

Stephen Dwoskin and Jewish Masculinity¹

“Often, masculinity is employed as a mechanism for social organization myths and archetypes of masculinity are used to categorize individuals according to various stereotypes within a hierarchical system whereby a certain “ideal” masculinity (typically white and heterosexual) is presented as the apex of power” (Mckinley, 2015:3)

“In part, Jewish culture demystifies European gender ideologies by reversing their terms, which is not, I hasten to emphasize, a liberatory process in itself but can be mobilized – strategically - for liberation.” (Boyarin, 1997:xxi).

Stephen Dwoskin’s late film *Sun and Moon* (2003) was conceptualised through the traditional Fairy Tale of Beauty and the Beast. The film is an elliptical version of the famous story, stripped of all narrative except the basic requirements of the existential presence and experience of the protagonists in the moment, namely that of the young beauty and old beast. In his vision of this film Dwoskin embodies the beast as a figure of frightening and frightened abjection. There is an undertow of threat as a low-level creation of mood. The lighting is low, full of shadows. There is no direct contact between subjects moving through an interior domestic space, each in isolation. There is no dialogue, merely growls and howls, the sounds of a storm outside. The sound is mostly incidental banging and knocking, amplified by the slow motion building towards music as a finale to add to the poignancy, mixed by the composer Phillipe Ciompi. Throughout much of the film we see the beast flailing about on a bed, the sound of his voice in slow motion renders it a beastly growl. Other times he is moving slowly or just sitting up breathing heavily, working hard to draw breath from what must be a CPAP machine. It is a dark film of a man alone, abject and alienated. The world outside the house is represented, as often in the Jewish world, as threatening, through the images of a stormy night, trees waving in the howling wind; a full moon. Dwoskin plays the beast as himself. The latent violence in the film never comes to fruition but conversely ends in the gentle poignancy of the young woman’s hand reaching out to touch Dwoskin’s own hand, having overcome her fear and distaste for his body. Ultimately he craves kindness and connection. This is expressionist cinema, with many possible readings.

Stephen Dwoskin, the acclaimed film maker was born in Brooklyn in 1939 into a family of working class Russian Jewish heritage that was culturally Jewish, but not religious. He contracted Polio at the age of 9, initially had to use an iron lung and never recovered the use of his legs. He received medical care due to his father’s membership of the garment workers union that guaranteed medical support. Tragically he had wanted to become a dancer like

his beloved grandfather, however that was clearly not to be, although he had a lifelong interest in movement and the body born not just from his disability but of his love of dance.

Dwoskin's film catalogue constitutes around 50 films that are diverse in their cinematic language and approach that cross the boundaries that usually delineate a film maker's reputation and audience: that of auteur Cinema, experimental and Avant Garde film. His work also encompassed a breadth that spanned from narrative to found footage and documentary and from feature films to low budget shorts at different points in his career. He was commissioned by the BFI, Channel 4, ZKH TV station in Germany and when there was no alternative, he self-funded several films. Given the scope of his films, the corresponding narrowness of the writing about his work in the anglophone work is surprising. The main critical focus even now is on the sexualised male gaze. My own text aims to offer a more complex approach through a close reading of sections of the films *Sun and Moon* (2007) and *Behindert* (1974), analysed in tandem with a range of theoretical readings on the Jewish man and disability to think through Dwoskin's sometimes challenging relationship to heterosexual desire in film and to widen the scope of possibility for thinking about Dwoskin and his work. I will also draw on some literary fiction from the period of Dwoskin's youth in the 1950s and 1960s that is helpful to give a picture of the specific representation and self-representation of the Jewish Community in the United State from which he emerged.

Like many artists of his generation, Dwoskin believed in the liberatory promise of universalism and didn't directly discuss Jewishness in his work, although he and I discussed anti-Semitism, Jewish culture, Jewish history and of course Jewish food! We both came from an Ashkenazi background, my grandmother was from Brooklyn and my father was also from a working-class garment maker's background, and like Dwoskin, contracted polio as a child. Through these converging family experiences, we developed conversations, not just around art but also how this might intersect with his visual sensibility. I grew to understand some of the complexities of self that will inform my argument here. Furthermore, despite the lack of explicit content, I would like to draw together some theorisations of disability and Jewishness to explore some of the strands of subjectivity I see in his work. The films that I discuss are a useful exemplar of Dwoskin's preoccupations with embodiment, expressionism and existentialism. *Sun and Moon* (2007) particularly is a useful film to think about how these issues might interlace with Dwoskin's Jewishness and is part of a wider project to address the dearth of interpretive mechanisms applied to this rich, multi-layered work.

