a context to begin my research and she agreed to allow me to observe the 1997 festival. I offered to assist her and the festival any way I could. Zukerman put me into contact with Debra Kwinter, the director of marketing, and we agreed that my contribution to the festival would be as the coordinator of that year's audience survey.

shall outline the community I was working from, the Toronto Jewish community. Then, I address the Toronto Jewish Film Festival as a context within which to initiate contact with members of the Toronto Jewish communities. I discuss the Festival in terms of who attends; in asking the question of who are the participants who celebrate this combination of Judaism and Cinema, the cultural context emerges from this situational context.

The cultural context becomes further significant when I begin to discuss the ways in which the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is a "proper" festival, as ethnographers understand the term. This was one of my immediate questions entering the field situation: was this film festival a "festival" where active participation among the attendees is as much a part of the event as the films shown, or was this a festival "in name only," a "showcase," where the audience's participation was irrelevant, except as passive consumers. By understanding what the Toronto Jewish Film Festival celebrates, an understanding of the Jewish culture doing the celebrating emerges.

Finally, I draw some argument about how film festivals in general, and the Toronto Jewish Film Festival in particular, celebrate themselves and their community. Meaning in festive behaviour is as emergent within a film festival as it is within any other "traditional" or "folkloric" celebration. That film is but the medium of communication, instead of music, dance, food, or prayer, becomes apparent.

THE JEWS OF TORONTO

The Toronto Jewish community I come from, and the one which I have the greater

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understanding of, is the *Ashkenazi*, or German and East European Jews. For most of this current research, I am focusing on this particular group. But that does not imply that there are not other distinct cultures within Judaism. The *Sephardim*, for example, refers to the Spanish Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, some of whom emigrated north into Holland, but most of whom went south into North Africa. Also there exists the culture of the "Oriental Jews", the Jewish cultures which have persisted in the Middle East since the Jews were expelled from Judea in 77 A.D. by the Romans. These Jews survived in pockets throughout the region, often living harmoniously with their Arab neighbors (Telushkin, 1991: 206-208).

The history of Toronto's Jewish communities is a long one. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted in her own doctoral thesis on the same ethnographic community, "the oldest Jewish community in the New World was formed in New York before 1700. An organized Canadian Jewish community appeared in Montreal as early as 1838 and in Toronto by 1847, although there were Jews living in Canada as early as 1752" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 29; cf. Speisman: *passim*). Most of the city's Jewish populations are Eastern European, Ashkenazi, Jews from Germany, Poland and Russia. The peak period of East European Jewish immigration was the period from the end of the nineteenth century until just before the Second World War, when Canada closed its doors on European Jewry (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 225; and cf. Abella and Troper: *passim*).

The settlement patterns of Ashkenazi Jewry in Canada in many respects parallel the Jewish immigration into the United States, where entire families, facing persecution

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in Europe would come to a major urban centre where a relative (uncle, cousin, or brother)
had settled previously (cf. Howe: *passim*).

> The Toronto Jewish community exhibits most of the patterns that
> characterize the Canadian Jewish community .... Previous to 1880, few
> Jews lived in Toronto and only in the 1850's was the first synagogue
> formed. Consistent with the history of Jewish immigration to North
> America generally, some of the earliest Jews to live in Toronto were
> English Jews, such as Lewis Samuel, and German Jews, such as Solomon
> Cohen and his family in the 1830's and Abraham and Samuel Nordheimer,
> who moved to Toronto in 1844. The 1880's witnessed the establishment
> in Toronto of the first permanent congregations of East European Jews.
> After the turn of the century, floods of East European refugees arrived in
> Toronto as a result of the Russo-Japanese War and Russian Revolution,
> both of 1904 (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 40).

Most Jews settled in areas which already had a substantial Jewish population, which

assured access to religious amenities (synagogues, shops which sold religious

paraphernalia), kosher butchers, and Jewish schools, but most importantly, these

neighborhoods assured a kind of solidarity and communitas. The distinction between

"community" and the term I use here, "communitas" is the difference between an etically

determined and bounded geographical area (a community or neighbourhood) and the

feeling of belonging within a specific group (communitas). This feeling of communitas

was essential for a group that had been persecuted in Europe for so long. In Toronto, the

primary area of settlement was in the Montrose and College area, and down Spadina

Avenue in the region of Kensington Market, a few blocks away from where the Bloor

Cinema, the location of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, is today.

> Many of the Toronto [Jewish communities] learned English, established
> themselves in their own businesses, improved their financial state, bought

their own home, moved from the old immigrant neighborhood in downtown Toronto to the new Jewish suburbs in the northern part of the city, sent their children to the university to become doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, and accountants, and sense with each advance they made just what a long way they had come form the *shtetl* in Poland to the suburb of Toronto (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 288).

THE TORONTO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

Festivals have been the focus of study for a number of disciplines including Folklore, Anthropology and even Literature. Roger Abrahams, for example, charted the conceptual development of festivals from basic recurrent patterns of human behaviour, through its increasing intensity and significance for a group, into "experiences for which people prepare and anticipate in common how they will act and feel," what he calls "celebrations" (Abrahams, 1987: 176-177). Abrahams continued, stating that when these "celebrations" are incorporated into a yearly calendar, and are anticipated by the community who celebrate them, two possible results emerge. If the celebrations reflect the natural world and the community's role within, then the celebration is a "rite." If the celebration seeks to explore the reversal, rather than celebrate how the world is put together, celebrate the disruption of the world, then we are in "festival" (Abrahams, 1987: 177).

> Festivals ... operate during those very times when the life of the group seems most stable, in the 'flat' times of the year; festivals manufacture their own energies by upsetting things, creating a disturbance 'for the fun of it'. While ritual underscores the harmonies and continuities in the expressive resources of a cultures, emphasizing the wholeness of the world's fabric,

festivals work (at least at their inception) by apparently tearing the fabric of pieces, by displaying it upside down, inside-out, wearing it as motley rags and tatters (Abrahams, 1987: 178).

Alessandro Falassi's definition of "festival" is also useful to understand the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, in particular, and the relationship between cinema and community – in this case. the Toronto Jewish communities. Falassi defined "festival" as "a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate [sic.] directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview" (Falassi: 2). It is this definition of "festival" and much similar literature which I wish to engage with in greater detail.

Helen Zukerman. the co-founder and executive director of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, sat down with me during one of the matinees at a cafe across the street from the festival venue. My first question to her was to outline the history of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. With that simple question. I sat silently for about twenty minutes while Zukerman related the story to me. I was able to interject a comment only once during her entire narrative. All I asked was when the Festival started. and Zukerman began:

> '93 was the first year. 1993. It was seed funded by the charitable
> foundation that I run. Family charitable foundation. And Debra Plotkin
> was the first artistic director. She was moving to Toronto — What
> happened was – we funded a piece of a film that Francine Zukerman made
> — no relation to me — called *Half the Kingdom*. *Half the Kingdom* went
> to play in San Francisco to close one of their festivals [San Francisco

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Jewish Film Festival]. In 1992, obviously. And I went out just to see
what the festival was like and have a look around, and thought this was
really great. So why don't we have a festival? John Katz was there,
because he's a – he teaches film [at York University] and he has a lot of
friends there. So, he then told me there was an organization starting up a
film festival here. They'd tried twice before, and they were in the process.
So I said 'great. Listen, when I come back to Toronto, we'll get to together
and talk about it.' So I came back to Toronto, talked to him, and I got a
sense of the politics of what was going on, 'cause it was emanating from
the JCC [Jewish Community Centre]. When it emanates from a JCC there
are politics involved insofar as selection — you know— I don't even
know who the players were. But all I know is that John and I sat and
talked and he told me what was going on, who was what doing what, and
who was — And I said, 'look. I don't have time for this kind of stuff. If
you ever get it together, give me a call because we'd really like to be
involved in this.' Next thing I hear, nothing's happening. Nothing's
happening here. I still wanted to do a festival. Francine Zukerman got
involved with Debra Plotkin, personally, and Debra was moving to
Toronto. So I thought, 'oh, this is interesting.' 'Cause her sister, *Janis*, is
the director of the San Francisco film festival. And her sister and Deborah
Kaufman started *that* film festival which is now 14 years old. It was the
first one. So I — we talked to Debra Plotkin about becoming the director.
And she said, 'great'. So she moved here and that's what happened
(Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

Emerging from this excerpt are a number of key points which highlight the experience of

trying to create cultural events within the Jewish communities of Toronto. The

relationships between independent filmmakers, foundations, universities, and other

cultural agencies converge. But more importantly, it is the personal relationships between

individuals working within those organizations which create new cultural expressions,

and opportunities for cultural growth. Helen Zukerman had the financial means to get

involved and help set up the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. When Francine Zukerman

brought Debra Plotkin to Toronto for personal reasons, the former's previous relationship

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with Helen Zukerman, as producer of her film, allowed Helen to make further contact

with Janis Plotkin. This enabled Helen to pick up the ball, as it were, and run with it,

with her own team.

Zukerman continues the story:

So we had — we rented this theatre, and Debra and I go out to have a
couple of real stiff drinks because we had rented a 950-seat venue, and
don't know what the hell we're doing. Because we wanted this area of
town. We wanted — and she said, rightfully so, that you put in as much
effort in a four hundred seat venue or a two hundred seat venue than you
do in a six hundred seat venue. And there are not very many theatres that
are freestanding — like this is — and in this area, which we really like. So
we were really limited where we could go, down here. So anyway we took
it and we went out and had a few drinks and we said, 'you know what?
We'll close the balconies.' So — we'll have five hundred people down
there (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

At this point in the story. Zukerman broke off from her chronological narration to note

the context of other Toronto film festivals. Earlier that year. 1993, the Art Gallery of

Ontario had programmed a series of Brandeis University's collection of Yiddish language

films. and that proved to be quite successful. But no annual festival of Jewish film had

materialized. The success of the AGO series could be explained as a novelty, but whether

or not people would come to a Jewish film festival was another thing. Zukerman did not

know whether or not people would come to her festival.

I remember when the international festival started [the Toronto
International Film Festival]. like I can't even remember how many years
ago, I was walking on Bloor and Yonge one day and they were pulling
people into the theatres. because nobody was going to the movies. Helga
Stephenson [executive director of the Toronto International Film Festival]
— she said 'you know. the first few years of the festival, we were pulling

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people in off of the streets. We were *giving* away tickets'. I remember
some guy coming over to me and saying 'here's a ticket. There's a movie
over there'. I said, 'get outta here. I've got other things to do. I'm busy'
(Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

Worried that the Toronto Jewish Film Festival would suffer similar growing pains to the

Toronto International Film Festival (now the largest film festival in North America),

Zukerman and Plotkin went to a near by bar to wait and see if anyone would come.

So anyway, Debra and I go out and we're hysterical. We're drinking and
we're hysterical. 'Cause we don't know what we're going to do. And we
have the theatre. And we started working and we worked like *dogs*. I
have to tell you, we had three months to put this together. But the one
thing that I wanted to do was I wanted to fund it as much as I could,
because I wanted — . I felt, that if you do a half-assed job the first time,
you can't recoup the next time. We either come out big or you don't come
. . . And I must say we worked so hard and it came out and there were a
couple of things lucky that happened and people came and it became clear
to us — like we would pull up here like two hours before show time and
there would be a line-up. And we'd get hysterical. We couldn't believe it.
So we would say, 'how long do you think ahead of time we have to come
not to have a line up?' and I don't think it ever happened. That there was
no line up. And then — so that came to an end. We were thrilled to
pieces (Zukerman. personal interview. 7 May. 1997. 9713).

The first Toronto Jewish Film Festival was in May 1993 and lasted five days. It

was a huge success. and, as I show below. a good quarter of the surveyed 1997 audience

had been attending from the beginning. Zukerman continues the story:

So then we put that to sleep and we thought 'ok. What are we going to do
next year?' — So Debra and I sat and I said to my lawyer, I said, 'what if
they don't come next year? Maybe it was a fluke. They came the first year.
They said they liked it. But you know people — 'we must get together
sometime' — . And the next year everybody came again and it was *bigger*.
And we made it a week. And then we hired Debra Kwinter last year, for

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the fourth year[3]. The third year — first two years I think our foundation was going to subsidize any loss, and then even the third year my lawyers said, 'look. Technically, if you were to do 52% of the funding they wouldn't kill you this year. Because it's a new thing.' So that's what happened. And now, I think we provide maybe 25% of the funds. That's all. Well, depending what final numbers are. And then it started really growing (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

To be sure, the success of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is quite amazing. But the

enthusiasm needs to be tempered with some reality, and the festival organizers will not

rest on their laurels.

> And it just keeps growing and growing. Last year, it really exploded from the third year till last year. Box office really exploded. This year, I think we're ahead a little bit. I see this year, Kwinter's not going to like it, but I see this year — 'cause I think she wanted it to explode the way it had last year, from the third to the fourth. I don't think that's possible every year. I think we've put more roots out, because what we've done is this way, matinees — *more* matinees, a serial, so we've changed a lot of things that people really like. So that's the history of the festival (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

MIKEL KOVEN - SURVEY GUY

I was in a position to be a participant observer for the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film

Festival. Through my conversations with Debra Kwinter, now director of marketing, we

devised a survey which would meet both our respective, marketing and scholarly, ends.

Kwinter wanted to make sure they had enough information to assess their advertising and

marketing performance, while I wanted ethnographic data on Jewish film going practices.

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[3] Debra Plotkin left the Toronto Jewish Film Festival at the end of the 1996 year.

As it turned out, our respective needs did not conflict, and actually complemented one another.

By including the data that they needed to accrue within the same survey that I was compiling, the Festival organizers would put this single survey on their letterhead, and be responsible for adequate duplication and distribution. My job within the Festival was to collect and collate this data. In exchange, I received a pass to the Festival of the type reserved for staff members: a business card sized name plate on bright goldenrod paper, with the Festival logo, and a job description which became a running joke the rest of the Festival: my pass read "Mikel Koven - Survey Guy".[4]

Each year the Toronto Jewish Film Festival requests that audience members complete a survey. The information collected from these surveys enables the festival better to direct their marketing in the upcoming years. In addition to information collection, we requested audience members to fill in their names, addresses, and phone numbers for the Festival's database. Each year they award one lucky audience member two VIP passes to the following year's Festival, and that recipient is chosen from these surveys. The 1996 survey had 259 completed forms, while my 1997 survey resulted in 540 completed forms.

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[4] Kwinter noted to me as she was making these passes in her office the first day of the Festival, that after meeting me the one time, the previous day, she felt that I had the personality which would accept the flippant tone of the job description. She also noted that "Festival Ethnographer", which we had also bandied around as a job description, was likely to cause me to answer more questions then I could ask. Hers was a good call.

The 1997 survey included a forward written by me and explained my interest in the responses.

> If this year's survey seems longer than last year, it is because we are working with Mikel Koven, a Ph.D. student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, studying Jewish cinema. Some of the questions will be used for his thesis data. We thank you in advance for taking the time to help us serve and understand you better. Please fill in the appropriate responses:

Festival volunteers distributed the surveys to audience members as they entered the cinema, and there were two large boxes in the foyer, clearly marked, for the audience members to put their completed surveys.

I shall now go through the survey itself, documenting the results generated. and hypothesizing what these results may mean, thereby constructing some sense of the informant base I was working with. and a profile of the participating members of the community itself.

The first question I asked was whether or not this was the first time the audience member had attended the Festival. The results were not terribly surprising:

Is this the first time you've come to the festival?		
No	361	**67%**
Yes	179	**33%**

Figure 2.1: TJFF Survey - "Is this the first time you've come to the festival?"

67% of the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival audience was returning for another year.

33% of the questionnaire respondents were new Festival goers.

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The next question I asked was specific to returning audience members. I asked

how many years had they been attending. Although the first Toronto Jewish Film

Festival was held in 1993 (and therefore the maximum number of years an individual

could attend was four), 15% of those who completed the surveys identified that they had

been attending for five years or more. At least one respondent identified that they had

been coming for ten years! As Helen Zukerman joked to me, "yeah, those first five years

were *really* boring." Zukerman further hypothesized that the respondent was probably

confusing the Toronto Jewish Film *Festival* with the Toronto Jewish Film *Society*, an

organization which has been in operation for almost twenty years.

(If not) How many years have you been coming?		
>5	10	**2%**
5	72	**13%**
4	64	**12%**
3	103	**19%**
2	92	**17%**
1	17	**3%**

Figure 2.2: TJFF Survey - "How many years have you been coming?"

These statistics coincide with what Zukerman herself identifies as the period of growth

the festival experienced. I found that Festival audiences create annual patterns of

attendance; that the Toronto Jewish Film Festival draws in many of the same people year

after year. Furthermore, this attendance behaviour begins to point to the Festival

becoming a traditional event on the calendar for Toronto Jewry.

I also asked whether or not the respondents bought individual tickets to specific

movies or the "festival pass" which would get holders into any number of films during

the Festival. For the Festival organizers themselves, they intended the information to

reflect their own box office statistics.

Do you have a festival pass, or do you buy your tickets individually?		
Festival Pass 140	26%
Individual Tickets 388	72%

Figure 2.3: TJFF Survey - "Do you have a festival pass, or do you buy your tickets individually?"

I intended this question to demonstrate the dedication of Festival goers to the event itself.

This question was to separate individual movie goers from Festival participants. To me,

purchasing a "festival pass" is indicative of a total commitment to the event, as opposed

to the purchase of individual movie tickets which points toward more of an interest in a

specific movie[5]. For those Festival attendees whose main focus are the films themselves,

rather than immersion within a cultural event, the cultural aesthetic in operation is based

on the desire to see movies that they may never have the opportunity to see again[6].

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[5] As Bakhtin noted, full participation is required for the "festive" experience. "Carnival [which here is used synonymously with festival] is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival, and renewal, in which all take part" (Bakhtin: 7).

[6] In my own participation with the Toronto International Film Festival as an attendee, I came across a number of avid Festival goers whose choice in movies was based exclusively on the chances of the film not being theatrically released. Certain movies would be actively avoided if there was a possibility of the film being commercially

Several survey comments said this, but one will suffice as an example: "many of these films will never be shown commercially so its the only opportunity to see them" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). Beverly Stoeltje notes that "if those in attendance are primarily observers or consumers rather than participants, the event is not based in the social life of the community" (Stoeltje, 1992: 266). Yet, participation for some, if not all, still makes for a festival. For those who wish the total immersion within the Festival experience, an alternative to Stoeltje's "consumerist" festival emerges:

> [I] look forward every year to being able to focus my attention in a short time span on an array of the themes pertinent to being Jewish – the diversity of the Festival's inclusions each year is important. There is little reflection — despite our 'ownership' of Hollywood — of non-stereotypical Judaism and Jewishness otherwise available in mainstream, Christian-oriented films/movies. It's a great vehicle for many younger people to explore Jewish issues in a setting they might find very comfortable (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival).

I also wanted to identify festival going habits. I asked with how many people did the respondent come to the Festival.

How many people did you come down here with?		
self	56	10%
one other	274	50%
group <5	129	24%
group >5	27	5%

Figure 2.4: TJFF Survey - "How many people did you come down here with?"

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available. This seems to be part of the *film* festival experience.

Half the respondents identified that they came down with one other person which points toward, although certainly does not prove, incidental movie going behaviour. This is in contrast to the 5% who identified attending in larger sized groups, which requires a larger degree of organization; a greater amount of effort in order to attend, turning the relatively mundane activity of going to a movie into an event.

Barbara Myerhoff noted that "cognitive dissonance theory is clearly pertinent, stating as it does that the degree to which individuals have suffered for an experience is directly related to the value they place on that experience ... the higher the price paid, the more likely are subjects to insist that it was worth while" (Myerhoff: 121). Therefore, as Festival participation is concerned, the greater effort placed on attendance, for example the organization of a larger sized group, the greater the importance of the event itself for those who attend. Conversely, for those who put little effort into attending, for those who essentially "show up," they may diminish the experience.

I also wanted to discover the attendees' categorization of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival within the contexts of film and Jewish culture in the city. On the 1996 survey, they asked whether or not audience members attended other Jewish events in Toronto. I noted to Kwinter that although one would expect to draw audiences from Jewish contexts to this Festival, they were also drawing from film contexts. I therefore made a distinction between two questions: I asked whether or not attendees went to other film festivals in Toronto (Figure 2.5) and asked whether or not attendees went to other ethnic (i.e., Jewish) festivals in Toronto (Figure 2.6).

Do you go to any of the other film festivals in Toronto?					
No	276	**51%**			
Yes	251	**47%**			
Toronto Int'l Film Festival	178	**33%**	Jewish Film Society	4
Inside/Out	14		Hot Docs	3
Cinematheque	8		Yiddish	3
Short Film Festival	5		Animation Festival	2
			Israeli	1
			Women's Film Festival	1

Figure 2.5: TJFF Survey - "Do you go to any of the other film festivals in Toronto?"

As far as the film contexts go, those who attend other film festivals and those who do not are about 50/50 (although 33% of all completed surveys noted that they do, at least occasionally, attend the Toronto International Film Festival in September). A few respondents identified the breadth, beyond the Toronto International Film Festival, of Toronto film culture's festive contexts: they identified attending the Cinematheque, the Inside/Out festival [an annual Toronto gay and lesbian film festival], the Short Film Festival, "Hot Docs" (a documentary film festival), the Animation festival, and the annual Women's Film Festival.

The ethnic festival question revealed different results:

Do you go to any of the other ethnic (i.e., Jewish) festivals in Toronto?				
No	136	**25%**		
Yes	389	**72%**		
	Music Events	70	Caravan	7
	Lectures	68	Jewish Film Society	8
	Theatre	42	Kolel	8
	Ashkenaz	38	UJA	6
	Temple/Syn	32	Caribana	4
	Jewish Book Fair	27	Feminist Events	4
	Holocaust Memorials	26	Harbourfront	4
	Misc. Jewish Events	25	UJA Walkathon	5
	Friends of Yiddish	17	Jewish Genealogical	3
	JCC	13	Peace Now	3
	Misc. Ethnic Events	11	Yiddishland Café	3
			B'nai Brith	2

Figure 2.6: TJFF Survey - "Do you go to any of the other ethnic (i.e. Jewish) festivals in Toronto?"

Almost a full three quarters of respondents said that they attended other ethnic festivals in Toronto, and most of those identified were Jewish contexts. We can put forward then as a general hypothesis that those who attend the Toronto Jewish Film Festival see its place within the context of other *Jewish* events, rather than film culture events.

There is a site of intersection between these two cultural contexts, the Jewish and the cinematic: the film festival. Bill Nichols noted that

> the festival circuit allows the local to circulate globally, within a specific
> system of institutional assumptions, priorities, and constraints. Never only
> or purely local, festival films nonetheless circulate, in large part, with a
> cachet of locally inscribed difference and globally ascribed commonality.
> They both attest to the uniqueness of different cultures and specific
> filmmakers and affirm the underlying qualities of an 'international cinema'
> (Nichols, 1994: 68)

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Although Nichols' assumption which sees a homogenizing effect of erasing difference in the consumption of cinema from around the world, is perhaps true in the context Nichols worked in, The Toronto International Film Festival, but in smaller, ethnically bounded festivals, like the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, differences *are* celebrated, as I note below. However, for many of my festival informants, this global circulation within a local space is a major motivation for film festival attendance.

The survey was also required for the Festival's future marketing plans: it asked where the attendees heard about the Festival, but these survey results also begin to point toward an understanding of the social networking that occurs within the Toronto Jewish and Arts communities. We gave a number of choices on the survey itself. as well as a blank space marked "other." for miscellaneous sources.

How did you hear about this festival?					
Mailing	213	39%	Poster	29	6%
Word of Mouth	121	22%	Globe & Mail	28	5%
CJN	115	21%	Jewish Tribune	15	3%
Toronto Star	56	10%	Radio	15	3%
Now	56	10%	eye	13	2%
Brochure	46	9%	CFMT (TV)	1	0.1%
Festival Mag.	37	7%	Cinematheque	1	0.1%
			UJA	1	0.1%

Figure 2.7: TJFF Survey - "How did you hear about this festival?"

By far the most efficient means of communicating information about the Festival to potential Festival goers is through direct mailing. This method of information

distribution is also the most expensive and is therefore used to maintain connections with already existing Festival attendees, and not to cultivate new audiences. Yet, the Festival in 1997 attracted a third of its total audience through other means.

The next two major sources cited for information distribution are significant: those who heard about the Festival through word of mouth, and those who heard about the Festival through the *Canadian Jewish News*, a community newspaper that serves the Jewish community in Toronto and Montreal. What these sources of information begin to point toward is the network of social relationships within the Jewish community. Not all Toronto Jews read the *CJN* — in fact, it is a rather conservative publication that caters to senior citizens, offering them package deals to Israel, among other things. Likewise, we would not expect many of the more secularly oriented, or non-synagogue attending Jews, by virtue of their absence from organized Jewish life, to be within the social network of Jewish cultural event calendars. This small percentage of attendees receive information about the Festival from alternative media.

I think we can begin to divide the remaining sources of information into their respective cultural addresses. Such a distinction is artificial: it assumes that there is no crossover readership. However, by examining the percentile of marketing *toward* a specific Jewish audience and specific film audience, the above distinction between the two cultures begins to emerge. *Festival*[7], along with *Now*[8], appeal to a younger, more

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[7] The Bloor Cinema, the location of the Festival itself, is an independent cinema which shows "second run" movies and does art house retrospectives. Along with The Fox, The

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secular, "downtown" culture, than the mainstream media of *The Toronto Star*. Likewise, the Cinematheque, a resource center and repertory cinema which runs throughout the year concurrent retrospectives of important film makers and film movements, is clearly addressing itself to *film* culture. It is a reasonably safe assumption to make that *Festival* and *Now*, along with the Cinematheque, are connecting with participants of Toronto's film cultural contexts. Together, these three sources only resulted in 20.1% of the total cited sources of information.

The other cultural context that the marketing of the Festival addresses is that of the Jewish community. *The Canadian Jewish News*, *The Jewish Tribune* (another Jewish newspaper), the UJA (The United Jewish Appeal — a Jewish charity organization), and CFMT (a Toronto multicultural television station), were cited by 24.2% of attendees as a result of this marketing plan.

The remaining media are what I would characterize as "mainstream", and within this group, I would hypothesize, are the ambivalent — those who identify themselves with neither the Jewish nor the cinematic [9].

Paradise, The Kingsway, and The Revue, all independent cinemas, the Bloor Cinema publishes a newspaper, *Festival*, once every two months which lists the films being shown at all the "indies" [independent cinemas].

[8] An alternative weekly newspaper that has, from my own experience, the best arts and culture listings of any source in the city.

[9] The 1996 survey resulted in the following statistics: 40.1% identified direct mailings, 4.25% noted *The Toronto Star*, 3.86% noted *The Globe and Mail*, 5.79% noted *Now*, 0.39% noted *eye*, and 11.2% noted *The Canadian Jewish News*. Although impact from

I had hoped to identify a particular medium of cinematic expression to which those attending the Festival preferred: fiction or documentary films; dramatic or comedic movies. In many cases I asked the wrong question. Frequently respondents said "all", or "only good movies." One of the ways in which this question was wrong was in my use of the word "prefer"; I intended respondents to cite only one of the four possible choices, by either form (fiction or documentary) or by genre (drama or comedy). What occurred consistently enough to enable some generalization was a selection of all of the possibilities with only minor variations according to an actual preference.

In general, what kind of movies do you prefer?				
Fiction	184	34%		
Documentary	298	55%		
Comedy	296	55%		
Drama	326	60%		
Hebrew	6		Feminist	2
Yiddish	6		Romance	2
Experimental	4		Biographies	1
Film Noir	4		Classics	1
Historical/period	4		English	1
Fantasy/Sci-Fi	3		Jews in other lands	1
Holocaust	3		Lesbian	1
Action/Adventure	2		Violent	1
Docudrama	2			

Figure 2.8: TJFF Survey - "In general, what kind of movies do you prefer?"

More people cited documentary films than fiction films, and at that level alone I can

direct mailing is down in 1997 (and this may be due to the increased survey base), all other sources are up substantially.

begin to generalize about cinematic preference *vis a vis* a moderate preference for documentary cinema. Still, at this stage, I *can* note, there is something going on within this community with regards to "truth" — that a good film is one that depicts the world as it "really is," an idea I shall explore in more detail in Chapter Four. A very few people wrote in their own preferences in more specific terms. I list those preferences in Figure 2.8.

I also found how the respondents viewed the Festival within the context of the cultural life of Toronto Jewry.

How important do you think this festival is to the cultural life of Toronto Jews?		
Very important	317	59%
Moderately important	169	31%
Not at all	8	2%

Figure 2.9: TJFF Survey - "How important do you think this festival is to the cultural life of Toronto Jews?"

With this question in the context of the first five questions, determining the dedication of Festival respondents to the Festival as an event, an interesting observation emerges. Although the majority of people surveyed identified that the festival is a "very important" dimension to the local Jewish calendar, only about one quarter of the total respondents attends the entire event.[10] The apparent conclusion to make from this is that "importance" does not demand "attendance", and if we can see the Festival as metonymic

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[10] Obviously such things as previous obligations or employment issues affect this to a large degree.

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of the entire culture, then Jewish pride and Jewish identification does not necessarily demand Jewish participation.

The next series of questions attempted to define what, exactly, was Jewish cinema. I began with a three-part question: "is a Jewish director, star, writer important to you?" Each (star, director, writer) had a "yes/no" possible answer.[11] Again, I should admit, that this was not the best possible question to ask, for those attendees that I spoke with through exit polls identified "Jewish content" as the deciding factor in whether a film was Jewish or not, and not necessarily the ethnicity of anyone involved with making the film[12]. Still, some interesting results came from this question.

Is a Jewish director, star, or writer important to you?								
	Star			Director			Writer	
Yes	170	**31%**	Yes	214	**40%**	Yes	273	**51%**
No	302	**56%**	No	247	**46%**	No	192	**36%**

Figure 2.10: TJFF Survey - "Is a Jewish director, star, or writer important to you?"

In very broad terms, the writer is the one responsible for the content of the film: it is he or

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[11] Even though there were only two possible answers to each question, some respondents still felt obliged to argue: "what do you mean by 'important'? or 'This isn't a yes/no question.' As a running joke between myself, Helen Zukerman and Debra Kwinter, we noted that only Jews could find something to debate on in a yes or no question.

[12] By "content," my informants referred to those films which have substantial Jewish *diegetic* content.

she who decides what the actual diegesis[13] is. The director, on the other hand, is who decides *how* that narrative is to be performed. Based on this statistic, I can tentatively conclude that it is Jewish *content* which determines a Jewish movie. This is a point that I will return to repeatedly.

The next two questions were complimentary to one another: "are all movies made by Jews, Jewish?" and "can a non-Jew make a Jewish movie?" My assumption was that there was something fundamentally Jewish about a Jewish film maker that would permeate all their work, regardless of the content. My expected answers to these questions were "yes" and "no" respectively. The results were not what I expected.

Are all movies made by Jews, Jewish?		
Yes	29	6%
No	488	90%

Figure 2.11: TJFF Survey - "Are all movies made by Jews, Jewish?"

Can a non-Jew make a Jewish movie?		
Yes	467	86%
No	48	9%

Figure 2.12: TJFF Survey - "Can a non-Jew make a Jewish movie?"

Only 6% of those surveyed said that all movies made by Jews are somehow Jewish. Yet, as one of the surveyed informants noted in their comments,

> anything anyone makes is influenced by their life experience. Being
> Jewish is a part of a Jew's life experience. It somehow influences anything
> that [a] Jew makes in subtle ways — the way they perceive things, what

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[13] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define "diegesis" as "in a narrative film, the world of the film's story. The diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown on screen" (Bordwell and Thompson: 385).

angles they take, the questions they ask. Even if it is not about anything
Jewish (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival)[14].

Strangely enough, the question regarding non-Jewish participation in Jewish film culture,

although still not what I was expecting, was more ambivalent. Again a single survey

comment will suffice to indicate some of the comments I received:

> Yes, I believe a non-Jewish person can make a Jewish movie ... however,
> the non-Jewish person would have to remain conscious of the fact that
> their approach, opinions and aesthetics does not quantify itself in the
> context of the Jewish experience — and MUST AT ALL TIMES BE
> careful of the offending and antagonistic aggression of cultural
> appropriation (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film
> Festival).

I also found that 75% of surveyed Festival attendees were over the age of 40 (40-

54 34%; 55-69 30%; and 70< 11%)[15]. Nevertheless, when placed within the context of

the other data this survey generated, perhaps the results were, to some degree at least,

predictable.

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[14] This view coincides with the film studies approach noted by Friedman (1991:31), and
cited in the Introduction.

[15] To determine this, I used the age groupings that the Festival used the previous year:
under 18, 18-29, 30-39, 40-54, 55-69, and over 70.

Age?			
	<18	4	0.70%
	18-29	53	10%
	30-39	82	15%
	40-54	183	34%
	55-69	165	30%
	70<	60	11%

Figure 2.13: TJFF Survey - "Age [of Festival attendee]?"

Given the large portion of Festival attendees who identified the position of the Festival within the cultural life of Toronto Jewry, given the nexus of information that circulates within that context, perhaps it is not surprising to discover that the Toronto Jewish Film Festival appeals to an older, more conservative crowd of Jews, rather than the younger participants within film culture, such as those who read *Now* and *Festival,* and go to the Cinematheque.

The next question was based on gender.[16] This statistic brings forward a lot more questions than it answers:

Gender?			
	Male	156	29%
	Female	374	69%

Figure 2.14: TJFF Survey - "Gender [of Festival attendees]?"

Were women the majority of survey completers? Are women the keepers of Jewish

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[16] A few attendees noted on their survey form that there should be more than two categories.

culture (and if so, what are the men's role)? I was unable to answer these questions successfully, if answers are possible. Still, the questions themselves are significant.

The penultimate question was also controversial. Kwinter noted to me that the previous year they had asked "are you Jewish?", and that the question resulted in one complaint questioning whether or not the Festival organizers were trying to put on a festival for Jews only. In my eagerness to get into the cultural subdivisions of Toronto Jewry I suggested altering that question to a more ambiguous one: "denomination"? What I had hoped for, by phrasing the question as I did, was to see some division within the Jewish community among Reform Jews, Conservative Jews, Orthodox Jews, and the variety of non-Jews who would attend.

Denomination?						
Not Answered	207	38%				
Jewish	235	44%				
	Reform	18	Catholic	14	Agnostic	4
	Conservative	13	Christian	2	None	4
	Non-practicing	9	Protestant	2	Humanist	2
	Reconstructionalist	7	Anglican	1	Atheist	1
	Hebrew	7	Half Jewish	1	Filmish	1
	Egalitarian	4	Lutheran	1	Rastifarian	1
	Orthodox	1	Muslim	1	Spiritual	1
	"Reconservadox"	1	Non-Jewish	1	Wiccan	1

Figure 2.15: TJFF Survey - "[Religious] Denomination?"

A large number of people did not answer the question, possibly because they did not understand what I meant by the word "denomination", or making jokes like "prefer 20s, but will take 5s". It is also possible they felt the question was intrusive, and flat out

refused to answer it. Another 44% simply identified themselves as Jews. I was therefore

unable to see *what* parts of the Jewish community were being administered to by the

festival.

The final statistical question on the survey was regarding synagogue affiliation[17].

Are you affiliated with a synagogue?		
Yes	281	52%
No	251	46%

Figure 2.16: TJFF Survey - "Are you affiliated with a synagogue?"

Over half of the surveyed respondents identified themselves as affiliated with a

synagogue (which can include anything from being a member of a particular congregation

to occasionally attending services). Taking into consideration the respondents who

identified themselves in the previous question as not Jewish (7%), and those non-Jews

who did not answer the question at all, still leaves the non-synagogue affiliated statistic as

fairly large. What does this mean? On the one hand it reveals that the Toronto Jewish

Film Festival does reach out to a large number of Jews who do not necessarily participate

in other Jewish events; a factor I discuss in more detail below. However, the majority of

those who attend the film festival are synagogue affiliated; that is, they are actively

involved as religious Jews (in one form or another).

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[17] The 1996 survey resulted in a statistic of 49.81% who were affiliated with a synagogue, and 50.19% who were not.

Yet, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted, quoting Evelyn Latowsky from a 1971 newspaper article, "the so-called 'religious' or 'socio-religious' ... Jewish community is in fact an ethnic community in which religion ... is only one component,' adding that 'Jews are affiliated with synagogues not to worship God but to perpetuate a people'" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 48). As anecdotal evidence to support this, during my fieldwork at the festival, one of the volunteers quipped that should any Jewish event need to attract more people, all they need to do is advertise it as a "Singles Event" and people will flock to whatever it is. The implication is that even the most assimilated Jews, that is, Jews who work in the non-Jewish world, the majority of their friends are non-Jews, do not keep *kosher* — in fact, the entire context of their lives is non-Jewish — that they still, whether because of cultural prohibition or personal choice, wish to form partnerships within the faith.

I think this last statistic is perhaps the most indicative of the character of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. The festival is primarily within the context of Jewish culture; that is, it draws its participants from Jewish contexts, rather than other film contexts (but, obviously not exclusively). In addition to direct mailing, information about the festival is primarily circulated through word of mouth and advertising in Jewish contexts. Those who already socialize within Jewish circles (who attend Jewish events, go to synagogue, subscribe to the *Canadian Jewish News*), are the primary audience the

festival draws[18]. However, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival reaches beyond that audience, attracting many Jews who do not attend synagogues, or are otherwise connected to Toronto Jewish life. Almost half of those festival participants who filled out the survey did not go to synagogue (including those who are not Jewish). This combination between the synagogue affiliated and those who are not, make the Toronto Jewish Film Festival a truly inclusive event.

THE TORONTO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL AS FESTIVAL

Are film festivals "true festivals" as folklorists understand the term? Some folklorists shy away from viewing festivals that celebrate popular culture, seeing instead a commercialization factor as replacing the expression of community itself (Stoeltje, 1992: 261-262; Abrahams, 1982: 171). Beverly Stoeltje noted "those events that do have *festival* in their titles are generally contemporary modern constructions, employing festival characteristics but serving the commercial, ideological, or political purposes of self-interested authorities or entrepreneurs" (Stoeltje, 1992: 261-262). Over the next paragraphs I shall be outlining the many ways in which the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is indeed a festival. Although a popular culture festival, this festival was not predicated upon the commercialization process which Stoeltje noted.

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[18] A statistic which Debra Kwinter confirmed to me. My inclusion of the question surrounding other film festivals attended was specifically to see this breakdown.

One of my original questions on beginning this research was whether or not the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is an actual festival or not, as is understood by the definitions given above. Otherwise, the event would be, for lack of a better word, a "showcase," an opportunity to watch a lot of movies and denying the engagement with the full cultural dynamic. Helen Zukerman, executive director of the Festival, noted this when she observed the problems in setting up the festival funding. Although she runs a private family foundation, the foundation could not fund the project without special clearance from Revenue Canada.[19] Her lawyer found a loophole.

> And the way he did it — he applied under 'culture'. He minimized the watching of a film and eating popcorn, and maximized the culture around it, and the fact that directors were coming in and they're going to educate and speak. So finally they said 'yes. For one year' (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

Although her lawyer found a loophole in which to get special clearance from Revenue Canada for the funding of the Festival, this loophole demonstrates the slippage between the consumption of a single text (watching a movie) and developing a full-fledged "festival". That Revenue Canada made a distinction, where Zukerman at first did not, is

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[19] According to Zukerman, "In the meantime, my charitable foundation is a private family foundation and I'm not supposed to be doing this kinda stuff. So [I] make an application to Revenue Canada for permission and they say 'no'. And ... why? Because we could make money. So after we got off the floor laughing, my lawyer and I, so we told them, 'no. No festival in the whole world makes money. Why should ours be any different'. But anyway it became sort of a contest" (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

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interesting in its own right, but also demanded of the Festival organizers that a *festival* was what they actually required.

To get an overview of the event as a festival, I am first going to use Beverly Stoeltje's schema: Stoeltje developed, over a number of years, a morphological "checklist" of acts that make up the overall event[20]. According to Stoeltje, a festival is made up of six types of acts: an opening ceremony, rituals, dramas and contests, feasts, dance and music, and finally a concluding event (Stoeltje, 1992: 264-265). Although this morphology is considered descriptive, rather than prescriptive, a certain ordering of these acts and their respective inclusion is by design and self-conscious.

Festival begins with an opening ceremony of some kind. Although Alessandro Falassi referred to the opening ritual as a "rite of purification" where they cleanse the festival space "... by means of fire. water. or air, or centered around the solemn expulsion of some sort of scapegoat carrying the 'evil' and 'negative' out of the community" (Falassi: 4), in practice all that we require from an opening ceremony is that the space itself be demarcated as different from other spaces for the period of the celebration (Stoeltje: 264). Mircea Eliade noted the importance of valorizing space as sacred. even if for a set time period.

> ... to settle somewhere, to inhabit a space, is equivalent to repeating the
> cosmogony and hence to imitating the work of the gods, it follows that, for

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[20] I am self-consciously referring to the distinction Dell Hymes made with regards to a "speech act" and a "speech event".

religious man, every existential decision to situate himself in space in fact constitutes a religious decision. By assuming the responsibility of creating the world that he has chosen to inhabit, he not only cosmocizes chaos but also sanctifies his little cosmos by making it like the world of the gods (Eliade, 65).

Therefore, to demarcate the festive space as belonging to that festival, and to the celebrating culture, by means of an opening ceremony of some kind, sanctifies the event.

The opening night of the Festival was a busy one. In many respects and from different perspectives, the entire evening's series of acts can be considered an "opening ceremony" for the variety of people who participate in the Festival. The "official" opening of the Festival was the public remarks given by Helen Zukerman and Shlomo Schwartzberg, the Director of Programming. To begin with Zukerman thanked and introduced the office crew. This action in effect, not only marked the official beginning of the Festival, but as a ritual of inclusion, recognized the activities of those not in the direct public spotlight as equal contributors to the event. Likewise, Zukerman, by reading out a list of corporate sponsors, incorporated the financial development of the Festival, and self-consciously recognized the monetary dimension to the event as a whole. Finally, Zukerman noted that their advertising slogan, "you don't have to be filmish", had already caught on in the vernacular lexicon of Montreal Jews, and was becoming a popular expression throughout both Montreal and Toronto. She ended her introduction with a special thank-you to the audience, an incorporation ritual for their active participation in the Festival. The structure of the contests (as discussed below) implies this audience

incorporation to be actual and essential to the operation of the Festival. This is unlike the Toronto International Film Festival, where they position the audience in a much more passive position, and the audience has little impact on the proceedings of the event itself[21].

Schwartzberg's opening remarks were to introduce the Festival content, highlighting various movies and guests who would be appearing. Whenever he singled out a specific film as particularly noteworthy, he always interjected that all the films were noteworthy.

After the screening of the first feature film, *Ha-Italkim Ba'im [The Italians are Coming]* (1996), the Festival organizers held a small reception in the lobby of the Bloor Cinema. Various types of food and drink were available for those in attendance at the movie (discussed below). This rather large opening night party was for all attendees of the Festival; again. it was an inclusive event. Yet this post-film party was only one of three events that marked the opening of the Festival. The other two were more exclusive (although I had access to them as "Survey Guy"). and each demarcates different sectors of the Festival participants.

Earlier in the evening. prior to the screening of the first film, I attended a reception sponsored by the Israeli consulate in Toronto. They served finger foods, wine

[21] Although, in one respect the audience does have an impact on the Toronto International Film Festival: Air Canada currently sponsors a "Peoples Choice" award, which enables festival participants to vote on their favorite movie.

and soft drinks in the "party room" of a downtown condominium complex[22]. The festival organizers specifically geared this event toward welcoming the Israeli guests, producers and filmmakers. In attendance were, among others, Ram Loevy (director of the Israeli mini-series *Mar Mani* [*Mr. Mani*] (1996), which they screened in its entirety during the Festival), Eyal Halfon (writer and director of the opening night film, *Ha-Italkim Ba'im*), and Mordecai Bregman (producer of *Layla Lavan* [*White Night*] (1996), which was also screened at the Festival).

At one point the Consul General welcomed everybody to the reception, citing the Festival's hard work at promoting Israeli culture in Toronto. This year had the largest number of Israeli films present, and the Consul General joked (half-joked, according to Zukerman), that maybe next year it will be an exclusively Israeli festival. The 1997 Festival was the first time that they included the Israeli consulate reception as an "opening night" event. Previous years saw Israeli receptions, just not in this very specific temporal frame. As Zukerman tells it,

> We need them [the Israeli consulate] to fly our films diplomatic pouch, which they do whenever they can, which saves us a lot of money. We don't *need* a reception. Whenever they put on a reception — this one was pretty-well attended. Last two years when they put on a reception we told them 'this is not a good time'. Last year they put it on during two of the best Israeli documentaries, *You, Me, and Jerusalem* [1995] and *Inside God's Bunker* [1994]. 'So what are you *doing*?' It was the only time they could get this Israeli to donate the use of his art gallery in Yorkville. Five people showed up. I ran over for 15 minutes and I came back. The year

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[22] Within that same complex is Helen Zukerman's home.

before, they wanted to do a Sunday brunch — and I thought it was a nice idea. The people didn't show up. So this year, I said 'before'. I said, 'although it's a pain in the ass for *us*, because we're busy, and we're —' But at least he got a decent turn out. I don't know if he was happy about it or not. ... I think they expect to be treated very differently than other funders. And they expect a lot more in return (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

What both my observations of the opening night reception and Zukerman's comments reveal is the special status that Israeli culture has within Jewish culture in North America. We cannot belittle the importance of Israel to the Toronto Jewish community, and to North American Jews as a whole. The festival organizers geared this opening night event exclusively for the Israeli participants within the Festival.

The other major exclusive event that evening that officially opened the Festival was the opening night party, held at a nearby restaurant, Southern Accents. This party was for all the guests of the Festival, including staff, volunteers, corporate and patronage supporters. There was a much more "festive" atmosphere here. The Israeli party was rather dour and reserved. At Southern Accents, the reception appealed to more of a younger set, representative of downtown culture. The guest list's inclusion of staff and volunteers, community members and local merchants, seem to be integrating the immediate physical community that houses the Festival.

For the past five years, they have held the Toronto Jewish Film Festival at the Bloor cinema in Toronto, a downtown cinema that is independent from the two major cinema chains in Ontario — Famous Players and Cineplex Odeon. According to Helen

Zukerman,

> It actually — this is the area of town where a lot of the Jews grew up in.
> They immigrated and came here. So for a lot of them its coming back
> *home.* It's just a really nice mixed area. A lot of the unaffiliated — the
> *less-traditional* Jews live down here. A lot of them. And we get them. I
> just love the *place* (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

One of the comments I received on my survey shared a similar perception: "For Jews

born downtown, like myself, it brings back memories — I see people I haven't seen in

year[s] ... I still love the downtown core" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto

Jewish Film Festival).

Festival attendees mistaking me for someone who worked *for* the Festival

frequently complained to me regarding the downtown location. Although historically, the

Bloor Cinema is in an area of the city where the Jews settled, most have since moved into

the north part of town. As Helen Zukerman noted to me

> Debra Kwinter doesn't like it here [the downtown venue]. She's made no
> secret of that. From the first day she started working here, she was
> hassling — I said 'Debra, I understand what you're saying. But for every
> person that you run into that doesn't like it, I run into people who love it.
> And this is not a film festival for the Forest Hill Jews. I'm really sorry.' I
> haven't said that to her, but she *knows.* Honestly speaking, I don't care that
> much about the Forest Hill Jews, simply because they go everywhere and
> do everything. I'm trying to capture those people who are sort of on the
> fringe. So I like it here. A lot of people like it here (Zukerman, personal
> interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

Zukerman makes an interesting point: that although many of the Jews who live in the

north end of the city would prefer the Festival to be held in their area, they do actually

travel downtown for this event. Whereas the Jews who have distanced themselves from the "Forest Hill Jews", as Zukerman calls them, do not feel alienated by the venue[24]. On my survey, one person noted "sometimes I have difficulty being comfortable in a suburban Jewish milieu (clothes, jewelry, etc.)" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). And it is the inclusion of this side of the Festival's demographic, the downtown population, which the Southern Accents event demarcated.

Opening receptions, as ceremonies, then establish the festival in space. For Jews who have moved out of the downtown corridor, there is a sense of "coming home". As a rite of valorization, referring to it as a "rite of purification" may be too strong, the community establishes itself within a set temporal and spatial context. By inhabiting the space, they reestablish a Jewish cosmos, and its inclusion of diverse sections of the Jewish and non-Jewish communities is a significant means of establishing cultural control within the festive space.

The religious dimension to the festival as a whole is a contentious issue. It connects to the question, which neither I. nor anyone I have met can answer adequately: is Judaism a religion or a culture? Implied in the writings of Israeli folklorist Dov Noy, who separates Jewish folk *culture* from Jewish folk *religion* according to context, the

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[24] The "Forrest Hill Jews" that Zukerman and Kwinter refer to are those Jews who have settled in the more suburban neighbourhoods in the northen parts of the city. These gentrified communities are stereotyped as bourgeois and materialistic; therefore those Jews who are more working class or feel excluded from this milieu, are included in the festival by virtue of its downtown location. The survey comment below reflects this alienation.

religious dimension to Judaism is whatever they sanctify through an official religious

conduit — be it synagogue based, cultic, or ritualized (Noy, 1980b: 273).[25] *Ipso facto*,

the Toronto Jewish Film Festival would not be a religious event, and yet at the same time,

it is the shared religious experience of Judaism that binds all those participants together[26].

The ritual dimension, which Stoeltje equated with the religious (Stoeltje, 1992: 264), is

not as explicit as in other festivals that celebrate specific religious events. In fact, for

many "secular" or "cultural" Jews who actively eschew the religious contexts where

Judaism can be expressed, this festival is one of the only places for that kind of

communitas.

