Yiddish Returns: Language, Intergenerational Gifts, and Jewish Devotion

By

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# Introduction: Yiddish Returns.



**Figure 1. A scene from the Jewish innovation event.**

In April 2012, I made my way to a stylish, three-floor event-venue in Manhattan. I stopped at security, where a guard in a trim black suit searched his list for my name. A minute later, I was allowed to pass into an open room brimming with the activity of young Jewish entrepreneurs—a scene that differed remarkably from the small Yiddish reading groups or events I had been attending in New York City. I had come to this networking event to see a presentation by members of a new Jewish "venture" known as Yiddish Farm. The non-profit initiative, located in Goshen, New York, brings together Yiddish students and native speakers from both Ultra-Orthodox and liberal Jewish backgrounds in an immersive, Yiddish-language environment. The Yiddish Farmers constituted one

group among a number of young "Jewish innovators," as they were referred to at the event. Standing at tables with their promotional materials the innovators enthusiastically networked with visitors and possible professional contacts. The latter, for their part, carried with them sheets of paper, printed to look like bank notes, upon which they could provide encouragement, advice and, of course, contact information to the young founders. The bank notes, as I was told by an event organizer, "let you 'invest' in a project you might want to support." In addition to the Yiddish farmers, the Jewish start-ups ran a gamut of new Jewish ideas: a new campus organization seeking to promote pro-Israel politics among GLBT students, a new non-profit looking to create sustainable architectural models for Jewish communities, even a young artist who had designed fingernail decals, to be worn in substitution of nail polish, depicting Jewish themes. "That way," she explained to a smiling group crowded around her table, "you can always have Judaism right 'at your fingertips'."
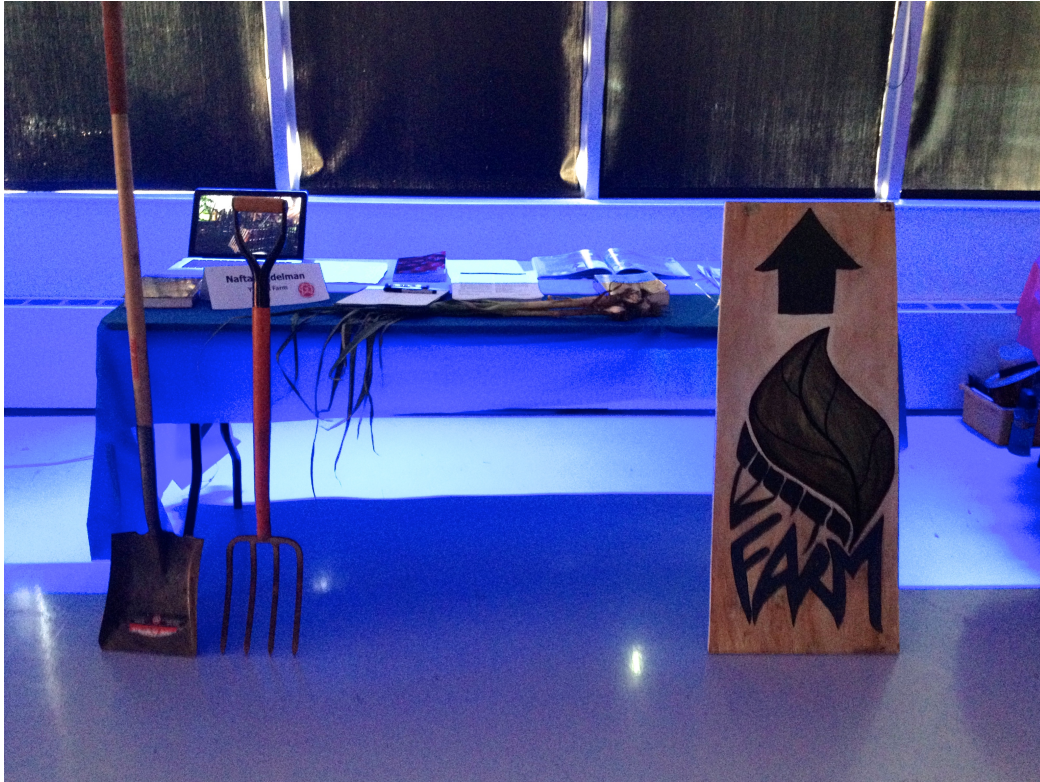


**Figure 2. The Yiddish Farm booth.**

For those familiar with the dominant narratives associated with the Yiddish language, a sleekly produced networking event like this might seem something of a strange place to begin an ethnography of contemporary Yiddish culture work in the United States. The vernacular language of an estimated two-thirds of world Jewry before the Holocaust, Yiddish is often typified in the dominant narratives of American Jewish history as the language Jews left behind as they achieved socio-economic upward mobility. In fact, as part of the "price" that Jews paid for achieving whiteness in the U.S. Yiddish has often been ideologized as diametrically opposed to the accumulation of wealth (Goldstein 2006, see also Kun 2005:48-85). The attendant linguistic ideologies that link the language with the intimate, feminized space of the kitchen, the family unit, and sentiment further reinforce this opposition.[1] Yiddish, in such ideological renderings, is non-productive, anti-modern: a language thick with the memories of its murdered speakers, or the schmaltz of nostalgia; always of the past, never in the Jewish present or future.[2]

Yet the relationships of exchange embodied above, in which Yiddish is commensurable with a variety of Jewish projects pursued by young American Jews, is not unique to Yiddish Farm. Months earlier, while conducting ethnography at the Yiddish Book Center, the relationship between Yiddish, youth and money was clearly on the table as I sat down for drinks, a few miles away from the Center, with a friend and informant in a local Amherst, Massachusetts bar. Mark, we'll call him, is a graduate student who had taken time off in order to participate in the Yiddish Book Center's yearlong "fellowship program." Each year the Center, which depends primarily on bequest money,

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[1] On the gendered ideologies associated with Yiddish in relationship to Hebrew in Jewish literature, see especially Seidman's conversation of the "sexual/linguistic system" (Seidman 1997) that has historically marked Jewish "internal bilingualism" (Weinreich 1975).

[2] This is, of course, a rough glossing that reflects particularly postwar, and especially post 1960s attitudes toward the language. As Josh Kun writes about performer Mickey Katz, the sound of Yiddish struck many audiences in the immediate postwar context as both implicitly racialized and offensive (2005:67-68).

private donations and foundation grants, hires four to five fellows in their twenties, "*recent college graduates*," the Center's website emphasizes, for, "a year-long professional experience in Yiddish language & Jewish cultural work" (The Yiddish Book Center n.d.(d)) emphasis in the original). Mark had studied Yiddish as an undergraduate at an elite American university. He identifies (like me) as politically left wing, and feels particularly drawn to the socialist political tradition with which Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European immigrant Jewry is so commonly connected. Mark also feels attached to the Book Center. He'd worked as a summer intern there during college, taking Yiddish classes in the mornings, and then assisting staff as they worked to pack and unpack donations of its hundreds of thousands of salvaged Yiddish books—the materialization of the institution's cultural rescue mission which made the Center famous.

Now a fellow, Mark was initially impressed by how much agency the Jewish cultural institution seemed to give him and his "fellow fellows" (as the group affectionately referred to one another). The older, permanent staff solicited their ideas for new Yiddish language and culture projects, and seemed sincerely interested in their feedback. But, at least in this moment, probably deepened by the depressing, snow-laden grayness of the Amherst winter, the work-a-day patterns of the office, and the practical frustrations of transforming ideas into concrete projects, Mark was feeling a bit less enthusiastic. He knew, for example, that the same desire to draw on the ideas of young Yiddish students was part of a wider, in his opinion, neoliberal discourse of "innovation" and "creativity." And Mark, always the astute social critic, was quick to connect those values to a broader American corporate culture. "There's something almost 'Silicon Valley' about the Book Center now," he reflected to me about the desire for innovation that seemed to have set in at the organization—its thirst for new energy and new projects.

Mirroring the networking event, Mark's sense that there is something reminiscent of Silicon Valley at the Yiddish Book Center places questions of political economy, and particularly of

American Jewish philanthropy, at the center of contemporary Yiddish cultural production. Clues to those relationships are alive in the above networking event. There we can see cohorts of young culture workers, twenty-somethings working the room to help maintain a heritage language that most American Jews today were not raised speaking, hearing, or reading. Around them, as indexed in play-money and the discourse of innovation, circulates a semi-anonymous public of potential investors that, while some among them may care deeply about Yiddish, cannot pass it on to future generations. As spaces of Yiddish encounter, I argue, the Yiddish Book Center and Yiddish Farm strive to mediate these relationships of exchange, thereby offering real and potential donors the opportunity to foster spaces of intergenerational Yiddish and Jewish transmission through philanthropy. In this way, both of these institutions offer a window into how the culture of the postwar American non-profit sector is currently remapping the territory of institutions, individuals and curated programs that make up "Yiddishland"—literally helping to produce, disrupt and remake its institutional centers.

## *Defining the Site: Yiddishland's "Centers"*

### *The Yiddish Book Center: Between American Yiddish and American Jewish*

The Yiddish Book Center, formerly the "National Yiddish Book Center" and before that the "National Yiddish Book Exchange" was founded in 1980 within the context of a broader post-1960s cultural and linguistic reengagement among American Jews with Yiddish. Its founder, Aaron Lansky, attended Hampshire College in the mid-1970s as baby boomer generation American Jews were increasing in number on university campuses. As with other white ethnic groups of his generation, whose members attended college in the wake of the civil rights struggle, the Vietnam protests and the emergence of the Black Power movement, American Jews like Lansky entered university environments animated by an interest in "ethnic roots" (Jacobsen 2006, Staub 2002). For Jews in

particular, the intergenerational politics of roots-seeking were highly combative: younger generations

of Jews accused their parents of purposely abandoning the past, trading custom, memory and

tradition for upward mobility in the United States. Groups of Jewish students lobbied for more

Jewish studies classes on college campuses; they charged their parents with repressing knowledge of

the Holocaust (a myth that remains popular despite its historical speciousness (Diner 2009)); and

they formed alternative institutions and modalities of Jewish practice that they understood as

embodying a countercultural critique of the "Jewish Establishment" (Prell 1989). It is this larger

context that, in part, gave rise to the Yiddish Book Center.

Yet the particular popularity of the YBC in comparison to other Yiddish non-profit

institutions and cultural projects in the U.S. has as much to do with Aaron Lansky's ability to make

Yiddish a concern for the social class of American Jews so often the object of those countercultural

critiques. Architecturally speaking, the Center's gorgeous, multi-million dollar headquarters, set on a

former apple orchard on Hampshire College's campus, is constructed in a style meant to evoke

Eastern European synagogue architecture, appealing implicitly to the popular nostalgia among

American Jews for small Eastern European Jewish towns or shtetls.[3] Completed in 1997 with a

subsequent wing added in 2009, the building itself makes concrete *how* American Jews care for

Yiddish. It is the manifestation of fundraising drives, of dedicated plaques and shelves of Yiddish

books memorializing loved ones—of, in short, the efforts of American Jews to create a space for

Yiddish in the way in which they had historically become accustomed—by building institutional

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[3] A number of scholars have noted the extent to which the shtetl has been "good to think" for American Jews—reflecting, but more importantly refracting, contemporary cultural and political concerns through what has been imagined as the prototypical, hermetically sealed Jewish space. For example, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, echoing Miron's (2000) thesis about how the shtetl has underwritten long distance Israeli nationalism in the diaspora, describes how the exile of the fictional residents of *Anatevka* served to underscore the importance of the Israeli state for the film's Jewish viewers (2001:155-199). For a recent discussion of the shtetl as concept in Jewish life, see Shandler (2013).

centers. On one side, across the road from the parking lot, Hampshire's dormitories and classrooms flank the Jewish institution. On the other, peaking out above the trees, one can see the mountaintops of the Holyoke Range. Indeed, though rural in character, the Book Center's Amherst setting embodies much of what postwar American Jewry sought in the suburbs: open spaces, elite universities, a sense of security.



**Figure 3. Arriving at the Yiddish Book Center.**

Today on the cusp of 60, Lansky is short, attractive and energetic. Even now with graying hair and a few wrinkles, the enthusiasm with which he speaks maintains something of the boyish youthfulness he embodied when, at 23, he took a leave of absence from graduate school and founded what has become one of the largest American Jewish cultural organizations in the United States. Among those familiar with him, he's famous for his effectiveness as a public speaker, for his impassioned stories of Yiddish book rescue, and for his ability to relate emotionally to a range of

audiences. As "Sarah," a long time Book Center volunteer explained to me about Aaron Lansky's appeal:

> [he] is really just such a dynamic speaker and such an incredible figure. I mean, he's like everyone's brother, son, grandson, and college boyfriend…he's creative and intelligent, and he's got these great little round glasses! He can really emotionally connect with people. In this day and age, with everything moving so fast, with all the technology that inundates people's lives, if you want to get someone to care about your idea it really has to hold your attention. It has to be great. He's creative and a success. He's someone you want to give your time to. I mean, look, for the Book Center to work, you've got to fall in love with Aaron Lansky.

Aaron Lansky's idea was to "rescue the world's Yiddish books." As a graduate student during the late 70s in East European Jewish Studies at McGill University, he found himself frustrated by the difficulty students had acquiring the Yiddish reading materials assigned in class. To address the problem, he looked to Montreal's still notable native Yiddish speaking population and was struck by a sense of historical fate. If students and scholars of Yiddish needed books, the population of native Yiddish speakers and readers who owned their own collections were dwindling in number. Furthermore, with fewer readers, the institutions that trafficked in Yiddish print—public libraries with Yiddish collections, Yiddish membership organizations, or the few Yiddish book stores and presses that were still active—would be left with unknown numbers of Yiddish language artifacts and no apparent heirs. Finally, the population that had and continues to maintain Yiddish as a language of everyday life, communities of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, officially prohibit the consumption of secular materials—including but not limited to the at times vehemently anti-religious corpus of modern Yiddish literature.

Lansky realized that these processes had potentially dire implications for Yiddish literature and even the language itself. From the rise of modern Yiddish culture within the context of mid-18th century Eastern Europe until the Holocaust, writers in Yiddish developed an extensive and diverse

print culture.[4] But when Lansky discovered the language in the 1970s, most Yiddish titles were out of print, and no one could quite determine what works were "out there" to be potentially lost or saved. The negative, or at best patronizing, associations in American Jewish popular culture with Yiddish only compounded these dangers. Lansky reasoned (probably correctly) that most North American Jews, the children or grandchildren of those who might have owned or read Yiddish literature, would not have the wherewithal to save Yiddish things—particularly those in the form of commodified, mass produced books. The threat to Yiddish was thus magnified. It came not only from the fact that there were fewer individuals and communities who could speak, read and write it. What Lansky recognized and subsequently legitimated as dangerous to the language was a deficit of American Jewish emotional attachment: American Jews did not even recognize that the absence of care could in fact prove perilous.

What would happen next in his personal story now constitutes the official narrative of the institution. Lansky began hanging fliers in Jewish stores and organizations asking for used copies of Yiddish books. His initial idea was straightforward. He would accumulate books and then recirculate

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[4] Because Yiddish speaking Jews were spread throughout the Russian Empire and Europe (particularly Eastern Europe), and then the countries in the Western hemisphere where they migrated in the 19th and 20th centuries, the political, economic, and cultural circumstances that mediated the development of modern Yiddish culture varied. Generally speaking though, Yiddish publishing emerged against the backdrop of the *Haskalah*, the European Jewish enlightenment. As European countries lifted discriminatory policies against their Jewish populations, thus entitling them (in theory) to equal citizenship, Haskalah intellectuals advocated the adoption among Jewish populations of Enlightenment ideas, including (to different extents among different writers) the abandonment of traditional Jewish culture and practice. Many Yiddish writers would have preferred not to write in Yiddish at all, aspiring instead to the languages of European high culture like French, German, or even Hebrew—the latter considered "high status" among non-Jewish intellectuals due to its biblical associations. But, while many authors wrote in multiple languages, cultivating a broad Jewish readership meant publishing in Yiddish. In this way, modern Yiddish print culture emerged as much out of necessity as out of the ethno-linguistic aspirations of its writers. For helpful introductions to the rise of modern Yiddish culture and the history of Yiddish print across cultural-historical context see especially, Fishman (2005), Trachtenberg (2008), Shneer (2003), Estraikh (1995), Stein (2003), Kugelmass and Shandler (1988).

them to new readers. As the number of books increased, though, Lansky decided to take on the mission full-time. He moved back to Amherst, raised money for affordable storage space, often within the abandoned textile warehouses and old mills that dot the Pioneer Valley, and began to publicize his project in newsletters and newspaper ads. Together with a small group of young friends, Lansky made frequent trips to New York City and other nearby heavily populated Jewish areas, to collect books. The stories of those collection trips have today made Lansky into an American Jewish household name. In fundraising letters, speaking tours, interviews, video documentaries and especially in his own award-winning popular memoir *Outwitting History: The Amazing Adventures of a Man who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books* (2004a), Lansky describes collection trips as iterative rituals of Yiddish rescue and transmission: between an older generation of elderly Yiddish readers, who have no heirs for their beloved Yiddish books, and a young generation of recent college graduates seeking out knowledge of the Jewish ancestors.

Lansky's has been a powerful story. In institutional rhetoric, the Center has often described its work as constituting "a bridge of books" between the generations. Through the salvage and institutional preservation of book artifacts, the suggestion is, the American Jewish community can intervene in relationships of intergenerational linguistic and cultural transmission that have generally not been possible in the postwar period within actual American Jewish families and communities. This narrative has won Lansky a great deal of public recognition and support. In 1989 he received a McArthur genius grant for his efforts. In the mid-1990s the Center acquired funding from Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation to digitize each individual title within its collection. As of 2014, according to a report conducted by independent auditors and available on the Center's website, the institution's total assets were listed at $46,629,566—an increase of almost $9 million dollars from the previous year (Meyers Brothers Kalicka PC 2014:3). Today, like other non-profits, the institution is also pursuing a "planned giving" drive, in which donors can ensure that part of

their estate is transferred to the cause of keeping Yiddish alive for future generations. Capturing the intergenerational aspirations of this campaign, the Center has dubbed it "The Yerushe Fund" (*yerushe* being the Yiddish word for "inheritance").[5]

As I began preliminary ethnographic fieldwork at the Book Center in the summer of 2010, the institution was in the process of reorienting its mission. A number of staff members were laid off as the Center explored hiring new, full time educators, and contemplated developing new programs. The mission of collecting books, though still central to the institution's public identity had largely been completed. Consequently, books themselves simply afforded the Center fewer possibilities for new projects—and thus fewer opportunities to cultivate the emotional (and intertwined financial) investments of new generations of donors and foundations on which 501(c)(3) non-profits like the Book Center have, particularly over the last three decades, come increasingly to depend (Hall 1992:257-298, Kelner 2013:56-57).[6] When I returned to the Center in the winter of 2011, the institution devoted to Yiddish revival seemed itself to be undergoing its own process of organizational revitalization.

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[5] The term "yerushe" is generally employed to describe transactions of financial and material wealth. However, depending on its context of use, it can also carry a more mimetic connotation of heritage transmission.

[6] The practice of non-profits cultivating more personal relationships with individual donors, a phenomenon widely observed across the sector over the last three decades, is embedded in both shifts in the distribution of wealth in the United States upward (Brown and Martin 2012) alongside shifts in the politics and culture of philanthropic activity (Hall 1992). Observers and employees within the non-profit sector have noticed a general trend in the motivations of younger generations of donors. Their motivations for organizational involvement have been characterized by some as, "far more closely tied to … personal needs, interests and ambitions," than a belief in the importance of civil society organizations (Hall 1992:264). Wood (1999) observed an analogous trend in the activist behavior of younger board members. Alongside perceived shifts in the culture of giving so too have the sheer numbers of non-profits and foundations expanded—the diversity of the field growing increasingly complex (Hall 2006). These are processes scholars have tied to 1980s government cut-backs in social services (Hall 2006, Salamon 2012), the emergence of the "super rich" (Brown and Martin 2012:508), as well as the increasingly complex relationship between for- and non-profit sectors, as well as non-profits and government. I more fully flesh out these issues below.

The Book Center defines the means of institutional revivification in terms of "education." Practically speaking, that mission is manifested in an array of different projects and programs. These projects include, for example, conferences and lectures for adults on different topics related to Yiddish language, history and culture (usually given by academics in the field of Yiddish and Jewish studies); grants for the translation of Yiddish literature into English; audio and video interviews (in English generally about Yiddish, broadly conceived) for its "Wexler Oral History Project," and others. Most significantly and especially over the past decade, the Book Center has targeted its programs at a demographic of primarily, though not exclusively, Jewish young adults. The Center currently runs a range of programs for this demographic: the seven week, intensive "Steiner Summer Program," developed to train eighteen[7] college-age and recent graduate students in Yiddish language, culture, and history; its "Tent: Encounters with Jewish Culture" programs, one-week workshops for twenty-somethings focusing on some aspect of modern Jewish culture (for example, theater, food-culture, or creative writing), and a "Great Jewish Books" program aimed at high school juniors and seniors, which the Center describes as an opportunity to, "read, discuss, argue about, and fall in love with powerful and enduring works of modern Jewish literature" (Yiddish Book Center n.d.(e)). In addition to these programs, the Center also organizes "winter term" Yiddish language courses, which college students within the surrounding five-college consortium can take for credit.[8] Finally the Center runs its fellowship program that brought my friend Mark back to the institution. Taken together, this suite of youth programs constitutes the means through which the Center currently seeks to revitalize its own form of yerushe.

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[7] The numerical choice is not insignificant. Eighteen is the numerical equivalent of the word *chai* or "life" in Hebrew. Accepting 18 students implicitly mirrors the practice among Jews of giving monetary gifts in multiples of 18.

[8] The Five College Consortium consists of Hampshire College, Amherst College, University of Massachusetts (Amherst), Mount Holyoke, and Smith College.

*Locating Yiddishland*

Within the Yiddish world, Amherst is not the most predictable place for a Yiddish center. Indeed, by all accounts, the de facto capital of Yiddishland is New York City. Yet, before moving to the importance of New York City to Yiddish and the postwar, American Jewish reengagement with the language, a little context about the broader "Yiddish world" is in order. The Yiddish world, or "Yiddishland," as Yiddish devotees sometimes refer to it, does not designate a particular territory or even neighborhood where people speak Yiddish. Prior to the Holocaust, the idea of Yiddishland was linked to Yiddish speech communities in Eastern Europe; but today, place names like this are generally employed by insiders to refer to a small transnational Yiddish subculture. Because most Yiddish devotees outside the Ultra-Orthodox world are not raised in the language, and because the population of secular native speakers is declining, the Yiddish world is today given form primarily through an array of either institutionally mediated or informal, self-consciously produced Yiddish spaces. These include college and university classrooms, non-profit cultural institutions like the Yiddish Book Center, immersive language programs, cultural festivals and workshops. In addition to these spaces, Yiddishland is also articulated through online and print media, list-serves, blogs and facebook pages. The people who animate this Yiddish public sphere are defined not first and foremost by knowledge of the language, but also and indeed primarily, by meta-linguistic Yiddish practice (Shandler 2006a, Avineri 2012, 2014). Thus Shandler has described contemporary Yiddish cultural practice as "postvernacular" in nature, defined more by ideological and affective engagement with language than communication in it (2006a:4). Linguist Netta Avineri, has similarly theorized Yiddish devotees as constituting a "meta-linguistic community" made up of people who, "experience a strong connection to a language and its speakers but may lack familiarity with them due to historical, communal, and/or personal circumstances" (2012:2).

Across the media organizations, festivals, institutions, and immersive Yiddish programs that make up the Yiddish world, the activists, organizers, and regular participants tend to know, or know of, each other. Beyond that, the meta-linguistic nature of contemporary Yiddish practice entails no small degree of difficulty in determining who counts as "a speaker," or even if speaker is the proper category of assessment. Avineri suggests a population of, "2 million who have some language ability worldwide," (2012:105) but argues instead that Yiddish language vitality be measured by meta-linguistic practice within communities as opposed to numbers of speakers. The discourse about the Yiddish world, as well as my own research, suggests a "core-periphery" model in which Yiddish is anchored within certain centers of activity animated by devoted activists around which a more loosely committed public circulates.[9] Among that devoted core, many working within one sphere of Yiddish cultural production will move between sites organized by others. In the four years that have passed since I began this research, I have come to appreciate this fact as I routinely encountered students I met, say, at a Yiddish program in Vilnius, Lithuania, later performing, studying or working at the Book Center, in New York City or at Yiddish Farm. Generally speaking, the Yiddish world's formal institutions tend to function as nodes of Yiddish practice, publication, networking, fundraising and other forms of culture work for a loosely constituted network of Yiddish consumers and producers.

A constitutive and structuring feature of the Yiddish world is that its participants are generally outsiders to, or at least on the boarders of, the Ultra-Orthodox or "Haredi" Jewish communities that do continue to employ Yiddish as a language of everyday life.[10] These

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[9] This model is also reflected in the metaphors used in scholarly and popular literature to describe the locations that make up that world, which range from "centers" Kaffrisen (2010), "scenes" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998b), "Yiddishlands" (Shandler 2006a, Mann 2012b) and so forth.
[10] The term "Ultra-Orthodox," though overly evaluative in nature, is the one most commonly used to describe Hasidic as well as "Litvish" or "Yeshivish" communities of Jews. Both groups maintain a traditionalist approach to Jewish law and practice. Although differences between them have

communities draw religious, spatial and linguistic boundaries between themselves and, to different

extents and in different ways, the larger Jewish world.[11] Scholars generally quote numbers of native

Yiddish speakers, primarily from these communities, as ranging anywhere between 200,000 and

500,000 worldwide. A 2010 Pew report put the population of Yiddish speakers in the U.S. (the vast

majority assumedly Ultra-Orthodox) at 160,968, with 76% living within the New York Metro area

(Ryan 2013). In New York City itself, Ultra-Orthodox speakers concentrate in particular

neighborhoods, especially amidst the most observant, or *frum* (pious), communities centered in Boro

Park and Williamsburg. Among other communities of frum Jews, for whom New York "serves as a

national and international frum hub" (Bunin Benor 2012:12), Yiddish continues to be employed to

different extents, especially within religious domains—for example within yeshivas, the male

domains of formal study and disputation of religious texts. There is a multi-disciplinary scholarly

literature on Yiddish language use and language ideology in these communities—but they reflect

dynamics that are largely distinct from the linguistic and cultural practices of Yiddish devotees that

animate the Yiddish world.[12]

These social divisions are ideologically reflected on the level of language itself. The history of

modern Yiddishism, like the history of other ethno-linguistic national movements, is punctuated by

prescriptive projects of language planning. These efforts reflected the ideologies of the movements

diminished over time, at the most general level, Hasidim are differentiated from other Ultra-
Orthodox Jews based on their adherence to the authority of spiritual leader or *rebbe*. For a helpful
introduction, see for example, Heilman (1992:11-39).
[11] Thus Chabad Lubavitch, the Hasidic community famous for its outreach to less religious Jews,
(and whose members maintain Yiddish to much lesser degrees than other Ultra-Orthodox
communities) has more social contact with the non-Ultra-Orthodox world than say, the Satmar
community in Williamsburg and Monroe County—which has maintained Yiddish in part to separate
themselves from non-pious Jews. The primary exception to the separation between communities can
be seen in online and print culture, which provide more anonymous forums if not for
communication, than at least for the ability to gain a window into the social life of the other.
[12] For work on Yiddish language use among Ultra-Orthodox speakers see, Tannenbaum and
Abugov (2010), Fader (2008, 2009), Isaacs (1999).

and organizations pursuing them. Thus, Standard Yiddish Orthography, completed in 1936 in Poland by the diaspora nationalist YIVO Institute, emphasized the distinctiveness of Yiddish from German—an endeavor motivated in response to pervasive linguistic ideologies dictating that Yiddish is not a "real language" but rather an impoverished Germanic derivation.[13] In contrast, Yiddishist efforts of purification and orthographic standardization have not been employed by Ultra-Orthodox communities; it is not only common to hear or read what Yiddishists would consider "Daytshmerisms" in the speech of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, but also to hear code switching between Yiddish, English and Hebrew in daily speech in a way that differs from the aspiration among some of the most devoted Yiddish activists toward the comprehensive application of spoken Yiddish. These differences have often served as grounds for drawing ideological lines between "secular" and Ultra-Orthodox speakers—lines that, of course, both reinforce and are reinforced by religious, social, and aesthetic boundaries.

