

Imagining Europe: The Popular Arts of American Jewish Ethnography

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

"Practically everyone has seen the prize-winning musical about the loveable people in that little village in Old Russia called Anetevka [sic]. Well, as far as we're concerned, 'Fiddler' made a GOOF!" *Mad* magazine's irreverent parody of the Broadway show (1964) and film (1971) "takes this famous musical about the problems of people who had *nothing*, and updates it with a version about the problems of people who have *everything*--mainly America's Upper Middle Class."¹ This 1973 spoof ends with the people of Anatevka arising from the depths of an American Jewish unconscious to haunt the nightmares of their dysfunctional descendents. Don't blame us for your problems, they say. *Fiddler on the Roof*, as theatre, cinema, and comic, is a prime example of how the popular arts of American Jewish ethnography have been used to imagine Europe.

Before the Holocaust, anthropologist Franz Boas tried to protect Jews from ethnography, because he saw cultural difference as a liability in the fight against anthropological theories of race. During the same period, progressive social worker Boris D. Bogen used the popular arts of ethnography to celebrate Jewish cultural diversity in the service of a more humane approach to Americanization. For Bogen, the Jewish diaspora offered a model for American cultural diversity.

After the Holocaust, the relationship between professional and popular uses of ethnography shifted. Boas's worst fears had been realized. Race science had been the handmaiden to genocide. Denying Jewish cultural specificity and avoiding ethnography had not worked in the way that Boas hoped. What role might ethnography now play in the wake of the destruction of European Jewish communities? For the first time, American anthropologists, several of them students of Boas, made East European Jewish culture the subject of sustained research.² The

¹ Mort Drucker and Frank Jacobs, "Antenna on the Roof," *Mad* 1, 156 (January 1973), 4. This comic strip appears in the "Fiddler Made a Goof Department" of the magazine.

² Many of Boas's students were Jews, but they had chosen to study the Winnebago (Paul Radin), Ojibwa (Ruth Landes), Pueblo (Ruth Bunzel), and Dahomeyans (Melville and Frances Herskovits).

success of their ethnography, *Life Is with People* (1952), is due in no small measure to the literary works it took as models--Maurice Samuel's *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, Bella Chagall's *Burning Lights*, and Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Earth Is the Lord's*.³ All of them are examples of the popular arts of ethnography. These are the kinds of texts that the creators of *Fiddler on the Roof* consulted when they adapted Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Dairyman*, a collection of short stories, for stage and screen.⁴

Fiddler on the Roof was intended to address a mainstream audience by imagining an Old World that was not "too Jewish" and by presenting its dissolution as symptomatic of the challenges facing "tradition" in modern life.⁵ Though it does not make any direct reference to the Holocaust, *Fiddler on the Roof* uses the popular arts of ethnography to perform a distant vanished world into life, while figuring its dissolution in ways that resonate with tragic events in recent memory. The mass exodus of the Jews from the fictional Anatevka can not but evoke the fate of European Jewry during World War II. In *Fiddler on the Roof* two kinds of Holocaust memory converge. The first attempts to recover a destroyed world. This is the mode that dominates *Fiddler on the Roof*. The second documents the destruction and commemorates those who perished. This mode is suggested but not fully realized in *Fiddler on the Roof's* theme of dissolution.

Not long after *Fiddler on the Roof* debuted on Broadway in 1964, a proliferation of Holocaust museums and memorials would ensure that the genocide and its victims would be remembered unflinchingly. In recent years, the fear that the world will know more about how Jews died than about how they lived has given to the recovery of a destroyed world a new role in the commemoration its tragic destruction. At the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, which opened in Manhattan in 1997, the first floor is devoted to Jewish life before the Holocaust and the third floor to life after the Holocaust. They serve to contextualize the central exhibit--the Holocaust itself.

³ *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952) was retitled *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken, 1962) for the paperback edition. The 1995 edition included my new introduction. Maurice Samuel, *The World of Sholom Aleichem* (New York: Knopf, 1943); Bella Chagall, *Burning Lights*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York: Schocken, 1946); Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950).

⁴ On the relationship of *Fiddler on the Roof* to the history of the Sholom Aleichem texts, see Ken Frieden, "A Century in the Life of Sholom Aleichem's *Tevye*," The B.G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies, New Series, Lecture One, 1993-1994 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997) and Seth L. Wolitz, "The Americanization of *Tevye* or Boarding the Jewish *Mayflower*," *American Quarterly* 40 (1988): 514-36.

⁵ Richard Altman, and Mervyn Kaufman. *The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof* (New York: Crown, 1971), 14.

Erasing the Subject

A German-Jewish immigrant himself, Franz Boas settled in New York in 1887. His work offers something of a limit case for thinking about the popular arts of ethnography because Boas, a founder of American anthropology, saw the key to Jewish survival in cultural disappearance. Opposed to theories of racial formalism and immutability, Boas not only insisted that culture was independent of race--nothing cultural was biologically inherited--but also he celebrated the capacity of immigrants to shed their European culture. By showing that immigrants could and did adapt to American culture, he hoped to counteract hostility to immigrants and efforts to restrict immigration.

Anti-immigration sentiment, which culminated in the quotas of 1921 and 1924 and was fueled in the 1930s by the rise of fascism, made race—and the question of Jews as a race—a very charged topic. During this period, anthropology was to all intents and purposes an applied science and provided support for restrictive immigration policies, eugenics, and social welfare programs. In his efforts to protect Jews from the liability of difference, Boas went beyond proving that they were not a race. He also argued that they were without a distinctive culture. Given the stakes, Jews could not afford to be different, ethnographically speaking. It was thus virtually impossible, or at the very least too dangerous, for American anthropologists before World War II to imagine Jews as an ethnographic subject. Instead, they rallied virtually the same arguments they had used to demonstrate that Jews did not constitute a race to prove that they were also without a distinctive and/or distinguishable culture. If Jews did not exist--either in racial or in cultural terms--then perhaps they might cease to be a target of anti-Semitism. They could certainly be spared from ethnography or, at least, from the kind of ethnography that would fix cultural difference and attribute those difference to racial inheritance.

Whereas the loss of culture had prompted eleventh-hour salvage ethnography among Native Americans, it was the fear that immigrants would not give up their distinctive ways that prompted anthropological research to document their ability to disappear. Accordingly, Boas framed all considerations of cultural change among immigrants exclusively in terms of *loss*, not retention or acquisition, of culture. His sole concern was with the disappearance of distinguishing characteristics, not with the process by which natal culture persisted or "American culture" was acquired, and certainly not with the impact of immigrant cultures on the American scene.

For Boas, cultural death was the most powerful evidence of the plasticity of human behavior. It was also at one with his personal philosophy as expressed in "An Anthropologist's Credo," which appeared in August 1939, and his way of answering American nativists and Nazi racists. In a rare moment of personal

accounting, towards the end of his life, Boas stated that his "parents had broken through the shackles of dogma. My father had retained an emotional affection for the ceremonial of his parental home without allowing it to influence his intellectual freedom. Thus I was spared the struggle against religious dogma that besets the lives of so many young people."⁶ The outcome was his conviction that the "individual must be valued according to his own worth and not to the worth of a class to which assign him." Moreover, "It must be the object of education to make the individual as free as may be of automatic adherence to the group in which he is born or into which he is brought by social pressure."⁷

There is a painful paradox in Boas's thinking. In his scholarly work on North American Indians, he affirmed the relativistic values of anthropology that accord equal worth to all cultures. But in his anthropology of European immigrants and in his personal credo, Boas expressed his belief in the need and capacity for distinctive cultures to disappear and for everyone to accept universal and absolute ethical values. Utopia meant freedom from the "shackles of tradition."⁸ It meant the disappearance of competing claims to cultural superiority, while recognizing that "the solidarity of the group is presumably founded on fundamental traits of mankind and will always remain with us."⁹ The historical context in which Boas wrote had put anthropology's sacred principle of cultural relativism to the ultimate test and Boas took a stand: "the study of human cultures should not lead to a relativistic attitude toward ethical standards."¹⁰

Clearly, the battle in Boas's time was to be free of involuntary categorizations, to be free *not* to identify or be identified with a particular group. Boas almost always defined identification in negative terms as the fate of outsiders who are consigned to despised groups by the in-group. These are the terms in which Boas speaks of modern group life. Boas exemplified what Roland Barthes has called constitutive negativity.¹¹ Following an agenda set by the opposition, Boas tried to erase the subject, not only in anthropometric, but also in cultural terms. But to erase the subject, he had first to constitute it. Only then could he eliminate the necessity for ethnography by demonstrating and celebrating the disappearance of its subject.

⁶ Franz Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," *The Nation* 147, no. 6 (August 1938): 201.

⁷ Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," 202.

⁸ Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," 203.

⁹ Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," 202.

¹⁰ Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," 203.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills." *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 64.

By 1920, as anti-immigration measures were gaining ground, Boas looked beyond physical anthropology for cultural evidence to support his argument that Jews were not a race. He saw in the gap between generations an opportunity to document cultural assimilation and support his case for the mutability of immigrants in the United States. Noting that "the break between the younger generation and the older generation" is "one of the most serious problems," Boas urged Leah Rachel Yoffie, a high school teacher in St. Louis, to record "what the people bring over in the way of folk-lore and folk-customs and how much it is lost in the younger generation."¹² Boas did not have in mind salvage ethnography, but rather hoped to provide evidence of "the process of assimilation of the Jewish community in this country."¹³ Yoffie, explaining that she was "gradually gathering all the Jewish folk-lore in St. Louis," declined the invitation, adding that:

The break between the two generations is no greater nor more serious[?] to-day than it always has been among Jews....I am sorry I can't get up my enthusiasm on the wide breach between the two generations, but it is because I have not seen it. I believe that is a sentimental postulate based by a few emotional social-workers in New York on a few picturesque cases, and not founded on figures and facts.¹⁴

Characteristically, Boas affirmed that he was "not wedded to any particular theory" and encouraged Yoffie to gather the material to support her observation, which she did.¹⁵ This overture is a rare exception to Boas's strict avoidance of immigrant culture as a subject for study. He did encourage his own students to study "acculturation," but only among Native Americans, not among immigrants. By the 1920s, Boas had lost the fight against restrictive immigration. By the 1930s, he saw clearly what was happening in Europe. He was prepared to use any means he could in his fight against racial theories, even ethnography--the ethnography of cultural disappearance.

Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands

Yoffie's comment about social workers might well have applied to Boris D. Bogen, himself a Russian Jewish immigrant. In contrast with Reform Jews, who, in Bogen's view, worried that

¹² Letter from Franz Boas to Leah Rachel Yoffie, 4 March 1920, in *The Professional Correspondence of Franz Boas*, microfilm edition (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1972).

¹³ Boas to Yoffie, 4 March 1920.

¹⁴ Yoffie to Boas, 29 March 1920.

¹⁵ Boas to Yoffie, 31 March 1920. Between 1916 and 1949, Yoffie published five collections of folklore from St. Louis in the *Journal of American Folklore*, which Boas edited from 1908 to 1924. Her first two articles, "Present-Day Survivals of Ancient Jewish Customs," *Journal of American Folklore* 29, 113 (1916), 412-417, and "Yiddish Proverbs, Sayings, Etc., in St. Louis, Missouri," *Journal of American Folklore* 33, 128 (1920), 134-165, must have caught his attention.

to suggest any kind of national distinction was unAmerican, Bogen saw Jewish culture as a resource and used the popular arts of ethnography to redirect the entire project of Americanization.¹⁶

Social workers who fostered appreciation of immigrant cultures during the first decades of this century hoped that if immigrants were valued they would be treated more fairly and would respond more warmly to Americanization efforts. Liberal intellectuals such as Horace Kallen, who coined the term *cultural pluralism*, and Randolph Bourne, who proposed a "trans-national America," condemned the position that immigrants should be stripped of their "ancestral endowment." They proposed instead that cultural differences be respected as part of "American civilization."¹⁷ In the paper that he read at the 31st Annual YIVO Conference in 1957, Kallen contrasted Emancipation in Europe, which "was particularly intolerant of the Jewish culture complex," with Emancipation in the United States, which "came to be interpreted as an opportunity to enhance and enrich Jewish cultural heritage with new content and new values."¹⁸ These views informed social work among immigrants, nowhere more clearly than in the many homelands exhibitions, festivals, and pageants during the first half of this century.¹⁹

Inspired by the national pavilions and foreign villages so prominent at international expositions, Bogen mounted *Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands*, a Jewish world's fair in miniature, at the Jewish Settlement House in Cincinnati in 1913. As early as 1909, the Settlement House board was seeking ways to shake the "growing indifference to the good and wholesome old"?²⁰ When lectures by renowned speakers and amateur theatricals on Jewish subjects did not do the trick, a comprehensive plan was proposed, at the beginning of 1912, "to modify the entire work of the Settlement [sic] with the view of

¹⁶ Boris D. Bogen, *Born a Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 74.

¹⁷ Horace Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," *Nation* (18 and 25 February 1915): 190-194, 217-220; Randolph Bourne, "Transnational America," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 86-97.

¹⁸ A summary of Kallen's paper, "The Antithesis of Emancipation," appeared in a report of the conference in *News of the YIVO* 64 (March 1957), 1.

¹⁹ See, for example, Ilana Abramovitch, *America's Making Exposition and Festival (New York, 1921): Immigrant Gifts on the Altar of America*, Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 1996); Allan H. Eaton, *Immigrant Gifts to American Life: Some Experiments in Appreciation of the Contributions of Our Foreign-Born Citizens to American Culture* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1932); and David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

²⁰ [Boris D. Bogen], "History of the Exhibit," in *Jews of Many Lands: Exposition Arranged by the Jewish Settlement, January 18 to 26, 1913, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, 1913), 6.

making Jewish culture the central idea of all activities."²¹ This work culminated in the Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands.

The exposition was an answer to the question "Should this culture and art be preserved, or should they give way as speedily as possible to Americanism?"²² This question animated the pages of *Jewish Charities* during this period: "The value of the foreign culture that the immigrant brings to this country has been extolled by Miss Jane Addams; but she is partial to the immigrant, and has a keen sense for the artistic and picturesque in him, whether of custom or craft, and a fine regret for their neglect and rapid obliteration in America."²³ Bogen argued that to think of cultural preservation as an impediment to Americanism was to forget that "besides the advisability of making the parents more modern and putting them, so to say, in a shape lovable to the children, it is also important that the children should be able to realize the strong and positive sides of their parents, not only as much as they have succeeded in modifying themselves in the process of Americanization; but, aside from it, the child should be able to appreciate the merits of their parents as they are."²⁴ By focussing on the Jew rather than on Judaism, by making "Jewish culture the central idea of all activities," and by avoiding a "policy of inflexible Americanization," Bogen hoped to close the gap between immigrant generations and reduce the divisiveness among Jewish groups.²⁵

For Jewish leaders in Cincinnati, the first step in the adjustment of immigrants to America was their adjustment to each other. In his introductory words to the program booklet, George Zepin pegged the exposition's success to its showing "that men may be different in dress but alike in soul-complexion, different in manners but alike in fine heart-throbs. At any rate, it will be our endeavor to show that difference does not mean inferiority. And, if this contributes to make us feel more keenly the brotherhood of Israel, it has done enough."²⁶ Jews were unified, in Bogen's view, by a common legacy of persecution, a sense of responsibility to co-religionists, and "a high standard of moral integrity of the home."²⁷

The theme of persecution unsettled any easy celebration of the Old World, understood as the countries from which Jews had

²¹ [Bogen], "History of the Exhibit," 6.

²² [Editor], "The Month in Brief," *Jewish Charities* 3, 10 (May 1913), 2.

²³ [Editor], "The Month in Brief," 2.

²⁴ Boris D. Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," *Jewish Charities*, 3, 10 (May 1913), 5.

²⁵ [Bogen], "History of the Exhibit," 6; Bogen, *Born a Jew*, 57.

²⁶ George Zepin, "Introductory Words," in *Jews of Many Lands*, 3. Bogen repeats these words verbatim in "Jews of Many Lands," 10, and in Boris D. Bogen, *Jewish Philanthropy: An Exposition of Principles and Methods of Jewish Social Service in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 257, which raises the question of whether he or Zepin is their author.

²⁷ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 3.

emigrated. How, for example, could they sing the national anthem of a country that had persecuted them?

A chorus of boys and girls, clad in the garb of all the nations in which Jews are citizens, sing native songs. Saturday night the chorus sang the Russian hymn "God Save the Czar," and men and women who had fled to America from Russian persecution hissed. "Why should the Czar be saved?" they asked. "Did he spare us?" So the song was eliminated from the program.²⁸

Instead, "The Russian department presented a recital of continuous suffering and oppression. The orthodox rabbi, the soldier, the political prisoner, the revolutionist, the different types of women, represented by immigrants from Russia, reenacted actual episodes of Jewish life in the Dark Russia, with a background of scenery representing the interior of a Russian *izba*—soldiers' guard booth and appropriate music and national dances."²⁹ This was not the *shtetl* of *Life Is with People* or the Anatevka of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Similarly, many of the domestic objects loaned by the immigrants for display commemorated historical events. For example, Miss Numa Kochman, "whose parents were killed in the Kishineff massacre," loaned "a prayer shawl, the weaver of which was also killed in the massacre."³⁰

The Jewish home became the prime site of Jewish cultural revival and intergenerational rapprochement. The great danger in the United States, in Bogen's view, was "a totally unprecedented breakdown of the Jewish home."³¹ He attributed the worst effects of Americanization not only to external factors--bad influences from the environment--but also to internal ones, most importantly the weakness of the Jewish family to withstand those influences. Americanization had driven a wedge between parents and their children that expressed itself in "estrangement from the old tradition of religious ceremonial life."³² This estrangement, for Bogen, was more a matter of Jewish culture than Judaism.³³ To stem the tide, Bogen advocated "a strenuous effort...in different directions to revive the interest toward Jewish ideals; to return to Jewish culture; to develop an interest toward Jewish history, and

²⁸ "Show Jews' Progress in Exposition," *The Post*, 20 January 1913, 1.

²⁹ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," *Jewish Charities*, 7.

³⁰ "Show Jews' Progress in Exposition." See Steven J. Zipperstein, "Shtetls Here and There," in *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 16-39. Zipperstein suggests a shift in orientation to the Old World from a predominantly negative one in the case of first generation immigrants to a more positive one on the part of later generations. The popular arts of ethnography show how immigrants during the first half of the century negotiated conflicting feelings about the places from which they had come.

³¹ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 3.

³² Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 4.