Answering one of my survey questions, "Why do you come to the Festival?", one

person observed this very point: "We consider a good film festival (Jewish) to be a very

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[25] This is very different from Primiano's view of "vernacular religion": "The need to do justice to the experiential component of people's religious lives [which] can only be satisfied by a term which specifically addresses the 'personal' and 'private'. Equally significant is the relationship of vernacular to the 'arts' manifested in the creativity and artistry expressed by the human drive to interpret religious experience. The omnipresent action of personal religious interpretation involves various negotiations of belief and practice including, but not limited to, original intention, unintentional innovation, and international adaptation" (Primiano: 43).

[26] But, as Eliade noted above, when a group establishes itself in space, the group's culture is reified as cosmography, thereby making even secular establishments, in some respects, sacred. "If the temple constitutes an *imago mundi*, this is because the world, as the work of the gods, is sacred. But the cosmological structure of the temple gives room for a new religious valorization: as a house of the gods, hence holy place above all others, the temple continually resanctifies the world, because it at once represents and contains it. In the last analysis, *it is by virtue of the temple that the world is resanctified in every part*. However impure it may have become, the world is continually purified by the sanctity of sanctuaries" (Eliade: 59, emphasis in original).

integral part of the Jewish cultural scene and perhaps important for Jews who don't wish to attend cultural, quasi-religious events in synagogues" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). For others, the festival functions much more centrally in their Jewish lives: "It's part of my spiritual practice as a Jew" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival), and "It's an easy way to be a Jew" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). Another survey informant included the following: "Once in a while (not too often) I like to get in touch with my Jewish roots" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival).

For some Jews who are uncomfortable with their ethnic identity, this festival is a safe context in which to explore their roots. Although not discussing Jewish Film Festivals specifically, University of Toronto Anthropologist Ivan Kalmar noted that assimilated Jews frequently seek out the occasional Jewish context in order not to feel "Jewish", that is feeling that they are "different". "An odd thing, but not a rare one: a Jew seeking to be not Jewish in the company of other Jews. It may even be the chief motivation for the EJI ['embarrassed Jewish individual' — Kalmar's term for secular Jewry] in the Diaspora to attend *shul* [synagogue]" (Kalmar: 212). The perception of "movies" being a relatively harmless entertainment medium, of being frivolous, allows the deeper play of dismissing attendance as just "going to the movies" while in reality participating within Jewish culture. As one informant noted on their survey form "this is a place I 'fit' as a Jew" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). For another, the reason for attending the Festival is much more personal: "to connect with my Jewish

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heritage. To learn what I've missed as having a Jewish father not proud of his heritage"

(comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). For many of the

attendees, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival functions as religious simulacra; participation

within the faith of Judaism, but in the alternative context of a film festival. It is Judaism

without the cultural calories.

The dissatisfaction with synagogue-based Judaism and discomfort with many

issues facing modern Judaism (e.g. the Holocaust, Israel) is one of the prime motivations

for Helen Zukerman in organizing the Festival.

> People make choices in their lives based on what they know to be
> available to them. If *you* see a thousand different ways of being Jewish,
> you may not be *so* disenchanted with Judaism that the only thing Jewish
> you do all year is go to that festival. If you could find a place in this
> society, where your Judaism was as valued as the image we have of what
> Jews *are*, which the Orthodox Jews have told us *is* Judaism, you might not
> be as disentangled from the community. *That's* what I want people to see
> (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

Therefore, although the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is a *secular* Jewish event, it has as

referent the *religious* life of Jews at its center. The religious dimension to the festival is

ambiguous: on the one hand this is not a synagogue, or synagogue-based, event; and yet

the dominant commonality of the group is a shared religious experience. Again, as I

noted above, statistically, just over half of those who attend the festival are affiliated with

a synagogue, and the 48% who are not would also include the non-Jewish attendees.

Although the Festival is not religious per se, according to Stoeltje's schema, the religious

dimension does exist as cultural referent.

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But ritual activity, in other ways, is observable. Alessandro Falassi, in his own morphology of the "festival", cited a number of different ritualized possibilities that may or may not occur within any given festival. Falassi noted that "these units, building blocks of festivals, can all be considered ritual acts, 'rites', since they happen within an exceptional frame of time and space, and their meaning is considered to go beyond their literal and explicit aspects" (Falassi: 3-4). And again, these ritual acts are by degree. For example as I noted previously, for the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, the "rite of purification" might include the putting up of posters for the week that the Festival runs at the Bloor, or tidying up the cinema, and polishing the popcorn maker.

It occurred to me that I should not look for such obvious markers of "traditional festivity". I was concerned that since these films are not in competition with each other, like at the Cannes or Toronto film festivals[27]. Falassi's "rites of competition" may not occur (Falassi: 5)[28]. But the completed surveys are eligible for a draw to win two VIP passes to next year's Festival. Unlike the film festivals at Cannes or the Toronto International Film Festival, festivals where the *films* are in competition with one another for various prizes, at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival the contest is among the audience

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[27] It should be noted that unlike the Cannes festival, the Toronto International Film Festival does not distinguish between those films *in* competition and those films *not in* competition. At the Toronto International Film Festival, *all* the films are eligible for a number of awards.

[28] This also satisfies one part of Stoeltje's "drama and contest" activities (Stoeltje, 1992: 264). The "drama" activity is discussed below.

members themselves. The films at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival are not in competition with one another; there are no prizes given out to the films themselves. Including the audience as active members of the community, rather than passive spectators, makes the Toronto Jewish Film Festival more "festive".

There is also Falassi's "rite of reversal", which according to most scholars is the litmus test for a "real" festival[29]. Falassi notes that this rite "through symbolic inversion, drastically represent the mutability of people, culture, and of life itself" (Falassi: 4).

Barbara Babcock defined the concept of "symbolic inversion" in her introduction to her edited volume, *The Reversible World* as follows:

> 'Symbolic inversion' may be broadly defined as any act of expressive
> behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion
> presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms
> be they linguistic, literary, or artistic, religious, or social and political.
> Although, perhaps because, inversion is so basic to symbolic processes, so
> crucial to expressive behavior, it has not, until recently, been analytically
> isolated except in its obvious and overt forms such as 'rituals of rebellion,'
> role reversal, and institutionalized clowning (Babcock: 14).

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[29] As Bakhtin noted, "all the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, peculiar logical of the of the 'inside out' ..., of the 'turnabout', of a continual shift from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin: 11). Likewise did Falassi note this, and in turn, began to point towards meaning in this reversal: "if we consider that the primary and most general function of the festival is to renounce and then to announce culture, to renew periodically the lifestream of a community by creating new energy, and to give sanction to its institutions, the symbolic means to achieve it is to represent the primordial chaos before creation, or the historical disorder before the establishment of the culture, society, or regime where the festival happens to take place" (Falassi: 3).

The idea of symbolic inversion is central to an understanding of festival; Abrahams, Bakhtin, Stoeltje, Falassi, et. al. see festival time as a time of inversion to the normal societal processes which govern a culture. As Babcock noted above, this philosophy, while manifestly observable in such forms as clowning and particular festive rituals, characterizes the whole spirit of the festival.

Still, what ways was culture being reversed? Is it seeing movies in unconventional time slots, like on a weekday afternoon?[30] Going downtown? In part, but also there is an implicit message with so much "art cinema" presented, so much explicit Jewish and Hebrew culture made manifest, so many movies that my informants note "we'll never see again", that it strikes me as a direct opposition to the consumerist Hollywood industry[31]. If this festival is *a priori* based on some sort of reversal, and that

[30] Babcock noted: "Victor Turner ... [has] modified ... [the] concept of ritual reversal in at least three respects: (1) by demonstrating that such inverse ritual behavior is not confined to seasonal rituals and that, in fact, it is a central component of the liminal period of rites of passage ...; (2) by showing the 'rebellious ritual' does not occur *only* within an established and unchallenged social order ...; and (3) by pointing out that ritualized role reversal is confined neither to "primitive" cultures nor to ritual proper ..." (Babcock: 24). In Woody Allen's film, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), Mia Farrow's and Allen's characters steal away during a dull afternoon to go to a movie matinee. Farrow's character notes that there is a rebellious feeling going to the movies in the afternoon. This sentiment underscores, perhaps, one of the "reversals" film festivals make available — the chance to go to weekday matinees.

[31] Hegemony, according to Antonio Gramsci, is "the supremacy of a social group" which is expressed "as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (Gramsci: 197). Raymond Williams takes the idea further: "it is not limited to matters of direct political control but seeks to describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its

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those reversed aspects are in no particular order Israeli, Yiddish, explicitly Jewish,

foreign, short subject, experimental/art, and documentary cinema, through a negative

relief I think a picture of hegemonic cinema begins to emerge. The idea seems to posit

that Hollywood is American, English, non-ethnic, familiar, feature length, somehow

"inartistic" and fictitious. Film festivals in general act as opposition to the accepted

norms of film going. The film industry gives license to these festivals as controlled

counter-hegemonic voice, and community film festivals frame that discourse with full

license from the industry. It is not surprising then that when the counter-hegemonic voice

is actually a challenge to the industry, like Cannes or the Toronto International festivals,

so many Hollywood products infiltrate these frames. This is a view supported by some of

the completed surveys and exit polling I did where the main draw of a festival like the

Toronto Jewish Film Festival is to see alternatives to the Hollywood hegemony, as noted

previously.

However, as Abrahams and Bauman note, with regards to this sense of "[festive]

symbolic inversion":

The principle functionalist argument in the interpretation of rites of

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key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships. It
is different in this sense from the notion of 'world-view', in that the ways of seeing the
world and ourselves and others are not just intellectual but political facts, expressed over
a range from institutions to relationships and consciousness. It is also different from
[ideology] in that it is seen to depend for its hold not only on its expression of the
interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as 'normal reality' or 'commonsense'
by those in practice subordinated to it" (Williams: 118; also see Brown: xiv, 18).

reversal is that such rites are the symbolic expression of underlying and normally suppressed conflicts within the society. Accordingly, they constitute a mechanism by which the pressures engendered by social conflict may be vented without allowing the conflict to become fully overt and threaten the survival of the society ... Our analysis, however, calls for a different view ... Far from constituting events that have hostility and conflict as their organizing principle, [festivals] ... appear to us to draw together opposing elements in the two societies in which they occur, and to draw them together more closely and harmoniously than at any other time of the year (Abrahams and Bauman: 206).

What is significant about Abrahams and Bauman's contribution to this discussion is the cultural recognition that those aspects reversed are recognized as already existing within the culture, and at festival time, rather than doing the *opposite* of what one would normally do, allows license to those marginalized groups and individuals within a culture to express themselves without censure. Therefore, with regards to the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, Jews who do not practice the Jewish religion, those who perhaps married outside of the culture, or no longer (if ever) fully participated within the nexus of the faith and culture, and who are often labeled with the pejorative "Jewish in *name* only", can find a place to be Jewish.

Falassi's rites of "conspicuous display," which the author noted as "permit[ing] the most symbolic elements of the community to be seen, touched, adored, or worshiped; their communicative function [being] 'phatic'; of contact" (Falassi: 4), relates to the films themselves. Instead of seeing a film as a narrative, in which the total experience is based on the absorption of diegetic information — the flow of the story — we need to conceive of the films as artifacts. The watching of an Israeli film is to be in contact with Israel

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itself. In this respect, the films likewise conform, to some degree, with Falassi's "ritual drama" distinction: which reflect the celebrating culture's myths (Falassi: 5)[32]. Israel is just such a cultural myth for North American Jewry. Likewise are the functions of the Holocaust, and the culture of Yiddish speaking Europe before the Second World War. This is not to say such things as the Holocaust or the State of Israel do not *exist*, in some kind of external reality, but their *functions* to North American Jews, how these things or events are transformed away from objectified reality and into ideas, is what needs to be addressed. Zukerman notes

> You know what I said to Ram Loevy [director of *Mar Mani*, the Israeli mini-series screened at the 1997 Festival] last night that really blew him away? We were talking about Israel. Israel, financially, does not need North American money anymore. They really don't. I said to Ram 'you have to understand something. If we don't have Israel, we have to go about redefining what it means to be Jewish.' What does it mean? — Take Israel out of this. Take the Holocaust. — If Israel doesn't need me, or my money — and they don't — and the Holocaust ceases to be out there blinking, how are we going to be Jews? I don't know (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

With such a large number of Israeli and Holocaust themed films, the "mythic" relationship of these referents to the community becomes the very essence of the films "ritual dramas". The action of going to a special place (the Bloor Cinema — with the location's meaning for the history of Toronto Jews, its spatial relationship to the existing

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[32] This satisfies Stoeltje's "drama" activity in her "drama and contest" section, as noted above.

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Jewish community — being *down*town, and the one location that the Festival occurs in) has an aspect of coming closer, in literal spatial terms, to the simulacra of these cultural myths. As Rodger Brown notes, these public displays of the cultural myths are in reality a symbolic display of the community itself, regardless of their factuality (Brown: 50)[33]. The appearance of special guests, usually the filmmakers themselves, and the opportunity the Festival gives for Question and Answer sessions brings the relical dimension to the fore. The Toronto Jewish Film Festival presents these filmmakers, and their work, in "rites of conspicuous display".

At one point during Zukerman's opening address at the festival, a birthday cake was brought out celebrating the 5th anniversary of the festival. Festival volunteers distributed pieces of the cake among the audience members after the screening of *Ha-Italkim Ba'im*. Both Stoeltje and Falassi[34] noted the importance of food in festive

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[33] Brown also noted that "with space defeated by cars, the SST, fiber optics, and the Internet, people react by clinging to *place*, and the idea of places. But a sense of place can only develop over time, and it is increasingly difficult for people to remain in one space for enough years for it to deeply become place. Speed and movement, the acceleration of time and the compression of space, have severed us from wisdom. So, when people look for some kind of identity, be it national, regional, ethnic, sexual, or religious, authenticity no longer matter much" (Brown: 185).

[34] Bakhtin also noted the importance of food at festivals: "the feast (every feast) is an important primary form of human culture. It cannot be explained merely by the practical conditions of the community's work, and it would be even more superficial to attribute it to the physiological demand for periodic rest. The feast had always an essential, meaningful philosophical content. No rest period or breathing spell can be rendered festive per se; something must be added from the spiritual and ideological dimension. They must be sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human existence, that is, by the world of ideals. Without this sanction there can be no

celebrations (Stoeltje, 1992: 265; Falassi: 4). As Stoeltje noted

> [Food] will embody the identity of the group and represent the occasion,
> so festival foods are always specific ... Festival also emphasizes the *social*
> act of eating, for in this setting many people ingest their tradition simultan-
> eously, confirming their identity as a group by eating certain foods during
> a certain period of time (Stoeltje, 1992: 265).

Although food does not play an overly important role within the Toronto Jewish Film

Festival, it is present in a minor way[35]. The birthday cake is one of the more explicit

ways in which food is used. Distribution among all those in attendance for the opening

night screening again functioned as an incorporation dynamic for all those present.

Partaking of the cake, which in itself functions as referent to the longevity of the Festival,

incorporates those present into the flow of the festive time period. By eating the birthday

cake. Festival attendees are "ingesting" the Festival and all it represents. The cake is an

icon of the communion between the film festival and the cultural context of Toronto

Jewry, by celebrating its fifth continuous incarnation, and the Festival itself is an icon of

the persistence of Jews within the larger contexts of Toronto, and of Canada, and of the

world as a whole. To eat of the cake is to eat and celebrate the existence of Jewish

identity.

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festivity" (Bakhtin: 8-9).

[35] I am not talking about food *in* the movies shown, but food served within the festival
context. Although as I discuss below. 1 do address the issue of *music* in the films, food is
different. Music is experienced aurally, and therefore can be communicated via
electronic media. Food needs to be eaten, which makes its experience more difficult to
communicate through a medium like film.

Obviously, the food which most celebrates this event is the popcorn served by the Bloor cinema. It has become a modern cultural tradition within Western industrialized nations that when one goes to a movie, one eats popcorn. Is this particular food festive? Any time one goes to a cinema to see a film, one enters a special place demarcated for a specific type of cultural (even so-called "pop" cultural) event, and popcorn has become the significant food item for that particular kind of cultural experience. Even when made at home, in preparation for watching a movie on home video, the function of popcorn is the verisimilitude to the cinema experience. The inclusion of popcorn within the Toronto Jewish Film Festival incorporates the "film culture" identity within this particular nexus[36].

During the Festival's first year, Zukerman began what was to become an annual culinary tradition. When the movies were running late, and the line ups outside the cinema were growing, as was the impatience of the attendees, they served cookies to those waiting in line. The "festival cookies" have since become an entrenched part of the annual celebration and are actively looked forward to as an integral part of the celebration. As one person noted on their survey form: "The festival has the feeling of a 'happening' from the cookies in the lines to the 'turmoil' [of discussing the movies themselves] in the lobby and the feeling is fun and exciting" (comment on survey form,

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[36] Although the activity of going to a movie has become ubiquitous, and therefore so has popcorn, this particular food is framed within the cultural context of going to a movie (associatively, not exclusively).

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1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). This person equates the "festival cookies" with the discussion of the films themselves as integral to the festival experience, and the fact that the response was to the question "why do you come to the festival?", seems to pose that the "festival cookies" can be considered one of the very special dimensions to the event.

Sharing these festival foods, although not mutually exclusive to the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, furthers the sense of communitas. These foods have connotations of festivity to them; one remembers cookies, cakes, and popcorn from other parties one has attended, often with family and friends. This sharing of food from communal vessels (popcorn poppers, trays and plates) also contains a sense of sharing with one another, as a community, as friends, and as a family.

Stoeltje also noted that music and dance are integral parts of any festival (Stoeltje, 1994: 265), and if we are having to readjust our conception of "the festival" to include ethnic film festivals, we also have to alter our perceptions of what such a dynamic means. When I first met the Festival organizers, the day before the Festival began, there was klezmer[37] music playing in the background of the office. At one point during our meeting, Zukerman noted, apparently out of the blue, that she did not like the music that was playing and her recommendation was that she should not "book them." I was not sure what exactly Zukerman meant, but as we were discussing more pressing matters, I let

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[37] For definitions of the Yiddish and Hebrew terms, please see the glossary at the end of this work.

the issue go. I think, in hindsight, what "book them" referred to was the "preshow" music

which would be playing in between film screenings. The music playing between the

movies was from a compact disc titled "Sweet Dreams" by local Jewish musician Bluma

Schonbrun. Schonbrun plays Yiddish, Israeli and Sephardic folksongs on guitar and

flute. Cassettes and CDs by Schonbrun were available for purchase along with the

popcorn at the refreshments counter. The playing of Jewish music, rather than the more

alternative pop music that would normally be playing in the Bloor cinema, further stresses

the specialness of the event within that context.

But in other respects, Jewish music plays a major role within the films

themselves. One of the Festival attendees I exit polled noted this importance:

> — well — it would have to — it's either — the — the Jewish — Jewish
> *music*. If it has klezmer — if it has *shmaltzy* — bit of a background. I
> mean — I — there are films that — what I'm thinking of — umm — *The
> Pawnbroker* [1965]. — 'Course that didn't have Jewish music. It had jazz
> in it. — Howard, personal interview, 1 May 1997, 9701).

Each year the Toronto Jewish Film Festival has at least one film which puts the Jewish

musical tradition to the fore. Interestingly enough, all these "music oriented" films are

documentaries. For example, the 1994 festival showed *Zohar: Mediterranean Blues*

(1993), a film about a Sephardic Israeli pop star. In 1995, the Canadian film *September

Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill* (1995) was shown; in 1996, it was *Carpati: 50 Miles, 50

Years* (1996), a film about the relationship between Eastern European Jews and their

Gypsy neighbors. The programme book for that year has an interesting comment which

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highlights this dynamic: "filled with the music of Gypsy musicians who continue to play the traditional Yiddish melodies, director/musician Yale Strom (*The Last Klezmer*) has created a wonderful documentary on the soul of Jewish music" (Toronto Jewish Film Festival, 1996: 12). Films like these have proved so popular with festival attendees that for the 1997 festival, *A Tickle in the Heart* (1996), a documentary about klezmer music and focusing on the Epstein brothers who have come out of retirement with the recent klezmer revival, was the official closing night film. Tickets for this screening, which was held on a Thursday night, were sold out by the previous weekend. Music plays a vital role, not only in entertaining the Festival attendees between screenings, but also functions as a major motif for the understanding of Jewish culture in general.

The prestigious placement of *A Tickle in the Heart* as the closing night film, also demarcates the final of Stoeltje's activities, the concluding event (Stoeltje, 1992: 265). Like the opening of the Festival, at Southern Accents, the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival ended with a closing night celebration, a party for all those who were involved, physically and financially with the year's Festival. Interestingly enough, the closing of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, for the staff of the Bloor cinema, was really a transitional period; no sooner had the Toronto Jewish Film Festival cleared out, when the whole procedure began again with another of Falassi's "rites of purification", this time for the Inside/Out Film Festival, which began the next day.

Cinema as Liminal Experience

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The concept of "the liminal" as used here, comes from Anthropologist Victor Turner's writings, who in turn was elaborating on Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*. For Van Gennep, the liminal was a specific rite which somehow transforms an initiate from what s/he was to what s/he now is (Van Gennep: 11)[38]. Victor Turner, not content with describing the liminal as a state of being "betwixt and between", preferred to see liminality as a process, whereby separation occurred, but more importantly occurred over time and in a variety of degrees (Turner and Turner: 202).

The "liminoid," the modern cultural experience of "the liminal", is what needs to be addressed here. According to Turner, the liminoid process is when "we" "take our crises and transitions into our own hands, ritualize them, make them meaningful, and pass through and beyond them in a spirit of celebration, to begin a new uncluttered phase of our lives, having learned from some of the world's oldest and most tenacious cultures a portion of their wisdom, their understanding of the human condition" (Turner, 1982: 26). The relationship between the liminoid and festival becomes apparent. Beverly Stoeltje, although not including film festivals within her morphology of the festival, did note the connection between festival and liminality: "festival removes or transforms the behavioral environment into a space and time markedly different from that of routine life, i.e. into what Victor Turner labels the liminal for preindustrial society and the liminoid

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[38] According to Van Gennep, the "complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)" (Van Gennep: 11).

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for modern society" (Stoeltje, 1983: 243). For modern society, then, by taking control of the very symbols which have meaning for us, in whichever cultural contexts we happen to be operating, and celebrating those symbols, the liminal process should be in operation; that is, we should be communicating the *sacra*, and experiencing the *ludic* and *communitas* – playing with that which we hold to be sacred in order to foster a sense of community and groupness.

How this operates within cinema was also noted, albeit tangententally, by Turner as well. Firstly, Turner noted that

> Most cultural performances belong to culture's 'subjunctive' mood. 'Subjunctive' is defined by Webster as 'that mood of a verb used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc., rather than to state an actual fact, as the mood of *were*, in 'if I *were* you." Ritual, carnival, festival, theater, film, and similar performative genres clearly possess many of these attributes (Turner, 1984: 20-21).

The inclusion of cinema's subjunctive mood is significant, and while Turner developed his thesis of cultural subjunctivity with regards to theatre, his observation is relevant for the cinema too. Cinema is a medium which communicates its content in the subjunctive mood, expressing the cultural "suppositions, desires, hypotheses, and possibilities." The "Hollywood Dream Factory" is a frequent euphemism for the cinema, expressing just this dynamic. The difference between modern cinema and traditional celebrations, however, is their accessibility by, apparently, anyone. Some folklorists see the cinema as a medium of universalist communication, rather than community or group based.

I hope to demonstrate the fallaciousness of this assumption: the public display of a

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cinematic text, *however public is defined*, is subject to the same cultural dynamics as any

public display event, such as a festival, which includes the subjunctive mood. As cinema

expresses cultural subjunctivity in a public frame, similarly can this expression be

therefore seen as liminoid. In experiencing a cultural product, especially within the

public milieu of a cinema, the audience controls the dynamics of the context. When we

read cinema as subjunctive, it becomes liminoid within the context we observe it.

"Public liminality is governed by public subjunctivity" (Turner, 1984: 21).

The connection between cinema and festival is this dimension of liminality. At

the functional level, both publicly displayed cultural expressions, movies and festivals,

explore the liminal dimension of their respective cultures. As Turner noted,

> Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition. It is often the scene and
> time for the emergence of a society's deepest values in the form of sacred
> dramas and objects ... But it may also be the venue and occasion for the
> most radical skepticism — always relative ... to the given culture's
> repertoire of areas of skepticism — about cherished values and rules
> (Turner, 1984: 22).

The function of cinema, within the cultural nexus of the group who produces or presents

the film, is to give voice to the cultural dialogue which Turner identifies as "liminal".

The films shown at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival function in either a cultural-mythic

or a cultural-skeptic dynamic: they either support or reject the cultural values inherent

within the cultural hegemony, in this case the voice of mainstream Judaism. What is

significant for their cultural display, however, is the dialogical position with the audience

(Stam: 254)[39]. As Zukerman notes, the real meaning of the Festival is not on the screen,

> It's in the coffee houses after. It's in the car on the way home. It's in your
> discussion with other people during the week. It's — the best — what I
> love to see is people standing and arguing after a film. I love that.
> Because that's what it's for. So it's a safe way for people to discuss what
> they saw, and what it meant to them. ... I guess what I want to do is blur
> the lines between what is Jewish and what is not Jewish. And just to think
> about it. Listen, I've certainly gotten a lot more educated about what being
> Jewish is in the five years I've been involved here. I've no Jewish ba—
> very little Jewish background. My father was a 'lefty,' a 'commie.' So I
> had a lot of Jewish culture in my house, but *no* religion at all (Zukerman,
> Personal Interview, 7 May 1997, 9713).

For Zukerman then, the cultural dynamic is the very ontological discussion of what is a

Jew, and the medium of that discussion is film. I think this is an important point to make:

Folklorists too frequently approach cinema, especially popular cinema, as an artistic text

which has some kind of superorganic existence outside of the culture which produces it

(see discussion of Georges and Abrahams above); however, the Toronto Jewish Film

Festival repositions the discussion by including the cultural source back into the

discussion, thereby recognizing the position of the audience within its performative

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[39] The concept of "dialogical" discourse came from Soviet critic, Mikhail Bakhtin.
"Although it is true that complete realism is an impossibility, it is also true that spectators
themselves come equipped with a 'sense of the real' rooted in their own social experience,
on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representations.
For Bakhtin, all discourse exists in dialogue not only with prior discourses but also with
the recipient of the discourse, with an 'interlocutor' situated in time and space. Although
films are on one level powerful machines which produce an 'effet du reel,' this effect
cannot be separated from the desire, experience, and knowledge of the historically
situated spectator" (Stam: 254).

frame. Cinema, then, is but the medium through which cultural dialogue occurs[40].

This is not, however, to say that the dialogical discourse to festival or cinema is limited within a binary dialectic; frequently this discourse emerges in what Bakhtin has labeled "polyphony": "... 'polyphony' ... calls attention to the coexistence, the collaborative antagonism in any textual or extratextual situation: a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers and thus generate dialogical dynamism" (Stam: 262). It is the polyphonic dimension to any form of public display events which needs to be examined. As John MacAloon noted,

> We are asked to assume that cultural performances 'are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others' (MacAloon, 1984: 1).

It is this dynamic, and these alternatives, which are by design the basis of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. I noted to Helen Zukerman that I was disappointed with the Festival in one major respect: I had not seen *my* experience of Judaism on screen. Her response, I believe, cuts to the heart of understanding the cultural experience of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival:

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[40] Julia Dobrow also noted this dynamic in the context of ethnic video watching, where ethnically produced and consumed videos acted as "a forum for defining and reinforcing ethnic affiliation, and differences between themselves and the host society" (Dobrow: 204).

If you put a thousand faces on Judaism, then a thousand more people will find a connection. That's all it is. Because, we grew up with 'what is a Jew?' 'He obeys or she obeys —' you know that. So, I'm not sure I want you to see yourself onscreen, but I am sure I want you to see a hundred other faces of what Judaism is. When we previewed the film *Bene Israel* [1996], about the East Indian Jews, it blew me *away*! Well then we find out that there's a congregation, in Toronto, of East Indian Jews. So we contacted them, and they came to the film. I mean here are Jews with the red dots and wearing saris and they're praying in Hebrew. Now, how much more inclusive can you get? So when a kid who leaves his parent's form of Judaism, doesn't think he has to leave Judaism to practice a different kind of Judaism. That's all. Options, options, options (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May 1997, 9713).

In response to my question "why do you come to the festival?", an informant I surveyed

noted a similar reason for their participation within this context:

Fun, enjoyment, intellectual provocation, to be in the process of working though what it means to be a diasporic Jew in the late 20th century — a process aided by artistic representations like film — TJFF is one of the most important Jewish events in the city because it has managed to attract the most diverse cross-section of Jews to assemble in one place for a community event .... This, in a city quite fractured into isolated segments of Jewish life, is quite an accomplishment (comment on survey form. 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival).

The cultural studies and ethnographic scholarship, the cultural event producer and the

cultural event consumers all seem aware of the polyphonic dimension to such public

display events, although they may not use the same terminology. The multi-voiced,

multi-optioned dialectic which occurs whenever a cultural text is performed before an

audience, especially when the cultural producer and cultural audience share a base

cultural identity, demands a continual re-evaluation of the basic ontological

understanding of this identity. As Victor Turner noted: "When a social group ... celebrates a particular event ... it also 'celebrates itself.' In other words, it attempts to manifest, in symbolic form, what it conceives to be its essential life, at once a distillation and typification of its corporate experience" (Turner, 1982: 16). That is festival. And that is cinema.

Another dimension to the festival experience is, as I introduced earlier, the issue of *communitas*. For scholars such as Abrahams and Stoeltje, Turner and Rodger Brown, *communitas* must exist for the event to be considered a "festival." As Abrahams noted, "perhaps most important ... there is a sense that the community members must enter into the event for it to be successful; it is, after all, an epitome of everything which is important to the continuity of the community" (Abrahams, 1982: 171). The question on my survey form "why do you attend the festival" elicited a number of responses regarding *communitas* within this group. For many, they simply wrote "cultural experience," implying that this was their reason for coming each year. Some responses noted that the festival gives them "a Jewish feeling" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival), and for others "it tugs at my heartstrings — whatever that means" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). But others gave much more detailed responses.

> The festival is a unique cultural and community event in Toronto which I eagerly anticipate each year. The selection of films always bring to the Toronto Jewish community film[s] on the topics of Jewish relevance and concern. This one week a year gives me an opportunity to feel and be Jewishly active and affiliated in a very special way. Another great thing

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> about the festival is that it appeals to Jews across age and economic strata in the city ...! (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival).

And even more vehemently,

> It is a *duty* for every Jew to attend the Festival. We should be proud of our rich heritage. I think the Festival brings Jews from all denominations ... this is very good to keep our people together (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival).

The final dimension to the Toronto Jewish Film Festival that I want to discuss is regarding nostalgia. The nostalgic, the "bittersweet remembrance of things past" (Brown: 174), gives festivals, including the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, meaning. Beverly Stoeltje noted that "meaning in festival derives from experience; thus, festival emphasizes the past. Yet festival happens in the present and for the present, directed toward the future" (Stoeltje, 1992: 268). This enigmatic and slightly ambiguous comment highlights the complex web of cultural signification within which the Toronto Jewish Film Festival operates.

Festivals' use of the nostalgic obviously focuses attention on the past. As Abrahams noted, perhaps overly simplistically, "both fair and festival operate in the zone of nostalgia, as reminders of life in a simpler economy and technology, when individuals 'could do for themselves'" (Abrahams, 1987: 181). In many respects, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival is what Ralph Linton called a "nativistic movement": "[a]ny conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected

aspects of its culture . . . [C]ertain current or remembered elements of culture are selected for emphasis and given symbolic value" (quoted in Brown: xi). Here is a festival developed by, run by, and attended by members of the Toronto Jewish community, with the specific affect to be part of a city-wide cultural revival. Even the venue functions as a connection to the neighborhoods many of Toronto's Jews grew up in. As my survey data attests to, attendees of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival participate in a number of other Jewish and ethnic cultural celebrations. Film, for this festival, is just the medium of cultural transmission that was chosen, much in the same way that the annual Toronto Ashkenaz festival celebrates Yiddish culture through the medium of music and literature. Helen Zukerman notes,

> Almost as assimilation is happening, we're looking — myself — I'm taking courses in Judaism. And all the big synagogues are losing people. but what's happening is people are forming little *shtibles*; which is back to the eighteen and nineteen hundreds where they got together *shabbes* and then ten of them prayed, or ten of them told stories, or they did something Jewish. So we're back to the beginning and redefining maybe what the beginning is. I haven't got a *clue* what's going on. I don't know what's going on. I just know at *every Jewish event*. we can't believe how many people show up. Jewish film. Jewish plays, ... (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May 1997, 9713).

Barbara Myerhoff noted, rather than passively accepting cultural forms and discourse, by *creating* cultural scenes "we do them to and for ourselves, and immediately we are involved in a form of self-creation that is potentially community building. providing what Van Gennep would call regeneration by revitalizing old symbols from the perspectives of

the present" (Myerhoff: 131)[41].

Bakhtin also noted the importance of the festival ability to regenerate the community life: "this carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things" (Bakhtin: 34). For Bakhtin, and other scholars like Abrahams, Stoeltje, Brown, Alessandro Falassi, and Turner, it is specifically the rite of reversal which, by first deconstructing the culture itself, was able to rebuild and renew itself, on an annual basis. "Carnival ... did liberate human consciousness and permit a new outlook, but at the same time it implied no nihilism; it had a positive character because it disclosed the abundant material principle, change and becoming, the irresistible triumph of the new immortal people" (Bakhtin: 274).

But the "golden age," which festival looks to is not necessarily in the past; or rather, is both past and future. Bakhtin noted that

> Popular festive forms look into the future. They present the victory of this future, of the golden age, over the past. ... The victory of the future is ensured by the people's immortality. The birth of the new, of the greater and the better, is as indispensable and as inevitable as the death of the old (Bakhtin: 256).

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[41] A similar dynamic is noted by Ray Browne: "Apparently steadily moving from a religious nation, Americans have constantly altered and abandoned their forms of religious practices, at times almost abandoning them. Always, however, the old forms have apparently remained close to the surface. In times of national frustration, anxiety and incertitude, people have found the old forms again" (Browne: 2-3).

This is especially relevant within the Toronto Jewish Film Festival: although Jews can look back, quite far back actually, to either the nineteenth century *shtetl*, or being "the Chosen People" as idealized time periods of unquestioning identity and community solidarity, likewise the Festival functions to allow Toronto Jews the opportunity to look forward to a time when the Holocaust and the Israel/Palestine conflicts will be the stuff of stories. By celebrating culture, in whatever guise, there is an implicit knowledge that this year is not going to be the last, and that, in this case, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival will be around next year — a continuation of this cultural expression and all that it stands for. So not only does festival look to the past, but also plans for the future.

But, as the saying goes, "nostalgia ain't what it used to be;" that is, frequently the past idealized by nativistic movements is celebrating a period that was less than ideal. As Rodger Brown noted, "nostalgia may give the appearance of being a comforting, wistful state ... but after a while, if you fan away the mist, you begin to remember that the past is laced with anxiety, uncertainly, fear, denial and dread" (Brown: 174). The *shtetl* experience, for example, so idealized in films like as *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), was frequently characterized not only by community and identity, but poverty, pogroms, and a repressive patriarchy which kept women functionally illiterate. "Nostalgia has become history without guilt, and, for it to work, remembering and forgetting pull together in harness" (Brown: 175).

CONCLUSIONS

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Rather than seeing popular culture festivals, like film festivals, as expressions of hegemonically oriented consumer marketplaces, phenomena like the Toronto Jewish Film Festival do celebrate the culture which supports it. The complex dynamics of festival, of temporal and spatial distortion, of community definition, redefinition, renewal, and rea-vowal, of public liminality and subjunctivity, are all in evidence within this annual event. The texts themselves, the films, function as cultural icons to be displayed for the invocation of *communitas*. Cinema, itself filled with a degree of liminality, is largely just the medium through which the community is reborn and revalidated. The medium is the message; we as scholars should pay closer attention to whom we are listening — the individual texts, or the cultural celebrations surrounding those texts.

One of the ways of approaching this issue, and the basis of my own fieldwork, is the film festival. There are now, out "there", any number of ethnic, orientation, and interest group-based film festivals. Every group has, it seems, somewhere and at sometime, its own film festival. These festivals allow scholars to explore counter-hegemonic contexts and film texts salient to the group in question. In a set, bounded temporal and spatial context, a series of texts are presented which are *a priori* determined as culturally relevant to that group. And it was within that contexts that I worked.

What the Toronto Jewish Film Festival functions as is a social and cultural context where members of the Toronto Jewish communities are able to gather to celebrate being Jewish through the medium of popular cinema. By looking at one of the contexts in Metropolitan Toronto where Jewish cinema is available, I was able to focus my field

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research on a celebration of Jewish film. This celebration, in turn, redefined my own thoughts about how culture was emergent in popular cinema. As a participant observer, I was able to not only collect informant data, but to celebrate Jewish film too — that is, not only to celebrate film, but also to celebrate being Jewish. Once I began talking to these people, other films were cited, and I was able to develop a sense of the cultural geography of Toronto Jewry through their articulation about popular film. It is to this articulation, and what it means to view film ethnographically, to which I now wish to turn.

CHAPTER THREE
"THEORY HAPPENS": VERNACULAR THEORY AND THE MOVIES THEMSELVES

> "Theory happens in the context of an ongoing practice at a given cultural site"
> (McLaughlin: 158).

In this chapter I wish to discuss the vernacular theorizing that those I spoke with

at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival demonstrated involving the formation of emic

taxonomies, and the creation of vernacular genres[1]. Speaking to "expert practitioners," as

McLaughlin called them (McLaughlin: 22), a sense of the community aesthetic emerges;

the ways by which Toronto Jews conceptualize and order the world around them, in this

case, via the medium of cinema. Finally, I shall begin a preliminary discussion of the

films which my "expert practitioners" identified as significant to understanding Judaism

through cinema, and demonstrate what those vernacular taxonomies are.

I "exit-polled" thirty-four people during the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival.

These interviews were all conducted in the Bloor Cinema, either before or after one of the

screenings. Often these interviews were conducted in-between screenings. Between

screenings, those who held "festival passes" could stay in the theatre rather than going

outside and lining up again for the next film. As someone who has attended film festivals

in the past, I know that these can be fairly dull periods of time, which is why I chose these

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[1] Ben-Amos defined genres as "a coherent classification system [which] introduces
principles of order into an apparent chaotic mass of information by establishing features,
forms, and subjects as criteria for organization and by revealing patterns in multitudes of
detail and individual cases" (Ben-Amos, 1976a: xv).

times to interview people. I interviewed twenty-three women and eleven men[2], of varying ages between their early twenties to their mid-sixties. Because I did not ask for my interviewees age, I am basing this on their appearance. While their actual ages are not important, I cite this to demonstrate that I attempted to cover a broad range of age groups. It is this group of people who helped me develop my ideas about Jewish cinema.

Thomas McLaughlin's 1996 book, *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular*, introduced me to an important concept: vernacular theory[3]. By vernacular theory, McLaughlin refers to the ways in which all people, at some level, theorize the world around them, and influences their responses to it[4]. McLaughlin believes that theorizing

> is a daily occurrence for many people, always local in its origins, always limited in its insights, but always essential to the survival and growth of individuals and communities. It is the intellectual form of resistance in everyday life. and it takes many discursive forms (McLaughlin: 26).

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[2] A good random sample; these number coincide with the gender statistic I compiled from the survey (figure 2.14).

[3] The term is borrowed from Hurston Baker: "Baker uses the term to describe the strategies for understanding the African American experience that the blues provide. ... But my practice in these studies ... refers to the practices of those who lack cultural power and who speak a critical language grounded in local concerns, not the language spoken by academic knowledge-elites. ... They do not make use of the language or analytical strategies of academic theory; they devise a language and strategy appropriate to their own concerns. And they arise out of intensely local issues that lead to fundamental theoretical questions" (McLaughlin: 5-6).

[4] McLaughlin noted, working from Gramsci, that since all intellectuals are "organic" intellectuals "in the sense that they articulate the problems and desires and demands of the class that they represent". therefore "all theories are 'vernacular' in the sense that they never transcend *their* local origins" (McLaughlin: 10).

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Although not actually cited by McLaughlin, "vernacular theory" reifies, with some modification, what anthropology called "ethnoscience"[5].

In essence, ethnoscience recognized that members of a culture had cognitive categories for their own experiences.

> Most people do not stop to consider that they are continuously using categories as they think and talk. Much of their knowledge about the classification of experience and the attributes that are used for this purpose are outside of awareness. They believe that it is natural for the world to be divided up and structured in the way they have learned it to be. When they speak, each utterance is a stream of sounds which label categories and relate them in a variety of ways (Spradley: 191).

Spradley defined ethnoscience in much the same way that McLaughlin, above, defined vernacular theory.

> The categories in terms of which man sorts out and responds to the world around him reflect deeply the culture into which he is born. The language, the way of life, the religion and science of a people: all of these mold the way in which a man experiences the events out of which his own history is fashioned. In this sense, his personal history comes to reflect the traditions and thought-ways of his culture, for the events that make it up are filtered through the categorical system he has learned (Bruner, et. al.: 177).

Within culture, experiences are categorized into a system of cognition whereby the members of a culture are familiar enough with the local taxonomies to be able to classify further experiences. As Charles Frake noted, "categorization, in essence, is a device for treating new experience as though it were equivalent to something already familiar"

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[5] And in many respects is similar to what sociology calls "ethnomethodology".

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(Frake: 200). Frake continued noting that what ethnoscience was developed to prove were "the principles by which people in a culture construe their world reveal how they segregate the pertinent from the insignificant, how they code and retrieve information, how they anticipate events ..., how they define alternative courses of action and make decisions among them" (Frake: 203).

George Psathas noted that "... the task of the ethnographer is not merely to describe events as he might see them from his observer's perspective, but also to get 'inside' those events to see what kind of theory it is that the natives themselves inductively use to organize phenomena in their daily lives" (Psathas: 208). Many proponents of ethnoscience believed that "by discovering the irreducible components which natives use, it is possible to arrive at *a complete account* which then enables the investigator to generate the constituted phenomena in a form of appearance which is recognizable to the native" (Psathas: 211, emphasis added).

Herein lies the main distinction between ethnoscience and vernacular theory: while ethnoscience believed that we could achieve a holistic understanding of a community through an understanding of their taxonomies. McLaughlin noted that some group members will demonstrate extensive knowledge about certain aspects of their culture, while "naïve" about others (McLaughlin: 22)[6]. What is most significant about

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[6] An observation noted earlier by Marvin Harris: "The fact that emic rules sometimes lead to accurate predictions is not evidence against this proposition [Harris' title, "Why a Perfect Knowledge of All the Rules One Must Know to Act Like a Native Cannot Lead to the Knowledge of How Natives Act"]. There are always equally real alternative emic

this observation is that although some group members may appear naïve about aspects of their culture, this does not deny their *awareness* of it (McLaughlin: 22).

McLaughlin's vernacular theory, in this respect, is an important development to Dell Hymes's significant article "Breakthrough into Performance," that developed from the work of William Labov. Labov defined "competence" within a community as incorporating three dimensions, the interpretable, the reportable, and the repeatable, and that competent members of a group must be able to perform all three (Hymes, 1975: 14-15)[7]. To these dimensions, Hymes added a fourth, the acceptable or appropriate, which he defines as "the distinguishing of what persons will do in particular contexts from what they can do in principle" (Hymes, 1975: 16). For Hymes, this schema's importance lies in distinguishing "the difference between knowing tradition and presenting it; between knowing what and knowing how; between knowledge, on the one hand, and motivation and identification, on the other, as components of competence in the use of language [and by extension, culture]" (Hymes, 1975: 18)[8]. Ward Goodenough advocated searching for a

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rules present which would not lead to accurate prediction" (Harris: 243).

[7] Hymes characterized Labov's classification as categorizing members of a community into those who can "interpret (find culturally intelligible) and can report; ... interpret but cannot report; ... neither interpret nor report; ... [and] report but not interpret" (Hymes, 1975: 14). As noted, it is only members who fall into the first category, which Hymes and Labov identify as "competent" members of a group.

[8] Hymes's notion of performative competence was developed in opposition to Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence: "Hymes observed that speakers who could produce any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language ... would be institutionalized if they tried to do so. Communicative competence involves knowing not only the language code,

mythic "cultural expert" along these competency lines:

> In any community ... there are some people who are regarded as having *greater knowledge* of what the standards are *supposed to be*. They are called upon to pronounce what the standards are in disputes about them [the standards]. Thus, for some subjects at least, there are acknowledged authorities whose judgements regarding the agreed-upon standards and whose pronouncements as to whether something is right or wrong are accepted by others in the group (Goodenough, quoted in Harris: 247, emphasis added).

Marvin Harris, however, responded to this approach following the Hymesian model, and

anticipated McLaughlin:

> What Goodenough fails to realize in granting to authorities the ability to decide right or wrong is that general behavioral conformity to such decisions is in no way proof of general consensus. People obey rules endorsed by authorities, not because they are obedient to rules, but because they are obedient to authorities. The question of conformity to authoritative rules thus leads directly to the consideration of the distribution of power within a population (Harris: 247).

Hymes's point is that all tradition bearers/community members will demonstrate some

degree of competency. More likely, one is going to come across vernacular theorists

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but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have to enable them to use and interpret linguistic forms" (Saville-Troike: 22). This cultural knowledge is impossible to fully codify, for as Marvin Harris noted, "... the rules for breaking rules are also subject to rules for breaking rules and that the conditions defining occasions as appropriate for one rule rather than another are expressed by means of inherently ambiguous vernacular categories" (Harris: 244-245). This is the main reason why Harris noted, and Hymes implied, "a perfect knowledge of all the rules one must know to act like a native cannot lead to the knowledge of how natives act", as the title to Harris paper reads.

whose knowledge of their culture may not be complete, but the methodology of this form of cultural discourse demands the aggregate of comments to be taken under consideration for the accurate portrait to emerge.

Like the desire to find Hymes's "competent" performer, vernacular theory tries to identify the "expert practitioner" who demonstrates "extensive engagement in a particular cultural function" (McLaughlin: 22). The context of the culture this study was working within becomes central: as I noted earlier, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival draws upon two, although not mutually exclusive communities, the film community and the Jewish community. The competency regarding film for Jews may not be as developed as their knowledge of Jewish culture. The reverse is also likely: that knowledge of Judaism may be less for those members emerging from the film community. As my survey results noted, the split between those who attended the Toronto Jewish Film Festival and those who engage culturally with the film community in Toronto is about fifty/fifty, whereas those attendees who attend other Jewish contexts were three quarters. Based on these numbers alone, one can hypothesize that since more Festival attendees engage in Jewish culture than film culture, their competency with regards to one culture will be greater than the other. "Practitioners of a given craft or skill develop a picture of their practice — a sense of how it is or ought to be practised, of its values and its worldview — and many are quite articulate about this 'theory,' aware for example that there are competing theories that not all practitioners work from the same premises" (McLaughlin: 22). Consequently, I now wish to turn to my actual expert practitioners and hear their voices about Jewish film culture.

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THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING "WHAT IS A JEWISH MOVIE"

One of the most difficult questions I asked those attendees at the Toronto Jewish

Film Festival was how they defined "Jewish movies". For many surveyed, the context of

their film going experience determined the ethnicity of a film, a topic I discussed in the

previous chapter. I spoke with two women at the opening night party of the Festival, Pam

and Janis, about this taxonomy:

> Janis: My favourite *Jewish* movies? I don't know what *Jewish* — what are
> *Jewish* movies?
> Mikel: Well that was going to be my next —
> Janis: Like *Fiddler on the Roof?* Is that a *Jewish* movie?
> Pam: Well yeah. It can be.
> Janis: Or is *Schindler's List* [1993] a *Jewish* movie? And could that be a
> favourite? — I'm trying to think of what Jewish movies are (Janis
> and Pam, personal interview, 9701).

Pam and Janis are two Jewish film goers who regularly attend the Toronto Jewish Film

Festival, although I should note that although Janis is *more* engaged within Jewish

culture, Pam is *more* engaged within film culture. Perhaps this is a determinant of age

(Janis is in her sixties and Pam is in her twenties). Together, however, as active members

within both Jewish and film cultures in Toronto, we can begin to situate these two

practitioners within the cultural nexus of the Festival, a hybrid cultural form of Jewish

and film culture[9].

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[9] It is worth noting, as Hymes did, that such situating is the folkloristic sense of context:
"To place a text, an item of folklore, in its context is not only to correlate it with one or
more aspects of the community from which it came. ... [Context] wishes to study the
relationship between folkloristic materials and other aspects of social life *in situ*, as it
were, where that relation actually obtains, the communicative events in which folklore is
used" (Hymes, 1974: 129).

I also spoke with Howard and Sara, a thirty-something couple, also after the opening night film. Previous to this moment in the conversation, Howard and Sara both identified *Fiddler on the Roof* as a favourite Jewish movie, even though a non-Jew directed the film.

> Mikel: ... what makes a film Jewish? If non-Jews can make Jewish films, —
> Howard: Soul.
> Mikel: Soul? Ok. [Howard laughs]
> Sara: What does that mean?
> Howard: I don't know (Howard and Sara, personal interview, 9701).

This conversation between Howard, Sara and myself begins to confirm that there is some ineffable quality which the practitioner intuitively knows is emergent, the Jewish "soul," but is unable to put into words. According to Labov and Hymes, Howard can report, but not necessarily interpret.

Howard and Sara, and Pam and Janis are all able to identify when something is keyed "Jewish," and they are able report its manifestation within texts, but the interpretation dimension is not of relevance to them. Rather than seeing such cultural practitioners as non-competent, within the sociolinguistic definition, this ineffable identification of the "Jewish Soul" suffices for those who operate within this context.