In my chapter on *Behindert* I wrote that Dwoskin considered his disability as merely a more extreme version of the self-estrangement that is a normative condition of humankind. He was a great fan of Kristeva's book *Strangers to Ourselves* and contrived to work through Kristeva possibly as a way of universalising his own sense of estrangement but also his relationship to his own body. Much of his close alignments in literature such as Beckett

and Joyce as well as theory, such as Kristeva and Sartre or Camus indicate Dwoskin's desire to make sense of his estrangement from other people, and his rejection of bourgeois norms.

That his disability is the 'prop' that gives life to the other preoccupations (the impossibility of a love fulfilled) is not surprising, given his expressionist tendenciesⁱ. This physical differentiation he considered as merely a more extreme version of the so-called normative condition of being as self-estrangement and situates the nub of the paradox that fuelled his work. He understood this paradox psychoanalytically, existentially and metaphorically and is also at the root of his preoccupation with desire in his films.

(Garfield,2017)

Sun and Moon is a film of three protagonists. Dwoskin himself; a young woman and an older woman. The image of Dwoskin the beast, bloated stomach, breathing mask, wasted motionless legs, is in direct contrast to the young woman, fair and flawless looking straight out at the viewer. Hers is the first face we see, cropped closely so that we don't see the shape of the face nor the hairline. She is not easily identifiable as a woman. It is her youth and blond colouring that we notice. Hers is an active gaze, looking through the camera out into the world, interacting with the viewer directly. This outward and active gaze is a key feature of Dwoskin's work. He is interested in communicating directly with the viewer through his protagonists looking out. We first see the beast with his face filling the screen, also cropped closely, side on, resting on a pillow. The faciality is primal. He is sleeping. Just his eye and a part of the breathing mask is visible, his eye, with his age, has a somewhat reptilian appearance, adding to the beastliness – and possibly referencing also the absurd antisemitic stereotype propagated by David Ike, of the Jews being lizards really. The breathing mask and machine also amplifies the sound of his breathing which further positions him outside of the normative or the natural and differentiates him from the young beauty whose face is devoid of makeup – in all its natural and youthful beauty (more 'Darth Vader' than man). The camera lingers on his passive, sleeping face for some time. In this film we are looking at a series of inversions: the first one being that of an active woman and passive man.

The next shot is of the face of the older woman, scrunched in despair, screaming in slow motion, mouth open, reminiscent of Paula Rego's series of paintings entitled *Dog Woman*. Like the younger woman, she is active, looking out at the viewer but we don't know who she is exactly – housekeeper, procuress? His alter ego? Or his captor. In the film she serves as a buffer that disrupts the neat symmetry of the other two protagonists and ensuring gender stereotypes are not pervasive. Through this manoeuvre the older woman becomes the subject: both 'the beauty' and 'the beast' are the objects to be equally scrutinised.

Dwoskin's work was marked by a combination of his disability and the existential philosophies that was part of the post war populist ethos of his emergence as a mid-twentieth century heterosexual male artist coming from a

working-class Jewish background. From this background, his subject position as a man was central to his oeuvre but has not been well understood. Even less understood is the ways in which his multiple disadvantages – as Jewish, working class and disabled infused his sense of self as a man established a singular vision that, to be fully understood, requires some unpacking. A singular block to a nuanced and complex study of Dwoskin’s work has been the centrality of a specific approach to film studies derived from the 1980s discourses that were heavily reliant on a particular slant of Lacanian discourse as discussed in *Screen* magazine in the 1970s. The foundational text by Laura Mulvey has remained as a central motif without much problematisation in the popular imaginary. Jenny Chamarette discusses in some detail the important work in film theory and feminist film discourse that has served to ‘ghost’ Dwoskin from serious analysis in the Anglophone world in recent decades (Chamarette 2022). I will not repeat it here, suffice it to say that masculinity is often characterised largely as an exercise of power, the power of the gaze that disempowers women with Dwoskin as exemplar. The centrality of Mulvey still reverberates through anglophone film criticism. Chamarette problematises this reading through recent disability discourse and demonstrates how Dwoskin, as a Jewish, disabled man problematises those ways of analysing film. He does this both in his conceptualisation of self in his films and in his methodology of embodied film. His work, Chamarette argues was prescient and can be understood in a new and more generous way through the recent discourses of Crip Theory that disabled artists are embracing and that are being theorised in relation to their art work (Chamarette 22). It should be noted at this point that Mulvey’s initial draft of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* incorporated Dwoskin’s film *Trixie* as one of the case studies but was taken out when she decided that it should be a polemic. Mulvey herself explained on Dwoskin’s death that her approach, written as a feminist text in the early days of the second wave as a strategic manoeuvre, doesn’t take into account differences within masculinity “I regretfully left out the ‘Dwoskin section’ – partly for the sake of symmetry, partly because there’s no room for modification or nuance in a polemic” (Mulvey 2012 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/obituaries/stephen-dwoskin>) As Mulvey herself stated Dwoskin’s reputation suffered heavily through the often quite superficial use of this text that often leaves the nuanced complexities forgottenⁱⁱ. Mulvey’s argument was much more subtle and based on looking at Hitchcock, describing the visibility and invisibility of the camera in Hollywood narrative cinema specifically. This is ironic given that Dwoskin’s work had been at the heart of Mulvey’s thinking as it developed into *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. This is not widely known and if it is known, it is ignored as an inconvenient detail that assumes a universalist gender history and hegemonic power relations that needs recognising other differences and the intersectional subject position of a working class, Jewish disabled man from 20th Century Brooklyn.