³³ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 5.

to strengthen the weakening ties of the Jews of all the world."³⁴ He pointed to the Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands as an example of this "educational crusade."³⁵

What did the popular arts of ethnography look like on the eve of World War I? From January 18 to 26, 1913, the entire building of the Jewish Settlement House in Cincinnati was "utilized for booths, each one representing the settlement of Jews in another land, and each presided over by men and women in the picturesque costume of that land."³⁶ Twenty-seven countries were represented, "beginning with the United States and ending with Abyssinia."³⁷ The event brought together 400 volunteers, fifty-one local Jewish organizations and twelve national, philanthropic, and educational organizations representing a wide spectrum of the Jewish community, including labor unions, Zionist associations, fraternal organizations, synagogues, schools, and social clubs.³⁸ This event was to coincide with the convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Two modes of cultural competence converged at the Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands--the vernacular and the elevated. The vernacular mode, as manifested in the humble forms of everyday life associated with the Jewish home, expressed the heterogeneity of Jewish culture. The Jewish home of the Old World lent itself to the popular arts of ethnography and domestic objects figured prominently in the displays. Everyone was asked to help: "You can assist by loaning curios, costumes, treasures, etc."³⁹ Over five hundred objects, most of them brought by immigrants from the Old Country, were exhibited.⁴⁰ The abundance of embroidery and lace made by women was taken as an indication of "the innate love for the beautiful."⁴¹

The elevated mode, which operated in the media of fine art, was used to present general Jewish themes in a universalizing idiom. Performances included orchestral and

³⁴ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 5.

³⁵ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 5.

³⁶ Bogen, *Born a Jew*, 79.

³⁷ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 6.

³⁸ The numbers vary. In *Jewish Philanthropy*, 253, and "Jews of Many Lands," 5, Bogen indicates fifty-one organizations. In *Jews of Many Lands*, 6, he indicates forty-five organizations. Perhaps additional organizations joined the venture after the program had gone to press. It was the first of the three sources to appear. For a discussion of this event in the context of Jewish participation in world's fairs, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Exhibiting Jews," in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 111-117.

³⁹ "First Notice," Hebrew Union College Broadside Collection, SC 13:1, 3:7, 1904:1 + ? [sic].

⁴⁰ Whereas in 1913, Bogen borrowed artifacts from immigrants, in January 1944, YIVO would solicit material from the American Jewish public for a permanent Museum of the Old Homes (*Muzey fun di alte heyman*).

⁴¹ Bogen, "Jews of Many Lands," 6.

choral arrangements of national songs, pageants on the theme of Israel Zangwill's "Melting Pot," tableaux, or "living pictures," on such themes as the "Maidens of Many Lands" (including Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, Spanish, Russian, Jewish, and American "maidens"), and Samuel Hirszenberg's painting *Galut*.

While each of the twenty-seven Jewish groups was distinct and even incommensurate with the others, there were several methods for integrating them into a larger whole. The statistical surveys, displayed in the form of charts, made it possible to compare groups. Modular displays, by designating a booth for each country, provided a consistent template for displaying comparable differences. Every group was represented, which is to say, included as well as depicted. Choral and dance ensembles performed an eclectic repertoire that represented all the participating groups, within unifying choral or choreographic styles and arrangements.

Cincinnati's Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands was a tour de force of the popular arts of ethnography. It integrated a diverse immigrant community, while affirming its heterogeneous culture, by involving the participants in the display and performance of their doubly diasporic "heritage." They had been displaced, first from an ancient homeland and later from an Old World. Immigration had assembled the diaspora in America. By reviving interest in Jewish culture, this event was supposed to help close the gap between generations, divert youth from the worst influences of tenement life, and integrate Jews into American life. Jewish heterogeneity was both a challenge to Jewish solidarity and, as the exposition would demonstrate, a model for American cultural diversity.

Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl

During the first half of this century, Boas had felt compelled to protect Jews from anthropology. After World War II, his students felt a moral obligation to use ethnography to save a vanished culture from oblivion. *Life Is with People*, which appeared in 1952, represents the first time that American anthropologists made East European Jewish culture the subject of a sustained ethnography.⁴² Like the Exposition of the Jews of Many Lands, *Life Is with People* was an example of autoethnography by and for the Jews they were about. Jewish immigrants in New York City were the informants for this study of East European Jewish culture at a distance. The authors of *Life Is with People* intended that their book would be read by those it

⁴² The title of this book in 1952 was *Life Is With People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press). The authors are Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog. The subtitle was changed to *The Culture of the Shtetl* in 1962, when Schocken published the paperback edition.

was about and that readers would be able to recognize their culture in its pages. The recognition factor was due in no small measure to textual devices that have come to be associated with popular uses of ethnography. Like its models, this book tried to evoke a total world. However flawed as a professional ethnography, *Life Is with People* has been immensely successful with the wide audience for which it was written. The book has sold almost 132,000 copies over almost fifty years in print.⁴³

By the time American anthropologists were finally ready to study East European Jews, they were too late to study them in situ. They had no choice but to study them at a distance, much as they had studied the "broken" culture of American Indians "at a distance." Operating in the mode of salvage ethnography, anthropologists interviewed immigrants about a way of life in Europe that no longer existed. In this way, those who studied Jewish culture at a distance came to use the popular arts of ethnography in the service of one of two major modes of Holocaust memory--recreating a *world* that was destroyed. That mode reached its apogée with the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964.

Anthropology has always been, to some degree, an applied science and *Life Is with People* shows the discipline applying itself to the situation of American Jews in the immediate postwar period. Margaret Mead was determined that the book would be written in an accessible style. The book succeeded in doing this, in large measure, because of the models it followed, including the classics of Yiddish literature (for the most part in translation) and films on Jewish subjects. While content analysis of a wide range of material was a methodological requirement of the culture at a distance approach, only *Life Is with People* modeled itself on the form and style of popular literary works. Moreover, the people who were interviewed had also read the Yiddish classics and seen the films.

In my introduction to the 1995 edition of this book, I trace the history of *Life Is with People*, how it constructed the *shtetl*, and how it came to identify all of East European Jewish culture with the *shtetl*. Consistent with its literary models, *Life Is with People* produced a composite portrait of a virtual town, not an empirical description of an actual one. The goal was to delineate the general patterns of Eastern European Jewish culture, rather than inventory its customs, in order to illuminate how cultural practices shape personality. After a brief historical prologue, the book opens with the Sabbath, before proceeding to social organization and stratification, the life cycle, and sacred texts and

⁴³ As of May 1999, the hardcover had sold 12,000 copies and the paperback 119,956 copies. Schocken allowed the book to go out of print in 1998, for the first time in its history. The original publisher, International Universities Press, plans to publish its own paperback edition in 2000.

religious rules. There follow chapters on women's lives, the lowest social strata, and Hasidism, as well as charity and community services, social life and conflict resolution, and work. The final chapters deal with marriage, family life, children, growing up, the kosher home, and holidays. By the end of the book, the *shtetl* has become a protagonist in its own right. The last chapter, chapter, "How the Shtetl Sees the World," opens with the statement that "The shtetl views the universe as a planned whole, designed and governed by the Almighty." The conclusion continues, in this fashion, to speak of the *shtetl* in anthropomorphic terms, so fully animated had it become for the authors.⁴⁴

Life Is with People, which developed out of the Research in Contemporary Cultures project at Columbia University, is a classic example of Cold War anthropology. Funded by the Office of Naval Research in 1946, this project was designed by Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead to delineate the national character of the countries of strategic interest to the United States and provide a basis for forging a postwar peace. While China and the Soviet Union were central to the project, Jews were not part of the original plan. When it became apparent that many of the informants for the East European countries were Jews and that many of the researchers were also Jews, the Jewish research group was formed. Their book, *Life Is with People*, was to become the most enduring publication to arise from the larger project.

Although Benedict and Mead had persuaded the Office of Naval Research to fund the research, Mead turned to the American Jewish Committee for funding the writing of the book. In making her case to the AJC, Mead clearly positioned the projected volume within the popular arts of ethnography. She argued that this book would help mobilize "positive attitudes towards the traditional East European Jewish culture, which is part of the cultural legacy of contemporary American culture" and thereby serve "indirectly to refute or to illuminate current stereotypes about the Jew."⁴⁵ This pitch met with a sympathetic response from the AJC's Department of Scientific Research, which grew out of conferences on anti-Semitism held during World War II. A book like *Life Is with People* was not only good "counter-propaganda," but also it would strengthen Jewish self-identification at a time of low morale, or so it was hoped.⁴⁶

When *Life Is with People* appeared in 1952, the American Jewish Committee issued a press release stating that "For

⁴⁴ Zborowski and Herzog, *Life Is with People* (1995), 409.

⁴⁵ "Suggested Project on Jewish Culture," submitted by Margaret Mead, 3 March 1949. RG 347, American Jewish Committee Records, Gen-10, 73, Box 211, File: Mass Media, Books, "Life Is with People," Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁴⁶ For the historical context in which the texts considered here were written, see Arthur A. Goren, "The 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955," in *A New Jewry? America Since the Second World War*, ed. Peter Y. Medding, Studies in Contemporary Jewry, VIII (1992), 3-20.

millions of Americans, this book will open the door to a new understanding of their heritage. Such understanding is indispensable to that sense of identity which makes for a wholesome, integrated life in the present," echoing almost verbatim the words that had persuaded the AJC to fund the project in the first place.

Life Is with People was modeled on three texts, all of them published in the 1940s and examples of the popular arts of ethnography in their own right: Maurice Samuel, *The World of Sholom Aleichem*; Bella Chagall, *Burning Lights*; and Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe*. These works stand in a recursive relationship to one another in terms of theme, form, and sensibility. Sholom Aleichem's literary constructions become the basis for writing the *world of Sholom Aleichem*, a mediation that informs subsequent ethnographic inscriptions (*Life Is with People*) and embodiments (*Fiddler on the Roof*). What such examples of the popular arts of ethnography demand is not only attention to their content and form, but also to their structures of feeling. In the moment of their appearance and in their reception thereafter lie a history of changing sensibility.