Still, even at this early stage of theoretical emergence, my informants have cited two films, which happen to be the two most cited films by my expert practitioners, *Schindler's List* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, as significant Jewish movies. Although I shall hold off on my textual analysis of these films until a later chapter, their role within Jewish film culture is significant. Both films are historically oriented. They deal with Jewish roles in recent history, the Holocaust in *Schindler's List* and the turn of the century *shtetl*

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and the Jewish experience in the "Old World" in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Although, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, not everyone classifies them in the same way. The "Jewish History Film" will emerge later on as an important cultural motif; I just wish to point out its existence at this early stage. From an etic/film studies perspective I would classify *Fiddler on the Roof*, not as a "Jewish History Film" but as a "Hollywood Musical"; yet, this is less relevant for those who exist within Jewish culture. The distinction between a "Historical Drama" (*Schindler's List*) and a "Hollywood Musical" (*Fiddler on the Roof*) may in fact be a significant distinction for those who operate within a context of *film* culture, rather than *Jewish* culture.

The citing of actual films was also a difficult thing to elicit: many of those practitioners I spoke with had difficulty thinking up favourite or significant Jewish movies.

> I don't know the names of the Jewish movies very well. I mean I've come to the Jewish film festival for a few years. And I've seen lots that I've loved. But I'm not going to remember the names for you (Judith, personal interview, 9702).

Judith's comment again points toward the significance of the Festival as the singular context for films being identified as "Jewish". But like Howard's inability to express what he meant by "Jewish Soul," Judith's inability to remember specific film titles is not to question her cultural competency, but to re-question the importance of such dimensions within this culture. Another practitioner, Barbara, asked me to supply her with a list of Jewish movies so she could choose her favorites: "You see, to me, if I had a list then I could go through the list, and think — If I had a list of names — then it would jump out"

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(Barbara, personal interview, 9704).

It occurred to me well after the Festival was over, while I was transcribing these interviews, that perhaps one of the problems my practitioners had in identifying specific films was because they thought that I was asking about specific *Festival* movies, and not Jewish movies in general. While I was conducting these interviews in the Bloor Cinema before the screenings, I was wearing my "Survey Guy" badge, as part of my participant observation within the Festival. Because it was the same design and colour as the staff badges, perhaps some of my informants were mistaking my motivations as being specifically for the mention of movies they had seen during the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. Reba, an elderly woman in her late sixties that I spoke with, responded to my questioning about some of her favourite Jewish movies with a comment I only really noticed when transcribing the tape: "And so we were just talking about them [Jewish movies]. And I said, that's fine, but we've gone along way since. *You've* enlarged, *you've* gotten much more diversified in what you show" (Reba, personal interview, 9702, emphasis added)[10].

TOPICAL DEFINITIONS

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[10] One of the problems of doing this kind of participant observation research is being mistaken for a paid employee of the organization you are working with, and perhaps some of the responses reflect the practitioners trying to be helpful by telling me what they thought I wanted to hear.

Most of the expert practitioners I spoke with were able to engage "competently" with my questions, and a sense of the vernacular theorizing of this culture begins to emerge[11]. What I expected, from the beginning of this research, was that, as film studies teaches, the ethnicity of the director or screenwriter would be of more importance than the thematic considerations. One of the questions I asked on my survey was regarding the importance of the ethnicity of an actor, the director, or the writer, the responses I received indicate that just under a quarter of those surveyed identified the ethnicity of the actor as important, a fifty/fifty split on the importance of the director, but that the writer was by far the most important aspect of determining the ethnicity of a film. The respective roles of writer and director determine how the *performance* of the film (director) and the *content* of the film (writer) emerges. The emphasis on the Jewishness of the writer emerges as the more important aspect, and since the writer determines the content, it should not be surprising that the content of the film is what largely determines its ethnicity.

    Sy, for example, made a distinction between films which represent Jewish *culture*

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[11] This idea of "vernacular theorizing" has long been discussed in folklore studies. Alan Dundes called it "oral literary criticism", where cultural participants interpret and make meaningful for themselves the orally transmitted materials they disseminate (Dundes, 1975: 51-52). Ben-Amos called it "metafolklore": "... the conception a culture has of its own folkloric communication as it is represented in the distinction of forms, the attribution of names to them, and the sense of the social appropriateness of their application in various cultural situations" (Ben-Amos, 1976b: 226). Likewise can "metafolklore" be compared to Hymes's sense of competence with regards to interpretation, reportage, reproduction, and most importantly, applicability.

and those films which represent Jewish *history*. *Schindler's List*, for Sy as well as for many of my vernacular theorists, is an important Jewish *history* film (Sy, personal interview, 9704). Although Sy may not phrase his taxonomy as such, he does propose a *functionalist* schema: some films are important to teach Jewish history, some to teach about Jewish culture. For Sy, as vernacular theorist, film's function is primarily didactic. This distinction between "Jewish History" films and "Jewish Culture" films is one possible categorization of these films. However, even with that distinction, there may be a great deal of overlap between the two. Any film about a period of Jewish history may also try and recreate aspects of the Jewish cultural life; conversely, films made about contemporary Jewish culture may become important as historical documents (i.e. the Yiddish language cinema which I discuss in Chapter Five).

The total of thirty-four different individuals I interviewed over the course of this fieldwork cited a lengthy list of films to me. Frequently these people, as cultural practioners and as vernacular theorists, offered their own taxonomies of Jewish cinema. These films were categorized under a variety of criteria: generic, thematic, and nationalistic. On the one hand, this taxonomy reflects the diversity of "Jewish" cinema; while on the other hand, it also reflects the semipermeable nature of these categories.

By far the most frequently cited aspect which determines "Jewish Cinema" was the topic on which they based the film.

> What makes a movie Jewish? Anything that reminds us of who we are. Anything that talks about Judaism in a— that's the only thing that makes a movie Jewish. Something that talks about it (Mike, personal interview,

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9702).

I tried, unsuccessfully, to get Mike to elaborate on his comment. For Mike, a Jewish

movie was a movie that dealt with Jewish topics. Although he does mention that some

movies "remind us of who we are," an identifying aspect which I will deal with in the

next chapter. Regardless, Mike ends his comment, and effectively the entire interview,

quite definitively: that in spite of everything else, a Jewish movie talks about being

Jewish.

Mark, a successful Toronto comedian, similarly follows suit: "A Jewish movie is

a movie about Jews. Or Jewish themes. Those are two different things" (Mark, personal

interview, 9701).

Although Judith, above, had difficulty in remembering specific film titles, she had

no trouble at all in attempting to characterize what makes a film Jewish.

> What it's about. I mean, certainly if it's the director, and the direction, and
> the— so on. But, it can be the— political film. I mean, who else is going
> to do films about the Middle East? Or about family situations that have to
> do with the Jewish culture? So, it's — a combination of content, — what
> they're trying to show, like morals (Judith, personal interview, 9702).

Judith had difficulty in identifying specific films for citation[12], but was fully competent in

interpreting, reporting, and repeating the appropriate thematic aspects of film for a Jewish

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[12] Judith had difficulty in identifying specific films. The closest she came to succeeding
in thinking up a title was referring to the popular Israeli film, *The Summer of Aviya*
(1988), as "Something about Evita", getting the assonance of the first word correct, but
then confusing it with the Alan Parker film starring Madonna that was released a few
months previous (Judith, personal interview, 9702).

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context. This indicates not an "incompetent" cultural practitioner, but that emically the emphasis is not on the titles of the films, as much as it is on the thematic aspects of them.

And yet, only one of the practitioners I spoke with identified the tangible importance of the writer's contribution:

> First of all I would define [Jewish Cinema] as film which has a 'Jewish' type of subject. Jewish life in general, or Israeli life. Secondly, probably include films which have important Jewish writer — playwright, or director, so on — but that's secondary for me (Sy, personal interview, 9704).

Interestingly enough, Sy was the first to mention Israel as an important aspect of Jewish cinema. This aspect is reflected by the Toronto Jewish Film Festival's presentation of so many Israeli and Israeli-themed films. I noted in the previous chapter the relationship between the festival and Israeli consulate; that the Consul General hosts a reception during the festival itself to welcome the Israeli guests. Figure 3.1 shows the number of Israeli or Israeli-themed movies which the Festival showed during the festivals between 1994 and 1997.

Year	# of Israeli Films	Percentage
1994	1/27 films total	4%
1995	6/23 films total	26%
1996	9/30 films total	30%
1997	9/26 films total	35%

Figure 3.1: Number of Israeli films shown at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival

Of all the films mentioned by my informants, eight were either Israeli or about Israel. Another informant noted to me "by their nature Israeli films tend to be Jewish" (Ron, personal interview, 9701). One can then chart the films cited to me as Figure 3.2, based

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on the topic of "Israeli" cinema[13].

Genre:	Examples:
Israel/Israeli themed	*Avanti Popolo* (1986)
	Beyond the Walls [*Me'Ahorei Hassoragim*] (1984)
	Cup Final [*Gmar Gavi'a*] (1991)
	Exodus (1960)
	Hill 24 Doesn't Answer [*Giv'a 24 Eina Ona*] (1955)
	I Love You Rosa [*Ani Ohev Otach Rosa*] (1972)
	Sallah [*Sallah Shabbati*] (1965)
	The Summer of Aviya [*Ha-Kayitz Shel Aviya*] (1988)

Figure 3.2: Israel/Israeli themed films

Although films with Jewish topics are vernacularly considered "Jewish" by those expert practitioners who attend the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, there also exists a further category, "films of Jewish interest":

> To me [Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 documentary on Hitler's Nuremberg rally, *Triumph des Willens* is] a Jewish interest film. Made by a non-Jew, about a non-Jew . Um — but it's of Jewish interest. So I think that there can be anti-Semitic films — could be — I would find — if they showed it here [at the Festival] — that would be something I'd definitely want to see (Howard, personal interview, 9701).

Although Howard's comment again refers to the ethnicity of certain films being dependent upon context, that even an explicitly Nazi film could be considered a "Jewish Film" depending upon the context that it is presented in, as a film of "Jewish interest," it is worth mentioning here first.

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[13] Perhaps it is worth noting that within film studies, or from an etic perspective, I would have limited the topic of "Israeli" cinema to include only those films made *in* Israel, and exclude films made elsewhere *about* Israel.

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Finally, just as Howard defines films of Jewish interest, or as Mike refers to films which talk about Judaism, as Jewish films, these expert practitioners are engaging in an advanced form of vernacular theorizing by developing an inclusive taxonomic system predicated upon experience. As McLaughlin noted, "theory is not detached from experience; it is a way of unmaking and remaking cultural and social sense within experience" (McLaughlin: 25). Similar to many folkloristic discussions of genre, vernacular taxonomic systems are a means by which a culture categorizes its own experiences through verbal, material, and cultural means. Dan Ben-Amos noted, "the taxonomy ... has become actually a categorization of cultural experience, which are represented in the overt cultural attitudes toward themes and form" (Ben-Amos, 1976b: 223)[14]. I asked Sy and his wife Barbara about films that they would recommend which

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[14] Although folklorists, such as Alan Dundes, have noted that "the concept of genre in general impedes folklore research because it prevents scholars from examining the folk ideas that underlie and permeate verbal expression" (quoted in Ben-Amos, 1976a: xii-xiv), it is my contention that *vernacular* taxonomic systems actually reveal more about "folk ideas" than they "impede". This approach is more in line with Abrahams view, which stated "genres are useful not only because they help us focus on the relationship between performer and audience, but also because genres give names to traditional attitudes and traditional strategies which may be utilized by the performer in his attempt to communicate with and affect the audience" (Abrahams, 1976: 193). Paraphrasing slightly, if my expert practitioners have a name for it, and they do, as I shall demonstrate, then there is reason to suspect a cognitive and self-reflective categorization process is in effect. As Sturtevant noted, "the main evidence for the existence of a category is the fact that it is named" (Sturtevant: 137-138). Such an approach is basic to a study of ethnographic semantics, what ethnoscience calls "domains", which Sturtevant noted "is the necessity for determining in an nonarbitrary manner the boundaries of the major category or classification system being analyzed, i.e. for discovering how a domain is bounded in the culture being described [emic] rather than applying some external, cross-cultural definition [etic] definition of the field" (Sturtevant: 135).

would show an accurate portrait of Jewish culture:

> Barbara: The *Schindler's List* thing was certainly —
> Sy: But that doesn't show Jewish *culture*.
> Mikel: So, if *Schindler's List* isn't about Jewish culture, what category
>   would you —?
> Sy: It's a — that's a historical drama, and there would be other films of ...
>   or about the Second World War, or about the Nazis or whatever
>   and I would put it into that category (Sy and Barbara, personal
>   interview, 9704).

Here we see, not only Sy's ability to understand the differences between different culturally bounded distinctions of film within a culture, but also to apply those differences outside of the immediate, text-by-text accumulation, into an active taxonomic system. *Schindler's List* is not a film about Jewish culture, says Sy; it is a film about Jewish history[15]. Even within the context of Jewish topics, further emic distinctions need to be made, distinctions which I shall be making across the forthcoming chapters.

Perhaps here is the point at which I should begin to discuss the vernacular taxonomies which emerged from this fieldwork[16]. As Sy above demonstrates, these expert practitioners categorize these films in such a way so they make cultural sense, independent of any etic genre distinction.

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[15] Ben-Amos noted that "the functional approach [to genre] is concerned not with what genres are, but with what the members of the society say they are" (Ben-Amos, 1976b: 223).

[16] The importance of taxonomies is noted by Hymes: "The work of taxonomy is a necessary part of progress toward models (structural and generative) of ... description, formulation of universal sets of features and relations. and explanatory theories" (Hymes, 1972: 43).

Ruby, another of my expert practitioners, likewise expressed her own personal

taxonomic system:

> I'm a serious person, I'd probably [recommend] *The Quarrel* [1991]. I also
> study Holocaust literature, so I might [recommend] something like *The
> Summer of Aviya*. [laughs] Something like *Half the Kingdom*. 'Cause I'm a
> feminist, so ... (Ruby, personal interview, 9705).

Here we see Ruby's distinction between what she calls "serious" films, "Holocaust" films,

and "feminist" films[17]. The Holocaust is also a major theme of the festival movies.

Figure 3.3 shows the number of Holocaust related films shown at the festival between

1994 and 1997.

Year	# of Holocaust Films	Percentage
1994	10/27 films total	37%
1995	4/23 films total	17%
1996	6/30 films total	20%
1997	7/26 films total	27%

Figure 3.3: Number of Holocaust films shown at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival

Although, from an etic perspective, these figures may seem small, many festival attendees

felt that there are too many Holocaust themed movies shown. One comment on my

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[17] Roger Abrahams noted "The group's conventions associate certain sets of problems
with sets of expressive forms" (Abrahams, 1976: 196). How, for example, Ruby or Helen
(below) categorize *The Summer of Aviya*, or any film within the cultural repertoire,
reveals not so much what the film, objectively, can be categorized into, but where the
film's function for the individual, who as cultural practitioner may speak for the culture,
can be described.

survey form noted: "The movies that I saw were excellent. But 'Toronto Holocaust Film Festival' would have been the right name for it [the festival] (judging from the selection)" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). Be that as it may, the festival participants I spoke with identified a large number of Holocaust oriented movies as being of Jewish interest.

__Genre:__	__Examples:__
Holocaust Films	*Cabaret* (1974) *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* [*Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini*] (1971) *Judgement at Nuremberg* (1961) *Julia* (1977) *M. Klein* (1977) *Les Misérables* (1994) *The Pawnbroker* (1965) *Playing for Time* (1980) *The Quarrel* (1991) *Schindler's List* (1993) *Shoah* (1985) *Sophie's Choice* (1982) *The Summer of Aviya* [*Ha-Kayitz Shel Aviya*] (1988) *Triumph of the Will* [*Triumph des Willens*] (1935)

Figure 3.4: Holocaust films

It is interesting to note that Ruby classifies *The Summer of Aviya* as a Holocaust film, whereas Helen, within the context of the other films she cites as "favourite" Jewish movies mentions exclusively Israeli films: *Sallah*, *I Love You Rosa*, and *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (Helen, personal interview, 9702). Although *Aviya* is certainly about Holocaust survivors trying to put their lives back together in Israel, some will classify the same text

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as either a Holocaust film, or as an Israeli film, thereby demonstrating the semi-permeable nature of vernacular taxonomies[18].

I noted in the last chapter that more than two thirds of the surveyed festival participants were women. Up until 1997, and the addition of Shlomo Schwartzberg to the Festival staff, the directors, programmers, and employees of the Festival were also almost all women. In part, this was reflected in the number of films about women's lives, Ruby's "feminist" films, which the Festival programmed between 1994 and 1997.

Year	# of "Women's" Films	Percentage
1994	8/27 films total	30%
1995	4/23 films total	17%
1996	7/30 films total	23%
1997	5/26 films total	19%

Figure 3.5: Number of "Women's" films shown at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival

Likewise, enough films about women and their experiences within Jewish culture were cited by my informants to allow those films to be charted:

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[18] Hymes noted, with regards to language variation, that such taxonomic methodologies are useful in observing how one category can adapt to a different social context (Hymes, 1972: 43).

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Genre:	Examples:
"Women's" films	*Crossing Delancey* (1988) *Half the Kingdom* (1989) *Hester Street* (1975) *I Love You Rosa* [*Ani Ohev Eina Ona*] (1972) *Julia* (1977) *Sophie's Choice* (1982) *A Stranger Among Us* (1992) *The Summer of Aviya* [*Ha-Kayitz Shel Aviya*] (1988) *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995) *Yentl* (1983)

Figure 3.6: "Women's" films

What this semi-permeable nature of text and context reveals is that some other kind of criterion is required for the identification of Jewish "content" within these films. Following from Dundes' (1980), I refer to these aspects as Jewish *texture*; my informants refer to it as "Jewish sensibilities".

JEWISH SENSIBILITIES

While interviewing Pam and Janis during the opening night party, Pam's friend Mark came over and joined in our discussion. Pam introduced Mark and I to each other, and without missing a beat asked:

> Pam [to Mark]: What's your favourite Jewish film?
> Mark: *Annie Hall* [1977].
> Pam: That's a good answer. How come? [to Mikel] Is that the right
>   question?
> Mikel: Sure.
> Mark: Because its — its about the matrix of self-destruction. Neurotic
>   self-destruction. It's essential to the Jewish argument (Mark and
>   Pam, personal interview, 9701).

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When Mark identified "neurotic self-destruction" as "essential to the Jewish argument,"

he began to identify some of the less contentual, but nonetheless significant, aspects of

Jewish cinema. Further on in the same conversation, Mark begins to posit a definition of

what he terms the "Jewish sensibility," which I quote at length:

> Mark: And here's the litmus test: in the moment of greatest happiness,
> there has always got to be some sadness. Some melancholy. And
> that is what will make it a Jewish sensibility. I think. That's what
> makes a Jewish sensibility.
>
> Mikel: Ok, but if you're watching a movie, how do you know whether or
> not it's incidentally in the mix, or it has to be — in the mix?
>
> Mark: No, I'm saying — a Jewish filmmaker is most likely to include that
> in what he is doing because he can't help it. 'Cause it is so
> ingrained in the culture. You know, someone else could also have
> a melancholic point of view, it doesn't mean that its impossible for
> someone else to have —
>
> Jeannie: What about Russians?
>
> Mark: They borrowed it from the Jews. There were lots of Jews in Russia,
>
> Jeannie: Ok, no —!
>
> Pam: They killed them, they took it.
>
> Mark: They killed them, they take their melancholy, 'Where's my damn
> melancholy? Ah no, Sartre took it again!' (Mark, Pam, and
> Jeannie, personal interview, 9701).

As McLaughlin noted:

> To *have* a theory is to have a set of assumptions that make your
> interpretive acts possible. Anyone who produces or consumes discourse
> has such a set of assumptions. ... To *do* theory is to pay conscious
> attention to those assumptions, to think critically about how reading
> happens, how meaning is produced, how texts have their effects, etc.
> (McLaughlin: 34).

Mark is a vernacular theorist *par excellence*: he not only has a theory, a taxonomic system

which he uses to interpret cinematic texts identified as Jewish, but what is more

important, he can *do* theory, by applying those theoretical assumptions beyond the

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apparent manifest content of the film, in this case by exploring the thematic considerations of melancholy within the Jewish experience. Even when confronted with a challenge to his theory, that the Russians are just as melancholic as the Jews, Mark can fire back — even as a joke, that the Russians *must* have stolen it from the Jews.

Later in the same conversation, Mark and Pam began to apply this theoretical definition of a "Jewish Movie" further, to absurd degrees. In noting how few female pornographic movie stars were Jewish (Annie Sprinkle and Barbara Dare were the only two names they could think of), in comparison with allegedly the large number of Jewish male porn stars and pornographic directors and producers, Pam wondered whether or not a film which starred a Jewish female porn actress would then be a *Jewish* porn film.

> Mark: Well I think it depends on the amount of melancholy she brings to her orgasm. She goes 'I'm cumming! I'm cumming! But — I don't know — I feel empty somehow.' You know. 'Oh! Oh! Oh! The temple is being destroyed! Oh! Oh!' You know. I think that maybe that is something —
>
> Pam: That would be a Jewish porn film.
>
> Mark: That would be a Jewish porn film. Actually I was working on a Jewish porn film once, it was called 'Debbie Doesn't do Anything'. And um — It was very successful — ba-doom, boom — Or the wonderful, wonderful anal series, 'Butt Mitzvah'. 'Butt Mitzvah I' 'Butt Mitzvah II' 'Butt Mitzvah III' —
>
> Mikel: Wasn't that in 3D?
>
> Mark: That *was* the one in 3D actually. Yes, that's right. When they do it on the sweet table — do you remember that scene? Wonderful! Wonderful! Erotic, sensuous, and yet with a sense of loss (Mark and Pam, personal interview, 9701).

Although Pam is playing "straight man" to Mark's improvised shtick, together they demonstrate how this kind of vernacular theory is not only taxonomic, but that those taxonomies are applicable elsewhere, even as the basis for comedy.

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That same balance of *having* theory and *doing* theory is emergent among a number of the expert practitioners with whom I spoke. Another example:

> Rhonda: ... *Fiddler on the Roof* because it sort of shows — it depicts where the Jews come from and how they evolved as North Americans and why they maintain the traditions that they *maintain*. Not necessarily for religious purposes. And that's just from a personal point of view, because when I talk to non-Jewish people and I explain about Judaism, I explain — because I'm not a *religious* person — I'm more of a *traditionalist*. So I explain it from that point of view. And I think that *Fiddler on the Roof* is a really good piece of art that depicts that. And it has a lot of comedy, so it — it —
>
> Mikel: It's palatable.
>
> Rhonda: Yeah. Yeah. And then *Schindler's List*, I think, is — that's something that really gets to— the depths of your soul, because — like everybody is going to feel something, no matter who you are. And there isn't much comic relief in that, and that's sort of on the flip side of *Fiddler on the Roof*, where it sort of — also shows what brings Jews together and why we unite and what we have to fight for and what we've suffered and *why* we are so united and why we — you know are so strong as a nation. I mean that to me is a lot more what Judaism is about, rather than the actual religious aspects of it (Rhonda, personal interview, 9707).

Rhonda, like Mark, is able to distinguish between taxonomic distinctions, and then to apply those to her own experience. By using both *Schindler's List* and *Fiddler on the Roof* as didactic tools to explain herself within the context of the assimilated and non-Jewish world, film becomes a means to a pedagogical end. And for Rhonda herself, this application is important.

Finally I discussed the nature of Jewish humour with one expert practitioner. And herein, Debbie likewise demonstrates that she not only *has* a theory of Jewish humour, but she can likewise apply it.

Debbie: I think that Jewish humour uses — it's very — it's not totally self
deprecated. It's able to see two sides to an issue, and poke fun at
areas of — weakness and wrong — and injustice. And be able to
play those two sides.

Mikel: So, it's more satirical?

Debbie: It's very, very satirical. And it's very biting. And it's able to see
paradox — it's very paradoxical. It's able to see that.

Mikel: Is it safe to say that it avoids absolutes? That it's playing off
multiple sides —?

Debbie: No, I think it — I think it's able to see more than one point of
view. But it's able to see where is — what is the ethical stance.
And what are the moral issues at stake. But that's not to say that
Judaism always takes the high moral ground, but it is able to say
'these are the issues and this is the paradox' and you cut through to
find some message of truth and human responsibility and
behaviour. So it perhaps aims at looking at the high road whether
one takes it or not (Debbie, personal interview, 9702)[19].

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[19] There has been a great deal of material generated on the topic of Jewish humour,
especially by folklorists. I refer to two recent collections of essays, Avner Ziv and Anat
Zajdman eds. *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor* (Westport:
Greenwood Press, 1993), and Sarah Blancher Cohen ed. *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish
Humor* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990). The quarterly journal, *Humor: International
Journal of Humor Research*, has published at least one special issue on Jewish humour
(4.2 (1991)), which includes, among other articles Ofra Nevo's "What's in a Jewish
Joke?" (251-260), Jay Boyer's "The Schlemiezel: Black Humor and the Shtetl Tradition"
(165-175), and Christie Davies' "Exploring the Thesis of the Self-Deprecating Jewish
Sense of Humor" (189-209). Major folklorists, such as Dan Ben-Amos has written on
"Jewish Humor — The Concept from a New Viewpoint", published in Dov Noy and
Issaehar Ben-Ami eds *Folklore Research Center Studies. Volume 1.* Jerusalem: Magnes
Press, 1970: 25-33, and his more famous "The 'Myth' of Jewish Humor" *Western
Folklore* 32 (1973):112-131; Elliott Oring has published "The People of the Joke: On the
Conceptualization of a Jewish Humor" *Western Folklore* 42 (1983): 261-271, as well as
the book length study, *The Jokes of Sigmund Freud: A Study in Humor and Jewish
Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); and of course two very
important pieces by Alan Dundes, "The J.A.P. and the J.A.M. in American Jokelore"
Journal of American Folklore 98 (1985): 456-475, and "Auschwitz Jokes" *Western
Folklore* 42 (1983): 249-260. Other classic studies in Jewish "jokelore" include Heda
Jason "The Jewish Joke: The Problem of Definition" *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 31
(1967): 48-54, and Naomi and Eli Katz "Tradition and Adaption in American Jewish

Although Debbie was not discussing any specific film, nor does she utilize the language and discourse of academic film studies or folkloristics, she is able fully to articulate her understanding of the cultural matrix within which Judaism operates. Like Mark and Rhonda, Debbie is able to identify, what for her, are salient aspects of Jewish film culture.

One of the aspects, especially of Jewish humour, which has been missing so far, and surprised me while doing this fieldwork by its relative absence, is that of Jewish-American humour, which in film is most obvious in the films of Woody Allen and Mel Brooks. Although Mark cited *Annie Hall*, a Woody Allen film, he cites it apart from the humour aspects of Jewish comedy. One of the few references to these films was as follows:

> Amos: All the — Mel Brooks movies. — All the Woody Allen movies.
> They're all Jewish movies.
> Mikel: But what is it about those movies that makes them Jewish?
> Amos: They're funny ... it's a different part of Jewishness. But, but there
> is a— I don't know. I'm not much on Jewish movies. But it's very
> Jewish. What I would say — it has Jewish *sensibilities* (Amos,
> personal interview, 9702).

Although Amos was only able to identify the fact that Woody Allen and Mel Brooks movies had an amorphous "Jewish sensibility" to them, he does recognize that this sensibility is another aspect of Jewishness.

Humor" *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 215-220. Finally, in the context of vernacular theory and "expert practitioners". Rabbi Joseph Telushkin has published a book-length study, *Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say About the Jews* (New York: Wm. Morrow, Inc., 1992). I cite these sources here, rather in the body of this chapter, since Jewish humour is only an adjunct to the overall study.

When I questioned some people about the absence of Woody Allen or Mel Brooks from their lists of significant Jewish movies, they were quite explicit about their reasons for omitting them. Some informants, like Randi, accuse stalwarts of Jewish-American popular culture, like Philip Roth and Woody Allen, as perpetuating negative Jewish stereotypes.

> *Oh.* Is that what you mean by a Jewish film? Ya know what? That wouldn't have even occurred to me that those are Jewish films, but, by the same token, when I watch them I know that this depicts American Jewish humour. It's an expression of it. Like Philip Roth. Literature. Yeah. Ya know why? I've developed a pet peeve. I'm getting sick and tired of these — of seeing Jews stereotyped in American films. You know? With the Matzo ball business? Over and over, ya know? Like "The Nanny" on TV. It's so f— bloody — *fucking* tiresome and unimaginative (Randi, personal interview, 9702)[20].

Here, although Randi clearly is in possession of a theoretical approach to Jewish film, Woody Allen and Mel Brooks do not fit with it. In response, Randi, is able to point out exactly how American-Jewish comedy does not fit with her definition of Jewish film, based on what she sees as an American stereotype, which in her words, she finds "tiresome and unimaginative". We can further work from this brief statement to conclude that Randi demands a more rigorous performance and one which is less dependent upon

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[20] Phenomenology teaches that "the manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). ... it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him (Iser: 56-57).

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stereotypical iconography. The two films which she cites to me, both American films, and also cited to me by others, *Crossing Delancey* and *Hester Street*, she characterizes thus: "so, all those small, quirky films — it's a totally different story. Those films are rare. They're not for the mass market" (Randi, personal interview, 9702).

Lainie, another expert practitioner I spoke with, likewise is dissatisfied with American-Jewish culture, or at least with how it is portrayed in American films:

> They're trying to — to — to — portray Judaism as a— as like — mainstream culture views Judaism, rather than as genuinely is. Like I'm not saying that it's — it's sort of played up, or it's not genuine, but I think this [the Festival] is somewhat more genuine, and it's not — it's not geared at like *mass* culture, so it's not trying to put on any sort of front to appeal to everyone (Lainie, personal interview, 9703).

Lainie demonstrates herself to be quite canny about the popular culture institutions which produce film. And her position, along with Randi's, *vis-a-vis* American popular images of Judaism is another aspect of vernacular theory.

But, neither is vernacular theory blind to the controversy which it generates. Scholars are not necessarily the only ones who engage in theoretical debases. Even among, *especially* among, vernacular theorizers, these expert practitioners recognize that emically produced and identifiable cultural products run the risk of offending someone, within the community or without.

> Barbara: Some films make you ashamed of your culture — out there on the big screens. Some make you feel — I mean, like *Portnoy's Complaint* [1972]. And you think 'Oh God, I don't want to be identified with *that.*'
> Sy: Although, at the time, you probably would have. About the year when it was written, that was what everybody did.
> Barbara: The excess. I mean all the excess and the —
> Sy: *Goodbye, Columbus* [1969], same sort of thing.

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> Barbara: That's what I meant. — Now what does it *do*? Ok. Particularly
> when they are controversial films, they cause a lot of debate and
> discussion. And whenever a group feels vulnerable, they close off
> debate and discussion. And they say we need a common front to
> the world and so we need not put those issues out here. Maybe in
> our backyard, but not in public (Sy and Barbara, personal
> interview, 9704).

Perhaps partially to negotiate against further anti-Semitic attacks, or to present an accurate view of what Judaism is, one of the strongest vernacular aspects of what makes a film Jewish is the idea of an accurate and recognizable Judaism. This I shall discuss in more detail in the following chapter, but for now, when a film presents a not-so-flattering portrayal of the culture, understandably, it becomes controversial. McLaughlin himself recognized this as a crucial aspect of vernacular theory.

> Practitioners also have to raise theoretical questions and take theoretical
> positions when their practice is subject to criticism from outside its own
> institutions or, more generally, whenever the public's perception of the
> practice is an issue. In these situations the basic values of the practice
> must be articulated in terms that make sense to outsiders (McLaughlin:
> 23).

CONCLUSION

For McLaughlin, for myself, and for the Jewish cultural practitioners who attend the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, vernacular theory is more than just a means to pass the time away, or appear intelligent when a visiting ethnographer comes to call. Dan Ben-Amos, twenty years earlier than McLaughlin, noted something similar to vernacular taxonomies, a fusion of the anthropological "ethnoscience" and the sociological "ethnomethodology," that he called "ethnic genres":

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The ethnic system of genres constitutes a grammar of folklore, a cultural
affirmation of the communication rules that govern the expression of
complex messages within the cultural context. It is a self-contained
system by which society defines its experiences, creative imagination, and
social commentary. It consists of distinct forms, each of which has its
particular symbolic connotations and scope of applicable social contexts
(Ben-Amos, 1976b: 225).

Listening to the vernacular, as the subtitle of McLaughlin's book indicates, allows the

ethnographer access to the emic taxonomic systems of a group. This reveals the internal

issues a culture struggles with, be it the more serious issue of the esoteric/exoteric factor

(Jansen: *passim*), or in a more benign sense, whether or not to classify *The Summer of*

Aviya as a Holocaust movie, or an Israeli movie. Cultural practitioners operate within

culture on an everyday basis, making sense of their world. They do not do this

uncritically, or without self-consciousness, but engage with culture as aware, self-

reflective and self-reflexive individuals. Scholars who dismiss vernacular theory as

uninformed, or simplistic, create artificial distinctions between the critical theory done

within a university context, and that done in a downtown Toronto movie theatre. As

McLaughlin noted, cultural practitioners "have been doing vernacular theory all their

lives, and not just in school settings" (McLaughlin: 154).

There is yet another aspect to the vernacular articulation of popular cinema, so far

only hinted at by those I interviewed. I now wish to turn to a discussion of the

experiential component in vernacular theorizing.

CHAPTER FOUR:
"SMELLING RIGHT": READER PARTICIPATION AND THE CREATION OF TEXTS

In this chapter I wish to demonstrate how theoretical paradigms, such as phenomenology and its offspring, reader-response theory, remove the objections of folklorists to recognize popular film texts as legitimate sites for ethnography that I outlined in my introduction. I wish to follow this up by discussing how my informants, my expert practitioners, predicate their understanding of Jewish cinema within the boundaries of their own experience of being Jewish.

Implicit in Robert Georges' definition of a storytelling situation, as noted in my introduction, was that the teller and audience must be face-to-face for proper communication to occur, and this was the crux of the problematic relationship between folklore and film. This definition denied the applicability of popular film texts to the folklorist's field of discourse, since by their very nature, films are not face-to-face media of communication. With a film, the narrative is created/performed in one space and time, and the document of that performance is then able to be recontextualized atemporally and ahistorically. Although, as film theorist Vivian Sobchack noted: "the direct engagement ... between spectator and film in the film experience cannot be considered a monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Rather it is ... dialogical and dialectical ..." (Sobchack, 1992: 23).

Peter Narváez and Martin Laba also noted that "performance contexts of popular culture are usually characterized by significant spatial and social distances between performers and audiences" (Narváez and Laba: 1). In the introduction to their edited

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volume, *Media Sense*, the authors point out the similarity between the processes, structures, and functions of both folklore and popular culture. Specifically, for the present study, the authors noted:

> With regard to the functions of folklore and popular culture, both operate as organizational modes of activity in a social order, in that they serve to structure and provide repeatable expressive forms for individual and group experiences in everyday life. In other words, they offer a means of rendering experience intelligible and graspable through recognizable forms that are both pleasing aesthetically and relevant in a social interactionalist sense (Narváez and Laba: 2).

It is, therefore, less the content of the performed text, than the social context within which that text is performed.

Further to that point, Linda Singer has noted that cinema going is a communal and social experience:

> … going to the movies is an activity with an explicitly social dimension. We go to the movies to be seen as well as to see others, and to see the film with and in the presence of others. We function, in such situations, not as solitary spectators but as members of an audience, a community of perceivers (Singer: 55-56).

And to extend this proposition further, when that audience shares specific cultural similarities, say for example when they are gathered at a *Jewish* film festival, the nexus of cultural signification becomes emergent. To examine any form of cultural expression, say for example within the context of a festival, text becomes meaningful to the group as cultural performance, not based on the diegetic content of the text, but on its performance within set contexts.

Peter Narváez noted that one of the locations for the nexus of text and audience is

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"the expressive use of communications media, mass-produced goods, and mass-mediated texts in small group contexts" (Narváez, 1992: 17)[1]. Although Narváez was referring to fan-oriented groups who embrace a small series of mass-mediated texts as culturally significant, we can expand this paradigm to include ethnic groups as well, if we root our discussion within their lived experiences.

PHENOMENOLOGY

In order to discuss the relationship between cinema audiences and their reception of ethnically bounded cinematic texts, even if the context only bounds those texts in which they are presented, we require a discussion of the nexus between phenomenology, reader-response theory, and reception studies. Turn-of-the-century German philosopher Edmund Husserl

> ... set out to analyze human consciousness — that is, to describe the concrete 'Lebenswelt' (lived world) as this is experienced independently of prior suppositions, whether these suppositions come from philosophy or from common sense. He proposes that consciousness is a unified *intentional* act. By 'intentional' he does not mean that it is deliberately willed, but that it is always directed to an 'object'; in other words, to be conscious is always to be conscious of something. Husserl's claim is that in this unitary act of consciousness, the thinking subject and the object it 'intends', or is aware of, are interinvolved and reciprocally implicative. In order to be free of all prior conceptions, the phenomenological analysis of consciousness begins with [a suspension] of all previous suppositions

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[1] Jay Mechling also noted: "Folklorists need to look at cultural studies for help in understanding the crucial role of mass mediated experiences in modern lives, including modern folklore. Cultural studies critics need to look at folklore studies for ethnographically sensitive accounts of the discourses people bring to their mass-mediated experiences" (Mechling: 281).

about the nature of experience, and this suspension involves the 'bracketing' (holding in abeyance) the question whether or not the object of consciousness is real — that is, whether or not the object exists outside of the consciousness which 'intends' it (Abrams: 255).

Phenomenology, as philosophical discourse, posits that the subject and object are involved in a mutual meaning-making relationship, and in order to access the actual phenomena to be studied, as opposed to the *perception* of it, experiences are analyzed. the cultural/social perceptions bracketed off, and the hypothesis is that what remains is the actual phenomenon experienced, free of any preconceived notions.

Within the social sciences, phenomenology "takes as its main aim the analysis and description of everyday life — the life world and its associated states of consciousness" (Abercrombie, et al.: 158). Such studies are "carried out by 'bracketing off' judgments about social structure. that is. making no assumptions about the existence or casual powers of social structure. Phenomenologists argue that. although people generally take the everyday world for granted. a phenomenological analysis must show how it is made up" (Abercrombie. et al.: 158). I noted in the last chapter how many of my expert cultural practitioners could identify Jewish culture. and identify it in popular cinema. determining whether or not specific films could be considered "Jewish". but many had great difficulty in expressing what those constituent parts were. Such phenomenological approaches are, therefore. useful in an attempt to ascertain what are Jewish *experiences*.

This is not entirely different from David Hufford's self-defined "pedestrian" phenomenology. which he defined along the dictionary definition of the term: "the study of ... appearances in human experience. during which considerations of objective reality

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and of purely subjective response are temporarily left out of the account" (Hufford: xv)[2].

In both the social scientific and the "pedestrian" approaches to phenomenology the experience behind narrative is central, and this approach requires that such experiences be isolated from within the narratives themselves. What needs to be "bracketed off" within phenomenological studies is a distinction between the phenomena itself as object (*noema*), and the experience of that phenomena (*noesis*) (Sobchack, 1992: 34). The pragmatics of this approach are that

> knowledge is almost always characterized by typification and is essentially oriented to solving practical problems [for those participating members of the culture]. ... [It is suggested] that this everyday knowledge is creatively produced by individuals who are also influenced by the accumulated weight of institutionalized knowledge produced by others (Abercrombie, et al.: 158).

I have already demonstrated how cultural discourses experienced by the cultural practitioners themselves influence vernacular theory, but here I wish to point out that they further influence this theorizing, perhaps even more deterministically by experience within the culture itself[3].

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[2] For an application of Hufford's "pedestrian phenomenology" to popular cinema, see Koven, 1997.

[3] Sobchack stated that "... the radical reflection of phenomenology attempts to *reanimate* the taken-for-granted and the institutionally sedimented [we would say 'the everyday' or 'vernacular']. And because it turns us toward the origins of our experience of phenomena and acknowledges both the objective enworldedness of phenomena and the subjective embodied experiencing them. such radical reflection opens up not only fresh possibilities for living knowledge and experiencing phenomenon, for seeing the world and ourselves in a critically aware way" (Sobchack, 1992: 28).

READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Within literary studies, the phenomenological voice most cited was that of

Wolfgang Iser. Iser noted that "the phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the

idea that ... one must take into account not only the actual text, but also, and in equal

measure, the action involved in responding to that text" (Iser: 50). In responding to the

text, be it literary, oral, or cinematic, the action of reading "illuminate[s the] basic

patterns of real experience" (Iser: 56).

> We have the experience of a world, not understood as a system of relations
> which wholly determine each event, but as an open totality the synthesis of
> which is inexhaustible. ... From the moment that experience — that is,
> the opening on to our *de facto* world — is recognized as the beginning of
> knowledge, there is no longer any way of distinguishing a level of *a priori*
> truths and one of factual ones, what the world must necessarily be and
> what it actually is ([Maurice] Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Iser: 56).

Both Iser and Merleau-Ponty had influenced a number of further theorists into the

development of what has become known as "reader-response" theory, where scholars see

the diegetic world as experience mediated through the readers own experiences, both

diegetically and extra-textually. Development of reader-response theory, along with its

sibling, reception theory, meant the decline of phenomenology itself as a literary

discourse (Abrams: 257).

Reader-response theory, proper, positions the audience/reader as the loci of

textual meaning.

> Reader-response critics turn from the traditional conception of a work as
> an achieved structure of meanings to the ongoing mental operations and
> response of readers as their eyes follow a text on the page before them. By
> this shift of perspective a literary work is converted into an activity on the
> part of the reader. ... Reader-response critics of all theoretical persuasions

> agree that, at least to some considerable degree, the meanings of a text are the 'production' or 'creation' of the individual reader, hence that there is no one 'correct' meaning for all readers either of the linguistic parts or of the artistic whole of a text (Abrams: 269).

Essentially, reader-response theory presumes that since we cannot ascertain the authorial intention, focus should instead be upon the reader as the constructor of meaning (Stahl: 6). Neal and Robidoux argue certain folklore genres, Märchen and ballad specifically, encourage audiences to fill in the "gaps" with their own experiences (Neal and Robidoux: 212). The suggestion is that "folk" narratives, be they Märchen or ballad, have persisted specifically due to these gaps, and the genres' easy adaption to changing cultural mores.

In the last chapter, I noted the films, which by relative group consensus, were specified as significant. In a much later article, Abrahams noted that the field of folkloristics has been enriched "by reader-response literary critics through the notion of the *interpretive community*, one made up of a group which produces texts and goes on to delineate what and how those texts might be read and interpreted" (Abrahams, 1993: 387)[4]. Deriving from Stanley Fish's 1980 work, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, the *interpretive community* "is composed of members who share a particular reading 'strategy,' or 'set of community assumptions'" (Abrams: 271). Falling within this purview, one can begin to make some preliminary generalizations regarding specific group

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[4] Even earlier than Abrahams, Richard Bauman noted "fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. The competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways" (Bauman, 1975: 293). These are learned through cultural experiences.

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aesthetics, and literal *worldview*, which I shall begin to do in the next chapter.

RECEPTION THEORY

Reception theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the impact of the historical

audience, rather than the individual audience/reader, on textual hermeneutics[5].

Developed from the work of Hans Robert Jauss, reception theory

> like other reader-response criticism, ... focuses on the reader's reception of
> a text; its prime interest, however, is not on the response of a single reader
> at a given time, but on the altering responses, interpretive and evaluative,
> of the general reading public over the course of time. ... The response of a
> particular reader, which constitutes for that reader the meaning and
> aesthetic qualities of a text, is the joint product of the reader's own 'horizon
> of expectations' and the confirmations, disappointments, refutations, and
> reformulations of these expectations when they are 'challenged' by features
> of the text itself. ... [And since these readers are situated in both time and
> space], Jauss represents this tradition as a continuing 'dialectic,' or
> 'dialogue,' between a text and the horizons of successive readers ...
> (Abrams: 272-273).

Meaning for Jauss, and those scholars whom he influenced[6], was determined not

specifically by the positioning of an audience within a historical context (spatial contexts

are but implicitly referred to), but by the changing dynamics across time (and by

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[5] I am using the term "hermeneutics" in the more benign sense of "textual analysis",
rather than as a form of Biblical exegesis. Working from Abrams definition,
hermeneutics refers to "a formulation of the principles and methods of meaning involved
in getting at the meaning of ... texts" (Abrams: 91).

[6] In film studies, Janet Staiger's *Interpreting Films,* documented the changes in reception
theory over time, although she did not make the same epistemological distinctions among
the various forms of phenomenological theory that Abrams did.

extension across space).

FILM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

As applied to film studies, phenomenology has a particular resonance. Although film phenomenology has a diverse and convoluted history as the different approaches above demonstrate, some consistency emerges: "phenomenology is a method for studying *any* phenomenon: the world, the mind, or the cinema. Indeed, the cinema is a particularly apt subject for phenomenological investigation because it is so dependent on the explicitly *visual* experiences of time, space, perception, signification, and human subjectivity" (Tomasulo: 2). Likewise, Vivian Sobchack stated: "what else is film if not 'an expression of experience by experience'?" (Sobchack, 1992: 3). Harald Stadler noted: "A phenomenological film theory ... proposes a mutually constitutive relationship between the viewer's life-world and the reality of the filmic world: nonfilmic factors (everyday experience) motivate film reception and make it meaningful; filmic experience ... modifies perception and behavior in the viewer's everyday life" (Stadler: 41)[7]. It should

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[7] It should be noted that Stadler is not referring here to experience in the sense of cultural worldview, as much as he means previous *cinematic* experiences. As he noted later on, "The complex interrelation between filmic and everyday experiences may be described in the following way: the inventory of everyday experience and previous film experience draws the horizon of understanding and provides the schemata of interpretation for new film experience. The horizon and schemata available determine motivation, expectation, and selection regarding new film experience. Viewing a new film (or reviewing a known one) constitutes a meaningful event. i.e.. an 'experience' (in proper phenomenological terminology) in that the viewer relates the new and unfamiliar to established sense schemata and integrates new sense data into the available sense context. As a result, the experiential inventory (the horizon) is expanded, and future expectation, motivation, and interpretation will be modified" (Stadler: 45). But using experience in the sense of cultural worldview, as I am here. still validates Stadler's theory.

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come as no surprise then to discover that among the cultural practitioners I interviewed,

the defining characteristic that they required for a film to be successfully classified as

"Jewish" is predicated upon the verisimilitude of the film to their own experiences with

Judaism outside of the cinematic. A position likewise supported by Stadler:

> What is particular about a given film . . . is not *that it records a reality or*
> *creates a fiction* — an either/or decision — but *how it fuses* a necessary
> degree of recognizable reality with a desirable quantity of illuminating
> illusion. The term that supersedes actuality and fantasy in film analysis, as
> far as epistemology is concerned, is credibility: for any film to be
> convincing, it must to some extent be realistic (Stadler: 46, emphasis in
> original).

When both filmmaker and audience share similar cultural experiences, a cultural

"feedback" occurs: "the film experience is the that cinematic 'language' is grounded in the

more original pragmatic language of embodied existence whose general structures are

common to filmmaker, film, and viewer" (Sobchack, 1992: 13).

VERNACULAR THEORY AND THE EXPERIENTIAL

The basis of phenomenology is that at the heart of any textual representation of

culture, we can identify some form of experience[8]. The role of an "ethnography of seeing"

is to identify in what ways popular cinema represents the cultural experience of the target

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[8] Janice Radway quotes Raymond Williams as noting: "'in many societies it has been the
function of art to embody what we call the common meanings of the society.' He asserts
that 'the artist is not describing new experiences but embodying known experiences.
There is great dander in the assumption that art serves only on the frontiers of
knowldege'" (Radway: 256).

audience, often determined by context, in this particular case study, that of Jewish cinema. We can rephrase the question to: in what ways does Jewish cinema reflect Jewish experiences? Obviously such a question is heavily bounded by a historical and spatial subject, in this case, Toronto Jewry. There are two essentially phenomenological dimensions to a vernacular definition of Jewish cinema: on the one hand, audience members must be able to recognize these characters and their situations *as* Jewish, based on their own cultural experiences; and on the other hand, they must represent these cultural experiences with a sense of subjective, culturally experienced authenticity.

Many of my informants identified "authenticity," which in turn is based on their own experiences of Jewish culture, as being perhaps *the* single most significant determining factor in ascribing "Jewishness" to a film. Rachel states, that " ... the Jewish element comes in, if there's some authenticity in the experience" (Rachel, personal interview, 9702). Here, Rachel is being especially phenomenological: the experience she refers to is the *cinematic* experience, and within her brief comment, she demands an equation between what she experiences in a film and the verisimilitude of that experience with her *Lebenswelt*, as determined by her demand for authenticity. But Rachel was not the only one who demanded such verisimilitude.

During my research I had an off-the-record chat with one of my informants, Ron. This occurred after one of the evening screenings as we walked to the near-by subway station. We were discussing Jewish identity within a North American context, and Ron asked me, if he were to walk into my apartment in St. John's, how would he know that

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this was a "Jewish" household. I thought Ron asked an interesting question. The only artifact which explicitly states that I am a Jew within the material culture of my decor, apart from my rather meager collection of Judaica books on my shelves, is the silver *menorah* in our front room. "There, you see," Ron replied, "I would not consider that evidence of a *Jewish* home, but of a *North American* Jewish home." For Ron, within his own experience, there exists a distinction between a proper *Jewish* home, determined by how he defines the culture based on his own experiences as a cultural practitioner, and a *North American* Jewish home, which within his own cultural experience, violates the norms and tenets of the culture[9]. Earlier in the fieldwork process, Ron noted the following to me:

> you have — um — a film that — in the past couple of years — [*Welcome to the*] *Dollhouse* [1996]. And in the middle of the film, at a party, there's somebody playing 'Hava Negilah'. Ok, so these characters are Jewish. I *guess* (Ron, personal interview, 9701).

