

# NEXUS

Essays in German Jewish Studies

Volume 1

*Nexus: Essays in German Jewish Studies*

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# Nexus

## Essays in German Jewish Studies

### Volume I

A Publication of Duke University Jewish Studies

Edited by  
William Collins Donahue  
(Duke University)  
and  
Martha B. Helfer  
(Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)



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For editorial correspondence, please contact either of the volume editors:

William C. Donahue  
Department of Germanic Languages & Literature  
Duke University  
116K Old Chemistry / Box 90256  
Durham, NC 27708-0256  
[wcd2@duke.edu](mailto:wcd2@duke.edu)

Martha B. Helfer  
Department of Germanic, Russian, and East  
European Languages and Literatures  
Rutgers University  
172 College Avenue  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
[mhelfer@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:mhelfer@rci.rutgers.edu)

*To our spouses, Marie Donahue and Steve Nowick,  
who generously indulge our time management delusions.*



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## Acknowledgments

**N**<sub>EXUS</sub> WOULD SIMPLY BE INCONCEIVABLE without the extraordinarily collegial workshop out of which it has grown. The inaugural meeting in February of 2009 offered relaxed but also intensive opportunities for scholars to introduce research, test ideas, and propose collaborations. It also made clear to us how much work is being done in the field of German Jewish Studies. For generous funding and institutional support for the first workshop we wish to thank: Duke University Jewish Studies, the Duke University Provost's Office, the Duke University Arts & Sciences Dean's Office, the Duke University Department of Germanic Languages & Literature, the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey School of Arts & Sciences, and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey Department of Germanic, Russian, and East European Languages & Literatures.

As always, it is the personal touch that matters so much in the end. For setting an incomparable standard of organization we wish to thank Ms. Lindsay Hiatt. The success of the first workshop was in no small part due to her cheerful good work. For the first volume of *Nexus*, we owe a considerable debt of gratitude to David Bernay, who served tirelessly and intelligently as editorial assistant. Jim Walker, at Camden House, has been a partner in this project since we first proposed the *Nexus* series. We want to record our heartfelt gratitude for his extraordinary level of engagement with and dedication to this project.

W. C. D.  
M. B. H.



# Introduction

*William Collins Donahue and Martha B. Helfer*

THIS BIENNIAL PUBLICATION is a testament to the vitality of scholarship in the areas of German Jewish Studies. It began, however, as a mere hypothesis: we convened a group of scholars working on German Jewish topics and simply started a conversation. We had sensed that sessions at other major national conferences — such as those of the Modern Language Association, the German Studies Association, and the Association for Jewish Studies — were no longer sufficient to meet the growing needs of the field. But we frankly weren't sure. We would have been content to see colleagues exchange scholarship on an ad hoc basis. But as a result of the first German Jewish Studies Workshop (now a biennial event, with a second highly successful installment already under our belts), the conversations began to proliferate geometrically. Colleagues wanted to develop the papers they presented and share them with a broader readership. *Nexus* was born.

While this account makes the process seem a lot simpler than it actually was, it may suffice as a slightly mythologized creation story. At any rate, *Nexus*, we believe, answers a prior need. While there is ongoing discussion about the provenance and methods of German Jewish Studies — even a debate on what to call it — there is no doubt about the plethora of compelling scholarship that comes under this heading. Our approach has been — and remains — shamelessly inductive, which means we are learning about, inventing, if you will, German Jewish Studies as we go along. From the outset, however, it has been clear that the harvest is rich enough to require a forum for regular publication.

German Jewish Studies — and therefore *Nexus* — is a big, hospitable tent. It embraces a wide gamut of scholars, from medievalists and early modernists to literature and film scholars, critics of Holocaust museums and memorials, and commentators on contemporary art. *Nexus* fills a gap left in part by the venerable *Leo Baeck Yearbook*. While of inestimable value, especially to scholars of German Jewish Studies, the latter simply cannot accommodate the profusion of research particularly in the area of cultural studies, which has taken off in the last decade. We view ourselves as complementary allies in the field: *Leo Baeck* focused perhaps more on the social sciences and Europe, and

*Nexus* concerned more with literature, film, new media, performance art, philosophy, cultural theory, and public culture. In addition, we wish to become a venue for pedagogical projects central to our work at all levels of higher education. As the official organ of the biennial German Jewish Studies Workshop, *Nexus* will host scholarship primarily, but by no means exclusively, by North American scholars. We are proud that *Nexus* bears witness to the notion of “vertical integration” in higher education, by including the work of academics at all levels of preparation, ranging from advanced PhD students to renowned scholars.