This does not mean that on analytical levels it is sound to separate Yiddishists from Ultra-Orthodox speakers in an *a priori* manner. As much as for many Yiddish enthusiasts, like liberal Jews more generally (Kugelmass 1997), the Ultra-Orthodox represent an internal "repugnant other," many in the Yiddish world are often fascinated, if not at times perhaps a bit jealous, of those communities' linguistic proficiencies—touring neighborhoods individually or in groups, or analyzing the emerging Ultra-Orthodox literary sphere online.[14] Indeed, as I will show ethnographically, Yiddish can at times aid individuals from these different backgrounds—however ephemerally and tentatively—in imagining solidarities and future possibilities for both language and community.

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[13] On YIVO's language planning efforts see for example, Kuznitz (2014:163-71) and Fishman (2005:93-5). Among many Yiddishists, the historic stigmatization against Daytshmerisms (linguistic elements seen as too strongly indexing Germanness) continues today. Soviet language planning efforts for Yiddish involved the removal of the language's Hebrew orthographic components. For a discussion of dehebrization in Soviet planning see, Peltz (1985).
[14] For a related discussion see, Boyarin (1996:160-182).

Nevertheless, the extant social, ideological, and linguistic barriers between these communities also means that where one chooses to begin an analysis of Yiddish does much to determine the social relationships and cultural dynamics that will be made visible through that study.

*New York City: a Yiddish Framework*

As Lansky himself admits in *Outwitting History*, New York would have seemed the proper place for a Yiddish Book Center. In the 1980s and 90s, as the Book Center was growing in popularity, New York City was a hotbed of Yiddish cultural creativity and linguistic activism.[15] Of course, given the practical and symbolic role of New York within the immigrant experience of American Jews from Eastern Europe, this is hardly surprising. Throughout the postwar period, the largest and most important Yiddish cultural organizations as well as many of its most devoted activists have called New York City home. From the 1970s through the 1990s in particular, new generations of Yiddish devotees—many of whom were Lansky's peers in terms of age—drew on the world of Yiddish institutions and communities in New York City as a means to generate new expressive cultural forms relating to Yiddish language and Eastern European Jewish culture. Prewar immigrant generation Yiddish institutions headquartered in New York City, many of which emerged and grew within the context of a left-wing working class Jewish political culture, offered these activists not only institutional spaces for instruction and interaction in Yiddish, but also archives of Yiddish materials, East European born native Yiddish speakers, and an emergent peer group of Yiddish activists. These activists were inspired in part both by the larger cultural context of ethnic

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[15] There is much debate among Yiddish devotees, scholarly and popular alike, about how best to refer to the burgeoning post 1960s interest in Yiddish. Many are highly critical of the term "revival," particularly when applied to more recent Yiddish cultural projects. Cultural critic Rokhl Kafrissen observes that, what may have begun as a revival in the 1970s has now proliferated and diversified in ways that render the term both meaningless and delegitimizing (2010). Others argue that expressive forms like klezmer never disappeared to begin with. For a help discussion of the term in reference to klezmer music, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998b). Here, I reserve the idea of "revival" for iterations of Yiddish-oriented cultural projects that emerged roughly between the late 1960s and early 1990s.

revivalism then burgeoning in the U.S., as well as their participation in parallel countercultural

political, music and arts scenes centered in New York City.[16] If, as Deborah Dash Moore has

recently argued about New York City's streets, the urban landscape shaped and transformed

American Jewish culture (2014:71-111), then according to the memories of these Yiddishists the

Yiddish institutional landscape played a similar role—anchoring a key center of an emerging

revivalist scene (see chapter 2).[17] These institutions, and the people and things that animated them,

served in the words of one Yiddish activist involved in the revival during the 1980s and 90s, as a

kind of "framework" in relationship to which newcomers to the Yiddish world could pursue various

cultural projects.

Particularly central within that framework has been the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

In many ways, the Yiddish Book Center is an inverted, Americanized reflection of YIVO. YIVO's

primary function during the postwar period has been preserving documents related to the Eastern

European Jewish past and training students in Yiddish language, literature and history. But where

the Book Center's Yiddish salvage project is grounded first and foremost in the cultural

entrepreneurialism of its founder, YIVO's linguistic mission dates back to the ideological roots of

modern Yiddishism itself.

Self-consciously committed to Yiddish as the national language of the Jewish people, YIVO

was established in 1925 in then Wilno, Poland (for Jews "Vilna" and today officially Vilnius,

Lithuania) as the *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* (the Jewish Scientific Institute). Serving as the

national, social scientific center for the study of the Jewish *folk*, YIVO was a central institution

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[16] On the history of the Yiddish revival within the broader context of ethnic revivalism, particularly
with regard to klezmer music, see Slobin (2002).

[17] Certainly, the suggestion here is not that the renewed interest in Yiddish and Eastern European
folk culture was centered *only* in New York City. Nor do I mean to imply that it was a product
exclusively of that local environment. With regard to klezmer music in particular, Barbara
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett provides a helpful discussion of the broader economic, artistic and cultural
forces that helped facilitate its revival and proliferation (1998b).

within the Jewish diaspora nationalist movement in Eastern Europe. For Max Weinreich and the cadre of Russian and Eastern European Jewish intellectuals who founded YIVO, social science transcended the individual labor of an academic elite; rather, they conceived scholarship as a means for producing a shared national Jewish culture in the diaspora. By conducting this work in Yiddish, the vernacular language of the vast majority of European Jews, YIVO sought to ensure that the language in which that consciousness would be mediated was the common language of the folk.[18]

Between 1939 and 1944, during which Vilna was occupied alternatively by Soviet and Nazi forces, YIVO's leaders initiated what would ultimately become a permanent relocation of the institution's headquarters to its New York City office. From there, YIVO continued its work, focusing on efforts to document the catastrophe unfolding in Europe and repatriate lost and stolen materials. By the late 1960s and early 70s, in concert with the growth of Jewish Studies in the American academy, YIVO increased its investment in academic programs, especially through its 1968 founding of the Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies and the Uriel Weinreich Program in Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture (Kuznitz 2014:186-187). The latter especially, known colloquially as the *zumer program* (summer program) would become a central hub for graduate students, performers, musicians and other devotees who sought to cultivate Yiddish linguistic and cultural proficiencies—a function that the program continues to play today.

It was at YIVO especially that many of the key activists and cultural projects that constituted the Yiddish revival in the United States emerged. Not only has the Weinreich program served as an important center for Yiddish instruction for nearly every Yiddish cultural activist and academic in the United States and even internationally (including Aaron Lansky); in addition, during the crucial decades of the Yiddish revival in the wake of the 1960s, YIVO helped anchor within an

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[18] For an excellent account of YIVO's history see, Kuznitz (2014). One should take care not to elide the important role of self-conscious devotion and self-making to the emergence of YIVO. Weinreich, for example, was himself not a native Yiddish speaker, learning it instead as a teenager.

institutional context a culture of ideological Yiddishism that those new generations of activists encountered and augmented.

The presence of Dr. Mordkhe Schaechter at YIVO offers one illustrative example. Born in what was then Czernowitz, Romania[19] Schaechter's passion for Yiddish would eventually lead him to become a professional linguist, earning his doctorate in 1951 from the University of Vienna. Schaechter was eulogized upon his death in 2007 by at least one former student as, "a one-man Yiddish Empire" (Berger 2007). Before immigrating to the United States in 1951, he worked for YIVO as a volunteer collector of archival materials (*zamler*) in a displaced persons camp in Austria. In the United States, he raised his children as native Yiddish speakers (who in turn raised their children in Yiddish). But from his position as a language instructor at both YIVO and at Columbia University's esteemed program in Yiddish Studies, Schaechter influenced generations of Yiddish newcomers. Simultaneously, he helped produce new Yiddish cultural spaces, expanding the locations through which natives and newcomers could transmit the language. He was, for example, one of the cofounders of the Yiddishist organization *yugntruf* (call to youth) and its primary project *Yidish-Vokh* (Yiddish week), an immersive weeklong Yiddish retreat that remains one of the central nodes of face-to-face Yiddish encounter in Yiddishland (Niger et. al. 1981:770-771, Zucker n.d.).

Schaechter was, of course, not the only key figure at YIVO. Cultural activists like Adrienne Cooper and Henry Sapoznik, then working at YIVO alongside a small cohort of Yiddish cultural activists, would go on to play central roles within the revival of Yiddish and Eastern European folk culture. Under YIVO's auspices, Cooper and Sapoznik developed and helped run what would become both a staple of the Yiddish world, and an institutional model emulated by cadres of

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[19] Czernowitz was the site of the 1908 international Czernowitz language conference, the first such gathering in support of the Yiddish language. For Yiddishists, the conference remains a symbolically charged reminder of the highpoint of Yiddish linguistic and cultural activism. On the conference and its legacy, see for example, Fishman (1980) and Weiser and Fogel (2010). On the symbolic role of the city in post-Holocaust Jewish memory see, Hirsch and Spitzer (2010).

activists outside of New York: The Yiddish Folk Arts Program, or as it is popularly known, "KlezKamp." Inspired in part by immersive Balkan music camps in the 70s and 80s, KlezKamp from 1984 until its final year in 2014 served as an annual, immersive site where klezmer musicians across the country could gather, perform, teach and take courses, and network with other Yiddish devotees.[20] In addition to musicians, Yiddish and Jewish studies scholars as well as popular writers lectured and held workshops. Though initiated by younger generations of musicians, the event would eventually attract a multi-generational public, families alongside young artists. In time, other Yiddish enthusiasts replicated the KlezKamp model, reproducing it in the form of KlezCanada and KlezCalifornia. New York's Yiddish framework, in these ways, helped give birth to some of the key spaces and social networks through which Yiddish devotees transmitted Yiddish in postvernacular form.

A countercultural politics animated KlezKamp, one shared among many Yiddish activists in the 1970s through the 90s, and common among many today. In many ways, as interviews I conducted with New York Yiddishists from the revival's initial decades reveal, their discourse about the value of Yiddish in Jewish life mirrored that of other Jewish countercultural manifestations like the Havurah movement described by anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell (1989). In something of a parallel to how Havurah movement members saw small, independently organized *minyanim* (prayer groups) as a critique of, "the suburban and monumental urban synagogue as a viable expression of Jewish life" (Prell 1989:16), so too did the embrace of a language rejected by the kind of Jewish communities typified by that suburban edifice embody for them a more authentic, politically vibrant vision of Jewish culture and identity. Historically central in that regard within the culture of

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[20] The term klezmer refers to an Ashkenazi Jewish musical tradition consisting of dance tunes and instrumentals frequently played at weddings and other Jewish celebrations. For helpful overviews, including accounts of the postwar reengagement with the genre among new generations of musicians, see especially, Strom (2012, 2002), Sapoznik (1999), and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998b).

KlezKamp, and often noted about the Yiddish world in the United States more generally, has been

the important role that queer Jews have played in shaping the culture and politics of Yiddish space

since the revival. This is reflected, for example, in the discourse of what Jeffery Shandler (2006b)

and Alicia Svigals (1994) have referred to as "Queer Yiddishkayt"—a synthesis of new Yiddish

culture with concepts drawn from Queer theory and politics aimed at decentering simultaneously

hetero- and Jewish communal norms.

If many of the activists involved with Yiddish sought to positions themselves ideologically

against a suburbanized American Jewish population, the Yiddish institutional landscape they

encountered in New York City was, in a sense, similarly positioned, albeit for different reasons.

Specifically, Yiddish institutions generally struggled as the American Jewish community climbed

socio-economically in the postwar period. As one former director of the YIVO Institute put the

matter in an interview: "Were it not for NEH (the National Endowment for the Humanities), YIVO

would not have survived the 1970s. It wasn't the organized Jewish community that sustained YIVO

[from the 1970s through the early 90s], it was scholars in the federal government…who recognized

what the value of [YIVO] was." But on top of apathy or aversion to the language, matters of

institutional history and structure were also at play. If Lansky was able to transform Yiddish into an

object of philanthropic care and institutional stewardship, the largest and most well known Yiddish

organizations, the Workmen's Circle/*Arbeter Ring* and the Forward Association, were not until very

recently 501(c)(3) charitable organizations at all. Entrepreneurial charisma aside, these organizations,

like many other Yiddish organizations that survived into the postwar era, were socialist in origin, and

were not culturally and structurally suited to take advantage of the particular form of philanthropic

care Lansky was able to cultivate among American Jews.[21]

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[21] Prior to 2001, the Forward Association was legally a tax paying, for-profit entity. However, it
operated effectively as a non-profit corporation because of an absence of taxable income. In 2001,

The Workmen's Circle, founded in 1900, was originally created as a mutual aid society, offering to new immigrants services like life and heath insurance, burial assistance and education— the latter primarily through its *shule* system of secular Jewish supplementary schools for children.[22] Over the first decades of the 20th century the Circle's membership base grew to 85,000 members across 750 branches located throughout the United States and Canada. Some cities supported multiple branches (Michels 2005:180). Before WWII, the Circle was a central institutional force within the American Jewish labor movement. The Forverts at that time enjoyed similar popularity among Yiddish speaking, working class Jews. With a daily readership of nearly 200,000, the Forverts was, "the most widely circulated foreign-language newspaper in the United States" (Michels 2005:3).

Today, though, in the wake of the declining secular Yiddish reading public, the Forward Association (which prints the now bi-weekly Yiddish Forverts, a Yiddish website and more popular English versions)[23] operates at a multi-million dollar annual loss.[24] The Workmen's Circle gradually shed most of its social service programs as its membership rolls declined over the postwar period.

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the Forward legally restructured itself as a 501(c)(4) organization, in part to avoid potential tax complications related to the 2003 sale of its WEVD radio station—complications that might have occurred with 501(c)(3) status. This also meant, though, that the organization could not receive tax-deductible donations. It was not until 2009 that it legally restructured itself into a 501(c)(3) (telephone conversation, Adam Whiteman, former board member). The Workmen's Circle was a 501(c)(8) fraternal society until 2004, a status that limited the kinds of donations that qualified as tax-deductible. While the organization did maintain a small number of 501(c)(3) affiliate organizations prior to 2004, these were never significant sources of revenue. Information on historical shifts in organizational structure at the Circle during the postwar period are based on personal correspondences with current executive director Ann Toback (phone conversation, April 24, 2015), as well as former executive director and board member, Robert Kaplan (phone conversation, April 30, 2015),

[22] The shule model of education was not specific to the Workmen's Circle alone. A number of organizations, most of them socialist in nature, organized Yiddish supplementary schools for Jewish children in the prewar and to a lesser extend during the postwar period. See, Freidenreich (2010).

[23] The Yiddish version, however, is not a direct translation of articles published in the English edition. Rather, the former maintains its own editorial staff, publishing separate content.

[24] Public financial records indicate net losses of around 2-3 million dollars annually. See Department of the Treasury, (2011), (2012), (2013).

Currently the Workmen's Circle has roughly 8,000 members. Changes in the U.S. economy deepened the challenges posed to the Circle by a declining membership base. Increased regulation and competition in the U.S. insurance market, historically an important source of revenue for the organization, meant that by the 1990s, insurance no longer constituted a source of profit. For an organization whose revenue model historically depended upon mass membership, these kinds of losses and economic shifts were especially taxing. In 2004, the organization sought to address these challenges by excising itself from the insurance industry, and restructuring from 501(c)(8) into a 501(c)(3) charity.[25] Yet, the transition itself has been an uneven process. For most of its existence, the Circle saw its mission as providing for its members. Members were historically expected to give their time and energy in meetings and events, not their money. These values were reflected in its organizational structure. For example, until 2010 it maintained a National Executive Board of 49 people whose participation was based on geography and devotion to the organization, as opposed to wealth.[26] As one former president of the Workmen's Circle explained to me about the cultural shift that accompanied becoming charity: "one of the sayings among members, and you'd hear this, is 'at the Workmen's Circle Arbeter Ring one gets, one does not give'."

Particularly for liberal and left wing-identified Jewish baby-boomers, it is thus not hard to see the attraction of Yiddish as a resource for the production of a countercultural American Jewish identity politics. On the one hand, by taking Yiddish seriously, new cohorts of Yiddish activists positioned themselves against the dominant trends within American Jewish life. At the same, in a sense they simultaneously continued work that had long been pursued by Yiddishists like those at YIVO. If YIVO's academics produced Yiddish scholarship to counter ideological claims about the

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[25] Today the Circle is not entirely dependent upon donations, continuing to provide, for example, burial services for its members.

[26] The current board today has 18 members, and is more reflective of boards of non-profit charitable organizations more generally (phone conversation, Ann Toback, April 24, 2015).

language's supposed backwardness, for the post-1960s Yiddish activists described above, devotion to a language whose very sound most Americans find funny or offensive inverts the terms of American Jewish cultural intimacy—positioning Yiddish devotees as the true heirs of Jewish history.

### *Yiddish Farm and Yiddish Landscapes*

"kegen dem shtrom."[27]

"The first thing you need to know about Yiddish Farm is that it is not a joke. It's neither a punchline to a quip involving rabbis, herring or schlemiels nor a set for a surreal Catskills comedy skit. Nor is it a heritage re-enactment park somewhere outside Warsaw where gentile tourists can interact with Yankel the Sheep-shearer and Sorehle the kosher cow."[28]

Officially under the non-profit auspices of yugntruf, and founded in the winter of 2010 at the Stanton Street Shul on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Yiddish Farm is in many ways the genealogical heir to this ideological tradition. Naftuli Ejdelman, the Farm's education director and co-founder is the grandson of Dr. Mordkhe Schaechter. Ejdelman was raised, like his parents, in a Yiddish speaking home, participating from a young age in the world of Yiddish events, retreats, and groups. In his mid-twenties, he is, not unlike Aaron Lansky, good looking, charismatic, and passionate about Yiddish. Also, like Lansky, he embodies an entrepreneurial spirit that, as illustrated in this dissertation's opening scene, is quite fashionable in the contemporary American Jewish institutional world. But unlike Lansky, for Ejdelman, producing spaces of Yiddish immersion is something of a family business. Even the idea of a farm environment that runs in Yiddish is in part rooted in familial legacy. During his life, Mordkhe Schaechter had served as the head of the Yiddish League, which today still publishes a thrice-yearly literary journal entitled *Afn Shvel* (On the Threshold). The Yiddish League has its institutional roots in the *Frayland-lige.* The Freeland League

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[27] "Against the Stream"—a Yiddish Farm slogan.
[28] See, Finlay (2014:6)

represented an institutional manifestation of the ideology of Territorialism. Viewing the Zionist

movement as impractical and romantic, the organization attempted to secure large tracts of

unoccupied land for Jewish settlement in locations as diverse as Southern Africa, Australia and New

Zealand.[29] Schaechter, upon arriving in the US in the 1950s, had himself contemplated establishing a

Yiddish speaking agricultural community in New Jersey (Glinter 2012).

The location of Yiddish Farm embodies the revernacularizing aspirations of this tradition.

Situated in Goshen, New York the farmland itself is just an hour's drive north of Manhattan and a

twenty-minute drive from the Hasidic, native Yiddish speaking Satmar Jewish community of Kiryas

Joel. The Farm itself, though not identified with any particular Jewish denomination, has up until

now maintained a *shomer-Shabbos, shomer-kashrus*[30] environment, thus fostering a religious milieu that

visitors and organizers alike frequently described to me as approaching Modern Orthodox in feel.

The reasons for this orientation are multifaceted. First, in a pattern reflective of a number of

Yiddishists who have sought to maintain Yiddish as a language of everyday Jewish life, Naftuli was

raised in an observant Jewish home. He attended a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school before

college at Brandeis University. The Farm's cofounder, Yisroel Bass (born Warner Bass), is a *ba'al*

*teshuva*, that is, one who "returns" to observant Jewish practice during adulthood. But beyond these

matters of personal narrative, maintaining an observant Jewish environment inter-subjectively

authorizes Yiddish Farm as a vernacular Yiddish space—if not always in the eyes of Yiddish

speaking Ultra-Orthodox Jews, then at least in how those at the Farm are able to imagine that

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[29] The argument by Territorialists regarding Zionism's impracticality stemmed from their recognition of the challenges Palestine's Arab population posed to Zionist aspirations. They worried that creating a Jewish state in Palestine entailed either expulsion, or coexistence. Even after Israel was created, the Frayland-lige viewed "[t]he concentration of Jews in one small and vulnerable territory … as a mistake of the highest degree, placing the entire Jewish population in danger (Alroey 2011:22, see also Rovner 2014:119-121).

[30] That is, people living or visiting the Farm are expected to adhere to the religious commandments governing the weekly day of rest (Shabbos) as well as abide by Jewish dietary restrictions (kashrus).

Yiddish space in the eyes of pious Jewish others (see chapter 6). In a context in which language alone, as noted above, is inadequate to bridge differences between traditional and more liberal Jews, maintaining an observant Jewish context creates the possibility for social connections and at least imagined affiliations.

The promise (or peril, depending on one's ideological orientation) that native, Ultra-Orthodox speakers hold for Yiddish activists is an oft-recognized issue among them—particularly those who live in New York City. The Ultra-Orthodox Jewish world offers entire communities of native Yiddish speaking interlocutors; but those communities' commitment to meticulous religious observance sometimes threatens the non-traditionalist values of many, less traditional Yiddishists. Yiddish Farm's particular solution to these questions, as I will argue, involves creating possibilities for linguistic interaction among Yiddish adepts of all stripes, and newcomers to the Yiddish language. As with the Book Center's programs, those newcomers tend to be college and graduate-school aged students—dynamics that reflect the conditions through which most non-Ultra-Orthodox individuals first learn Yiddish today. Yet, Yiddish Farm ultimately aims not simply to train future scholars. Rather, by channeling these newcomers toward the language, Yiddish Farm hopes eventually to produce a vernacular Yiddish space, able to accommodate a small Yiddish speaking community on their land. In that capacity, the Farm would ideally serve as a new site within Yiddishland, one that would enrich the Yiddish language and broader community of Yiddish devotees.

Yiddish Farm also responds to a development at which I've heretofore only hinted—the changing nature of Yiddish space in New York City. As one long time secular activist described to me, the Yiddish world in New York City today is by no means less vibrant or rich; but in her words it is "*mer privat*" (more private) than in previous decades. In parallel with intermittent discussions among some New York City Yiddishists regarding the possibility of creating a new, permanent

Yiddish home in New York City, Yiddish Farm seeks to address what we might think of as the
"contraction" of full-time non-Ultra-Orthodox Yiddish spaces where face-to-face Yiddish
encounters might unfold. This contraction has resulted from the declining population of native
Yiddish speakers; but it is also grounded in the physical transformation of the Yiddish institutional
landscape in New York City—a transformation that has unfolded as membership bases of Yiddish
institutions have eroded, and those organizations have restructured themselves as charities in order
to survive.

A full, historical account of these shifts across the Yiddish institutional world requires an
enormous scholarly undertaking, one that has yet to be conducted. But a trend, by which established
Yiddish institutions have financed their ongoing operation in part by selling their assets, can be
observed across the Yiddish public sphere during the latter half of the 20th century. A few anecdotes
must suffice. In 1974, for example, the Forward Association sold its towering Lower East Side
Beaux Arts style building at 175 Broadway. Today, the building has been converted into
condominiums priced in the millions (Joselit 2007). After sharing ownership of a new facility with
the Workmen's Circle on East 33rd Street, that building was subsequently sold as well, with each
institution moving into floors of office buildings. Other assets, like the Forward's WEVD radio
station, netted the organization funds in the millions, which allowed it to enrich its endowment, and
invest in new projects. In 1993 the board of the YIVO Institute sold its most valuable financial asset
(and liability), its then crumbling Vanderbilt mansion headquarters at 1048 Fifth Avenue on the
Upper East Side, to cosmetics magnate Ronald Lauder (Winship 2001). YIVO subsequently joined a
small group of Jewish cultural organizations at the newly created Center for Jewish History (Dunlap
1993)—a project pioneered by YIVO board member, businessman and Jewish philanthropist Bruce
Slovin. So too has the Atran Foundation, which has historically supported Yiddish culture work,

repeatedly sold buildings housing a number of Jewish socialist and Yiddishist organizations, subsequently moving those organizations into more affordable, and often smaller, accommodations.

Even over the course of conducting this project, the shape of Yiddishland has continuously shifted. In addition to the Book Center and Yiddish Farm's new programs, other programs and spaces have closed, perhaps temporarily, perhaps permanently. This past winter, KlezKamp held what was announced as its final session, thus bringing to an end one of the central locations for transmission of the culture of the revival that emerged in the 70s. In 2014, the *Kultur Kongres* (Congress for Jewish Culture), which organizes Yiddish events, reading groups, and other Yiddish activities in New York City, was forced to close its sole office amidst financial difficulties. Today, a single staff member runs the organization (Kilgannon 2014). In addition, Yiddish activists historically instrumental in shaping the terrain of Yiddishland, and guiding its newcomers, people like Adrienne Cooper or Mordkhe Schaechter, have since passed away; others have moved on to other projects and endeavors, while new generations of Yiddish activists and culture workers are emerging on the scene.

This is not, of course, a process solely of "decline." Considering it as a "contraction" coupled with institutional restructuring in certain Yiddish spaces, better captures the processes of "dispersal" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994) and concomitant expansion of new Yiddish zones of engagement that have emerged alongside and at times in relationship to these shifts in Yiddish space in New York City. On a small, more informal level, to offer one example, friends and admirers of Adrienne Cooper gather together each year to remember someone who was nothing short of a pioneer in shaping the culture and politics of the Yiddish world. In the process, they enact a temporary site of Yiddishland. But on the scale of the cultural institution—which alongside college classrooms are today key contexts in which Yiddish proficiencies are acquired in the United States— the changing culture of non-profit institutions (described in more depth below) has been a clear

structuring force. Aaron Lansky's success serves as a good example: his creation of a new Yiddish

cultural institution was facilitated in part by the decline of older Yiddish organizations, which made

large numbers of Yiddish books salvageable to begin with. In addition to the Center, the decades

since the revival have seen a proliferation of Yiddish studies courses on college campuses (itself a

phenomenon tied to the investment of American Jewish philanthropists in Jewish Studies programs)

and intensive Yiddish programs like those offered at YIVO and the Book Center. The Forward and

Workmen's Circle's sale of their assets and the former's reinvestment of resources into their Yiddish

website also reflect these shifting dynamics.

As I describe in chapters five and six, despite this expansion, some Yiddishists fear that a

lack of devoted, full-time Yiddish spaces in New York City signal the watering down of Yiddish.