Rather than the identification of a traditional Jewish folksong, like "Hava Negilah", somehow transforming the textual narrative into an ethnically bounded text, as Jewish, Ron interprets the film as part of the "mildly ethnic" quality which he finds particularly worrisome.

For me, and maybe it's just a personal thing, where — where I have a

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[9] It is worth noting that Helen Zukerman, Toronto Jewish Film Festival director, noted something similar: "... sometimes we'll watch a film, the three of us [the Festival selection committee], and we say 'twenty minutes in. Where's the Jewish content? Oh, there's a menorah on the wall'!" (Zukerman, personal interview, 9713).

perspective on some of these issues, where I think 'huh? That's not the kind of Jewish family *I* ever knew'. Or, 'that's not — that's not *really* about Jewish ideas,' or you know — maybe that people are not — it could be that a lot of people who become filmmakers, were so much a part of the mainstream, that for them they wouldn't know. They wouldn't know what necessarily a Jewish family is going to feel or taste like. Because there is no particularly authentic experience for them, that differentiates their family from the guy down the street who is Italian, or Irish, or anything else. It is just something mildly ethnic (Ron, personal interview, 9701).

This is the problem Ron found with my *menorah* being the only visible signifier of my own Jewish ethnicity; being so much a part of the mainstream, so assimilated into the hegemonic culture of North America, I have been denied the knowledge about what a Jewish family "feels or tastes like". Ron delineates his own distance from the North American Jewish experience: "I have a bit of a different perspective on it, because I am the first North American in my family — coming from sort of an Israeli/European background, and even going to a Jewish school ..." (Ron, personal interview, 9701). Within Ron's own cultural experience, he creates a gestalt whereby it further mediates all cultural experiences. *My* cultural experiences, mediated by my own up bringing and background, create a different gestalt: one whereby the simple display of a *menorah* is sufficient for Jewish identity to be negotiated. And when it comes down to identifying particularly significant *Jewish* movies, these cultural experiences become significant in Ron's vernacular theorizing. Only one of the eight films Ron cited to me was supported by other cultural practitioners: *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974). Two of the other films Ron cites as significant, *Avanti Popolo* (1996) and *Cup Final [Gmar Gavi'a]* (1991), are Israeli. "By their nature, Israeli films tend to be Jewish," he noted (Ron, personal interview, 9701). In the context of Ron's own cultural experience, being the

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child of "Israeli/European" parents, Israeli films are considered to be more Jewish than

the American films, like *Welcome to the Dollhouse*. One of the few exceptions which

came to Ron's mind was *The Plot Against Harry* (1989):

> [*The Plot Against Harry*] is a film about Jewish characters who are — they
> are Jews. And I recognize these people. And they smell right. It's like 'Ok.
> I know what this is about' (Ron, personal interview, 9701).

In the last chapter, I identified *Fiddler on the Roof* as one of the most cited film on

my survey, in a second place tie with the Israeli film *The Summer of Aviya*. I asked Dave,

another cultural practitioner I interviewed, why? Why *Fiddler*, when it was directed by a

non-Jew, and so apparently aimed at a mainstream audience, could he hold the film as a

significant *Jewish* cinematic text? Dave's response cuts directly to the point I am trying

to make here: "it touched on everything that I envisioned influenced — what my

perceptions of what my grandparents grew up with. So, for that reason, it's quite —

inspiring" (Dave, personal interview, 9702, emphasis added). Dave succinctly iterates the

subjective aspect of phenomenological discourse: that he draws "inspiration" from his

own experiences of verisimilitude with his grandparents and the Tevye and Golde story,

and can do a mental transposition replacing one with the other, thereby making the film

personal. But that his grandparents' experience cannot be, for Dave at least, made distinct

from their role as Jews, and the resulting gestalt is predicated upon the acceptance of the

film as *Jewish*.

Another expert practitioner I spoke with, Eddie, talks about *Schindler's List* from

this personal experiential gestalt:

> And the reason that I say *Schindler's List* is because my mother went
> through that particular concentration camp, my mother's a survivor. And

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she said that of all the movies she's ever seen, *Schindler's List* is the only one that even comes close to depicting what it was actually like. Because most of the movies that she's seen, says it was like a picnic compared to what they really went through. Whereas *Schindler's List* is the only one that she's seen, that comes close to depicting what it was actually like (Eddie, personal interview, 9705).

Within the Hymesian components of speech events, we can begin to situate authenticity of experience with authority of the speaker. Eddie, as cultural expert participating within the Festival (I saw him there every day), cites the film *Schindler's List* with authority by invoking his mother's own experiences. The authenticity of *Schindler's List*, for Eddie, as for Ron above, emerges from the personal gestalt informed from their own upbringings. *Schindler's List* is significant because it does not violate Eddie's gestalt of the Concentration Camp-experience, as related to him by his mother. But a further step is completed, by Eddie's invocation of his mother's voice: although Eddie doesn't slip into an alternative performance mode, by emulating her voice, or any other instrumental paralinguistic aspect, semantically, he is able to speak for his absent mother by reiterating what she has told him about her own experiences as an Auschwitz survivor. Eddie's mother's experience becomes his own within his gestalt, and that, in turn is held up for validation with the Spielberg film.

And yet the opposite can also occur — that the cinematic depiction of certain events *violates* the memory of that experience. Again in *Schindler's List*, some Auschwitz survivors did not see the film as an accurate depiction of the experience:

When talking about the film to my own parents, both Auschwitz survivors, my mother criticized the Auschwitz shower scene: 'This is not how it happened; when we went in, we waited for the gas to come out of the pipes and kill us; but after some minutes a little water came out of the pipes, it

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was dripping, really, not flowing like in the film.' While to the rest of us
this is a mere detail, a variant of the great mystery called Auschwitz, for my
mother it was an unforgivable error — after all, that is when her life was
not taken; ... (Bresheeth: 205-206).

This comment by Israeli filmmaker's Haim Bresheeth's mother demonstrates the centrality
of verisimilitude: a detail, as Bresheeth himself noted, even a seemingly insignificant
detail, can mean the difference between recognizing the film as being culturally relevant
and not. And again, as Bresheeth noted, what we may understand as insignificant from an
etic perspective, may not be insignificant for insiders.

Although the personal gestalts of Ron or of Eddie lead them to their own aesthetics
of reception, they are also able to abstract this gestalt into theory. For Eddie, the
authenticity of cinematic experience is essential.

> If they are going to be exposed to something, then at least they should be
> exposed to something that's as accurate as possible. So they don't get a
> misconception. You know, when somebody learns, especially by film,
> which is the quickest way they retain something rather than reading, — but
> you only have to see a movie once and you remember it for *years*. It's
> instant education. So if you're going to have instant education, then you've
> got to get *accurate* instant education. Because if you educate wrong, it's
> going to stay there. And to re-correct it, and to change it around, who
> knows what you may have to go through in order to do that. Where in the
> meantime it could last for years or generations that you have wrong
> information accepted. ... Artistic license, if it contradicts the actual reality,
> then you're not educating properly (Eddie, personal interview, 9705).

Within Eddie's personal gestalt, as informed by his mother's Auschwitz experience, which
becomes his own in performance as a voice of authority, is predicated upon an *accuracy* of
representation — a recognizable reality which, for Eddie was experienced through his
mother, and validated by *Schindler's List*. Likewise, contained within Ron and Dave's

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gestalt, films like *The Plot Against Harry* or *Fiddler on the Roof* are validated by their own experiences within the nexus of Jewish culture. It is not enough to identify one's own experiences in a cinematic text, but that we require the accuracy of those experiences to validate them culturally.

But within the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, a slightly different operation is in effect. To be sure, as both Dave and Eddie's testimony attests to, seeing one's own cultural experiences on screen has the effect of validating them, of recognizing that one is not alone in one's experience of Judaism. Zukerman noted that her personal approach to directing the Festival is not to duplicate readily what our experiences of Judaism within a North American context would necessarily imply we should see. She sees her role within the experiential nature of the Festival as going beyond the obvious cultural motifs which so easily become stereotypes, Randi's "Matzo ball business". Zukerman continues:

> So, *that's* what the Jewish Film Festival — what *I* want it to be about. Showing people there are a thousand options. You know, you get kids who intermarry, and the parents — some parents, that's the end of the Jewish line. Well, you know what? *No.* There's room for them in the community. And they need to see themselves onscreen and they need to see *how* they can be Jewish ... (Helen Zukerman, personal interview, 9713).

Here, Zukerman notes the even more interesting didactic aspect of film phenomenology: that rather than seeing oneself, which she noted is not what she wants the Festival to be about, one can see alternatives within the cultural purview of the context. If one is uncomfortable with the "Matzo ball business", with the existing paradigms of cultural representation which so easily degenerates into stereotypes, then the Festival fulfills the cultural function of supplying alternative modes in which one can still be considered

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Jewish.

CONCLUSION

I began this chapter challenging the views of folklorists who see popular

cinema as a one-way system of communication, of passive spectatorship, denying

the active reception of film as cultural narrative. Phenomenology, and its

offspring, reader-response theory, put the emphasis back on the cultural audience

as the site of textual meaning. Stanley Fish's concept of the *interpretive community*,

when the reader/audience shares a similar cultural context along traditional "small

group" lines, further emphasizes the cultural impetus with which cinema may

function.

Turning to my expert cultural practitioners themselves, and listening to them, film

apparently both reflects experience, so long as done with a degree of cultural authenticity,

and can expand the cultural repertoire of practitioners themselves, by educating them

about the variety of cultural experiences that they may be unaware. Ethnic film festivals

are a prodigious way to begin to talk to cultural practitioners within those groups, and

from these conversations to begin to learn what those salient aspects of a culture are. *I*

used, primarily, but not mutually exclusive, two main theoretical approaches: vernacular

theory and phenomenology. Vernacular theory teaches one to listen to how the cultural

practitioners themselves characterize and codify their cinematic experiences, and to begin

to understand how those emic taxonomies are constructed and to what purpose. I used

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phenomenology, on the other hand, to understand the relationship between film texts and their verisimilitude to other cultural experiences.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss some of the central motifs within Jewish culture as demonstrated by what some of my informants identified as central "Jewish" films, the Yiddish-language cinema.

CHAPTER FIVE:
YIDDISHKEYT AND *MENTSCHLEKHKEYT*: THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE CINEMA

In this chapter I shall engage in textual analysis on an ethnically bounded category

of Jewish cinema, the Yiddish-language cinema. Yiddish, being the *mamaloshen* of the

Ashkenazi people, Eastern European Jews, is exclusively "Jewish." Unlike any other

conceivable national or linguistic cinemas, the Yiddish language can only be Jewish.

While at the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival, I asked two women coming out

of a screening to define what they considered to be a "Jewish Film."

> Suzy: ... I do feel a strong affiliation with anything which is *Yiddishkeyt*[1].
> That's why I'm here. ...
> Yona: Me? — I like — I really like the real Yiddish movies. In Yiddish.
> The ones from Poland, and from years ago. I love watching those
> (Suzy and Yona, personal interview, 2 May, 1997, 9702).

I mentioned to Yona that other people I had talked to during the Festival identified the

Israeli films as "true" Jewish movies. She responded emphatically "*No*. But from Israel

isn't Jewish — it's *Hebrew*! I'm talking *Yiddish*" (Yona, personal interview, 2 May 1997,

9702). Within Yona's vernacular theorizing, the linguistic distinction between Hebrew

and Yiddish is a vital one. For Yona, the distinction between what makes a film Jewish

and not-Jewish is the language it is presented in. "Yiddish" and "Jewish" are synonyms,

linguistically, and the resulting definition of what constitutes "Jewish" culture, including

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[1] Ruth Wisse defined *Yiddishkeyt* as "both the culture that is embodied in the Yiddish
language and a standard of ethical conduct that preserves the essence of Judaism without
the requirements of ritual and law" (Wisse: 29).

cinema, is frequently based on that[2].

If, as Yona notes, there is a distinction between what is Jewish, that is Yiddish, and what is not, i.e., Hebrew, a political distinction opens up: only those Ashkenazi Jews who are aware of and participate within *Yiddishkeyt* can be considered Jewish. Those who engage within Hebrew or Sephardic cultures may practice Juda*ism*, but within certain voices of vernacular theory, they are not considered Jew*ish*.

Three quarters of those respondents I surveyed during the 1997 festival identified that they participated in other "cultural" and "ethnic" type events. Identifying the "ethnic" distinction within Judaic cultures which these events spring from (i.e., distinguishing Israeli, Religious, Sephardic and Ashkenazi cultural events), the majority of these events are Ashkenazi. 13% of those surveyed identified musical events, specifically klezmer concerts — the *shtetl* music of the Old Country. 7% specifically identified Asheknaz, an annual Toronto festival of Yiddish culture. Another 4% identified either the Yiddish language revival group. "Friends of Yiddish," or the "Yiddishland Café" — an occasional Yiddish language cultural event which performs in different restaurants around Toronto. Collectively, almost a full quarter of those Festival

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[2] "The Yiddish word *yidish* (Jewish) identifies a people as well as a language and ... a Yiddish cinema [would then identify a cinema] made by Jews for a presumably Jewish audience..." (Hoberman, 1991: 5). As well, "[Max] Weinreich ... reminds us, 'religion' is a modern concept, one that assumes the existence of a sphere of life beyond the boundaries of religion. In Jewishness prior to the 18th century no such boundary existed. ... At the same time, though the Jewish language ... is based on Jewish religion, it resembles other European vernaculars in serving as the expressive instrument for the entire people in every facet of their lives, and is thus not *bound* by its religious sources" (Wisse: 30-31, emphasis in the original).

attendees who participated in my survey identified specific Yiddish cultural contexts for

their other ethnic involvements. This revival of *Yiddishkeyt* also effects cinema. Judith

Goldberg noted that Yiddish language films

> have once again become popular because of the recent acceptance and
> rediscovery of Yiddish culture and the growing interest in all types of film.
> The ethnic Yiddish heritage is no longer the embarrassment it was to the
> recently assimilated Jews of the past few decades. Yiddish is once more a
> real language with its own artistic body of work. Those who once would
> have been horrified by the outright sentimentality, the conservative ethics,
> and the technical crudeness of Yiddish films now attend them for their
> historical value as an excellent picture of immigrant Jewish life, the superb
> acting, and the simple fact that most of these films are very good
> entertainment. There is now an annual Yiddish film festival in New York
> City. The first Yiddish film festival in Los Angeles was so popular that it
> was repeated, and these films play to sold-out theaters, synagogues, and
> museums throughout the United States (Goldberg: 11).

Film critic J. Hoberman noted in at the beginning of his book, *Bridges of Light*,

that the Yiddish language had an ideological signification by its very utterance, and

therefore a Yiddish language cinema would likewise contain that ideology. Hoberman

noted that "this was not just a national cinema without a nation-state, but a national

cinema that, with every presentation, created its own ephemeral nation-state" (Hoberman,

1991: 5). Gottfried Herder's theories about the relationship between language and national

unity are also applicable here. For Herder. "language [was] the expressive vehicle of the

national soul" (Wisse: 30)[3]. At the heart of this affection for *Yiddishkeyt*, is a nostalgia for

the Old Countries that many North American Jews immigrated from in Northern and

Eastern Europe, as well as a sense of mourning for those Jews and the Yiddish culture

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[3] Although as an anti-Semite. Herder was certainly not talking about Yiddish.

murdered by the Nazis. Professor of Yiddish, Dr. Ruth Wisse noted "beyond this kind of

nostalgia, the mystique of Yiddish and of what is called *Yiddishkeyt* plays a significant

role in Jewish culture at large, particularly among those uncomfortable with the religious

definition of the Jew but nevertheless desirous of retaining their Jewish identity" (Wisse:

29). The language itself has replaced the religious dimension of Judaism for certain Jews,

and in the contemporary context of North American Jewish culture, functions as signifier

for the entire history of modern European Jewry, their destruction at the hands of the

Nazis, the massive immigration to the Americas at the end of the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, and of course each individual Jewish family's memories of

grandparents and their lifestyle. The Yiddish language, and by extension *Yiddishkeyt*, as

signifier, has so much associative meaning attached to it, that it is not surprising that it is

held to so dearly by North American Jews.

YIDDISH CINEMA

Mark Slobin began his review of J. Hoberman's study of Yiddish cinema, *Bridges*

of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds, with the following:

> What has film got to do with folklore? Quite a bit, in the rare case of an
> ethnic group that goes to the trouble of creating a homegrown commercial
> cinema in conditions of massive immigration and cultural change (Slobin:
> 229-230).

In addition to Hoberman's 1991 book, two previous studies of this phenomenon appeared:

Judith Goldberg's 1983 *Laughter Through Tears: The Yiddish Cinema*, and Eric

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Goldman's 1983 *Visions, Images, and Dreams: Yiddish Film Past and Present*[4]. It is an

impressive amount of work on a subject which Hoberman dismissed as "a novelty"

(Hoberman, 1991: 5) at the beginning of his own tome which runs more than 300 pages.

On the most general level, a Yiddish film is one made in the Yiddish language.

As Eric Goldman noted in his introduction

> When one attempts to provide a definition for what makes a film
> production Yiddish, the simplest common denominator is language. The
> picture may be made in Poland, America, or Russia, but if the language of
> expression is Yiddish, it falls within the purview of this study. Yiddish is
> not a nationality, nor a religion, so even though a film may be totally
> Jewish in character, if it is in French, English, or Hebrew, or any language
> but Yiddish, I have not considered it (Goldman: xvii).

Yiddish language is the *prima materia* of these films, and as far as contemporary modern

Jewry is concerned, its use in cinema is essential for these films to be considered Jewish.

Yiddish writer Joseph Opatoshu noted: "Yiddish is synonymous with *Yiddishkeyt* in

modern Jewish life just as *Yiddishkeyt* was synonymous with the Jewish faith thousands

of years earlier" (quoted in Wisse: 34). For these films to be considered "Jewish," the

language of expression need only be Yiddish.

Hoberman, Goldberg, and Goldman's books all approached the subject of Yiddish

cinema from a diachronic perspective, that is, they examined these films from the

perspective of a continuous historical development. To treat the subject synchronistically

refines the definition of *Yiddishkeyt* from an amorphous ethos, to specific examples

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[4] It is worth noting that Eric Goldman also founded Ergo Video, a video distribution
company which has been restoring and distributing many of these Yiddish films, as well
as other film of Jewish interest.

demonstrated by this specific cinema. And this is the approach I undertake in this chapter. The question I ask is what are the different manifestations of *Yiddishkeyt* in a survey of these films?

In this chapter I discuss the emergence of specific Jewish motifs in a bounded linguistically oriented cinema — the Yiddish language film. Between 1937 and 1940, in both Poland and the United States, this cinema came into full bloom — a "Golden Age" of Yiddish cinema (Goldberg: 73)[5]. Although none of the films discussed here were cited to me by specific cultural practitioners, other than comments like Yona's citing the entire genre, I have selected four Polish made Yiddish language films (*Yiddle with his Fiddle* (1937) [*Yidl mitn Fidl*], *The Jester* (1937) [*Der Purimsplieler*], *A Letter to Mother* (1938) [*A Brivele der mamen*] and *The Dybbuk* (1938) [*Der Dybuk*]), four American made Yiddish language films (*Green Fields* (1937) [*Grine Felder*], *The Cantor's Son* (1939) [*Der Khazn Zindl*], *Tevye* (1940), and *American Matchmaker* (1940) [*Amerikaner Shadchan*]), and one Austrian silent film, *East and West* (1924) [*Ost und West*], as a "proto-example [6]." Taken together, these films were produced within an ethnically bounded context, and therefore should demonstrate the cultural motifs salient to the

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[5] It should be noted that this "Golden Age" was prefaced by Yiddish language cinema produced in Europe, the Soviet Union, and the United States. But it is the cinema's maturation period which I shall be dealing with here.

[6] Missing from this survey is the entire contribution of Joseph Seiden, an American producer who made some of the first "talkies" in Yiddish. The omission is based on film availability, as well as comments in Hoberman, Goldman and Goldberg that his films were not very good. I recognize this omission, and since I'm not writing a history of Yiddish film, but outlining the various motifs of *Yiddishkeyt* as expressed in Yiddish language cinema, I do not believe this omission detracts from my argument.

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culture[7].

By cultural "motif" I am referring to those diegetic phenomena which are essential to the cinematic narrative[8]. This is in contrast to those "coded" attributes which are more texturally based, which I discuss in the next chapter. Since I noted across the two previous chapters, it is content that vernacularly determines Jewishness in cinema, we require a methodology for identifying "Jewish content."

EAST AND WEST AS PROTO-YIDDISH CINEMA

An obvious contradiction immediately occurs when dealing with a silent film in the context of a "national cinema" based on linguistic distinctiveness: how can a silent film be considered "Yiddish" if it is silent? Goldman noted that the most important criterion beyond language is the intended audience: "if the film was made specifically for a Yiddish-speaking audience then it is reasonable to consider it a Yiddish film" (Goldman: xvii-xviii). This is logical enough, and clear when there are Yiddish sub-titles, but proving the intended audience can be a more difficult task. Secondly, Goldman began

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[7] Each year the Toronto Jewish Film Festival has a programme of restored Yiddish language films from the 1920s or 1930s. Although my selection of texts to discuss is not predicated upon what the Festival has shown, in two cases (*East and West* during the 1994 Festival, and *American Matchmaker* during the 1995 Festival) the films I am discussing were shown. What is significant about these films is not that they were shown at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival, but their existence as a cultural expression in the pre-World War II period, and as demonstrative of the emergent cultural narrative motifs that they use.

[8] As Stith Thompson noted, "a motif is the smallest element in a tale having the power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power, it must have something unusual and striking about it" (Thompson: 415).

to identify the cultural motifs of *Yiddishkeyt* in these silent films.

> If intermarriage and assimilation are sanctioned, it is not a Yiddish film
> because the future of Jewish life is threatened. Yiddish cinema intended to
> insulate Jews from assimilation and external change; it attempted to keep
> Jewish culture and peoplehood intact. If it does not do this, then it is not a
> Yiddish picture (Goldman: xvii).

Goldman appears to be working from a conservative position of cultural "purity".

The opposition which Goldman sets up implies that any Jew who supports

intermarriage and assimilation is not a Jew. Unfortunately I recognize his voice

as indicative of mainstream, North American Judaism [9]. This motif will become

particularly relevant when I discuss the American made Yiddish language films.

But prior to that, I want to discuss an Austrian film, *East and West* (1924) [*Ost

und West*], directed by Sidney Goldin[10]. *East and West* is *in* Yiddish insofar as the

intertitles are bilingual — English and Yiddish (and frequently the filmmakers accent the

English — that is written in a kind of "Yinglish," or Judeo-English, as Joshua Fishman

calls it). However, given the contemporary practice of inserting intertitles in the language

of the country the film was being presented in, allowing films to be much more

"international" than when sound was added, one needs to question the original context of

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[9] As an ethnographer, I feel the need to become personally involved with this research,
and as a Jew, I find Goldman's comment particularly offensive. His characterization of
cultural purity is predicated upon a generalization which I personally reject, for the
record.

[10] Known as the "father of Yiddish movies" (Erens, 1976: 49).

the print of the film I saw. The distributors intended this particular print for a Yiddish speaking audience, but we do not have textual evidence about the audience from the film text. Beyond that though, *East and West* is here presented as *proto-Yiddish* cinema, in that it brings forward much of the "Jewish Content" which the "Golden Age" films explore.

East and West tells the comic story about Morris (Goldin) and Mollie (Molly Picon) Brown [formerly Brownstein], father and daughter assimilated Jews who go back to the Galician *shtetl* to visit Morris' brother, the Orthodox Mottle Brownstein (Saul Nathan). Once there, the tomboy Mollie gets herself into all sorts of trouble culminating in her "mock" marriage to Jacob, the Yeshiva boy (Jacob Kalich — Picon's real-life husband). When Mottle announces that in reality Mollie and Jacob's wedding was official, according to Jewish law, Mollie and Morris are horrified. Jacob, who is deeply in love with Mollie and defies a rabbinical order to give Mollie a divorce, goes off to live with his rich uncle, Mr. Freed (Johannes Roth), in Vienna for five years to make his fortune. If he is not a success after five years, he'll give Mollie her divorce.

The polarity between assimilation and tradition is a neat and simplistic dichotomy, even for 1924. To be sure the Browns are set in opposition to the Brownsteins, and much of the first half of the film's comedy comes from the distinctions between Morris and Mottle. For example, during the Yom Kippur services, Mottle asks Morris to lead a prayer, but becomes confused when he sees that the prayer book is in Hebrew, which he cannot read. Mollie meanwhile, overcome by hunger from fasting on the Holy Day, sneaks off into the Brownsteins' kitchen and helps herself to a feast of food, leaving none

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for the breaking of the fast. Before this violation of Jewish Law, we have seen Mollie in synagogue hiding a romance novel between the pages of her prayer book. Mollie further demonstrates her assimilation into mainstream American culture by her hobby of boxing, occasionally knocking out members of the Brownstein household who she is angry with, and at one point disguising herself as a Yeshiva boy[11]. So assimilated are Mollie and Morris that they refer to Mollie as "the American Shiksa". When it turns out that Mollie and Jacob are indeed wed, Mottle feels the need to point out to Morris that "according to *our* law [Jewish law], they are married", so alienated is Morris from the traditional *shtetl* life in which he grew up. The use of "our" in Mottle's statement implies that Morris too is no longer considered a Jew.

But the film also holds up Jacob to ridicule, and by his connection to the Brownstein family, so are his patrons. Once in Vienna the *shtetl* born Yeshiva boy looks out of place in this cosmopolitan city. Upon arriving at his uncle's door, he is mistaken for a beggar and chased away. Uncle's religion, although also a pious Jew, is more of a modernized Judaism, lying equidistant between the assimilated Browns and the traditional Brownsteins. Jacob moved by Uncle's faith, and impressed by his modern ways, decides to try and blend into Viennese society. A shot of a clean-shaven Jacob, who has cut off his *payez*, follows an intertitle which reads "progressing". The next intertitle reads "nearing perfection", and we are presented with a newly barbered, clean-

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[11] Picon was known, both from film and the Yiddish stage, for her cross-dressing: "some of Picon's best-loved theater vehicles featured her cross-dressed, a routine that led one reviewer to dub her the 'Yiddish Peter Pan'" (Sicular: 41). Picon will don men's clothes again in *Yiddle with his Fiddle*.

cut, suited (rather than wearing a Chassidic frock coat) Jacob. This new Jacob becomes a famous writer, and wins Mollie's heart. Resisting a binary opposition between assimilation and anti-assimilation, *East and West* presents a Hegelian synthesis of the two other Jewish types. That tension between assimilated and traditional Jews is fairly central in this film, and at this stage is offered up as one of the major motifs in the Yiddish cinema, which the other films in this chapter will bear out. In Chapter Seven I discuss these motifs as they are emergent in the films cited to me by my Festival informants.

Another central motif is the role of book-based knowledge versus experience-based knowledge. The figure of Jacob, and the role his Yeshiva education plays in the narrative is also significant: partially it acts as opposition to Morris' experience-based knowledge (probably in business), but also lends the character a connection to authority, specifically Talmudic and Mosaic authority, and therefore gives him a closer connection to God. Under his pen-name of Ben Alli in Vienna, Jacob becomes somewhat of a *cause celebre*, drawing the attention of all the local available Jewish women, including Mollie. Smart is sexy in *Yiddishkeyt*. Patricia Erens noted "basically, the narratives are thinly disguised moral lessons, natural enough for people whose book of laws (the Torah) has remained the basic text for three thousand years" (Erens, 1976: 50).

A third motif of the Yiddish film is the importance of ritual: the greater majority of these films use specific Jewish rituals at moments of diegetic significance. Judith Goldberg noted

> Religious ceremonies were a common inclusion and were treated as part of everyday life. They included everything from the lighting of the Sabbath candles to the memorial service for the dead (Goldberg: 79).

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Within *East and West*, several Jewish rites are performed. The mock wedding between Mollie and Jacob occurs parallel to the "real" wedding of Mottle's daughter, Zelda. The "guests" of the mock wedding are the household servants excluded from Zelda's wedding, which is how the error of actually getting married could go undetected. I have already mentioned there is a Yom Kippur service where the film developed the assimilated characteristics of the Browns within the diegesis. But from the very beginning of the film, when the Brown's first arrive in Galacia, a traditional *Shabbes* dinner welcomes them. Although ritual plays a minor role in *East and West*, we shall see how important it is in many of the other Yiddish films. For the Goldin film, however, as proto-Yiddish cinema, Jewish ritual plays a more vital role with regards to the main motif of the Yiddish cinema — that of the family[12].

Without a doubt the Jewish family is the centerpiece to Jewish identity; it is through the family that the continuity of the Jewish community is assured. At the Yom Kippur service, Brownstein blesses the "golden link which binds [family] together", the eastern and the western sides of the one family. Throughout Yiddish cinema, the family is at the heart of every Jewish ritual performed, and the two, family and ritual, must be seen in tandem as *Yiddishkeyt*. As historian Irving Howe noted, "the survival of a persecuted

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[12] Patricia Erens saw, in Yiddish film's use of ritual, a more sociological dimension: "Another common feature of most films is the inclusion of religious ceremonies. *Bar Mitzvahs*, Purim celebrations, and funerals were depicted side by side with Sabbath and daily prayers, and the ever popular wedding ceremony. ... For a people steeped in ritual, the appeal of such scenes is understandable. especially in a period when many Orthodox customs were falling to the wayside and were mere memories of another way of life" (Erens, 1976: 51).

minority required an iron adherence to traditional patterns of family life" (Howe: 495) and the family becomes the locus of Jewish ritual, while ritual is always focused on the Jewish family. Overall though, "... the films concentrate on family conflicts and economic problems, on parent-child relationships rather than male-female ones, on parental-platonic love and not marital-romantic" (Erens, 1976: 49). Although *East and West* does focus on male-female relationships (the Mollie-Jacob relationship) more central for the film's Jewish content is Mollie's relationship with Morris, Morris' with Mottle, and Jacob's with his Uncle. Other readings, such as that of "romantic comedy", extend beyond the present focus on the Yiddish motifs, but such readings would be more etic.

JOSEPH GREEN

Although Jewish filmmakers made some archaic Yiddish language films in the United States, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere in Europe in the early 1930s, the "Golden Age" of Yiddish language cinema came out of Poland in the late 1930s. And it is these films which I wish to deal with in greater detail. Before I do, however, I should contextualize this "Golden Age." The flourishing of Polish-made Yiddish language cinema is primarily due to one person, the American born Joseph Green. Legend has it that while working as a production assistant on Warner Brothers' landmark film *The Jazz Singer* (1927), Green heard more Yiddish being spoken than English on the set. It was from this experience that the dream of a Yiddish language cinema was born (Goldman: 89).

Green's normal procedure was to take a small group of American-Yiddish

actors to Poland to star in his films. Supporting actors and crew were
drawn from local sources. Working in first class Polish studios, Green
was able to turn out polished productions for $40, 000 - $50, 000 (Erens,
1976: 51).

It was these films which Yona identifies as the quintessentially "Jewish" movies that I

noted at the outset. But more important than location or nationality of the actors,

Yiddishkeyt permeates Green's Polish made films. As Eric Goldman noted

> Green searched for authenticity. He attempted to produce as realistic a
> picture of Jewish life in Eastern Europe as was possible and felt that only
> in Poland could he do this. If he could not film "on-location" in a *shtetl*, he
> had a *shtetl* built (Goldman: 91).

The ethnographic verisimilitude which Green sought was not so much a desire to preserve

a culture at risk, from assimilation and annihilation, but in order to create a cinema which

was both "authentically Jewish", and with a technical quality that would be "universal in

appeal" (Hoberman, 1991: 239). If the Yiddish language was a problem for other

cultures, Green dubbed his films into the languages he needed to for world-wide

distribution (Erens, 1975: 51). The authenticity which Green sought derives from the

inclusion of the cultural motifs which lie at the heart of the Jewish experience, some of

which I have already identified in *East and West*.

The most obvious cultural motif within Green's Yiddish cinema is the attention to

ritual. I have already noted the importance of such Jewish rites as the marriage ritual,

Yom Kippur, and the Sabbath in *East and West*; that it is these moments of documenting

Jewish ritual which are frequently moments of importance for the diegesis. Goldman

noted the function of ritual in Green's Yiddish cinema:

Maintaining one's connection with Judaism and one's ties to custom and tradition is the message of the film[s]. Even in times of despair, there is hope that tradition will keep families together. It is no mistake that each of the Green's pictures has at least one major Jewish custom in it. There is the wedding in *Yidl mitn Fidl*, the seder in *A Brivele der Mamen*, a sukkah (booth) celebration in *Mamele* [1939], and the purimshpil (Purim play) in *Der Purimsplieler*. A connection with the Jewish people is the major thrust of *A Brivele der Mamen* and all the Green films; in fact it is the governing force of all Yiddish cinema (Goldberg: 104).

Jewish rituals do play a vital role in *A Letter to Mother*, and these roles need to be explored.

A Letter to Mother is a melodrama about the suffering of the quintessential Jewish mother, prior to her vilification in contemporary Jewish-American fiction and cinema[13].

Dobrish Berdichevsky (Lucy Gehrman) is the long-suffering wife of *schlimazel* Duvid

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[13] It is worth noting that rather than the term "melodrama," within the context of *Yiddishkeyt*, the more appropriate term would be to characterize films such as *A Letter to Mother* as *shund* — a term that is frequently used to describe all Yiddish language films. Hoberman noted *shund* is "a term of contempt indicating literary or theatrical 'trash' and denoting variously an inept mishmash, a vulgar display, a mass-produced trifle, or a piece of sentimental claptrap. *Shund* encompasses the full range of Yiddish kitsch ..." (Hoberman. 1991: 206). Jewish historian Irving Howe, on the other hand, noted that "for whatever else *shund* may have been, it was not 'escapist' in any obvious sense: it coarsened and corrupted, but it drove right to the center of 'the Jewish heart'" (Howe: 482). This aspect of *shund*, Howe earlier noted, derives from the theatrical tradition of Yiddish stage plays, predominantly those produced in New York for immigrant audiences. For these audiences, Howe noted, "realism seemed dry, redundant, without savor. What stirred their hearts was a glimpse of something that might transcend the wretchedness of the week ..." (Howe: 461). Continuing, "vast outpourings of creative energy made the performance of a Yiddish play an occasion for communal pleasure — the kind of pleasure that audiences took in seeing their experiences (or more often, their memories) mirrored back at them in heightened form" (Howe: 493). In this respect, *shund* further underlines what I was saying in Chapter Four.

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(Alexander Stein). She carries the burden of the family herself without complaint, including begging for credit at *shtetl* merchant, Reb Hersh's (Samuel Landau). Duvid is just plain unlucky, and is relatively unaware of the dire financial straits the family is in. Son Meyer cannot focus on what he wishes to study (he changes from law to medicine to dentistry), daughter Miriam (Gertrude Bulman), engaged to the engineer Yudke, but runs off with her dancing instructor Solomon, leaving the only hope of the family to the youngest son, Arele. Dobrish faces all of these hardships with a brave face to the outside world. The face becomes increasingly difficult to put on as Duvid goes to America in order to become a success, having to lie to Shimen (Max Bozyk) and Malke, Yudke's parents and Dobrish's neighbors about Miriam's whereabouts. Duvid sends for Arele to join him. Meyer dies in World War One. Obviously the Jewish family *is* central to this film, but before discussing the family, I want to discuss the centers of ritual activity which the film presents.

As Goldman noted above, the central ritual in *A Letter to Mother* is the Passover seder. The sequence occurs not long after Duvid has left for America but before they have sent for Arele. Duvid's chair at the head of the table remains empty, and Dobrish advises her family just to pretend that Duvid is there. Arele attempts to ask the "four questions" but is unable to without Duvid present. Without the presence of the father, Arele cannot ask the "four questions", and it follows that if he cannot ask the questions, there is nothing to be answered. The answering of these questions is the basis of the Passover celebration. The word "seder" means "order", in the sense that Jews bring the foods out in a specific, ritualized, order; without Duvid as head of the family, there effectively is "no order" — no seder.

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Contained within the liturgy of the Passover seder itself, narrating of the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, is the celebration of Jewish survival. Without recounting the story of the Exodus, Passover is moot. The ritual is not completed with Duvid's absence, which calls into question the survival of the Jewish people. Also central to the Jewish celebration of Passover is the notion of sacrifice, a practice that "went dark" with the destruction of the second temple (Wouk: 48). The seder sequence echoes this signifier of sacrifice, with Dobrish functioning as paschal lamb. Ironically, the film was made in 1938, the year before the Nazis invaded Poland, effectively bringing an end to a majority of European Jewish culture. The connection between ritual and family and cultural survival is fairly explicit, especially in a film like *A Letter to Mother*, however, there is another Jewish ritual which occurs toward the end of the film which is equally significant.

Toward the end of the film, Dobrish is finally able to travel to America and hopes to be able to find Arele, who she has lost contact with after receiving the news of Duvid's death. The Atlantic crossing occurs during Rosh Hashanah, and the Jewish passengers celebrate the New Year festivities on board. with the requisite optimism about the future. Throughout the narrative of the film. America functions as a new land of opportunities, especially for Jews. It is therefore in keeping with the dramatic irony of the film to have the Dobrish's new life begin on the New Year. Although the new life-new country-new year parallelism may be trite. its consistency within the Jewish calendar is a significant recognition of the culture which produces these films.

Other Joseph Green films also use ritual like this, but not necessarily in so explicit a manner. For example, in *The Jester*, Purim is obviously the central celebration.

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Deriving from the Book of Esther, Purim celebrates the defeat of Persian rule over the Jews, with a carnivalesque celebration of reversals, plays, singing and dancing. One of the central aspects of the Purim celebration is the Purim Play, a theatrical reworking of the Book of Esther. Much like a cross between a Mummers play and a medieval Passion Play, in the Purim plays the actors (*purimspielim*) are disguised and given a certain degree of licence in parodying and satirizing their patrons. Gestel (Zygmund Turkow) is an itinerant actor who takes up temporary residence in the home of a *shtetl* shoemaker, Nukhem (Ajzyk Samburg). Gestel falls in love with Nukhem's daughter, Esther (Miriam Kressyn), but she is in love with another itinerant actor, called Dick (Hi Jacobson), who comes along after Gestel. Meanwhile, Nukhem inherits a great deal of money, and desiring a better life for his family, arranges for Esther to marry a rich half-wit, Yossel. Nukhem, forgetting his humble roots alienates his old friends in favour of his newly acquired rich ones. During the Purim feast, which doubles as an engagement party for Esther and Yossel, Nukhem calls upon Gestel to present a Purim play for the wealthy guests. Gestel's performance goes too far satirizing the town's elite and they banish him from Nukhem's sight. This is the opportunity that Gestel has been waiting for, and he helps Esther run away and find Dick. Like with *East and West*, the Purim celebration is important more as a part of the film's narrative structure, than in its religious signification.

Of course the most dominant ritual in the Yiddish cinema is the wedding. All of Green's films made in Poland have, at some point in their narration, a wedding ceremony. Sometimes these weddings are central for their ritualistic importance, sometimes for their narrative importance.

Yiddle with his Fiddle features an important diegetic wedding sequence. *Yiddle*

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tells the story of two poor itinerant musicians, Arye (Simcha Fostel) and his daughter (Molly Picon). After they are evicted from their home *shtetl*, Arye's daughter gets the idea to disguise herself as a boy, Yidl, and have the two of them travel the countryside. Yidl and Arye team up with two other itinerant musicians, Isaac (Max Bozyk) and Froym (Leon Liebgold). Yidl falls in love with Froym, but of course this love is unrequited, since he believes Yidl to be a boy. At one point the four musicians are hired to play at the wedding of a rich old man, Zalmen Gold (Samuel Landau), and his much younger bride Tauba (D. Fakiel). Tauba is unwilling to marry the old man since she loves another, Yosele. The four musicians help Tauba escape, and she, in return, joins their orchestra as a singer. Like in *The Jester* the ritual functions more as narrative progression than as cultural validation, as the Passover seder or the New Year celebrations in *A Letter to Mother*. It is through the wedding ritual that the idyllic relationship among the four musicians becomes strained. Yidl becomes jealous of the friendship that Froym has with Tauba, not realizing that their friendship is based on Froym's promise to find Yosele. It is worth noting, parenthetically, that *Yidl* was so successful, that within weeks of the film's release in Poland, the score to the film had already entered the repertoires of Eastern Europe's *kelzmorim* (Hoberman, 1991: 238).

In Green's two musical comedies that I have surveyed, a unique narrative structure emerges from the various relationships. In both *Yidl* and *The Jester* there is a central love triangle involving a young woman, the wealthy man her rich father wants her to marry, and the poor man who the woman loves. The narrative's leading players help the young

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woman to escape and find her true love[14]. Within the Jewish tradition, especially among the more traditional sects, the practice of arranged marriages was frequent. The Green films seem to posit a critique of this overtly traditionalist view of marriage, in favour of a, if not assimilated, then more modern Jewish wedding. The poorer, true-love, may not be the father's choice for a husband, but he is always Jewish. No one in these Yiddish films even questions marrying outside of the faith, a primary difference with the American made Yiddish language films. This is a particular attribute of Green and his desire to represent a more insular, although modern looking Judaism. Green wanted to present to the world, both Jewish and non-Jewish. a Jewish community that was self-sufficient and not worried about the outside, Gentile world. His aim was to "avoid the *goles yid* [literally, "goyish Jew"; one who is so assimilated as to be no different from a Gentile]" (Sicular: 41-42). It is perhaps one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Polish Yiddish films; that there is not a non-Jew. or even a recognition of non-Jews existing, in the diegetic world of the films.

The Dybbuk, although not a Joseph Green film. but made in Poland at the same time Green was making his films. has a different view of the wedding celebrations: that of its ritual dimension in the spiritual life of Judaism. Based on the play by Sh. Ansky,

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[14] Although this narrative strand has the *feel* of an international tale type (or an international motif). I could find no specific allusion to it in the Aarne-Thompson index. The closest I could find was the international motif R225.2 - *Lovers elope to prevent girl's marriage to undesired fiancé*: the problem with this motif is that the emphasis is on the lovers' active decision to elope. rather than the actions of the trickster figures — Gestel in *The Jester* or Yidl. Arye. Froym and Isaac in *Yidl*. In both films, the male fiancé is absent, and the female fiancé is bound by duty to her father's wishes.

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The Dybbuk, "the greatest of all Yiddish films" according to film historian Patricia Erens (Erens, 1976: 52), is kind of a Jewish version of *The Exorcist*: two young Yeshiva scholars make a promise to each other that should their unborn children be a boy and a girl, that their children will wed[15]. Young Nison (Gershon Lemberger) dies in a boating accident on his way home to attend his wife's delivery of his son Khonnon. Meanwhile, young Sender's wife dies delivering him a daughter, Leah. Khonnon (Leon Liebgold) grows up to be a Yeshiva scholar like his father, and wanders from *shtetl* to *shtetl*. Sender (Moyshe Lipman), having left the Yeshiva, becomes a shrewd business man. Khonnon eventually arrives in Sender's *shtetl*, and as was the practice then, he takes the young man in. Of course, Khonnon and Leah (Lili Liliana) fall madly in love, but Sender looks to a richer man for his Leah. In order to prove himself a worthy husband to Sender, the young scholar abandons his Talmudic studies and embraces the Kabbalah (Jewish mystical texts). Khonnon becomes so obsessed with his desires for both Leah and the powers of God, which the Kabbalah promises, that he dies, just as Sender remembers the promise he made to Nison, that Leah and Khonnon were betrothed to one another. In grief, Leah invokes Khonnon's spirit never to leave her, and on the eve of her wedding to the man Sender most recently promised her to, Khonnon spirit possesses his beloved. What is central to *The Dybbuk* is the traditional Jewish belief that promises are never to be made lightly. Throughout the film wanders a strange messenger figure, who admonishes Sender and Nison never to make this kind of a promise without "proper

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[15] International motif M246.2 - *Covenant of friendship: no matter how poor son of one is, daughter of other will accept him as groom.* Interestingly enough, this motif is identified in the Motif Index, not as Jewish, but as Indian.

deliberation." It is unclear from the film what "proper deliberation" includes, but in context of the diegesis, one can speculate in general one should never take vows like this for granted. It is also worth noting that in *The Jester*, the belief is voiced that at birth one's mate is already chosen for you[16]. Therefore, in films like *The Dybbuk* and *The Jester*, as well as in *Yidl*, where they show father-chosen grooms to be at best inappropriate, at worst blasphemous, one can argue against the practice of arranged marriages based on the belief that since God chooses one's mate, man should not interfere with God's decision.

Another belief tradition the film presents involves Judaic supernatural beliefs. The opening shot of the film is in a synagogue. The camera slowly pans down from the ark, which contains the Torah scrolls, to a book lying on the *bima* (alter). The book opens revealing Hebrew lettering. Title cards inform us that what the book says, "as it is written": "When a man dies before his time, his soul returns to earth/ so that it may complete the deeds it had left undone,/ and to experience the joys and griefs it had not lived through." It is worth noting that the film ends in a parallel action, as the camera pans upwards from the book to the ark, before the final blackout. This of course further underlines the motif I originally identified in *East and West* regarding the distinction between book-based and experience-based learning: the Yeshiva, which both Nison and Sender went to as young men, and that Khonnon currently studies in, is the center of book-based learning. When Sender moves away from the books to a more experienced-

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[16] International motif T22.4 - *Lovers fated to marry each other born at same time*. This motif is from the Jewish tradition, and the belief itself is expressed in *The Dybbuk* by cross-cut editing between the births of Leah and Khonnon.

based form of leaning, his role as a business man, he forgets everything that he held dear to him, including his daughter. In a series of temporal jumps, indicating approximately twenty years of elapsed time, we see Sender and Leah getting older, but they remain fixed in the same positions of the mise-en-scene — Sender sitting at his table counting his money, while Leah stands nearby trying to get his attention. Although Khonnon embraces the dark side of study in order to win his beloved, his motives are pure, knowingly predicated upon the vow Sender and Nison made years earlier.

Although the book vs. experience based learning polarity does not function within Green's two musical comedies, neither, *Yidl* nor *The Jester* have scholarly characters in them, I believe the function of this motif is not so much a mandatory requirement of Jewish culture, but one which frequently occurs.

It is worth noting that An-sky, the author of the original play "The Dybbuk", was himself, an early Yiddish folklorist.

> Between 1911 and 1914, Sh. An-sky headed an expedition for the Jewish Historic-Ethnographic Society of St. Petersburg. Armed with cameras and recording equipment, An-sky and his associates plumbed the tiny hamlets of Belorussia and the Ukraine, transcribing Jewish legends, noting spells and remedies, collecting songs and proverbs, photographing old synagogues and cemeteries, and purchasing old ceremonial objects, jewelry, and clothing (Hoberman, 1991: 8).

And to be sure, the film *The Dybbuk*, is filled with ethnographic detail: from minor household belief traditions ("the dead pray in the synagogue on Sabbath nights") to Chassidic dancing[17]. And throughout all of the Polish-made Yiddish language cinema

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[17] Michael Alpert discussed the portrayal of Chassic Dancing in the Yiddish cinema. Regarding *The Dybbuk*, Alpert notes: "The movements and style are traditional (arms on

one can examine this footage with ethnographic eyes. If, as *Yiddishkeyt* assumes, religion and culture are inseparable, both must influence each other, and within the context of Jewish culture specifically, the inclusions of various ritual behaviours make manifest the belief traditions and cultural nexus of Jewish life in Poland.

The family motif identified in *East and West* is also evident in these Polish made films, although perhaps not as significantly as in *A Letter to Mother*. In *Letter* we see the family as the locus of Jewish culture quite explicitly. Arele's inability to ask his father's empty chair the "four questions", which makes it impossible for the seder to continue, thereby challenging the signification of the ritual, and the continuation of Jewish survival, is explicit. Also in *Letter*, Miriam's marriage to Yudke, strengthens the Berdichevsky family's relationship with their neighbors, Shimen and Malke, and it is to her new in-laws that Dobrish turns to for help. Like in *East and West*, family and ritual are inextricably linked within Jewish culture. The Purim-play in *The Jester* is likewise a family affair, as is Esther and Yossel's wedding - the linking of two Jewish families through matrimony. Even in *The Dybbuk*, it is only when the great Rebbe is able to remember his own family, his own lineage from a long line of great rabbis, that he can find the strength to defeat Khonnon's spirit, by reciting their names, invoking their strength ritualistically, into his own power.

But most often the function of the family is context for these movies. *Yidl* begins with Yidl playing in the streets by herself so she can provide for her elderly father, Arye.

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shoulders, small steps to the left in duple meter, right foot passing in front of the left, etc.), and the feeling is restrained. A sense of ecstasy is communicated without exaggerated gesturing typical of postwar interpretations of Hasidic dance" (Alpert: 6).

All of the heartache that Dobrish experiences is from the family. Nukhem adopts Gestel into his family when he first arrives, which further rhetorically makes his winning over Esther an impossibility because of the incest taboo. Further in *The Jester*, Nukhem's father, Zurekha, lives within the small shoemaker's shop, and stays behind to keep the shop going when Nukhem's newly found wealth takes the shoemaker away from his origins. As Nukhem becomes further assimilated into the wealthier world he aspires to, he, like Sender in *The Dybbuk*, forgets what is most important to him as a Jew — the Jewish family. He is willing to give his only child to an obvious half-wit, and alienates his own father. Upon returning to the shoemaker's shop after a visit with Nukhem, Zurekha embraces a glass of tea with relish. Remembering the tea Nukhem served him, he comments "Rich people's tea doesn't even taste Jewish."