The World of Sholom Aleichem

Appearing in 1943, *The World of Sholom Aleichem* carried a solicitation for war bonds on its back leaf and the marks of wartime publication in its "full compliance with all government regulations for the conservation of paper, metal, and other essential materials."⁴⁷ Searching for metaphors to describe his book, Samuel called it a "pilgrimage" to the lost world of our "grandfathers and grandmothers."⁴⁸ It was an "act of piety."⁴⁹ It was a sin, the sin of "necromancy, or calling up the dead, which was the sin of Saul. For that world is no more."⁵⁰ Samuel's self-appointed task was nothing less than resurrection of the dead. His goal was to "recapture the warm, breathing original creation" using that "mirror of Russian Jewry," Sholom Aleichem.⁵¹ The *World of Sholom Aleichem* is an early example of the popular arts of ethnography put to the service of the mode of Holocaust memory that recovers a lost world. A striking feature of this book, written and published in the midst of World War II, is its

⁴⁷ This statement appears on the verso page of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations Edition, which was published in May 1943. The foreword by Abram Leon Sachar that appeared in the first edition was dropped from the later paperback edition. It largely repeated what Samuel himself had written in the first chapter of the book. Also, some twenty years later, when the paperback appeared, Sachar may not have had sufficient name recognition to continue to include his foreword.

⁴⁸ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 3.

⁴⁹ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 3.

⁵⁰ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 3.

⁵¹ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 3, 5.

attribution of the "obliteration" of the "strange world" of Sholom Aleichem to a half century of cataclysmic events, including "two gigantic wars and a major revolution."⁵² This characterization suggests that the enormity of the genocide of World War II, its difference from other dramatic events of the century, had not yet registered.

The "world" of Sholom Aleichem, as Samuel explains, is not only the world in which Sholom Aleichem lived (he is "himself its focus and miniature"), but also "the world which appears in his books."⁵³ With this formulation, Samuel attributes to Sholom Aleichem "complete self-identification with a people" and the "fusing [of] external and internal material in a natural whole."⁵⁴ This extraordinary book, written and published in the midst of the war, is an instance of the popular arts of ethnography in a distinctively autoethnographic vein.

The operative term is "world," what philosopher Alfred Schutz calls "a province of meaning."⁵⁵ World also suggests the immediacy of being there, which accounts for the strategic realism of the account.⁵⁶ If we are to believe Samuel, "We could write a *Middletown* of the Russian-Jewish Pale basing ourselves solely on the novels and stories and sketches of Sholom Aleichem, and it would be as reliable a scientific document as a 'factual' study; more so, indeed, for we should get, in addition to the material of a straightforward social inquiry, the intangible spirit which informs the material and gives it its living significance."⁵⁷ This idea was repeated by a reviewer of *Life Is with People* about ten years later, "With all due respect to Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and the authors of *Life Is with People*, it can be safely asserted that the greatest 'anthropologist' of the *shtetl* was the Yiddish novelist and writer Mendele Mocher Seforim."⁵⁸

As literary scholars disabuse naive readers of the illusion that literature is ethnography, anthropologists are insisting that

⁵² Sachar, "Foreword," *World of Sholom Aleichem*, n.p. Sachar is echoing Samuel's characterization, p. 3.

⁵³ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 6.

⁵⁴ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 6.

⁵⁵ See Alfred Schutz, *The phenomenology of the social world*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972, c1967).

⁵⁶ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 3.

⁵⁷ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 6-7. *Middletown*, by Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929), was an early experiment in studying "an American community as an anthropologist does a primitive tribe," as Clark Wissler characterized this book in his foreword to it.

⁵⁸ Moshe Dector, "The 'Old Country' Way of Life: The Rediscovery of the Shtetl," *Commentary* 13, 6 (1952), 604. For a critique of this view, see Dan Miron, *Der imazsh fun shtetl: dray literarishe shtudyas* (The Shtetl Image: Three Literary Studies) (Tel Aviv: I.-L. Peretz Publishing House, 1981).

ethnography is literature.⁵⁹ This does not make Sholom Aleichem an anthropologist or the authors of *Life Is with People* novelists. But it does make *The World of Sholom Aleichem* the missing term in the equation. In *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, Samuel fashioned a hybrid genre that mediates between literature and ethnography, between retelling the Tevye stories and providing an ethnographic gloss on them.

Where Samuel referred his observations about East European Jewish culture to Kasrievky, a fictional Jewish town, Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog referred their observations to an unnamed, prototypical, equally "virtual" Jewish town--the *shtetl*. In the absence of an actual Jewish community in Eastern Europe, the anthropologists posited a virtual one and always kept it in mind. The Jewish "world" called forth in Yiddish literature provided a vivid model for imagining the virtual *shtetl* of *Life Is with People* and for integrating otherwise disparate information from more than a hundred informants from many different locations.

The World of Sholom Aleichem and *Life Is with People*, like *The Earth Is the Lord's* and, for that matter, *Burning Lights*, offered a spiritualized account of Jewish culture. This approach arises in part from an elegiac mission that finds consolation in the indestructibility of a spiritual legacy. The notion that Jewish culture is inherently spiritual, rather than material, becomes a matter of necessity.⁶⁰ It is a way of sacralizing the loss. The popular arts of ethnography become a mode of worship.

Burning Lights

Burning Lights was written in 1939 and appeared in Yiddish as *Brenendike likht*, with drawings by Mark Chagall, in 1945, the year after Bella Chagall died. The English translation was published in 1946.⁶¹ By stressing cultural intactness and writing in the present tense, Bella Chagall's memoir takes on an ethnographic quality, however soft the focus of this "portrait of the warm world of Russian Jewry," as the book is described on its cover.⁶² *Burning Lights* contains no dates, place names, or family surnames. It is *not* organized chronologically from Bella's birth in 1895 into a well-to-do Hasidic family, through her graduation from the Vitebsk Gymnasium for girls, where she studied

⁵⁹ See, for example, James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶⁰ Samuel, *World of Sholom Aleichem*, 5.

⁶¹ *Brenendike likht* (New York: Book League of the Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order, IWO, 1945). Two English translations have appeared, *Burning Lights*, trans. Norman Guterman (New York: Schocken, 1946) and *First Encounter*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Schocken, 1983), which includes additional material. The book has also been translated into French, German, and Hebrew.

⁶² This phrase appears on the front cover of the first Schocken paperback edition (1962), seventh printing (1974).

Russian, to her entrance into the University of Moscow in 1912, "where she writes her thesis on 'the liberation of the Russian peasants' and Dostoievski."⁶³ These facts appear in the publisher's prefatory note, not in her account.

Though memoir and autobiography have long served as genres of Jewish autoethnography, Bella Chagall breaks with convention by writing about childhood alone. More typically, as in the memoirs of Yekhesl Kotik or Pauline Wengeroff, childhood is not only the site of a world lost or rejected (and minutely described), but also the prelude to a transformative experience of some kind and to a coming of age.⁶⁴ In *Burning Lights*, the chapters roughly follow the holidays of the calendar year as seen through the innocent eyes of a little girl who never grows up. As one reviewer commented, "We find very little personal experience in *Burning Lights*. The ego of the author is dissolved in the general atmosphere of a life conducted according to fixed Jewish customs.... The same thing, more or less, has been done during the last eighty years by almost every Yiddish and Hebrew writer."⁶⁵

The book's opening chapter, "Heritage," establishes the elegiac tone of the memoir. Like *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, *Burning Lights* seeks to bring the dead to life. Bella Chagall's childhood years return with such force that "they could be breathing into my mouth."⁶⁶ Fearing that her memories would die with her, she sets out to "draw out a fragment of a bygone life from fleshless memories."⁶⁷ Her description of that task, "I am unfolding my piece of heritage," anticipates the opening song of *Fiddler on the Roof*, "Tradition."⁶⁸

Like *Burning Lights*, *Life Is with People* is lyrical, elegiac, and idealized. *Life Is with People* offers a romantic and generalized portrait based on the themes of piety, poverty, and insularity. Even Mead got caught up in this spirit when she wrote of *Life Is with People*, "This book, this record of a whole way of life, has been written from the inside, where the mother's tears of mingled joy and sorrow glistened through her fingers as she lit the Sabbath candles."⁶⁹ That very image was to appear on the cover of

⁶³ Chagall, *Burning Lights* (1962), 7.

⁶⁴ Yekheskel Kotik, *Mayne zikhroynes* (Berlin : Klal-Verlag, 1922), 2 volumes; Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoiren einer Grossmutter. Bilder aus der Kulturgeschichte der Juden Russlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1908-1910).

⁶⁵ Ayalti, 1946: 598.

⁶⁶ Chagall, *Burning Lights* (1962), 9.

⁶⁷ Chagall, *Burning Lights* (1962), 10.

⁶⁸ Chagall, *Burning Lights* (1962), 10.

⁶⁹ Margaret Mead, "Foreword," *Life Is with People*, p. 21. A drawing of a mother blessing the Sabbath candles, one of thirty-six drawings Marc Chagall prepared for Bella Chagall's memoir, made its way to the cover of the paperback edition of *Burning Lights*. The paperback cover of *Life Is with People* also bears an evocation of *Burning Lights*—Marc Chagall's illustration "House in Vitebsk." Bella was born in the Byelorussian city of

Burning Lights. The title itself is an allusion to the Sabbath and to all the other holidays when candles are lit. Both books launch their evocations of a lost Jewish world with an account of Sabbath bliss, an icon of Old World Jewish joy.