“These intersecting and influential writings on experimental cinema and the gaze leave limited room on the record for feminist film reception and feminist film critique. Nonetheless, this does not prevent a

feminist history of critique to powerfully shape contemporary readings of Dwoskin's work." (Chamarette 2022)

Mulvey's point and reason for including Dwoskin initially, was to explore the ways in which Dwoskin's film problematised the power relations between 'the looker' and 'the looked at' through the intimacy and collaborative participation in his film *Trixie* and as a problematising exemplar set in opposition to the Hollywood example of the problems of mainstream cinema. In other words Mulvey was using Lacanian thinking to expand and deepen the critiques of Plato's cave to understand film. Most of Dwoskin's films can in fact be analysed through the problematisation of the power relations between 'the looker' and 'the looked at', transformed in his later films by the inclusion of himself in the film as both subject and object.

Another aspect that is missed and that allows for an assumed level playing field of gendered power, pertinent to this article, can be argued through what is now sometimes called "jewface". "Jewface" in Hollywood serves to elide Jewish difference as much as it is an exemplar of the difference of Jews. Until recently it wasn't even a 'thing'. However, the consistent use of non-Jews to play Jewish subjects in Hollywood does raise questions regarding the elision of Jewishness in understanding cultural voices that Nathan Abrams has consistently researched throughout his career. While the debate continues (<https://www.jewthink.org/2021/12/01/on-jewface/>) I would argue that in the case of Dwoskin, his Jewishness adds another dimension to the power relations between him and non-Jewish women in his films, particularly those who were positioned as the desired subjects. Jonathan Boyarin (Boyarin 1992: 80) critiques the relegation of Jewishness to a "biography effect", which is the approach I'm taking in this paper. That is not to say that Dwoskin does not hold power as a man, but that it has parameters that require consideration. Part of the problem of course is the whitening of Jews and the concomitant assumption that Jews are just WASPs with a different religious provenance. In the same essay, Boyarin continues to ask 'Why is it that the Otherness of Jews has tended to be occluded in Europe and America since WWII?' (ibid 86). His answer is to do with the required empathy demanded of the Holocaust as a European atrocity and how it is difficult to bring together both 'shared humanity and cultural Otherness' so he continues 'In popular-culture representations of the Holocaust, the particular horror of the Nazi genocide is emphasized by an image of Jews as normal Europeans, "just like us." ' (ibid, 86). The normalising of the Jew elides the history of focus on the Jewish body as monstrous and feminised. While this in many ways is a good thing, the long shadow of internalised shame, particularly for the Jews of the 20th Century should be acknowledged and considered. I am proposing that this occlusion is yet another reason for the short shrift given Dwoskin's films for those who dismiss his work as sexist. I will propose some new analysis that opens up a space that would further problematise the existing critiques of his films. So the misunderstanding regarding how to read power relations in cinematic work in relation to both race, disability and gender are key to full understanding of Dwoskin's films.