In order to accommodate researchers and students outside the field, we have required contributors to provide English translations of all primary material used in the body of their articles. Thus readers need not fear encountering a sudden linguistic roadblock at a crucial point in an argument. Further, researchers will find user-friendly abstracts at the head of each essay. Due to that practice, we will dispense in this introduction with substantive discussions of each contribution.

This inaugural volume of *Nexus* contains three focus areas. While these divisions are perforce somewhat overlapping, we hope they will provide a heuristic structuring principle for future volumes. The first section, “Theoretical Approaches to the Field,” includes essays that explore the meaning and boundaries of German Jewish Studies, as well as reflections on the historical imaginary that in a sense constitutes the “German Jew.” In “German-Jewish Studies in the Digital Age,” Todd Presner analyzes the theoretical implications of the media in which the field of German Jewish Studies has been, and will be, articulated. Likewise examining the critical underpinnings of current and future research models, Lisa Silverman in “Beyond Antisemitism” postulates a theoretical framework for German Jewish Studies modeled on gender studies. Focusing on a historically specific trope in her essay “Unrequited Love,” Katja Garloff explores why German Jewish relations before the Holocaust were so often characterized as a one-sided “love affair.” Rounding off the volume’s theoretical section, Sander Gilman considers “Happiness and Unhappiness as a ‘Jewish Question’” from the nineteenth century onward.

The second section, “Literary and Literary-Historical Studies,” gathers together essays that present new paradigms for the study of German Jewish literature, historiography, and film. In “Auerbach, Heine and the Question of ‘Bildung’ in German and German Jewish Culture,” Jeffrey Grossman reconsiders the thesis that *Bildung* was central to the construction of German Jewish culture in the nineteenth century. In “The Literary Double Life of Clementine Krämer,” Elizabeth Loentz reintroduces a forgotten figure well known in the early twentieth century who created two distinct authorial personae as a German Jewish writer and a Bavarian *Heimat* and dialect writer. In contrast, David Suchoff’s “Franz Kafka, Hebrew Writer” opens up new perspectives on an author who, despite

his own intentions, certainly has not been forgotten, demonstrating that the influence of Kafka's study of Hebrew on his later prose has not been fully appreciated in the scholarship to date. In "Words at War," Nicola Behrmann analyzes unexpected parallels between Dada founder Hugo Ball's praxis and Walter Benjamin's early messianic writings. Wrapping up this second section, Agnes Mueller's "The Inability to Love" explores the absence of engagement both with actual Jews and with the Shoah in recent works by Günter Grass and Martin Walser, arguing that this absence also informs some contemporary discussions of antisemitism.

The third section, "Public Culture: Memorial, Performance, and Post-Holocaust Retrospectives," comprises essays that analyze the Shoah and its aftermath in German and German Jewish culture. In "Written into the Body," Juliette Brungs introduces the performance video art of Tanya Ury, arguing that this British-born daughter of German Jewish immigrants develops a Jewish language of remembrance by turning her body into a projection surface, reflecting and criticizing the audience's voyeurism. In "Disfigured Memory" Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich explores exhibits and memorials in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Jewish Museum in Berlin that destabilize conventional Holocaust symbols and evoke a sense of the sacred. Finally, in "Beyond Victim and Perpetrator," Michael Levine analyzes new subject positions in recent German-Jewish film, asking a number of interrelated questions centered around the traumatized children of victims and perpetrators.

Like the field of German Jewish Studies itself, *Nexus* is a work in progress. We welcome your feedback and suggestions for future volumes (see the copyright page for contact information).