The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jews of Eastern Europe

The Earth Is the Lord's valorized the inner life of Ashkenazic Jewry and offered its enduring value as the basis for Jewish spiritual continuity in the face of physical annihilation. It did so by allegorizing a barely material Jewish world in order to redirect ethnography to the project of Jewish spiritual survival. Heschel seemed to suggest that by not entrusting to the material world that which they most cherished the Jews of Eastern Europe created a spiritual legacy beyond the reach of those who annihilated them. In a mode that was at once autoethnographic and anti-ethnographic, Heschel enacted in his own text the very qualities that he attributed to his subjects.

Heschel first delivered the essay that became *The Earth Is the Lord's* in Yiddish at the 19th Annual Conference of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in 1945. As Deborah Dash Moore has reported, "When he finished speaking, the audience of several thousands was moved to tears, and a spontaneous Kaddish [mourner's prayer for the dead] was uttered by many who were committed secularists and nonbelievers."⁷⁰ Attesting to the indestructibility of spirit in the face of physical destruction, Heschel offered a transcendent account of the "inner world" of East European Jewry. Here, as in *The World of Sholom Aleichem*,

Vitebsk, and Marc in Liozno, a small town nearby. Like *Burning Lights*, *Life Is with People* begins, after a short prologue, with a chapter on the Sabbath. During this period, Heschel also published an essay on the Sabbath, both as a separate book, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Noonday Press, 1951), illustrated by Ilya Schor, and as an expanded edition of *The Earth Is the Lord's: and The Sabbath* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963).

⁷⁰ Deborah Dash Moore, "Preface," in *East European Jews in Two Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Annual*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1990), viii. Moore reprints Heschel's "The Eastern European Era in Jewish History." The talk was published as an essay in Yiddish in *Yivo bleter* 25, 2 (1945), in English translation in the *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 1 (1946), and in an expanded version as *The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jews in Eastern Europe* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), copyrighted in 1949, with illustrations by Ilya Schor. Various forms of this essay/book were also translated from Yiddish or English to other languages. The complicated publication history of this essay is detailed by Jeffrey Shandler, "Heschel and Yiddish: A Struggle with Signification," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2 (1993): 245-99. See also Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and Edward K. Kaplan, *Holiness in Words: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety* (West Fulton, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996)

the operative term is "world," not *shtetl*. Indeed, the English text makes no reference to *shtetl* whatsoever. It refers instead to an era or period, to a people, or to "little Jewish communities in Eastern Europe" and "a typical Jewish township."⁷¹

Without ever using the term ethnography, the 1949 preface to *The Earth of the Lord's* invokes this modality and transmutes it. Heschel takes as his subject "a whole people," rather than exceptional individuals.⁷² It was, after all, a whole people that had been annihilated and it was their way of life as an achievement in its own right that Heschel set out to define and praise. To do otherwise would be to suggest that some lives were worth more than others, that some deaths were more tragic than others, that the outstanding contributions of exceptional individuals, or of an entire people, made their annihilation more terrible. It was therefore not his "intention to dwell upon the various achievements of that period, such as the contributions to science and literature, to art and theology, the rise of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the revival of the Hebrew language, the modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, the development of the Yiddish language, Zionism, Jewish socialism, the establishment of new centers, the rebuilding of Israel, the various attempts to modernize Jewish life and to adapt it to changing conditions."⁷³ Rather than judge this era by "progress in general civilization," Heschel took as his measure "how much spiritual substance there is in its everyday existence."⁷⁴ Not only was the spiritual all that remained, but, in what might be seen as a homeopathic gesture, Heschel suggested that Jewish life had always been defined in spiritual terms. By valorizing the "spiritual integrity" of everyday life, he celebrated a capacity that had been denied Jews by their murderers.⁷⁵

Finding the defining pattern of East European Jewish culture in its inwardness, Heschel could be said to have taken as his ethnographic subject "the Jewish soul" and to have created a text that effects a kind of transmigration of soul from a world lost to one yet to be gained.⁷⁶ Anticipating the objection that his account is idealized, Heschel stated, "There is a price to be paid by the Jew. He has to be exalted in order to be normal. In order to be a man, he has to be more than a man. To be a people, the Jews have to be more than a people."⁷⁷ After all, they had been annihilated for being less than human and less than a people.

Ethnography, however attenuated, offered Heschel a model for finding the exceptional in the ordinary. Accordingly, he made *culture* rather than *Culture* his focus and drew on two

⁷¹ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 92, 42.

⁷² Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 9.

⁷³ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 8.

⁷⁴ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 9.

⁷⁵ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 9.

⁷⁶ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 10.

⁷⁷ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 64.

approaches in the American anthropology of his time, salvage ethnography and patterns of a culture, and transmuted them both. Like the salvage ethnographies of Native Americans that Boas and his students had produced, *The Earth Is the Lord's* was written into the face of its disappearing subject, but with this critical difference. Anthropology as a field had been complicit with the institutions and policies that decimated Native American communities and destabilized their cultures. For that reason, it could be said that the discipline of anthropology had helped to produce the necessity for its own salvage practices. In the case of *The Earth Is the Lord's*—and for that matter *Life Is with People*, which was modelled on it—salvage ethnography was deployed by and on behalf of those who had suffered incalculable losses at the hands of others. These works were not only salvage ethnographies (and salvage ethnographies of a special kind). They were also autoethnographies. Autoethnography, as figured in Heschel's work, is history's alter ego. In the *longue durée* of eight-hundred years, "the Ashkenazic period," an era defined by the Catastrophe that closed it against its will, Heschel found his ethnographic present.⁷⁸ In this "golden period in Jewish history, in the history of the Jewish soul," it was Hasidim, with its valorization of simple piety over erudition and notion of divine sparks in the commonplace, that provided Heschel with the inner mandate for a theologically infused ethnography.⁷⁹

Salvage ethnography, by its very nature, required piecing together fragmentary information to form a larger cultural whole that no longer existed. How was the larger whole to be constituted? Not by making a complete inventory of the outer world, the observable practices and artifacts, of Jewish culture. Consistent with the trend in American anthropology during the 1940s, Heschel "had to inquire into the life-feeling and life-style of the people." Ruth Benedict, whose *Patterns of Culture* (1934) became one of the best-selling works in the history of American anthropology, offered a model compatible with Heschel's project.⁸⁰ He aimed to describe the "pattern of life of a people" and to delineate "the character of a people as reflected in its way of living throughout generations."⁸¹ These goals were virtually identical with those of the configurationist anthropology of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, which sought to identify the patterns of a culture and the relationship between culture and personality or national character. Heschel's text applied these concepts to East European Jewish culture even before *Life Is with People* was conceived.

⁷⁸ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 8.

⁷⁹ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 10.

⁸⁰ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, [c1934]).

⁸¹ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 7-8.

The anti-ethnographic character of *The Earth Is the Lord's* arises from its refusal to objectify its subjects, its refusal to treat them as specimens. By focussing on cultural patterns and inner life, *The Earth Is the Lord's* studiously avoided the objectifying tendencies of salvage ethnography, which tended to inter, even as it inscribed, its disappearing subject. He sidestepped the museological effects of clinical descriptions of the "outer world" of his subjects. As Heschel would later state, "Eastern Europe is not a collection of antiques to be relegated to a museum. It must become part and parcel of the mode of life of Jews born in America."⁸² To avoid delegating a lost world to the museum, Heschel offered an account that was more inspirational than informational.

Instead of recreating with clinical detachment the tangible world of those who had perished, Heschel gave sensuous presence to the inner life of East European Jewry. Taking his lead from his subject, about whom he states that "Audacious doctrines were disguised as allegories,"⁸³ Heschel allegorized from the concreteness of "ethnographic" detail, which he understood as "habits and customs," "attitudes," "values" and "style"—in a word, the "unique and enduring features" of Ashkenazic Jewry.⁸⁴ Thus, although Eastern European Jews "had no affinity with things," Heschel made objects metaphors for intangible and inexpressible features of an unseen though fully experienced inner world.⁸⁵ He anthropomorphized icons of the world of Ashkenazic Jewry in the service of portraiture. The physiognomy of the Jew in Eastern Europe "was not like a passage in an open book—a static picture of uniform lines with a definite proportion of text and margin—but like a book whose pages are constantly turning."⁸⁶ Similarly, "The little Jewish communities in Eastern Europe were like sacred texts opened before the eyes of God so close were their houses of worship to Mount Sinai."⁸⁷

In this and other ways, Heschel enacted in his own text qualities he attributed to his subjects. "Everywhere they found cryptic meaning."⁸⁸ So too does Heschel. "The purpose [of their piety] was to ennoble the common, to endow worldly things with hieratic beauty."⁸⁹ Such is Heschel's purpose as well. Heschel's allegorization of a barely material Jewish world redirected ethnography to the project of Jewish survival after the Catastrophe.

⁸² Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," *News of the YIVO*, no. 64 (March 1957), 2.

⁸³ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 59.

⁸⁴ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 7-10.

⁸⁵ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 15.

⁸⁶ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 15.

⁸⁷ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 92-93.

⁸⁸ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 57.

⁸⁹ Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 20.

When Heschel spoke in 1945, his words resounded in the void of the Catastrophe to a YIVO audience that was in a state of shock and grief. While the Catastrophe (*khurbn*) had infused Heschel's 1945 account of the Eastern European era, he had not addressed the genocide directly in what was a text of consolation for an inconsolable community. *The Earth Is the Lord's* sought to fan the spirit flame of Eastern Europe that it might survive in the lives of American Jewry. The physical destruction was barely mentioned, so raw was the sense of loss, as the spontaneous Kaddish uttered by the YIVO audience attests.

