

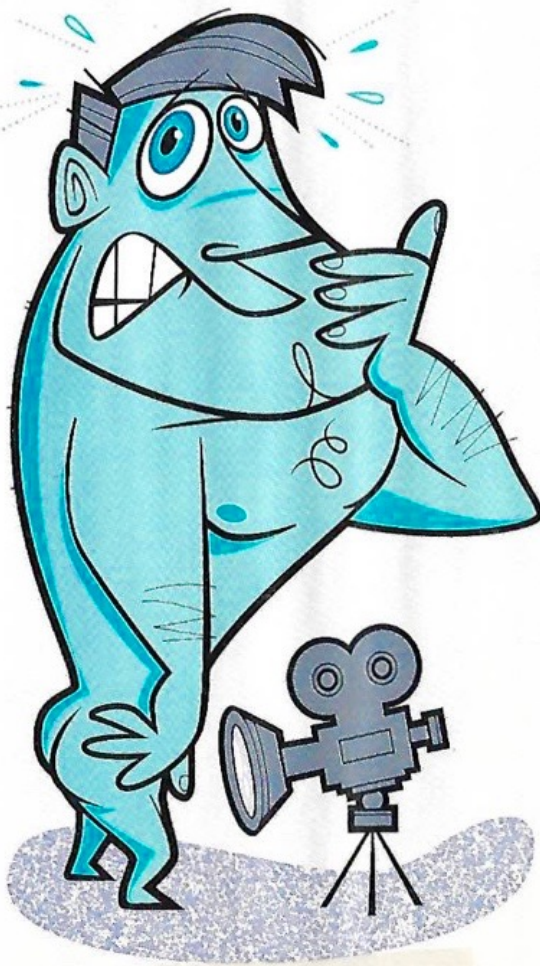
It's no secret that movies have become more risqué and sexually explicit over the past few years. In the current filmmaking climate, masturbation, ejaculation, and all forms of fornication make regular appearances at your local multiplex. But there is one major player in this carnal carnival that has remained out of the spotlight, just off-stage, shrouded in mystery. An entity of many names but rarely a face. We're talking about the penis.

For every free willie that makes the final cut, there are many left on the editing-room floor: Bruce Willis's in *Color of Night*, Kevin Costner's in *For Love of the Game*. Still, there is a growing crop of up-and-comers, such as Jude Law (*Wilde*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*), Mark Wahlberg (*Boogie Nights*—with prosthetic enhancement), and Ewan McGregor (pretty much anything he's in), who are doing their part to demystify the male organ. They stand in contrast to an earlier generation, for whom doing a full-frontal nude scene was a tremendous leap of faith and, thus, a career-defining exposure. Richard Gere became infamous early in his career for standing naked by a set of venetian blinds in *American Gigolo*. Don Johnson revealed his, well, johnson, in *The Harrad Experiment*. Even Robert De Niro flashed the Little Method Man, in *1900*.

There are times when showing the penis is essential, when no carefully placed sheet will do. One of the most famous examples popped up in *The Crying Game*, when the plot hinged on Jaye Davidson's unveiling his manhood, which was, as screenwriter Paul Rudnick (*In & Out*) points out, "the first time that a penis was used as a MacGuffin."

Though at one time the sight of a penis virtually guaranteed an X or NC-17 rating, it has managed to slip through the cracks of a newly elastic R. But it remains problematic for other reasons. "The minute someone takes their clothes off," *People* magazine film critic Leah Rozen says, "that's all you're looking at. Nudity like that is just distracting, because it often removes you from what's really happening onscreen." She mentions the locker-room scene in *Any Given Sunday* as an example of how sudden confrontation

Absence of Phallus



with the member can cause the audience to merely snicker.

When a role calls for a full-frontal, many actors side with the less-is-more theory—and with good reason. "Male sexual equipment is judged a little more harshly at times, and more visibly," Rudnick says. "I think men see exposing themselves both as a form of powerlessness and as a global reckoning." Rozen believes that actors will be more reluctant to drop trou now that DVD technology and the Internet have made it possible for fans to freeze the frame with enough detail to take measurements: "These days, you really have to ask, 'Do I want every pervert in the world to be studying my genitalia up close?'"

That doesn't seem to bother actor Kevin Bacon, who had a much-ballyhooed pickle shot in the trashy swamp thriller *Wild Things*, when he materialized out of a shower through a pillow of steam in his birthday suit. "I went to the press junket, and in one day I did 60 interviews in a row. One hundred percent of the American journalists asked about the nude scene. I honestly was shocked when there was such a big deal made of it." The fact that, as Bacon notes, only about 20 percent of the foreign interviewers brought it up points to a particular brand of American puritanism.

The general opinion, though, seems to be that Bacon's endowment is . . . impressive. So maybe it depends on who's doing the full monty. Rudnick suggests that "perhaps an audience vote should be required," citing Harvey Keitel, and the ubiquitous Harvey Jr. (*Fingers*, *Bad Lieutenant*, *The Piano*), as repeat offenders.

But perhaps, in typical Hollywood fashion, the overall absence of phallus could be explained by simple economics. "It's all about trying to entertain people," Bacon says. "And certainly from a business standpoint, people are trying to think of what's gonna put people in the seats. I'm not saying that women can't appreciate [male nudity], but I don't think that's what puts them in the seats." Rozen agrees. "I'm not going to put down my \$9.50," she says, "just because some actor's going to be taking his clothes off." —JAY A. FERNANDEZ