In *Sun and Moon* (2007) at approximately 11 minutes into the film, we see Dwoskin through a series of mirrors. His body is cut up by the rectangles of the mirrors. In one we see his masked head in silhouette. In the second mirror we see a fragment of his fleshy gut framed by the mirror's rectangle. His body image here is abstracted and fragmented. It is at first hard to make out what we are looking at. His breathing contraption is at the front of the shot, foregrounding the reliance on the machine as a hybrid - post human figure. The imagery is dark and shadowy. Some of the film is shot through a fish-eye lens adding to the sense of estrangement. It is only when he turns his lumbering body that it becomes clear what is being on display here. It is a reminder of the set up – this is a film – a representation of his image. We are looking at an image of a disabled man positioned as caught within the narrative of the disabled body and through the fragmented pieces of body objectified by being framed through mirrors, at a distance. He is there on a plate for the viewer to gawk at, laid before us, so that we can take in the body of this beast. Throughout the film he is on his bed immobilised. He is thus depicting his own body as not only on display for others but as fragmented and incomplete. This is an image that is designed to shock and attest itself as incompatibly different from the assumed perfection, or at least normality, of the viewer's body. Both women face the viewer and join 'our' gaze. Unlike Dwoskin the beast, who is always at a distance, unreachable and trapped in his body.

The figure of the monster has long been intertwined with Jewishness through its relationship with anti-Semitic images of Jews dating back to the middle-ages in Europe where Jews were considered monstrous (Gelbin 2019: 4) to the images within Jewish folklore of monsters and animals derived from the Kabbalah. Furthermore, Dwoskin would have been aware of the importance of the film *The Golem* (1922) within the 20th Century Jewish communities of Europe and also, as someone deeply engaged in the history of cinema. To be a monster is in keeping with Dwoskin's interest in crossing boundaries (he had a lifelong interest in HD and the film *Borderline* as an example of people living on the edge of society) and in many ways monsters are 'compulsive border crossers' existing in a liminal space (Idelson-Shein & Wiese, 2019) and as such is an apposite figure for Dwoskin to choose in his self-image, particularly as someone emerging out of his own uncanny bodily liminality where again and again Dwoskin frames his body through the camera as a large lump of flesh. This body, broken up by the mirrors (as metaphor for the broken, "disabled" body) dark and swarthy and immobile.

By contrast the young woman, "Beauty" is either seen as a full-face (fair of face) shot looking out at the viewer or as a complete subject walking towards the camera. She is pure and youthful. However, while his, the Beast's, body does not conform to the heteronormative expectations of masculinity nor really does the young woman. Her body, while seamless, and taught - is also androgynous. Her hair is cut short, in a "boyish" hairstyle, not either conforming to feminine imperatives, in opposition to the misshapen lumpiness of Dwoskin. So, while they are positioned as binary opposites in terms of age and youth, in terms of gender, so important to discourses around the male gaze, this is not so: the beauty is neither feminine, nor the beast masculine but both naked bodies circling

around each other in existential alienation, only finding brief comfort at the end with the touch of a hand to hand gesture.

Daniel Boyarin in 'Unheroic conduct' sets out a gendering of Jewish subjects whereby the men are 'meek' and 'feminised', the women are the bread winners and the ones who faced the challenges of the world. He also sets out a Jewish sexuality that goes beyond reproduction and sees humans as sexual subjects positing the cartesian split as alien to Jewish subjectivity. Judaism, according to Boyarin assumes 'the acceptance of fleshiness in its most material and lower-body forms as the embodiment of God's wisdom...and [defines] the human as his or her body' (as cited in Davison 2010:134). Boyarin continues to say (ibid 134) that 'the human race is marked from the very beginning by corporeality, difference, and heterogeneity. ...The midrashic reading of the text cited above presents the originary human person as dual sexed, as two sexes joined in one body. The splitting of the androgynous body ordains sexuality' (Boyarin, 1997:45) Furthermore, sexuality arises from *Yetzer Hara* (the evil inclination) which according to the rabbis is from within god's sphere (not outside of it as in Christianity). It is ironized by the rabbis as dialectical: they do not see desire as evil or to be suppressed. Instead, they argue that to do away with illicit sex you also destroy licit sex. In this way Sun and Moon can be interpreted clearly within the 'fleshly' descriptions of sexuality as described by the rabbis. In fact, many of Dwoskin's films demonstrate a dissolution of divisions between sex and other operations of the body, desire and existential anguish that would fit as well as the questioning and queering of gender binaries. (as also set out by Chamarette 2022)

Davidson discusses Modern Jewish masculinity as caught between the *Halachic* (that is, according to Jewish law) ideal of masculinity and the emancipatory *Haskalah* (the Enlightenment) ideal of manhood. This tension I would argue – and it bears repeating – situates Jewish manhood as a complex entity, how much more so when disability and post war assimilation is thrown into the mix.

Boyarin is at pains to point out, and I would too, that the aim is not to suggest that women and men were equal in Judaism or Jewish history, merely that these different gender expectations might serve to question assumptions of power in the cinema particularly in relation to the cinema of Stephen Dwoskin. Nor does the common readings of Dwoskin's work take into account the relationship between the 'failure' of masculinity that the disabled body represents in its 'lack' of musculature that is behind the Western ideal of manhood since the enlightenment establishment of ancient Greece as the measure of ideal (read normative) masculinity.