I have held off discussing one of the most important motifs until now, for it is an essential in Jewish discourse, whether spiritual, cultural or cinematic. Within *Yiddishkeyt*, the totality of Yiddish experience, one attribute of the culture emerges as primary: *mentschlekhkeyt*. Ruth Wisse defines *mentschlekhkeyt* as "humaneness, an ideal of behavior in which the whole religious discipline of Jewish life is transmuted into the practice of kindness and decency" (Wisse: 29). Rabbi Joseph Telushkin notes:

> Because many observant individuals erroneously assume that Judaism believes that God cares more about rituals than about how people treat one another, Haskell Lookstein, a prominent Orthodox rabbi in New York, has written that Jews today need a new slogan: "*Mentschlikhkeit* [sic.] before Godliness" (Telushkin, 1991: 514).

As expressed in the Yiddish cinema, Joseph Green himself in an interview noted "While [a Yiddish movie] should have folklore and ethnicity, it *must* ... expose social injustice. It

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can do this artistically, without heavy-handed propaganda" (quoted in Hoberman, 1991:
239; emphasis added)[18]. Patricia Erens also addresses the primacy of *mentschlekhkeyt*,
which she noted:

> ... is the heart of all Jewish literature, Yiddish films emphasized man's
> obligation to his fellow man, faith in the goodness of all human beings,
> and a belief in ultimate justice. At its most sublime, *mentschlekhkeyt*
> dictates great self-sacrifice; at its most banal, the necessity of bringing
> chicken soup to a sick friend (Erens, 1976: 48).

When looking for examples of *mentschlekhkeyt* in these Yiddish films, they likewise run
the gamut from the sublime to the ridiculous.

On the smaller scale, we can see examples of *mentschlekhkeyt* expressed within
the family. So many distant relations and friends are welcomed as immediate family
members into a central household: Morris and Mollie are welcomed into the Brownstein
house and Jacob is welcomed into Uncle Freed's in *East and West*, Isaac's girlfriend in
Warsaw welcomes all the *klezmorim* into her home in *Yidl*, Gestel is welcomed into
Nukhem's in *The Jester*, and Khonnon is welcomed into Sender home in *The Dybbuk*. In
the two musical comedies, *Yidl* and *The Jester*, the protagonists' interference in the
central love-triangle, by spiriting off the bride (or bride to be) to their own true loves also
falls into acts of *mentschlekhkeyt*. In *Yidl*, Tauba is welcomed into the ersatz family of the
klezmorim, just as the *klezmorim* are welcomed into Isaac's girlfriend's home; in *The*

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[18] This approach of decrying social injustices becomes central in many of the Jewish
films I discuss in Chapter Seven. It is worth remembering Mark's comment in Chapter
Three about "melancholy"; that within a Jewish film it *has* to be "in the mix". Likewise
with *mentschlekhkeyt*.

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Jester, Gestel, who helps Esther escape from marrying Yossel, is then adopted by Esther and Dick in their own showbiz family.

The act of doing a *mitzvah*, the individual expression of *mentschlekhkeyt*, within Jewish thought, draws on the belief that because one God has connected all things, kindness to another is kindness to oneself, based on this interconnectedness of all things. A *mitzvah* which frequently occurs, and can also be seen in connection with the motif of book-based knowledge, is the adopting of a Yeshiva boy into one's home while they are studying: the Brownsteins and Uncle Freed adopt Jacob, and Sender adopts Khonnon. In *East and West*, we are presented with a title card explaining this practice as "according to custom" wealthy merchants acted as patron to young Talmudic scholars. In the same film, Jacob's friend, Menashe, also gives the scholar sanctuary, when Jacob defies the rabbinical demand that he divorce Mollie.

The centrality of guest-friendship within *Yiddishkeyt* is actually predicated on Mosaic authority: the Torah notes this no less than four separate times, all noting that the Jews were once strangers in Egypt, and how God responded to the ill treatment the ancient Hebrews received there. Therefore, the proper treatment of a stranger is with kindness (Exodus 22:20, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 10:19 and 24:17-18)[19].

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[19] "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20); "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34); "You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19); and "You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless .... Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment" (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). (All quotes from Telushkin, 1991: 502).

A Letter to Mother perhaps best exemplifies all the levels of *mentschlekhkeyt*. The merchant Reb Hersh, although reluctant to do so, extends Dobrish's credit in his shop, even though he's fairly sure that he'll never see any money from her. During World War One, the residents are forced to evacuate the *shtetl* to the city, and we see the severe food shortages they experience. In the breadline, Dobrish is the last person served and Reb Hersh is the first to be told that there is no more bread. Dobrish, on the spot, cuts her loaf in two and shares it with Reb Hersh. That is *mentschlekhkeyt*. Mr. Shein, the local representative of HIAS, an American Jewish Aid Agency, whose role is to act as mediator for Jews who immigrated to the States with their families back in the old country, and to negotiate potential future emigrants, parallels the mitzvahs that Dobrish and Reb Hersh make. So do Shimen and Malke, Dobrish's neighbors and future in-laws. The bureaucratic system the local HIAS office has set up, appals Shein as impersonal and alienating. "Instead of brotherly support [i.e., *mentschlekhkeyt*], I see only formality," he admonishes his workers, "Open your hearts to those who come for help." Dobrish's sharing her bread with Reb Hersh might be "banal *mentschlekhkeyt*", as Erens calls it (although I think Reb Hersh might disagree), but we also see Erens' "sublime *mentschlekhkeyt*" in Shein's restructuring of the HIAS office. Performing a *mitzvah*, acting according to *mentschlekhkeyt*, is the backbone of *Yiddishkeyt*.

YIDDISHKEYT, MADE IN THE USA

It should not be surprising that some of the motifs identified in the Polish Yiddish films are also in evidence in the American made Yiddish language films, and some are not. Nor should it be surprising that American Yiddish films have a different set of

concerns than the Polish made films. Joseph Green wanted to produce accurate expressions of Jewish culture for world consumption. And as such, the portraits of Jewish culture he painted, express a very different ethos than those films made in America at the same time. The Yiddish-American films of the late 1930s were produced exclusively for an immigrant population living in the large urban centers of North America (Hoberman, 1991: 17)[20].

> It was in partial response to this gradual disappearance of Jewish themes in Hollywood cinema that independent Yiddish filmmaking arose. Written, directed and acted by Jewish talent, with many stars from the Yiddish theater, and financed by Jewish capital, these works were aimed at an immigrant and first-generation audience and filled the need not met by the dominant commercial cinema. This need combined a delight at hearing spoken Yiddish and Hebrew melodies with a desire for seeing narratives with specifically Jewish content (Erens, 1984: 163-164).

The Yiddish-American films, still maintaining a desire to present *Yiddishkeyt*, present a different meta-narrative to their Polish counterparts, due primarily to the differences in experience and the condition of living in America.

Let me begin discussing Yiddish-American film with what is considered the best of the Yiddish language films made in the United States. *Green Fields*. The film was so popular among the immigrant populations in the States that legend has it audiences refused to leave the cinema after the first screening so they could watch it again (Goldberg: 86). Based on the classic Yiddish play by Peretz Hirshbein, *Green Fields*, is a

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[20] As Sarah Cohen noted, "by recreating *shtetl* life and types, the Yiddish theater [and by extension, Yiddish cinema] preserved the familiar within the unknown and made the new aliens less homesick" (Cohen, 1983: 1).

gentle pastoral comedy about a quiet farm in Europe (actually filmed in New Jersey), and the arrival of a young Yeshiva scholar, Levi-Yitskhok (Michael Goldstein). Levi-Yitskhok is on a search for, what he calls, "real Jews", after having found the urban Yeshiva stultifying. He arrives at the farm of Dovid-Noyakh (Isidore Cashier) and is asked to stay on as the children's tutor. Dovid-Noyakh's neighbor, Elkone (Max Vodnoy), offers to assist with Levi-Yitskhok's upkeep, so he can likewise educate his own children. Elkone's daughter, Stere (Dena Drute), is madly in love with Dovid-Noyakh eldest son, Hersh-Ber (Saul Levine), but with the arrival of Levi-Yitskhok, Elkone thinks the scholar would be a better match for his daughter. Dovid-Noyakh's own daughter, Tsine (Helen Beverley), has fallen in love with Levi-Yitskhok, and consults with her mother, Rokhe (Anna Appel), about how to be a "good Jewish wife" fit for a Yeshiva scholar. All of these romantic intrigues obviously cause friction between the two neighbors, and they catch poor Levi-Yitskhok in the middle.

Rhetorically, however, the film functions as a discussion about what makes a "good Jew"; a question none of the Polish-made films asked. Levi-Yitskhok's whole reason for leaving the Yeshiva is to find what he calls "real" Jews, sort of an idealized notion of the "folk" within a Jewish context. Twice in the film, Levi-Yitskhok notes "Rabbi Eleazar says: a man without land is not a man. As it is written ... the heaven is the Lord's heaven and he has given the earth unto man." For Levi-Yitskhok, those who toil and till the land are therefore closer to God than those who experience the relative luxuries of the city. Yet, Levi-Yitskhok is embraced and welcomed as a scholar, a *rabbi*, by Dovid-Noyakh's family, as someone learned in Jewish law. As Dovid-Noyakh says to Levi-Yitskhok, "in the country, it is hard to be a good Jew." Later on in the film, Dovid-

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Noyakh says again, "City Jews are real Jews. They can go to the synagogue, give [to] charity [*mentschlekhkeyt*]"; these activities are not available to rural Jews. Beside the already noted motif of book-based knowledge (Levi-Yitskhok) versus the experienced-based knowledge (Dovid-Noyakh), which in this film is fairly obvious, a new motif begins to take shape which we begin to see frequently in the Yiddish-American cinema: expressed as a cliché, "the grass is always greener on the other side." Both Levi-Yitskhok and Dovid-Noyakh view the other, and the accompanying lifestyle, as somehow more Jewish. While Dovid-Noyakh is closer to the land and cultivates that which God gave to Man, Levi-Yitskhok can go to synagogue and give to charity.

This "grass is greener" motif can also be seen in the film *Tevye*, based on the writings of Shalom Aleichem. Unlike the more famous characterization of Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Maurice Schwartz's *Tevye*[21] is a testament to the prevention of mixed marriages. The famous *shtetl* milkman's life is destroyed when his daughter Khave (Miriam Riselle) marries the Christian Fedye (Leon Liebgold). As Eric Goldman noted:

> Schwartz and his audience were troubled by the problem of intermarriage. To them, it posed the single greatest threat to the continuation of Jewish life. Intermarriage had become synonymous with a renunciation of Judaism, and Schwartz centered his 1939 film on Khave's story to emphasize the point that intermarriage is unacceptable to the Jewish community. In the film, Tevye tells a priest who intimates that Jewish children are joining the church through intermarriage, "I would rather see them perish than see them betray our faith." No such comment appears in the Shalom Aleichem original, and one can only wonder whether Schwartz is

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[21] Schwartz was the founder of one of New York's premier Yiddish language theatre production companies, the Jewish Art Theater, that was responsible for increasing the quality of Yiddish theatre in New York (Erens, 1976: 49). In addition to directing *Tevye*, Schwartz also played the title role.

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asking his audience to agree with it (Goldman: 126).

Of all the Yiddish American films surveyed, *Tevye* contains the strongest anti-assimilation argument, but Goldman did not interrogate *why* Khave marries Fedye. and to a large degree her motivations derive from this "grass is greener" motif. Although *Fiddler's* Tevye is semi-literate, for comic purposes, misquoting Talmud and voicing proverbs with authority, Schwartz's Tevye is well versed in the Talmud (a trait in keeping with Aleichem's literary character). Fedye, on the other hand is a student of secular literature, introducing Khave to such writers as Gorky and Tolstoy. For Khave, the "grass is greener" on a more intellectual level; she finds her father's scholarship dull, and embraces the secular literature of Gentile world. Goldman's observation regarding Schwartz's anti-assimilation argument, which after watching the film is pretty hard to argue against, seems to posit also that it is dangerous to even intellectually assimilate, by preferring Tolstoy to Talmud. Gorky to God.

The Cantor's Son also mediates the discourse between assimilation and tradition via this "grass is greener" motif. "*Der Khazns Zundl* ... was based on singer/cantor Moishe Oysher's life story: how he left his home in Eastern Europe to attain success as one of America's finest voices" (Goldman: 81). Young Shlomo, back in the *shtetl*, defies his cantor father's orders and runs off with a band of itinerant actors. The acting troupe gets its big break, and is brought to America. But the troupe soon disbands, and Shlomo (Oysher), rather than return to Europe. stays on as a sweeper in a nightclub. One night he gets his big break. an opportunity to sing in the night club. the same night that Yiddish radio impresario, W. H. Rosovitch (Isidore Cashier) is in the audience. Of course,

Shlomo is a success and becomes a regular on Rosovitch's radio show. Meanwhile, Shlomo is developing a relationship with former headliner Helen (Florence Weiss). As Shlomo's success increases, he is able to send more money back home. Just before Rosh Hashanah (one of the few uses of ritual in the Yiddish-American cinema), he sends his cantor father (Juda Bleich) money for a new prayer shawl. His mother (Bertha Guttenberg) cries with delight: "Our boy didn't forget he's a Jew!", while his father weeps with joy. That night, Rosovitch wants Shlomo to sing Rossini's "Figaro" aria, but Shlomo instead wants to sing "Av Harachamim" — a Hebrew chant about the persistence of memory and the resilience of the Jewish faith, using his father's own melody. Shlomo wins out, and "Av Harachamim" is as big a hit as Shlomo's (and in real life also Oysher's) "Mine shtetele Belz"[22]. Shlomo travels the country to sold out houses. Upon his return, he receives a letter from his parents requesting that he come home for their Golden Wedding Anniversary. Helen, with whom he is now living, does not want Shlomo to go away again. But he does. Back in Belz, his childhood sweetheart, Rivka (Judith Abarbanel), is still waiting for him and the two seem to pick up where they left off. Back in the *shtetl*, Shlomo rediscovers his true self — his heritage, his family, Rivka — all the things which made him feel complete, and regardless of his American success, what he lacked in the States. Helen, worried about Shlomo, follows him to Belz. Shlomo is forced to choose between the assimilated Helen and the traditional Rivka. As Malke makes the traditional prayer "on this Sabbath may everything evil depart from this

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[22] Cantorial singing was as popular among Jewish immigrants, as folk melodies or popular songs. Some cantors were famous as other singers of contemporary popular music, and like Oysher, some made movies.

house," we see Helen return alone to the States. Unlike the Yiddish-Polish films, *The Cantor's Son* rejects the assimilated life for the more traditional one.

Likewise does *American Matchmaker* propose a return to more traditional Jewish life. *Matchmaker* tells the story of another *schlimazel*, Nat Silver (Leo Fuchs), who has just broken his eighth marriage engagement. Lost and without direction, Nat's mother (Celia Brodkin) tells him how similar he is to an old country uncle, Shya (also played by Fuchs). Shya too was a romantic *schlimazel*.

> Mother: One day he got an idea. He became a *shadchan* — a matchmaker.
> Nat: For himself?
> Mother: No. For others. He could make others perfectly. He thought by
> helping others he might help himself.

In a flashback we see Shya, alone at a table, but addressing off screen people around him, rhetorically addressing the film audience.

> Don't make fun of matchmakers. A *shadchan* does good. He brings
> strangers together — and knits the bonds of friendship closer.

Nat not only becomes a *shadchan*, but "an advisor of human relations" using contemporary psychological techniques to make perfect matches. "Shadchanology" he calls it.

In the musical comedies from Poland, *Yidl* and *The Jester* as well as in more serious films like *The Dybbuk*, the *shadchan* is presented as an archaic institution. It is the father of the bride who consults the matchmaker in order to find an appropriate match for the girl. The Yiddish-Polish films reject this tradition, by either having the protagonists help the bride escape, or by having the true match sanctified by God in the

form of a promise. The Polish films argue for a more assimilated existence, moving away from certain archaic practices in the *shtetl*. The American films, on the other hand, reverse this: in arguing against assimilation, they advocate embracing the traditional way of life, including such things as matchmaking. *The Cantor's Son* likewise argues for a return to more traditional values by returning to the *shtetl* itself and rejecting all assimilated culture — "may everything evil depart ...". Not only does Tevye disapprove of Khave marriage to Fedye, he sits *shiva* for her — not only does he treat Khave as dead, but unlike an actual death in the family, Tevye commands that Khave only be mourned for an hour, and then never to speak of her as dead, but to treat her as if she never existed!

Although the differences between the Polish and American Yiddish cinemas are large and noteworthy, the two also share a number of similarities, similarities which begin to point to some generalizations about Jewish culture. For example, the Jewish family is still at the heart of these films. In *Green Fields*, the rural life becomes attractive to Levi-Yitskhok, in part because of the closeness of Dovid-Noyakh's family. With the engagement between Hersh-Ber and Stere. Dovid-Noyakh and Elkone become more than neighbors. As in *A Letter to Mother*, Dobrish and Shimen become in-laws, that is family. By becoming engaged to Tsine. Levi-Yitskhok likewise joins this agrarian family. By the end of the film, everyone has become family.

Family is so important to Shlomo. in *The Cantor's Son*, that although he originally defies his father and becomes a performer. rather than a cantor, at the top of his career he goes back to the *shtetl* and takes over as cantor of the shul. Like with the Polish-made films. they make the connection between being a Jew and the Jewish family explicit: it is

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through sending his father a new *tallis* on Rosh Hashanah that Shlomo stresses his commitment both to the Jewish faith and to his family. Likewise does he demonstrate this by turning his father's melody to "Av Harachamim" into a popular hit. The faith and the family are inseparable within *Yiddishkeyt*.

We also see the family as central in *Tevye*; beyond Khave's expulsion from the family, we see Tsyetl, the eldest daughter (Paula Lubelski), come back to Tevye's house after her own husband has died. Tevye takes on the education of Tsyetl's children himself. So important is the Jewish family in these narratives that Khave's "death" for the family is too much for mother Golde (Rebecca Weintraub) to take, and effectively, dies from a broken heart. But even Khave's death cannot deter her commitment to her own family: as Golde lies on her death bed, we are presented with a shot of Khave outside Tevye's house, in the rain, paying her last respects. When Khave attempts to return to Tevye's house, after abandoning her Gentile family, Tsyetl intercedes on her behalf. As Tsyetl defends Khave to Tevye, her arguments are predicated on Khave's commitment to the Jewish family. "Khave's soul was always with the family", she tells her father. Furthermore, she informs him that unbeknownst to Tevye, Khave mourned at Golde's grave, and always fasts on Yom Kippur. Tevye accepts Khave back into the family, as the film ends, in an emotional demonstration of the persistence of the Jewish family[23]

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[23] Goldman made an interesting observation: "Aspects of the original Tevye stories are chosen and adapted to suit each audience. In the Israeli version [*Tevye and His Seven Daughters*], pursuit of economic wealth is the overriding theme; the Jewison film [*Fiddler on the Roof*] focuses on the generational differences in values. Interesting to contrast is the conclusion of each film. At the close of Schwartz' film, Khave deserts her Gentile family and returns to the comfort of her Jewish home. The Israeli, [producer Menachem] Golan, focusing on the Jewish calamity, shows a disgruntled Khave who,

Even in a comedy like *American Matchmaker*, the family plays an important role. One could argue that a *shadchan's* role is building Jewish families. It is Nat's mother who tells him about Uncle Shya, since she's worried about her *schlimazel* of a son. More important, it is Nat's sister, Elvie (Anna Guskin) who goes to Nat's "Shadchanology clinic", not for herself, but because she is worried about the loneliness of her brother — she is unaware that the clinic is Nat's, or that he has anything to do with it. His sister's plea so moves Nat that he finds himself a fiancé, and the film ends with their wedding.

Finally, *mentschlekhkeyt* is in these films, since it is an essential dimension to *Yiddishkeyt* itself. At the most basic level, in *Tevye*, we hear about Golde's charity, that "whatever she had, she shared." In *The Cantor's Son*, Rivka welcomes Helen to her engagement party, even though she knows who the other woman is, and what she's doing in Belz.

A film like *American Matchmaker* is predicated upon *mentschlekhkeyt*. Nat, like his Uncle Shya, hopes that by doing good things for others, good things will happen to him. By that Nat means the "bringing of strangers together", and continuing the Jewish family is one of the greatest *mitzvah* one can do. Nat's Shadchanology clinic, however, is further steeped in *mentschlekhkeyt*, in that Nat does not charge for his services. Independently wealthy, Nat changes from a life of leisure, to a life dedicated to making

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realizing that she has no place in a Gentile world, prepares to leave for Palestine (Israel). In *Fiddler*, Khave and her Gentile husband, choose to leave behind a community where bigotry is condoned; as they leave. Tevye mumbles under his breath his belated blessing, 'Peace be with you,' as if to finally accept their marriage. Whether seen by Greek, Italian, or Japanese audiences, Tevye symbolizes an ethical and moral human being who refuses to ignore his roots and traditions" (Goldman: 127).

people happy by bringing them together. When this bothers the other *shadchanim* in town, those who charge for their services, Nat hires them to work for him, but still does not charge for the matchmaking service.

There is a moment in *Green Fields*, benign to be sure, but also with great resonance, of *mentschlekhkeyt*. Tsine, flirting with Levi-Yitskhok, falls out of a tree and hurts her arm. Tsine sulkily, asks Levi-Yitskhok why he should care if she "almost killed herself", since the young scholar has not shown the slightest interest in her prior to this moment. Levi-Yitskhok is taken aback, and says, "Of course I care. I have a Jewish heart." The center of being for Jews, that which keeps Jewish blood flowing, is caring what happens to others — *mentschlekhkeyt*.

CONCLUSION

Mark Slobin noted,

> Cementing the alliance between the filmmakers and the community, the plots and themes of the movies themselves served as kind of cultural glue. This involved creative use of two cultural resources: the huge repertoires of heroes, stories, and symbols that the long history of Judaism provides; and the modes of popular entertainment pioneered since the 1870s, most notably the Yiddish theatre, itself a skillful amalgam of folk and popular materials. The age-old tendency of Jewish folklore to be didactic and to incorporate current events into allegorical, time-tested forms provided a helpful base for creating movie mythology (Slobin: 230-231).

In addition to using phenomenological approaches in order to understand the relationship between cinema and the experiential, one can also used a more literary phenomenological approach on the texts themselves. By "bracketing off" the motifs that reoccur in bounded cinematic categories (whether etically or emically — but preferably emically bounded),

those narrative issues salient to the community should emerge. This was utilized in an attempt to ascertain the specific "ethnic" content within a filmic text.

So far I have identified a number of motifs which occur in these films, motifs which are seen as culturally specific to Ashkenazi Judaism, within the context of *Yiddish-keyt*. Some motifs are exclusive to the Polish-made films, and others are exclusive to the American-made films. The differences appear to be based on practices of either cultural exclusion or cultural inclusion.

Green was aware from the outset that these films would be seen not only by Jews outside of Poland, but also by non-Jews. Therefore, he was aware of their ethnographic importance. These cinematic *shtetls* offer views of a mythical homogenous and harmonious existence whereby the stereotypes of the older, more traditional Jewish identity, exemplified by the Chassidic groups, are gradually becoming more assimilated into a modern Judaism — still pious, still devout, but abandoning some of the more traditional cultural behaviours of which "others" (Gentiles, American Jews, urban Jews in other European centers) may disapprove. The traditionality of some Jews is the only negative aspect of the culture presented, and it is presented with an understanding that these practices are in fact changing. The other cultural motifs the Polish made films develop are all exceptionally positive. The Jewish emphasis on book-based education, the attention to ritual, and the integration of the religion and the lived culture, all put a very positive face on a culture that has been subjected to dispersion, pogroms, and attempted annihilation for its five thousand year history. These cultural motifs answer the question of Jewish survival.

The American films introduce some different cultural motifs, which reflect the

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differences in experience across the ocean. Assimilation, even modernization, is rejected and vilified. These films posit a desire to return to the more traditional values which the Polish films advocate a moving away from. Where the Polish films demonstrate that Jewish survival is based, in part, on the Jew's ability to adapt, the American films argue that such acculturation is the death of the culture. Goldman even argued, as noted above, that if a film advocates assimilation, it is not a Yiddish film, for it would mean the death of the culture. Although Goldman is referring to intermarriage, and as I also noted above that the Polish films exclude any reference to Gentile existence, the cultural logic is in evidence from the author's unfair total rejection of assimilated Judaism as *Yiddishkeyt*. Furthermore, and not entirely unrelated to the assimilation question, the cultural motif of believing that "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" frequently pops up in these film narratives. Whether it is in the context of believing that urban Jews are more Jewish than rural Jews, or that Gentile literature is better than Jewish literature, the American Yiddish films present Jews as looking over the fence and seeing what other people are doing, and coveting their freedom.

But, finally, there are motifs that both the Polish and the American Yiddish films share. One of these is the centrality of the Jewish family; whether celebrated in ritual or not, it is through the family that they transmit *Yiddishkeyt*.

There is one final motif which I have discussed all the way through this chapter, and I wish to end with its reiteration: the very basic commonality among all of these films is that their language of performance is Yiddish. As Wisse noted, "Yiddish ... was the collective experience of all that Jews thought and felt and did" (Wisse: 30). To speak Yiddish is to engage in several thousand years of Jewish identity — at once the

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vernacular language, the family, the religion, the culture. It is this nexus of signification which is what allows me to call Yiddish an essential motif— even the character of the Priest in *Tevye* speaks Yiddish, making the whole world *Yiddishkeyt*. This is why an informant like Yona can say "but to me, a Jewish film is a Yiddish film. The Yiddish films *are* the Jewish films" (Yona, personal interview, 2 May 1997, 9702).

Although many of my informants cited to me the importance of Jewish *content*, of those explicit motifs, like the ones observable in the Yiddish language cinema, my *own* experience with the discourses of film and cultural studies leaves me aware that there may be other aspects in operation within these films which may not be readably observable to most people, aspects where further textual analysis is required in order to excavate them. It is to those aspects I now wish to turn.

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CHAPTER SIX:
ENCODE THIS: CODING AS ESOTERIC COMMUNICATION IN JEWISH CINEMA

Within this chapter, I discuss "coding" as a form of intragroup communication. In addition to those aspects of an ethnography of seeing I have already outlined, an alternative dimension exists which may not be readily observable to the vernacular theorist.

Returning once again to Georges's primary postulate on the nature of storytelling events, he noted a series of points which are equally relevant when discussing cinematic narration. "In every storytelling event, there is at least one encoder and at least one decoder," wrote Georges (Georges: 317). Language, as a communicative medium, requires the message transmitted to be first translated into a form which is understandable to both sender and receiver. At the most primary level, this translation is from the cognitive to the uttered by means of a common tongue. If there is something I wish to say, I must first think of what it is, and then translate it into language in order to speak it. To translate the idea into language is to *encode* the message for transmission. Another agency must then receive, and decode the message from language into idea. And as Georges noted, each message that is transmitted, *to be* transmitted, must first of all be encoded (Georges: 317). Further to the point, such encoding includes a variety of linguistic, paralinguistic, and kinesic codes, and that we transmit these codes via both audio and visual channels (Georges: 317). There is an implicit sense within Georges schema that such encoding/decoding must be, *a priori*, within a face-to-face context (Georges: 317), and therefore is predicated upon the exclusion of cinema as a storytelling event.

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Within the discourse of Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall, likewise noted that all communication is in some way encoded.

> Before [the] message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which have an 'effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences (Hall: 130).

This is the most general and pragmatic levels of reception, however. When both sender and receiver share culture, when they both claim membership within a particular category of groupness, the clarity of textual transmission increases. Through the implied shared cultural identity other forms of discourse have the potential to be transmitted. This is not to say such further discourse is necessarily in contradiction with the surface-level-discourse, but that when the encoder/decoder relationship is predicated upon shared cultural values, the transmission process is more definite. What Hall called *equivalence*, I further specify as *cultural equivalence* (Hall: 131). "What are called 'distortions' or 'misunderstandings' arise precisely from the *lack of equivalence* between two sides in the communicative exchange. Once again, this defines the 'relative autonomy' but 'determinateness' of the entry and exit of the message in its discursive moments" (Hall: 131; emphasis in original).

Hall, in rejecting the more simplistic distinction of denotation/connotation as literal/figural language, proposed the distinction as a question of degrees of observable ideological discourse (Hall: 133). Put differently, denotation in visual discourse refers to the explicit operation of ideology within the transmitted message and that "connotation of

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the visual sign" would then be predicated upon "its contextual reference and positioning

in different discursive fields of meaning and association" (Hall: 133), thereby allowing

the potential for counter-hegemonic readings of ideological texts to emerge.

Hall then hypothetically identified three positions for the decoding of the

transmitted text: 1) the *dominant-hegemonic position*, "when the viewer takes the

connotated meaning . . . full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the

reference code in which it has been encoded . . . " (Hall: 136); 2) the *negotiated code*,

which recognizes the operation of hegemonic encoding, and further connects the

connotative message to a larger, globally operational superstructure (Hall: 137); and 3)

the *oppositional code*, whereby the receiver "detotalizes the message in the preferred

code in the order [sic.] to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of

reference" (Hall: 138)[1]. Within Hall's schema, and this in turn has influenced the entire

field of Cultural Studies and its derivative disciplines. one is engaged with cultural texts

at the surface level, *unaware* of the hegemonic discourse presented, one is in *support* of

such dominant discourse and can apply it outside of the immediate cultural context, or

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[1] Here lies an implicit problem within the discourse of Cultural Studies: Hall identified
that there are only two possibilities of discursive positioning within hegemony: either one
is culpable with the ideological position of the dominant cultural order, or one is in
opposition to it. This discursive position automatically precludes the existence of non-
oppositional, yet non-hegemonic, cultural entities. like ethnic identification. Or as Robert
Klymasz noted, "it is the dominant, mainstream culture itself that dictates and furnishes
the appropriate escape mechanisms and makes available the various generative tools and
productive vehicles with which to reshape and refine the old folklore legacy. In effect,
then, the reconstructed folklore complex allows its assorted carriers and enthusiasts to in-
dulge in a fantasy of ethnic separateness and individuality without transgressing the limits
and patterns prescribed and sanctions by the surrounding English-speaking culture"
(Klymasz: 139).

one is actively *in opposition* to the cultural discourse.

Hall's schema negated the potential for a multiplicity of traditional readings of any cultural context, where an ethnic reading may be neither unaware, nor in support of, nor in active opposition to, the dominant cultural discourse. In a Bahktinian sense, the reception of cultural texts must be seen as polyphonous: "a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers and thus generate dialogical dynamism" (Stam: 262). The multifaceted experiences of cultural audiences operate within a pluralistic reality; that each different audience member, with his/her own cultural background and experience, is going to approach texts differently. Some may in fact be, as Hall argued, unaware of the hegemonic operation, others may agree with this operation, and still others may in fact be opposed to it. But Hall's approach disregarded the existence of the polyphonous audience, whose experience may be neither unaware, supportive, nor oppositional [2].

A more concrete analysis of the operation of coded meaning in cultural texts is put forward by Joan Radner and Susan Lanser, in their highly influential "Strategies of Coding in Women's Culture". The authors' goal is to identify the techniques that women utilize in order to exclude the hegemonic male audience from their private discourse. Although dealing with "women's culture", an analogous operation is observable in Jewish

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[2] Roland Barthes, Hall's mentor, understood the polysemic nature of textual analysis: "The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal: it is not a question of conceding some meanings, of magnanimously acknowledging that each one has its share of truth; it is a question, against all in-difference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible" (Barthes: 6).

culture. In many respects, to replace the signifier "women's" with "Jewish" creates, with some modification, a similar interpretive dynamic.

Radner and Lanser saw a further application of the concept of code.

> Coding occurs in the context of complex audiences in which some
> members may be competent and willing to decode the message, but others
> are not. In other words, coding presumes an audience in which one group
> of receivers is 'monocultural' and thus assumes that its own interpretation
> of messages is the only one possible, while the second group, living in two
> cultures, may recognize a double message — which also requires
> recognizing that some form of coding has taken place (Radner and Lanser:
> 3).

Within this current study, the assumption here is that Jewish audiences are going to have a different understanding of the cultural dynamics in operation within specific film texts, than is readily observable by non-Jewish audience members. In many respects, this latter "monocultural" audience will, like Hall's "negotiated code" audience, interpret any "difference" to their own cultural experience through the dominant worldview which their group represents[3]. "*Coding*, then, is the expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a (bicultural) community under the very eyes of a dominant

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[3] It should be noted that this kind of coding is not myopic: if we take for example a film like *Half the Kingdom*, a film about Jewish women, a non-Jewish woman may still empathize or understand the coded discourse within the film, not as a Jew, but as a woman. Likewise, a Jewish man watching the film, may understand the cultural discourse of Judaism, but not catch the coded feminist discourse. Barre Toelken discusses "the multiplicity of traditions" that 'the probability that most people belong to more than one folk group is a consideration that must remain central in the study of folklore dynamics; it requires us to recognize that a given person may have a wide repertoire of potential traditional dynamic interactions, each of which is set in motion by particular live contexts' (Toelken: 72).

community for whom these same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible" (Radner and Lanser: 3, emphasis in original).

In order for such senses of "groupness" to exist, this cultural opposition requires a "cultural bilingualism". As Radner and Lanser likewise commented, hegemonically ruled classes must be fluent in the dominant culture, as well as fluent in the culture of its own community, "because dominated people need this knowledge to survive" (Radner and Lanser: 2).

Radner and Lanser noted that plurality does not exist within multicultural contexts: hegemony, at one very basic level, denies the existence of Bakhtin's polyphonous cultural expression. Any culture different from the dominant one, in ideology, in praxis, in belief system, is inherently subservient. Radner and Lanser note that parallel cultural spheres do not exist as equals, but in a dominant/subservient relationship (Radner and Lanser: 2). The existence of ethnic communities within cultural or national borders is proof of the resistance to this hegemony.

In order for ethnic identity to continue to exist, small groups must continually renegotiate their own identities in opposition to the cultural hegemony within which they exist. Hall implied, above, that alternative frameworks of the interpretive communities were governed by some kind of oppositional consensus — that all resisting groups agreed on their forms of alternative readings, in what Raymond Williams called "alternative hegemony — a new predominant practice and consciousness" (Williams: 118). Radner and Lanser offered a more precise reconfiguration of this cultural operation. In discussing the existence of "women's culture", the authors noted that

In using the concept *women's cultures*, we do not mean to suggest that

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women share a universal set of experiences or any essentially 'female' understanding or worldview. Rather, we understand gender itself to be constructed through the social relations of particular communities. We assume, therefore, that women's experiences, material circumstances, and understandings — hence women's identities — vary from culture to culture, community to community, and individual to individual (Radner and Lanser: 2).

By replacing the signifier "women" with "Jewish" in analogy, then we can observe a similar dynamic in operation: that, although we cannot refer with any accuracy to "the" Jewish community, we can assume that Jewish "experiences, material circumstances, and understandings", although differing from group to group, will share some kind of commonality, even if only the opposition to the cultural hegemony.

It is worth noting here some fundamental differences between how Stuart Hall and Radner and Lanser understood the concept of coding. Within Hall's schema, the text itself is not much more than a medium for hegemonic maintenance. One is positioned before the message in either a purely denotative position, or if sensitive to the subtleties of connotation, either in support of or in opposition to the hegemonic social order. This schema ignored the performative affect of the cultural producer. The assumption was predicated upon a monolithic cultural industry which denies the existence or life of small group resistance at the production level. Hall only recognized resistance at the reception level[4].

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[4] Janice Radway characterized this binary opposition between rejection and acceptance of mass mediated texts: "Because readers are present in this theory as passive, purely receptive individuals who can only consume the meanings embodied within cultural texts, they are understood to be powerless in the face of ideology. The text's irreducible givenness prevents them from appropriating its meanings for their own use just as it thwarts any desire on their part to resist its message. ... In this theory of mass culture,

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To reduce the process of cognition and meaning-making within popular culture to a simplistic binary opposition between acceptance and rejection, Janice Radway commented, was "to petrify the human act of signification, to ignore the fact that comprehension is actually a process of making meaning, a process of sign production where the reader actively attributes significance to signifiers on the basis of previously learned cultural codes" (Radway: 7). In Radway's ethnography of women romance novel readers, she demonstrated that the ideology within popular culture could be interpreted in a multitude of ways, and, much like Barthes polysemic codes (Barthes: *passim*), was not quite as simple as a polar rejection/acceptance dynamic of the industrial patriarchal hegemony.

Radner and Lanser offered a different paradigm. They likewise offered a tripartite schema. but in this case the emphasis is not on the text, but on the cultural producer — the encoder. Just as Hall subdivided his schema into connotative and denotative codes, Radner and Lanser divided their schema into complicit, explicit, and implicit codes. The authors recognized complicit coding as those culturally agreed upon code words and symbols as identity signifiers. We require some emic knowledge to understand that any kind of coded message is there at all (Radner and Lanser: 5). Explicit coding. on the other hand. is evident even to those who do not understand the coded message (Radner and Lanser: 5). "In complicit coding. an unwitting receiver has no idea an act of coding is taking place; in explicit coding. any receiver knows the code exists. even if she or he

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ideological control is thought to be all-pervasive and complete as a consequence of the ubiquity of mass culture itself and of the power of individual artifacts or texts over individuals who can do nothing but ingest them" (Radway: 6).

cannot crack it" (Radner and Lanser: 6). In both these modes of coding, ethnographic studies are required in order to assess the rhetorical function of the codes themselves.

At a further level there exists codes which Radner and Lanser identified as "implicit" codes: "precisely those acts whose very codedness is arguable" (Radner and Lanser: 6). The centrality of implicit coding is that the sender may be unaware of anything but a denotative message in the text. It is this level that requires hermeneutic approaches.

> At the same time, the suggestion of implicit coding must ultimately remain an act of inference — one that has potential consequences for individuals and communities and therefore should not be undertaken without care. Who is to say whether coding has taken place in a given context? Who is to say what the decoded meaning is? What are the relations of power in which such judgments are made? If coding is a strategy adopted (consciously or not) for concealment, what will be the consequences of uncovering an act of coding? These are not merely academic questions; they involve the safety. reputations. and well-being of individual[s] . . . and entire communities (Radner and Lanser: 9).

This brings up what I feel is the most contentious aspect of the Radner and Lanser paradigm of coding: the notion of risk. Radner and Lanser distinguished between groups at "risk" and groups at "play".

> By situations of *risk* we mean those occasions when the code has been adopted to provide safety or freedom rather than simply pleasure or play. Coding may be undertaken for a variety of purposes. not all of them involving real or perceived danger to the encoder or the encoding community . . . Such cases involve a 'bicultural' context but not necessarily an operant context of dominance: there is thus no need to suppress the fact that coding might be embarrassing or uncomfortable but not of serious consequence (Radner and Lanser: 4-5. emphasis in

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original)[5].

Although all communication is coded by virtue of the fact that language is a series of signifiers in itself, members of smaller communities within a larger hegemony can communicate among themselves by means of cultural codes that may or may not be observable or cognizant to the larger society. Some of these codes are explicit, that is understood as coded even if the code cannot be "cracked", while others are complicit, understood within the community itself as significant markers of identity or meaning, and of which outsiders may not be aware.

Jewish historian Irving Howe noted that when Jewish comics of the early television age used Yiddish expression, they encoded them as "waving to the folks back home" (quoted in Shandler: 20). Shandler noted that within later American popular culture too, which supported a kind of bland generic ethnicity, as opposed to specific ethnic expression rooted in the lived experiences of cultural groups. ethnic audience members would try and identify their own countrymen.

> Some characters who would appear to be beyond ethnicity are open to the projections of viewers' idiosyncratic assertions. *Star Trek's* Science
> · Officer Mr. Spock is a perfect example. When I worked on a screening and discussion series on ethnic portraiture on prime-time television for the Jewish Museum of New York in 1991, Spock came up several times in discussion. Author Jewelle Gomez, who was the series discussant for

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[5] Radner and Lanser ignore Jeremy Benthem's notion of "*deep* play" altogether. Benthem proposed the concept of "deep play", where "the stakes are so high that it is ... irrational for men to engage in it at all. ... [But] in such play, money [or whatever is at stake] is less a measure of utility, had or expected. than it is a symbol of moral import, perceived or imposed. ... In deep [play] ... much more is at stake than material gain: namely, esteem. honor. dignity, respect — in a word ... status" (Geertz: 432-433). Their differentiation between "play" and "risk" is qualitative, based on etically derived presumptions.

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science fiction programs, noted that many African Americans identified with Spock, who was stigmatized as 'other' because of his skin color and his multiracial background (his mother a human, his father a Vulcan). Charlie Chin, then of the Chinatown History Museum, told me that many Asian Americans feel an affinity for Spock — skin color again, as well as those slanted eyebrows, while the character's Vulcan logic was understood as the equivalent of Confucian philosophy. I, of course, explained to them that Jews lay claim to Spock as a figure of their own sense of 'otherness' and 'between-two-worldliness' — besides, the actor who plays him is Jewish, his Vulcan hand salute is derived from the gesture made by *kohanim* when they offer a priestly benediction, he works for the Federation (rabbis love to point this out) and — as I have been told by a member of the Jewish Science Fiction Society — if Vulcan logic is symbolic of anything, surely it must be Talmudic sophistry! (Shandler: 20)

It is my contention that coding does occurs within films, specifically within ethnic cinema as a means of intragroup communication. Coding excludes non-members from total understanding of the cinematic text. By utilizing a variety of linguistic, paralinguistic, iconographic, and musical signifiers, ethnic cinema sends a, not necessarily contradictory, but certainly more holistic textual, and therefore cultural, understanding.

By code, I do not mean, necessarily a subversive, or "hidden", message within the text to avoid the kind of physical risk Radner and Lanser warned of; but I do mean that by using a medium of mass communication, whereby anyone *may* have access to the narrative, in order to prevent the risk of psychic alienation, these films use coded meaning to bring about intragroup cohesion. Perhaps, by using the Toronto Jewish Film Festival as a beginning point for this research, I choose a "safe" environment in which to conduct this study. The assumption working within such a context is that I am, like the Festival attendees, Jewish, and therefore the films cited to me were more explicit in their Jewish

content than if I had conducted this research outside of such a context. If the cultural producers explicitly intend a film for an ethnic, or limited market, then the need for coded messages is less than if they intended the film for a larger market. When a film produced for a mainstream audience, and is based within a specific ethnic tradition, the existence of coded messages within the text is more likely to occur; likewise, the more specialized the film, such as documentaries, like the often cited *Half the Kingdom* (1989), or *Shoah* (1985), or low-budget independent films like Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* (1975) or *Crossing Delancey* (1988), or even non-American films like those from Israel (*The Summer of Aviya* (1988) and *I Love You Rosa* (1972)) and Canada (*The Quarrel* (1991) or *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974)) are less likely to use implicit coded messages. The evidence presented in Chapter Seven bears this out.

LANGUAGE CHOICE CODING

A number of socio-linguists have noted that although Hebrew remains the official language of Jewish *religion*, Yiddish is a language of Jewish *culture* (Fishman: 1, 11). I have already noted the centrality of Yiddish for some people to determine a film's Jewish identity, but other examples of Jewish language usage go beyond any specific cinema framed by language choice.

Speaking in a counter-hegemonic language, which for a North American is any language other than English, explicitly excludes anyone who does not speak that language. Even with the use of English-language subtitles, many people within Canada

and the United States actively eschew non-English language films[6]. When I've mentioned to others, Jew and non-Jew alike, about my interest in Yiddish-language cinema, they have almost to a one, concluded that I must speak Yiddish.

One of the strategies of coding which Radner and Lanser pointed out to be operating in women's culture is that of "distraction". "Usually distraction involves creating some kind of 'noise,' interference, or obscurity that will keep the message from being heard except by those who listen very carefully or already suspect it is there" (Radner and Lanser: 15). The avoidance of risk within Jewish cinema can also utilize counter-hegemonic language in order to discourage attack by preventing non-friendly audiences from attending. The use of languages outside of the cultural context of presentation, in English-speaking Canada, for example, are films whose primary language is Yiddish or Hebrew, distracts those potentially hostile toward Jewish culture, from attending.

For example, in *Schindler's List* (1993)[7]. as a prologue to the film, we see, in

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[6] Perhaps the vernacular response to English sub-titles is most explicitly expressed by a friend of mine in Toronto. who when I invited her to see a foreign language film. replied that she does not pay eight dollars to "read a movie".

[7] *Schindler's List* is the story of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a Nazi profiteer. who saved the lives of 1100 Jews who worked for him from the death camps. One of the things which makes *Schindler's List* so significant, however. is the radical split between the scholarly criticism and the popular support for the film. For example, Miriam Bratu Hansen, in a recent article noted: "The first and obvious argument is that *Schindler's List* is and remains a Hollywood product. As such it is circumscribed by the economic and ideological tenets of the culture industry. with its unquestioned and supreme values of entertainment and spectacle: its fetishism of style and glamor; its penchant for superlatives and historicist grasp at any and all experience ...; and its reifying, leveling, and trivializing effect on everything it touches. In this argument, *Schindler's List* is usually aligned with Spielberg's previous mega-spectacles, especially *Jurassic Park*, and

colour, as opposed to the black and white cinematography the majority of the movie is filmed in, an orthodox family (signified by their clothes and *payez* on the men) reciting the *brakha* over the wine which begins the *shabbes* meal. The prayer, familiar enough even to those Jews who have only a cursory knowledge of their faith, is in Hebrew, sanctifying the wine in a prayer of thanks. Although one may take for granted the knowledge that Hebrew is the Jewish language of prayer, we cannot assume the apparent obviousness of this language choice.

Jews understand the religious context of Hebrew; among North American cultural Judaism (that is, non-practicing, or secular), the only time one is likely to come into contact with Hebrew is in the religious context. Taking a clip like this one from *Schindler's List*, which is presented in another language without the benefit of subtitles, out of the context of an English language movie, demonstrates how this "distracting" technique of coding operates. While watching *Schindler's List*, the non-Jewish audience member may be alienated, made to feel as an outsider, before being sutured into the diegesis of the English language movie, since they may not have the cultural knowledge of that prayer.

When one level of coding is inaccessible to the audience, in this case Radner and Lanser would have argued it is an *explicit* code since the non-Jewish audience is aware

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is accused of having turned the Holocaust into a theme park" (Bratu Hansen: 80). The problem with approaches like this to Spielberg's film is that it assumes *a priori* that because Hollywood produces fluff movies, everything it produces is, *ergo*, fluff. There is no recognition of the possibility that Hollywood, or Spielberg, could produce anything of substance. Bratu Hansen went so far as to refer to *Schindler's List* as "Shoah-business" (Bratu Hansen: 80), in a pun which is more vulgar than any Hollywood film.

that the language is not immediately understandable, they must resort to other codes with the cinematic frame in order to comprehend what is going on. As can be deduced from the context of a film about the Holocaust, from the somber tenor of the benediction, and the seriousness of the performed litany, the prayer itself might be etically interpreted as a song of mourning. Unaware that the *brakha* over wine is a prayer of thanks[8], thanking God for giving the Jewish people "the fruit of the vine," an outsider could "misread" the cultural codes.

This distinction between prayers of mourning (etic) and prayers of thanks (emic) relates to one of the comments on my survey from the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival: "I'm a soul reborn from the Holocaust. I love hearing Hebrew" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). The comment is quite revealing: the person refers to themselves as "a soul reborn from the Holocaust", namely someone who survived Hitler's genocide. But more than that, the comment also has a connotation of cultural/religious renewal — that being a "survivor" of the Holocaust has renewed this individual's Jewish identity. That renewal is also directly linked with the Hebrew language. This person is probably referring to Israeli cinema. Hebrew is the language of Israel, and hearing Hebrew reborn (like themselves, after the Holocaust) in the modern Jewish state, is likely going to have a greater resonance for him/her, than even Jews who had not been touched by the Holocaust could understand. Tying this comment back into *Schindler's List*, this opening sequence implies that the *brakha* is likewise testimony to

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[8] "Blessed art thou./ our Lord. our God./ King of the Universe./ who gives us the fruit of the vine."

the persistence of Hebrew, and by extension, the Jewish people.

Films in Hebrew (i.e., films made in Israel) or in Yiddish, even if supplied with subtitles which allow non-Hebrew or Yiddish speakers to feel less "distracted" by the unfamiliar language, do not give the audience full immersion into the cultural experience of the language, or from the culture whence that language emerges. As I noted in the previous chapter, the Toronto Jewish Film Festival always shows a Yiddish language film. One of the people I spoke with at the festival commented upon the importance of understanding the language choice which cannot be translated in subtitles.

> 'Cause if you'll notice when they had the Yiddish movie, people who understand Yiddish, such as myself, a few things that are very difficult to translate, some of the things that weren't translated at all, were absolutely hilarious. And it has so much more taste and feeling to it when you understand it from that perspective (Eddie, personal interview, 9705).

Further evidence to this point comes from the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival. I noted in the last chapter that each year the festival screens a classic Yiddish language film. In 1997, the film was *The Vow* [*Tkies Khaf*] (1938) and was an unprecedented success. Helen Zukerman tells the story:

> You know, when I sat in the theatre Sunday, and peoples' reaction to *The Vow* — I couldn't believe it! I expected 250 people to show up. Maybe 300 people. [the show sold out — over nine hundred people] So in the office, when ticket sales were happening, I look at the ticket sales, and thought 'this is really interesting'. But then I thought 'well, they're coming to see it 'cause it's a new version that I happened to get,' and all that stuff. When I sat in the theatre, I didn't expect to watch that whole film. I wanted — I started watching it because I wanted to see if the print was any good. And the people we so involved. I sat there and watch this film. And when the wedding happened, and everybody started clapping [and shouting *'mazel tov!'*] — I mean, if I had been sitting with Ginger [Mittleman — the festival administrative assistant], I would have gotten

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up and *danced.* I though, this is unbelievable. This is a whole generation
— and in the audience, where people were laughing, I would suggest that
half of them could speak Yiddish because they were laughing in different
places. So you figure 300 and some odd people could speak Jewish and
the others didn't. But the people who couldn't were *so* into it. They left,
they *loved* it (Zukerman, personal interview, 7 May, 1997, 9713).