# **I. Theoretical Approaches to the Field**





# German-Jewish Studies in the Digital Age: Remarks on Discipline, Method, and Media

*Todd Samuel Presner, University of California–Los Angeles*

*Digital media technologies have given rise to new forms of scholarly production, communication, output, and publication, which are transforming the fundamental critical methodologies, knowledge formations, publication platforms, and institutional structures that gave rise to and supported German-Jewish Studies as a discipline. In this article, I discuss the media in which German-Jewish Studies will be carried out in the future and analyze the impact of new information technologies. With reference to key watershed moments in the history of German-Jewish Studies, I argue that attention to media specificity has long been a fundamental part of this dynamic field and that, in fact, new forms of literacy, sociability, and scholarly authorities can be traced throughout the history of Jewish hermeneutics.*

AT THE START OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, the editor of the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* invited the members of its advisory board to articulate their views on the future direction of research in the field of German-Jewish Studies. Many members, such as David Sorkin, posited the emergence of a new era of German-Jewish Studies, which for him was characterized by the end of “the émigré synthesis,” a period in which the intellectual agenda of the LBI was shaped by a generation of emigrants who “either had direct experience of German-Jewish life and culture prior to 1939 or else grew up with intimate family memories of them.”<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1955, the Institute published its first *Year Book* the following year, beginning with a deeply ambivalent call for “rebirth” after the years of calamity in Nazi Germany.<sup>2</sup> Its scholarly agenda was largely shaped by Jewish emigrants from Germany who took on the enormous “cultural task” of researching, archiving, and preserving the “history of German Jewry since the Emancipation,” whether through philosophy, religion, science, economics, or art (*LBIYB*, 1956, xi–xiii). This was largely a retrospective project of commemoration, preservation, and historicization

of “the remnants of German Jewry” (*LBIYB* 1, ix).<sup>3</sup> In fact, as Hannah Arendt argued in 1958, the study of German Jewry was now “altogether historical . . . a matter of the past.”<sup>4</sup> But at the start of the new century, the Holocaust was no longer the singular *Ur*-event or *raison d’être* for the discipline of German-Jewish Studies, the Institute, or the scholarly work of its members. Without rejecting its original agenda and its success in establishing German-Jewish Studies as an academic discipline, the advisory board sought to articulate a set of “future research” directions that recognized the changing nature of the field, including both the experience of its practitioners and its methodological investments at the start of the new century. To that end, they argued for the need for a broader social and cultural history of the Jews, the adoption of a comparative, transnational perspective, a greater attention to everyday life and religious practice, and, finally, a focus on issues of gender and sexuality.

Indeed, over the past decade, many of these calls for transforming the discipline of German-Jewish Studies have been answered through the richly textured contributions of scholars who have expanded the temporal and geographic scope of the discipline, developed new methodological insights for investigating both new and old questions, and situated the discipline within a broader, comparative framework. A significant body of literature, for example, now exists on the early modern period as well as on the post-45 period, both of which were truncated in the original formulations of the Institute’s scholarly program.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there has been a surge of studies on everyday history, popular culture, religious practice, and cultural studies of German Jewry as well as a formidable corpus of scholarship on the Jewish body, prompting one scholar to term this upsurge as “the corporeal turn” in Jewish Studies.<sup>6</sup> Spurred by the work of thinkers such as Daniel Boyarin, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Paula Hyman, Marion Kaplan, Leslie Morris, and many others, this “more affective Jewish Studies” goes beyond gender and sexuality by investigating all aspects of embodied experiences, including “new ways to think about text as a social, corporeal, and material practice.”<sup>7</sup> At the same time, new social and cultural histories of the Jewish body have emerged that examine various facets of Jewish agency (rather than victimhood) in the construction of the modern Jewish body.<sup>8</sup>

With regard to defining the fault lines of German-Jewish Studies in particular, one of the more provocative debates has focused on the vexed relationship between the disciplinary fields of “German Studies” and “Jewish Studies,” not to mention the very categories of “German” and “Jewish.” In a hotly contested polemic, Mark Anderson went so far as to claim that American German departments have actually engendered a “gross distortion” of the German literary canon by their “excessive focus” on German-Jewish authors (such as Heine, Schnitzler, Roth, Kafka, Benjamin, and Arendt) at the expense of “Goethe-and-Schiller Germanistik.”<sup>9</sup>

Because, he argues, the Holocaust “still dominates Germany’s relations with Jews,” the result has been a “political and moral identification of German intellectuals with Jewish victims [that] has skewed their professional judgments about Jewish as well as German issues.” The study of literature has been reduced, in his words, to “the study of persecution, exile, and genocide,” at the expense of traditional approaches to the canon of German literature and culture, not to mention real dialogue and substantive critique between German and Jewish intellectuals.<sup>10</sup>