Twelve years later, in 1957, Heschel again addressed a YIVO audience, this time to admonish American Jewry for their complacency.⁹⁰ Not only was the younger generation ignorant of the world that had been destroyed, but also "there are in America now young Jews who maintain that extermination of six million Jews is a myth."⁹¹ By 1957, the American Jewish community had become complacent and Heschel's words to them were reproachful: "Dark are our days and we do not even kindle the Sabbath lights. Six million Jews passed away in smoke. Blood is not silent, but our conscience is as unresponsive as the wall. We have become intoxicated and giddy with the vanities of the world."⁹² He exhorted his audience "to prevent a second extinction of East Europe. The body of the six-million community, the body of an entire generation was destroyed by the barbarian. Shall we permit a second extinction of the spirit of Eastern Europe, the spirit of all the generations?"⁹³ For the present generation, "the name of Las Vegas is more meaningful than Vilna."⁹⁴ As a result of their shame, ignorance, and complacency, "The heritage of Eastern Europe is being dissipated nowadays."⁹⁵ "YIVO's Task Now," the title of the published summary of his remarks, was "To serve as a memory, to remember, to remind, and to study the world that we have lost."⁹⁶ Stressing the importance of "the study and elucidation of the heritage of East European Jews" for Jewish survival, Heschel placed heritage, which is at the heart of the popular arts of ethnography, at the fore.⁹⁷

When Heschel's *The Earth Is the Lord's* was finally published in English as a book, it was illustrated with Ilya Schor's hieratic wood engravings. Schor's engravings were inspired by East European Jewish folk art, including tombstone

⁹⁰ Heschel chaired the opening session of the 31st Annual Conference of YIVO. His remarks were summarized as "YIVO's Task Now," *News of the YIVO*, no. 64 (March 1957), 2-3.

⁹¹ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 2.

⁹² [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 2. In Israel, Yom Hashoah became the official day of commemoration in 1951.

⁹³ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 3.

⁹⁴ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 3.

⁹⁵ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 2.

⁹⁶ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 2.

⁹⁷ [Heschel], "YIVO's Task Now," 2.

carvings, papercuts, manuscript illumination, ritual silver and synagogue embroidery. Photography is absent from this book as well as from the other texts discussed here. There was no scarcity of photographic images. Rather, a particular kind of artistic mediation was necessary to spiritualize these otherwise documentary projects and that mediation operated both textually and visually, even in photograph albums such as Roman Vishniac's *Polish Jews: A Pictorial Record*. Vishniac's photographs had been exhibited by YIVO in January 1944 and again in January 1945, to coincide with the YIVO conference at which Heschel delivered his legendary elegy. If anything, these photographs needed a textual intervention to mitigate what Vishniac himself described as "real life unposed."⁹⁸

That intervention took two forms in *Polish Jews*, an album of thirty-one photographs, most of them portraits, which Schocken published in 1947 and again, as a paperback, in 1965. First, part of Heschel's 1945 YIVO address served as the introduction to this album, which took as its theme "the religious absorption of Jewish life in Poland."⁹⁹ Selected from more than 2000 photographs made by Vishniac in 1938, "These pictures are largely concerned with what was the major aspect of East-European Jewish life: its intense religious quality."¹⁰⁰ Second, the captions are cryptic--Fish Seller, Exegesis, Chant, Heder, Storekeeper with Nothing to Sell, Grandfather and Granddaughter, Courtyard, Old Man. Thanks to such captions, which include the general locations where the images were taken (Cracow, Warsaw, Carpathian Ruthenia, Munkacevo, Poland, and Russo Poland), persons, places, and scenes tend toward the typical, rather than the particular. Together, Heschel's introduction and the cryptic captions intensify the tension between the ethnographic character of the album as cultural portraiture and its anti-ethnographic avoidance of detail.

Just before and after the opening of *Fiddler on the Roof*, Schocken brought out the first paperback editions of *Burning Lights* (1962), *Life Is with People* (1962), and *The World of Sholom Aleichem* (1965). The covers of these books were illustrated not with photographs but with the line drawings of Marc Chagall and Ben Shahn. Ben Shahn, who had done the drawings for Arnold Perl's 1953 play, *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, designed the cover for the paperback edition of Samuel's *The World of Sholom*

⁹⁸ Back cover of fourth printing, in 1973, of the first Schocken paperback edition of Roman Vishniac, *Polish Jews: A Pictorial Record* (New York: Schocken, 1965). The book first appeared in 1947. The colophon indicates that "The introductory essay by Dr. Abraham J. Heschel is part of an address delivered at the Nineteenth Conference of the Yiddish Scientific Institute of New York, by whose permission the present version is printed."

⁹⁹ Vishniac, *Polish Jews*, back cover.

¹⁰⁰ Vishniac, *Polish Jews*, back cover.

Aleichem.¹⁰¹ The central image is a sketch of a fiddler. Shahn's fiddler stands on his own two feet, with his back to the reader, not perched precariously on a *shtetl* rooftop. Marc Chagall's drawing of a mother and daughter blessing Sabbath candles appeared on the cover of *Burning Lights*, which he also illustrated with thirty-six drawings.¹⁰² His drawing "A House in Vitebsk" appears on the cover of *Life Is with People*.¹⁰³ The title of *Fiddler on the Roof* was inspired by a Marc Chagall painting, not by the Sholom Aleichem stories, and Chagall's paintings were also the visual inspiration for Boris Aronson's stage designs. They were supposed "to capture the flavor and special essence of Chagall and at the same time to serve the spatial needs of Jerry Robbins."¹⁰⁴ The tension between the suggestiveness of drawings and the literalness of photography finds its parallel in the stage and film versions of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Fiddler on the Roof

Mad magazine's "Fiddler Made a Goof" may well resonate more fully with Heschel's 1957 exhortation than does *Fiddler on the Roof*. Writer Frank Jacobs and artist Mort Drucker, in inimitable *Mad* style, tell the story of a dysfunctional (Jewish) family in the suburbs. The scenario is a group therapy session. Dad, who looks like Zero Mostel, complains to the psychiatrist, who looks like Freud, about his materialistic wife and three disaffected daughters. Sheila is a hippy and sex fiend. Nancy is a junkie. Joy is a political radical turned lesbian. The session ends with Dad, on the psychiatrist's couch, narrating a nightmare: "It's--it's **THEM!** It's our **ancestors** from the **Old Country!**" Images of the characters in *Fiddler on the Roof* flood the dreamscape. They loom over scenes of industrial pollution, labor unrest, Yippie protests, and police brutality. They point their accusing fingers at Mom and Dad, who cringe in their bed, the covers pulled up, terror on their faces. Sung to the tune of "Miracle of Miracles," the ancestors make their final indictment of Tevye, Golde, Motel, Yente, and "all the **other** people from **Anetevka**" with the following words: "God may make a fuss And ... some ... how ... blame ... you ... on ... us!"¹⁰⁵ The Old World talks back. In a preemptive strike, dead ancestors distance

¹⁰¹ Arnold Perl's *The World of Sholom Aleichem* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1953) consists of dramatizations of three Yiddish stories by Sholom Aleichem and I.L. Peretz. The play was released as a motion picture in 1959 and as a sound recording around the same time.

¹⁰² This image appears on the seventh printing (1974) of the first Schocken paperback edition (1962) of *Burning Lights*.

¹⁰³ This image appears on the fifth printing (1967) of the first Schocken paperback edition (1962) of *Life Is with People*. A study of the changing cover art of these books would reward further study.

¹⁰⁴ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 40, 46-47. Aronson, who was born in Russia, had worked in the Yiddish theatre before 1935, the year he designed his first Broadway show.

¹⁰⁵ Drucker and Jacobs, "Antenna on the Roof," 10.

themselves from their living descendents. If *Fiddler on the Roof* universalized a Jewish story about the dissolution of Old World tradition, "Fiddler Made a Goof!" does the same for New World materialism and links the two situations by making the characters in *Mad* the descendents of the characters in *Fiddler*.¹⁰⁶

Both *Fiddler on the Roof* and "Fiddler Made a Goof!" address the generation gap, which they locate not only within their narratives of family strife, but also within the lives of their respective audiences. They do this from opposing generational vantage points. The musical speaks for an older generation in an elegiac mode. It exhorts the next generation to take responsibility for "Tradition." The comic speaks for a younger generation in an irreverent mode. It blames arriviste parents for the disaffection of their countercultural offspring. It does this through the venerable mode of ethnographic burlesque, which repudiates what it describes in order to repulse, rather than attract, its readers.¹⁰⁷

Such examples of the popular arts of ethnography demand attention not only to their content and form, but also to what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling." Williams distinguishes feeling ("meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt") from ideology ("formally held and systematic beliefs"), noting that they are of course interrelated in practice: "Methodologically, then, a 'structure of feeling' is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements [affective elements of consciousness and relationships] and their connection in a generation or period, and needing always to be returned, interactively, to such evidence."¹⁰⁸ These invocations of the Old World are an archive of changing structures of feeling and their generational character, nowhere more apparent in the various versions of *Fiddler*.

The Broadway musical debuted on September 22, 1964 and broke a record with three thousand performances in its eight-

¹⁰⁶ It is no accident that this parody appears in the January issue, which takes up Christmas themes in the aftermath of the holiday. When Dad, lying on the psychiatrist's couch, sings "Millions just like us/Throughout ev'ry state!" to the tune of "Matchmaker, Matchmaker!", he is speaking directly to the "modern Christmas Spirit." (p. 5) Who is the "us"? The American descendents of the people of Anatevka. The back cover of this post-Christmas January issue of *Mad* features a wreath of dollar bills. "The Mad Christmas Hate Book" in this same issue includes a cartoon whose caption reads "**DON'T YOU HATE**...when your class is preparing religious Christmas displays and rehearsing the Christmas Pageant...and you're Jewish." (p. 37)

¹⁰⁷ See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Problems in the Early History of Jewish Folkloristics" *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, August 16-24, 1989, Division D, Volume II, Art, Folklore, and Music, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990), 21-32.