"Yiddishologist", Leo Rosten, has likewise noted the near impossibility of translating

Yiddish into English, since the language is so-closely tied into the culture itself.

> To translate is to re-create portions of a culture to someone not raised in
> that culture. To translate Yiddish is to translate an entire style of life, a
> construct of perceptions, a complex system of values, subtleties of
> thinking and feeling which are imbedded in the history of European Jews
> and the life of their decedents (Rosten, 1982: 14).

The Jewish languages, Yiddish and Hebrew, are not as readily translatable as pure

vocabulary: within each language is encoded the cultural history of the people, and that

one must understand culture for the language to be decoded.

Other surveyed festival participants also confirmed this dimension of language

choice as essential to Jewish film. For example, one person noted on their survey form:

"It gives me a special feeling to hear Hebrew spoken in the movies (i.e., Israeli films)

even though I don't understand it at all" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish

Film Festival). Here the festival participant, although not a Hebrew speaker, finds cultural

solace in hearing the language spoken. Other festival participants go specifically for the

Yiddish films: "I love hearing Yiddish spoken. Hope you have more than one film in

Yiddish next year" (comment on survey form, 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival). Many

of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival goers attend explicitly to immerse themselves within

these linguistic codes of Jewish languages[9].

The *Schindler's List* sequence I noted above, although in Hebrew, is still within the context of an American produced, English language film. It exists within the film as a culturally significant linguistic moment. Within North American films, it is these isolated moments of spoken Yiddish or Hebrew which are the norm. In Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles* (1973)[10]; African-American sheriff, Bart (Cleavon Little), remembers his family crossing the frontier in a wagon train when he was a child. At one point they meet a tribe of Native-Americans, whose chief is played by Mel Brooks himself. In addition to speaking stereotypical broken English to these homesteaders, Brooks's Chief also speaks in Yiddish. Film scholar Lester Friedman noted that the sequence "seems comically appropriate that the West's most conspicuous outsider, the Indian, should speak in the

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[9] As an interesting aside, it is worth noting the ideological definition of Yiddish as the *mamaloshen* of Ashkenazi Jews. Leo Rosten noted that "Hebrew was the father's language, since the holy books were in Hebrew, and only Jewish males were taught to read. Yiddish became known as 'the mother's tongue,' the language of the home" (Rosten, 1968: 223). Charles Ferguson noted the distinction between high literary forms of a language and the more vernacular, dialect based speech patterns, and the code-switching between the two (what Ferguson called "diglossia"): "among speakers ... adults use L [low forms of speech, or dialect] in speaking to children and children use L in speaking to one another. As a result, L is learned by children in what may be regarded as the 'normal' way of learning one's mother tongue. H [high forms of speech] may be heard by children from time to time, but the actual learning of H is chiefly accomplished by the means of formal education, whether this be traditional ... schools, modern government schools, or private tutors" (Ferguson: 239). Given Ferguson's schema, it seems apparent that Hebrew is H, and Yiddish is L for Ashkenazi Jews.

[10] Cited to me by one informant (Yona, personal interview, 9702). But *Blazing Saddles* along with Brooks' entire *oeuvre* was cited to me others in context as a significant reflection of American Jewish humour in film.

tongue of history's traditional outsider, the Jew" (Friedman, 1982: 228).

But for a non-Jew, there could be some confusion between hearing Yiddish spoken outside of an explicitly Jewish context, and German. I note this because of one of my early memories of *Blazing Saddles*. When the film was first released, the television advertisement made a comment along the lines that in Mel Brooks's version of "the Old West" the Indians spoke "German". Whereas a non-Jewish response to hearing Yiddish and identifying it as German may be an error based on cultural unfamiliarity, to propagate that error through Warner Brothers's own publicity department is more ideological. Radner and Lanser's "distraction" becomes paramount here: by publicly identifying the language as German, creates this sense of "noise" around the Jewish content of the film. This distraction allows the Jewish content to be encoded, complicitly, thereby alleviating the risk of, if not Anti-Semitic attack, then non-exclusion of the potential Anti-Semitic audience. If one has already identified the language as German, then the Indian ceases to be necessarily Jewish, and remains abstractly "Other", much like Bart's African-American family.

A much more complicated level of coding is centered around Judeo-English (JE)[11]. At one point in the film *Crossing Delancey* (1988)[12], young Issy (Amy Irving) is

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[11] Judeo-English (JE) is the socio-linguistic term for the more vernacular "Yinglish" — the vernacular speech pattern of English speaking Jews.

[12] *Crossing Delancey* is about Issy, a successful book store manager, who is madly infatuated with a charismatic Dutch author who lives in her New York neighbourhood (Jeroen Krabbe). Several times a week, Issy "crosses Delancey," one of the streets in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, the old Jewish immigrant neighbourhood, to visit her Bubee. Bubee is upset that Issy is in her thirties and still not married, and hires a *shadchan*, Hannah Mandelbaum, to find her granddaughter a match. Mrs. Mandelbaum's

invited over to her Bubee's (grandmother — played by Reizl Bozyk) for supper only to

discover she's been set up by the neighbourhood *shadchan*, Mrs. Mandelbaum (Sylvia

Miles), to meet a potential husband. Mrs. Mandelbaum is the embodiment of the

stereotypical elderly Jewish lady: brassy, loud, and obnoxious. In fact, those familiar

with the stereotype mark Mrs. Mandelbaum as a "Delancey Street Jew", from

Manhattan's Lower East Side, the immigrant neighbourhood where many Jews settled in

the early parts of the 20th Century. But that characterization has come to act as a metonym

for American Judeo-English. Some of my Toronto Jewish Film Festival informants

identified this use of Judeo-English as a significant aspect of the Jewish character in

American cinema.

> Amos: Well, — it's a different part of Jewishness — But it's very Jewish.
>   What I would say — it has Jewish sensibilities.
> Toni: *Yes.*
> Amos: There's that whole — Jewish language.
> Mikel: Is that Yiddish or Hebrew?
> Amos: No, it's English.
> Toni: New YO-rk.
> Mikel: The New YO-rk. OK.
> Amos: It's English. That's English — English language (Amos and Toni.
>   personal interview. 9702).

I've shown *Crossing Delancey* to a number of non-Jews, and most compare Mrs.

Mandelbaum with the Fran Drescher's character on the television show "The Nanny".

Drescher's character of Fran Fine, also a New York Jew, has perpetuated this stereotype

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choice is the local pickle merchant Sam (Peter Riegert). This romantic comedy asks
whether or not Issy will choose the traditionally Jewish Sam, or the Gentile writer, and by
extension, will Issy choose between fully assimilating into Gentile New York culture, or
stick to her roots?

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further.   Here is another person I spoke with at the Toronto Festival:

> Ruby: I don't watch television, so it's only by chance, 'cause someone told
>   me that I reminded them of 'The Nanny,' that I know about 'The
>   Nanny'.
> Mikel: You don't look a thing like Fran Drescher.
> Ruby: No, it's my accent. I'm from New York. So I did watch 'The Nanny'
>   (Ruby, personal interview, 9705).

Although stereotypical, this New York accented form of Judeo-English is marked as

Jewish only through the complicit coding based on *a priori* knowledge of the code. It is

an agreed upon shorthand for American Jewish culture. Even if knowledge of this code is

available to those outside of the culture, based on proliferation of the code through the

mass media, its clear and intentional communication is in jeopardy without knowledge of

the originating cultural context. This misreading of the coded discourse may be, in part,

how stereotypes become disseminated as reality.

Stereotyping though can also be considered a form of implicit encoding: Radner

and Lanser referred to "indirection" as a code which women's culture frequently applies

in to order for their "feminist messages" to be communicated (Radner and Lanser: 16).

The authors cited the use of metaphor within women's culture as a means of discussing

forbidden subject areas (Radner and Lanser: 16). Within Jewish culture, if we see

esoterically produced stereotypes as metaphoric, the stereotype then functions as

indirection for the Jewish discourse encoded deeply within a film like *Crossing Delancey*.

It is easy to dismiss Mrs. Mandelbaum as a crude stereotype of the Jewish matron;

however she is the mouthpiece for traditional *Yiddishkeyt*, a cultural aesthetic which feels

like an anomaly in modern New York.

CUSTOMARY CODING

Non-Jews can see, and enjoy, Jewish customs within a film without fully understanding the ritual significance of the actions. It is worth reiterating again, that while Jewish spectators are likely to see such customs as obvious, non-Jews do not necessarily even "see" the actions portrayed.

In the final sequence from *Schindler's List*, the actual survivors of the Holocaust saved by Oskar Schindler, the so-called "Schindler Jews", and the actors who portrayed them in the film, file past the real-life grave of Schindler in Israel, placing stones on his grave. Again, this sequence is in colour, not black and white, and functions as a frame to the *brakha* sequence which opens the film.

The question why Jews place rocks on gravestones is a matter of some debate. All Jews recognize the practice as being "Jewish", but there are perhaps as many explanations as to why this is done as there are types of Jews. For example, according to the Internet's soc.culture.jewish newsgroup's "F.A.Q." [Frequently Asked Questions document]:

> Originally, there were no engraved tombstones like we have today;
> instead, visitors to the gravesite would each put a stone on the grave. Over
> the years, a mound of stones would accumulate, memorializing the
> deceased through the hands of his/her loved ones. Although Jews now
> follow the common practice of putting up tombstones (generally unveiled
> eleven months following the actual funeral and burial), many people still
> hold to the earlier custom of a more personal monument (Faigin: [np]).

Still another, perhaps more pragmatic, reason behind the practice is put forward by Judith Doneson: "It is customary in Jewish tradition to place a stone, or a piece of grass, on a grave, a sign to the departed that he or she has had a visitor" (Doneson: 148). And yet,

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within my own Jewish upbringing, I was taught the custom was symbolic of reburial; that every time one visits a grave of a loved one, one must ritualistically re-bury them. Rabbi Ari Shishler gives a further explanation:

> Jewish mysticism teaches of four levels of life forms: human, animal, vegetation and inanimate. A stone appears inanimate yet also has a G-dly[13] life-giving force in it that keeps it in existence (a soul of sorts). We place a stone on the grave as an indication that even that which appears dead, is in fact alive. The symbolism is most appropriate (Ari Shishler, personal communication, 26 February, 1998).

Regardless of the reason for the custom, it is widely recognized as a Jewish practice, at least among Jews.

Within the *seder* sequence, in *A Letter to Mother*, as I noted in the previous chapter, the chair at the head of the table, presumably Duvid's, remains empty. Duvid functions as a "structured absence" in the sequence; his patriarchal influence felt by its absence in the failure of the *seder* to run effectively. At one narrative juncture, when the youngest son, Arele, is to ask the "Four Questions", Arele breaks down in tears because his father is not there to answer the questions. As I noted above, if the father is not able to answer the questions, then the Passover *Seder* cannot be completed.

> In order to arrive at a complete understanding of the Exodus through the Seder, we must first ask the questions of the *'Ma Nishtana.'* and then proceed to the explanation of the *'Avadim Hayinu'*. These are the rungs of the ladder which must be climbed in sequence. Understanding is achieved through perception which leads to conceptualization. The *'Ma Nishtana'* corresponds to the raw perception of events, while *'Avadim Hayinu'* is the

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[13] In more traditional Jewish circles, it is considered blasphemous to even write the *English* name of God. Instead, within the Jewish tradition, the "o" is replaced with a dash — "G-d." Out of respect to Rabbi Shishler, I have not altered his usage.

conceptualization of what has occurred (Cohen and Brander: 4).

Without the questions being asked, and those questions answered, the Jewish family cannot fulfill the commandment to retell the Exodus from Egypt at Passover. This is the Jewish understanding of the impact of Duvid's absence on the rite.

In *Leon, the Pig Farmer* (1992), a strictly *kosher* young Jewish man (Mark Frankel) from North London discovers not only is he the product of artificial insemination, but that due to a lab error, the sperm used to conceive him was actually that of Brian Chadwick (Brian Glover), a pig farmer from North Yorkshire. Leon travels to Yorkshire to meet his biological father and his family. Once there, he begins to get homesick, but the Chadwicks decide to try and behave a bit more like his Jewish family. The result is an exceptionally funny montage of clips which particularly point out the differences between Gentile and Jewish cultures. Because the narrative of the sequence is built upon learning the codes of Jewish culture, the cultural items themselves are obvious, but there is a further level of meaning which is esoteric.

The sequence begins with the removal of the decorative pigs' heads which the Brian Chadwick had above his mantel — pigs being *trayf* to the strictly *kosher*. A framed picture of Leon replaces one of the heads, reflecting the cultural stereotype of parents who are overly proud of their children[14]. A small Israeli flag replaces another. A tacky chandelier replaces an antique lighting fixture, looking quite incongruous with the rural motifs of the Chadwick farm, reflecting the stereotype of conspicuous consumption

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[14] A recent joke I heard reflects this stereotype: "What is the definition of 'genius'? An average student with a Jewish mother."

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among Jews[15].

     This montage of visual gags leads up to a visual "punch line": the Chadwick's son,
Keith (Sean Pertwee), is lying in bed reading Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* with one
hand, while with his other hand, he is practicing his grip and looking under his bedcovers.
A non-Jew who was familiar with the film, noted that she felt the look of intense
concentration on Keith face was the basis of the visual joke. Non-Jews may correctly
identify any individual icon, but the cultural significance lies in the combination of icons.
Roth is an important Jewish-American writer, *Portnoy's Complaint* is perhaps Roth's
most famous book, many people read in bed, and Keith's concentration may be his
dedication to learning about Leon's culture. But when we combine these icons, through
the medium of cultural experience, the filmmakers successfully communicate the joke:
Roth's controversial novel, is in part controversial for its focus/obsession on
masturbation; hence, Keith practicing his grip and looking under his bedclothes. Roth's
second chapter in *Portnoy's Complaint*, titled "Whacking Off," opens with the following

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[15] Dan Ben-Amos noted this stereotype of Jewish conspicuous consumption: "A rabbi told
me the following story: 'The story is told in this regard of the priest and the rabbi who . . .
and a minister, who are walking down the street and they saw a new family moving into a
new house in the suburb. And so they said: 'Mmmm, a new family. I wonder what religion,
who is going to get them, which church.' so they said, 'Well, the shades are up, let us take a
look and see if we can recognize by the house, you know, whose it is.' So the Catholic
looks into the house, peeps in, then says: 'Oh, no, it is not one of my flock.' So the minister
looks in and says, 'Well, I don't see any Bible that I can recognize, it is not one of my
flock.' The rabbi says, 'Well, let me take a look.' The rabbi takes a look and then says, 'Oh
yes, it is one of my flock.' They say, 'What is it, you see a Jewish star or a *menorah* or
something like that?' 'No,' he says, 'Wall to wall carpet." ... This contrast between
conspicuous consumption and traditional observance expresses the particular antagonism
the rabbis feel toward their congregation" (Ben-Amos, 1973: 126).

sentence: "Then came adolescence — half my waking life spent locked behind the bathroom door, firing my wad down the toilet bowl, or into the soiled clothes in the laundry hamper, or *splat*, up against the medicine-chest mirror, before which I stood in my dropped drawers so I could see how it looked coming out" (Roth: 17-18). The context in which Keith reads *Portnoy's Complaint* is culturally significant for those who are familiar with Roth's novel. The masturbation joke does not work without a degree of knowledge about the author and that particular work. Here is Radner and Lanser's "complicit coding" *par excellence*: there is no masturbation joke without understanding the complicit encoding of Roth as a "masturbatory" author, or the stereotype of the sexually obsessed young Jewish male.

This dimension of the combination of specific icons as being the locus for cultural meaning is essential to an understanding of cinematic coding. There is another shot in *Leon*, a benign moment focusing on the Chadwicks' dinner table. We had seen this table prior to this shot, a beautiful hardwood table, but now is covered with a white table cloth. On the table are two dark candlesticks, with white candles burning, a bottle of wine, and a bread on the table. The Chadwicks each have a crystal/glass wine cup in front of them, but it is the placement of a silver wine goblet in the center of the table which appears significant, and changes the entire meaning of the table setting. I showed this clip to a knowledgeable Gentile, one who is married to a Jew, and she instantly identified the significant icons of the candles, the "*Kiddush*" cup, and the bread. I then asked her what about those icons made them "Jewish". She noted that it was not anything in particular about the items themselves (save for maybe the "*Kiddush*" cup), but the combination of items which was significant. The shot then tracks to the right, in order to reveal someone

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walking in the front door, but this camera movement reveals that the bread is in fact under a *challah*-cover, further particularizing the table setting as Jewish.

The characterization of Keith in *Leon, the Pig Farmer* also has an example of Radner and Lanser's "implicit coding", where the existence of the code is arguable: Keith is studying to be a *cordon bleu* chef, and in an earlier sequence, attempts to turn chicken soup into some kind of *nouvelle cuisine*. Perhaps the most famous (infamous) moment in Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* is Portnoy's confession that he used a piece of liver to masturbate in:

> My first piece I had in the privacy of my own home, rolled around my
> cock in the bathroom at three-thirty — and then had again on the end of a
> fork, at five-thirty, along with the other members of that poor innocent
> family of mine. So. Now you know the worst thing I have ever done. I
> fucked my own family's dinner (Roth: 134).

The image of "liver" returns in *Leon, the Pig Farmer* a few minutes after we see Keith reading Roth's book. While at the dinner table, eating chopped liver, Leon chastises the Chadwicks for

> ... just fulfilling stereotypes. You don't understand the fundamental
> concept of guilt. Without guilt it's meaningless. 'Guilt' isn't a word — it's a
> way of life.

Keith replies: "I think I do — understand the concept of guilt. I just realized — I uh — used pig's liver." At the explicit level, the humour comes from the accidental violation of the *kosher* laws; but the implicit level could be a pointed reference to the liver use in Roth's novel.

Another of the encoding techniques which Radner and Lanser identified as

"complicit" is that of "incompetence", that when someone appears to be inept at specific tasks, they may in fact be demonstrating their resistance to it (Radner and Lanser: 20). Jews may interpret the Chadwicks "incompetence" at reproducing the codes of Jewish behaviour as resistance to understanding Jewish culture in anything other than the stereotypical manifestation. As Leon himself comments, "you're just fulfilling stereotypes". The Chadwicks do not understand the cultural concepts which lie beneath the surface of the manifested cultural traits. The incompetence with which the Chadwicks reproduce the codes of Jewish culture expresses their implicit resistance to the changes Leon requests. Textually, we see Brian Chadwick's resentment on his face as he takes down his pig-head plaques from over the mantelpiece. As Radner and Lanser noted above, one of the problems in identifying the encoded complicit discourse, is that it may reveal cultural aspects the members of the culture would rather not have revealed. Jewish paranoia about the motives or sincerity of non-Jewish interest in Jewish culture beyond the stereotypical is perhaps not something most Jews would like revealed; it is something we would rather keep to ourselves, even subconsciously.

Although in some respects many of these clips could be classified as more icono-graphic than "customary", it is the customary use of these icons which is significant for the encoding of Jewish identity. However, it is the icons which are identifiable to non-Jews, even if they do not understand their customary uses within the culture.

ICONOGRAPHIC CODING

The use and meaning of specific icons within Jewish traditions likewise may not be identifiable or accessible to non-Jews. Some of these icons are obvious, some are not.

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There is a moment in *Exodus* (1960)[16], where young Dov Landau (Sal Mineo) is

being initiated into the Israeli terrorist organization, the Irgun[17]. Akiva (David Opatoshu),

the fictional leader of the Irgun, holds a Bible (one assumes an Old Testament), on top he

lays a pistol. He takes Dov's left hand and places it on top, with his right hand picks up a

six-stemmed *menorah*, and gets Dov to swear an oath of allegiance. Here we have the

crux of *Exodus'* use of Jewish iconography in its narrative: it in no way attempts a cultural

verisimilitude which is emically understandable, but instead utilizes iconography which is

exoteric — that is, it uses icons which non-Jews are likely to identify as Jewish.

Although the icons utilized in the sequence are recognizably Jewish — the Old

Testament, the *menorah* — the swearing of an oath on them appropriates the standard

(Christian) American practice of "swearing on a Bible", and the inclusion of the

menorah for apparently "Jewish colour". The gun is symbolic, diegetically, of the

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[16] *Exodus*, the classic epic film of the establishment of Israel and based on the novel by Leon Uris, tells the story of Haganah member, Ari Ben-Kanaan (Paul Newman), who heroically smuggles in Jewish Holocaust survivors to British Mandate Palestine, and helps to establish the State of Israel. The film is Hollywood produced (United Artists), and is considered by many to be a particularly superficial gloss on the Israeli War of Independence. In part this is due to the film's attempted appeal to a "universal" market, and that it is not geared toward any kind of particular Jewish context.

[17] Telushkin noted: "in January of 1944, as Allied victory over the Nazis became increasingly certain, the Irgun, under the leadership of Menachem Begin [co-winner of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize], renewed its battle to chase England out of Palestine. The Irgun opposed terrorism against civilians, generally restricting its attacks to British army officers. ... The Irgun's most famous terrorist act was the bombing in 1946 of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, a wing of which served as British army headquarters in Palestine. ... Not only was the whole wing of the hotel demolished, over ninety people were killed" (Telushkin, 1991: 278). The bombing of the King David Hotel is represented in the movie *Exodus*.

Irgun's commitment to violent overthrow of the British controlled Mandate in Palestine. I asked some people on the Internet newsgroup soc.culture.jewish, about Jews taking oaths; Dov's swearing his allegiance to the Irgun interpolates as enculturated for American audiences of the film, and does not "feel" very Jewish. Douglas Jones noted to me that "I believe that a Jew could properly refuse to swear to God, since this might be seen as a vane [sic.] oath" (Douglas Jones, personal correspondence, 25 February, 1998). However, Zev Sero noted to me that "Jewish tradition certainly includes oaths . . . including oaths holding a *sefer torah*" (Zev Sero, personal correspondence, 25 February, 1998). Elsewhere, Zev Sero noted

> Some prefer to affirm, but so long as its a Jewish Bible, I'm not sure what the advantage of affirming is. An affirmation has the same legal status as an oath, after all. I think the Jewish preference for affirming came mostly from the days when Jewish Bibles weren't available (Zev Sero, personal correspondence, 24 February, 1998).

More pragmatically, Herman Rubin, a professor of Statistics at Purdue University, wrote to me saying that "there is no legal requirement [in the United States] of using a Bible, and Jews should refuse to use anything containing the Christian portions of it" (Herman Rubin, personal correspondence, 25 February, 1998). In most of these cases, they deferred the actual religious proscription to taking oaths to rabbis. Only one rabbi responded to my query, and as far as his knowledge of matters in Jewish law are concerned, he can be considered an authority:

> Jews do not take oaths on a bible or using G-d's name. When the Temple stood, the *Sanhedrin* (Jewish high court) had the authority to make a person take an oath, using G-d's name. This was only used under certain circumstances and was viewed as an exceptionally serious process (after all, it is one of the ten commandments not to take G-d's name in vain).

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During this process, the person taking the oath would hold a Torah scroll,
not just a bible. Today, we do not use this process (we are not authorized
to do so). Judaism does view taking oaths or making promises in a
serious light. So, even when asking a promise, without using G-d's name,
we are very careful to adhere to it. If we feel we may be unable to live up
to our assurance, we add the phrase 'bli neder', implying, I will do such
and such, but I'm not binding myself with the force of a promise (Ari
Shishler, personal correspondence, 26 February, 1998).

Perhaps it would have been more "ethnographically accurate" to have Dov swear on a

sefer torah, but because of the unfamiliarity of the non-Jewish world with that visual

icon, director Otto Preminger substitutes the Westernized standard of a "black book", a

Bible.

On the other hand, Radner and Lanser noted that "appropriation" is a legitimate

technique of implicit coding. The appropriation of the legal "swearing on the Bible" for

an emerging Israeli loyalty oath, and the requisite replacement of iconography, could be

argued is intentionally drawing attention to its own absurdity for the Jewish audience.

Based partially on Luce Irigaray's concept of "ironic *mimicry*," within feminist studies,

"in which a patriarchally designated feminine position is repeated with exaggeration in

order to expose it" (Radner and Lanser: 10), this sequence from *Exodus*, reveals the

absurdity of the icons with which Jewish identity is expressed exoterically *vis-a-vis*

Jewish "mimicry" of the Christian hegemony's perception of the culture. If so, then

Dov's initiation into the Irgun, is an intentionally absurd moment for the Jewish

audience; and its absurdity is implicitly encoded. Therefore it can be argued the

sequence is an explosion of the exoteric perceptions of Jewish ritual icons.

In yet another sequence from *Schindler's List*, we see a bourgeois family being

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forced out of their luxury apartment in a Nazi appropriation of Jewish property. As they pass the doorway, the man stops, and removes the *mezuzah*[18] from the doorpost, kisses it, and places in his pocket as he leaves. The action of taking this artifact with one when moving interpolates at a further level for the Jewish spectator. At one, diegetic level, the man leaving his home is just taking this last personal effect with him. However esoteric cultural knowledge leads one to a larger and more emotionally effective act of decoding.

For those conversant in the culture of Judaism, the removal of the *mezuzah* from the door signifies that the next owner of the apartment will not be Jewish. Rabbi Ari Shishler notes:

> If . . . you sell to a Jew you are not allowed to remove the Mezuzot. Actually, the Torah teaches that one who does not leave their Mezuzot for the next Jewish tenant, brings misfortune on oneself, G-d forbid (Ari Shishler, personal communication, 26 February, 1998).

The removal of the *mezuzah* in the context of *Schindler's List* signifies quite clearly that no Jew will be moving in. Understanding the *mezuzah* icon, and its cultural meaning when removed is encoded as "complicit", since anyone familiar with the meaning will understand its significance.

We can take this issue even further, approaching an encoded message of "implicit" meaning, with regards to the context within *Schindler's List* and the

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[18] Folklorist Judith Neulander defined the *mezuzah* as: "a small, usually tubular case ... [which] holds a rolled parchment inscribed on one side with biblical verses ... and is inscribed on the other with amuletic formulae. The amuletic tradition probably reflects the ancient practice of affixing protective charms to the doorframe, to keep demons from the house" (Neulander: 28).

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Holocaust. The family vacating their apartment has not "sold" it to the Nazis; the Nazis "repatriated" it for a Gentile German. Foreknowledge of the Holocaust, of what is likely to befall the family in question, signifies not only that a non-Jewish family will be moving into that apartment, but in addition, no Jewish family will *ever* live in that apartment again, since there will be no more Jews.

MUSICAL CODING

Music also has a strong cultural association to it, and to be aware of those associations reveals a deeper level of meaning in the cinematic text. I have already noted, in Chapter Two, the importance of music for the Jewish community with the context of the Toronto Jewish Film Festival. In this section, I will discuss the encoded-ness of music with the Jewish film.

In *Annie Hall* (1977), Alvy (Woody Allen) and his friend Max (Tony Roberts) are walking down a Manhattan street. Alvy, as usual, is ranting — this time about the Anti-Semitism he experiences everywhere he goes. To prove this to his friend he tells him the following anecdote:

> You know, I was in a record store — listen to this — so I know —
> there's this big, tall, blonde, crew-cutted guy and he's looking at me in a
> funny way and smiling. And he's saying 'Yes, we have a sale this week
> on Wagner.' Wagner, Max! Wagner! So I know what he's really trying to
> tell me. Very significantly! Wagner.

Knowledge that the German composer Richard Wagner was both a vehement Anti-Semite and Hitler's favourite composer is not *Jewish* per se, but is significant within Jewish experience to think that someone suggesting Wagner to you is also aware of the

cultural associations the composer evokes. The joke about selling an album by an Anti-Semitic composer to a Jew can only work if one is *a priori* aware that Wagner was Anti-Semitic, and much appreciated in the Third Reich. Those associations are "complicit" — if one is unaware of the association that Wagner has, one is unaware of a joke even being told.

The musical number "Sunrise, Sunset", from *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971)[19], is also informative. The context of the song within the diegesis occurs during a wedding celebration as Tevye's (Chaim Topol) family watch his oldest daughter get married. The lyrics function as internal monologues for the family members lost in their memories of growing up together, an aspect I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. It is a highly sentimental song; some could say nauseating — and many do.

The characters in the *Fiddler on the Roof* wedding are Jews. The clothes the characters are wearing are stereotypically Old World Jewish: nineteenth century, peasant clothes — frocks on the women, and men in dark suits and black overcoats. But more specifically, the women appear to be wearing wigs, and the men are wearing dark fur hats, traditional of the Chassidic Jew. It should be noted that if these characters are

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[19] Based on the writings of the Russian-Jewish humourist, Shalom Aleichem, *Fiddler on the Roof* tells of Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman in the tiny village of Anatevka, somewhere in the Pale of Settlement, an area running from Lithuania down to the Black Sea where the Russians restricted Jewish settlement. *Fiddler on the Roof* focuses on changes in Jewish culture which Tevye observes, primarily with regards to his three oldest daughters marriages. *Fiddler on the Roof* is an important film to discuss here. On the one hand, the songs reflect many of the narrative motifs and significant attributes of Jewishness this current study is trying to identify. On the other hand, director Norman Jewison (despite his Semitic sounding name) is a non-Jew, and makes a number of odd directorial choices which are uninformed by Jewish culture.

Chassidic Jews, it was odd that none of the men had *payez*. Yet there are other Jewish icons within the sequence: the inclusion of a wedding canopy, the bride and groom sharing a silver goblet of wine, and then the breaking of the glass upon being declared husband and wife, to the shouts of *"Mazel Tov"* — the traditional cheer of congratulations. These customary and iconographic items, taken together, implied the wedding was among Jews. If the wedding were a Jewish wedding, than the music, logically, would also be Jewish.

Yet, as a "Hollywood musical", *Fiddler on the Roof* is able implicitly to encode its Jewish discourse through a technique that Radner and Lanser identified as "trivialization":

> Trivialization involves the employment of a form, mode, or genre that the
> dominant culture considers unimportant, innocuous, or irrelevant. When
> a particular form is conventionally nonthreatening, the message it carries,
> even if it might be threatening in another context, is likely to be
> discounted or overlooked (Radner and Lanser: 19).

Fiddler on the Roof's depiction of the Old World Jewish family, with its cultural gender inequality and the patriarchal discourse of Tevye, the father, as the center of the Jewish family is able to be expressed through a "trivial" genre, the musical[20]. The opening sequence of the film, the diegetic musical number "Tradition", encodes the narrative world we are about to spend the next three hours within as one based on tradition; a cultural aesthetic which may not be too popular in 1971's United States, a period where

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[20]Referring to *Fiddler on the Roof*, or any musical film, as "trivial" is not meant as *my* pejorative or critical comment; I use "trivial" here in the sense that Radner and Lanser do: as a "nonthreatening" and "easily" dismissed form.

the traditional values were being challenged. Although, within the diegesis of the film, Tevye eventually learns to accept certain modern practices, including intermarriage, rejection of the *shadchan*, and the leaving of the home for America, it is presented with a kind of melancholy over the loss of these traditions. The imposition of modernization on the traditional Jewish family, and its reluctant acceptance is a fairly serious topic to discuss. But within the context of a "trivial" genre, like the musical, it is able to be encoded for those with the cultural background to decode it.

Finally, turning again to *Schindler's List*, there is a sequence of intense musical coding. This sequence, which depicts the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, is shot from Schindler's perspective, high on a nearby hill. Schindler watches in horror as the Nazis massacre the Jews in the streets. Instead of a cliched, "dramatic" kind of music, film composer John Williams utilizes the Jewish lullaby "Oyf'n Pripetshok" sung by the Li-Ron Herzeliya Children's Choir[21]. At a very basic level, there is a tonal juxtaposition between these images of carnage and a soft song sung by children. This act of juxtaposition, is itself, a technique of implicit coding according to Radner and Lanser (Radner and Lanser: 13), where the juxtaposition between music and image attempts to encode a further message. The juxtaposition is textual: "Oyf'n Pripetshok", which translates from Yiddish as "The Hearth," is a song about the safety of home and the family hearth, while the images show the destruction of Jewish households. Scholar Maurice Yacowar refers to Spielberg's irony in using this song as a "cruel inversion"

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[21] Music that occurs on the soundtrack of a film that is not emanating from the onscreen action, but is often reflective of it, is called "non-diegetic" music: music that is not part of the "diegesis".

(Yacowar: 43); that the smoke from the family "hearth" becomes the smoke from Auschwitz's furnaces.

But at a very personal level, this sequence was one of the few moments in the film where I was overwhelmed. Although *Schindler's List* is a moving film, it was this sequence that really upset me. My heartache was not so much because of the violence of the images, unfortunately one becomes inured to images of violence in the media, but because of the music. "Oyf'n Pripetshok" is the one lullaby I remember my mother singing to me as a small child, and that cultural association, of feeling safe in a mother's arms as a small child, compounded by having the song sung by a children's choir, created an even stronger juxtaposition with the violent images, where mothers were helpless in protecting their children. I happened to mention my reaction to this sequence to my grandmother, and her reply was that it was the one song most Jews remember their mothers singing to them. The tonal juxtaposition between the innocent children singing and the horrors of the images are observable to anyone paying attention, allowing the audience to feel that they understand what is going on emotionally with the sequence. But the linguistic level, of understanding the Yiddish of "Oyf'n Pripetshok", presents an even more exclusive degree of irony, that Yacowar refers to as "cruel". And yet a third level, more inchoate, more profound, also opens up: the personal and familial association of that memory of one's own childhood and those feelings of safety at the "hearth". Any scholar with the wherewithal to research the lyrics of "Oyf'n Pripetshok" can access that second level of signification, but only those with the memory of one's family and the songs sung around the cradle can reach the third level.

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Conclusion

Decoding of Jewish discourse within popular cinema is a highly hermeneutic activity. Radner and Lanser identified several techniques by which women's culture, and by extension, through a switch of signifiers, Jewish culture can encode their discourse — that is encode Jewish messages even without knowing such messages are being communicated. Identifying the use of such techniques as appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, and incompetence positions the scholar in a position to uncover potentially subversive messages which are "appropriate" only for esoteric consumption.

A discussion of the Internet web-conference, Jewish Filmmakers Forum, on Barry Levinson's film *Avalon* (1990), demonstrates this debate in miniature. The discussion began with the following posting:

> We rented '*AVALON*' last night. What a strange movie! I enjoyed the performances and it was nicely filmed, but it left me with a nagging feeling of 'missingness.' I awoke at three a.m. chewing it over in my mind. At four am I realized what had bothered me about *Avalon*. The characters were written as Jewish, yet there was NOTHING Jewish about them! This is allegedly a first generation family of immigrants, fresh from 'the old country.' Yet, there was no sign of Judaica, no Jewish cooking, no klezmer, even in the musical scenes in the nightclub, no Yiddish spoken, not so much as a single 'Meshuggenah!' Even recognizing that the family was completely secular, there was no trace of cultural Jewishness to be seen, outside of an 'old-country' accent (Frank Champagne, Jewish Filmmakers Forum, May 8 [1997]).

Frank's comment elicited a response from the forum's moderator and documentary filmmaker, David Notowitz:

> You have hit upon one of the best examples (in my opinion) of a recent movie wrecked in the attempt to make it 'universal.' The only reference to the Jewishness of these characters is at the scene in the cemetery. But

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even then it is ... well ... shrouded. The film made me angry as well
and also bothered me for a long time, because it could have been such a
rich and engaging film if the Jewish spark had been allowed to shine
through (David Notowitz, Jewish Filmmakers Forum, May 8 [1997]).

Another participant contributed the following:

> About AVALON and your comments of how it was made non-Jewish.
> You didn't mention the Thanksgiving dinner reunion scene. Doesn't every
> Jew agree with me that this was really the annual Pasach [sic.] seder,
> when all family members get together? (Yoesh Gloger, Jewish
> Filmmakers Forum, May 8 [1997])

Within this debate I want to offer the final word to contributor Larry Mark, who

maintains his own "Jewish movie" web page. Larry not only recognizes the coded

discourse in operation, but in addition is able to integrate it into the film's thematic

structure as well:

> In response to Mr. Gloger's note about the Thanksgiving scene in AVA-
> LON ... for the scene to be a seder and not thanksgiving would ruin the
> story ... the scene is about the Americanization of part of the family and
> the loss of certain traditions (like waiting for the poorer brother) ... also
> the scene in which the turkey is placed into a gas oven by the 2nd
> generation, while in the background the 1st generation speaks in un-
> subtitled Polish and Yiddish about the War, is a metaphor for the Shoah
> (ovens), as is the basement scene in which the model plane burns to
> shrieks of both joy (the boys) and horror (the immigrant girl) (Larry
> Mark, Jewish Filmmakers Forum, May 8 [1997]).[22]

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[22] Other films could easily be substituted for *Avalon*: on the same forum a few months
previous, Walter Ruby complained about *Dirty Dancing* (1987) along similar lines: "I
adored the film *Dirty Dancing*, but was appalled at the chickenshit decision of the
filmmakers never to use the word 'Jew' in a film that was entirely about a Jewish milieu
and about a Jewish girl getting involved with a gentile from the wrong side of the tracks.
That was atrocious ... Is that kind of fear of mentioning Jewishness even when evoking it

The problem with such encoding is that its decoding is an individual, arbitrary, and potentially idiosyncratic form of scholarship. Implicit and explicit encodings of Jewish culture, which, even if non-Jews are aware they are in operation, cannot necessarily penetrate their meanings.

These films are not necessarily "oppositional", in Hall's schema, neither is it to read industrially produced cinematic texts like *Schindler's List*, *Exodus*, or *Fiddler on the Roof*, as *Jewish* to read oppositionally. Any view that is not reflexive of the dominant cultural view is not necessarily oppositional. This binary positioning of being aligned with either the hegemonic order or opposed to it seems artificial and simplistic. It may be true in some cases, but that syllogism cannot be applied *carte blanche*.

Radner and Lanser's quasi-Bahktinian approach to "bicultural" readings of texts (polyphony by any other name) seems more in line with the folkloristic understanding of the encoded messages communicated by any storytelling context. For any message to be received, there needs to be someone to encode and someone to decode that message. Linguistic codes themselves are not always sufficient for direct communication of data; cultural specificity frequently precludes things other than language, although not excluding it. Put differently, Jews are in a better position, or are more likely, to get a fuller understanding of Jewish texts by virtue of their cultural experiences, expectations, and understandings of the codes within which culture manifests itself.

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still happening in Hollywood today especially when decisions are being made whether or not to 'greenlight' a project"? (Walter Ruby, Jewish Filmmakers Forum, December 22 [1996])

CHAPTER SEVEN:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SEEING

> Let me see if I understand this correctly: ... you're doing a thesis on Jewish identity at
> Memorial University of *Newfoundland* ... [clapping out the rhythm and singing] "I'se
> the b'y that builds the *shul*. I'se the b'y that ..."
> - Mark (personal interview, Toronto Jewish Film Festival, 9701)

In this chapter, I outline my ethnography of seeing, the methodology I propose for

the ethnographic study of popular cinema. To do this requires both hermeneutic and

ethnographic understandings. By taking the comments collected from the fieldwork data,

an overview of Jewish culture emerges, and that overview is what should inform any

hermeneutic analysis of specific films from this ethnographic perspective.

Karl Heider, in his 1976 book-length study of the subject, *Ethnographic Film*,

made the following comment, which reflects what I have been wrestling with:

> As long as we phrased the questions in the form 'What is an ethnographic
> film?' or 'Is X an ethnographic film?' we were assuming the existence of a
> bounded category. We had to direct our energies to discovering the
> boundaries, and we had as our goal the definition of a set of boundary
> criteria which would allow us to mark off some films as 'ethnographic'
> and, at least implicitly, the rest as 'not ethnographic' (Heider: 3).

Regarding the present case study on *Jewish* film, my fieldwork experience revealed a

similar conundrum: I was attempting to define an etically bounded category which was

not recognized as bounded by the cultural practitioners. While at the Toronto Jewish

Film Festival, several of my informants asked me what *I* meant by "Jewish" films. so they

could understand what I was trying to get them to define. To reiterate one of those

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informants: "My favourite *Jewish* movies? I don't know what *Jewish*—what are *Jewish* movies?" (Janis, personal interview, 9701). Even though Janis and I talked within the context of a *Jewish* film festival, she questioned conceptualizing film as having an ethnicity, as evidenced by her emphasis of the word "Jewish."

Further on Heider noted,

> In some sense we could say that all films are 'ethnographic': they are about people. ... There are many films which have little pretension to ethnographicness but which are of great interest to the ethnographer. I personally feel that *The Last Picture Show* [1971], about the high school class of 1952 in a small Texas town, is a statement which captures the culture of my own high school class of 1952 in Lawrence, Kansas. Likewise, *The Harder They Come* [1973] (about Jamaica), *Scenes from a Marriage* [1973] (about middle-class Swedish marriage), or *Tokyo Story* [1953] all present important truths about cultural situations. As statements (native statements, in fact) about culture, these films are important, and they could very easily be used as raw data or documents in ethnographic research. I am tempted to call them more than just 'raw data' and think of them as 'naïve ethnography' (Heider: 5).

The issue of film as ethnography then has moved from whether or not the film was made by an ethnographer made the film or with ethnographic consultation (cf. Sherman 1981, 1996 and 1998), to a recognition that even within popular culture and mainstream cinema, films have ethnographic value. In fairness to Heider, however, his book was primarily concerned with the ethnographic *documentary* film, not the fiction feature film. For Heider, the fiction film may be informed by ethnography, and may be of interest to ethnographers, but he sees it as a lesser form.

Since the bounded category of the "ethnographic film" was difficult to define,

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perhaps we should also be asking a different question of "Jewish film." Rather than try to

define what is, and by extension, what is not an "ethnographic film," Heider suggested

"we ... talk about the degree of *ethnographicness* of a film" (Heider: 3, emphasis added).

This comment struck me like a revelation: one of the more incompatible comments from

my festival informants, a comment which I could not integrate within my preconceived

notions of trying to define these "bounded categories," suddenly made sense: "I don't

know, but I have a feeling that there are [not] a lot of Jewish ... cinema, but *Jewishness* in

films" (Amos, personal interview, 9702). Informants like Amos, for whom there was no

bounded category of *Jewish* movies, goes to a Jewish film festival in order to celebrate

Jewishness in cinema. Suddenly reading Heider, I felt I could replace his signifier

"ethnographic" with my own of "Jewish" and the results would hold up.

Stuart Hall, citing G. Gerbner, noted similarly to Heider and Amos that film as

representation cannot be equated to reality, but needs to be approached as

representational to reality (Hall: 131). This is an essential epistemological distinction to

make: *Jewish cinema* cannot exist, and instead we have to perceive film as a message

about, in this case, Judaism. Hall continued,

> Since the visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-
> dimensional planes, it cannot, of course, *be* the referent or concept it
> signifies. ... Reality exists outside of language, but it is constantly
> mediated by and through language; and what we can know and say has to
> be produced in and through discourse (Hall: 131).

Movies, popular or ethnographic, are not representations *of* reality, but representations

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about reality. This distinction from Hall is significant; we should not be looking at films as manifestations of ethnicity itself, but as discourses about ethnicity within which ethnics situate themselves. We need to look for the "ness" of films — those attributes of a culture which express specific messages about that culture.

To do this, Heider noted, "a useful approach is to look for attributes, or dimensions, of ethnographicness in films" (Heider: 3). An "ethnography of seeing," as a methodology, should be looking for those attributes or dimensions which help define the "ethnic-ness" in films, in this case study, as Amos notes, *Jewishness*.

> Adopting this strategy, we should ask 'What features make films more or less ethnographic?' and 'How ethnographic is this film?' The idea, then, is not to define an ethnographic box-category, but to make explicit those features which contribute to the ethnographicness of films (Heider: 3).

Translating this strategy for the current study, we need to reformulate these questions into "what features make films more or less Jewish?" and "how Jewish is this film?" Transposing these signifiers, we need to make explicit those features which contribute to the *Jewishness* of films.

Throughout this current work, I have outlined these attributes chapter by chapter. At this point, in my final reconfiguration, I shall summarize these points and place them in the order of cultural significance for the cultural practitioners. Further explications are also required of the significance of the attributes and their ranking.

In reiterating these attributes, I shall do so by demonstrating their manifestation within specific films. The films discussed below were all cited to me by those people at

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the Toronto Jewish Film Festival during my "exit-polling". By doing textual analysis on these films, with my eyes open for those ethnographically determined attributes, some films demonstrate more Jewishness, others demonstrate less Jewishness. I limited my consideration of these films to those cited to me by more than one informant, which, along the lines noted by David Hufford, indicate some cultural consensus (Hufford: xv).

I discuss these films synchronistically in order to underscore their use of these various Jewish attributes, rather than diachronically, which may imply a conscious linear development.

THE FAMILY

The most important attribute for those I spoke with and surveyed at the Toronto Jewish Film Festival was content: In Chapter Five, I discussed the narrative motifs found within a specific body of Jewish content films, the Yiddish-language cinema. The citing of these motifs, these narrative attributes of the cinematic content, then reappear with various intensities in these films.

Yet, even disagreement on the significance of these attributes is not indicative of their inapplicability. David Desser and Lester Friedman noted: "Even if all members of the community do not literally experience most of these motifs, the fact that they appear in books and plays, in movies and magazines, on television and in newspapers, and in comedy routines and poetry becomes — in and of themselves — part of the shared experience of that community" (Desser and Friedman, 1993, 19).

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The narrative motif of "the Jewish family" is frequently central to these films. This is not to say that in every case the same emphasis or demonstration of the Jewish family is going to be reproduced. Desser and Friedman noted the centrality of the Jewish family in Jewish-*American* culture:

> One of the hallmarks of traditional Jewish culture remains the emphasis on the family. Although some traditional family dynamics might have changed in America ..., Jewish homes remained predominantly child-centered. Children play central, tradition-sanctioned roles in almost all Jewish secular and sacred celebrations, those joyous, noisy rites of passage such as bar mitzvahs, weddings, and religious holidays. Scholars often cite the concept of *naches*, the Hebrew word for please or gratification that Yiddish adopted, as central to Jewish families. Marshall Sklare notes that 'while it is possible to receive *naches* in many ways, there is only one true and abiding source of *naches*: that which is received from children' ... (Desser and Friedman: 27-28).

The Jewish family, frequently the locus for the maintenance of Jewish tradition, can exist in a fully iterated state, in films where the family is shown to be closely knit and supportive, to a "structured absence," where the Jewish family's centrality is demonstrated by its absence. This latter manifestation is frequently a narrative motif of Holocaust films, where the destruction of European Jewry is particularized in the absence of the Jewish family.

For example, in *I Love You Rosa*[1] [*Ani Ohev Otach Rosa*] (1972), the Jewish

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[1] *I Love You Rosa* is about "the Law of Levirate (forced marriage to the deceased husband's brother, if the deceased has no children to carry on his name)" (Shohat: 166). In 19th Century Palestine, young Raphael dies, and his 20-year-old widow, Rosa, because of the Law of Levirate, must be betrothed to his unmarried, 12 year-old brother, Nissem. Obviously too young to be married, Nissem must wait until he is "a man" before either

family plays a major role in two specific and pivotal ways: one is the Law of Levirate[2] which designed for the maintenance of the Jewish family insofar as without any male offspring, the family name is therefore in jeopardy. The narrative construction based on this ancient law is about the continuation of the Jewish family, and by extension the Jewish people. In a related way, Rosa's (Michal Bas-Adam) demand of a release from her obligation to Nissem (Moshe Tal) so she can choose him of her own free will predicated their marriage on love, rather than obligation. The result is ultimately the same, but the

marrying Rosa, or releasing her in disgrace through the specific ritual outlined in Deuteronomy. Young Nissem, unhappy living with his mother, his brother and his brother's family, runs away and moves in with Rosa, whom they have allowed to keep her own home. Nissem, knowing that his family intends Rosa for him, takes over the role of "man of the house" and gradually falls in love with Rosa. When Rosa rejects Nissem as a husband, the young boy runs away. Five years pass, and a fortune teller tells the adult Nissem that Rosa really does love him. He returns to her, and after a night of passion, Rosa still demands a release from her obligation. Nissem confesses to the local rabbi that it is because he loves Rosa that he wants to release her. Rosa wants the release so she can choose Nissem herself, free from cultural obligation.

[2] The "Law of Levirate" is based on biblical authority. Deuteronomy 25:5-10: "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not be married abroad unto one not of his kin: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the first-born that she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother that is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate unto the elders, and say: 'My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother unto me.' Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand, and say: 'I like not to take her'; then shall his brother's wife draw nigh unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face: and she shall answer and say: 'So shall it be done unto the man that doth not build up his brother's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, the house of him that had his shoe loosed".

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implication is that a marriage founded on love will be more solid than one built on the Law of Levirate alone. Although "romantic," the foundation of the Jewish marriage on love, rather than duty, strengthens the family bonds, and thereby strengthens the Jewish family.

Even within the ersatz Jewish family which Rosa builds with young Nissem (Gabi Oterman), we see the maintenance of Jewish ritual and custom. We see Rosa lighting the Sabbath candles as the men return from the synagogue, including Nissem, and then the young man making the *brakha* over the wine. Even in an absurd "marriage" like this one, they maintain the rituals as the foundation for the family and the faith. The "Release" ceremony, where the adult Nissem releases Rosa from her obligation, is shown in great detail as outlined in Deuteronomy. The one significant deviation is that Rosa cannot bring herself to spit in Nissem's face, thereby potentially violating the sanctity and authority of the rite.

Likewise, *Fiddler on the Roof* focuses on Tevye's family, and several of the diegetic songs reflect this family orientation of Jewishness: the first song of the film, "Tradition," focuses not so much on the community, or the religion, but on the family as the foundation for both community and ritual. We are presented, narratively, with the roles of "the papa," "the mama," the "sons" and "the daughters," and these roles define the community itself. Communities are, within Jewish culture, the amalgam of familiar responsibility. At Tzeitel and Motel's (Rosiland Harris and Leonard Frey) wedding, they celebrate the emergence of a new family from Tevye's with the song "Sunrise, Sunset".