Dwoskin married young but the marriage didn't last. He studied art and became part of the Underground film movement, mixing, through his producer Emile de Antonio, with associates such as Andy Warhol, Jack Smith and Jonas Mekas – all fellow outsiders. Less known to the experimental film world is that Dwoskin was also as a successful graphic designer. He worked on the classic film *West Side Story* titles, brought in by Saul Bass and was

design editor of *Industrial Design* magazine, on the cusp of the 1950-1960s on Madison Avenue. Dwoskin did well in this environment. However, it was a place and time of hyper-masculinity. The series *Mad Men* (2007-2015) eloquently identified the prejudices of the time and place of what would have been Dwoskin's working environment: the sexism, the competitiveness - and the anti-Semitism. Importantly Jewish men at that time were also assimilating into those norms of masculinity as can be seen in models such as Norman Mailer, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow. Mary McKinley (2015:8) identifies in these authors an aggressive masculinity 'when each character's freedom to perform gender is prevented by actual institutional oppressions of perceived threats from racial and ethnic stereotyping to feminine and masculine "others" who complicate and confuse each male character's sense of his own masculine self'. She claims that through the internalisation of the masculine hegemonic trope of the time Jewish and Black men would overcompensate the perceived ideal through aggression and violence. McKinley focuses on key writers of the period for example Norman Mailer and the impact of existentialism on the requirement to transcend division through individual extremes of behaviour or attitude. Dwoskin was a product of this existential moment and himself saw art as a part of the fulfilment of man's drive to break down barriers between people through striving for an unfettered authenticity. Raw emotion was the key to breaking down bourgeois morals and a reimagining of the sexual self. However instead of aggression turned outwards as in Norman Mailer, Phillip Roth and Saul Bellow, instead of the macho mail who used aggression as a redemption of their masculinity 'to set himself up as an existential "sovereign subject" by destroying an "other" that prevents him from doing so' (McKinley 2015:9) the violence is turned inwards. In focusing on desire unfulfilled, on his own abjection and his inability to 'keep' a woman in his films and in his depictions in his late films of himself as a subject in BDSM practices. There is no redemption in Dwoskin's manhood as portrayed in *Behindert* (1974) or *Sun and Moon* (2007). He too, I would argue, was prevented from being able to 'perform gender' due to an anxiety of not being able to conform to the internalized narratives of masculinity imbued through the culture at large. Dwoskin's anxiety, entwined in being both Jewish and also disabled was heightened by a double negation of manhood (in fact one could say a triple negation: ethnicity, class and disability), and therefore took a different form than the hyper masculinisation of Mailer, Roth et al. Dwoskin's was an existentialism of resignation not one of hope.

By the 1960s according to David Brauner (2001) Jewishness had gained a sort of trendiness in the US even if at a cost. At the time of Dwoskin's youth in the 1950s Jewishness was marked by the imperatives and ambivalences of assimilation, characterised to some extent in Roth's novella, *Goodbye Columbus* written at the end of the 1950s. This novella focussed on a young male librarian who falls for an upper middle class Jewish woman he meets through his cousin and who is about to go to college. Over the summer the two start to date. He is lacking in professional ambition, instead he values intellectual ambition and sees himself as the erudite one and her as superficial and in fact intellectually a little lazy. He is ambivalent about this woman whom he desires and enjoys but treats with a measure of disdain. He has particular disdain for her 'fixed' nose and the superficiality of the desire for assimilation (and norms of beauty) that it represents. What he doesn't see is that he is as subject to

those norms as the next person - as someone who has fallen for her looks. Above all he has disdain for the lack of authenticity and compromises her family are willing to make in their assimilation and wealth. The running commentary within this short story of the continual jibes he makes towards her, is of the requirement to be 'fixed' as good enough for the gentile world. (Gilman, 2006). Within this context, the need to assimilate (both in class terms as well as ethnicity) was often performed on the body through plastic surgery on the Jewish nose.ⁱⁱⁱ Both the trendiness and the fixing testify to the ways in which the Jewish community in the US was transforming at the time of Dwoskin's coming of age – there may well be a connection between the drive to a kind of bodily normativity and the rising acceptability or even trendiness of the Jew, particularly the strident Jewish male artist who adopts the aggressive position. This was a type of masculinity that Dwoskin could never achieve.