While there is no doubt, as Leslie Morris reminds us, that the field of German Studies is “very” Jewish *and* that the field of Jewish Studies is “very” German,<sup>11</sup> Anderson’s argument rests on a fundamentally flawed assumption: that it is truly possible to separate that which is “Jewish” from that which is “German.” In fact, as the field has advanced over the past decades, the two terms — referencing a complex of shifting identities, histories, and worldviews — have become ever more deeply entangled in one another. The little hyphen that often connects the two terms together has become the site for a fascinating array of studies of both “bifurcated” identities and, perhaps more tellingly, profound interactions, exchanges, and encounters between “German” thinkers and “Jewish” thinkers. If anything, German, Jewish, and German-Jewish culture are not stable objects waiting to be read and interpreted but rather, as Morris elegantly argues, “critical problem[s]” that demand “new forms of critical writing.”<sup>12</sup> It has become impossible to separate out “the German” from “the Jewish,” and, hence, return to a pure German (or Jewish) Studies.

We might thus ask: How does the hyphen both separate two identities and histories and link them to one another in a deep and perhaps irrevocable way? As Paul Mendes-Flohr has succinctly and cogently articulated, “the dialectics of German-Jewish spiritual history will be determined by this ‘and’ [between German and Jewish] — for although a simple particle of speech, this conjunction is not unambiguous.”<sup>13</sup> While the hyphen may certainly signify “and,” it opens up an array of possible meanings, ambiguities, relationships, and tensions in which the two terms move with respect to one another, in which they receive various valuations and inflections, even, at times, blurring together. We must pause — and keep pausing — on the hyphen because the connection between the two terms is far from symmetrical, stable, or obvious.<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, like the Deridean logic of the chiasm, it separates and binds, estranges and unites, as each becomes interlinked in the other.<sup>15</sup>

Over the past decade and a half, a significant body of scholarship has probed the psychic depths, fractured identities, and torn affiliations of German and Jewish thinkers like Varnhagen, Heine, Cohen, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Arendt, Adorno, and others, while variously acknowledging and sometimes revitalizing critical moments of German-Jewish dialogue and friendship, such as that between Lessing and Mendelssohn.<sup>16</sup> More

recently, attention has begun to turn to what I call the deep — and decidedly precarious — entanglements between German intellectual, cultural, and social history and Jewish intellectual, cultural, and social history. Here, I mention Peter Eli Gordon's work on the "intimate commonality of ideas" between thinkers as seemingly divergent from one another as Heidegger and Rosenzweig,<sup>17</sup> or Atina Grossman's triangulated history of occupied Germany, in which she proposes an "entangled approach" that not only "de-Germanize[s]" German history by foregrounding "multiculturalism and heterogeneity" but also "cut[s] through the persistent division between German history and the history of Jews in Germany."<sup>18</sup> My own work has attempted to map moments of encounter within modern German-Jewish intellectual and cultural history and is grounded in the idea that German modernity and Jewish modernity are deeply, precariously, and indissociably intertwined.<sup>19</sup>

In 2009, the Leo Baeck Institute held another round of discussions on "the future of German-Jewish Studies," bringing together a cohort of senior and junior scholars in the field to, once again, address new directions in research. John Efron began by pointing out that "German-Jewish historiography [is] not undergoing revolutionary change" but rather making "evolutionary development" as new historians (many of whom have no family connection to Germany Jewry or are not even Jewish) assume the helm and produce more comparative, transnational histories (*LBITYB* 54.3 [2009]: 3). While a significant number of scholars focused on "gaps" that still needed to be filled — for example, authoritative biographies of key thinkers, definitive social or cultural histories of particular periods, and nuanced accounts of everyday life and religious practice — others sought to rethink both the temporal and geographic scope of the field of German-Jewish Studies. Michael Brenner pointed out that "the meaning of German-Jewish historiography has expanded in terms of time and space," not only involving a significantly more comprehensive historical sweep but also a greater attention to rural communities, immigrant narratives, and places of encounter and exchange outside of the national unit "Germany" (*LBITYB* 54.3 [2009]: 14). Derek Penslar rightfully posited that the study of Jewish civilization has become "a truly global enterprise," with the opening up of the Eastern European archives, the rise of American Jewish history, and the numerous studies of Middle Eastern, North African, and Balkan Jewry, among other places (*LBITYB* 54.3 [2009]: 13–14).