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The lyrics of that song reflect a sense of nostalgia surrounding children growing up, and starting their own families. "Do You Love Me," an incidental song, but one which reveals many ethnographic attributes of Jewishness, occurs in a quiet moment between Tevye and his wife Golde (Norma Crane). Underlying this song is the sense that the "traditional" marriage, arranged outside of the couple's own consent, and the foundation of the "Jewish family," still requires affection (and in this respect *Fiddler* parallels *I Love You Rosa*). Tevye asks Golde, because they have been married for so long, despite their five children, "do you [actually] *love* me?" Love, as a concept for marriage, is "traditionally" not the foundation. Tevye asking the question violates the spirit of the Jewish tradition: Jewish marriages are predicated upon the continuance of the Jewish family, and not personal affection. Golde's response, a deprecating "I guess I do," turns the utilitarian tradition around and reincorporates affection into the Jewish marriage dyad: Tevye and Golde, although they live within an arranged marriage context, have developed a love for one another. And in turn this further strengthens the Jewish family.

This narrative motif is also front and center in the NFB [National Film Board of Canada] documentary *Half the Kingdom* (1992)³, and made explicit by the women informants' own experiences. For example, the family is exceptionally important in these

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³ *Half the Kingdom*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada's Studio D (the "women's studio") and directed by Francine Zukerman and Roushell Goldstein, is a one hour documentary on women reclaiming their role in Judaism. Through a series of interviews and reminiscences, several women from different backgrounds and religious affiliations discuss what they have done to reclaim women's roles within the faith.

personal experience narratives: for Judaism to become more inclusive in celebrating God, the changes must begin within the home, and within the Jewish family. Orthodox feminist Rabbi Norma Baumel Joseph mentions the traditional Jewish man's daily prayer, "thank God I was not born a woman," which she had always found offensive and could not convince her husband to omit from his prayers, even though both knew the "spirit" he offered that prayer in was not aimed at Norma herself. The prayer was finally dropped when her young daughter came home from school in shock that such a prayer existed. Joseph notes her pain and joy at her daughter's recognition: pain at her daughter's realization that their faith could exclude her, but joy in seeing how strong her daughter was becoming in not allowing that prayer into their home. Other women interviewed in the film came to similar realizations with the death of parents, and wanting to mourn their loved ones as "Jewishly" as possible, but likewise feeling excluded. The family, then, becomes the context for these vital changes within the spiritual life of Jewish women.

The family is also a narrative organizing principle in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*[4], [*Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini*] (1970): the relationship between Micol

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[4] Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, based on the autobiographical novel by Giorgio Bassani tells the story of Bassani as a young Jewish university student in Italy during the establishment of Mussolini's "Racial Laws" which limited Jewish freedom in Italy during the days leading to the outbreak of the Second World War. His father, a dedicated Fascist, hopes that his commitment to the Party will allow his family to be exempt from the Racial Laws. Meanwhile, Giorgio has been madly in love with Micol Finzi-Contini, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish scholar, since they were children, but she has rejected all his romantic advances.

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(Dominique Sanda) and Giorgio (Lino Capolicchio) also tells the story of the Finzi-Contini and the Bassani families. What happens to the individual is reflected in what happens to the family. And as *Jewish* families, what happens to these two families, in turn happens to Italy's Jews. This is no better reflected than at the end of the film, where the two families are being "relocated," and the Fascists hold the entire Jewish population of the region at the local school. Due to overcrowding in the classrooms, a bureaucrat simply divides up the group he needs to find space for between two rooms, thereby splitting up the Finzi-Contini family. As in *Shoah*, discussed below, we quite poignantly see how Fascism destroyed Jewish families, and how that narrative motif in these films reflected the destruction of the Jews *in toto*.

Continuing with the family as a narrative motif, and in keeping with the genre of the Holocaust film, *The Summer of Aviya*[5] [*Ha-Kayitz Shel Aviya*] (1988) focuses on the destruction of the Jewish family at the hands of the Nazis. Aviya's father has died during the war, before Aviya (Kaipo Cohen) was born, and the young girl refuses to believe her father is dead. If she can just find him, she believes it would restore her mother (Gila Almagor)'s mental health. When Mr. Ganz (played by the film's director, Eli Cohen) moves into the community, Aviya believes he may be her long lost father. One can

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[5] *The Summer of Aviya* is based on the autobiographical novel and one-woman play by Israeli actress Gila Almagor recalling the summer when her mother, an emotionally scarred Holocaust survivor, is temporarily released from an asylum and takes primary care of her 10 year-old daughter.

reconfigure the film's narrative as being about Aviya trying to heal the unhealable wound that the Nazis inflicted on her family.

Within the Holocaust films, however, something different happens to the family: the family, the locus of Jewish tradition, is destroyed, and the family exists in these films as a structured absence. Most profoundly, we see this in *Shoah*[6] (1985). We are presented with a number of narratives told about individuals forced to dig up mass graves and finding their parents or siblings, and about discovering that individual members of huge families were the only survivors of the Holocaust. As one witness put it "one second you were part of a family, and the next ... death." Families, and this is consistent with a great deal of holocaust-related cinema, exist as a structured absence; the film discusses the existence of Jewish family, but the implication is that the family no longer exists. The death of the Jewish family acts as a narrative metaphor for the destruction of European Jewry *en masse*. The film shows only one survivor with his family present, in Israel, but the family only exists, diegetically, because the daughter is filmed hearing her father's experiences during the War for the first time. Elsewhere in the film, narratives are told

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[6] *Shoah*, the Hebrew word for Holocaust, is unique and noteworthy for a number of reasons. To begin with, the sheer scale of the film makes it an important film: nine and a half hours of witness testimony. Director Claude Lanzmann spent six years filming and five years editing this *magnum opus*, collecting first hand narratives from concentration camp victims, camp guards, peasant witnesses, and transportation bureaucrats, in order to present as vivid a portrait of the destruction of European Jewry as possible. Lanzmann's film is further unique in the total absence of stock footage and family photographs. He films entirely in the present tense, taking survivors and witnesses back to the Nazi killing grounds and trying to get those who experienced the horrors to relive their memories.

about the destruction of Jewish family by negative relief: one witness notes that fathers trampled their own sons trying to survive in the gas chambers.

There are two exceptions in *Shoah*; moments when the Jewish family structure survives even the Nazi death camps. Lanzmann tells one narrative of mothers killing their own daughters to save them from the gas chambers. Although that particular story does not sound like *mentschlekhkeyt*, the implication is that the daughters in question were able to die in relative peace, rather than the panic which ensued in the gas chambers, as the father and sons' narrative mentioned previously indicates.

The other moment, an anomaly in this epic film, deals with the Jews of Corfu. Lanzmann gives the Corfu Jews sequence just twenty minutes of screen time, but in that brief period, we hear about a strong and lively community that has actually tried to rebuild itself after the war. We see survivors holding up family photographs and telling about those family members who did not survive. It is only in this brief Corfu sequence where the Jewish family is brought to the fore, and the attempts at reconstruction shown, that some semblance of normalcy is evident.

David Desser and Lester Friedman, in their *American Jewish Filmmakers*, noted many of the narrative motifs which are emergent within director Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker*[7] (1965). For example, the authors noted, "an injunction that is virtually

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[7] *The Pawnbroker* was one of the first Holocaust themed films actually to try to recreate a concentration camp. The story tells of Sol Nazerman, a cold and destroyed man who saw his entire family killed by the Nazis, and who now runs a pawnshop in Harlem where he alienates everyone around him.

biblical informs [director Sidney] Lumet's conception of guilt, that of a father's guilt

being passed on to his sons and implicating them profoundly" (Desser and Friedman:

163). Within *The Pawnbroker*, Nazerman's (Rod Steiger) guilt at not being able to save

his family, particularly his son David, who he was unable to keep on his shoulders in one

of the Nazi cattle cars, resulting in the child being trampled to death, is all encompassing.

Nazerman's guilt is that of the survivor, which none of those who surround him in Harlem

can understand. Even his deceased wife's sister's family, who have adopted him in

America, cannot understand why Uncle Sol does not want to go with them on a vacation

to "Europe" (implication being Germany). Desser and Friedman also noted that the

structure and dynamics which empower the Jewish family, also empower the Jewish

individual to treat the world as their family, through *mentschlekhkeyt* (Desser and

Friedman: 163). With Nazerman's family destroyed, the Nazis also destroy any of the

character's good will toward others.

RITUAL LIFE

"Jewish rituals," frequently within the family context, are also important narrative

motifs. The Jewish religion, in addition to the Jewish culture, are important for Jewish

identification of themselves *as* Jews. Therefore, it is important to show Jewish ritual life

as central to the culture. Without this dimension many cultural practitioners, like one of

my informants, "would say 'Jewish' in quotation marks" (Alan, personal interview, 9705).

For informants like Alan, Jewishness in film must also demonstrate being "*observant* of

Judaism" (Alan, personal interview, 9705, emphasis in original), and that requires Jewish ritual life to also be demonstrated.

Schindler's List demonstrates many of these explicit Jewish narrative motifs. But what is significant about the manifestation of these motifs, is that, in a mainstream American movie, Jewish lives are presented as *Jewish* and not as something benignly ethnic. Specifically this manifestation occurs around the presentation of Jewish rituals. We see Jews practicing Judaism; even in films which demonstrate a high degree of Jewishness, we rarely see an unproblematized expression of the Jewish faith. From the opening sequence, where an ultra-Orthodox family recites the *brakha* over the wine sanctifying the Sabbath, to the sequence of the actual survivors together with the actors who played them placing stones on Schindler's grave, we see a variety of expressions of Jewish religious life. Within the horrors of the Holocaust, we see Jewish families engaging in ritual activities. This is perhaps most profoundly noted in Amon Goeth's (Ralph Fiennes) speech about the liquidation of the Kracow ghetto, and that as of tomorrow, there will no longer be a "Jewish Kracow," is intercut with images of Jewish families in prayer. We see weddings held surreptitiously at the Plaszow camp, and even Schindler commands that his Jewish workers not forget to commemorate the Sabbath.

In *Shoah*, the Corfu sequence is also the only moment in the film where we see Jews praying. Not only has the Corfu Jewish community attempted to rebuild itself, but it is the only group documented in the film which has maintained the Jewish ritual life. The Jewish religious dimension is demonstrated through the rest of the film as a ghostly

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absence: abandoned or converted synagogues and crumbling Jewish cemeteries which no one visits. The closest visual evidence to the ritual life of the Jews in Europe is the Treblinka death camp site, where a memorial of stones has been set up in such a way as to echo the Jewish practice of placing stones on visited graves. Elsewhere we hear of Jews going to their deaths praying or singing "Hatikva," a traditional song which translates from Hebrew as "Hope" and today used as the Israeli national anthem. But, even less than the Jewish family, across the nine and a half hours of the film, Lanzmann makes little reference to the Jewish religion, or its practices.

Half the Kingdom, in documenting the reclamation process Jewish women are undergoing in redefining their roles within the faith, proposes changes to the very rituals in which Jewish men and women participate. Other movements within the faith, in all affiliations, are beginning to change these rituals to include women's participation within the spiritual life of Judaism. The film opens with a "naming ceremony" for a baby girl: the sequence brings home, as does the accompanying narratives, that although male babies are incorporated into the faith through the circumcision rite, there was no comparable ritual for girls. The "baby naming ceremony" is one of the recently developed rituals which begins to include women. As one woman noted, "for the first time, *I* felt like I had done something." Within that ceremony, participants make appeals to the *matriarchs* of the faith, not the *patriarchs*. The women in the film also note that we need other celebrations to include women's experiences and women's lives: no current religious celebration exists for the first menstruation, or for menopause, and these gaps are decried.

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We hear journalist and social activist Michele Landesberg having to go through the antiseptic "confirmation" ceremony, before the "invention" of the *Bat Mitzvah*[8]. We also hear of the development, even among the Orthodox congregations, of all-women's services, and Joseph's development of all-women Torah study groups to extract what were women's contributions to our collective cultural history.

Even in a movie like *Fiddler on the Roof*, ritual attributes of Judaism are in evidence. The "giving of a pledge" solemnizes Motel and Tzeitel's engagement. This idea of a "pledge" is a significant one in Judaism. The prophet Elijah sanctifies promises, pledges, or vows, and therefore they are spiritually bound. As noted in Chapter Five, this sense of "giving a pledge" is the foundation for the possession in *The Dybbuk*. Even though they did not arrange their engagement through the traditional mediation of a *shadchan*, or without family consent, their engagement has to be respected because of this "pledge". We also see a "Sabbath Meal," and although the basis for a musical number within the diegesis, the characters sing the liturgy in English.

Still discussing *Fiddler*, two major diegetic songs within the musical reflect a

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[8] The *Bat Mitzvah* is the female equivalent of the *Bar Mitzvah* and "is of much more recent vintage. The first woman to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah was Judith Kaplan, daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionalist movement [in the 1930s]. Bat Mitzvahs today are routinely celebrated by Reform, Reconstructionalist, and Conservative Jews, and the girls generally perform the same synagogue rituals as the boys. ... There has been less acceptance of the Bat Mitzvah ceremony among the Orthodox, since most Orthodox congregations do not permit women to participate publically in the synagogue service. Nonetheless, such celebrations are gradually becoming more popular among Orthodox Jews as well" (Telushkin, 1991: 612-613). *Half the Kingdom* reflects these changes in Jewish practice quite movingly.

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commitment to Jewish ritual life: "Matchmaker" and "Tevye's Dream". In "Matchmaker," Tzeitel, and two of her sisters, Hodel and Chava (Michele Marsh and Neva Small) parody the local *shadchan*, Yente (Molly Picon). The song underlies that having arranged marriages though this kind of local marriage broker is traditional; the girls do not like this tradition, but they accept it. "Tevye's Dream", on the other hand is more complex: Tevye, having reluctantly accepted the fact that Tzeitel is going to marry Motel, instead of the arranged marriage to Lazar Wolf (Paul Mann), is trying to figure out how to break the news to Golde[9]. While in bed together, he concocts a fake nightmare, where Golde's grandmother's ghost (Patience Collier) comes to him to congratulate Tevye in his forthcoming *simcha* of the wedding of Tzeitel and Motel. He explains to the ghost that she is not marrying Motel, but Lazar Wolf. The angry ghost of Lazar Wolf's first wife (Ruth Madoc) then appears to warn Tevye that should Tzeitel marry Lazar Wolf, she will haunt their marriage home. Knowing Golde's belief in dreams as precognitions, Tevye is able to manipulate Golde's supernatural beliefs in consenting to Tzeitel's marriage to Motel, rather than Lazar Wolf.

JEWISH EDUCATION

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[9] An encoded subtext within the diegesis which escaped me was noted by Seth Wolitz: "the Lazar-Wolf-Tsaytl [sic.] marriage was doomed from the start, for in Jewish kosher food laws you cannot mix *dairy* (Tevye the *dairy*man) with meat (Lazar-Wolf the *butcher*)" (Wolitz: 518).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted:

> Religious learning is a divine obligation in traditional Jewish culture from
> the earliest times to the present day. The learned man is accorded great
> respect, prestige, and authority because in addition to being a *mitsve*
> (commandment, good deed) [sic.], learning is one of the three primary
> criteria of social status in the *shtetl*, the other two being wealth and *yikhes*
> (lineage) (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 56-57).

"Jewish education," ideally education which is particularly Jewish (i.e., Yeshiva

education), but also the university educated and professional classes (which implies a

university education), are important within the narratives. These films often put those

who are formally educated into contrast with those who are informally educated, the

scholarship versus experience binary opposition.

Often Jewishness in popular cinema is focused on characters who have Jewish

educations: Yeshiva scholars, who act as moral centers to the diegetic worlds presented.

The characters of Bernstein (Mel Howard) in *Hester Street*[10] (1975), or Hersh (Saul

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[10] *Hester Street* was forced to be an *independent* American film because the studios
thought the film was limited in its appeal. Based on the novella, "Yekl" by the editor of
the *Jewish Daily Forward*, Abraham Cahan in 1896, *Hester Street* documents the lives of
Jewish immigrants to New York City at the end of the last century. Yekl, now called
Jake, wants nothing more than to be a "regular Yankee". He works in the sweatshops all
day, and goes to the dancing palaces to meet with his girlfriend Mamie every night.
Jake's life gets turned upside down, when his wife from the Old Country, Gitl arrives with
his son Yossl (renamed Joey), and begins to cramp his new lifestyle as a playboy. Gitl has
problems in assimilating to the very different way of life in America, and develops a close
friendship with their boarder, Bernstein, a Yeshiva scholar also working in the
sweatshops. Film scholar Patricia Erens noted: "In spite of its low-budget limitations
Hester Street found a receptive popular audience in many urban centers. Unable to
negotiate a good release contract with any of the major studios, all of which claimed the
subject was too specialized, the Silvers (husband and wife) [producer Raphael, and

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Rubinek) in *The Quarrel*[11] (1990), for example, are Jews whose Jewishness is encoded within their roles as (specifically) Jewish scholars. In the case of Hersh, he has gone so far as to found a Yeshiva in Montreal, and part of *The Quarrel*'s diegesis — *The Quarrel*'s quarrel — Hersh tries to understand why his friend Chaim (R. H. Thompson) left this world of Jewish scholarship.

Jewish education, not just educated Jews, permeates *Half the Kingdom* as well. Norma Baumel Joseph notes her own commitment to educate women in Judaism, and to that end set up her own study group. Joseph's movement within Orthodox Judaism attempts to understand the male hegemony in the creation of the Jewish sacred texts, but also reclaims women's voices in these texts, and proposes the writing of *new* texts, *women's* texts, which include women's experiences. Likewise, Elise Goldstein, a Reform Rabbi, notes that studying Torah with her male colleagues brings out a new perspective to the texts which her male colleagues note they would not have picked up on had she not been a woman; therefore, one of the emergent contributions of women to Judaism, according to those women interviewed in the film, is toward alternative understandings of these sacred texts. The film even notes that in Israel, it is only very recently that girls have

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director Joan Micklin] distributed the work themselves. The success of this effort, acknowledged by Carol Kane's Oscar nomination for best actress, proved that the time was ripe for a fresh look at immigrant life and ethnic history" (Erens, 1984: 326).

[11] Eli Cohen's *The Quarrel* is about two old friends who studied together in the Bialystok Yeshiva before the war, who meet up in a Montreal park in the 1950s, and continue the argument they began years ago.

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had equal educational opportunities to boys, including religious instruction.

The Deuteronomy passage, which is basis for *I Love You Rosa*'s diegesis, is read aloud at the beginning of the film (in the English language version) by Rabbi Gunther Hirschberg, as further evidence of Jewish learning and biblical sanctification of the film. Women are also versed in Jewish learning: Rosa tells her great grandson, Nissem, about his great-grandfather (the structuring premise of the film) by noting the symbolism that Nissem has been dead for forty years, and equates that with the forty years the Hebrews wandered in the desert before arriving in Israel.

The Rabbi (Avner Hizkiyahu) also functions within the community of the diegesis as leader and authority. Young Nissem wants to leave school in order to learn a trade and support Rosa "like a proper husband," but the Rabbi dissuades him, telling him that "wisdom is better than strength," thereby underlining the point that within Judaism, education is one of the most important resources the community can have. Perhaps there is nothing extraordinary about that pronouncement, but within the narrative context of a Rabbi's wisdom, and it is that specific wisdom which convinces Nissem not to leave school, that the Jewishness begins to become emergent.

In the above examples, Jewish education is made explicit. In some films, however, like *The Pawnbroker*, this kind of learning is implicit. Desser and Friedman noted an implicit Jewishness in the basic topic of the Holocaust film (as a genre, therefore one can extend this argument to include all Holocaust oriented films), one which is predicated upon Jewish learning, "the injunction to remember" (Desser and Friedman:

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164). The authors called these films "celluloid Haggadahs" in reference to the Passover text where in the Exodus from Egypt is recalled, with a similar injunction. The authors continued:

> Like the Haggadah, these films commemorate, they do not celebrate. It is as if they are drawn from the canon of Judaism, itself dominated not by celebration but by commemorations, by days of remembrance and atonement, of wandering and guilt (Desser and Friedman: 164).

Tackling a subject like the Holocaust, Jewish filmmakers, or by extension an audience going to see a Holocaust oriented film, engage in a ritualistic and solemnicized act of Jewish faith (cf. Koven, 1998).

In *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis, Jewish* education, per se, is not in evidence beyond an obscure symbolic reference to the Finzi-Contini's garden as Edenic, and their expulsion from that ancestral home by the Fascists as a kind of "Fall," which would have a similar resonance with the Catholic majority in Italy. We do, however, see that both Micol and Giorgio are university students. In fact, Giorgio sees himself getting closer to Micol when he is expelled from the university for being Jewish, and enters private study with Micol's uncle, a literature professor (Camillo Angelini-Rota). We also know that Papa Bassani (Romolo Valli) is an active Fascist bureaucrat. The Jewishness becomes emergent in the film, with regards to the educational attribute, by understanding the positioning of the two families within their educated elite contexts: the Bassanis as political and the Finzi-Continis as scholarly.

This aspect of the importance of education within modern Jewish families,

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whether it be secular or Jewish education, is often at the centre of these films. Primarily

the education in *Fiddler on the Roof* is the tension between Tevye's *Jewish* education and

Perchik's (Paul Michael Glazer) secular and socialist education, even after Tevye has

hired Perchik to educate his girls in Judaism. The Jewish emphasis on being educated,

specifically *Jewish* education, is emergent in two diegetic songs: "If I Were a Rich Man,"

in so far as Tevye's fantasy about what he would do if he were a rich man, includes

presenting himself as a man learned in Talmud, and studying with other great Yeshiva

scholars. The other song where Jewish education is emergent is Motel's song "Wonder of

Wonders": after having stood up to Tevye in declaring his undying commitment to

Tzeitel, a first for the young tailor, Motel sings to Tzeitel that within a litany of God's

miracles on earth, all from Jewish sources, the greatest was God's giving him the strength

to stand up for himself. Although at the diegetic level, the song is a basic love/coming of

age song, the cultural context of the lyrics are all from Jewish learning.

MENTSCHLEKHKEYT

The idea of *mentschlekhkeyt*, of doing good deeds for others or concerned with

social issues, is likewise central to these films. Yet, *mentschlekhkeyt* is also one of the

more "slippery" narrative motifs: it is not only a question of a character in a film doing

good deeds for another person or being socially responsible — of *mentschlekhkeyt* being

diegetically present, but it can also be the social awareness of the filmmakers themselves,

by their commitment to discussing the issues the film presents. Although I only discussed

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this issue with two informants in one interview setting, we noted that films like *The Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), about the civil rights movement by Jewish director Rob Reiner, reflects its Jewishness in its concern for the equality of African-Americans, even though there is nothing explicitly "Jewish" about the film (Sy and Barbara, personal interview, 9704). David Desser and Lester Friedman noted that such a concern with social justice is a major Jewish literary and cinematic theme, whether explicitly Mosaic or not (Desser and Friedman: 15-17).

Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* may possibly be the most significant Jewish film made in the United States. Although a Hollywood studio film, made by the man who has more "blockbuster" films to his credit than any other individual filmmaker in history, Spielberg choose to shoot this film on location in Poland, including the Auschwitz site. Jewish Studies scholar Sara Horowitz, however, argued that the film was not informed by Judaism. She noted that even though we are presented with images which point out that *Schindler's List* is a film "about religion, or a religious film, specifically a film about Judaism" (Horowitz: 124), that narrative promise is not fulfilled.

> But, apart from serving as icons of Eastern European Judaism ... the ritual acts and objects of sanctification are not given any depth or Jewish meaning. A Jewish spiritual crisis is neither precipitated nor resolved in *Schindler's List* ... Spielberg's film does not chart the Jewish victim's struggle with the Jewish God (Horowitz: 124-125).

I do not concur; *Schindler's List*'s diegesis is predicated upon the Jewish precepts of *mentschlekhkeyt*, of Schindler sacrificing his own fortune to help these Jews. Within the

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Talmud is the adage, even used as the film's advertising slogan, that whoever saves one life, saves the world. Unlike *The Quarrel*, for example, which posits a Talmudic debate as the *structure* and *content* of the diegesis, the motivation for Schindler's actions, unknown to him, is the Jewish concept of *mentschlekhkeyt*. It is significant that this is unknown to Schindler, since it presents the very Jewish concept of social responsibility as the natural order of the world. The world in *Schindler's List* is a Jewish one, and even when some characters operate against the Jews and the Jewish worldview, they are operating against the very laws of God.

But beyond cases like *Schindler's List*, where diegetic characters are (consciously or unconsciously) motivated by *mentschlekhkeyt*, some Jewish films contain this aspect by virtue of their subject matters: by tackling difficult and socially aware themes, it is the Jewish filmmaker (even if not the diegetic characters) who are informed by *mentschlekhkeyt*. For example, in *The Pawnbroker*, since Sol Nazerman himself is not the site of *mentschlekhkeyt*, one must look elsewhere for this motif than in the explicit actions of the characters. Desser and Friedman noted that it is precisely in director Sidney Lumet's vision of Harlem as unromanticized, dirty, violent, and crime ridden, but also as a place of families and hard-working people who are trying to survive.

> In essence, *The Pawnbroker* compares the situation of Jews under the Nazis to the situation of blacks and Hispanics in the contemporary ghetto. It also implicates the Jewish survivor, Nazerman ..., in the contemporary holocaust of racism, poverty, and victimization, ... (Desser and Friedman: 204).

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Mentschlekhkeyt, then is not necessarily going to be that of a diegetic character's, but may also be the social activism of the filmmaker. This equation between the Holocaust and Harlem, although controversial, can also be expressed in particularly Jewish terms:

> If it is too late to save the Jews [murdered by the Nazis], we can at least rectify the horrors in our own backyard. Who better than Jews to understand the horrors of contemporary society? ... Lumet's point can only be that Jews have a special burden to bear witness to history, to remember. and to learn from it (Desser and Friedman: 212-213).

In this film the social awareness is at the cinematic level, not the diegetic level.

Likewise the characters in *The Summer of Aviya* are not the nicest one could hope to come across. The community's cruelty toward Aviya and her mother registers with the audience as inexcusable. Aviya's mother, Henya, was a partisan fighter in Poland against the Nazis. a hero to the Jews, but in her new life in Israel. the community views her as "insane". Rather than support and try to heal the profound wounds Henya has suffered from the war. the community ostracizes her and Aviya as pariahs. The "Jewish homeland" is shown critically to be only a homeland for those who are willing to move beyond their diasporic roots. Israeli film scholar Judd Ne'eman noted ironically that

> ... unlike the Holocaust victims. we the New Jews will not be going like lambs to the slaughter. Becoming a fighter has always been considered by Zionist ideology as the necessary corrective for the endemic reluctance of diaspora Jews to take up arms. even for self-defense (Ne'eman: 26).

Henya and Aviya's presence within their community is a constant reminder of the victimization of the Jews. which Israelis built the Zionist ideology of the "New Jew" to reject. By focusing the diegesis on the re-victimization of the diasporic Jew by Israelis,

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the film sets up an internal critique of Israeli culture, predicated upon the absence of this fundamental cultural motif, *mentschlekhkeyt*.

There is a Jewish legend told at the very beginning of *Half the Kingdom* about an old woman who is planting trees. A passerby asks her why she is bothering, when she is too old ever to see her work come to fruition. She replies that there were trees here when she was born, and she's planting trees so future generations will have them. Another woman in the film notes a similar Jewish ethic, that we are put here to "repair the earth," and that is our only job. I cannot think of a better definition of *mentschlekhkeyt* than those two examples: what the Jewish dedication to social issues is predicated upon is the "repairing" of the earth, of leaving things slightly better than when we found them for future generations, like the old woman who plants trees. *Half the Kingdom* contributes to that social dialogue by raising feminist issues as social issues. Michele Landesberg tells of a family ritual she initiated which expresses this ethos: at the dinner table "you serve the littlest one first." Implicit in Landesberg's custom is the idea that the Jews are responsible for ensuring that those who are least in a position to help themselves are taken care of before one helps oneself. Whether at a family dinner table, or Jewish women protesting the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians, we can redefine *mentschlekhkeyt* as "serving the littlest one first."

ASSIMILATION

The final narrative motif, and the other "slippery" one, is the idea of assimilation.

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In Chapter Five, Eric Goldman noted if assimilation was advocated then it was not a

"Jewish" movie, since assimilation means the death of the Jewish people (Goldman:

xvii). Many Jewish practitioners would agree, and just as many would vehemently

disagree. Therefore, as an attribute of Jewish culture, I note that the "issue" of

assimilation is important, insofar as it is an issue which concerns Jewish identity.

Whether or not a film advocates assimilation, or eschews it, that it even raises the issue is

what is important[12]. But it should also be noted that, like the American-made Yiddish

language films, assimilation is going to be more of an issue in North American contacts

than in Europe, or in Israel, based on the degree of contact with the non-Jewish world.

In *Half the Kingdom*, Michele Landesberg characterizes the Reform synagogue

she attended as "bloodless, feelingless modernism"; the Holy Blossom Synagogue in

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[12] Film scholar Patricia Erens noted the centrality of this debate within Jewish American circles: "As the desire to maintain a group apart ran counter to the Jews' desire to assimilate, it became necessary to work out an acceptable solution. By and large this was achieved through the process of acculturation. Acculturation refers to the absorption of the dominant culture without the concomitant loss of ethnic specificity. Acculturation coincides with the notion of equality for all people. It has led to the concept, developed in the 1960s, of pluralism, a confederation of distinct ethnic groups within a larger community" (Erens, 1984: 10). For the Jewish communities in the Untied States, and to a lesser degree in Canada as well, to remain "ethnic" was to deny one's "Americaness". And in the period of mass Jewish immigration, before the quota system in the mid-1920s, the American President, Woodrow Wilson, explicitly enforced this: in a speech in 1915, Wilson stated "'America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American.' The notion of America as one happy family was thus proffered to an immigrant audience well prepared to accept these values" (Erens, 1984: 82-83).

Toronto, was so assimilated that the congregates were trying to "pass as white."[13]

Assimilation, then is front and center for the discussion presented in the film. "How can one be a feminist, a social activist, and still remain a Jew?" the film asks. Naomi Goldenberg is a professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa who the film characterizes as a "Jew, an atheist, and a feminist." She had a child out of wedlock with a non-Jew and faces exactly that issue. Her question, although academic with regards to her research area, is also a personal one: how to raise her daughter to be comfortable with her own Jewish identity. There are many in the Jewish world who would argue that Goldenberg can never instill Jewish pride in her daughter if she demonstrates so little herself, but the film itself refuses to take sides. Goldenberg defines herself as a Jew, but as a highly assimilated one. Just as the film demonstrates women reclaiming their own places within Judaism, so too does it argue that Judaism needs to make space for Jews like Goldenberg.

As a film about the Americanization of Jewish immigrants, assimilation obviously plays a large role in *Hester Street*. "In America," Jake (Steven Keats) expresses vehemently, "you marry for love". Unlike the Old Country, where a *shadchan* usually arranged marriages, Jake justifies his adulterous relationship with Mamie (Dorrie

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[13]Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also commented on this particular congregation: Holy Blossom Temple, the oldest congregation in Toronto, "is referred to disparagingly by Conservative Jews as 'the church on the hill' and for a long time controversies raged over the introduction of an organ into the synagogue and organ music into the services" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 46).

Kavanaugh) with that admonition. Jake has shaved off his beard and cut off his *payez*, and upon arrival snips his son Yossl's *payez* too. Jake has more difficulty with getting his wife Gitl (Carol Kane) to assimilate: she is uncomfortable with Jake's request to lose her wig or kerchief, and walk about "in her own hair, like a Gentile woman". When she finally does, Jake attempts to tear off this "wig" in disgust at his wife looking like a prostitute. I think the most profound moment of Jake's assimilation is upon receiving the news from the Old Country that his father has died, Jake attempts to say the *Kaddish*, but cannot remember the Hebrew prayer; so that he is unable to mourn.

Of all the Jewish motifs in the film, *Crossing Delancey* is ultimately about assimilation. Issy tries to impress on Bubee how important her career is — how much responsibility she has, that she has Isaac Bashevis Singer's unlisted phone number — but all to no avail. All Bubee can see is that her only granddaughter is unmarried. Issy has accepted the assimilated lifestyle, and the film juxtaposes both sides of Delancey Street. Issy is a modern Jewish woman: she is comfortable with her Jewish friends, going to one friend's first child's circumcision (and that friend is equally modern, having had this child without marrying her baby's non-Jewish father), and yet has succeeded within her career in the Gentile world. Issy unproblematically moves between the two worlds. What she sees in Sam (Peter Riegert), however, is an Old Country "greenie," an immigrant, completely naïve about the way things are in a modern New York.

But Sam, too, is modernized, although he chooses the traditional lifestyle. In an apparent gesture of *mentschlekhkeyt*, Sam demonstrates he is not quite as naïve as Issy

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would make him out to be. Issy has been having an adulterous affair with Nick (George Martin), whose wife is repeatedly throwing him out. While on a date, Issy invites Sam back to her place, and Nick bursts in with the information that his wife has finally thrown him out for good, and inquires whether or not he can stay with Issy. Sam offers Nick a bed at his own place, which Nick begrudgingly accepts. Issy whispers to Sam that she thought that was a nice gesture, and Sam, with a wink, whispers back "not entirely." Sam's not altogether altruistic offer develops the character; Sam may be "traditional" but that does not mean "stupid" or naïve.

Assimilation is also the most significant of the Jewish narrative motifs to be played in *Fiddler on the Roof.* As noted above, Tevye lives by "Tradition". As he himself notes in that song: "why do we do this? I tell you — I don't know." As the diegesis concerns the weddings of his three daughters, each of those daughters function, within the assimilation motif. as further degrees of moving away from Tevye's "tradition". Beginning with Tzeitel and Motel. where the young lovers reject the *shadchan* and choose their own partners. to Hodel and Perchik not even asking Tevye for permission. Those two sisters chose Jewish partners for marriage. even though they were breaking from tradition: when Chava chooses Fyedka (Ray Lovelock). a Gentile. this is too much for Tevye and he banishes her from the family. Intermarriage. in the film. is seen as both the logical conclusion to assimilation. and the moving away from "tradition". The song "Unthinkable." which Tevye sings when each of his daughters confront him with their marriage plans. underlies this motif. Significantly, Chava's intermarriage is the

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one final movement of assimilation which Tevye cannot accept.

The film also plays out the assimilation motif with Tevye's relationship to the young radical scholar Perchik. Perchik, as a socialist, tries to break many of the traditional practices in Anatevka. I have already noted the opposition between Tevye and Perchik, expressed as an opposition between *Jewish* and secular education. Perchik also destroys the *mechitza*, the ceremonial separation of men from women, at Tzeitel and Motel's wedding. Noting that at the wedding, men are forbidden to dance with women, Perchik tears down the rope which separates the two sexes, and holds out his hand for Hodel to take for a dance. Tevye follows, demanding that Golde dance with him. Although Tevye cannot accept the marriage between Chava and a Gentile, he is willing to assimilate to some degree by dancing with his wife, and allowing Tzeitel and Hodel to choose their own husbands. This assimilation motif, as played out in *Fiddler on the Roof*, has particular resonance for North American Jewry, reflecting quite accurately the social and cultural contexts within which many Jews find themselves.

There is problematic discourse in assimilation debates, where Jewish experiences are generalized to such a degree that the ethnic particularity is removed. In *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* for example, the Jewish experience of Giorgio Bassani is told/filmed by (the non-Jewish) De Sica, as an *Italian* story, and the Jewish specificity is largely absent, apart from the specific diegetic attributes. Here is an example of a film which is based on Jewish source, Bassani's autobiographical novel, but expresses its Jewishness only in its diegesis, those elements which De Sica retained from the original

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source material. Both the Finzi-Continis and the Bassanis are heavily assimilated, but that no one calls assimilation into question, or made an issue. Even the actors, Sanda and Capolicchio, have blond hair and blue eyes, making them look particularly Aryan. A criticism of many Holocaust themed films is that they generalize the Shoah to such a degree that it ultimately removes its Jewishness, and this is a rebuke well-leveled at De Sica's film.

In general though, it is not so much a question of privileging one narrative motif over another in these films, but rather recognizing that these are the areas of Jewish thought which can be expressed within cinema, and reflect the Jewishness of some films. These motifs are different to the Jewish encodedness of some of the attributes, which I discuss below: for something to be considered a narrative motif, it must be integral to the diegesis, rather than something thrown in for "ethnic colour" or cultural verisimilitude.

VERISIMILITUDE TO JEWISH EXPERIENCE:

In Chapter Four, I noted that one of the crucial attributes in identifying Jewishness in film was its reflection of Jewish experience. There needs to be a high degree of verisimilitude to Jewish culture and to Jewish experience for the Jewishness to be emergent.

We can consider this attribute on three levels. On one level, informant comments can reflect cultural verisimilitude like Eddie's, who noted that his mother, an Auschwitz survivor, identified the accuracy of *Schindler's List*. Ron noted that certain depictions of

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Jewishness just "smell right" like in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974)[14]. Like Lumet's view of social activism and Micklin Silver's attack on the traditional roles for women with the culture in *Hester Street*, *Duddy Kravitz* casts a critical eye on the "American Dream," especially when exported to Canada, and among the Jews, and this is an aspect which many Canadian Jews could relate to. The "Mount Royal" Jews, a vulgar *nouveau riche* neighbourhood, look down on the working class "St. Urbane" Jews. Says one of Duddy (Richard Dreyfuss): "It's cretinous, little money-grubbers like Kravitz that cause anti-Semitism." This characterization of the Jew was of concern for many when the film was first released, some wondered, regardless of how accurate a portrayal of someone like Duddy was, whether the film would spark anti-Semitism.

> Ron: ... Indirectly, I think that — a film that was really controversial for my family 'cause — it was seen as being anti-*Semitic*, but it wasn't of course, the adaptation of Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Which is — its about— it's a real classic, this is a money-grubbing son-of-a-bitch character, with — perhaps the best of intentions, once. Nonetheless, the milieu and all the rest of it really resonates [with Jewish audiences].
>
> Mikel: And some people found it anti-Semitic?
>
> Ron: ...My dad did. My dad — my dad who's gone through pogroms, suddenly sees somebody portraying an absolutely despicable human being and saying 'here's a Jew'. Well, for him he's saying, 'my God, like Gentiles don't have enough —'
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> Mikel: — 'ammunition' (Ron, personal interview, 9701).

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[14] Based on the novel by Mordecai Richler. *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* tells of Duddy, a conniving and devious individual who wants to make a name for himself. With his Zaida's words ringing in his ears, that "a man without land is a nobody." Duddy endeavors to purchase all the land around an undeveloped Quebec lake, and become a "somebody".

To be sure, *Duddy Kravitz* is a negative portrayal of Jewishness, yet the film appeals to Jewish audiences because of the high verisimilitude to the experience of being Jewish in urban Canada. Even though we may wish to distance ourselves from characterizations like Duddy, Richler and director Ted Kotcheff confront us with the very stereotypes which have plagued Jewish culture for centuries, and they do so in such a way which is readily identifiable and yet, never devoid of its humanity. Rather than the easy accusation that films like *Duddy Kravitz* are evidence of the "self-hating" Jew, Jews who hate being Jewish or identified as "Other," the film humanizes Duddy. By developing the character so that the audience is aware of the moral center, even if Duddy is not, the character becomes much more complex.

On another level, the source material of the film may be relevant: films like *The Summer of Aviya* or *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* are based on autobiographical novels, and therefore, by virtue of the Jewish writers drawing from their own experiences they must be accurate. Other films, specifically *Hester Street*, represent historical experiences from a contemporary observer, thereby assuming a verisimilitude to the events and culture being depicted. Language also plays a role in the verisimilitude of the film: although ostensibly in English, the film also makes use of Yiddish and Hebrew, as well as a kind of "Yinglish," of English spoken with a heavy Yiddish accent.

At one point in *Crossing Delancey*, a package from Sam arrives at Bubee's for Issy. As Issy is about to tear into it, Bubee stops her: "you don't know how to open a

package! That's good string you're wasting. It's nice heavy paper. Something to save." My

own Bubee saved string and heavy wrapping paper, partially from her memory of

immigrant poverty[15]. For those of us lucky enough to know our Jewish grandmothers, the

scene rings with absolute verisimilitude. We recognize these people living in the houses

around our grandparents, and their characterizations, done with respect and affection and

never to the detriment of one's self-respect, read as true — they "smell right". That

verisimilitude is what stays in the audiences mind beyond the narrative motifs the film

utilizes.

Finally, with regards to documentary films, like *Shoah* or *Half the Kingdom*,

which use first person experience narratives (of the Holocaust and of being a Jewish

woman, respectively) demonstrate that verisimilitude is the *sin qua non* of documentary

cinema[16]. The verisimilitude to the Jewish experience can manifest its Jewishness in a

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[15] Diane Tye noted to me that her grandmother also used to save paper and string like Bubee does. I noted in the previous chapter that individual icons or behaviours were not necessarily evidence of Jewishness *per se*, however become Jewish in combination with the other diegetic codes.

[16] McIlroy noted that "documentaries via phenomenology guide us ... to the real world. We, as viewers, accept the contract [between filmmaker and audience], implicit or otherwise, that what we see is *about* the real, not *the* real" (McIlroy: 291). In many respects McIlroy's approach to documentary phenomenology is akin to Oring's view of legend (*vis-a-vis* belief): that these are not *believed* narratives, as much as they are narratives *about* belief (Oring, 1986: 125). Further on, McIlroy noted this dynamic explicitly: "Documentary film also criticizes the idealist view that objects in a film have no existence outside of the film viewing experience. The referential element of documentary film has a different ontological and phenomenological status than that of fiction films" (McIlroy: 297). Referring back to the statistics generated in Figure 2.8, that the Jewish film festival attendees preferred documentary cinema by a slight margin,

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number of ways, and we can then take these manifestations into consideration.

Lanzmann's technique of having the witnesses of the *Shoah* tell their own experiences on camera brings the verisimilitude to the fore. In addition to verisimilitude being the *sin qua non* of the documentary film genre, there are other cinematic techniques which Lanzmann utilizes in order to bring out this realism. By using first-person film footage at the death camp sites, of having the camera follow the footsteps that the Jews themselves took fifty years previous, Lanzmann positions the audience in the role of those Jews being marched to their deaths. This representational technique is an attempt to draw as much attention to the experience as possible. Likewise, Lanzmann's questions often border on the trivial or the banal; by asking about the weather on the day one survivor dug up his own mother's grave, or what they built the cattle cars out of, the filmmaker is attempting to elicit as much detail as possible in order for the viewer to gain as much experiential insight into the "Shoah" as is possible.

In *Half the Kingdom*, having women relate their experiences of Judaism, it emerges that those experiences are quintessentially *Jewish*. And yet, the film does not generalize the women's experiences within Judaism to all Jewish experience, but maintains its own gendered particularism, while not excluding either men, or non-Jews.

JEWISH CONTEXT:

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reveals this dynamic in praxis.

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"Jewish Context" looks at the context where the cultural producer both made and exhibited the film. Within this attribute there is a tacit rejection of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking. Jewishness is emergent within films made outside of the entertainment industry. Israeli filmmaker Eyal Halfon, the director of the opening night film at the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival, rejected the term "Israeli film *industry*." As he noted in the "Question and Answer" session following the screening of his film:

> That's — first, forget about the word 'industry.' The 'industry' exists mainly in one place, which is the United States, and maybe in England—France, and Germany. All the other places they've film 'culture.' They don't have film 'industry' (Halfon, 1 May, 1997, 9701).

Within the attribute of "Jewish Context" lay those films made outside of the industrial mainstream. This includes films made in countries without an established film industry like Canada and Israel, as well as those films which were made outside of a studio system in film industry countries like the United States and France. The production context of these films is also tied to their distribution: films made outside of the centers of the entertainment industry frequently need to find alternative distribution and exhibition contexts, like film festivals and "art-house" screenings. As one of my informants noted

> I like more obscure films that — like I would usually be going to the Carleton [first run art-house cinema in Toronto]. You know, like those kinds of films. Which is why I like film festivals (Judith, personal interview, 9702).

In my chapter on the film festival itself, I noted that the survey I conducted revealed that a half of those surveyed participate within the film culture of Toronto, by going to other

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film festivals, with a third citing the Toronto International Film Festival specifically. These alternative venues, within festive contexts, are outside of the norm of mainstream, Hollywood distribution. This in turn, reflects another attribute of Jewishness.

In addition to the industrialized or independent production of these films, Jewishness is emergent when the films are photographed on-location, where the events being depicted actually occurred, thereby linking this contextual attribute with the verisimilitude noted above. Also, Jewishness is contextually emergent when the films are based on "Jewish" source material (like Jewish personal experience narratives or Jewish authors).

For example, with *Shoah*, by filming on location at the death camp sites, Lanz-mann's aim at verisimilitude reaches into the contextual as well. These death sites and groves the Nazis planted to cover up their atrocities are not just discussed but shown visually. Even within the context of a cinematically industrial country like France, Lanzmann produced *Shoah* independently and likewise did the festival circuit, before its brief run at cinemas like the Carleton in Toronto in 1985-86. Due to its immense length, the film was commercially screened in two parts, taking up two different cinema screens, and requiring viewers to make a return trip to see the whole movie. This film-going context is not Jewish, *per se*, but it is non-mainstream.

JEWISH TAXONOMY (GENRE):

The vernacular taxonomies that became emergent, although less important than

the other attributes identified, do play a role in identifying the Jewishness in film. I already noted the distinction between emic and etic genres, of how outsiders and insiders differ in their taxonomic processes in Chapter Three, but here, as an attribute itself, these genres need to be outlined again: the genres which the cultural practitioners identified as reflecting Jewishness were Holocaust films, Jewish history films, Israeli films, Jewish culture films, and "women's" films. Of the cited films from those I "exit-polled" we can put together a chart which demonstrates these emic genres and their examples.

Movie:	Emic Genre(s):
Annie Hall (1977)	Jewish Culture
The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1974)	Jewish History
Avanti Popolo (1988)	Israeli
Beyond the Walls (1984)	Israeli
Blazing Saddles (1974)	Jewish Culture
Cabaret (1974)	Jewish History; Holocaust
Crossing Delancey (1988)	Jewish Culture: Women
Cup Final (1991)	Israeli
Exodus (1960)	Jewish History; Israeli
Fiddler on the Roof (1971)	Jewish History
The Fixer (1966)	Jewish History
The Frisco Kid (1978)	Jewish History
Funny Girl (1968)	Jewish History
The Garden of the Finzi-Continis (1972)	Jewish History: Holocaust
Gentleman's Agreement (1948)	Jewish Culture
Goodbye Columbus (1969)	Jewish Culture
The Graduate (1967)	Jewish Culture
Half the Kingdom (1992)	Jewish Culture; Women
Hester Street (1974)	Jewish History; Women
Hill 24 Doesn't Answer (1955)	Jewish History; Israeli
I Love You Rosa (1971)	Jewish History; Women; Israeli
The Jazz Singer (1927)	Jewish Culture
The Jolson Story (1946)	Jewish History
Judgement at Nuremberg (1961)	Jewish History; Holocaust
Julia (1977)	Jewish History; Holocaust

M. Klein (1977)	Jewish History; Holocaust
Lost in Yonkers (1993)	Jewish History
Miller's Crossing (1990)	Jewish History
Les Misérables (1995)	Jewish History; Holocaust
The Pawnbroker (1965)	Jewish Culture; Holocaust
Playing for Time (1980)	Jewish History; Holocaust
The Plot Against Harry (1969, released 1989)	Jewish Culture
Portnoy's Complaint (1972)	Jewish Culture
The Quarrel (1990)	Jewish Culture; Jewish History; Holocaust
Sallah (1965)	Israeli
Schindler's List (1993)	Jewish History; Holocaust
Shoah (1985)	Jewish History; Holocaust
Sophie's Choice (1982)	Jewish History; Holocaust
A Stranger Among Us (1992)	Jewish Culture
The Summer of Aviya (1988)	Jewish History; Israeli
The Ten Commandments (1956)	Jewish History
Triumph of the Will (1935)	Holocaust
Welcome to the Dollhouse (1995)	Jewish Culture
Yentl (1983)	Jewish History; Women
Zelig (1983)	Jewish History

Figure 7.1: List of Cited Films with Emic Genres

These genres demonstrate a hodgepodge of narrative forms, countries of origin, and diegetic content, and are not necessarily how an outsider would classify them.

Significant genres, like movies about Israel, can override the historical accuracy or verisimilitude of a film. A movie like *Exodus*, considered to be highly inaccurate in both its depiction of the establishment of Israeli, and in its adaption of Leon Uris's novel, is still important within the context of Jewishness in cinema are the associations one makes with that film. Phyllis, one of my festival informants noted to me:

> You know, to tell you the truth, the movie *Exodus* — I mean when I first saw it, to me that was *Exodus*. But I think that it would give, should give non-Jewish people an insight as to the struggle that we had in landing

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somewhere. Nobody wanted us. I think that because it's — they don't look at the love story kind of thing, they look at the *connotation* of the movie, would give them an insight as to where we've been (Phyllis, personal communication, 9707).

Exodus, although flawed as history and in particular as *Jewish* history, has a great deal of significance as a representation of the *idea* of the struggle for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. Presented as a mainstream Hollywood epic, the idea of a Jewish homeland is made to have resonance for the non-Jewish world.

Fiddler on the Roof, as a film about a significant aspect of Jewish history, what some informants refer to as films about the "Old Country," has other attributes which reflect historical Jewish experiences in Europe. At the one level, we can say that Perchik functioned as a reminder of the strong Jewish involvement in the Bolshevik and socialist movements in Europe. Pogroms and displacements were also matters of course in the Old Country, and the anthem "Anatevka," a mournful song about the lost community, act as a reminder to what our families went through.