As a Jewish man who was a survivor of polio Dwoskin's body could not be 'fixed' despite much medical intervention. He would have been noticeably different physically and would not conform to the usual expected standards of masculinity. He was in hospital from the age of 9-15 and so missed the normal schooling of most children. The hospital environment was quite brutal according to Dwoskin's accounts with regular fighting and bullying. Dwoskin himself would reminisce to me about the Korean war veterans, who became disabled through fighting in the war, would throw themselves off the roof of the hospital in their wheelchairs because they couldn't see any future for them, such was their personal investment in a normative male body. On being integrated back into his family at the age of 15 and a half, Dwoskin was shipped out of the neighbourhood to the only school with a lift, where he had to eat meals in the kitchen with the other disabled children and so didn't have the opportunity to form friendships with any of the children in the school. He describes how his only friend was another disabled man who had a car so they would drive around at weekends looking at the people walking on the sidewalk. He was thus isolated from normative society due to his body until art school. This everyday reality of his childhood as being othered must surely had a profound impact on his sense of self as a non-normative outsider. The inference from his autobiographical film *Trying to Kiss The Moon* (1994) is of a close knit Jewish family from which he is thrown into exile by the Polio. There is a link made between the physical exile of his illness and the subsequent inevitability of the geographical exile that was his lived reality.

Body differentiation is also replicated in the representation of disabled men in film noir from just a decade earlier, the period of Dwoskin's teenage psychic formation. Film Noir is discussed by Micheal Davidson (2008) as an exemplar of the fear of failed masculinity in the 1940s. Film Noir was an important reference point for Dwoskin's generation that can be seen in the writings of key feminist cinema theorists in the UK such as Laura Mulvey, Annette Kuhn and of course in Dwoskin's own interest in the genre (O'Donoghue). Polio, in Davison's analysis of Noir, is seen as an infantilising disease that robs men of their ability to have successful relationships.

[the] disease had a profound impact on young men in the highly masculinized

postwar period, creating “an infant-like dependency: temporary loss of control over bladder and bowel and of sexual function, confinement to bed and dependency on others for the most basic necessities” (Davison,19).

Davidson cites *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) at length and this film is a particularly useful as a reference point, as the main character Arthur Bannister is, like Dwoskin, a polio survivor. The film turns on two things, Bannister’s inadequacy as not being able to hold on to a desirable woman, except through money and nefarious means and his Jewishness. Of course, in line with anti-Semitic stereotype, one would be constitutive of the other.

The Lady from Shanghai (1947), an Orson Wells film is one of a series of ‘noir’ films that depict disabled men in the post war era in the US. Davidson discusses masculinity and Jewishness in relation to disability and film noir. He describes how *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) situates both polio and Jewishness together as markers of outsidership. He outlines the wider social stigma of the time of the polio survivor as a sign of the immigrant spreading diseases, given of popular racist stereotype abound at the time and the way that Jewishness and effeminacy is folded into this characterisation^{iv} (Davidson, 73). The film does this, according to Davidson, through the husband Arthur Bannister, portrayed as impotent and who therefore needs to keep his wife, the main character, by controlling her. His wife is played by Rita Hayworth, a considerable beauty. In short, Bannister is characterised as an unfit husband to the beautiful woman, his wife. This dynamic is played out by the narrator, a man portrayed as the Ur masculine man (and viewer) who deserves the woman in the film and of course who serves to highlight both the woman’s beauty and the inadequacy of the Bannister character. By contrast in the Dwoskin film from 1974, his first film exploring his disability, he turns the table on the representation. In *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) we are required to identify with the man who is besotted by the Hayworth character against her scheming disabled husband. In *Behindert* (1974), a film that depicts a relationship between a disabled man (Dwoskin) and an able bodied woman (Carola Regnier), we are required through the camera work to identify with Dwoskin who is considered unfit by the woman’s encounter with the day-to-day reality of the effects of his disability.

The sense of bodily inadequacy underwrites much of Dwoskin’s film oeuvre. While the stereotype of the scheming malevolent man and the helpless woman is not how Dwoskin portrays gender differences,^v the first film where he films himself is one that portrays a relationship whose failure pivots on his/the main protagonists disability. *Behindert* (1974), set as a narrative film but what Dwoskin describes as a ‘subjective documentary’ as it is also a replay of his actual relationship with the actress Carola Regnier with both Regnier and Dwoskin playing themselves re-enacting their own recent failed relationship. The film portrays the combined attraction and repulsion involved in a relationship between an able-bodied woman (Regnier) and a disabled man (Dwoskin). Dwoskin had planned and written detailed treatments for this film well in advance of its shooting and several years before he had met