When I arrived in New York City in 2011, most opportunities for face-to-face Yiddish interaction

among non-Ultra-Orthodox Yiddishists took place at events, talks and performances, or in private

reading groups (*leyenkrayzn*) and *svivas* (Yiddish conversation circles or private apartment gatherings).

Nor were all, or even the majority of the formal events held in Yiddish. Exceptions to these

dynamics can be found in a few private residences of Yiddish speakers who have devoted

themselves to speaking only Yiddish in the home, or among a handful of families raising children in

Yiddish. For activists like those at Yiddish Farm, aspirations toward a full-time, Yiddish

environment addresses, even if obliquely, these shifting dynamics of Yiddish space, together with

what these changes mean for the vitality of the Yiddish language.

Though ideologically apart on the matter of Yiddish vernacularity with the Yiddish Book

Center, the form through which the Farm seeks to attract both new cohorts of Yiddishists and new

donors bears a marked similarity to the Book Center's efforts to maintain its own ongoing

institutional work. Specifically, Yiddish Farm runs language programs of different durations (often

held over summer and winter breaks) that have up until now generally attracted college-age students

and recent graduates. Unlike at the Book Center, no formal requirement exists that students be of this demographic. However the farmers have grounded these dynamics by building a committed core of activists drawn from their peer group, and by ensuring that their programs are eligible for college credit. In addition, the similarities between the Book Center and Yiddish Farm can also be seen in the kinds of philanthropic networks in which both institutions are striving to embed Yiddish culture work. In fact, the "Jewish farm" component of Yiddish Farm emerges not only out of a familial-ideological genealogy of cultural Yiddishism; it comes also from similar immersive Jewish environmental and farming programs, subsidized by American Jewish donors and family foundations, that seek to provide Jewish community building experience for Jews in college and their twenties.

Given the philanthropically supported non-profit networks out of which the Farm emerges, and to which its entrepreneurial founders have sought to link their culture work, it was perhaps somewhat naïve of me to be surprised when, one January day at the Book Center, only a few weeks into my fieldwork, a volunteer from Yiddish Farm walked from the winter's cold into the comfortable confines of the Book Center's Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Building. Yudl, we'll call him, is attractive and tall, in his mid-twenties. If he wasn't already a fluent Yiddish speaker he would be precisely the demographic the Book Center is increasingly pursuing for its suite of Yiddish youth programs.

Nearly a year later during Yiddish Farm's summer program, Yudl explained to me that he had come to meet with Aaron Lansky for advice about cultivating donors, and perhaps a few contacts as the young activists sought to get the institution off the ground. But, the scene at the Book Center provided few indications about his motivations. After hellos I, together with the Book Center's group of year long fellows, gathered together at a long wood table across from Yudl, shelves of books surrounding us, as Book Center staff set up video and audio equipment. Yudl

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apparently did not realize it at the time, but for the first hour of his brief stay at the Book Center, he was scheduled to contribute his Yiddish story to the Wexler Oral History Project. Only after accounting for his Yiddish self to the Center, did Center staff receive him into the administrative wing, leaving the rest of us to our culture work.

### Rethinking Yiddish Space

*Between "Narrowing" and "Expanding"*

In the small scholarly literature on contemporary Yiddish cultural practice, metaphors of "expansion" and "contraction" dominate the discourse. Expanding what counts as a Yiddish engagement beyond communicative practice itself, as Avineri argues for example, challenges the dominant criteria by which professional linguists measure language vitality (Avineri 2012, Hill 2002, Dobrin et. al. 2007). So too for Shandler's influential theory of postvernacular Yiddish language and culture, which in Jewish Studies represents the current analytical paradigm through which scholars theorize contemporary Yiddish cultural practice (Rabinovitch at al. 2012). Shandler defines postvernacular Yiddish in the following way: "In semiotic terms," he writes, "the language's primary level of signification—that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas—is narrowing in scope. At the same time," he continues, "its secondary, or meta-level of signification—the symbolic value invested in the language apart from the semantic value of any given utterance in it—is expanding" (2006a:4).

For critical theorists interested in breaking down Herderian linguistic ideologies that define ethnic groups in terms of their particular language and their particular ethnic culture, Shandler's notion of the postvernacular has valuable analytical ramifications. Considered postvernacularly, Yiddish practice and transmission do not necessarily depend on daily language use within an

ethnically defined speech community. Nor are Yiddish adepts necessarily Jewish. It thus follows that

language maintenance in postvernacular form does not depend upon raising new families of native

Yiddish speakers. As Shandler writes: "[a]lthough Yiddish culture is often vaunted as a 'golden

chain' forged by an unbroken succession of biological generations, it might be better understood in

the modern era as proceeding through cohort generations, manifest in youth movements, political

parties, trade unions, literary circles, education institutions, various immigrant, refugee and survivor

associations, and so on" (2006a:190). This understanding has potentially radical implications. For

Shandler, Yiddish transmission parallels cultural transmission in queer communities, in which,

"generationality is articulated not in terms of the biological relationship of parents and children but

(as is also the general pattern of modern Western youth culture) by coming-of-age cohort groups.

Hence, cultural identity is more a matter of when and where one grows up rather than into what

family one is born" (2006a:189).

Most fully laid out in his *Adventures in Yiddishland* (2006a) Shandler's case for the legitimacy of

the postvernacular has been recognized as the central scholarly contribution of his work. As linguist

William Weigal observes in a review of *Adventures in Yiddishland*, postvernacularity demonstrates how

"the vernacular/dead opposition is not necessarily a binary, nor even a one-dimensional continuum,

but contains within it a world of possibilities" (2011:157). Scholar of Yiddish literature Jeremy

Dauber sees "postvernacular scholarship" as potentially proliferating as the phenomenon of

postvernacular Yiddish, "increasingly permeates American Jewish culture on new terms" (2012:378-

379). More recently, scholars have sought to employ Shandler's framework beyond the case study of

Yiddish alone. Brink-Danan (2010) has extended Shandler's notion of Yiddishland to theorize online

Ladino speech communities. Anthropologists and linguists have also begun to take note of the

possibilities of postvernacular theory outside of the Jewish context. James Clifford has considered

how postvernacularity can help theorize projects of language and culture revival among indigenous

communities in North America (2013:277-279). Reershemius (2009), meanwhile, has sought to demonstrate the applicability of Shandler's work to Low German speech communities in Northern Germany.

Though he does not cite linguistic anthropologists working on similar relationships to language (but see Avineri 2014), Shandler's work theoretically mirrors current critiques regarding the social construction of competence and linguistic authenticity across different speech communities. Such critiques of authenticity are especially important within sociolinguistics, a field whose theories, as Mary Bucholtz argues, were historically underwritten by a "nostalgic" ideology of "real language" (2003).[31] Bucholtz and Kira Hall have thus problematized the concept of "authenticity" by thinking about the processes through which linguistic and cultural forms are "authenticated" (Bucholtz and Hall 2008, Hall 2005). These insights mirror similar theoretical adjustments in the field of identity studies (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Linguistic anthropologists working with indigenous populations seeking to revitalize heritage languages have formulated similar critiques. In the context of First Nations speakers of Kaska, Barbara Meek (2011) has shown how the idealized standard of native fluency, as the unquestioned criterion of revitalization, can often underwrite extant, racist expectations about the "failure" of American Indians to perform linguistic fluency in general (see also, Webster 2011). Other scholars have redescribed languages that lack significant populations of fluent speakers as "sleeping" as opposed to "dead" or "dying" (Hinton 2001). This work on language in particular reflects a longstanding critique of cultural authenticity in anthropology, in which scholars have recognized the political, legal and economic stakes entailed in the insistence that

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[31] Bucholtz defines the ideology of "real language" as, "authentic language produced in authentic contexts by authentic speakers" (2003:398). The ideology's implicit essentialism, she notes, relies, "on the belief that what differentiates 'real' members from those who only pretend to authentic membership is that the former, by virtue of biology or culture or both, possess inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristic criteria of membership" (2003:400).

cultural groups adhere to strict norms of ethno-linguistic authenticity (Clifford 1988, Povinelli 2002,

Samuels 2004).

In the case of Yiddish in particular, the language's capacity to almost, at its essence, critique

hegemonic notions of authenticity has rested very much in its relatively deterritorialized nature—

particularly when set against the political ideology of modern Zionism.[32] Yet, I would suggest that in

the very worthy analytic goal of critiquing what counts as authentic Yiddish, scholars have exhibited

a certain degree of theoretical ambivalence about the material, political, and cultural contingencies

that mediate the production of Yiddish spaces. Considering the possibilities of what Yiddish practice

looks like after the Holocaust, for example, Jonathan Boyarin emphasizes the importance of writing,

"in opposition to the ironic or nostalgic discourse of a lost or dreamland Yiddishland. It's better to

keep in mind the Yiddish nowhere-land. One must live on this earth, true; but to be entirely

earthbound is also unhealthy" (Boyarin 1996:200). Shandler, for example, lauds "the geographic

uncanniness of Yiddish—what Michael Wex archly terms 'the national language of nowhere' [that is]

essential to its appeal. While imagining Yiddishland is not necessarily an anti-Zionist project,"

Shandler argues,

> it does offer an alternative model of Jewish at-homeness, one that can exist not only
> instead of the State of Israel but also alongside and even within it. Indeed, the ways
> that Yiddishlands conceptualize Jewishness in spatial terms are radically different
> from political Zionist visions. Poems and maps of Yiddishland do not rejoice in the
> amassing of turf—in contrast, say, to early Jewish National Fund maps showing how
> many dunams of land its contributions had purchased in Palestine—but instead
> celebrate the great distances among its many outposts. Nor does Yiddishland paint
> an agrarianist vision of homeland; unlike the idyllic fields and orchards once depicted
> on Zionist fund-raising brochures, Yiddishland is in essence a cosmopolitan utopia
> (Shandler 2006a:49-50).

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[32] For a discussion of the identity politics entailed within the issue of territorial sovereignty in Jewish
culture, see especially Boyarin and Boyarin (1993).

Considered postvernacularly, Yiddishland in Shandler's analysis can performatively flash into existence nearly anywhere people gather to speak Yiddish or interact around the idea of Yiddish as a shared symbolic object.

As indicated in the above discussion of the Book Center and Yiddish Farm though, the terms of Yiddishland's narrowings and expansions transcend symbolic processes alone. Not all Yiddish spaces, that is, are made of the same *stuff*. Thus at the Book Center, for example, staff and volunteers have not counted dunams of land as they produced this new, powerful center within the Yiddish world—but they were certainly counting, in fundraising letters, in books, in speeches, its salvaged Yiddish books. Without those material things, at the scale of language itself, one struggles to imagine the production of a center for Yiddish in Amherst, Massachusetts. In a related analytical vein, the material elements that go into the creation and maintenance of Yiddish spaces are not subject to identical conditions of circulation and exchange; these elements lead their own "social lives" (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986)—lives that entail transformations from being heritage objects and memory sites to commodities. The fungibility of Manhattan real estate, as opposed to poems or maps, in the last half of the 20th century, for example, has done much to shape the particular form that Yiddishland's newcomers will encounter today—the people they will meet, the networks they will create, in short, the very paths available to take through Yiddishland.

The need to attend to these different contingencies involved in producing diverse postvernacular Yiddish spaces is part of literary scholar Barbara Mann's question, in reference to Shandler's work, about how we might, "begin to theorize the various diasporic "Yiddishlands" that have emerged since the break, especially in relation to normative Jewish notions of homeland and exile" (Mann 2012b:254). At the present moment, the Book Center and Yiddish Farm offer valuable ethnographic contexts in which to do so. In the contemporary United States, in which there are fewer opportunities for non-Ultra-Orthodox students to learn Yiddish from native speakers, formal

institutions of language instruction constitute the key points that mediate the entrance of newcomers into Yiddishland. It is within these contexts that they not only first enter that imaginary territory; these are increasingly the places where they acquire the skills to partake in the Yiddish world's ongoing production.

Focusing analytically on educational institutions also requires close scholarly attention to the political economy of cultural production. And that, I argue, means rethinking the map of Yiddish space laid out in the work of Shandler, Avineri and other scholars of contemporary Yiddish cultural practice. If trade unions, educational institutions, youth movements, and so forth mediate the shape Yiddishland might take at any particular historical juncture, then Yiddishland is, from the outset, not just a *Yiddish*-land; it is bisected and cross pollinated with the culture of those "territories" and their histories—of those trade unions and educational institutions that help endow Yiddishland with form. These dynamics of mediation and entry also require we take another look at the scene with which I opened this introduction. We must keep in analytical view those other agents circulating around the Yiddish Farm display table, ready to exchange a vast range of Jewish projects for business cards, social networks, and possible future investments. It means we look also to the contemporary state of the American Jewish non-profit sector, and the American philanthropic context in which Jewish non-profits are enmeshed.

*Yiddish Projects and The Instrumentalization of Jewish Culture*

Few would likely identify 1990 as a relevant date in Yiddish history. But in the history of American Jewish education, the date approaches iconic status. In 1990 The Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJF) published the second in a series of three National Jewish Population Surveys (NJPS) that would inflame lingering Jewish communal anxieties about demography as well as cultural and religious identification among younger Jews. Despite the range of

issues that the statistically based survey covered, the 1990 NJPS acquired notoriety with a single

number: 52%, the rate of intermarriage among American Jews. This statistic, combined with

evidence that the Jewish population was an aging one, and that Jewish families, in keeping with

sociological patterns common to middle class families in the U.S., delayed marriage and childbirth,

created a palpable sense of crisis in American Jewish popular discourse. A community that had

historically identified itself with narratives of upward mobility began increasingly to talk about itself

as a community fighting for its very survival—a community undergoing, "a continuity crisis."[33]

This crisis of continuity emerged alongside ideological and institutional shifts in the structure

of the American Jewish organizational world (Wertheimer 1995, Kelner 2013). For most of the post-

WWII period, the dense and complex network of organizations that make up the organized

American Jewish community were supported and organized around the same organization that

conducted the 1990 survey—the Council of Jewish Federations. Today known as the Jewish

Federations of North America, it constitutes an umbrella organization for a national network of

local Jewish federations, typically organized within a greater municipal area (i.e. Greater Detroit, or

Boston, etc.). During the postwar period, the federation system has served as the primary

fundraising and redistributive body of the American Jewish community. Based on assessments of

the needs of local Jewish communities, the interests of major donors, and the national and

international priorities of the American Jewish community, federations distribute funds raised during

local campaigns to designated organizations within the system's local, national and international

network (Kelner 2013). Throughout the initial decades of the postwar era, the primary fundraising

platform of the federation had been supporting progressive causes in the U.S. and Jews overseas—

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[33] The authority of the particular agents and institutions involved in this work reflects Lila Corwin Berman's observations about the central role that social science expertise has played in shaping both public and private Jewish communal discourse (2009). For an anthropological discussion of the importance of quantified, biopolitical knowledge within the production of those discourses see, Kravel-Tovi (Forthcoming).

especially in Israel.[34] But by the 1990s the annual fundraising campaigns had begun to flatline, leaving communal professionals concerned not only with the collective health of the American Jewish population, but with the federation system itself (Kelner 2010:37-40).

As the federated model suggests, more was at stake in these campaigns than the functioning of any particular charitable organization. In its authority to assess community demographics and needs and concomitantly set policy about which causes would be priorities for the American Jewish community, scholars have argued that the federation system constitutes an apparatus akin to a state for the voluntary population of American Jews (Elazar 1976). With the first federation founded in Boston in 1885, their emergence, growth, and ultimate consolidation into a national system was precipitated initially by waves of Eastern European immigration in the first half of the 20th century. As the American Jewish community sought to account for and help acclimate these populations to American life new federations began to take shape across North American cities. Over the course of the latter half of the 20th century, the federation system gradually extended its power over the American Jewish communal sphere. Thus, writing in 1995, Jack Wertheimer could observe that, "few Jewish agencies are not beholden to federations for at least part of their funding" (Wertheimer 1995:67).

With the 1990 study pointing to attenuating ethno-religious identification and practice, the continuity crisis first and foremost offered, as Shaul Kelner puts it, "a cause to rally around" (2010:39). Pointing out the need is not necessarily an indication of cynicism on Kelner's part. At least for the networks of Jewish professionals, scholars, and devoted volunteers who work within the federation and its partner institutions, participation in federation life, despite its bureaucratic,

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[34] This was precipitated by the gradual merger by individual federations of their federation campaigns and the campaigns of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), which raised money specifically for causes in Israel. This process was completed in 1986, when the UJA of New York finally merged its campaigns (Wertheimer 1995:15-16).

institutionalized nature, is not necessarily disenchanted labor. Federation-based philanthropy, especially in the context of its annual fundraising and emergency campaigns, historically came complete with its own ceremonies, rituals, and special honorees —its rituals of "card calling"[35] and phoneathons, its dinners, invited speakers, and so forth (Kelner 2013:65-66, Woocher 1986). Sociologist Jonathan Woocher (1986), building off Bellah's (1967) notion of civil religion described federation work as constitutive of a post-Holocaust ethos of "sacred survival." Sacred survival stressed the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, the shared responsibility of world Jewry to ensure communal protection, and the centrality of American Jewish philanthropy in achieving those goals. Woocher understood this ethos less as a form of Jewish secularism than the articulation of its own particular form of Judaism. Slack fundraising indicated to federation functionaries that the federation's agenda seemed no longer to pull on the heartstrings of American Jewry; and to the extent that philanthropy interpellated the American Jewish community, bad fundraising campaigns *themselves* indexed ethnic attenuation (Kelner 2013).

A growing concern over youth education had, in fact, been building gradually in the American Jewish institutional world at least since the predecessor to the 1990 NJPS, conducted in 1970.[36] During that two-decade period, Jewish communal professionals worried especially about the college campus. As college attendance became increasingly an assumption among American Jews, sociologists, rabbis and other Jewish communal professionals worried that campuses were potentially hostile territories for young Jews—especially with the emergence of the New Left and

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[35] The practice of card calling emerged as a means to promote conspicuous giving at federation campaigns and other fundraising events. During the event, attendees were called upon by name and asked to publically declare the size of their gift. While uncomfortable for some givers, for decades it proved highly effective.

[36] On the 1970 NJPS survey and intermarriage see, Mayer (2008) and Wertheimer (1995:34-5).

Black Power movements, which were frequently critical of Israel.[37] Communal experts fretted that college environments lacked the Jewish organizations, communal spaces and Jewish mentors to guide Jewish students. Nor was this a concern only among communal elites. Jewish university students, spurred by the same climate of ethnic revitalization that helped spark the Yiddish revival, rallied around what they felt was a deficit of Jewish studies courses and Jewish campus culture. These are the dynamics that, in a discourse almost unimaginable on most college campuses with significant Jewish populations today, made thinkable the charge by Jewish students, as they protested the CJF's 1969 General Assembly meeting, that their college campuses were "Jewish wastelands" (Wertheimer 1995:39). In a similar vein the Jewish sociologist Charles Liebman could write in 1973 that with the, "absence on the college campus of positive Jewish figures who command deference or respect…." Judaism remained for college students, "an experience of childhood which one outgrows—a parochialism which must be submerged in the universalist order which is so demanding and at the same time so attractive" (Liebman 1973:130).[38]

By the 1990s Jewish professionals increasingly recognized the prospect of Jewish youth "outgrowing" Judaism in college as a serious demographic, cultural, and political threat. It is worth noting, to that effect, the statistically based, social scientific language of marriage and birthrates in which this crisis of continuity was couched. If college and the twenties was a period in which American Jews were most displaced from the suburban Jewish institutions of their youth, it also constituted a life-stage in which young Jews were most likely to make decisions about family and marriage that (given the implicit assumption that intermarriage would yield non-Jewish children),

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[37] Of particular concern for many Jewish social scientists was what they felt was a large percentage of American Jews involved in New Left protest movements and what they referred to as "the counterculture." For examples see Rose (1969), Liebman (1973), Sidorsky (1973).

[38] For Liebman, it should be noted, this was not simply a critique of the college campus, but also of Jewish families and communal organizations. In their ambivalent attitude toward Jewish particularity, he contended, Jews encouraged assimilatory patterns in college.

would ultimately divert them from American Jewish institutional life in the future. Given substantial investments in the suburban landscapes of synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, and summer camps, those decisions boded dire consequences, if not for individuals themselves, then certainly for an American Jewish community and its institutions.

Within the federation system itself, the first changes made to address concerns about continuity were as much ideological and structural as they were financial in nature. Since their founding, federations had competed heavily with synagogues, which traditionally raised their own funds from members. In fact, throughout the course of the federation system's growth and development during the early 20th century, its functionaries consistently sought to, "wrest control over Jewish social welfare efforts from the synagogues" (Kelner 2013:59). From the perspective of federation officials, the independence of synagogues made them both inefficient and undemocratic, standing outside of the body that claimed to represent the Jewish people. Synagogue leaders and rabbis thought federations risked producing Judaism in form only, lacking any kind of spiritual content. As these tensions persisted into the postwar years, they were often articulated along "secular" and "religious" lines—with federations responsible for civic duties and synagogues responsible for the religious realm. Of course, as the notion of "sacred survival" indicates, these divisions are not so neatly teased apart in practice; but with the emergence of the continuity crisis in the 1990s a new consensus crystalized. As Kelner has written about these developments, "[u]nderstanding themselves to be facing a shared problem, federations and synagogues became increasingly convinced that the key line of distinction in the American Jewish community was not between secular and religious institutional spheres but the distinction between people who maintained any type of Jewish connection and people who maintained none" (2013:62-63).

As the American Jewish community sought to address what is now generally referred to as "Jewish engagement" among college students and twenty-somethings, the categories of the Jewish

professional sphere (educational institutions, research centers, foundations and so forth) eventually captured this emphasis on "any type of Jewish connection." Social psychologist Jeffery Arnett's concept of "emerging adulthood" for example, circulates throughout Jewish community literature on this demographic (2002).[39] Emerging adulthood, for Arnett, represents a period of the life cycle during which individuals have left their parent's homes, but are still making decisions about areas of life like work, love and family, and religious commitments. It is thus a period defined, in Arnett's work, very much by the practice of experimentation itself. To the extent that communal experts understood the outcomes of those experiments as loaded with consequences for the future of a broader American Jewish community, ensuring continuity meant understanding the choices of young Jews. Indeed, if Jewish professionals could determine how and why young Jews "choose Jewish," they could better guide them through what they considered the perilous years of college and the twenties.

Though of particular concern to the American Jewish community, the most concrete, financial steps to address those emerging, youthful desires actually reflected shifts in the American non-profit sector itself more than any particularist agenda. Communal hand-wringing in the 90s about stagnating federation campaigns, together with declining synagogue attendance, unfolded within a broader context of public concern about what declining membership (or the perception of it) in civil society organizations and religious institutions meant for American society writ large (Kelner 2010:38-39, Putnam 1995, 2000). Some, following sociologist Robert Putnam, worried that institutional apathy among a "Me-generation's" (Hall 1992) would ultimately prove parasitic on the fabric of American civil society. As sociologists, popular and scholarly alike, speculated about the future voluntary behavior of the grassroots, non-profits themselves began to encounter new

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[39] For a few examples see, Hillel (n.d.), Cygielman (n.d.), Feigelson (2013). In addition, at the Reform Movement's Hebrew Union College, students can receive a "Certificate in Jewish Education for Adolescents and Emerging Adults" (Hebrew Union College, n.d.).

patterns among their donors. Younger donors and board members, in contrast to previous

generations, sought more say in how organizations managed their resources and set policy (Wood

1999, Hall 1992, Solomon 2005:102). Alongside these perceived shifts in donors practices, scholars

of the non-profit sector observed a rise in the number of grant giving foundations, so that, "by the

end of the twentieth century more than 80,000 grant makers, of which 60,000 were in the form of

foundations, made over 500,000 grants annually, with assets in excess of a quarter of a trillion

dollars" (Solomon 2005:101). Simultaneously, rollbacks in social welfare programs under Reagan's

"conservative revolution," according to historian Peter Dobkin Hall, helped spark an expansion and

diversification of the U.S. non-profit sector itself (Hall 2006). This phenomenon was precipitated by

a greater distribution of wealth upward during and after the 1990s, and American tax laws that

encouraged philanthropic giving. These general transformations in the American economy had

particular ramifications for the structure of American Jewish philanthropy. As Kelner has observed,

where federation functionaries had previously wielded a great deal of agency in setting policies and

priorities, "[s]ince the 1990s, the federation system nationally has increasingly found itself in the

novel position of having to respond to priorities set by foundations" (Kelner 2013:57).

The most well known, and most explicitly demographically oriented Jewish youth endeavor

grounded in these new patterns of philanthropic giving and concern over emerging Jewish adults is

Taglit-Birthright Israel. Initiated in 1996, Birthright, initially funded by Jewish "mega-donors"[40]

Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, subsequently received funding from the Government of

Israel and the Jewish federation. Birthright brought experts from a variety of fields—tourism,

education, history, sociology—together with major research institutions to design, organize and

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[40] The term "mega-donors" refers to about 20 of the largest donors within the American Jewish
community (Kelner 2010:39-40). The Book Center has received funding from a number of them—
including the foundations of Harry and Jeanette Weinberg (for whom their main building is named),
Steven Spielberg and Michael Steinhardt.

implement fully funded tours to Israel for American Jewish youth between the ages of 18-26. The only requirements for attendance are that participants have at least one Jewish parent, not actively practice another religion, and have never previously traveled on an organized Israel tour. Critics have frequently charged that Birthright's main purpose is to politically indoctrinate young Jews into a pro-Israel position. But the primary aim of Birthright is to engage their participants in an intense, emotionally laden experience that unfolds through a trip to Israel. They are, as Kelner has described them, "tours that bind" (2010), which he theorizes as efforts to "instrumentalize" culture toward ends that are simultaneously demographic, political, and ethno-religious in nature.

Birthright hardly disguises its aim to cultivate the intimate attachments of young Jews. Now "themed," Birthright tours cater not only to the various educational imperatives that tour designers and funders might have, but also to the desires and tastes (or perceived desires and tastes) of college-aged and twenty-something American Jews. Thus, Birthright has marketed tours designed specifically for religious Jews, for Jews interested in environmentalism, for GLBT identified Jews, and even for Jews interested in hip-hop and skateboarding. Each tour literally traces a different path through Israel, exposing students to a vision of Israeli society and culture tailored to what its target demographic seem likely or excited about consuming.

*Taglit*, or "discovery" in Hebrew reflects the American Jewish community's shift in ideology toward the valuation of any kind of Jewish identification. The program's thematic tours suggest that no matter the young participant's interest, he or she will discover it in Israel alongside other American Jewish peers. In Jewish young adult programming this logic extends beyond Birthright alone. If one looks across the array of programs aimed at emerging Jewish adults, together with an expanded array of foundations and wealthy donors focusing resources on this demographic, one can see a variety of initiatives that draw on elements of Birthright's thematized, peer-oriented, immersive logic. There are farming programs, like the Adamah program at the Isabella Friedman retreat center

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in Connecticut, demographically targeted bike trips for American Jewish youth, social justice and service programs run by American Jewish World Service, Avodah, and others. Alongside these immersive programs exist an array of week and weekend-long workshops, skill-building retreats, and networking events that seek to help foster what is labeled "Jewish innovation" among younger generations of Jews. Many of these workshops bring Jews together within immersive contexts to foster new cohorts of Jewish leaders who are, as one institutionally funded study described them, "heirs to the Jewish communal system of the 20th century" (Jumpstart et. al. 2010).