¹⁰⁸ Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132-133. I explore this idea in relation to klezmer music in "Sounds of Sensibility," *Judaism*, issue no. 185, volume 47, number 1 (1998), 49-78.

year run. *Fiddler on the Roof* was released as a motion picture in 1971, the year a history of the production was published.¹⁰⁹ The play, musical score, sound recordings, and video release of the film remain in print. So powerful was *Fiddler's* presence at the time of the Broadway musical that the dust jacket for Sholom Aleichem's *Tevye's Daughters* carried the statement, right under the title, "The stories on which the great musical FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is based."¹¹⁰ While its Broadway record has since been broken by other musicals, among them *Cats*, *Fiddler's* afterlife in amateur productions may be even more impressive, if less celebrated, than its Broadway and cinematic success.

From the outset, its creators sought ways to avoid *Fiddler* being "just an ethnic show with limited appeal."¹¹¹ Indeed, they hesitated to approach a producer because "If we had gone to a producer and said, 'Hey, we've got an idea for a musical about a bunch of old Jews and they have terrible trouble and there's a pogrom,' he'd have thrown us out of his office, even through we were all fairly well known writers in the field."¹¹² They also had difficulty raising money because "Everybody thought it was far too special, too ethnic and parochial for any kind of open audience."¹¹³ Richard Altman, who was the researcher for the production and wrote a history of it, explained to each company as it was about to go into rehearsal that "This is not just a show about Jews living in Russia in 1905, although it is that, on the surface. At its heart, it's about the enduring strength of the human spirit—and man's ability to grow, to change, to overcome adversity."¹¹⁴ While the performance itself was to bring out the universal meaning of a Jewish story and transcend Tevye as "an ethnic symbol," the producers also wanted the audience to meet the production half way by subordinating their own "cultural identification" and "private prejudices."¹¹⁵

Two months before rehearsals were to start, director Jerome Robbins gave the following instructions to Joseph Stein, who wrote the book: "dramatize the story of Tevye as that of a man in the state of transition. This is the story we are telling; without it our show is just a touching narrative Jewish

¹⁰⁹ Altman's *Making of a Musical* is a history of creation of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Altman kept a detailed journal of his observations, just as he had done for *Tenderloin*, another Broadway show. A Ford Foundation grant had supported the documentation of *Tenderloin's* development. See Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 26.

¹¹⁰ Sholom Aleichem, *Tevye's Daughters*, trans. Frances Butwin (New York: Crown, n.d.). This edition is copyrighted 1949. While no publication date is indicated, it was probably published around the same time as the deluxe edition, with illustrations by Ben Shahn, in 1965, which was also published by Crown.

¹¹¹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 9.

¹¹² Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 21.

¹¹³ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 22.

¹¹⁴ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, vii.

¹¹⁵ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, vii, 150.

Cavalcade.... The audience must be strongly directed to Tevye's ambivalences and struggle to keep his traditions while being assailed by outside forces that are projected in terms of his daughters and their suitors."¹¹⁶ Robbins quickly realized that "if it's a show about tradition and its dissolution, then the audience should be told what that tradition is."¹¹⁷ To do so succinctly, Robbins suggested that they "create a song that would be tapestry against which the whole show would play."¹¹⁸ Slowly and with great difficulty, Jerry Bock, who composed the music, and Sheldon Harnick, who wrote the lyrics, created "Tradition." Bock worried was that this song would just compound the show's problems: "I was terrified that the whole show was too long and that it was going to be too serious and too Jewish and a disaster."¹¹⁹ Contrary to his fears, "'Tradition' became the key to *Fiddler's* meaning" and to every scene and character.¹²⁰ It is in the staging of tradition that we can see the popular arts of ethnography at work and differences in the approaches of the stage and screen versions of *Fiddler*.

Fiddler on the Roof's success as a theatrical work derives in no small measure from its suggestiveness. As the opening song attests, it is Tradition, not traditions, that is the focus of the production. Even when Tevye refers to traditions, they are so generic that anyone could fill in the blank with his or her own customs: "Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything--how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes." Who doesn't? Even when "the little prayer shawl" is mentioned, as evidence of "our constant devotion to God," it turns out to be arbitrary and determining: "You may ask, how did this tradition start?" Tevye answers his own question, "I don't know! But it is a tradition. Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do." A kosher home, the Holy Book, the rabbi, and the Sabbath are about as specific as Tradition gets. As a result, a Jewish audience could fill the blanks with all that it already knew about the virtual Jewish world of Anatevka, while other audiences would not be prevented by too much Jewish detail from making their own connections. A key to such differential response was a coded Jewishness, which was decipherable only by those who could hear it in the accent, idiom, and style of the performance itself, as Henry Bial discusses in his study of American Jewish theatre and film in the postwar period.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 43.

¹¹⁷ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 31.

¹¹⁸ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 31.

¹²⁰ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 31-32.

¹²¹ Henry Bial in "The Men Who Would Be Tevye: Zero Mostel and Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*" (unpublished essay, 1997), compares the interpretation of Tevye in the stage and film versions of *Fiddler* to show how the coding of Jewishness in the performance itself structures the

The challenge for the team was to etherialize (rather than spiritualize) the Jewishness of Anatevke. They produced Jewish lite--the flavor, style, and feel of a vaguely Jewish world--by suppressing markers thought to be too overtly Jewish, even though the team demanded detailed research as a foundation for their work.¹²² As official researcher for the production, Altman was asked to find "as much information as could be found on Jewish life and lore at the turn of the century, specifically the way people live in the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe, the work they did, their professions."¹ To that end, he "scoured the secondhand bookstores on lower Fourth Avenue. I also visited the library of the Yivo Institute on upper Fifth Avenue to bring Jerry books and illustrations that would provide him with a visual flavor of the times. This research gave him the basis for attempting to communicate with Boris something of the scenic values he wanted."¹²³

How they got from detail to flavor can be seen in their handling of language, which Stein saw as part of the "too Jewish" problem. He was "very careful not to have any Yiddish words or phrases in the script—and there are only one or two Yiddish words in any of the songs. But through the quality of the talk, the construction of sentences, there is a kind of ethnic rhythm without any Yiddishisms."¹²⁴ Harnick explained the decision not to use Yiddish words as follows: "I remember seeing so many nightclub comics, including Lenny Bruce, get cheap laughs by throwing in Jewish phrases. So we were careful."¹²⁵ Harnick understood the special affective associations that Yiddish had acquired as it became obsolescent for a generation that remembered a time when the language was vital vernacular.¹²⁶ He also agreed with Robbins that "even one noticeable accent would destroy the illusion that the characters were all speaking their native tongue."¹²⁷

To prepare for the Broadway production, members of the team drew on their childhood memories, "fieldwork" in Hasidic communities in New York, and library research. Bock wrote the music from what he described as "A conglomerate spiritual feeling" and "instinctive knowledge" based on his childhood memories of Jewish music.¹²⁸ Stein also drew on his childhood

way different audiences will respond to it. This work points to the need for an analysis of the production that goes beyond its literary sources, script, and score.

¹²² Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 108.

¹²³ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 89-90.

¹²⁴ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 39.

¹²⁵ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 118. Nonetheless, Zero broke the rules and "let loose with a stream of Yiddish, under his breath." (118)

¹²⁶ On the special affective associations acquired by obsolescent languages, among them Yiddish, see Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 95.

¹²⁷ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 140

¹²⁸ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 35, 36.

memories. He had grown up in a Yiddish-speaking family in the Bronx. Robbins and Altman attended Hasidic weddings in New York, including one at "the baroque Ansonia Hotel on Manhattan's upper West Side," because Hasidim "adhered strictly to a kind of tradition, in form and spirit, that Jerry hoped to re-create in *Fiddler's* wedding sequence."¹²⁹ Every time they went to a Hasidic wedding, Altman reported, "we felt as though we had hurtled back through time and been plunked into another world."¹³⁰ They observed the costume, the modesty of women, the arranged marriages, and the customs associated with the wedding ceremony--smashing the wine glass, crying out "*Mazl tov*," and the merrymaking. As Altman explains, "Jerry absorbed all these details and selected from them, without forsaking their validity."¹³¹ Specifically:

One evening, during the entertainment that followed the wedding ceremony, a Jewish comedian did a funny dance while balancing an empty wine bottle on his head. Jerry said nothing about it at the time, but I remembered the rapt smile on his face and his almost hypnotic absorption. The impression obviously remained strong with him, for to climax the exuberant wedding celebration in Act One, he added the relatively brief but intensely exciting "Bottle Dance," during which four male villagers did a spectacular dance with wine bottles balanced precariously on their heads.¹³²

The team also looked to the Yiddish theatre. "If I Were a Rich Man" was "inspired by a performance the composers had seen at a Hebrew Actors Union benefit held at a theatre on Second Avenue." It reminded them of a "boy-boy-boy" syllabic song they had heard at a Simchas Torah celebration in Williamsburg."¹³³ In these ways, the team identified religious orthodoxy with tradition and staged tradition as heritage through a theatrical mediation of the ethnographic.

It was felt by producers and reviewers alike that the slickness of a Broadway production was fundamentally at odds with the simplicity--and ugliness--of Tevye's world. The first task was to make the performers would look less like singers and dancers and more like villagers--and specifically, like Anatevkans, which were a species unto themselves. As the production concept coalesced, the virtual village of Anatevka became more "real." Robbins had each actor "write an essay describing the character he played.... to heighten their self-awareness and the pride they were to feel at being Anatevkans."¹³⁴ For at least one reviewer,

¹²⁹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 64-65.