Carola, so the experience may well have been repeated throughout his life. Casting it as a re-enactment upends the power relations regarding where the sympathies of the viewer may lie, unlike the earlier film noir where the 'nasty man' gets what he deserves. In *Behindert* (1974) the ambiguity of both protagonists is laid out without blame and Dwoskin, in the end is rendered lonely and isolated, a victim of his failed masculinity. The film opens with her looking at him, intrigued and attracted. Dwoskin at this point is sitting behind a table as Carola enters the room. The viewer doesn't see him as he is holding the camera so only sees what he is looking at. Thus, the viewer, like Carola, is unaware of his disability. The camera through zooms, durational but edited shots studies the responses of Carola as she becomes aware of, then intrigued by Dwoskin. However, the camerawork is set up so that his gaze becomes our gaze. They play cat and mouse with their eye contact, or the viewer plays cat and mouse with Carola's eye contact. Until she sees his disability. When at the end of the evening he offers her a lift, her ambivalence is clear, made more powerful by viewer's entanglement with Dwoskin through the camerawork. However, despite her initial reluctance she falls in love with him only - for her initial reluctance to return. The film develops through Regnier's mounting distaste for the limits of his body as it becomes exposed through the expressive camerawork, as well as the narrative. We see her developing frustration as he can't move as fast as she, as her untidiness affects his ability to move around in his flat due to his crutches. At one point, the beginning of the end, when she wants to go out and he doesn't "Everything is so difficult" she states in exasperation. He says sorry. In the end she leaves his space and him and he is again alone^{vi}. In this film Dwoskin echoes the fear of Arthur Bannister in *The Lady from Shanghai*, (1947) as a more benign example of the man who cannot keep the beautiful woman because of his disability. Except in *Behindert*, our sympathies are with Dwoskin and his honest struggles as a disabled man.

Unlike the scheming Bannister, Dwoskin is abject. There is a harrowing moment where Dwoskin losing all his dignity, crawls along the floor after Regnier, dragging his legs with his arms in a failed pursuit of his love. It is an inversion of the normative gendering mode which is for the woman to plead and the man to make proud gestures. The image from above and behind of the squirming creature crawling out of the bedroom is reminiscent of Gregor, stuck in his room as a cockroach in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, surely an intentional metaphor (O'Donoghue). Dwoskin tries to leave the room in a desperate bid to keep his love - but cannot. This is a high stakes moment and one where he shows himself to be at his most bodily, and therefore his most unmanly – if we are to follow the Cartesian model. This is the opposite of the idealised abstraction of love, akin to the body in abjection and prostration.

So, two key feature films of Dwoskin from either ends of his career (1974 and 2007) pivot on the self-depiction as specifically sexually inadequate because of his disability and Jewishness combined.

In the later *Sun and Moon* (2007) Dwoskin again depicts himself as unfit for a beautiful woman. In the treatment for the earlier *Behindert* (1974), he described 'a double *deja vue*' in his treatment which implies that he was already expecting his lived relationship with Carola to fail, and already denigrating himself. By 2003, in *Sun and Moon*, the expectations of his needs as represented in this film had reduced even further; at this point a relationship was not within his scope to expect, but a mere touch of the hand in affirmation of his humanity.

Furthermore, whereas in *Behindert* (1974) Dwoskin's abjection was a momentary flashpoint of desperation, by the time he makes *Sun and Moon* (2007), abjection is the *modus operandi*. His body has taken over. Throughout this film we see images of Dwoskin that show him in his nakedness, with his legs, thin from the wasted muscles of the disease, his 'oversize' body and the sagging skin of the elderly. The camerawork does not hide his body shape but exposes it as outsized or misshapen or old. He is impotent, seen through the filming of his inability to get an erection: the ultimate failure, where at its core, masculinity is at its most powerful in the moment of ejaculation. The sound of his voice is slowed down so that his speech sounds like that of a monster groaning: a monstrous, read 'failed' masculinity.