New communal structures and organizations underwrite an array of different Jewish "contents" supported in these programs. Thus in 2005, to provide one suggestive example, the Schusterman Foundation, a major American Jewish family foundation, together with Taglit-Birthright created the suggestively named "ROI community." "ROI," the organization describes, "stands for 'return on investment,' a common business term that refers to achieving a desirable outcome through wise investment. Furthermore, *ro'i* in Hebrew means 'my shepherd,' which stems from the word *ro'eh,* a symbol of leadership in the Jewish tradition" (ROI Community n.d.(a)). ROI holds an annual networking and professional skill building summit for "Jewish innovators" in their twenties and thirties and seeks to link international communities of young Jewish activists and organizers in order to help them produce their own new Jewish initiatives (ROI Community n.d.(b)). In a 2011 article entitled "The Work of a Young Jewish Innovator," Naftuli Ejdelman describes his experience at ROI's annual summit, where he was able to connect and network with other Jews, some of them also Yiddish speakers, involved in social media, service organizations, and religious communities as he worked toward building Yiddish Farm (2011).

ROI participates in a larger ecology of wealthy philanthropists, Jewish community professionals, new and existing American Jewish institutions and young Jewish entrepreneurs that make up part of what American Jewish foundations and philanthropists have recently dubbed, "the

Jewish innovation economy"—an estimated $200 million dollar per year segment of the larger

North American Jewish non-profit sector (which one estimate put at $10 billion annually, with

another depicting net assets at $26 billion).[41] One study attempting to map the Jewish innovation

economy describes it in the following terms:

> The Jewish startup sector runs lean and burns hot with the twin fuels of knowledge and
> social capital. Long-term investment in Jewish education and leadership has created a
> workforce well prepared and highly motivated to shape its own communal destiny. New
> Jewish initiatives complement existing communal institutions and in many cases achieve
> results and impacts that extend those institutions' core missions. These are not potential
> resources; they are current, sustainable, even renewable sources of communal energy
> (Jumpstart et al. 2010:1).

A similar discourse of innovation appears in an array of cultural "incubators" that provide seed

money and professional training for Jewish "cultural entrepreneurs." Other organizations like Natan,

Slingshot Fund, and Reboot offer opportunities for accumulated wealth to be directed to

"innovative" "creative" and "new" cultural projects.

It perhaps goes without saying that these developments reflect the knowledge forms and

culture of a broader economy of innovation in the United States and globally in the early decades of

the 21st century. Indeed, in the above study, before informing their readers about the Jewish

innovation economy itself, the authors provide a short review of Austrian economist Joseph

Schumpeter's critique of neo-classical economics in order to stress the importance of speculation,

innovation, and new projects to economic development in the new economy (2010:2). If these

authors see promise in these principles' application to American Jewish culture production, it is

because they constitute a key discourse mediating projects to revive the American economy itself.

Observers of and agents within the innovation economy often use its discourses and logics

to describe economic revitalization projects within physical space. Such practices are reflected in the

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[41] For these reports see, Pearlman (2009) and Nathan-Kazis (2014) respectively.

promotion—though tax incentives, and subsidies—of "innovation districts" within post-industrial, economically depressed American cities. I suggest though that we think in similarly spatial terms about the philanthropic subsidization of Jewish culture to address ethno-religious attenuation. Today, Jewish philanthropists, Jewish professionals and young entrepreneurs currently seek to remake Jewish culture through an array of projects aimed at harnessing the desires and creative potentials of young Jews—networking events, immersive educational programs, and Jewish cultural and professional workshops. Considered this way, the institutions and projects that make up *any* given cultural terrain—including Yiddishland—also offer concrete and imaginative spaces to revivify and remake with philanthropy. This analogy seems to me latent in Mark's feeling about the relationship between Silicon Valley and the Book Center. Indeed, he may very well have noticed the shift to innovation over the course of his multiple returns to the institution. Years before his fellowship, when Mark worked as a summer intern at what was then the National Yiddish Book Center, he spent countless hours sorting thousands of Yiddish books in the post-industrial city of Holyoke in the former Lyman Mill building. The Mill building, after undergoing its own process of revitalization that unfolded throughout the years that the Book Center was revitalizing Yiddish within its confines, is now known as "Open Square" which is located "in the heart of Holyoke's Innovation District" (Open Square n.d.)

*Cultivating Yiddish Energies*

The Book Center and Yiddish Farm offer two ethnographic contexts in which to ask how, and to what extent, American Jewish philanthropy is currently impacting the imagined terrain of Yiddishland. Thus, rather than provide an expansive mapping of its landscape (Shandler 2006a), or a broad account of its participants (Avineri 2012), I seek instead to analyze entwined economic and cultural transformations gradually taking shape within two of its centers. Immersive Yiddish

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programs for students in college and the twenties offer excellent contexts in which to view these potentially transformational processes. They represent the forms through which the Book Center today seeks to maintain itself as a site of Yiddish transmission, and through which Yiddish Farm is seeking to develop its own revernacularized Yiddish space. Philanthropy, from this angle, presents tempting possibilities for Yiddish cultural producers. But such educational programs possess value for other reasons as well. Many of the people working the room described above had likely arrived at the event knowing that "Jewish education," "community building" and "20s/30s engagement/development" constitute three of the Jewish innovation economy's top five growth industries (Jumpstart et al. 2010:1). They came aware then, that educational programs, especially of the immersive form employed at the YBC and Yiddish Farm, constitute highly trusted mediums through which the American Jewish community seeks to spark the Jewish futures latent in youthful "energies." American Jews may historically have invested little in Yiddish's capacity to cultivate those energies. But under the discourse of innovation, any number of Jewish engagements, perhaps even Yiddish ones, also promise to "burn hot" with potential.

Following Shandler's discussion about the importance of the institutional form to how Yiddish is transmitted intergenerationally, this field of philanthropically subsidized programs, new Jewish initiatives, and young cultural entrepreneurs requires us to rethink what people and institutions cultivate in and through the pursuit of Yiddish linguistic and cultural capacities. After all, with a focus on emergence, experimentation and innovation, what develops in these locales of intergenerational transmission may encompass futures that transcend the domains of Yiddish itself—whether understood in vernacular or postvernacular terms. As such, this ethnography also provides an opportunity to reconsider the "lands" of which any Yiddish space is a part. I turn to the task of retheorizing those spaces in the next chapter.

## Chapter 1.

## Real Jews in Theory.

*Scene One: "Are you writing all this down?"*

In July of 2011, as part of the Yiddish Book Center's half-week trip to New York City, 18 Steiner students, a few staff members, and one anthropologist, set out from the New York University dorms to meet face to face—for the first time—the older generations of Book Center supporters and wealthy donors responsible for fully funding the cost of the program. The students had been prepped beforehand by the Center's development staff, who offered basic suggestions about dress and comportment, thus providing clues as to the social key of the "Steiner Dinner": "remember," one staff member advised prior to the trip, "these are older people. So you want to dress like you're going to see your grandparents."

"What should we talk about with them?" one student asked.

"Don't worry," the staff member replied reassuringly, picking up on the slightly uncertain tone in the student's voice, "Just be yourselves. They'll love you. Just by learning Yiddish, they *already* love you."

We packed into the rented bus—guys in collared shirts and slacks, young women in skirts or dresses—and set out for the dinner. "Party bus!" one student yelled to the laughter of those around her. "Misha Rothman," joked another about the young, handsome director of education walking up the steps to the bus, "is like my prom date." As we pulled away from the dorms, heading across the river to Brooklyn, youthful chatter, laughter and gossip, primarily in English with smatterings of

Yiddish, circulated between the students. Having only recently arrived at the NYU dorms with little time to settle in, they seemed ready to enjoy the free dinner and drinks, as well as the honorary status awaiting them at the event. "A few years ago," Rebecca, a former summer program participant and current staff assistant explained to me, "they actually had a red carpet."

Approaching Steiner Studios, the massive movie studio complex located on the Brooklyn Navy Yard, students grew more conscious of the particular environment they were preparing to enter. As we crossed through the guarded entrance, so too did the exchange of youthful sociality, circulating up until that point "horizontally" between participants, seem to cross over "vertically" between themselves and their waiting philanthropic sponsors. "Do you think if I become my donor's best friend she'll fund my trip to Vilnius?" asked Mary, who had coincidentally met her donor earlier that summer on the latter's visit to the Book Center. "Seriously, though," she only half seriously insisted, "that woman *loved* me." "I'm gonna get set up with someone's granddaughter!" Brian said to the laughter and a few eye rolls of those around him.

As we drove further into the studio grounds, we could see from our windows actors making their way in and out of the complex—preparing to perform in movies, or in television programs produced at Steiner Studios. "You know Sex and the City was shot here," one staff member remarked aloud. We pulled to a stop. Rebecca turned to me. "Are you writing all this down?"….

### Vectors of Jewish Futurity

#### Crafting Chronotopes of Emergence

In an historical context in which life lived by Jews between college and marriage is understood as a precarious journey, perhaps no scene better captures the formal techniques American Jews have employed to address these routes than that of the tour bus. In literature on Jewish youth travel programs, scenes like this on tour buses have served as rich ethnographic

material for scholars (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a:16, 19-20, Kelner 2010:47, Habib 2004:227-228). As a space between two points, one neither here nor there, this might seem curious. A bus, in fact, seems to be "no place" at all. But by packing a young peer group together within its relatively private, backstage confines, there are fewer places that more clearly reveal the role these programs play in making space Jewish. In the relaxed banter of prom-dates and parties, even and perhaps especially in the collusive, playful mockery of the elderly Jews who have no doubt financed this very setting of youthful collusion, the cohort of Steiner students enacts a scene highly desired throughout the American Jewish community—college aged students, in this case, mostly Jewish, creating intimate ties with Jewish peers in reference to Jewish engagements.

Theorists of contemporary Yiddish practice understand affective or ideological engagement with Yiddish as a hallmark of the postvernacular mode. But the history of peer-based Jewish intimacy on display here does not belong to any particular Yiddish genealogy; rather, in the contexts of these kinds of programs, American Jewish youth summer camping offers a better point of departure. Indeed summer camp has served as a model and point of reference for the kinds of immersive programs outlined in the previous chapter. While the first Jewish summer camps were established shortly after World War I and contained little Jewish content, the mobilization of summer camping as a means of socializing Jewish children into the institutional culture of American Judaism began in earnest in the post WWII period. Then, Jewish denominational movements began creating networks of camps that, "aimed to link the Jewish activities of the school year in religious school, Hebrew school, or Day Schools, and youth groups to intensive summer experiences, and thus to shape, or more likely reshape, children's Jewish environments" (Prell 2009:4-5). Gradually, amidst increased concerns over assimilation, Jewish professionals began to recognize the possibilities of intimate bonds between Jews that summer camps seemed so adapted to cultivate.

Within the professional discourse of social scientists and Jewish professionals who theorize

and also help inform the practice of Jewish youth programming, the production of intra-group intimacy like that performed on the Yiddish bus above belongs to the domain of "informal education" (Chazan 1993, Zeldin 2006). For Barry Chazan, the sociologist in part responsible for designing and implementing the assessment for Birthright Israel (Saxe and Chazan 2008), informal education found at summer camp prioritizes the social life and affective ties of the group by fostering a participatory and interactive environment. Summer camp's affective power, as Michael Zeldin, professor of education and Senior National Director of the Reform Jewish movement's schools of education argued, lies in the capacity of camps to create a "holistic" educational context, in which the very idea of curriculum is not just a "'course to be run,' but rather, "all the experiences that participants have under the auspices of an institution" (Zeldin 2006:88).

Given the pedagogical value placed on immersion outside of daily life, scholars have often understood summer camping through the lens of anthropological theories of liminality (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1967:93-111). Noting that Victor Turner recognized the pedagogical importance of liminality, "Jewish summer camps," Prell writes, "were constituted as a quintessential 'liminal' space,'" fostering environments in which Jewishness was an interactive norm that permeated bounded institutional contexts (2009:6-10). In part because of its capacity to provide a hermetically sealed Jewish environment, Jack Wertheimer lauded summer camps as, "perhaps the most powerful vehicle for informal Jewish education" (Wertheimer 1999:89).[1] Historically, Jewish educators valued camps partially because the affective ties produced there served, in Zeldin's words, as, "a form of 'pediatric inoculation' that would last from year to year, and, if a child received enough 'boosters,' would last for a lifetime" (Zeldin 2006:102).

The transformation in American Jewish philanthropic priorities described in the previous chapter has entailed an "extension" of informal Jewish education "upward" into the life cycle. This

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[1] Cited also in, Zeldin (2006:110)

extension of immersive Jewish environments into the college years and twenties underwrote my and Moshe Kornfeld's original formulation of these programs as key nodes within a broader American Jewish "episodic culture" (Friedman and Kornfeld 2014). Specifically, like summer camp, such programs generate affective connections by facilitating the removal of young adults from their everyday lives and their subsequent immersion in age-specific Jewish peer groups focused on Jewish engagements. Thus American Jews address perceived problems of attenuating ethnic attachments, often associated with processes of economic deindustrialization and declining ethnic neighborhoods, through the creation of spaces defined primarily through their management of Jewishness in time. Jewish episodes can be established and enacted nearly anywhere that philanthropic investment travels. The artificiality of the relatively temporally and spatially bounded worlds created in episodic programs produce social conditions that are conspicuously saturated with Jewish engagements and Jewish attachments—the precise phenomena about which the broader community of organized American Jewish institutions, professionals and philanthropists are so concerned.

Episodes call attention to the form of these programs rather than their content. They organize a variety of different engagements across Jewish themes. But theorizing the extension of what we might think of as a "summer camp" framework of Jewishness later into the life cycle opens new theoretical possibilities to reconsider the episode. Jewish youth groups and summer camps in the postwar period, for example, have historically been tied to denominational movements grounded in primarily suburban congregations in particular American Jewish communities (Prell 2009). In contrast, the programs, conferences, retreats, skill-building workshops and networking events targeted at what are called "emerging Jewish adults" are generally neither denominationally specific nor regionally grounded. Untethered to the social life of particular Jewish families and communities, these episodes cater ultimately to the interests, desires and aspirations of a demographic. Put differently, Jewish camps, youth groups, and day schools are more closely connected to *emplaced*

Jewish communities and families than programs aimed at Jews in college and the twenties. In contrast, I would suggest, the episode's temporal connotations derive from the period of the life cycle through which they guide participants.

Most pertinent for the ethnography that follows is a third conception of the episode indexed in the opening scene of this chapter. As our bus crossed into Steiner Studios, the creation of episodes—specifically of the serialized television program "Sex in the City"—came clearly into view. Not unlike the actors we passed, so too did it strike the Steiner students that they were about to play their parts within an unfolding American Jewish drama. The question, "are you writing all this down," at the moment of entrance registered to that effect the sudden experience by some on the bus of the performance frame.[2] Like episodes of a television program, dramatized 30-minute or one-hour increments structuring the unfolding narratives of characters, so too does each distinct session of an immersive educational program constitute a temporally delimited segment for organizing Jewish narratives. These segments, (the weekend retreat, the week-long workshop or tour, or the one-two month immersive program) are composed of intensified Jewish "scenes" played out within relatively standardized sets: buses and celebratory dinners, dorms, classrooms, hotels and tourist sites that populate the literature on American Jewish youth programming. It is within these scenes that participants like Mary and Brian practice Jewish literacies and intimacies, ideally cultivating a desire for, and the skills to enact, future Jewish engagements. These might include, for example, the Vilna Yiddish program to which Mary aspires to attend next summer, or the Birthright Israel trip that Brian had completed just prior to beginning the Steiner program.

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[2] "Performance is … a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act of speaking on display—objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience" (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73). The appeal by Rebecca at that moment to ethnographic writing indexes a consciousness on her part, I would suggest, that the scene enfolding on the bus was an object of interest to the Center, and thus also, to the organization's ethnographer.

In and through their engagement with American Jewish philanthropy, the Yiddish Book Center and Yiddish Farm are gradually and incrementally being conscripted, while striving to link into, this wider subsidized field of demographically targeted, metacultural programs—thereby negotiating their relationship, and potentially the relationship of Yiddishland, to that field. In her definition of heritage as metacultural production, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett brings into sharp relief metaculture's conscripting power. "[H]eritage is created," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes:

> through metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods (collection, documentation, preservation, presentation, evaluation, and interpretation) to living persons, their knowledge, practices, artifacts, social worlds, and life spaces. Heritage professionals use concepts, standards, and regulations to bring cultural phenomena and practitioners into the heritage sphere, where they become metacultural artifacts, whether "Living National Treasures" or "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" (2006:161).

The programs described here as episodic conscript as well. Specifically, they pull emerging adults into the sphere of the American Jewish non-profit sector. Each program is designed and curated to facilitate the movement of people through what might otherwise be a Jewishly unstructured period of the life cycle. Because they offer participants new skills and literacies, episodic programs do not make up a set tourist route on which participants travel. Rather, they are the generative contexts for future possibilities of Jewish becoming, portending what Greg Urban would refer to as a "vector of [Jewish] futurity" (Urban 2001:1). By indexing and enabling possible future Jewish engagements, each metacultural program, "aids culture in its motion through space and time. It gives a boost to the culture that it is about, helping to propel it on its journey. The interpretation of culture that is intrinsic to metaculture…focuses attention on the cultural thing, helps to make it an object of interest, and hence, facilitates its circulation" (2001:4).

As structuring environments for the life-vectors of countless participants, Jewish episodes reveal an understanding of Jewish cultural, demographic and religious continuity as a problem of

cultural circulation. Specifically, the philanthropic investments that subsidize episodic Jewish cultural

programs emerged from an understanding that the process of leaving home for college offers

vectors leading young Jews away from Jewish communal life. At their worst, these alterative vectors

portend non-Jewish futures or, alternatively, deny the broader American Jewish community the skills

and resources future generations have to offer. Iterative decisions by individual Jews to pursue non-

Jewish engagements in college and the twenties increases the chances that they will have little need

for American Jewish institutions in the future. Episodic programming can be understood as one

important method though which American Jewish philanthropy creates a density of interactive

*contexts* in which a Jewish regime of value will invest Jewishness in the array of different (objectified)

subjects who pass through these programs.[3] Jewish episodes are, as the above development director

noted, places in which, "just by learning Yiddish, they *already* love you" (even, indeed, if not every

student is Jewish); and where by virtue of that fact, the students, dressed like they are visiting

grandparents, get red carpet treatment.

Donors fund and culture workers design episodes to discipline Jews and ensure that possible

individual life-courses are transformed into Jewish biographies. As a field, such programs enfold an

aspiration to the production of emergent Jewish chronotopes: storylines that come into being

through the cultivation of desire by participants for subsequent philanthropically produced

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[3] Later in this chapter, I more fully flesh out these arguments about the production of Jewishness
within episodes. My appeal at this point to the language of regimes of value is meant to signal a
theoretical engagement with a body of scholarship that has departed from Appadurai and Kopytoff's
biographical approach to objects. See for example, Appadurai (1986), Kopytoff (1986), Lee and
Lipuma (2002), Tracy (2013), Keane (2003a). As objects circulate, the way people value them also
shifts. A thing may at one moment be a commodity, and at another a gift or a resource. But at any
given moment the futures of those things cannot be known for certain. In a sense, the anxiety about
continuity maintained by agents within the American Jewish non-profit sector registers about the
social life of young American Jews what Keane (2003a) (with regards to material things) and Samuels
(2004) (with regard to identity), recognize about indexicality—that there is always a certain degree of
openness about future contextualizations. The field of programs described here as episodic is
intended to manage those emergent possibilities by working toward the investment of Jewishness.

engagements, as well as more private Jewish scenes. Yiddish Farm exemplifies this point—an episodic program created by young Jews modeled in part on their previous participation in episodic programs. The intensified, dramatically Jewish nature of these episodes—including but not limited to Yiddish ones—indexes a narrative structure typified by what Bakhtin in his discussion of chronotopes in the novel, called "adventure time." For Bakhtin, the adventure time of the Greek Novel, one still quite alive in popular culture today (Clark and Holquist 1984:282) is punctuated by intense moments of action defined by their contrast to the quotidian or everyday. Time organized in this manner, "lacks any natural, everyday cyclicity—such as might have introduced into [adventure time] a temporal order and indices on a human scale, tying it to the repetitive aspects of natural and human life" (Bakhtin 1981:91).

An exception here to this articulation of adventure time is worth our attention. Unlike these adventures, in which elements of daily life do little to structure time in the novel, in the logic of these programs, much of the Jewish engagements that can unfold, "on a human scale," after the program ends are highly valued by the American Jewish public that has invested in them. If, as intense spaces of Jewish engagement, episodic programs are valuable, that value stems in part from their capacity to inspire more intimate, small-scale Jewish engagements in their wake: subsequent Jewish studies back at college or afterward, greater levels of religious observance, even collusive banter between participants who may understand themselves as off stage. Indeed, within a larger institutional context in which all forms of Jewish engagement have repercussions for the larger Jewish community all of these practices constitutes valuable outcomes of episodes.


*Generating Formats, Formatting Generation*

Episodes are made collaboratively. They, and the affective attachments they produce depend on non-profit culture work. The labor of creating episodic programs can be productively theorized

in terms of what Andrew Shryock has called cultural formatting (Shryock 2004b:309, Shryock and Nabeel 2000:27-29). Shryock describes formatting as ensembles of practices and techniques employed to reduce complex cultural materials (in this case, the life trajectories of emerging adults), into more simplified forms that facilitate public display and circulation. Drawing on the language of yerushe that marks the Book Center's planned giving campaign, we can call what episodes produce the "inheritance format." As a comparative and related example, take "the heritage" format so often performed in festivals or parades. Understanding that such festivals last only a few hours, the culture workers who design and facilitate them must make "Chinese," "Jewish," or "Arab" culture into objects of experience for what are often anonymous publics of consumers. To enable these processes of translation and representation, cultural festivals come equipped with categorical and material "tool kits"[4]: ethnic dance, dress, food, language, art and ritual that every group "has" along with the necessary equipment for representation: information sheets about history and culture, stages where dance can be performed, booths and tables where art can be viewed and food tasted (Shryock 2004b:308-9). These tool kits entail the work of experts in cultural formatting: fundraisers and membership directors, tour guides and scholars who understand how to facilitate translation of cultural materials into the forms deemed desirable or appropriate for anticipated publics. This chapter's opening scene places some of these experts on display: development staff who know how students should dress to please older generations; Jewish academics, contracted part time to help guide young students in their Yiddish studies; administrative staff charged with securing travel schedules and housing, program and event logistics.

In an age of mass culture, in which public identities circulate to increasingly large and diverse audiences, the work of cultural formatting can be highly sensitive and complex. This appears in

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[4] This is Shryock's term, which I'm borrowing here from personal correspondences with the author. The most recent occurred through e-mail correspondences, May 6 and 7, 2015.

Shryock's discussion of his own post 9/11 culture work with ACCESS, an Arab American community organization in Dearborn, Michigan. Formatting culture at ACCESS entailed producing knowledge about Arabs and Muslims that could successfully strike a balance between the desires of "the community," a broader American public, as well as, "the U.S. government, private foundations and corporate sponsors." (2004b:283). As the 9/11 context of this work reveals, the thinness of such cultural representations belies the complexity of investments, networks, and forms of expertise entailed in mediating between different audiences. Arlene Davila's ethnographic and historical account of the Latino advertising and marketing sector reveals similar techniques of reduction, although she does not use the language of cultural formatting. Davila shows, for example, how advertising campaigns capable of appealing to the diverse tastes and assumptions of Latin American populations from different national backgrounds helped constituted the very category of Latino— one subsequently taken up in identity politics (Davila 2001:88-125).

Attention to the mediating capacities of cultural formatting described by scholars like Shryock and Davila exemplifies a wider scholarly effort to theorize mass and commercial culture beyond its capacity to distort, through inauthentic representation, "the real." For cultural critics like Baudrillard, the kinds of representations ethnographers like Shryock and Davila describe seem remarkably akin to simulacra, Disneyland-like representations that have replaced, and today now generate, reality (1981:1-43). This is a line of critique most associated with Jürgen Habermas who, in his famous analysis of the historical demise of the 18th century bourgeois reading public, argued that the public sphere under the influence of commercial interests ultimately loses the capacity to precipitate political critique among subjects. A "world fashioned by the mass media," Habermas wrote, "is a public sphere in appearance only" (1991:171). The public, in such a world, is not only misled, but also hypnotized as, "publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display" (Habermas 1991:206). In contrast, Davila's work shows how popular and mass culture constituted

an ethnic category on which claims for political rights and resources would later be made in the formal sphere of politics. In Shryock's work, mediating between divergent publics does not simply produce representations that are more or less accurate; they create zones of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), and thus new possibilities for social action, cultural encounter, and ethno-religious self-making.

A similar concern with the political implications of cultural formatting—beyond how they do or do not correspond to the "authentic"—animates my own interest here with episodic Jewish programs. Certainly, the contestation over authenticity has historically featured prominently in the post-Holocaust politics of Yiddish (Norich 1990, see also chapter two). However, when considered in relationship to the investment of knowledge and resources in cultivating Jewishness in programs, courses, retreats and other intentionally curated episodes, the criteria of what makes a program valuable or effective may have little to do with its relationship to any particular understanding of authenticity. It may matter little to many interested parties whether an episodic program strives to emulate what is deemed authentic, or ironically flouts its conventions. Indeed, as reflected in the themed Israel trips described in the previous chapter, the terms of assessment for these tours are not first and foremost about whether programs portray or make tangible a real Israel. Certainly, American Jews interested in maintaining Jewish life in the U.S. are not interested in whether young Jews make *aliyah* (immigrate to Israel). Rather, the success of a program hinges on whether it succeeds in binding participants to one another (Kelner 2010). Similarly, the value of a Yiddish episode at the Book Center or Yiddish Farm lies not only in the Yiddish learned there; it lies also in how effective it is in cultivating emotional ties between participants and to the institution. For a potential donor, a program's value may rest in its capacity to lead students to subsequent Jewish engagements that cannot be confined to Yiddish alone. In the eyes of non-profit staff, it may stem from the labor they provide for institutions that, if they are to survive in a context of philanthropy,

require new projects on which to work. At times, as will become clear in the chapters that follow, these values are legitimated even when actors themselves espouse different aspirations and aims.

*Episodic Programs, Abstract Kinship and the Anthropology of Inheritance*

*Scene Two: "the other 98 percent"*

On a fall evening, only a few months after our summer trip to New York City, I made my way back to the Book Center for a three-day "translation conference." I was feeling a bit ambivalent about the trip's timing. "Occupy Wall Street" was in full force in Zuccoti Park, and among the protestors were social-justice minded American Jews—including some Yiddishists I knew—heading to Wall Street to participate in demonstrations, support the full-time occupiers, or even organize worship services with other Jews within a nascent "occupy Judaism" sub-movement. In spite of my political sympathies, though, Yiddish ethnography called. The translation conference, after all, promised a large gathering of Yiddishists, including both friends as well as New York-based Yiddish devotees with whom I wanted to make contact going forward with my research in New York City.

The conference convened scholars and translators, Yiddish activists and former Book Center students to discuss plans for the Book Center's new Yiddish translation agenda—part of the Center's new mission to promote education, alongside its array of immersive programs for younger students. I walked into the Book Center to encounter Yiddishists of all stripes. I recognized a few, in fact, from Yiddish events I had recently attended in New York. After hellos and *sholem aleykhems* ("peace be upon you") in the foyer, I headed to the Applebaum-Driker theater with a friend, a Yiddishist and fellow academic I met through another mutual friend, a former Book Center intern and year-long fellow. On our way down the ramp we passed, on our right, the Center's development and membership office, a zone reserved for staff only, its window looking out over thousands of artifactual Yiddish books to our left, a portion of the "over 1.5 million" books collected by the

Center.