¹³⁰ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 65.

¹³¹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 67.

¹³² Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 67-68.

¹³³ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 100.

¹³⁴ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 90-91

they did not entirely succeed: "*Fiddler on the Roof* takes place in Anatevka, a village in Russia, and I think it might be an altogether charming musical if only the people of Anatevka did not pause every now and then to give their regards to Broadway, with remembrances to Herald Square."¹³⁵

While priding themselves on there being "nothing glamorous about *Fiddler on the Roof*," which the team praised as "the opposite of conventional showmanship," they depended on theatrical mediation to aestheticize what Hal Prince, for one, saw as an otherwise alien genre and ugly people--"there is a certain beauty in ugliness when enlightened artists deal with it."¹³⁶ Reviewing the musical in the *New York Times*, Brooks Atkinson noted that this "major artistic achievement" makes the "shabby clothes" and "unlovely" environment look "extraordinarily beautiful." This is not Heschel, who looked to inner life for beauty. In *Fiddler*, the surface is Jewish, however attenuated, and the "heart" is the human spirit.

According to Altman, "Inevitably, the screen *Fiddler* became more ethnic than the play," in large part because of how the producers understood the nature of the film medium at the time.¹³⁷ Film provided a preternaturally realistic surface, in contrast with the suggestiveness of the theatrical medium. It was not simply a matter of filming the musical. As Altman explains, "What Jerry Robbins was able to *suggest* on the stage had to be *shown* on the screen. Jerry could be selective, but Norman [Jewison] had to fill the screen with realistic detail. The camera's very literalness was Norman's greatest obstacle in trying to retain those delicate and special qualities that had brought *Fiddler* so beautifully to life on the stage."¹³⁸ The Anatevka of the stage could be more suggestive because, "In the theatre it is easier to accept a stylized, unreal atmosphere."¹³⁹ Not so in a film that is set in "the real world, with real scenery and real sounds."¹⁴⁰ Because "most films are more realistic than ever," filmmaker Jewison believed that it was "very difficult to use music and poetry and to suspend audiences' disbelief, as *The Wizard of Oz* once did so perfectly."¹⁴¹ In other words, "We can't have the villagers all lined up, coming down the road, singing 'Tradition.'"¹⁴² If the stage production's suggestive and stylized approach produced a generically ethnographic effect, the film version aimed to make realism evocative by creating "the feeling of a place untouched by time or the twentieth century."¹⁴³

¹³⁵ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 106.

¹³⁶ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 111.

¹³⁷ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 204.

¹³⁸ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 184.

¹³⁹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 194.

¹⁴⁰ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 194.

¹⁴¹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 194-195.

¹⁴² Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 195.

¹⁴³ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 196.

Fiddler on the Roof was shot in Yugoslavia, within thirty miles of Zagreb in the village of Lekenik, which was "built entirely of wood and has a Chagall-like quality in its random design."¹⁴⁴ This set was a veritable ethnographic village, not only by virtue of its intactness but also because of the standards of ethnographic accuracy that guided the construction of the film set. So complete was Lekenik that for it to become Anatevka, "All that had to be built there was Tevye's house, barn and cheese hut, and these were deliberately constructed with tools and material that dated from the turn of the century, so that on film there would be no way to tell the old from the new, the real from the artificial."¹⁴⁵ The Russian part of Anatevka was shot in the village of Martinska Ves, which was chosen for its "totally Slavic" architecture.¹⁴⁶ A market place and synagogue were constructed in Mala Gorica and "The clutter of shops and stalls that was fashioned there was so convincingly realistic that one day, at the peak, of shooting, a local peasant tried to buy a horse."¹⁴⁷ Preferring "hardy peasant faces evocative of Eastern Europe rather than Central Casting," Jewison used few American actors and depended on local people for extras.¹⁴⁸ Their horses, carts, chickens, and ducks were rented for the film.

Jewison wanted to retain the original conception of *Fiddler*, while using his "Panavision camera to enter the daily lives of Jews in the village, to see the rich, broad expanse of European farmland—how hard the people worked there, how close they were to the earth and to their faith."¹⁴⁹ The Jewishness of this world was as fuzzy as the dream sequence, which was shot through a silk stocking in order to produce warm earth tones and a "feeling of Chagall."¹⁵⁰ The ethnographic effect was concentrated on the surface of the film, as the camera captured "everyday" life, none of it particularly Jewish, in sharp and concrete detail.

Fiddler on the Roof spoke to a suburbanized Jewish public removed from old immigrant neighborhoods and reassured by the existence of a Jewish homeland in Israel, not Europe. *Fiddler* ends by charting all the exits from Tevye's disintegrating world. That world had already been foreclosed by such representations of it. Those representations evince a kind of sincerity that would later seem sentimental, nostalgic, or even kitsch. They stand in sharp contrast to the more recent protocols of Holocaust memory, which are predicated on confrontation, the impossibility of representation, and the centrality of evidence, witnessing, and mourning.

¹⁴⁴ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 199.

¹⁴⁵ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 199.

¹⁴⁶ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 199.

¹⁴⁷ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 199.

¹⁴⁸ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 196.

¹⁴⁹ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 203.

¹⁵⁰ Altman, *Making of a Musical*, 204.

In the course of a century, American Jews have been protected from an ethnography that would racialize them and saved by an ethnography that would make children proud of their parents and inspire American Jewry to continue the spiritual legacy of East European Jewry. They have been consoled by elegiac invocations of a vanished world and admonished by Heschel and *Mad* magazine alike for succumbing to the materialism of American middleclass life in the course of their postwar suburbanization. Through books, expositions, performances, images, and films, American Jews would find in the popular arts of ethnography a way to remember a world that was a destroyed. Until they could face the genocide itself more directly, invocations of a lost world would serve as their primary mode of Holocaust memory. More eulogy than document, the popular arts of ethnography of the postwar period exhibit not only an autoethnographic, but also an anti-ethnographic character. Such aesthetically mediated self-portraiture was intended to inspire, more than to inform, for its goal was cultural survival, rather than museological preservation.¹⁵¹

Fiddler on the Roof brought this mode of Holocaust memory to its apogee during the period that the televised Eichmann trial forced American Jewry to confront the genocide itself more directly than ever before.¹⁵² In the years that followed, documenting the genocide and remembering its victims would take precedence over the recovery of a lost world. Nonetheless, that world would continue to be the elusive object of modern forms of heritage tourism, pilgrimages to hometowns, and documentary projects to recover through interviews, photography, and film the remaining traces of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Beth Hatefutsoth (Museum of the Diaspora), which was conceptualized in the 1960s and opened in Tel Aviv in the 1970s, had the aura of a Holocaust memorial (and contained within itself such a memorial) from the outset. The diaspora is figured here, in the Israeli context, not only in a museum but as museological. Moreover, this museum made a radical departure from conventional practice by deciding not to collect or exhibit original objects. The diaspora could be exhibited in facsimile. Such an approach would have been unthinkable at the Book of the Shrine, where facsimiles supplement fragments of the original Dead Sea Scrolls but do not supplant them.

¹⁵² *Fiddler on the Roof* has gone on to have a life of its own beyond anything envisioned by its creators. Not only is it often performed by amateurs, Jews and non-Jews alike, but also it has become of kind of proof text for church sermons. Ray C. Steadman of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, compares Tevye's struggle with the violation of tradition to Mark's Gospel and the conflict between the ministry of Jesus and the traditionalism of the Pharisees. This text appeared in the series "The Servant who Rules" (Scripture: Mark 6:53-7:30, Message: No: 12, Catalog No: 3312, January 26, 1975), <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/mark/3312.html>, last modified 6 June 1997.

¹⁵³ See for, example, Theo Richmond, *Konin: A Quest* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995). See also, Jack Kugelmass, "The Rites on the Tribe: The Meaning of Poland for American Jewish Tourists," in *Going Home*, ed.

In recent years, American Jews have also been exporting Europe back to itself, as the success of *klezmer* music and young American *klezmer* musicians in Europe attest. With such developments, American Jews are not the only ones producing and performing an imagined Europe. *Klezmer* music is following a precedent set by *Fiddler on the Roof*, which continues to be performed in Europe and the United States by Jews and non-Jews alike. An instance of the popular arts of ethnography in its own right, *klezmer* music sounds the sensibility of a new generation as it takes on the challenge of imagining Europe.¹⁵⁴

Note

I would like to thank Jeffrey Shandler for his generosity and expertise. I am grateful to Zachary Baker, formerly the head librarian at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and currently at the Stanford University Library, Barbara Gilbert and Grace Grossman of the Skirball Museum, Jenna Weissman Joselit, Kevin Profitt of the American Jewish Archives, and Jennifer Turvey of Schocken Books for answering my queries and bringing material to my attention. This essay was revised at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences, Uppsala. My deep appreciation to SCASSS for supporting my spring 1999 residency.

Jack Kugelmass, *YIVO Annual*, volume 21 (1993), 395-453. Though beyond the scope of this essay, the proliferation of memorial books (*yizker-bikher*) during the postwar period should be noted. They are an important example of the popular arts of ethnography and, in particular, of a vernacular autoethnography. See Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken, 1983). The appearance of this volume and such books as Lucjan Dobroszycki and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image Before My Eyes: A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland* (New York: Schocken, 1977) is a reaction to the diffuse and sentimentalized ways in which Europe had been imagined by *Life Is with People* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, among others.

¹⁵⁴ See *Judaism*, issue no. 185, volume 47, number 1 (1998), which is devoted to *klezmer* music.