In *The lady from Shanghai* (1947) the framing of mirrors is brought to bear to reflect on disability and sexuality and desire. It is literally a hall of mirrors and brought together as Davidson suggests in his analysis of this film, with the post war understanding of Jewishness

These theatrical representations of physical weakness combine with his racialized Jewishness (in contrast to O'Hara's Irishness and Elsa's nordic blondness) to create a figure of ambiguous racial and physical threat (p 72)

I would go further to suggest that the Jewish racialisation is in itself also physical and that Dwoskin's body cannot be seen outside of the racializing gaze any more than it can be seen outside of the physical or gendered gaze. Each infiltrates the other as a complexifying factor, that asks the question of how gender, the body and race are constituted but that makes clear that each, in his case, sits outside the *doxa* of the normative powerful male gaze as set out by Mulvey in her foundational text that makes use of Lacanian formulations of the phallus to situate gendered power relations in Hitchcock's Hollywood films. These power relations are based on the singular powerful Aryan body that is formed and chiseled and honed in Hollywood as the normative ideal of Christian culture unlike the messiness of the Jewish - and the disabled - body. Daniel Boyarin, in his groundbreaking book, *Unheroic Conduct* offers a different understanding of the role of the phallus in gendered power relations,

The Lacanian distinctions between the phallus and the penis reinscribes the identical dualism that privileges "male" incorporeality over "female" embodiedness. This cultural motive, which goes back at least to the Pre-Socratic in

Greek culture privileges the ideal over the real, the homogeneous over the heterogenous, and thence the phallus (as an ideal abstraction from the penis) over the female body, the sex that is not one. (Boyarin 1997:9)

Boyarin continues that it is the abstraction of the Phallus that is the male ideal in the European imaginary (at least post Romantic) rather than the fleshiness of the penis. Body is female and abstraction is male. He premises his thinking in the history of rabbinical thought that the castration is not feminising in Jewish culture because 'masculinity was not defined by possession of the phallus' (ibid:9)

Dwoskin's work deals at all times with the lived realities of the flesh, of human connections and an embodied life. He explores powerlessness as much as power and inverts the expectations of who has power and who does not.

The film *Outside In* (1981) depicts a moment when Dwoskin's girlfriend puts on his calipers. She is disabling herself through his physical apparatus as she can barely control her movements in them. After walking around the room for a few paces she admits that she is exhausted and sweating from it. She tries to get up and collapses in laughter, falling on top of Dwoskin who is lying on the bed. She rolls around laughing and he mentions that she has broken one of the crutches. To which they both start laughing. There is no doubt that Dwoskin is trying to portray the levels of humiliation that he is subject to on a day-to-day basis. This film sets out a range of vignettes from his life whereby he has been forced into difficulty through his disability (ie being forced to sit down for an interview, people tripping over his crutches etc). The scene described of the woman, mostly naked, inhabiting his world through the calipers is particularly ambiguous: she is both proven to be physically weaker than him while becoming grotesque - rather than sexy. Just as he is asking us to inhabit the psychic space of a woman in, say the film *DynAmo* (1972), he is asking a woman to inhabit his space which she is only able to do because of the objects that mark his inadequacy.

If in the post -second World War United States, assimilation was within the grasp of Jewish men and came face to face with the Aryan masculinity that in McKinley's argument, by denying Jewish and Black men their masculinity through their subordination. Where masculinity means power pushed them because of their disempowered status to over-compensate with aggression 'as rebellious response to the various expectations regarding their gender' (McKinley 7). The violence, she argues is an attempt to reclaim through another stereotype of the oppressive male that leads to a 'deepened sense of conflict and emasculation' (ibid 8).

That Dwoskin didn't take on that stance in his work, but instead, aimed to put himself and the viewer in the emotional space of the woman I would attribute that to the double difference of Jewishness and Disability.

ⁱ He had polio as a child. He had to use calipers to walk as a young man but was later a wheel-chair user. His polio contributed to his death.

ⁱⁱ In “The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing” Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gammen remark on the many commentators who misuse the term ‘the male gaze’ as they often use merely a cursory understanding of the term, without having engaged with Mulvey’s text nor the Lacanian theories from which it is derived. This is also an issue for the understanding of Dwoskin’s work and the attacks his work has suffered through this misunderstanding. (Evans and Gammen, 15)’

ⁱⁱⁱ In *Goodbye Columbus* the nouveau riche girlfriend, has had her nose fixed. This becomes a refrain of the relationship – what she needs to be fixed to fit in.

^{iv} Although this was seen as a stigma and demasculation at the time, Davidson, in line with contemporary thinking posits the queering as an opportunity for rethinking masculinity rather than as the undermining factor it would have been for normative masculinity.

^v Dwoskin does portray other men as unscrupulous predators within specific contexts such as the predatory men who assault the women in a strip club in *DynAmo* (1972). See the review in *Spare Rib* and *Shrew*

^{vi} I wrote about this film in detail in “Between Seeing and Knowing: Stephen Dwoskin’s Behindert and the Camera’s Caress”, *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and British Experimental Film in the 1970s* (edited by Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey) IB Taurus, London and New York, p 235-245, 2017

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