In the auditorium, people got settled, awaiting the opening remarks by Aaron Lansky. Some kibitzed in Yiddish, but most spoke in English. In time, conversation settled down and the Center's passionate founder began his discussion, framing the dire need for translation and for new generations of translators. Despite the Book Center's success collecting and digitizing its titles of Yiddish books, for example, Lansky informed us that, "of about 28,000 Yiddish titles, just a little bit over 1 percent have been translated into English, so far." Lansky was in his usual inspiring form, making starkly clear just how much work lay ahead of us, how many untold Yiddish masterpieces "out there in the stacks" have yet to be rendered into English. After a concise, eight minute talk, Lansky introduced an invited scholar, a professor and Yiddish translator from an elite liberal arts college. The professor centered his comments, like Lansky, on the potential value that lies within yet-to-be translated Yiddish titles, and especially the urgent need to train the next generation of translators: "It simply cannot be the case," he said in clear, forceful tones, "that the achievement of Yiddish literature is adequately represented by 2 percent, or less than 2 percent, of its production. We cannot have been so discerning as to translate only the best, and even if we had been, 2 percent is not enough. I imagine the community of untranslated Yiddish writers marching on us with banners borrowed from Occupy Wall Street that proclaim, "we are the 98 percent! Pay attention to us! Translate us!"…

The professor's rhetorical play on these newly iconic numbers provocatively foregrounds the competing histories, communities, and investments brought together through formatting inheritance at the Book Center. Even as his approximate inversion of "the 99 percent" makes reference to the political tradition of the Yiddish past, our distance from Zuccoti park or the comfort of our surrounds conjures also the degree to which honoring "the 98 percent" at the Book Center means

connecting it to the one. Jewish programs for future generations constitute one way of connecting disparate publics in common projects of cultural maintenance despite markedly different interests, investments and motivations. Thus, Jewish episodes do not constitute and link groups determined along lines of ethnic difference, as in Shryock and Davila's work; rather episodic Jewish cultural programs constitute and connect cohorts of Jews in which the dominant terms of difference are constructed intergenerationally. By producing episodic encounters with Jewish culture for young participants, non-profits like the Yiddish Book Center, Birthright, Adamah, and other Jewish organization conscript cohorts of emerging adults within a collective, American Jewish project of cultural, religious and political transmission.

Donors and professionals who help create these programs may possess a variety of motivations for doing so. But whatever else they achieve in the process, the creation of these programs address perceived problems about cultural, linguistic and demographic loss germane to actual American Jewish families by creating formal, extra-domestic contexts for the practice of age-specific intimacy and Jewish study. In that capacity, programs provide spaces where the intergenerational transmission of culture can take place. For both donors and students then, within the voluntary context of the American Jewish community, in which both Jewish subjects and Jewish literacies are always potentially jeopardized or at least mutable, these programs create *alternative* heirs to Jewish culture. Formatting inheritance with episodes can thus be initially theorized, in terms that Goody (1973) long ago referred to (though, in quite different contexts) as a "strategy of heirship." In Goody's work, strategies of heirship are legitimated social conventions by which kin attempt to secure the transmission of wealth "vertically" in the absence of heirs.[5]

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[5] In a recent discussion of Goody's work in the Jewish context, read through Devora Weisberg's formulation of biblical Levirate marriage as a "strategy of continuity," Jonathan Boyarin's comments imply the potential analytical promise that such strategies can have in the context of American Jewish non-profit institutions. He suggests that we think of, "such a strategy … as a way to assure

Producing episodic program thus addresses problems of inheritance by transforming financial wealth into potential, future Jewish value. Even if a given donor or a given student could not transmit or receive desired forms of Jewish value within their actual familial homes, the episode formats social relationships so those transmissions can, in fact, unfold smoothly under non-profit auspices. Within the context of episodes themselves, the precise kind of Jewish value created is undefined, in process, emergent. Whether a participant's Jewish practices in a program help yield future scholars, Jewish families, "Jewish innovation" or simply future donations to Jewish organizations cannot be known in advance. Each value is, in other words, a potential "return" on investments in non-profit culture work. Episodes, in this sense, do more than create heirs to Jewish culture—they also symbolically transform the donors who make inheritance possible into participants within a collective process of linguistic, cultural, and ethno-religious transmission. This is especially clear in the case of Yiddish non-profits, in which the donor-class of primarily American Jews lacks the ability to transmit Yiddish competencies to future generations within their own families and certainly on the scale of "Yiddish" writ large. Instead, they require the institutional mediation of Yiddish "centers" to transform their wealth into any number of possible, valuable Jewish futures.

Goody's own work on kinship, property, and inheritance has largely fallen out of favor with most socio-cultural anthropologists, largely due to his evolutionary assumptions about societal change, as well as his reliance on statistically based data sets like the Human Relations Area Files (see Yanagisako 1979, Hann 2008). However the recent creative scholarly reengagement with the study

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the genealogical chain of ancestry and descent—so that, for example, naming a newborn after a parent's deceased ancestor would also be a "strategy of continuity" (2013:46-47). It is worth noting, to that effect, the Yiddish Book Center's practice of pairing each Steiner student with the foundation or the donor who has sponsored their Yiddish studies—a practice of dedication that is mirrored in the naming of individual, and collections of, Yiddish books, shelves, classrooms, reading nooks and so forth throughout the institution.

of kinship invites revisiting the kinds of strategies for transmitting wealth like those described by

Goody. Such questions seem particularly relevant in light of the wealth of anthropological literature

on the potential of new reproductive technologies to shape family arrangements, conceptions of

relatedness, and concomitantly, how kinship relations are governed and managed by institutions (see

for example, Strathern 1995, Kahn 2000, Dolgin 1999, McKinnon 2015). In a related vein, scholars

have similarly recognized how gay and lesbian families challenge established constructions of kinship

and intergenerationality, and thus how rights, resources, and responsibilities are ideologized and

distributed among family members (Carrington 1999, Sullivan 2004).

Particularly among anthropologists working in the United States, in which inherited wealth

plays such a central role in social reproduction, I would suggest we add to these objects of inquiry

the institutions and forms of expert knowledge that mediate how and to whom wealth is

transmitted. George Marcus's ethnographic work on the dynastic fortunes of wealthy Texas families

offers a productive model from which to depart (Marcus and Hall 1992, Marcus 1998, Hann

2008:152-153).[6] Marcus shows how descendants in these families understand the terms of their

relatedness first and foremost through the mediating legal and institutional arrangements that govern

the distribution of family fortunes. Where Marcus originally began his study exploring the,

"commonsensical…here and now existences of dynastic families," he eventually, "began…to know

a family first as the business of trust departments, accountants' calculations, investment managers'

decisions, and the work of law offices and, then, to become acquainted with it as flesh-and-blood

descendants" (1998:157). Marcus observes that dynastic families create and rely on these other,

"unseen worlds" of expert knowledge and activity that are simultaneously essential for maintaining

the family as a social unit, even as those realms are largely distant from and foreign to actual flesh

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[6] For a more recent exploration of the intertwined relationship between kinship, business practices, and wealth within the contexts of individual families, see Yanagisaco's work on family firms in Como, Italy (2005).

and blood relatives (Marcus 1998:154-155).

Considering American Jewish non-profits as akin to other expert domains charged with managing wealth seems to be a particularly instructive framework for comparison, especially given the increased reliance of institutions like the Book Center on donations from private individuals and family foundations, sometimes of extremely wealthy families. Skills and techniques mobilized by Jewish non-profits resemble the accountants and trust managers' specialized forms of knowledge and expertise in their foreignness. Neither donors nor descendants in dynastic families comprehend the complexities of how their money is transformed into intergenerational bonds. Jewish professionals, hired or contracted by non-profits to run these programs, and to instruct the young students who participate in them, specialize in Jewish engagement. They create, manage and instruct cohorts of emerging Jewish adults in how to engage with and develop attachments to Jewish culture. They endow those individuals with forms of Jewish desire and skills for Jewish self-cultivation. In the process, they augment or replace what families and communities can do on their own.

Take, for comparative example, the Adamah "Jewish Environmental Fellowship" designed specifically for 20-32 year olds. On its website, the organization describes a, "typical day…," which is:

> … spent on our six-acre farm, in our commercial kitchen and on our goat pasture, helping to create a sustainable business that models ecological design, financial viability and social responsibility. Evenings are spent learning about Judaism and sustainability, building community and cultivating leadership skills. Our amazing staff and assortment of visiting faculty will help you listen to and follow your soul's yearning for ecological and spiritual wholeness, recraft a Jewish identity that sings to you, and build relationships and skills that will sustain you for the rest of your life. (Adamah n.d.(b))

In the episodic peer-based community on the farm, the participants' efforts to "recraft" their Jewish identities requires the mediation of full time staff and part-time contracted visiting faculty who help guide the direction of an emerging Jewish self and developing soul.

Unlike Marcus's ethnography, these specialized zones of Jewish youth cultivation extend not from any particular family of flesh-and-blood relatives. Rather, the non-profits that produce youth programs seek to place Jewish culture work in relationship to streams of wealth that come from a large public of donors, encompassing different families. Similarly, the young people who attend these programs are not, generally speaking, actual kin of particular donors. Instead program participants constitute a generalized Jewish public defined first and foremost in and through its desire to, at the very least, "try out" Jewish literacies. Indeed, because of the episodic nature of these programs, involving new cohorts of students each summer, an ongoing rollover in "future generations" of young students stand in as kin in the abstract, destined perhaps to inherit the "transformed" wealth of Jewish donors.

These networks bring together what I refer to as "abstract kin." I understand abstract kinship as a variety of intergenerational "relatedness" facilitated by Jewish non-profits (Carsten 2000). Like concepts of "fictive" (Schneider 1984), or "virtual" (Watson 2004) kinship, abstract kinship employs the idiom, form, and rhetoric of family relationships even if the people brought together in these networks do not literally understand themselves as family.[7] I highlight the concept of abstraction, in this formulation, because the term captures the work required to transform the wealth of donors into potential Jewish value in the future. These programs "pass down" Jewishness through time precisely through the ongoing, regular circulation of cohort groups through them. Each participant offers to donors, non-profits, and the American Jewish public more generally a possible Jewish return on financial investments. This particular organization of intergenerational

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[7] Though each one of these concepts was developed to productively extend analyses of what might constitute familial relationships, they are not mutually interchangeable. Carsten, for example, developed the concept of "relatedness" in response to Schneider's influential critique that the study of kinship had historically been predicated upon a naturalized Euro-American assumption of biologically-based reproduction—an assumption that cannot be universalized across culture. Relatedness, Carsten argues, does not depend on a distinction between biological as opposed to social kinship, and thus allows for scholars to reengage cross-cultural comparison.

inheritance thus functions precisely by removing responsibility for transmitting Jewishness from any particular party to these iterative exchanges. After all, in the liberal context of the United States, in which decisions about ethno-religious belonging are (theoretically) voluntary,[8] and in which children of bourgeois families are encouraged to find themselves in college and the twenties, no party to these relationships can ensure that any *particular* student's experimentation with a given Jewish cultural medium will deepen their engagements in Jewish life beyond the time spent in a program. In fact, some participants will drop out of Jewish engagements completely, while others may pursue forms of Jewish devotion that differ from the ones formally presented in the program. This logic of experimentation informs the programs' structure. Where some students may drop out, new students arriving each session offer renewed possibilities for wealth to be transformed into a Jewish future.

The distant, relatively anonymous connotations abstraction entails are reflected in the social distance between donors and cohorts of students brought together in these intergenerational relationships of exchange. In fact, each party relies for their ability to give and receive Jewishness on the alienability of these roles from actual persons. Brian's quip about marrying into the family of donors, for example, relies for its humor on the shared recognition with his peers of the differences between rights and responsibilities adhering to real as opposed to abstract kin. What he receives in the form of a subsidized program is a very specific use of donor wealth, funds to which he would ostensibly have freer access were he able to cross over from the domain of the Jewish program into that of the donor family. The familial-relation of students to donors depends on the latter's place within the Yiddish program—an "unseen world" of Jewish cultivation analogous to the financial institutions that Marcus describes.

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[8] Clearly in the United States race practically constrains the experience and possibilities of ethno-religious volunteerism and identification. Though not all Jews identify or are read as white, the problems of assimilation these strategies address are underwritten by an assumption of Jewish ethno-racial assimilability. For a discussion of the historical process through which Jews acquired white privilege in the United States see, Brodkin (1998).

Episodes facilitate this process of abstraction, and thereby intergenerational exchange. The "inheritance" of cultural value in these arrangements is not transmitted unidirectionally "downward" from old to young. Rather these programs establish a mutually constitutive set of exchange relationships (see chapter 4) in which money, Jewish things and Jewish subjects in the making circulate between the networks of actors that animate the practices of these non-profits. Indeed, by developing and managing Jewish episodic programs, donors, Jewish professionals, and volunteers participate in the collective work of "giving Jewish" to future generations. Simultaneously, by participating in these programs young adults do more than work on their Jewish selves; they also put to Jewish use the investments of the broader community. In the process, they constitute themselves (at times, even without their consent) as potential heirs to those American Jewish cultural fortunes.

Furthermore, as products of transactions that unfold in the "staff only" area of development, the Jewish spaces created in these programs do serve an important fiduciary role for some families. But it is a role that belongs to a world where I, like the program participants who were my central informants, was only granted fleeing, indirect access. If the donors are assumed to know little about the Yiddish treasures that, in scene two, I passed on my left, these donors' abstract kin acquiring Yiddish competencies are kept at a distance from the activities unfolding to my right, in membership and development. These culture workers bear a more proximate relationship to the decisions of donor families. For the very wealthy among them, charity is not only a manifestation of their care for Yiddish or for Jews, but also part of managing family fortunes in trusts and estates. Preservation of that wealth is always at stake in—whether or not it is the primary motivation behind—a decision to underwrite Jewish culture through non-profits.

In a related sense, this domain of wealth management makes financing Jewish non-profits a particularly *American* Jewish form of ethno-religious exchange. Alongside the conditions that helped facilitate the American Jewish experience of postwar upward mobility (see for example, Dash Moore

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2004) the particular terms of the American tax system have played a critical role in shaping these relationships of intergenerational transmission. In the United States, 501(c)(3) entities whose missions are religious, charitable, educational and civic in nature are both exempt from taxation and can receive tax-deductible donations. As Maslow (1974) and Werthheimer (1995) have noted, the emergence and development of American Jewish philanthropy would be nearly impossible to imagine without the congenial environment fostered by the American tax code. Certainly, tax regulations and thus the structure of the non-profit sector can shift rapidly (Hall 2006). But much of what Maslow wrote in 1973 holds true today. As historian Peter Dobkin Hall has observed about the historical development of the American non-profit sector, such features as the ability to "donate or bequeath property for charitable purposes, the distinction between joint stock and non-stock corporations, [and] tax exemption" historically precipitated that sector's growth and shaped its structure by incentivizing charitable giving—especially among the wealthy. "It is no accident," Hall observes, "that the impressive proliferation of registered tax-exempt nonprofits in the United States from fewer than 13,000 in 1940 to more than 1.5 million at the end of the century coincided with legislative and regulatory policies that defined and systematically favored nonprofits and those who contributed to their support" (Hall 2006:32).

*Intergenerational Gifts and the Anthropology of Consumption*

Tensions between the alienating, universalizing associations of abstraction and the intimate, particularistic connotation of kinship also index a dynamic relationship in these programs between processes of cultural commodification and intimacy. Indeed, the expansion of programmatic opportunities for Jewish cultural consumption among Jewish young adults always references reproduction—biological, social and cultural in nature. This study thus joins an emergent scholarly interest among anthropologists in the commodification of intimate relationships, particularly those

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associated with domains of reproductive labor (Constable 2003). Of particular note in this regard to the ethnography that follows is the analytical focus in this literature on "care work" (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, Lan 2006, Russ 2005). A common theoretical thread running through this literature maintains that care work within a globalized economy complicates ideological divisions associated with the classic Marxist account of commodification: between public and private, commodity and gift, money and love, surface and depth, male and female, persons and things. Facilitated by new technologies of travel and communication, phenomena like burgeoning markets of domestic labor (Paerregaard 2014, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) foster intimate, familial relationships between employer families and employed caregivers. Similarly new technologies of reproduction and surrogacy (McKinnon 2015) can produce new kinship relations. These processes, furthermore, have repercussions at the level of citizenship and nationality (see for example, Deomampo 2014).

Ethnographic topics like gestational surrogacy or migrant labor highlight the moral boundaries entailed in commodifying intimacy. But even on the more everyday or quotidian levels of daily consumption, such tensions exist. Daniel Miller, in his subtle and insightful analysis of shopping, for example, offers a productive framework through which to consider the role of consumption in creating desire. Through his ethnography of the supermarket purchasing practices of London housewives, Miller shows how shoppers enact relationships of love and concern for family members through the consumption of commoditized goods. Shoppers purchase products they know their family members enjoy, or enact their care for kin by choosing healthier products (1998). Miller argues that shopping is not simply a disinterested desire to purchase things that others may want—it is generative of "desiring subjects." "The purpose of shopping," Miller writes, "is not so much to buy the things people want, but to strive to be in relationship with subjects that want these things…what the shopper desires above all is for others to want and to appreciate what she brings" (1998:148-149).

Analogous intergenerational concerns about desiring Jewish subjects animate programs for Jews in college and the twenties. Just as parents care for children by choosing healthy products, so too do donors perform care for "future generations" by subsidizing programs for cohorts of young students. As with shopping, desire and appreciation are at the core of these transactions. Underwriting the Jewish communal investment in episodic programs is the hope that their young participants will appreciate and remember what the American Jewish community "brings" them. Simultaneously, by taking care of Jewish heritage through charitable giving, wealthy donors also take care of familial inheritance. Care here, like love in Miller's analysis, is both a desire a subject might have, and an artifact of exchange relationships—relationships that depend, in these cases, on the mediation of non-profits.

Formatting intergenerational exchange through episodes reflects the observations of Jean and John Comaroff that the commodification of culture is not only a process by which identities are alienated from the groups that claim them, but can also be the very means by which minoritized groups attempt to secure and remake their own "ethno-futures" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:6). To be sure, the commodification of culture entails risk and loss, as well as relationships of power and domination. However, imagined communities of all kinds negotiate and wield capitalist institutions and logics for their own ends. Robert Foster, building on Miller's argument that consumption can be understood as a kind of labor (2008), argues for political organizing grounded in consumer-based politics, like boycott, that divest branded commodities of value by withholding the labor of consumption (Foster 2008:187-209). In her insightful ethnographic exploration into the effects of casino gaming on Seminole Indian culture and politics, Jessica Catellino shows how gaming, "[b]esides altering household economies…has enabled Seminoles to reproduce valued forms of cultural and political distinctiveness, and in turn reinforce their tribal sovereignty" (Catellino 2008:1). Catellino demonstrates, for example, how Florida Seminoles utilize gaming to

fund programs and projects of cultural education and language maintenance, thus both reinforcing and simultaneously altering social relations of intergenerational obligation and communal ties. A key theoretical intervention of Catellino's argument centers on the nature of money itself. Where scholars generally have focused on money's, "abstracting and deculturalizing force" (2008:12), Catellino shows how money's quality of fungibility enables Seminoles to, "revalue casino money in the service of social reproduction" (2008:3). Thus, by thinking about the conversion of donor wealth into Jewish value through abstract kinship, this study touches on these broader ethnographic explorations of how the abstracted, the commodified, and the alienated are transformed in projects aimed at producing cultural value and communal power.

### *Toward an Ethnography of Jewishness*

#### *Inheritance Formats and the Structuring of Jewish Space*

By considering the Yiddish Book Center and Yiddish Farm in relationship to this wider terrain of non-profits that mediate intergenerational exchange, this dissertation speaks to and builds upon an analytical focus among ethnographers of diaspora Jewry on questions of space and place (Mann 2012a). Of course, questions of space, particularly as they pertain to the ethical dimensions of Jewish sovereignty in Israel, or the viability of Jewish community in the diaspora, have been at the heart of the Jewish encounter with modernity. But scholars across disciplines more recently have sought to interrogate how Jews produce and are produced by the spaces in which they live and which they help constitute. Focusing on examples ranging from funeral processions to pushcart peddlers to urban planning in New York City, Deborah Dash Moore has recently shown how city streets have shaped and modified American Judaism (2014:71-101). If Dash Moore has focused on the material and geographic dimensions of spatiality, Jeffery Shandler recently has considered space conceptually—specifically by showing how Jews have employed the shtetl as an idea with which to

make sense of Jewish culture, history and politics (2013). Indeed, Barbara Mann has recently suggested something akin to a "spatial turn" among scholars of Jews (Mann 2012a).

Diana Pinto's concept of "Jewish Space" within the European context provides an instructive framework with which to theorize the highly curated Yiddish and American Jewish spaces of concern here. Pinto defines Jewish space as, "an open cultural and even political *agora* where Jews intermingle with others qua Jews, and not just as citizens." A Jewish space, Pinto argues, "cannot exist without Jews, but neither can it exist only with them, for the space is not the equivalent of a community." Instead, Jewish spaces are created, Pinto argues, "anywhere where Jews and non-Jews interact on Jewish themes or where a Jewish voice can make itself felt" (2002:251). In her recent ethnography of Jewish heritage tourism to Poland, Erika Lehrer productively applies Pinto's notion of Jewish space to questions of cultural inheritance in the Polish city of Kazimierz. Kazimierz represents a central location of popular Jewish cultural revival in Poland, spearheaded primarily by non-Jews. After the fall of Communism and the subsequent expansion of the country's tourist industry, the city became a popular destination for travelers in search of Jewish ethnic and familial roots. Despite popular understandings among Jews that Poland represents a space of, "abjection and repudiation, a void punctuated only by 'the camps'" (2013:3), these tourists depend on the mediating work of non-Jewish Poles (tour guides, performers, shop owners and other culture brokers) who aid participants in a process of cultural inheritance at once Jewish and Polish.

The focus in Lehrer and Pinto's work on making space in which forms of Jewishness are produced, as opposed to Jews or Judaism, constitutes a productive methodological approach to theorizing the social production of generation among American Jews. Though they do not draw on Pinto, Carol Aviv and David Shneer echo her concern with freeing the analysis of Jewish space from any dependence on hegemonic or naturalized conceptions of Jewishness (2005). In *New Jews* (2005) the authors offer the concept of "homemaking" to consider the diverse ways Jews create a sense of

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home, thereby challenging the diaspora/homeland dichotomy that reinforces the centrality of Israel within Jewish life. To do so, they focus on younger generations of Jews whose homemaking practices they describe as "global" in nature. "To call a place home," Aviv and Shneer write, "is a statement of power (Zionists know this best). By arguing that a place is home, Jews express a sense of entitlement, control, and familiarity" (2005:23). Through this framework Shneer and Aviv consider tourism to the Lower East Side, museums in Los Angeles, Jewish cultural production in Moscow and Queer Jewish community in Tel Aviv. In all of these contexts, Shneer and Aviv see young Jews engaged in the practice of engendering Jewish familiarities—that is, of creating spaces where "…people practice identity and intimacy" (2005:23).

Both Lehrer and Aviv and Shneer see space making as a craft and a project; yet, each author's focus differs in important ways. Aviv and Shneer seem explicitly interested in how *Jews* practice intimacy and identity. In contrast, Lehrer foregrounds how Jews and non-Jews are collaboratively engaged in the work of producing and caring for a kind of Jewishness that both Poles and North American Jews lack. The Poles in Lehrer's ethnography lack a murdered Polish-Jewish population that many non-Jewish Poles see as a lost part of Polish history and culture; Jewish tourists lack Jewish heritage and family histories, the reclaiming of which depends on encounters with their Polish interlocutors. Lehrer is thus wary of considering Jewish cultural reconstruction in Poland only in terms of a process of Jewish intimacy and identity making. As she writes:

> …my aim is for this process of reconstruction to be recognized as something more complicated—and in my opinion, more hopeful—than the reestablishment of a terrain for Jewish cultural performance, production and community building *ex nihilo*, an imported Jewish life raft thrown from Israel or the United States into an abject sea in which a few Jews may still be adrift. Such a view would erase two decades of creative caretaking and cultivation of Jewishness by local actors, Jews, and non-Jews alike (2013:203).

Yet, despite their differences, both of these analyses conceptualize the creation of Jewish

space as a collaborative project frequently aimed at supplementing or augmenting the Jewish identities, literacies, and desires of subject. The practices and political economies of Jewish intimacy and identity articulated in a number of the spaces Shneer and Aviv describe are also oriented around the assumption that their participants possess Jewish identities that require completion. So too with regard to the episodic programs described here. That American Jews have come to understand institutionally created "homes" as ideal places for the practice of Jewish intimacy and identity associated with actual homes indexes an assumption of incomplete Jewishness—even among "real" emerging Jewish adults (that is, Jews who are Jewish according to established ideologies of descent). A potentially mutable Jewishness requires the intermediation of experts in special, formalized settings—experts who are not necessarily Jewish—to help young participants practice Jewish intimacy and identity.

Unlike ethnographies of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities which are often grounded within specific ethnic neighborhood centers like Crown Heights and Boro Park,[9] the fieldsite for contemporary ethnographers of non-traditional diaspora Jewry is often first and foremost grounded in culture work as opposed to the presence of "real Jews." This signals a transition from a previous generation of Jewish ethnographies written within the context of the reflexive turn in anthropology. Those ethnographies, like Barbara Myerhoff's *Number our Days* (1978), Jonathan Boyarin's *Polish Jews in Paris* (1991) and Jack Kugelmass's *Miracle on Intervale Avenue* (1986), took as their subjects elderly Jews who had lived through the major events and social transformations that have become watershed moments of Jewish experience in popular American Jewish culture. These include the Holocaust, the creation of the state of Israel, Jewish upward mobility in the U.S. and the flight from

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[9] For recent examples see especially, Goldschmidt (2006) and Fader (2009)

first and second settlement areas to ethnic neighborhoods and suburbs.[10] Matti Bunzl argues that these reflexive ethnographies conducted by Jewish ethnographers are marked, "by a sense of mournful loss," as well as a nostalgia for, the Jewish past (Bunzl 2004:5-16). Other scholars contend they foreground reconstructive Jewish memory work as a critique of fashionable post-modern theories insisting on the libertory potential of fragmentation and discontinuity.[11] That such ethnographies of Jews tended to disclose, in their structure between self and/as other, an intimate, personal relationship of identity negotiation was part of the reason that Virginia Dominguez could critically pose to the discipline whether ethnographies of Jews seemed "too Jewish," and thus whether anthropology's historic resistance to Jewish themes reflected a disciplinary specific "Jewish problem" (1993).

In contrast, the Jewish worlds ethnographers of American Jews enter today are increasingly impacted, if not generated, out of a collective concern about the presence of real Jews. Certainly these conditions in part reflect a more general anthropological paradigm recognizing that contemporary ethnography is conducted in a world where culturally defined spaces are "dispersed" (Clifford 1992, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994), where "the field" is multiple and dislocated (Marcus 1998), and where "the natives" have often become as adept at producing and consuming representations of themselves as ethnographers (Jackson 2013). But I would also argue that these new analytical interests in formal cultural productions aimed at *making* Jewishness also reflect certain entwined generational and political economic developments both within the American Jewish community and concomitantly among their ethnographers. Today, the public culture of American Jews unfolds against an experience of increased generational distance from a number of the

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[10] On the role of the movement from immigrant enclaves to ethnically defined neighborhoods in the creation of American Jewish modernity see, Dash Moore (1994) and (2014).