As I noted previously, one of my Festival informants said that *Fiddler on the Roof* "touched on everything that I envisioned influenced what my perceptions of what my grandparents grew up with" (Dave, personal interview, 9702). I think for that reason, how it allows Jews to imagine what our families went through in the Old Country, just like how *Hester Street* reflects what we imagine our families going through when they immigrated, has great emotional power for Jewish audiences.

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CODING:

The issue of encoding Jewishness in films is controversial. For coding to occur, as Radner and Lanser noted, some sense of risk must be felt, otherwise one does not require this visual connotation. Within the relatively safe contexts of many of these films, as independent films and films shown for specifically Jewish audiences, there is less need to encode one's Jewishness. Subsequently coding is the least important attribute. Conversely, films which are intended for more mainstream audiences use coding more so than the other films.

For example, in *Shoah*, the languages in the film actually reflect, to some degree, the multitude of Jewish voices exterminated by the Nazis. We hear French, English, Polish, German, Yiddish, Hebrew and even Italian. Although Lanzmann speaks many of these languages himself, for his Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish interviews he relies on a translator who appears on screen talking to these people standing beside Lanzmann himself[17].

Artifacts also play an encoded role within the film. I have mentioned already how the abandoned synagogues interpolate like ghosts throughout the film, but at the death camp sites, piles of luggage, metal utensils and eyeglasses, and shoes give their own

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[17] Interestingly, as an aside, the subtitles in the film are also geared towards Lanzmann's own understandings: when the interviewee is speaking in a language the filmmaker understands we see instantaneous subtitling, however, when working through a translator, we only see the subtitles when the Polish, Hebrew, or Yiddish is translated back into French for Lanzmann.

testimony to the Holocaust. We read piles of Jewish detritus as significant testimony of

those who can no longer speak. Related to these piles, at the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film

Festival, Seth Kramer's short film, *Untitled* was screened. In an attempt to understand the

enormity of the Holocaust, Kramer documented the counting out of six million grains of

rice; it is a visual representation of every life taken by the Nazis. Kramer noted in the

Question and Answer session following the screening of his film,

> I might also add that I did take a trip to Poland. And to Auschwitz. And
> one thing that served as an inspiration for [making this film] was my
> experience seeing the shoes — I don't know if anyone is familiar with this
> — but they have, still at Auschwitz, which is now a museum, shoes from
> — of the victims. It's about 800,000 pairs of shoes. And you walk in a
> bunker, and there they are in these kind of metal cages. It takes you about
> five minutes to walk through the bunker to see all the shoes. And you
> leave the bunker and you walk into the next bunker, and there's yet again,
> still more shoes. And again you walk for five minutes. Staring at these
> thousands and thousands of shoes of the victims. So you leave the second
> bunker, and you enter the third. Again more shoes. And a fourth bunker
> and a fifth bunker and a *sixth* bunker. And nothing has really impressed
> upon me the enormity of the Holocaust more than just seeing the victims
> in one place kind of physically represented (Kramer, Question and Answer
> session, 5 May, 1997, 9707).

The piles of detritus in Lanzmann's film gives similar testimony.

Coding is also significant in *Exodus*. Because director Otto Preminger made it

outside of an independent Jewish context for consumption by a mass audience, the film

needed to address itself to its Jewish spectators differently. The Jewish specificity of the

film emerges from a deconstruction of its encoded icons. I noted in Chapter Six, that

Exodus encodes its Jewishness in its use of artifacts (like those used in Dov's initiation

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into the Irgun). But there is another attribute of coding which I have yet to discuss in the film: the use of diegetic music. When the Haganah raise the Israeli flag on the Cypriot ship, renamed the "Exodus," in defiance to the British blockade of Palestine, and carrying several thousand Jewish refugees, the Jews break out into singing the "Hatikva," which will become, historically, the Israeli national anthem. That knowledge, as well as an understanding that "hatikva" means "hope" will have resonance only for those who are familiar with Judaism enough to pick up on it.

The coding in a film like *The Garden of Finzi-Continis* will also have a substantially low degree, in part due to the ethnicity of the director; De Sica, as a non-Jew, would not necessarily be sensitive to the cultural icons which are operative within Jewish culture. The Jewish customs which are shown in the film, going to synagogue and celebrating Passover, are textually based, but De Sica has not endowed them with any Jewishness. However, this does not deny any of the film's *potential* for Jewishness: Lyla, one of my informants at the festival, noted the following:

> I didn't go there [to see *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*] ex— because I wanted to see a Jewish film. I went there because I wanted to see a— you know, a movie. And I didn't even know that there was a Holocaust element in it. But I thought it was a fabulous film. If you would define that as a Jewish film, yes, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* was wonderful (Lyla, personal interview, 9702).

Occasionally, as Lyla demonstrates, films which have a lower degree of Jewishness in them hit the right Jewish chord by taking the audience by surprise. If one is not expecting Jewishness in a film, and then discovers a small amount of it, that cinematic experience

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of Jewishness becomes heightened.

Like De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, a non-Jew directed *Fiddler on the Roof.* Most of my informants noted to me that *Fiddler* was a Jewish movie, even though director Norman Jewison was not Jewish. This was reflected on my survey with the question as to whether or not a non-Jew could make a *Jewish* movie — some even going so far as to cite Jewison and *Fiddler* specifically. Only one of my informants noted that Jewison's non-Jewish ethnic identity impacted on the film:

> Helen: Although, now that you mention it, some aspects of *Fiddler on the Roof*, if a Jew had done it, he wouldn't have made those mistakes.
> Mikel: Like what?
> Helen: Knowing — because of my background, there were thing in there. I can't recall specifically ... for example, in a traditional orthodox home, you would never have a couple sleeping in the same bed [referring to Tevye and Golde in the 'Tevye's Dream' sequence]. I remember that. That was just — it would never happen. from that part of the country. that part of the world. If he had been a Jew, he would have known that, right? (Helen, personal interview, 9702)[18]

There are other, if not *mistakes*. then at least inaccuracies in the film: for example. although Tevye and the residents of Anatevka are supposed to be traditional Jews, and we see the women wearing wigs or kerchiefs over their heads, and the men all have beards

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[18] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted the reasons for this prohibition: "In religious homes married couples had two single beds instead of one double bed. One important reason for this custom was the requirement that man and wife suspend sexual relations each month during menstration [sic.] and for a week after. During this time the women were considered unclean and the man was forbidden to have any physical contact with her. Two separate beds helped insure that they would not violate this taboo" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 245).

(except Perchik), none of the men have *payez*. These are all examples of coding —

although in this case, examples of inaccurate coding.

Coding plays a large role in understanding the Jewishness/non-Jewishness of this

film too. Only Tevye and Yente kiss the mezuzah on the door posts when they pass. Both

actors, known for their Jewishness outside of the context of the film, add this touch where

other actors do not. I think a Jewish director would have included more of this activity,

rather than someone unaware of that tradition.

Within the *non-diegetic* music in the film, although for the most part it maintains

the klezmer style of the score, John Williams' arrangement includes many "classical"

music styles which conflict with the klezmer style[19]. These musical moments, violin

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[19] Wolitz saw in the musical arrangement a further dimension: "Even the score [non-diegetic music] reinforces the ideological perspective of the musical — itself a 'hybrid' art form, like 'Jewish-American'. When Mark Slobin defined the Eastern European Jewish melody types as based on the augmented second and the augmented fourth, he pointed out that even *Fiddler on the Roof* could not resist using the first type. He was amused, however, that it was used only as the counter theme of the orchestra to the opening theme played by the fiddler on the roof. Why, he asked, was a *definable* Jewish melody type *not* given to the fiddler? Slobin, I believe, misinterpreted the meaning of this musical decision when he stated, 'It is as if the mainstream wanted to force the musical stereotype on an unwilling captive Old World *klezmer* who knows he is merely one of the stage props.' The Fiddler's 'Broadway' melody, which begins and *ends* the musical with its slight 'exotica,' *is* the message of the musical: Jewish continuity exists through accommodation and acculturation. The construction of the fiddler's theme expresses the ideology of the composer. [Jerry] Bock's [the composer of the musical] use of the 'minor mode and the characteristic opening half-step — but not following the augmented second' is, then, totally in character: the Jewish and the Western/American elements commingle to create a 'Jewish-American' sound. The orchestra's counter-melody represents the 'pure' Eastern European *shtetl* world which suffuses the work, but its 'transmigration' and 'transmogrification' are found in the melody of the fiddler — symbol of the Jewish paradox, continuity by accommodation" (Wolitz: 530-531).

solos within the overture, appeal to a non-Jewish musical tradition, when they could have utilized and maintained the cultural context within the klezmer style. That being said, diegetically, within "Rich Man," Topol utilizes a cantorial style of singing at one point.

What this demonstration should reveal is that we base Jewishness within film primarily on content, not performance. Those Jewish attributes which my informants identify in the film are textually bounded to be there; they are part of the source material which the director's job is to bring to life. If the director is unaware of the cultural context s/he is working in, then certain other attributes may not reflect Jewishness. But the point here is that what is seen as salient for the cultural group, may not be in its performance, but its content. And in the case of *Fiddler on the Roof*, that content is important enough for it to transcend a non-Jewish performance.

Schindler's List is also a heavily encoded film. In Chapter Six, I discussed some of the operations and examples of coding which work in the film, examples include the opening *brakha*, the placing of stones on Schindler's grave, the removal of the *mezuzah*, and the use of "Oyf'n Pripetshok" as non-diegetic music. Now let me discuss the significance of this encoding. Spielberg, a mainstream Hollywood filmmaker whose material success is unrivaled in the industry, and who made this film with the support of a major studio (Universal), intended the film to act as a crossover film: that is, *Schindler's List* would be of interest to many people, and not just a Jewish audience. Horowitz noted,

> Oprah Winfrey ... declared on national television that the mere act of seeing *Schindler's List* has made her 'a better person' as she chastised her audience for not having made time to see it. Christine Todd Whitman,

governor of New Jersey, mandated special screenings of Spielberg's film as an antidote to racism and anti-Semitism in her state. Viewers with little prior interest emerged from the theatre convinced that the Holocaust 'really happened'; some even express interest in reading or viewing survivor testimony. One rabbi, steeped in the historical, literary, and cinematic representations of the Shoah, confessed to me that, viewing Spielberg's film, he had wept for the first time over the murdered Jews of Europe and 'could finally mourn' (Horowitz: 119).

With so much mainstream attention on the film, even winning the 1993 Oscar for Best Picture, much of the film's Jewishness needed to be subsumed within the overall narrative, perhaps so as not to alienate a Gentile audience, or, following the implications of Radner and Lanser, to avoid encouraging anti-Semitic attacks. For the Jewish audiences of *Schindler's List*, the film's Jewishness emerged beyond the apparent content.

CONCLUSION

An ethnography of seeing is ultimately an analytical approach, rather than a purely descriptive one; yet the attributes through which one examines the popular films of a particular group need to be ethnographically determined.

Karl Heider, in his investigation of the "ethnographic film", noted that such a creature did not actually exist as a bounded category (Heider: 3). Likewise, when looking for Jewish cinema, I discovered that it too was an imaginary bounded category. Heider recommended that, instead of looking for those films which fell either inside or outside this non-existent category, one examined the ethnographicness of cinema — in his purview, what one could learn about an ethnographic topic by looking at a specific film

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(Heider: 3). In a similar vein, I looked at the films those people I "exit-polled" cited to me at the 1997 Toronto Jewish Film Festival to try and see what kinds of Jewishness were emergent. And by extension, to attempt to understand what the cultural discourses are that contemporary Judaism is undergoing.

Enough people noted to me that Jewish *content* was the single most deciding factor. What made up this Jewish content I had previously analyzed from examining an ethnically bounded series of films — the Yiddish language cinema — and then applied those cultural motifs to these informant cited films. The Jewish family was central in most of these films, regardless of in what country they were made, or what the film was about. Even in films where the family was absent, like in the Holocaust films, this motif was present by its conspicuous absence. The Jewish family is the primary locus of Jewish celebration, and by extension the place of Jewish continuity. Within American Jewish culture, the motif of assimilation is also at the centre of discourse on Jewish identity. Whether in favour of assimilation, or decrying its potential to destroy Jewish life, this motif emerges as an important cultural attribute. The motif of education was also frequently noted, from both secular and sacred educational traditions. Whether this motif occurs in the form of traditionally oriented *Jewish* educational contexts, of learning Hebrew and Talmud, either as a vocation or even just for one's *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, or the importance placed on education within the secular world, by going to University in general, medical, dental, law or graduate school more specifically, education plays a large role in Jewish life. *Mentschlekhkeyt*, as either diegetic character's virtuous behaviour, or

as the social activism of the filmmaker, is also prominent. Historically, Jewish involvement in leftist movements, charity work, and benevolent societies are all indicative of the traditional belief that we are put on this earth to leave it better than we found it. When filmmakers tackle difficult and potentially controversial subjects like feminism and religion, genocides (especially when aimed against the Jews themselves), poverty in African American ghettos, or even the acculturation of the "American Dream", they do so in order to raise awareness, and hopefully create action to combat these social ills. To reiterate Debbie's comment from Chapter Three: "But that is not to say that Judaism always takes the high moral ground, but it is able to say 'these are the issues and this is the paradox' and you cut through to find some message of truth and human responsibility and behaviour" (Debbie, personal interview, 9702). In Chapter Two, I noted that the Toronto Jewish Film Festival cut across both religious and secular lines in Judaism, and that cross-section is also reflected in these films' use of Jewish religious life. Some do reflect Jewish religion, and some do not. Each individual motif, on its own, gives some indication of the ethnographic reality of Jewish life. But, like with those aspects of coding I discussed in Chapter Six, the more motifs that are contained within a single text, the more Jewishness becomes emergent.

Understanding whether or not the culture one is studying values verisimilitude in its emic representations is equally important (it is understood that groups do not necessarily appreciate etic misrepresentations, but here I posit verisimilitude to Jewish experience in opposition to representations which are based more on cultural metaphors).

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In this case, Jews demand a certain degree of verisimilitude to their representative images and narratives. That can be identified by the number of cited documentaries, historical films, and films based on true stories within the list cited to me by my informants. As I noted in Chapter Two, this seems to posit a preference for "factual" rather than "fictitious" narratives.

Jewish contexts, as distinct from other film production and distribution contexts, attempt to rupture the hegemony of the Hollywood film industry. Films made outside of that industry are often more valued as being somehow "more authentic", particularly in their portrayal of Jewish culture. Again this attribute underscores what I argued above with regards to verisimilitude, about Jewish culture privileging factual discourse.

Linked with the above discussion about Jewish content, and its accessibility through Jewish film's cultural motifs, are those categories which Jewish cultural consumers organize their film narratives. Ignoring etic genres, by and large, the people I "exit-polled" had their own categories, most of which differed from how I would have treated these material. Understanding how people categorize their popular films, can lead one to an understanding of how they order the world around them. These topical categories can sometimes even override the privileging of the factual, as with the movie *Exodus*.

Finally, we come to the issue of coding. As I have said above, and in the previous chapter, films aimed at an explicitly Jewish audience, either through independent production and distribution, through language choice, or through specialized festivals,

often require less encoding of cultural materials, than those films which are intended for a mainstream audience. When films are aimed at a mainstream audience, sometimes the Jewish discourse is hidden to prevent alienation from the non-Jewish world. But there is a flip side to coding too; when Jewish audience members can watch Jewish-content films made by non-Jews, and enjoy both what they seem to understand about Jewish culture, and what they do not seem to understand.

There is a great deal of ethnographic material in popular films, ways of entering into a culture's worldview. Most people, within most cultures, view popular culture entertainments as entertainment. When one goes to a movie, one is not overly concerned with the deciphering the cultural messages in the film that the cultural producer is sending directly to his/her cultural consumers. To paraphrase Janice Radway, we do not necessarily understand the way other groups watch popular films (Radway:11). This methodology is a means to work toward that understanding. Which is why we need to train ourselves to see ethnographically.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
CONCLUSIONS: POPULAR CINEMA AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Within *Jewish* culture specifically, Jewishness in cinema is a direct revelation of Jewish content. Stories which reflect the Jewish family, incorporate Jewish rituals and education, and explore social awareness and the issue of assimilation are all vital to Jewish culture. But furthermore, for these films to have emergent Jewish*ness*, they must demonstrate some verisimilitude to Jewish experience. Although some films have a higher degree of Jewishness than others, because of their context of production and distribution, like Israeli or Yiddish-language films, or fall into the vernacular taxonomy of established Jewish narrative genres, it is still the diegesis which ultimately informs the Jewishness of a film. Coding is useful to explore situations when either the director is not Jewish, or the filmmaker aims the film at a predominantly non-Jewish audience.

I contend that this methodology, here used to assess the Jewishness of cinema, is also applicable to other cultural groups as well. Obviously the particulars will differ, from culture to culture, but the overall methodology should be applicable.

The first thing the ethnographer must do is identify salient contexts where the cinema of a specific group is emergent. This can be based on ethnic neighbourhood cinemas, independent film series, film festivals, or any kind of community film-going contexts.

Within that context, the ethnographer must release him or herself, particularly if

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s/he is trained in film or cultural studies, disciplines which put more emphasis on the hermeneutic than the ethnographic, to begin to talk to the cultural participants within that context. Surveys are a great way of having one's own hermeneutic preconceptions destroyed; that is, having one's *a priori* etic assumptions of textual meaning challenged. The role of the cinema ethnographer is to understand how the community itself views such things as the importance of the verisimilitude to the cultural experience, and the particular genres which the culture understands as significant.

In many cases, there may be an established body of significant cinematic texts available, or cited by the cultural practitioners. If so, then the cinema ethnographer can examine this corpus of texts to see which narrative motifs are salient within a particular culture. In concert with the interviews and discussions advocated within the cultural context, we may verify or dispel the importance of these motifs.

Finally, we may explore the issues surrounding coding. In reality the issue involves two larger questions: one is what one needs to know in order to understand a particular culture and its visual iconography; the other has to do with the issues involved with hiding cultural materials, of the risks involved with expressing certain ideas or cultural artifacts.

Once we have compiled this data, we can begin to discuss how much *ethnic-ness* any single film is expressing. The results of which, I believe, offer an understanding of popular cinema from the point of view of the culture that produces it. As I noted at the beginning of the last chapter, many of the films which my informants cited to me are not

necessarily the ones I would have chosen, likewise, not a single individual cited many of the films I would have chosen. We need to work within what the culture itself identifies as salient, and not put ourselves above the material, and recreate colonialist analysis, whereby the scholar is in sole control of the knowledge being presented.

Does this methodology work? Or does it work for any culture other than Jewish culture? The truth is I do not know. I *believe* it does. But the only way to be sure is to give me the benefit of the doubt, and to apply this methodology elsewhere. In developing this thesis, and trying to choose a group to use as a case study, I went through a number of options: First Nations cinema, African American cinema, gay and lesbian cinema, Newfoundland cinema, or even horror movie fans cinema. My being Jewish largely informed my selection of Jewish cinema, and therefore I felt I could approach the subject from more of an insider's perspective. It is only through further studies of cultural groups and their cinema that this "ethnography of seeing" as a methodology can be improved upon and be understood as valid.

FILM AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:

Finally, I want to reiterate Mark Slobin's informing question: "what has film got to do with folklore?" (Slobin: 229) For Slobin, the answer was predicated upon a bounded cultural cinema made by and for a particular group, in this case, the Yiddish language cinema (Slobin: 229-230). And in a very obvious sense, Slobin is correct; folklorists should pay attention to ethnically bounded cinemas as expressions of those

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cultures. The problem is that all cinema is bounded, in one sense or another, within

particular cultural groups.

It is worth quoting that well-known chestnut by Alan Dundes to underline this

point:

> The term 'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at
> least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is — it
> could be a common occupation, language, or religion — what is important
> is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which
> it calls its own. In theory, a group must consist of at least two persons, but
> generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group
> may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common
> core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group
> to have a sense of identity (Dundes, 1983b: 242).

Since, as Dundes noted, any group of people can be considered folk, and that people

make films, then the logical conclusion is that all cinema is, in some respect "folk

cinema". But, in order for such a distinction to be useful in understanding how culture

operates in its particularities, the group itself needs to be defined before we can say that

its cinema was "folk". The repercussions of Dundes's statement is that any manifestation

of a member of "the folk" will demonstrate to some degree the cultural identity of that

group. This belief is the assumption behind an ethnography of seeing: that by studying a

group's cinema, one has access to the group's identity.

Cultural identity is the basis of folklore studies. Both Alan Dundes and Elliott

Oring have argued that the folk artifact (verbal, material, and customary — or in this case,

cinematic) are manifestations of cultural identities, and that regardless of what theoretical

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names we give to what we do, that fundamental process has remained the same (Dundes,

1983b: 258; Oring, 1994: *passim*; also see the responses to Oring by Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett, 1994 and Glassie). Laurie Honko concurred:

> Far from being a new direction or concern in folklore studies, identity has
> always been a central concern — in fact, *the* central concern — of the
> field. The definition of folklore has been anchored to a concept of identity.
> That is tell as to [sic.] an individual manifesting or describing core
> elements of group behaviour, sacred values, preferred attitudes or the
> repertoire of traditional features selected from the collective tradition.
> Describing group identities means selecting symbols and metaphors. It is
> of crucial importance that we as researchers do not make these selections,
> and that our verbalisations of identity feeling are governed by selections
> made by members of the group studied (Honko: 8).

An ethnography of seeing recognizes the crux of Honko's position: what is in fact an

identity marker within all forms of culture, including popular cinema, needs to be decided

by the cultural practitioners themselves, and not decided upon etically by the scholarly

community.

As I noted in Chapter Three, and which Dundes above further reiterates, not

everyone in the community is going to know the entire cultural repertoire. By working

within what McLaughlin called "vernacular theory," by listening to cultural practitioners

engaged in cultural dynamics, a degree of consensus can be determined. It does not matter

whether the cultural selections made necessarily make etic sense, so long as they make

emic sense.

> What makes a system out of the identity symbols is not any logical, in the
> sense of rational, relationship among them. The meanings that they have
> fit into a complex that is significant to the people concerned. The

meanings amount to a self-definitions and an image of themselves as they have performed in the course of history. The selection of cultural elements for symbolic reference goes on in terms of the character of the image; the frequent shifts in emphasis are part of the process of maintenance in response to alterations in the environment (Edvard Spicer quoted in Honko: 17).

Films as artefacts are cultural symbols, and those symbols will make cultural sense in praxis.

Laurie Honko recognized that within the cultural nexus, a phenomenological, experience-based approach is the more accurate for those who participate within the culture: "The scene of identity experience stands out more than the actual persons and events, cultural heroes and their deeds, sometimes recreated through ritual, music, dance, codified in art and literature" (Honko: 19). In many respects, this reflects what I argued in Chapter Four: the validity of artistic expressions is predicated upon the verisimilitude to cultural experiences. It does not matter, say, that Spielberg's Oskar Schindler is less history than Hollywood, but that the film captures a better sense of the experience of Auschwitz than other films had, validates the *artistic* experience.

Cinema is a symbolic manifestation of cultural identity based on the experience of that identity. The question we as ethnographers need to ask is not whether or not "film is folklore," but what can we understand about cultural groups by their cultural products, and include popular cinema in that category. So what has film got to do with folklore? Quite a bit, even beyond Slobin's "rare case" of a Yiddish language film.

GLOSSARY OF YIDDISH AND HEBREW WORDS:

Ashkenazi (pl. *Ashkenazim*) — "The name applied, since the sixteenth century, to the Jews of central and eastern Europe — ancestors of the vast majority of Jews in the United States" (Rosten, 1968: 19).

Brakha — blessing; "a large number of Jewish blessings revolve around food; indeed the rabbis believed that eating food without first blessing God was a form of stealing ..., since the blessing is the only 'payment' God demands for the food He provides Man" (Telushkin, 1991: 668)

Bubee — "Affectional term of endearment, the diminutive of *bubeleh* ... Grandmother; the affectionate diminutive, really 'little grandma.' (*Baba*, which means midwife or grandmother in Russian and other Slavic tongues, was often used in addressing any old woman, whether one's grandmother or not)" (Rosten, 1968: 53).

Bar (Bat) Mitzvah — "the ceremony held in a synagogue or temple, in which the thirteen year old boy [or twelve year old girl in the case of a *bat mitzvah*] reaches the status, and assumes the duties, of a 'man'. It is held on the Saturday closest to the boy's thirteenth birthday" (Rosten, 1968: 32).

Cantor (also *chazzen, khazn*) — "The trained professional singer who assists the rabbi in religious services" (Rosten, 1968: 79)

Challa — "A braided loaf of white bread, glazed with egg white, very soft, delicate in flavor" (Rosten, 1968: 68).

Haggadah — Hebrew for "tale" or "telling". On the one hand, this refers to "the enormous repository of Jewish allegorical material, including historical episodes, theology, folktales, fable, prayers, parables, witticisms, anecdotes, ruminations, sermons, etc., etc., found in the *Talmud*"; and on the other hand is "the narrative that is read aloud at the Passover *Seder* piecing together, from many sources, the story of Israel's bondage in, and flight from, Egypt" (Rosten, 1968:148).

Kaddish — "1. A prayer glorifying God's name, recited at the close of synagogue prayers; this is the most solemn and our most ancient of all Jewish prayers: 2. The mourner's prayer" (Rosten, 1968: 164).

Kiddush — "The prayer and ceremony that sanctifies the Sabbath and Jewish holy days" (Rosten, 1968: 179).

Klezmer (pl. *klezmorim*) — "An informal group of musicians; many wee itinerants who went from village to village, in eastern Europe, playing traditional music, folk songs, folk dances, solemn hymns before prayer" (Rosten, 1968: 185).

Kosher — "Fit to eat, because ritually clean according to the dietary laws" (Rosten, 1968: 193).

Kvell — "To beam-with-immense-pride-and-pleasure, most commonly over an achievement of a child or grandchild; to be so proudly happy 'your buttons can burst'" (Rosten, 1968: 201).

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Landsman (pl. *landsleit*) — "Someone who comes from the same home town — i.e. in Europe" (Rosten, 1968: 207).

Mamaloshen — "Mother tongue" or more precisely, "Mother's language or mother's tongue;" "Hebrew was the father's language, since the holy books were in Hebrew, and only Jewish males were taught to read. Yiddish became known as 'the mother's tongue,' the language of the home" (Rosten, 1968: 223).

Mazel tov — "'Congratulations!' or 'Thank God!' rather than its literal meaning: 'Good luck'" (Rosten, 1968: 227).

Menorah — "The *menorah* most commonly referred to is the eight-branched candelabrum lit on *Chanukah*, the Feast of Lights" (Rosten, 1968: 236).

Mentschlekhkeyt — "Ethical behavior," particularly from Jews (Telushkin, 1991: 514).

Mitzvah — "A meritorious act, one that expresses God's will; a 'good work,' a truly virtuous, kind, considerate, ethical deed" (Rosten, 1968: 252).

Naches — "Proud, pleasure, special joy — particularly from the achievements of a child. Jews use *naches* to describe the glow of pleasure-plus-pride that only a child can give to its parents..." (Rosten, 1968: 261).

Payez — "The long, unshorn ear-ringlet hair and sideburns-locks worn by very Orthodox Jewish males" (Rosten, 1968: 287).

Seder — Passover ceremonial meal. "The traditional Seder has more rituals than any other Jewish ceremonial meal. Most important, participants are expected to read through the *Haggadah*, a short book detailing the story of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. At the Seder, participants are supposed to lean on pillows and recline in their chairs, in the style of free men of leisure" (Telushkin, 1991: 585).

Sefer Torah — "The scroll containing the Five Books of Moses that is kept in the Ark at the front of a synagogue or temple" (Rosten, 1968: 317).

Sephardi (adj. *Sephardic*, pl. *Sephardim*) — "Spanish and Portugese Jews, and the descendants of the Jews of Spain and Portugal" (Rosten, 1968: 318).

Schlimazel — "A chronically unlucky person; someone for whom nothing seems to go right or turn out well; a born 'loser.' ... The twelfth-century poet Abraham ibn Ezra ... described the *schlimazel's* lot when he wrote: 'If I sold lamps,/ The sun./ In spite./ Would shine at night' " (Rosten, 1968: 352).

Shabbes — The Jewish Sabbath.

Shadchan — "A professional matchmaker" (Rosten, 1968: 329).

Shiksa — "1. A non-Jewish woman, especially a young one [offensive]; 2. (As used, on occasion, by Orthodox Jews) A Jewish woman who is not Orthodox, pious, observing, does not keep a *kosher* household, etc." (Rosten, 1968: 346).

Shiva — "The seven solemn days of mourning for the dead, beginning immediately after the funeral, when Jews 'sit *shiva*' in the home of the deceased" (Rosten, 1968: 347).

Shmaltz — "1. Cooking fat: melted or rendered fat — usually, chicken fat; 2. 'Corn.' pathos; maudlin and mawkish substance: excessive sentimentality; overly

emotional mush; sugary banality" (Rosten, 1968: 355).

Shoah — Hebrew work for the Holocaust.

Shtetl — "Little city, small town, village — in particular, the Jewish communities of eastern Europe, where the culture of the *Ashkenazim* flourished (before World War II)" (Rosten, 1968: 373).

Shtibl — "House of prayer of hasidim, usually consisting of a single room" (Mintz: 449).

Shund — "A term of contempt indicating literary or theatrical 'trash' and denoting variously an inept mishmash, a vulgar display, a mass-produced trifle, or a piece of sentimental claptrap. *Shund* encompasses the full range of Yiddish kitsch ..." (Hoberman, 1991: 206).

Simcha — "1. A happy occasion; a celebration. ... 2. A great pleasure" (Rosten, 1968: 384).

Tallis — "Prayer shawl, used by males at prayer at religious services" (Rosten, 1968: 389).

Talmud — "The *Talmud* is a massive and monumental compendium of sixty-three books: the learned debates, dialogues, conclusions, commentaries, commentaries upon commentaries, commentaries upon commentaries *upon* commentaries, of the scholars who for over a thousand *years* interpreted the *Torah* ... and applied its teachings to problems of law, ethics, ceremony, traditions" (Rosten, 1968: 393).

Torah — "The Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy" (Rosten, 1968: 408).

Trayf — "An animal not slain according to the ritual laws and by an authorized *shochet* (ritual slaughterer); any food which is not *kosher*" (Rosten, 1968: 410).

Yarmulke — "The skullcap worn by observing Jewish males" (Rosten, 1968: 426).

Yiddishkeyt — "Both the culture that is embodied in the Yiddish language and a standard of ethical conduct that preserves the essence of Judaism without the requirements of ritual and law" (Wisse: 29).

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Alien. 1979. Dir. Ridley Scott. With Tom Skerritt, Sigourney Weaver, John Hurt, Ian Holm, Harry Dean Stanton, Yaphet Kotto, and Veronica Cartwright. 20th Century Fox. 117 min.

Amerikaner Shadchan [American Matchmaker]. 1940. Dir Leo G. Ulmer. With Rosetta Bialis, Leo Fuchs, Judith Abarbanel, Yudel Dubinsky, and Wolf Mercur. National Centre for Jewish Film. 87 min.

Ani Ohev Otach Rosa [I Love You Rosa]. 1972. Dir. Moshe Mizrachi. With Michel Bat-Adam. Ergo Media. 77 min.

Annie Hall. 1977. Dir. Woody Allen. With Woody Allen, Diane Keaton, and Tony Roberts. United Artists. 91 min.

Apocalypse Now. 1979. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. With Marlon Brando, Robert Duvall, Martin Sheen, Frederic Forrest, Larry Fishburne, and Dennis Hopper. Paramount. 150 min.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. 1974. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. With Richard Dreyfuss, Micheline Lanctot, Jack Warden, Randy Quaid, and Denholm Elliott. International Cinemedia Centre. 121 min.

Avalon. 1990. Dir. Barry Levinson. With Aidan Quinn, Elizabeth Perkins, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Joan Plowright, Lou Jacobi, and Leo Fuchs. Tri-Star. 126 min.

Avanti Popolo. 1986. Dir. Rafi Bukaee. With Salim Daw and Suhel Hadad. Ofer Ben Aharon. 84 min.

Bambi. 1942. Dir. David Hand. Animated. Walt Disney. 69 min.

Beauty and the Beast. 1991. Dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. Animated. Walt Disney. 85 min.

La Belle et la bete [Beauty and the Beast]. 1946. Dir. Jean Cocteau. With Jean Marais, Josette Day, and Marcel André. DisCina. 95 min.

Bene Israel. 1994. Dir. Karen Nathanso and Jean-Francois Fernandez. Documentary. [n.d. - Toronto Jewish Film Festival 1996]. 33 min.

Blazing Saddles. 1973. Dir Mel Brooks. With Cleavon Little, Gene Wilder, Harvey Korman, Madeline Kahn, and Mel Brooks. Warner Brothers. 93 min.

A Brivele der Mamen [A Letter to Mother]. 1938. Dir Joseph Green. With Lucy Gehrman, Misha Gehrman, Max Bozyk, Edmund Zayenda, and Alexander Stein. Green Films. 100 min.

Cabaret. 1972. Dir. Bob Fosse. With Liza Minelli, Michael York, Joel Gray and Marisa Berenson. Allied Artists. 128 min.

Carpati: 50 Miles, 50 Years. 1996. Dir. Yale Strom. Documentary. New Yorker Films. 90 min.

Carrie. 1976. Dir. Brian De Palma. With Sissy Spacek. Piper Laurie, John Travolta, William Katt, and Nancy Allen. United Artists. 97 min.

Crimes and Misdemeanors. 1989. Dir. Woody Allen. With Woody Allen, Mia Farrow,

Alan Alda, Martin Landau, and Anjelica Huston. Orion. 104 min.

Crossing Delancey. 1988. Dir. Joan Micklin Silver. With Amy Irving, Reizl Bozyak, Peter Riegert, Sylvia Miles, and Jeroen Krabbé. Warner Brothers. 98 min.

The Deer Hunter. 1978. Dir. Michael Cimino. With Robert De Niro, Meryl Streep, Christopher Walken, John Savage and John Cazale. Universal. 183 min.

Deliverance. 1972. Dir. John Boorman. With Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight, Ronny Cox and Ned Beatty. Warner Brothers. 109 min.

Dirty Dancing. 1987. Dir. Emile Ardolino. With Jennifer Grey, Patrick Swayze, Jerry Orbach, Cynthia Rhodes, and Jack Weston. Vestron. 97 min.

Dumbo. 1941. Dir. Ben Sharpsteen. Animated. Walt Disney. 64 min.

The Evil Dead. 1983. Dir. Sam Raimi. With Bruce Campbell, Ellen Sandweiss and Sarah York. New Line. 85 min.

Exodus. 1960. Dir. Otto Preminger. With Paul Newman, Eva Marie Saint, Ralph Richardson, Peter Lawford, Lee J. Cobb, Sal Mineo and David Opatoshu. United Artists. 213 min.

Fantasia. 1940. Production Supervisor Ben Sharpsteen. Animated. Walt Disney. 120 min.

Fiddler on the Roof. 1971. Dir. Norman Jewison. With Topol, Norma Crane, Leonard Frey, Molly Picon, Paul Mann, Rosalind Harris, Michele Marsh, and Neva Small. Metro Goldwyn Meyer. 181 min.

The Fixer. 1968. Dir. John Frankenheimer. With Alan Bates, Dirk Bogarde, David Warner, and Ian Holm. Metro Goldwyn Meyer. 132 min.

Friday the 13th. 1980. Dir. Sean S. Cunningham. With Betsy Palmer, Adrienne King, and Kevin Bacon. Paramount. 95 min.

The Frisco Kid. 1979. Dir. Robert Aldrich. With Gene Wilder, Harrison Ford, and Leo Fuchs. Warner Brothers. 122 min.

Funny Girl. 1968. Dir. William Wyler. With Barbara Streisand, Omar Sharif, and Anne Francis. Columbia. 155 min.

Gentleman's Agreement. 1947. Dir. Elia Kazan. With Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire, John Garfield and Celeste Holm. 20th Century Fox. 118 min.

The Ghosts of Mississippi. 1996. Dir. Robert Reiner. With Alec Baldwin, Whoppie Goldberg, and James Woods. Columbia. 130 min.

Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini [*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*]. 1971. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. With Dominique Sanda, Lino Capolicchio, Helmut Berger, Fabio Testi and Romolo Valli. Facets Video. 95 min.

Giv'a 24 Eina Ona [*Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*]. 1955. Dir. Thorold Dickinson. With Edward Mulhare, Haya Harareet, Michael Wager, Michael Shillo, and Arieh Lavi. Facets Video. 102 min.

Gmar Gavi'a [*Cup Final*]. 1991. Dir. Eran Riklis. With Moshe Ivgi and Muhammed Bakri. First Run Features. 107 min.

Goodbye, Columbus. 1969. Dir. Larry Peerce. With Richard Benjamin, Ali MacGraw

and Jack Klugman. Paramount. 105 min.

The Graduate. 1967. Dir. Mike Nichols. With Dustin Hoffman, Anne Bancroft, and
Katherine Ross. Embassy Pictures. 105 min.

Grine Felder [Green Fields]. 1937. Dir. Edgar G. Ulmer and Jacob Ben-Ami. With
Michael Goldstein, Helen Beverly, Isidore Cashier, Anna Appel, Dena Drute, and
Herschel Bernardi. National Center for Jewish Film. 95 min.

Half the Kingdom. 1989. Dir. Francine Zukerman and Roushell Goldstien.
Documentary. National Film Board of Canada. 60 min.

Halloween. 1978. Dir. John Carpenter. With Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence, P.J.
Soles, and Kyle Richards. Media Home Entertainment. 93 min.

The Harder They Come. 1973. Dir. Perry Henzell. With Jimmy Cliff, Janet Barkley, Carl
Bradshaw, Ras Daniel Hartman, and Bobby Charlton. International Films. 98
min.

Hester Street. 1975. Dir. Joan Micklin Silver. With Steven Keats, Carol Kane, Mel Ho-
ward, Dorrie Kavanaugh, Doris Roberts and Stephen Strimpell. Facets Video. 92
min.

Inside God's Bunker. 1994. Micha X. Peled. Documentary. Moving Images. 40 min.

Ha-Italkim Ba'im [The Italians Are Coming]. 1996. Dir. Eyal Halfon. With Franco Nero,
Vincenzo Crocitti, and Asher Tzarfati. Cristaldifilms. 88 min.

The Jazz Singer. 1927. Dir. Alan Crosland. With Al Jolson, Warner Oland, May
McAvoy, and William Demarest. Warner Brother. 89 min.

The Jolson Story. 1946. Dir. Alfred E. Green. With Larry Parks, Evelyn Keyes, William
Demarest, Bill Goodwin, and Tamara Shayne. Warner Brothers. 128 min.

Judgment at Nuremberg. 1961. Dir. Stanley Kramer. With Spencer Tracy, Burt
Lancaster, Richard Widmark, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Maximilian Schell,
Montgomery Clift, and William Shatner. United Artists. 178 min.

Julia. Dir. Fred Zinnemann. 1977. With Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave, Maximilian
Schell, and Jason Robarts. 20th Century Fox. 118 min.

Ha - Kayitz Shel Aviya [The Summer of Aviya]. 1988. Dir. Eli Cohen. With Gila Alma-
gor, Kaipo Cohen, and Eli Cohen. Ergo Video. 95 min.

Der Khazn Zindl [The Cantor's Son]. 1937. Dir. Ilya Motylef. With Judith Abarbanel,
Helen Beverly, Isidore Cashier, Moyshe Oysher, Michael Rosenberg, and
Florence Weiss. National Center for Jewish Film. 90. min.

M. Klein. 1977. Dir. Joseph Losey. With Alain Delon, Jeanne Moreau, and Michael
Lonsdale. Columbia. 122 min.

Kwaidan. 1964. Dir. Masaki Kobayashi. With Rentaro Mikuni, Michiyo Aratama, Keiko
Kishi, Tatsuya Nakadai, and Takashi Shimura. Janus Films. 164 min.

The Last Klezmer. 1993. Dir. Yale Strom. Documentary. New York Films. 83 min.

The Last Picture Show. 1971. Dir. Peter Bogdanovich. With Timothy Bottoms, Jeff
Bridges, Ben Johnson, Cloris Leachman, Ellen Burstyn, and Cybill Shepherd.
Columbia. 118 min.

Layla Lavan [*White Night*]. 1996. Dir. Amon Zadok. With Amon Zakok, Shalom
Shmuelov, Liora Rivlin, Shmil Ben Ari, and Sharon Alexander. Creative Films.
92 min.

Leon, the Pig Farmer. 1992. Dir. Vadim Jean and Gary Sinyor. With Mark Frankel,
Janet Suzman, Brian Glover, Connie Booth, Maryam d'Abo, and Gina Bellman.
Unapix Films. 98 min.

Leprechaun. 1993. Dir. Mark Jones. With Warwick Davis, Jennifer Aniston, and Ken
Olandt. Trimark. 92 min.

Leprechaun 2. 1994. Dir. Rodman Flender. With Warwick Davis, Charlie Heath,
Shevonne Durkin, and Sandy Baron. Trimark. 90 min.

Leprechaun 3. 1995. Dir. Brian Trenchard-Smith. With Warwick Davis, Lee Armstrong,
and Michael Callan. Trimark. 90 min.

Leprechaun 4: In Space. 1996. Dir. Brian Trenchard-Smith. With Warwick Davis,
Debbe Dunning, Rebekah Carlton, and Brent Jasmer. Trimark. 90 min.

Lost in Yonkers. 1993. Dir. Martha Coolidge. With Richard Dreyfuss, Mercedes Ruehl,
Irene Worth, and David Strathairn. Columbia. 112 min.

Mamele [*Little Mother*]. 1938. Dir. Joseph Green and Konrad Tom. With Molly Picon,
Edmund Zayenda, Max Bozyk, Gertrude Bullman, and Simcha Fostel. Green
Films. 100 min.

Mar Mani [*Mr. Mani*]. 1996. Dir. Ram Loevy. With Yarden Bar-Kochba, Max Digby,
Yehoram Gaon, Olaf Hensel-Kirscht, and Mark Ivanir. First Channel, IBA, and
Israel TV. 300 min.

Me'Ahorei Hasoragim [*Beyond the Walls*]. 1984. Dir Uri Barbash. With Amon Zadok,
Muhamad Bakri, and Assi Dayan. Facets Video. 103 min.

Miller's Crossing. 1990. Dir. Joel Coen. With Gabriel Byrne, Albert Finney, Marcia Gay
Harden, and John Turturro. 20th Century Fox. 115 min.

Les Misérables. 1995. Dir. Claude Lelouch. With Jean-Paul Belmondo, Michel
Boujenah, Alessandra Martines, and Phillippe Léotard. Warner Brothers. 178 min.

Ost und West [*East and West*]. 1924. Dir. Sidney Goldin. With Sidney Goldin, Molly
Picon, and Jacob Kalish. National Center for Jewish Film. 85 min.

The Pawnbroker. 1965. Dir. Sidney Lumet. With Rod Steiger, Geraldine Fitzgerald,
Brock Peters, and Jaime Sanchez. Landau Company. 116 min.

Pinocchio. 1940. Dir. Ben Sharpsteen and Hamilton Luske. Animated. Walt Disney. 88
min.

Pinocchio's Revenge. 1996. Dir. Kevin Tenney. With Lewis Van Bergen, Ivan Gueron,
Thomas Wagner, Janis Chow, and Ron Canada. Trimark. 96 min.

Platoon. 1986. Dir. Oliver Stone. With Tom Berenger, Willem Dafoe, Charlie Sheen,
Forest Whitaker, and Johnny Depp. Hemdale Film Corporation. 120 min.

Playing for Time. 1980. Dir. Daniel Mann. With Vanessa Redgrave, Jane Alexander,
Maud Adams, Viveca Lindfors, Melanie Mayron, and Verna Bloom. Cineplex-
Odeon Home Video. 150 min.

The Plot Against Harry. 1989 [1969]. Dir. Michael Roemer. With Martin Priest, Ben
     Lang, Maxine Woods, Henry Nemo, Jacques Taylor, Jean Leslie, and Sandra Ka-
     zan. New Yorker Films. 80 min

Portnoy's Complaint. 1972. Dir. Ernest Lehman. With Richard Benjamin, Karen Black,
     Lee Grant, and Jill Clayburgh. Warner Brothers. 101 min.

Der Purimshpiler [The Jester]. 1937. Dir. Joseph Green and Jan-Nowina Przybylski.
     With Zygmund Turkow, Miriam Kressyn, Hymie Jacobson, Max Bozyk, and
     Berta Litwina. Green Films. 90 min.

The Quarrel. 1991. Dir. Eli Cohen. With R. H. Thompson and Saul Rubinek. Atlantis
     Films. 88 min.

Rambo: First Blood Part II. 1985. Dir. George P. Cosmatos. With Sylvester Stallone,
     Richard Crenna, and Steven Berkoff. Tri-Star. 95 min.

The Re-Animator. 1985. Dir. Stuart Gordon. With Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, Robert
     Sampson, and David Gale. Empire Pictures. 86 min.

Rumpelstiltskin. 1995. Dir. Mark Jones. With John Ducey, Allyce Beasley, Tommy
     Blaze, Max Grodénchik, and Kim Johnston Ulrich. Spelling Films. 87 min.

Sallah Shabbati [Sallah]. 1965. Dir. Ephraim Kishon. With Topol, Geula Noni, Gila
     Almagor, Arik Einstein, Shraga Friedman, and Esther Greenberg. Ergo Video.
     105 min.

Scener ur ett Äktenskap [Scenes From a Marriage]. 1973. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. With
     Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson. Cinematograph. 168 min.

Schindler's List. 1993. Dir. Steven Spielberg. With Liam Neeson, Ben Kingsley, and
     Ralph Fiennes. Universal. 195 min.

September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill. 1995. Dir. Larry Weinstein. With Lou
     Reed, Nick Cave, William S. Burroughs, and Elvis Costello. Rhombus
     International. 86 min.

The Serpent and the Rainbow. 1988. Dir. Wes Craven. With Bill Pullman, Cathy Tyson
     and Zakes Mokae. Universal. 98 min.

Shoah. 1985. Dir. Claude Lanzmann. Documentary. New Yorker Films. 503 min.

Snow White. 1997. Dir. Michael Cohn. With Sigourney Weaver, Sam Neill, and Monica
     Keena. Polygram Filmed Entertainment. 100 min.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. 1937. Dir. Ben Sharpsteen. Animated. Walt Disney.
     83 min.

Sophie's Choice. 1982. Dir. Alan J. Pakula. With Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, and Peter
     MacNicol. Universal. 157 min

A Stranger Among Us. 1992. Dir. Sidney Lumet. With Melanie Griffith, Eric Thal, John
     Pankow, and Tracy Pollan. Propaganda Films. 109 min.

The Ten Commandments. 1956. Dir. Cecil B. De Mille. With Charlton Heston, Yul Bryn-
     ner, Anne Baxter, Edward G. Robinson, Yvonne De Carlo, Nina Foch, Vincent
     Price, and John Carradine. Paramount. 220 min.

Tevye. 1939. Dir. Maurice Schwartz. With Maurice Schwartz, Rebecca Weintraub,

Miriam Riselle, and Leon Liebgold. National Center for Jewish Film. 96 min.

Tkies Khaf [*The Vow*]. 1937. Dir. Henryk Szabó. With Max Bozyk, Itskhok Grundberg, Dina Halpern, Kurt Katch, Moyshe Lipman, and Zygmund Turkow. Green Films. 90 min.

A Tickle in the Heart. 1996. Dir. Stefan Schwietert. Documentary. Ventura Films. 90 min.

Titanic. 1997. Dir. James Cameron. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Billy Zane, and David Warner. Lightstorm Entertainment. 194 min.

Tokyo Monogatari [*Tokyo Story*]. 1953. Dir. Yasujiro Ozu. With Chishu Ryu, Chieko Higashiyama, So Yamamura, Haruko Sugimura, and Setsuko Hara. New Yorker Films. 134 min.

Triumph des Willens [*Triumph of the Will*]. 1935. Dir. Leni Riefenstahl. Documentary. Connoisseur Video Collection. 110 min.

Welcome to the Dollhouse. 1996. Dir. Todd Solondz. With Heather Matarazzo, Eric Mabius, Brendan Sexton Jr., Telly Pontidis, and Herbie Duarte. Sony Pictures Classics. 87 min.

When a Stranger Calls. 1979. Dir. Fred Walton. With Carol Kane, Charles Durning, Colleen Dewhurst, Rachel Roberts. Melvin Simons Productions. 97 min.

When Harry Met Sally .... 1989. Dir. Robert Reiner. With Billy Crystal, Meg Ryan, Carrie Fisher, and Bruno Kirby. Columbia. 95 min.

The Wizard of Oz. 1939. Dir. Victor Fleming. With Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley, and Margaret Hamilton. Metro Goldwyn Mayer. 101 min.

Yentl. 1983. Dir. Barbara Steisand. With Barbara Streisand, Mandy Patinkin, Amy Irivng, and Nehemiah Persoff. Metro Goldwyn Meyer. 134 min.

Yidl Mitn Fidl [*Yiddle With His Fiddle*]. 1936. Dir. Joseph Green and Jan-Nowina Przybylski. With Molly Picon, Max Bozyk, Leon Liebgold, Simcha Fostel, and Dora Fakiel. Green Films. 92 min.

You, Me, and Jerusalem. 1995. Dir. Micha X. Peled and George Khleifi. Documentary. Moving Images. 60 min.

Zelig. 1983. Dir. Woody Allen. With Woody Allen and Mia Farrow. Orion. 79 min.

Zohar: Mediterranean Blues. 1993. Dir. Eran Riklis. With Shaul Mitzrahi and Gabi Anrami. Movit Ltd. 116 min.