[11] For a related discussion, the dissertation on which Lehrer's book is based offers a productive retheorizing of the nostalgic tradition in Jewish ethnography as grounds for productively rethinking this history of the salvage paradigm within anthropology (2005:51-81).

community's own authenticated "others"—native-born secular Yiddish speakers, Holocaust survivors, even the collective others of mass membership institutions that once dominated the American Jewish public sphere. These conditions, no doubt, helped inform Jonathan Boyarin's prescient observations nearly two decades ago, about the American Jewish community, whose, "collective cultural mission for a number of generations yet will consist largely in the finding of containers for fragments of a shattered world" (1996:175). Twenty years later the expansion of youth programs reveals that the variety of devices and practices of enclosure have diversified. So too have their temporal orientations—concerned increasingly not only with the salvage of past fragments, but with the production of the very conditions in which a subject desirous of Jewishness might be produced in the present and maintained in the future. If ethnography is, as Shryock writes, "a shared labor of objectification," (1998:1) then ethnographers today must take as much account of the constitutive work of this public of institutions, philanthropists and culture workers who share with ethnographers in the labor of producing not only "real Jews", but also the metacultural spaces designed to create their potentiality.

So, taken together, what does the ethnography of youth programming within American Jewish non-profit institutions offer Jewish ethnography? First and foremost these spaces reflexively draw our focus to, and thus provide a context in which to clarify, the slipperiness of the conceptual object of the anthropology of Jews. As Marcie Brink-Danan has emphasized, categories such as "Jews" or "Judaism" seem insufficient to account for the fact that Jews are not just those who practice the Jewish religion, nor is "Judaism" the central or unproblematic object of focus for people who identify as Jewish. As Brink-Danan writes,

> The question of what to call such ethnographic pursuits (anthropology of Jews, of Judaism, and of Jewish-ness?) bespeaks a fundamental theoretical challenge to the conceptualization of Judaism as a religious faith or set of ritual laws. Of course, Judaism equals 'religion' to many Jews, especially those who most strictly adhere to a prescriptive Judaism. At the same time, anthropologists have shown that even in the

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most 'religious' of Jewish communities, the practical often trumps the ideological in everyday activities…Nonetheless, to many self-designated Jews, Jewishness, or Judaism, it is of course much more than a religious faith, and includes (among other things) a national sense, a people, belonging to a race, a dietary inclination, a (multi)linguistic proficiency, a political orientation, a sense of difference, a source of pride, a curse, a blessing and so on. (2008:681)

In addition to indexing a fundamental challenge, Brink-Danan's suggestion that an anthropology of "Jews" might differ from an anthropology of Judaism or "Jewishness" also points to opportunities. Clearly, not all ethnographies of Jews take Judaism as their central object of theoretical inquiry. Conversely, some of the communities and individuals that have understood themselves as practicing Judaism (Jackson 2013, Kravel-Tovi 2012, 2014) often find their status as "Jews" a matter of contestation and negotiation.

What, though, of an anthropology of Jewishness? At first blush, the term appears commensurable with "Blackness", or "Asianness," a marker of ethnic or racial identity that indexes a range of tokens that could fall under that type. But this is not how scholars deploy the concept. Quite the opposite, in fact. In Jewish studies, Jewishness is generally used as a kind of "catch all" term that extends beyond ethnicity alone, encompassing nearly any cultural expression that might point to any kind of Jewish referent—whether religious, political, ethnic, racial or otherwise. Lehrer's Jewish spaces, for example, are clearly not spaces populated primarily by ethnic Jews, nor are they religious spaces. But they are, still, undeniably Jewish. For the scholars who employ this term, the analytical utility of Jewishness seems to lie precisely in its ability to evade strict identification with particular bodies, particular materials, or particular spaces.

In thinking about what an ethnography of Jewishness might look like, Jonathan Boyarin's analytical elaboration of Joselit's (1990) discussion of Orthodox Jews as "Jewish Jews" provides a productive way forward:

There is a phrase sometimes used, by Lubavitchers, by other Hasidim, and by other

Jews primarily engaged in intimate Orthodox communities, to describe themselves. They call themselves *yidishe yidn*, "Jewish Jews"… This provides some purchase on the genealogical definition of Jewish identity—that a Jew is first of all one born of a Jewish mother. Of course this definition is valid in Jewish law, but it may well be that it is conventionally emphasized because the genealogical definition provides a strong diacritical contrast to the dynamics of Christian identity, provided by baptism or some other *assumption* of Christianity. The idea of the *yidisher yid* moves beyond the pole of givenness in identity, suggesting that on one hand there are Jews who are Jews because Jewishness is given to them, *and on the other hand there are (doubled) Jews* who make themselves as Jews: *Jewish Jews*. For a *yidisher yid*, the former are only once Jews. Becoming a Jew involves a self-making, a doubling, a supplement to the given of genealogy. Moreover, like circumcision, this constitutes a completion of the self, rather than a postmodern splitting, which would entail a reaction to a modernist presumption of wholeness and authenticity (1996:174-175, emphasis my own).

Among the Hasidim who use the term, cultivating that doubled supplement first and foremost means producing a pious Jewish self. But that supplemental "Jewishness" also invites in Boyarin's analysis a ground for theorizing what he goes on to describe as, "various inflections of Jewishness" that people and larger collectives produce and enact whether or not these inflections are attached to a "real Jew" (1996:175).[12]

The field of Jewish cultural programs aimed at Jews in college and the twenties thus provides an opportunity to ethnographically analyze the politics and social production of the category of Jewishness within a particular socio-historical context. In that field, Jewishness is not only a flexible analytical tool that helps scholars capture a slippery ethnographic object; it is *itself* an object of non-profit culture work. Episodes strive to mediate a form of Jewishness that is, by definition, *multiply inflected*. Reflected in the discourse of "discovery," "seeking," or "follow[ing] your soul's yearning…for wholeness" episodes understand the precise articulations of Jewish practice, identity, and community as essentially emergent, still in process. Within the episodes themselves participants represent Jewishness in its breadth; that is, they are first and foremost bearers of "energy" that

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[12] This performance approach runs throughout post-modern identity studies. See especially Butler (1990).

portend future projects still in the making. Populating a programmatic field aimed at taping those

energies, episodes strive in their form to encompass the "various inflections" that Jewish

engagements might take for younger Jews in the present, so that participants might better complete

adult Jewish selves in the future.

An ethnography of Yiddish episodes within that wider field is not first and foremost an

anthropology of Jews or of Judaism. It is the anthropology *Yiddishness*. By "Yiddishness," I do not

mean to connote a Jewish ethnic identity in the style of Yiddish (though, that too is certainly

performed and enacted in the Yiddish world). Rather, I mean Yiddish as a resource philanthropically

subsidized to foster future American Jewish projects—that is, subsidized to "spark" young Jewish

energy. *Yiddishness* in episodes thus constitutes something quite different from *Yiddishism*—the

ideological commitment to Yiddish language and culture "as a modern expression of Judaism"

(Goldsmith 1998:11). Rather, in programs that move young cohort groups through a Yiddish

episode, a Yiddish devotee—a scholar, an aficionado, a cultural activist, a fluent reader or speaker—

constitutes a possibility. It is one outcome from a broader process of episodic Jewish practice. Other

interests, other possibilities, lie latent as well. From the perspective of the panoptic gaze of the

donors and the broader American Jewish community on whom these programs rely, those

possibilities include other Jewish engagements that, though in the case studies here may begin with

Yiddish, are valued for their emergent, unrealized Jewish possibilities. The divergent futures they

portend are also latent within the productive energies of young Yiddish students—potential

concretizations of accumulated wealth transformed into Jewish cultural value.


*The Jewish Doublings and American Jewish Philanthropy*

The central role of charitable giving to the subsidization of non-profit culture work also

offers a new theoretical take on the politics of philanthropy. Usually described by scholars as, "the

institutionalization of private voluntary action for the common good—an organized collective effort as opposed to individual acts of charity or benevolence" (Kelner 2013:58), this idealized notion of philanthropy approaches an ideology of a "pure gift." In that sense, the giver appears disinterested in whether or not the gift is reciprocated, or what its outcomes might be (Bornstein 624:2009). This appears to place charitable giving squarely outside the self-interested, rational sphere of capitalist action (see Weber 1978, Bornstein 2009). In contrast though, scholars have revealed a complex, interlocking relationship between capitalist accumulation, philanthropy and politics. Some scholars insist that a "non-profit industrial complex" depoliticizes social movements in and through non-profit reliance on governments and private grant making foundations (Roy 2004). Others argue that these relationships do not as much depoliticize as they restructure social movements, opening new possibilities for political action (Herzog 2011). A number of critics have shown that the politics of philanthropy are themselves never socially neutral. In the American Jewish context, for example, historian Beth Wenger has recently argued that the emergence of philanthropy in the late 19th and early 20th century, as a more 'technical' and 'efficient' medium of giving in comparison to charity, in fact shifted control over charitable giving from female to male spheres (Wenger 2014). More recently, in a phenomenon popular writers have described as "philanthrocapitalism," philanthropists and foundations seek to apply business models and corporate expertise to charitable endeavors. This process insinuates the agency of givers more directly into the realm of policy making (Bishop and Green 2008).

Scholars of American Jews have richly documented the political dimensions of philanthropy. Kelner's analysis of Elazar's work on the Jewish federation system, for example, foregrounds the entwined relationship between philanthropy and governance. "Whatever else it may intend or accomplish, philanthropy—as an institutional sector— can also constitute a mechanism for the self-governance of religio-ethnic communities" (Kelner 2013:58). His analysis portrays the work of

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philanthropy as akin to governmentality described by Foucault (1991:87-105). According to Foucault, modern governance understands biopower, that is, the regulation of all aspects of a population, as a central priority. Biopolitical knowledge conceives of the population as a statistical aggregate in order to know its dynamics for the purpose of intervening in its biological qualities (i.e., health, fertility rates, cleanliness and so forth). Anthropologist Michal Kravel-Tovi has recently foregrounded the central role biopolitical knowledge plays within the organized American Jewish community. Her analysis brings out the struggle of communal demographers and policy makers to intervene, on the level of the body, in the behaviors of a voluntary ethno-religious population (Kravel-Tovi, forthcoming). Even if, for the sake of argument, federation officials or private philanthropists sought to establish fertility rates, for example, these efforts would inevitably yield little due to limitations in the kind of disciplinary capacities and mechanisms of enforcement enjoyed by sovereign states.

However, the doubling entailed in Boyarin's notion of "*Jewish* Jews" suggests that Jewishness itself can constitute an alternative realm of institutional intervention. As much as the philanthropic production of episodic programming for American Jewish adults is connected to a broader discourse about population, these programs manage less an imagined population of embodied individuals than the emergent possibilities of future concretizations of Jewishness. Not unlike biological aspects of a population, which states understand as a resource whose management and cultivation are tied to the broader political economy, the energies and decisions of young Jewish adults are also linked vis-à-vis their Jewish futures, to the broader resources of the American Jewish community. This connects young Jewish adults to the American Jewish institutional infrastructure (its buildings, religious institutions, civic centers, and financial resources), material culture (i.e. the world's Yiddish books), linguistic and heritage resources (Yiddish language and culture) and, at times, as I will show, population itself.

*Structure of the Ethnography*

*Chapter Outline*

This project is based on twenty months of ethnographic research between December 2010 and August 2012, supplemented by intermitted follow-up visits to the key fieldsites of the Book Center, Yiddish Farm, and in New York City.[13] In these sites and others within Yiddishland, I traced my own, ethnographic path—attending festivals like KlezKamp, the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, Yidish-Vokh, and so forth. What follows though is hardly a comprehensive account of the two institutional centers on which I focus, let alone the Yiddish world, or the world of American Jewish youth programming. Nor is my claim that the Book Center or Yiddish Farm are *only* iterations of this larger field of episodic culture work. Indeed, both organizations pursue other projects in addition to those aimed at college-age and twenty-something Yiddish students. Moreover, these programs, as I previous described, have been taken up within these institutional spaces for practical as well as ideological reasons, sometimes ambivalently and in piecemeal fashion.

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[13] In addition to participant-observation, I also draw on institutional media and literature as well as formal and informal interviews. Some of these interviews were recorded. During others, I took hand-written notes, later writing up more detailed accounts based upon these initial materials. A number of conversations and scenes throughout this ethnography are thus reconstructions of what was said and what transpired based on these materials as well as supplemental resources such as photographs. I've sought to reproduce these encounters as accurately as possible. A similar dynamic holds with regard to ethnographic scenes. In a number of instances, I was unable to take notes or record at the precise moments events were unfolding. Thus, to provide one example, during Shabbosim at Yiddish Farm writing was always implicitly and sometimes explicitly prohibited. In cases like these, my depictions of events are based on notes written or recorded later in a day or evening, after events had come to a close. With few exceptions, I took notes in English. Thus, when reproducing accounts of conversations in Yiddish based on hand written notes I have almost always done so in English.

My focus on episodic Jewish cultural programs at the Book Center and Yiddish Farm reflects the particular moment when I conducted ethnography. The field of social science expertise and philanthropic interests that support and inform the domain of American Jewish cultural production shifts as new trends and developments in those worlds become popular. Indeed, in a context in which "newness" and "innovation" are prized, new forms will undoubtedly emerge in the future. The volatility of the American economy further highlights the historical contingencies of this ethnography. Changes in the market such as the financial collapse in 2008 or shifts in the interests of philanthropists, reverberate in the non-profit world that mediate these programs. Had I chosen to do ethnography within a Jewish non-profit more affected by the Bernie Madoff scandal (which touched a number of major American Jewish organizations, even shuttering a few), or one that simply failed to find new sources of funding, my fieldsite might itself have disappeared entirely, or radically shifted in its form. When I began graduate studies, for example, one of the main producers of Jewish youth culture—a non-profit called Jdub records—was hailed as one of the most successful iterations of what became known as "new Jewish culture." A few years later, it closed amidst financial struggles—a development that itself prompted conferences and soul searching by young Jewish entrepreneurs and established Jewish professionals alike.

This ethnography thus begins not with the episode, but instead situates these programs within the socio-institutional contexts in which they have been taken up. I begin by tracing the history of the Book Center's efforts to transmit Yiddish intergenerationally before it intensified its development of language and cultural programs for young students. The next chapter thus departs from the origins of the Book Center—that is, from the particular artifact of the Yiddish book against the backdrop of the Yiddish activism in New York City. Specifically, I show how the Center articulated an "artefactual ideology" (Blommaert 2008) in which Yiddish language, literature and culture could be imaginatively saved in and through the collection of the world's Yiddish books.

This ideology facilitated the portability of the language itself away from its authenticated centers—particularly New York City—as well as its salvage in and through the construction of an American Jewish non-profit organization. This ideology contrasted heavily with the aspirations of Lansky's Yiddishist peers. I draw out this contrast through analysis of interviews conducted with twenty activists and culture workers within the Yiddish world during the crucial decades of what became known as the Yiddish revival from roughly the mid 1970s through the 1990s.

In chapter three, I explore the Center's collaborative practice of what I call "thin description" in its public representations of its historic mission to, "save the world's Yiddish books." Through the thin description of Yiddish books—specifically, with numbers—Book Center staff, volunteers, donors and visitors value these artifacts as so many interchangeable objects. But this discourse of thin description, unlike how numerical description is usually discussed by scholars, is hardly objective or dispassionate. Rather, treating books like numbers allows the Book Center and its public to invest them with a range of different associations, expectations, and desires about the Yiddish past, and for the Yiddish future. Thin description constitutes a longstanding practice at the Book Center. However, as the projects capable of producing Yiddish futures through books dry up, so too has this work of affective investment become increasingly difficult to perform in and through the Center's collected originals. Sometimes thin description at the Center becomes *too* thin. In these moments an institution that has pursued intergenerational Yiddish continuity for future generations of Yiddish devotees risks becoming what it seeks to avoid: "a *genizah*, a static storehouse for old books" (Yiddish Book Center n.d.(f)).

These challenges in part underwrite the Center's move away from books and toward education. In chapter four I thus move to the Steiner summer program. Drawing on anthropological theories of exchange, I show how the Book Center, in its physical architecture, programmatic design, and everyday practice creates an episodic space for Jewish and Yiddish cultivation among

students. The summer program aims to promote both literacy in Yiddish as well as intimacy among mostly college-age participants. At the same time, the Center objectifies and circulates the Jewish potential of these young students, creating artifacts of their devotion and the possible Jewish futures their youthful energy entails. The Center creates intergenerational relationships of exchange, I argue, by capitalizing on the thin interactions between donors and students that, as I have described above, constitute the Center's efforts to produce "abstract kinship."

Chapter five moves to the context of Yiddish Farm against the backdrop of New York City. I focus on the Yiddish Farm summer program to argue that its use of the episodic program form is currently structuring the possibilities for community on the Farm. By organizing episodic programs attracting primarily young Yiddish students, Yiddish Farm employs a form of Jewish engagement popular among American Jewish philanthropist, but in order to create a decidedly non-episodic Yiddish space. As I show, the participants' and founders' experiences and forms of expertise, drawn from the wider context of episodic Jewish programs and the American Jewish non-profit sector, shape expectations about Jewish culture and community on the Farm. In and through the practices of its participants, episodic culture is "growing" in Goshen too—often in tension with the Farm's revernacularizing aspirations.

Chapter six examines the emerging religious orientation of Yiddish Farm in order to rethink contemporary anthropological debates about religion and secularism in light of the ethnography of American Jews. In it, I describe how aspects of traditional Jewish observance are enacted alongside and in co-creative relationship with Yiddish linguistic practice. Such practices, both at the Farm and outside it, have been understood by some activists as linking Yiddish revernacularization to processes of religious self-making. Drawing on theories of entextualization (Silverstein and Urban 1996), I show how both folkloric traditions and Jewish discursive traditions are entwined together by

participants on the Farm. Such practices, I argue, require that we reconsider the relationship of religious piety and identity politics.

My own engagement with Yiddish began, like so many American Jews today, in the context of the university. The narrative underwriting that engagement though, lacks many of the genealogical underpinnings so commonly associated with Yiddish among Jews with Eastern European backgrounds. I never knew Yiddish speaking relatives and have no memories of hearing the language as a child. Yet, though a newcomer to the Yiddish world, I am very much a native ethnographer to the broader field of American Jewish organizations. Raised in the family of a Reform rabbi in a small university town, my upbringing was punctuated by summers at Jewish camp, youth trips to Israel, even a fellowship year working at the Reform Jewish movement's Washington D.C. office after college. I am, in other words, a product of Jewish programming; it seems appropriate to take note of this here, because my background and my positionality (a young Jewish 20-something when I began this research) shaped my access to the institutions and people I studied in profound ways. They not only helped dictate the individuals with whom I could spend the most time (which, because of the episodic conditions of the programs in which research was richest, had to be decided quickly); they also shaped how aspects of my own identity were represented by the institutions and understood by the people I encountered while conducting research. Similarly, especially at the Book Center, my ability to pass as an index of potential value for institutions and wider publics of donors and visitors often generated for me the richest ethnographic material. This ethnography is thus in part a product of the intergenerational exchanges I theorize and critique in the chapters that follow. In this sense, it is not only about them; it is also of them—a single vector of futurity among others.

## Chapter 2.

## Moving a Portable Homeland: Artifactual Ideologies and the Spatial (Re)organization of Yiddish Devotion in Yiddishland.

"When I came into the Yiddish world the only qualification I had was how serious are you, are you rolling up your sleeves and joining us in the fight [to save the language]… When they saw that I was earnest and speaking Yiddish, that was the only qualification the community needed."[1]

"The general Jewish community is ignorant of Yiddish…. They don't understand its importance and they don't take it seriously."[2]

"Books were our portable homeland."[3]

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"In Amherst, Massachusetts?" he asks, his face wrinkling in confusion.

I nod knowingly, anticipating the exchange that seems always to follow questions about my

fieldwork. I've run into an old acquaintance on a Brooklyn-bound 3-train; actually he's an old

summer-camper of mine from my camp-counselor years during college. Mike, we'll call him, was

only a teenager then, but now he's out of school, working for a non-profit in Manhattan and living

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[1] Shane Baker, actor in the Yiddish theater and head of the Congress for Jewish Culture in New York City (Basu 2014).
[2] Jordan Kutzik, yugntruf member and writer for the Forverts (Basu 2014).
[3] Aaron Lansky, an excerpt from the Book Center's documentary *Bridge of Books* (Ball 2001).

with three friends in a cramped, Crown Heights apartment, part of the wave of upwardly mobile, twenty and thirty-somethings moving into and gentrifying Crown Heights.

"Is there a Yiddish community there?"

"Not exactly," I tell him. "But there is an organization founded by this guy Aaron Lansky. He tried to save the world's Yiddi—"

"Oh yeah!" Mike cuts me off, his eyes lighting up in recognition. "I've heard about that place. I don't know much about Yiddish, but I do know about that guy who saved all the books!"

"Yeah, the Yiddish Book Center. I was up there doing research last year, and I just moved to New York for the next phase of the project."

"That's cool," he tells me, pausing for a second in thought, "But what's a center for Yiddish books doing in Amherst?"

As I exited the Nostrand 3-stop for my apartment, I went over Mike's question in my head, one asked to me so many times before: *What's it doing in Amherst?* The official history of the Center, in fact, offers some explicit explanations for what seems to many a surprising location. But walking down Eastern Parkway, as black-suited Lubavitch Hasidim passed by in yarmulkes, I could imagine why they would not have occurred to Mike. Even aside from the Center's official reasons—in short, that the Yiddish world in New York City was simply too politically contentious for Lansky's project to succeed—there are perfectly logical reasons for its location that even someone like Mike, who maintains he knows nothing about Yiddish, could certainly understand. A recent collect graduate living in Brooklyn could certainly grasp Amherst's comparatively affordable rent. And of course one need not be at the Center to read from its collection of books. They are available for purchase in vintage, reprinted or downloadable form. But generally speaking, like others who asked me this question, it just seemed natural to Mike that one should find a Yiddish Book Center in a *Jewish* place.

Indeed, in numerous exchanges mirroring this one, people often followed, "What's it doing in Amherst?" with, "why isn't it in New York?"

The fact that the home of the world's Yiddish books is not located in New York City offers a window into the Book Center's peculiar nature as an outgrowth of the oft-noted post-1960s reengagement with Yiddish among American Jews. For the new generation of Yiddish devotees that became the leading musicians, performers, activists and academics within the Yiddish revival, Yiddish "lived" most vibrantly in authentic Jewish places like New York City. It was, and for many continues to be, in New York City that Yiddish people, Yiddish things, and Yiddish places could be discovered and explored. Culture workers like "Marcel," who arrived in New York City from the mid-West in the 1980s, moved there in part out of a desire to be, "in a more grounded Jewish context." Yiddish New York, in this discourse, is a place of authentic Yiddish roots, one in which Yiddish and Eastern European linguistic and cultural literacies can be perfected and honed at the source. In a sense, as some alluded in interviews, New York is where one goes to receive, if not to inherit, Yiddish.

The work of inheritance varied in form in the memories of the New York City Yiddishists I interviewed. Some of them embarked on scholarly projects, others chose artistic ones, and still others depicted their own Jewish identities as projects in the making. But all were *serious*. Indeed, their language of seriousness cross cuts their memories, structuring narratives about their own relationship to Yiddish, its politics, and its distinction from what Kutzik glosses as, "the general Jewish community." Seriousness refers not to an internal disposition, nor does it index an absence of affective states like playfulness, irony and irreverence. Rather, the discourse of seriousness registers the devotion of activists prepared to "[roll] up their sleeve" and get to work cultivating Yiddish literacies. Activists recall practices as closely tied to an "authentic" Yiddish linguistic environment in New York City—a "framework" (to quote one informant) of Yiddish institutions,

native Yiddish speakers, and linguistic artifacts.[4] That environment served to authenticate serious

devotion to Yiddish culture work not only in the eyes of Yiddishists, but also in how those

Yiddishists imagined themselves in the eyes of older, native speakers.[5]

Emerging during the same period, the Yiddish Book Center was also concerned with the

transmission of Yiddish to future generations like the activists in New York City during the late

1970s through the 1990s. Yet the Center took a markedly different approach to the material, and

concomitantly the spatial, organization of that intergenerational project. Specifically, by

conceptualizing its object of salvage as, "the world's Yiddish books," the Center's work resulted in a

different mapping of relevant Yiddish spaces and interlocutors. Rather than imagining Yiddish as

centered in cultural institutions, native speakers, and language artifacts within authentic, urban

locales like New York City, "Yiddish" for the Center was dispersed to any location with a Yiddish

book. Through distribution of book artifacts the Center also dispersed Yiddish devotion and

knowledge.

These divergent approaches to Yiddish stewardship provoke broader theoretical questions

about the material dimensions of "intangible" cultural forms like language. Anthropologists have

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[4] The social and political dynamics entailed within the distribution of writing in physical space, especially in multi-lingual, urban contexts has recently become a topic of productive interdisciplinary scholarship. Specifically, scholars from media studies, socio-linguistics, anthropology and geography, among other disciplines, have utilized the concept of "linguistic landscapes" to account for the role linguistic tokens play in the social construction of public space. See for example, Shohamy and Gorter (2009), Shohamy et al. (2010), Cenoz and Gorter (2006). The concept generally refers to the marking of places, roads, advertisements and an array of other public objects. I have opted for the term "environment" here, both because this chapter focuses less on the analysis of written language as visual markers (relying more, as it does, on the memories of these places), and also because my primary concern is the importance of these spaces to the production of artistic networks and intergenerational solidarities.

[5] Use of the concept of "authentication" is intended here to work against any reification of an essentialist attribution of authenticity. The evaluation of practice as serious is instead intended to show how certain linguistic practices (and in this case, affective identifications with language as well) become understood in authentic terms. For a more general discussion of the concept within sociolinguistics, as well as a discussion of the importance of authenticity within the history of the discipline see, Bucholtz (2003), Hall (2005), Bucholtz and Hall (2004).

recognized that the material forms through which cultural and linguistic revival are pursued are hardly neutral, and are often matters of explicit political contestation (Blommaert 2008, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, Gonzales and Tonelli 1992:262-284, Sykes 2005:187-204, Kuutma 2013, Hill 2002). The very application of the category "cultural heritage" to an array of materials (e.g. land, artifacts, language) often creates highly contested, and mutually constitutive, relationships between identity groups and states, corporations, museums, universities and other agents that seek to control specific materials and resources (Brown 2003, Kirsch 2006, Povinelli 2002, Rowlands 2004, Clifford 2013). But the material dimensions of these conflicts become especially visible when the objects slated for protection are understood as essentially intangible. (Kuutma 2013, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, Alivizatou 2012). The ability of intangible objects to be housed and displayed within a museum or tourist site (Bauman 2011, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a:249-256), protected by heritage institutions like UNESCO (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006), or documented by linguists (Blommaert 2008) depends to a great extent on the materials in which those objects are understood as being embodied. Managing, protecting, and displaying intangibility thus frequently calls attention to the material forms being employed to mediate representation.[6]

With regard to the mediation of language in particular, Jan Blommaert has theorized what he calls "artefactual ideologies"[7]—that is, ideologies, "in which particular textual practices can reduce language to an artefact that can be manipulated like most other objects" (Blommaert 2008:292). Artifactual ideologies entail, first, that speech, "can be *reduced* to language by attending to and 'extracting' the core forms-and-combinations, and listing its words." Secondly, these efforts of

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[6] The material dimensions of intangible culture on which scholars often focus are the meta-cultural processes (practices of inventory, list making, and so forth) that are entailed within preservation practice. But, as Keane writes in relationship to sincerity, all semiotic phenomena are material in the sense that, to be social objects, they must have form (2007).

[7] When not quoting directly from Blommaert, I use the spelling "artifact," that is more commonly employed in the U.S..

reduction, as he argues, "can and need to be done in specific, *regimented forms of textuality*." That is, "it is not enough to just *know* these rules of grammar and lists of words, they must actually exist in specific genres of textual artifacts of limited size and specific shape" (for example, in dictionaries, books of grammar, etc.) (2008:292). Blommaert is especially concerned with the ways in which the material dimensions of language participate in defining what a "language" is, and thus what it means to be knowledgeable in and of that language: "Language becomes a book or a paper, or a collection of them, and many 'languages' exist only by virtue of the existence of such objects. The capacity to create such artifacts has become the hallmark of linguistic professionalism and expertise," Blommaert goes on to argue, "and the competence to consume them defines 'interest' and 'knowledgeability' in language matters" (2008:292).

Though the idea is not thoroughly developed in his work, Blommaert also implicitly notes the spatial implications of artifactual ideologies. "A 'language'," in the sense conceived of by linguists, "ideally, can be carried in one's back pocket or briefcase; it can be stored on the shelves of a library and it can be passed around and traded as an object" (2008:292). The spatial dimensions of writing have been an important topic of inquiry among book historians and ethnographers of reading alike. They have paid attention to the co-constitutive relationship between, on the one hand, the material organization of texts and the dynamics of their circulation and, on the other, the concomitant practices, communities, and publics these relationships mediate (Johns 1998, Chartier 1994, Silverstein and Urban 1996, Boyarin 1992, Stolow 2010). These scholars have, like Blommaert, theorized the relationship between institutional and professional authority and the materiality of writing. Thus, Jeffery Stolow has shown how the style, graphic organization and material form of Jewish religious texts produced by ArtScroll, the largest contemporary Orthodox Jewish publishing house in the U.S., has transformed and expanded where, how and by whom these materials are used. ArtScroll has thus facilitated changes in Orthodox religious authority and culture literally by "the

design" of their text-objects (2010). Similarly concerned with how the material form of writing shapes the social production of authority, Matthew Hull's analysis of government documents within an Islamabad bureaucracy shows how their graphic organization mediates relationships between the agency of individuals and the collective agency on which bureaucratic authority depends (Hull 2003, see also, Hull 2012).

The form that Yiddish took in the discourse and material practices of the Book Center during the initial decades of the Yiddish revival helped organize a conception of what it meant to be both knowledgeable and devoted to Yiddish that differed from that articulated by Lansky's contemporaries in New York City. This rearticulation also had implications for the relationship of Yiddish devotion, as a kind of Jewish practice, to what Kutzik glosses as, "the general Jewish community." Specifically, with each Yiddish book designated as a part of the larger "whole" of Yiddish, both knowledge of the language and devotion to cultivating that knowledge could be 'extracted' from any particular individual and place within the network of book collection. The devotion and knowledge required to read Yiddish could then be pushed forward down the network to the imagined, passionate community of Yiddish "students and scholars" who will make use of Yiddish books. In doing so, the Center's project of book collection rearticulates the politics of Yiddish salvage away from a strictly countercultural one, toward a public whose practices in fact mirror a vast array of American Jewish engagements with Jewish authenticity.

### *New York City, Yiddishland: a Socio-Institutional Yiddish Environment*

Interpretations of a resurgent interest in Yiddish among younger generations of American Jews that intensified in the 1970s and developed in the 1980s and 90s generally portray it as part of a broader turn to ethnic roots in the United States. Looking beyond ahistorical sociological models of "third generation interest" scholarship on white ethnic revival has more recently examined the

social, historical and commercial processes that underwrote the "new ethnicity."[8] Cultural historian

Matthew Fry Jacobsen, for example, has highlighted the role played by,

> …cultural, institutional and political forces: trade presses and television networks, which produced mass paperbacks and TV shows like *Roots*; news agencies, like *Time* magazine, which turned the roots phenomenon into a roots craze by providing instruction in genealogical research; publishers, scholars and universities, which produced studies like *World of Our Fathers* and offered college credit for *Roots*-inflected family histories; and politicians like Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, who sanctified a vision of "ethnic heritage" that had vast implications not only for individuals and families but for the nation itself and for reigning notions of "Americannesss" (Jacobsen 2006:4).

But in considering the particular Yiddish inflection of ethnic revival attention must

also be paid to the particular local contexts in which it emerged. Certainly, for the new

cohorts of Yiddish devotees who congregated around New York City's Yiddish institutions

in the late 1970s and subsequent decades, the factors that Jacobsen describes endure in their

memories of the Yiddish world in New York City. Politics, in the form of post-1960s

counterculture, university-education, and even cultural artifacts like Alex Haley's *Roots*

frequently came up in interviews. But the people I interviewed made use of these resources

in particular settings—settings that shaped the lived experience of the, "new, resurgent

ethnicity," to which Jacobsen refers.

In the narratives of those Yiddish language and cultural activists, the urban context of

Yiddishland emerges as an important practical environment for Yiddish cultural production. The

city also shaped Yiddishist identity politics. In these accounts, old Yiddish institutions, old speakers,

and old language artifacts form an authentic setting for devoted Yiddish practice. Alan, now a

professor of Jewish studies, describes how, as a teen, intersections not only of politics and popular

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[8] As Jacobsen notes, theories of third generation interest, which maintain that the grandchildren of immigrants seek to recover what their parent's generation sought to forget, strongly shaped how Americans understood the emergence of ethnic revivalism in the 1960s and afterward (2006:2-4).

culture, but ultimately of place sparked his Yiddish interests. "When I was about 14 or 15," he

explained, "I started thinking about what it meant to be Jewish and how one could get a more

positive content to it than being pushed around on the street for being Jewish." Alan grew up in

Brooklyn, in a largely Irish Catholic and Italian neighborhood, and remembers how the anti-

Semitism he experienced on the street was augmented by his consciousness of the 1973 War

between Israel and its neighboring states. "I was 14 in 1972, 15 in 1973 … the 1973 War, to my

surprise at the time, elicited a kind of gross emotional response from me," he explained. "And I

remember throwing some money at these right-wing Zionist … these Orthodox guys had these

sheets [bed sheets] and they would collect money in these sheets, and I would throw some money in.

But I started to look around; (short laugh) I literally started to shop for a Jewish identity and I

looked in the Jewish Catalog…"[9] I mean the Jewish Catalog," he emphasized, "really acted like a

catalog to me. I was like looking around, like what, 'what could I do'? And I remember, I was

already identifying myself as a socialist and I said, well, I don't believe in God, I'm not religious, so I

have to find a way to be Jewish that's compatible with those things."

In time, Alan's process of "shopping" for an identity developed into actual trips to Yiddish

destinations in New York City. Through his readings of literature from the Jewish Left, Alan had

learned about the Bund, the secular Jewish socialist organization originally founded as a political

party in Russia, which still maintained an office and archive in New York City.[10] One afternoon, he

made his way to the office. "As soon as you walked through the door," he told me,

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[9] The Jewish Catalog was an outgrowth of the Havurah movement that developed as a part of a broader critique of suburban American Judaism. Mirroring the Havurah movement's model of organizing Jewish community around small prayer groups (minyanim), the Catalog offered products and perspectives aimed at helping American Jews cultivate a "personal, independent and activists" Judaism (Prell 1989:16). Published first in 1973, and modeled on The Whole Earth Catalog, the Jewish Catalog was extremely popular, selling 200,000 copies by the early 1980s.
[10] For a history of the Jewish Labor Bund in the decades following WWII see, Slucki (2012).

it was, it's a different world. It was like Warsaw or Vilna, 1939. And I walked in and I went to the office of the Bund and I sat down and I talked to a guy, who I later realized was Emanuel Scherer, who was a former city councilman of Warsaw and a leader of the Bund. And I said: "I want to learn Yiddish and I want to join the Bund. I want to be…" you know. And they said, "well we don't teach Yiddish, but go to the Workmen's Circle," and they put me in touch with this little tiny youth Bund that existed at the time. And so I went to the Workmen's Circle and I started taking Yiddish and I joined the *yugnt Bund*."

The networks of institutions that Alan describes were central nodes within New York City's Yiddishland at the time of his entrance—the "other world" that he crosses into as he enters the Bund and meets an ex-city councilman of Warsaw. The office of the Bund no longer exists today. But when Alan started learning Yiddish, it could be found in the Atran House on East 78th Street (itself, now closed), alongside a number of other small, immigrant generation Yiddish institutions and Jewish left organizations. The Workmen's Circle, where he would take Yiddish classes was then located at the aforementioned East 33rd Street building. Such locations constituted Alan's particular "map" of Yiddishland in New York City, his relevant sites where he would cultivate Yiddish linguistic and cultural literacies.

Alan liked Yiddish, an attraction facilitated by a political ambiance that appealed to him and a like-minded community that was gradually coming into focus around him:

I was already active in the Democratic Socialist organizing committee, Michael Harrington's organization. And I didn't know any Yiddish. I didn't know anything at all. But I took a— wait, I must have been 16 years old when I started studying Yiddish. So, I was in high school and I took an evening course at the Workmen's Circle, once a week. The teacher was "Emily Horwitz," you know, the film maker, and at that time she was very young. She was a young adult, she was in her twenties… And there were other young people…there was this young crowd, which had a kind of post-60s political approach to Yiddish, you know, that 'we're for Yiddish,' and it's a specific kind of Jewish orientation with political implications, diasporist, compatible with socialism for sure, and compatible also with support for other people's minority cultural rights and with this very, very intense connection to the immediate Jewish past, both in New York and Eastern Europe.

In Alan's narrative, Yiddish institutional nodes anchor his emerging Yiddish peer group. These places are connected to, "the immediate Jewish past," in Eastern Europe and New York City. In those places people from different worlds come together: native Yiddish speakers and a "young crowd" with a shared political approach to the language.

As noted earlier, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research was at the time a central hub for creative Yiddish culture work. Although refracted through his American context, Alan's politics of cultural recovery mirror in many ways those of the institutions' founders. In addition to its diaspora nationalist origins, ethnographic salvage lies at the heart of YIVO's history and political legacy. Most famously in this regard, YIVO trained and deployed "zamlers," or collectors, to travel to shtetls and collect all manner of folk-knowledge, customs and material culture. Such ethnographic objects served as the raw materials upon which YIVO's social scientific sections (divided into Philology, Historical, Social-Economic, and Pedagogical) would produce scholarship that ideally would inform a Jewish national consciousness. In this sense, zamlers embodied a populist aspiration that for people with a, "post-60s political approach," to Yiddish was understandably appealing.

Just as importantly though, by the late-1970s and 80s, practical reasons secured YIVO's centrality within a revival pursued primarily by white, socio-economically ascending American Jews. As Alan put it, "YIVO is very important because YIVO was an academic institution. And after all, we were all not working class kids; we were, no matter what, even if some of us came from working class families, we were all, at least in the process of getting university educations." Karen, an archivist with YIVO in the 1980s, echoes Alan's sentiments in her own narrative of how she got involved with the organization. After, "rebelling against being the child of college educated parents," Karen decided to, "quit working as a salesperson at [a department store]," and, "all kinds of other crazy jobs," and attend graduate school in Jewish Studies. Her academic pursuits in the mid 1980s eventually led her to an internship at YIVO. Alexis, another YIVO culture worker, became involved

with the organization in graduate school after assisting an affiliated scholar on a research project. For these activists and others, then, upward mobility coincided with a crucial point of entry into the broader Yiddish world.

From a practical standpoint, YIVO connected people in relationships of cultural production and language activism. Working at YIVO during this crucial period were musician-performer-cultural activists like Henry Sapoznik and Adrienne Cooper who, as noted in the introduction, co-founded KlezKamp under YIVO's auspices. At YIVO, Cooper held the position of assistant director, while Sapoznik directed and organized the institution's sound archive. Alongside their formal roles at the Institute, they wielded influence in their capacity as what Kurin (1997) calls "culture brokers" in Yiddishland.[12] That is, their power lay in their ability to facilitate (and certainly, also in part to control)[13] cultural projects of different Yiddish devotees by connecting them to other Yiddishists, to Yiddish resources (archives, instructors, grant money), and to other Yiddish projects.

Lauren remembers Adrienne Cooper, a friend and former colleague during their tenure at YIVO not only as an activist and performer but also for her capacity to, "shepherd many, many very worthy cultural projects." As she explained about the ability of activists like Adrienne to facilitate connection: "Like Adrienne and Henry and those guys; you know they could always have free rehearsal space, nothing wrong with that! They'd have a piano and nobody was using [it], whatever; but it was nice, they got these "built-in" things, but it was partly 'cause they just could. And she [Adrienne] really helped KlezKamp to happen and to continue." Like Lauren, Karen similarly

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[12] In Kurin's work in the context of museums, culture workers involved within museum productions and exhibits play a key mediating role between artists, publics, financial supporters and others. As intermediaries, they facilitate the movements of people between publics or "worlds." In this case, through their work of linking people together to produce Yiddish culture, people like Sapoznik and Cooper can be understood as mediating people's passages through Yiddishland.

[13] By focusing on the facilitating role of people like Cooper and Sapoznik, my intention is not to downplay or erase the power dynamics that always accompany such roles. Conflicts and contests over resources is certainly part of the larger story of the Yiddish revival. It is not, though, one on which I am able to focus in this dissertation.

attributes YIVO's centrality for young Yiddish activists as stemming, to a great extent, from the social connections it practically fostered: "…it was doing well enough," Karen explained about YIVO in the 1980s, "where actually about 15, 20 people in their twenties and thirties got work there. So I was there, that's it. It became like people ended up working there; it became people's day jobs and why that was the case there and not in other places, I don't know… You know, you'd study in the summer program and get buddy-buddy with Adrienne or something; and then you might be able to get a job at YIVO while you were going to Columbia or whatever it was."

As Karen indicates, part of YIVO's centrality grew out of its long-standing relationship with Columbia University. From its inception, Columbia's program in Yiddish Studies was connected to a history of ideological Yiddishism stemming from the movement's roots in Eastern Europe. The program began in 1952 under Uriel Weinreich, the linguist and son of Max Weinreich (Kuznitz 2014:178-179). Cancer cut short Uriel Weinreich's life and productive career before people like Alan, Karen, Adrienne and others would arrive at the institution. But the commitment to maintaining Yiddish as a language of both scholarship and everyday Jewish life continued at Columbia and YIVO, especially through the influence of Yiddishist instructors like Schaechter and Columbia professor Mikhl Herzog for whom Yiddish was as much a matter of ideology as academic study.

For Yiddish newcomers like Alan and Karen these socio-institutional relationships helped structure their experience of Yiddishland. They provided what Karen called "a framework": "YIVO had its relations," she explained to me "…Columbia had a tight relationship with YIVO going back. And so there was a kind of framework for young people studying Yiddish to go back and forth between Columbia and YIVO." The importance of such frameworks in people's lives, of course, varied from person to person. Karen, for example, remembers shying away from yugntruf, even as she deepened her involvement with YIVO, eventually moving from interning to working as a full-time archivist. For Alan, who himself spent multiple summers studying under Schaechter in the

Weinreich program, his framework extended beyond YIVO and Columbia to include activism in the yugnt Bund, participation in yugntruf, and eventually part-time employment at the Bund. But, as another informant I interviewed explained, to whatever extent one made use of that framework—whether one was a tourist, an ethnographer, or a native within Yiddishland—"it was a world."

As much as places like YIVO and the Bund appeared to be "another world," as these narratives suggest, this world was not hermetically sealed. Rather, "Yiddishland" emerges from these accounts as both 'flanked' by other organizations and communities and cross-pollinated by the activities and interests that engaged this generation of activists. As Alan notes, his participation in socialist party politics and especially in graduate studies directed and shaped what he called his "Jewish orientation." Others linked their interest in Yiddish to their identities as Queer Jews. Some were artists active in theater companies, or in the case of Karen, came to Yiddish from a socialist Zionist camping and organizing background, which she maintains informed her political orientation to the language. So too for Henry Sapoznik, who credited his previous involvement in the old-time music scene with inspiring his foray into "his own" music and culture (Sapoznik 2002). Other musicians came to klezmer not only out of Jewish commitments, but also from their experience in folk, jazz or Balkan music scenes. These other orientations both rooted and were rooted by the particular spaces of Yiddishland in New York City and the kinds of communal networks they animated.

*Serious Genealogies*

Shandler describes a key feature of postvernacular Yiddish as the diversification of Yiddish agencies beyond the ability to communicate in the language (2006a:172-3, 195). The culture work of the artists, organizers and activists in the Yiddish world bear this out. Through their participation in Yiddish social networks, and work within Yiddish programs, spaces and organizations, they sought

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to develop an array of different proficiencies, literacies and projects. Capturing the prioritization on cultural creativity though Yiddish, Lauren describes the networks of activists and institutions Karen had previous conceptualized as a "framework" as an informal "incubator" for Yiddish cultural production.

Alan understood his work at YIVO, the Bund and other destinations in Yiddishland as part of a clear set of aspirations for Jewish authenticity in Yiddish:

"So…I really wanted to be Yiddish." He told me with a smile.

"You wanted to be Yiddish?"

"I wanted to be Yiddish. And this was very good for language learning. I wanted to just absorb the culture so thoroughly that I would be a native at it, or a near native. I wanted to speak well, naturally and with as good an accent as possible…I didn't like 'nostalgia Yiddish' and I didn't like English and I didn't like exaggerated Yiddish affect for [a] kind of funny effect or cute effect. So I wanted to be a Bundist in Vilna in the 1930s."

"You think that was your only… that is to say, was that your option for it not being cute or nostalgic?" I asked.

> Yeah. I mean, I suppose there could have been other options. I could have been a writer for the Forward in 1910 in New York or something like that, but it wasn't like *Joys of Yiddish*. I think that is always the emphasis. I did buy *Joys of Yiddish* and I did read it. I think I may have read it, I don't know if I did it on my own or there was a college class I took where it was recommended; so I might have bought it for that. And I read it and some of the jokes might have been funny, but you know it seemed shallow, and I didn't get it. So that's not what I wanted. I wanted to go to the heart of it and I think there was an aspect of authenticity, although it seemed like an authentic experience. This wasn't a place, Eastern Europe, Yiddish speaking Eastern Europe was a place where people were Jews because they were Jews. And the Bundists even proved it. It wasn't about religion, it wasn't about a specific belief necessarily, it was a thing you were born into and that you were and everyone was in it in that way so that there was this kind of authentic community, an ethnic community, a national community.

In his efforts to become "native or near native," Alan echoes Shane Baker's sense that one obtains a passport into Yiddishland by taking seriously the cultivation of Yiddish linguistic proficiency. In Alan's case, his serious devotion to Yiddish is materialized through fidelity to linguistic practice. He acquired this fidelity by cultivating a mimetic relationship to the immigrant generation of native Yiddish speakers he encountered, especially in places like YIVO and the Bund. In his rigorous devotion to Yiddish—his attentiveness—he seems to emphasize the same sense of work (rolling up one's sleeves) that marked Baker's discourse. Indeed, his adeptness marks off his own aspirational Yiddish engagement from those common to a larger American Jewish public. The latter he imagined encountering Yiddish through Leo Rosten's popular *Joys of Yiddish* (1968).

Alexis, an artist and social justice activist whose time at YIVO overlapped with that of Marcel, Alan, and Karen also began her work at YIVO through social connections with people like Adrienne Cooper. Growing up attending a weekly shule organized by a left wing Jewish organization, Alexis describes a feeling of ethnic "recognition" that she remembers lacking in more "mainstream" Jewish spaces. As she explained, coming to YIVO was like, "'oh yeah, this is what I'm used to,' which is a bunch of Europeans being totally thinky and different from each other, fighting about it. Argumentative, but in this disputation-as-the-way-you-grow-the-culture kind of way." She described the sense of recognition she felt at YIVO, as "my people are here." This fostered for her a sense of belonging and understanding lacking in her experiences within most American Jewish spaces: "cause in a lot of Jewish spaces," she explained, "I didn't know what was going on because I didn't have any recognition." That recognition came from the intellectualism and intense engagement she saw in the older generation of Eastern European born Jews at YIVO.

In Alexis's memories, seriousness extended beyond the question of linguistic fluency. Regardless of the medium in which one's Yiddish projects were conducted, she recalled seriousness as a precondition for social engagement with the older generation of European, Yiddish speaking

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employees and researchers at YIVO. Alexis remembers how taking Yiddish studies seriously is what

created the possibility for inter-subjective, mutual recognition across the generations. "You know

one of the things that would later happen in YIVO," Alexis explained to me, after describing her

Bundist family lineage, "was I studied it really hard. So that my secularism could be as informed as

my grandparents was, which could never happen because they grew up, they were European and [so]

they knew what all the weird digressive things in a Yiddish sentence would mean." Such affective

dispositions figure prominently in her memories of the older generation of European born scholars.

This is how she recalls Lucjan Dobroszycki, the Polish-born historian and Holocaust survivor, who

worked as a researcher at YIVO from the 1970s when he immigrated until his death in 1995.[14]

"Dr. Dobroszycki," she explained, "You know, you give him a lot of respect…," Alexis

described to me. He was, in her memory,

> ….very formal. And he didn't really want to talk to me because I'm this American
> slob. But then we were doing a project about Rosa Luxemburg, my theater company
> did a neo-primitive opera…and it was very beautiful work and taken very seriously.
> We rehearsed every single day and the music was amazing…But we studied Rosa
> Luxemburg like out the ass. But I know that as a Polish intellectual he's going to
> have something to say about Rosa Luxemburg. So I went in and I just started talking
> to him, he's looking at me like "what the fuck do you think you know about Rosa
> Luxemburg? And what language are you even going to talk to me in? English?!"

"So what language did you speak to him in?" I asked her.

"I spoke to him in English," she continued, "because my Yiddish wasn't good enough and

what I was trying to say was complicated and I was talking to him about revolutionary theory; like

'could you explain how this theory landed in Poland at that time and how did people of your ilk

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[14] In terms of scholarship, Dobroszycki is most famous for his work to chronicle the Lodz Ghetto.
But his most well known project is likely his collaboration with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett on
YIVO's 1976 "Image Before My Eyes" exhibit, which chronicled Polish Jewish life before the
Holocaust. The exhibit remains one of YIVO's most well known cultural productions. It was
eventually adapted into both a book and a film (Kuznitz 2014:187).

understand Rosa Luxemburg?' And I had read all these books … and I would quote things and he'd

be like, 'oh'? [demonstrates an expression of interestedness]. So obviously, he realized that I knew

what I was talking about because I was being very serious about certain kinds of historical things."

The seriousness Alexis describes indexes the hard work invested in the craft of salvaging and

disseminating Eastern European Jewish heritage. As Alexis described it, "as long as whatever

synthesis you're making, as long as it's totally grounded in materials that are real, that really come out

of the culture, and [as long as you are] really serious about studying the origin and what it means in

its context; as long as you really understand your fragments, you can do collage." In the memories of

Yiddish devotees like Alexis, the seriousness of Yiddish collage creates what Alan elsewhere

described as, "a unanimity of feeling," among those he called, "the YIVO people." In his memories,

the culture of the people at YIVO was characterized by, "this mission…[o]f rescuing the spirit [of

Eastern European Jewish culture] and disseminating it somehow; but also a feeling of a YIVO

mission of this exactingness of taking Yiddish seriously and the culture seriously."

Part of that need to take that world seriously appeared in the historical aura of the Yiddish

artifacts and archival materials found in YIVO's archives within its crumbling Vanderbilt Mansion

on East 86th street. "Everything was old." Alexis described about YIVO.

> It was very Julius Knipl.[15] Like lots of old sound gear, old machines, old objects. And
> it was dusty and it was unglamorous, but it was so interesting because of what was
> on all those records... And as I learned more and more about being there, the
> intention of the collecting [at YIVO], the intention of the collectors and the urgency,
> the urgency like, this is very serious. Like there's this amazing culture here that was
> destroyed. Except it wasn't destroyed because we've got all this shit and we're here

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[15] Alexis's explanation of Julius Knipl, a weekly comic strip by Ben Katchor published, among other
places, in the Forward, is also illuminating about the class-based nature of the aspirations seen as
embodied in YIVO's archives: "Julius Knipl is a real estate photographer and it's almost like he lives
in the world of the used tea bag. Like his world is the deal— the people who deal used tea bags; the
generation…looking in every shop window and every sign and seeing what was there in the 50s and
60s. Basically working-class Jewish culture."

and we're alive. And some people survived. And they're alive. And everyone was hard at work telling the story or writing the story.

For Alan, the affective disposition toward Yiddish things in YIVO explicitly tied culture work to an imagined Yiddishist genealogy that had originally been embodied in YIVO's mission: "It was like everywhere you went there was interesting stuff, you know most was piled in heaps," he explained. "Every corner had something…books, papers, art, that was redolent of this world of Eastern Europe, and just a seriousness about it that we were going to … rescue retroactively Jewish Eastern Europe from oblivion through study, which after all was not that far from what Max Weinreich originally did in the 1920's, or An-ski even before that. But now it was especially necessary, and we had physical remnants of it all around."

Like the socio-institutional "frameworks" in which Yiddish was embedded, Yiddish things were as practically as they were symbolically important to the projects on which these Yiddish devotees embarked, and thus, the history of the Yiddish revival more generally. "You know there were things to do," Karen explained with regard to why YIVO seemed to anchor a community of young Yiddish activists, "there were projects to work on. There was also a huge building full of interesting Yiddish stuff. So it was a little bit of a loose atmosphere, not that they, [the European born scholars] were so nice to you in the archives or library if you wanted anything necessarily. But you could sit... you know, end up becoming friends with someone there."

In even starker terms, Marcel places YIVO's collections at the center of the Yiddish and klezmer revival: "Those years when I was here the first time were incredible. YIVO was an incredibly fertile place for new ideas, and it was kind of the crux of the Yiddish revival in many ways, the cultural revival." Marcel explained. "The klezmer revival wouldn't have happened without the

documents [in the sound archive]. There's three or four big collections of historical, commercial recordings some of which you can listen to online and this sort of thing. But in the 80s this was it."[16]

Marcel is referring to the sound archive, directed by Henry Sapoznik, and in part an inspiration for the founding of KlezKamp. Among the many Yiddish projects incubated in New York City, KlezKamp can be understood as an extended, incubating site in own right. Eventually, it would emerge as a key locus for intergenerational transmission of postvernacular Yiddish. Inspired and modeled on similar folk music festivals attended by Sapoznik and other Jewish traditional music aficionados, KlezKamp incorporated into the music-camp model what Sapoznik described as a, "sense of transmission within a communal context" (Sapoznik 2002:177). Sapoznik envisioned KlezKamp, "as a way of making the sound archives—and YIVO itself—more activist. Instead of waiting for people to discover the institute and utilize its vast resources, KlezKamp would go out and find them, creating an easily accessible dynamic bridge to the institute" (2002:178). As a new Yiddish site, Sapoznik also conceptualized KlezKamp as an "extension" of the institutional "framework" for Yiddish study and cultural activism: "It also came to serve as a payoff," Sapoznik described, "for students who had just completed YIVO and Columbia University's rigorous six-week intensive summer Yiddish-language program. For one week, these students would be able to use the language they learned with some of the leading lights of Yiddish music and folk art culture—and have a great time" (2002:178). As "a bridge," KlezKamp ideally served as a new site through which Yiddish social networks could be articulated, thus augmenting the relationships of "incubation" referred to by Lauren.

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[16] The importance of YIVO's collection of 78' records features prominently in Henry Sapoznik's own account of the Yiddish revival: "I decided to begin with those unlistened-to 78s," Sapoznik describes about beginning his work in the sound archives, "kicking off a daily ritual of schlepping in my own Garrard 40B turntable and plugging it into an antique tape recorder left behind by a visiting scholar" (Sapoznik 1999:185).

Many of KlezKamp's activists also conceived of that Yiddish space as an explicitly countercultural Jewish site. More specifically, it decentered general Jewish community norms. Most commonly associated with this decentering function was KlezKamp's identity as a hub for the production of Queer Jewish culture—constituting a place where a Queer Jewish identity could be explicitly articulated, practiced and performed. Much has been written about KlezKamp's role in the klezmer revival, including the importance of Queer Jews in shaping the culture of the wider movement.[17] What I seek to call attention to here is the constitutive role that seriousness, as a meta-semiotic criterion of value for Yiddish projects, also played in decentering these structuring norms— that is, norms that separated Yiddishists from the mainstream Jewish community.

These networks of people, things, and places that constituted Yiddishland in New York City helped animate this particular affective orientation to the language. I would thus argue that we understand the framework of Yiddishland these activists described as an emotionally saturated space in which Yiddish devotees, in the words of Daniel Webster, could, "invest linguistic forms with felt attachments" (2010:188). Webster is especially concerned with how, "certain stigmatized ways of speaking can be…an emotionally saturated use of language that runs the risk of negative evaluation by outsiders (or non-outsiders), but is deeply and expressively feelingful for individuals" (2010:187). Yiddish activists invested Yiddish with seriousness not only through linguistic practice, but also through culture work. Serious Yiddish projects fostered a Yiddish counterpublic by turning the tables on the terms of American Jewish cultural intimacy.[18] Taking seriously what had become, in the popular imagination of American Jews, a laughing matter or object of overly sentimental, nostalgic longing positioned these activists and intellectuals on a moral high-ground on precisely the terms to which the established Jewish community laid claim. Through Yiddish devotion, within places and

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[17] On KlezKamp and the politics of the klezmer revival more generally see, Sapoznik (2002), Svigals (2002), Sapoznik (1999), Freedman (2009), and Shandler (2006(b)).
[18] For a discussion of the concept of counterpublics see, Warner (2002)

with people that suburban Jewry supposedly left behind, Yiddishists positioned themselves as the ones who were loyal to the Jewish ancestors. "You know looking back on it," Lauren recounted, "I really understand it [the initial decades of the Yiddish revival] as a post-Holocaust effort to really treat your heritage with respect." If the mainstream of American Jewry laughed at Yiddish as a way of enacting Jewishness, then serious Yiddish projects transformed that negative evaluation into a sign of American Jewish ignorance. Especially by the 1980s and 90s during which the American Jewish community began to take increasingly seriously what deficits in Jewish knowledge might portend for the broader community, such a reversal was hardly a laughing matter.

*The "Anti-Model": "Bookness" and the Redistribution of Yiddish Knowledge*
"The Book Center was the anti-model."[19]

New York City also informed Aaron Lansky's own Yiddish project—but in a way that differed markedly from the New York-centric activists in the city. For Lansky, the center of his own Yiddish studies, and the cultivation of his Yiddish passions, would begin at a remove from Yiddishland's de facto capital, in a classroom at Hampshire College in Amherst. The college campus itself, in Lansky's account, shifted his understanding of a language his parents used secretly to, "discuss our [the children's] bedtime or allowance" (2004a:9). In 1973 Lansky enrolled in a course that, in his memory, professors informed students was, "the first time a course on the Holocaust had ever been offered on an American campus" (2004a:9). Fascinated by the lives of Eastern European Jews, as opposed to their deaths, Lansky set out to learn the language in which those lives had been lived. After beginning formal Yiddish study at Hampshire, he decided to pursue a graduate degree in

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[19] A Yiddishist, explaining the origins of the Book Center within the larger revival.

Yiddish literature, studying with one of the preeminent authorities in the field, Ruth Wisse, then at McGill University in Montreal.

In Montreal Lansky remembers formulating the idea to "rescue the world's Yiddish books." "I was studying Yiddish literature; probably would have gone on to a very conventional academic career," Lansky explains in *Bridge of Books*, a documentary about the origins of the Book Center, "were it not for this one very basic problem: there were no books to read." (Ball 2001). As he began to address the problem, he soon realized that his mission's scale dwarfed his initial conception of the time and space required to complete it. Today, in promotional literature, tours of the Book Center's Amherst facility, and in his memoir *Outwitting History*, Lansky describes how the sheer mass of book objects—eventually "a Million Yiddish Books"— transformed what was originally intended as a two-year leave of absence from graduate school, into four decades leading a major American Jewish cultural institution (2004a). "In 1980," Lansky explains, when, "I decided to save the world's Yiddish books…scholars believed 70,000 volumes remained; today," he continues, "my colleagues and I have collected more than one and one-half *million*" (Lansky 2004a:ix)

Like Alan, Marcel, and others, Aaron Lansky articulated an intuitive sense that New York City was the logical place for a Yiddish Book Center. But he quickly dropped the idea. In *Outwitting History*, he describes the logic of the Center's destination:

> My first inclination after leaving Montreal in the Spring of 1979 was to make New York my home base, since…that's where the books were. But my teacher, Ruth Wisse, was dead set against it. The politics of the Jewish world there were too contentious, she explained, and the rancor of the Yiddish world was even worse. "If you're going to succeed," she insisted, "you have to start fresh. What you need is a Jewishly neutral location." So I returned to Amherst, the New England town where I had gone to college, moved in with friends, and, while finishing my master's thesis, began to lay the groundwork for what I was calling the National Yiddish Book Exchange (2004a:47).

From the Center's beginnings then, part of its approach to Yiddish embodied, "the anti-model." Rather than grounding its work within a center rooted in an historical Yiddish place, Lansky sought to, "lay the groundwork," for an entirely new Yiddish center. In the process, he predicated the physical location of the Book Center in Amherst on bypassing sustained social and political engagement with the de facto capital of Yiddishland: on literally *moving* Yiddish roots to Amherst. In Lansky's narrative the urban environments where for others the language seemed most alive were places from which the Yiddish language itself required salvage.

The materiality of Lansky's project made possible his institution's collective act of cultural relocation. The Center's rhetoric imagined the Yiddish language itself as held not only in the repertoires of its speakers, but also within, "the world's Yiddish books." In his project, such a materialization symbolically endowed each artifact with equal value. Regardless of a volume's history, content, or literary quality, each item possessed an aura of sacredness. Lansky further grounded this valuation of Yiddish books in his impassioned narratives of book collection from "the ancestors." Those narratives today pepper fundraising letters, tours of the Book Center, the institution's website and especially Lansky's memoire *Outwitting History*.

The reader of these diverse materials follows the young Lansky as he travels to abandoned basements and attics, the homes of elderly Yiddish speakers and aging Yiddish institutions to salvage Yiddish books before they are discarded. Travelling by moving van, Lansky encounters a public of elderly Jews from, "the old world," who entrust him with their prized possessions. In that world, forgotten by most assimilated American Jews and their organizations, the printed Yiddish word possesses unparalleled worth. "He says," Lansky recalls of an elderly book donor in *Bridge of Books*, "this book here my wife and I we bought in 1927 we went without lunch for a week, we should be able to afford it!'" (Ball 2001).

Two typical scenes of collection dominate his account; both highlight the close relationship between older Jews and their books. In one, intimate relationships of exchange unfold between owners of Yiddish books and Lansky's young group of friends. In the other, Lansky manages amazing last-minute salvage missions of books from the dumpsters, attics or basements scattered across a 1980s urban and primarily North American landscape. "The encounters," with the older generation, Lansky explains, "were almost always emotional: People cried and poured out their hearts, often with a candor that surprised us all" (Lansky 2004a:x). When books were not literally handed down from older generations, they are characterized as "rescued." In such narratives, Yiddish books acquire qualities of human subjectivity. "*Di bikher zenen geven lebedike nefoshes*,"[20] Lansky quotes of one book donor who had, "recovered [several Yiddish books] at the last minute from the *meysim shtibl*, the room where corpses are prepared for burial at the local Jewish cemetery" (2004a:55).

Lansky's personal stories dominate most of the Center's accounts of book collection. Yet, from the outset of his mission, the institution immediately sought to expand its reach beyond its charismatic founder's individual efforts. After all, with Yiddish salvageable through books, any place in which a book might be found was also understood as a place where a potentially irreplaceable part of the broader, intangible object "Yiddish" might be in danger. Nor was this sense of emergency simply a matter of institutional rhetoric. By the 1980s most Yiddish books were out of print. Both aging native Yiddish speakers, combined with the economic struggles of immigrant generation institutions, imperiled existing locations of Yiddish books. Add to this the negative ideological associations attributed to Yiddish within popular American Jewish culture, and it is not unreasonable to assume that a general disregard for Yiddish could entail disposal of Yiddish artifacts. What the average American Jew might very well understand as simply another old, mass-produced Yiddish

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[20] "The books were living souls"

commodity was in fact potentially singular in its value—a component of the larger, intangible object "Yiddish." The Center reimagined each moment lost as one when Yiddish itself, piece by piece, might be discarded.

To address this problem, Lansky sought to replicate his own efforts. Mirroring YIVO's historic ethnographic missions, he enlisted a broad network of his own "zamlers" assigned to collect Yiddish books on behalf of the Book Center within their own neighborhoods and communities. These networks expanded beyond the kinds of urban contexts that tend to dominate Lansky's own accounts. Indeed, as the Center itself notes, on a glossy museum panel displayed in its Amherst headquarters, "In the early 1980s, approximately 80% of our books came directly from the homes of older, Yiddish speaking Jews. Today such donations account for 5% of the books we collect; the rest now come from the suburbs, from American-born children and grandchildren."[21]

The scale of the collection project Lansky envisioned also meant that people donating books, as well as the people collecting and, back at the Center's headquarters in Massachusetts, sorting them, could not be assumed to read, speak or understand the language. Instead, in a marked divergence from the ideology of seriousness articulated in the above interviews, knowledge of Yiddish (and the authenticity or devotion that knowledge indexed) floated throughout the Center's collection network. "Is there a treasure in your attic?" asks an early Book Center flyer intended for distribution in synagogues, Jewish Community Centers and other locations where potential owners of Yiddish books might be found. "Yiddish books are a cultural treasure of the Jewish

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[21] Judging from the Center's collection practices, these are almost certainly estimates based primarily on inference. Based on the collection practices I observed at the Center, some books are simply mailed without ceremony, at times with little indication of their previous owners or who, exactly, donated them. And while volunteers keep a count of individual donations, the Center does not have a master list documenting how many volumes have been donated. In fact, one staff member recalls recognizing volumes and collections of books donated to the Center, which the Center had previously sold or donated to other individuals and institutions. Thus some books have been saved multiple times over.

people…Yiddish studies are on the rise, and students and scholars need books" (The Yiddish Book Center, n.d.(b)). As the flier tersely relates, the Center cannot assume its public recognizes the value of the Yiddish things they owned. Enlisting them in the work of Yiddish salvage involves educating them to recognize that they might very well possess, "cultural treasures of the Jewish people." Once realized, nearly anyone with knowledge of the institution can participate, through books, in the sacred work of Yiddish rescue.

When I arrived at the Book Center in the winter of 2010, a staff member explained to me the scale of the Center's mission in unequivocal terms: "we save everything." As I began to interview volunteers and staff, while participating myself in the work of book sorting, the extent to which the Center erred on the side of caution quickly became clear. To become consecrated as an object of salvage for the Book Center, experienced book workers explained, a text need not be composed entirely in Yiddish. Any amount, however minimal, of printed Yiddish text in any script is grounds for an object to be designated as a "Yiddish" one. Hebrew books, both prayer books and titles in modern Hebrew, or books in German, for example, which sometimes make their way into donations, are parsed out from the Yiddish ones and redistributed, occasionally sold at book sales or to individual consumers. In addition to literal "books," the Center has also collected, sorted, and organized into collections published journals and Yiddish sheet music. These it recirculates through digitization, or by mailing copies or collections of copies to libraries or individual buyers.

**Figure 4.** An old edition of the Reform Jewish movement's prayer book makes its way into a Yiddish donation.

"Everything," though, does not include all instances of Yiddish writing. The Center does not systematically collect and organize handwritten Yiddish text artifacts (letters, postcards, etc.). If thought to be of possible value, one staff member explained, such materials are sent to archives, or stored in boxes for possible future museum displays or projects. Nor has the center saved or inventoried newspapers. As one employee associated with the early collection trips of the Book Center described it, newspapers, "would just fall apart," through the very process of collection itself. The Yiddish book assumed value within the Book Center's collection network not only because of an imagined ethnic affinity between Jews and books, but also because the book enabled the Center's particular model of Yiddish salvage. In fact, judging from the things that become objects of institutional rescue, it would be more accurate to say that it is a particular understanding of *bookness* that grounds what the Center saves. A book's qualities—specifically, its durability and published character—structure what it collects, processes and recirculates. Such qualities have facilitated the scale of the Center's mission. Specifically, for *book* salvage to enable the Center's particular public to

save *Yiddish* all participants regardless of linguistic literacy required a sign of the object's value. Bookness fits these requirements. Published originally for consumption by reading publics of native Yiddish speakers, the printed, mass-produced Yiddish book bears witness to the universal value of its content. Such a sign would have enabled the Center's largely volunteer staff quickly to save large numbers of potentially irreplaceable Yiddish things without expending too many resources to determine whether or not the content beneath the cover held any value. For an institution set on saving as much as possible as quickly as possible, and initially working on a small budget, those efforts would have cost the institution valuable time. With each book "a treasure," questions about content, progeny, or otherwise, could be answered by briefly looking over the objects themselves, as they were loaded or unloaded, in and out of boxes.

What I would call "bookness" then, can be understood as an example of what Hull has called a "graphic ideology" at the Center—one that mediates between the individual agencies of Center volunteers, and the collective agency of the institution to save Yiddish (2003). Bookness has disciplined the material composition of the intangible object, "Yiddish," which the Center has saved. But even more importantly, bookness has also allowed for the distribution of Yiddish knowledge and devotion across the Center's network of volunteers. The practices of zamlers themselves with whom I spoke illustrate this sensibility. Some, for example, will make a point to go through donated materials and pull out prayer books, or other text artifacts that do not fall under the categories of a "Yiddish book." But others simply pass on whatever has been given to them to staff and volunteers at the Center who then glean the desired materials from those that need to be redirected to other destinations. "Sometimes, people have already boxed up their books for me," Alex, a zamler for the Book Center, explained about why he doesn't always have an opportunity to remove prayer books or other "non-Yiddish" materials. A Center volunteer sorting books may require rudimentary Yiddish or Hebrew—enough at least to determine the names of authors and titles. For finer levels of

differentiation, volunteers can ask the Center's lone librarian or other staff members who may possess higher levels of linguistic proficiency. When the Center has pursued larger projects, for example, organizing collections of Yiddish books for purchase by university libraries, it has often contracted with librarians and Yiddish scholars at other institutions. Yet most people across the network participate in a more piecemeal fashion. Each individual serves as a node within a larger network of Yiddish salvage.

People who have engaged in the Center's collection work conveyed the distribution of responsibility for knowledge and devotion to me on multiple occasions. "That's not really my responsibility," Sarah, a zamler who has been collecting books on behalf of the Center for over two decades, explained to me when I asked her whether she ever worried about the future of the objects the Center collected. "That's really the Book Center's job." Like other zamlers I interviewed, Sarah notes that she is part of a larger network of volunteers, her own work limited to collection trips to the homes of donors, and, in her case, an annual family trip to the Center to deliver the books she's collected. Another zamler, who is deeply invested in the Center's work of Yiddish revival, answered my question about the future of the objects he collects in a way that, like Sarah, also highlights the delimited nature of his participation. "To do this work," he explained to me "I kinda have to not think about that [whether or not they will be read]." Arthur, a zamler who reads Yiddish literature, echoes these sentiments when he explained why he refused to keep books that he collected on trips. Even though these books were intended for people who could read Yiddish, he explained to me, "they belong to the Center." In his opinion, taking a book out for himself felt wrong. "It's a processing center," explained one former, high-level Hampshire College administrator, who was intimately involved in the decision to sell campus land to the institution. His perception justified his lack of concern about whether or not Yiddish books were read, studied or understood in Amherst. As these comments reveal, even if an individual donor or collector did not know the value of a

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particular Yiddish book, responsibility for determining value could be passed along to others. Thus the collection process itself has secured the worth of Yiddish books. Within the collection network each object has inherent value, and each potentially anticipates those future students and scholars who need Yiddish books.

### The Value of the Book: Remaking Yiddish Connections

"We have this wonderful building. It gives to Yiddish what we call in Yiddish an '*adres*,' which in Yiddish means a little more than an address. It means, it gives it a place in the world."[22]

Construing Yiddish as savable through books has also allowed the Center to scale up the participants within the intimate chains of organizational salvage work. When former book owners or their children contributed their books, for example, their contributions could very well be invested with intimate connections. In such cases, donors gave up a possession of an actual family member or relative, not an alienated commodity. On numerous occasions, while speaking to Book Center visitors, I heard of how a member's initial exposure to the institution came when he or she donated a parent or grandparent's Yiddish books. On occasion, emotional conditions saturated these donations. In interviews I conducted with nine zamlers and on four collection trips I attended personally, donors and zamlers often reiterated Lansky's account, that their collection trips came within a larger context of a family's confrontation with end of life issues. Decisions to give books to the Center followed from the need to clean out the apartment of a recently deceased parent, or move a loved one into a retirement home or hospice care. As one book donor told me, after donating the books of her father, who had been a Yiddish writer, "It [donating her family's books] feels like a parallel process to taking care of my mother" (who had kept her husband's collection of

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[22] Aaron Lansky, *Bridge of Book*. See, Ball (2001).

Yiddish books until her death), akin to the work of arranging the burial, and tending to the other tasks that accompany death and dying.

Certainly, the Center has also effectively, and affectively, monetized these connections throughout its history. It encouraged members to "adopt a book," dedicate a shelf of Yiddish books in the memory of a loved one, or even bestow an entire collection to a university or national library. These intimate attachments produced by the Center have proved instrumental in the construction of its permanent facility. After years of renting space in multiple locations across the Pioneer Valley, Lansky entered negotiations with his alma mater to permanently purchase university land for the institution. These negotiations resulted in the sale of the ten-acre apple orchard located on the college's campus where the Center would build its headquarters. Today, when one walks into the
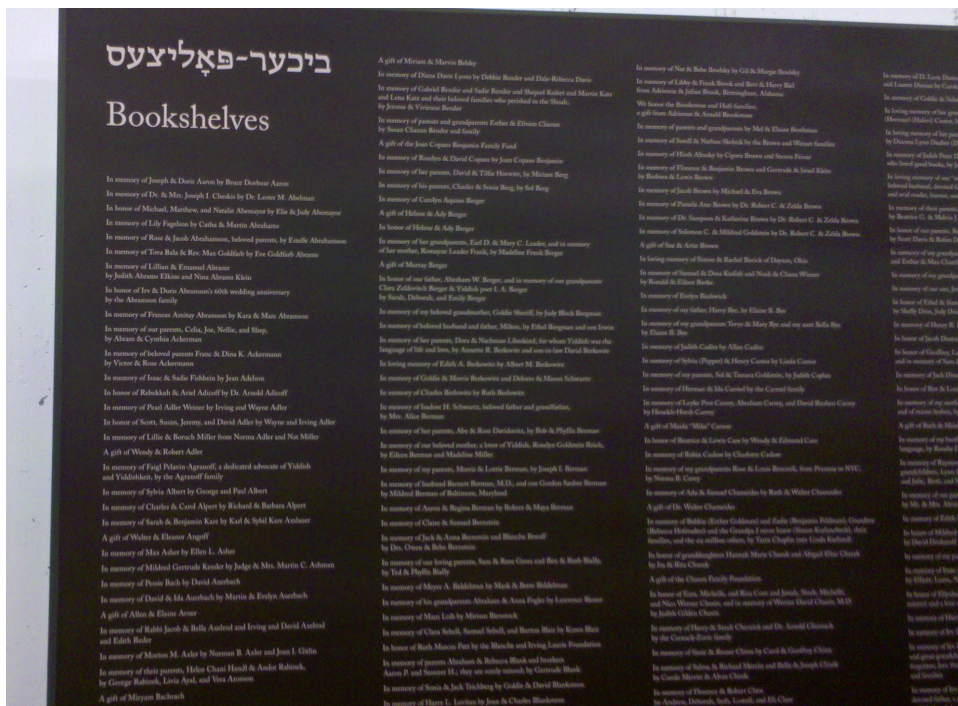


**Figure 5. Bookshelf dedications at the Yiddish Book Center.**

Center's facility, one sees the artifacts of the passions which yielded that building—the names of donors and loved ones inscribed on large panels hung on walls, or on plaques framing doors, shelves, book depositories, classrooms and offices.

The dispersal of the language beyond any particular site with Yiddish roots, and into any American Jewish home and family lineage, subtly embedded Yiddish into the rhetorics and everyday practices of suburban American Jews. The kinds of commemorative markers adorning the Center would be familiar to any American Jew who has ever set foot in a suburban synagogue. But on a more general level, a long distance and often vicarious relationship with authentic Jewish places and things has typified American Jewish identity performance and politics (Kelner 2010, Kugelmass 1997, Shandler and Wenger 1997). In the case of the relationship between suburban American Jews and Hasidim, for example, Jack Kugelmass has described this dynamic as a "self-as-other" relationship that helps constitute (and also disrupt) the liberal American Jewish self (Kugelmass 1997). Kugelmass analyzes the proliferation of coffee table books with photographs of Ultra-Orthodox communities meant for display in American Jewish homes, which encompass both Jewish self and Hasidic other through the mediating distance enabled by the commodity form. This is just one example among a wide variety of practices in which American Jews cultivate long distance relationships with authentic Jewish others. These range from charitable donations to the Jewish National Fund through which American Jews have helped "settle" Israel by purchasing trees, to political advocacy in the 1960s through the 1980s to free Soviet Jewry.[23] These endeavors, as noted in the introduction, were familiar to the American Jewish public within a broader context of "sacred survival." By the 1980s and especially the 1990s, when Lansky's project was growing in popularity,

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[23] The Book Center has itself been both explicit and adept in mobilizing these connections. For example, in 1990 the Center mobilized its public around a campaign to ship Yiddish books to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Endeavors that would later be dramatically retold in Book Center Media. See for example, the cover of the Winter 1990 edition of its *Pakn Treger/Book Peddler* magazine (1990).

students on college campuses had themselves been transformed into objects of an American Jewish communal mission. Put differently, by rhetorically configuring Yiddish books as objects that American Jews have to give and that young, college age Yiddish devotees desire, the book object itself allowed Yiddish to be embedded within the vernacular culture of American Jewish volunteerism that has historically mediated affective identification with the broader collective of the Jewish people.

Indeed, as Lansky's impassioned narratives of book collection indicate, the Center makes clear that by salvaging books, one is affiliating with the ancestors, and the broader collective of, "the Jewish people." The didactic rhetoric of old, weeping books, appearing literally endowed with the souls of the ancestors, plays to no small extent on a more diffuse sense of Jewish guilt about the cultural, religious and linguistic literacies of American Jews. By mistaking Yiddish books for alienated commodities, as opposed to material objects constituting the Yiddish language and endowed with the aura of the ancestors, American Jews are committing the sin of forgetting the past. They are literally throwing away the language and culture of their parents and grandparent's generations—if not the *hau* of ancestors attached to books that are also living souls. In a post-Holocaust context, in which the charge to "never forget" had for some been lifted to the level of a commandment, these are morally loaded insinuations. By passing Yiddish to others through books, though, American Jews could help the Book Center in its sacred work to, as one fundraising letter promises, "keep it alive forever!" (Yiddish Book Center n.d.(i)).

*Redefining Yiddish Knowledgeability: Jewish Things in Space*

Language artifacts, Blommaert argues, help define knowledgeability and interest in a language. But for the New York City Yiddishists described above, Yiddish knowledge entailed more than mastering formal pedagogical materials. Yiddish knowledgeability and interest were skills best

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cultivated within the authentic linguistic framework of New York City. Encounters there with native speakers, artistic communities, and 'authentic' Yiddish people, places and things helped devotees, as Alexis put it, "really understand [their] fragments," an essential precondition for serious Yiddish "collage." By considering people's relationship to such linguistically defined environments, we stand to gain better analytical purchase on the multiple artifactual ideologies that participate in the construction of knowledgeability in a language. Moreover, the case of the Book Center reveals how artifactual ideologies also participate in the production of institutional authority itself. At the Book Center, imagining the language as composed of objects with bookness helped remap the imagined topos of Yiddishland. Concomitantly, it also embedded the language into new networks of American Jewish exchange, and concomitantly opened new practices through which 'interest' and 'knowledge' of Yiddish could be redefined and reorganized.

The extent of that redefinition and reorganization of Yiddish devotion can be seen in the ambivalence many Yiddishists I interviewed expressed about the Book Center. On the one hand, as one professor of Yiddish studies explained: "whatever else Lansky has done, you can't say enough about what he did for Yiddish by digitizing the books." And, as another longtime member of yugntruf told me, "One thing the Book Center did do was really help change the popular perception about Yiddish among American Jews [to a more positive one]" But, at the same time, others worry about the difficulty of identifying Yiddish knowledge at the Center. "No one there knows Yiddish!" Yiddishists often explained to me, exasperated at the Center's power to shape public discourse and popular representation of the language without, so to speak, putting in the work to master the language. Another elderly Yiddishist explained her sense of disappointment and even outrage when, after travelling from New York to visit the Book Center for the first time, she was offered a tour of the Center and its books by a staff member, "who didn't even know the language!" She refused to go on the tour, she explained proudly, until Aaron Lansky himself came out to lead it. Gossip,

incorrect, about how Lansky himself doesn't know Yiddish, can also often be heard. "Dos iz nor far raykhers" [that's only for rich people], another Yiddishist explained about his feelings regarding the power the Center holds in relationship to the Yiddish knowledge that he feels resides there.

As this last Yiddishist recognizes, the Center's expansion of its collections has accompanied other expansions: its popularity, its physical infrastructure, and importantly, the financial resources at its disposal. These shifts are reflective of a larger reorganization of space in Yiddishland. Many of the social-spaces and culture brokers that mediated someone like Alan's entrance into Yiddishland are no longer part of Yiddish New York's "framework." An aging and declining population of secular, native Yiddish speakers in part explains this change; but this is not the only reason. The history of the Book Center's emergence over and against the collapse, break-up and reorganization of other Yiddish institutions and social networks does not simply register an inevitable, teleological decline of the language with its "authentic" native speakers. Rather, the Center's rise also must be understood in relationship to its success at validating the practices and cultivating the resources of American Jewish donors.

Certainly, many of the veteran culture workers who were involved with the Yiddish revival in New York City during the late 1970s through the 1990s continue to produce Yiddish culture and participate in activism and cultural politics in and in reference to the language. Even if I have not covered their work in this chapter, I do not want to minimize it. Rather, I note that the centers of power within Yiddishland have shifted over time. These processes inevitably have consequences for how and who can broker culture. Competing artifactual ideologies have played a key role in mediating these changes, and concomitantly, of mediating the different ways that American Jews organize Yiddish devotion. It is to the organization of Yiddish devotion within the Yiddish Book Center that I now explore in the next two chapters.