Not unlike Morris's call to think German-Jewish as a "problematic," my own study of German-Jewish modernity sought to introduce a geographic methodology to the study of intellectual and cultural history by foregrounding places of encounter, exchange, and mobility. Taking the dialectical spaces of the railway as the methodological framework as well as the material reality of Jewish migration, *Mobile Modernity* sought to

plot German-Jewish intellectual history onto the transnational railway system. What if intellectual history was organized like a geographical network, beginning, for example, at two sites — Berlin's Anhalter Bahnhof and the Greek island of Delos — with Celan and Heidegger reflecting on places of memory after the Holocaust? From there, we might travel to the University of Berlin in the winter semester of 1822/23, with Heine attending Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history, or to the end of the nineteenth century to witness an imaginary meeting of German railway pioneer Friedrich List and the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl. The railway system functioned as an overdetermined symbol and material space for investigating the relationship between German modernity and Jewish modernity, allowing us to produce a new, deterritorialized map marked by the multiplicity of places of contact, interconnectedness, and contention. The geographic contours of my study stretched between Berlin, Delos, Sicily, New York City, the North Sea, Nuremberg-Fürth, Palestine, Auschwitz, Vienna, Prague, Antwerp, and Paris, deterritorializing the national borders of "Germany" and, thereby, focusing on mobility and sites of contact, exchange, and migration. Far from a final, definitive, or complete mapping, the result is merely one possibility of mapping the German-Jewish dialectic.

Inspired by Paul Gilroy's cultural studies approach to analyzing the transnational spaces of encounter of the "black Atlantic," I suggest that we examine the interlinked, transcultural and transhistorical spaces of German-Jewish modernity. Like the "black Atlantic," the spaces of German-Jewish modernity are marked by and inscribed with bodies traversing places, from the mass migrations of Jews westward during the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century to the transnational swath of Yiddish modernism from its eastern-European roots to Western Europe, North America, and Israel. Of course, it also includes the history of exile, mass deportations, and the Holocaust, although this is hardly inscribed as a definitive or inevitable telos. Instead, these embodied geographies form a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure"<sup>20</sup> that stretches across and connects together nations, cultures, languages, and bodies, exposing at every "station" its contingency and discontinuity.<sup>21</sup> The narrative essentially performs or enacts transnational studies in its very organization.

While Brenner, Penslar, and others advocate for a truly global, transnational, comparative approach to German-Jewish Studies, it is important to underscore that this cannot be achieved just by expanding temporal and spatial parameters; rather, it requires a fundamental rethinking of how historical questions are asked, answered, and emplotted in narrative and media form. In other words, it requires attention to the very medium of German-Jewish studies, in much the same way that Walter Benjamin examined the medium of history in *Das Passagen-Werk* (The

Arcades Project). In this work, Benjamin sought to instantiate a “Copernican revolution in historical perception” by “[carrying] over the principle of montage” into the very composition of the cultural history of nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>22</sup> Consisting of over a quarter of a million words inscribed on tiny folios, some seventy-five percent of which were quotations, he attempted to create a new critical methodology for writing cultural history by rejecting the strictures of linear print in favor of the spatiality of montage. He organized his subject matter by thematic “convolutes” such that, according to Rolf Tiedemann, the editor of the *Passagen-Werk*, he could “bring together theory and materials, quotations and interpretations in a new constellation compared to contemporary methods of representation.”<sup>23</sup> History was no longer to be a cumulative narrative of development articulated according to the linearity of chronology and print, but rather a constellation of dialectical images, saturated by the tensions of the montage form.<sup>24</sup> Imported from the visual arts of the early 1910s and 1920s, montage represented a way of both assembling and deconstructing historical material by presenting its breaks, shocks, and contradictions. Although Benjamin does not fully articulate a media-specific analysis, the montage principle is both a recognition of the limitations of print and a meditation on the normative medium of the discipline of history. I imagine that Benjamin would have found the tools of new media, specifically the rhizomatic techniques of hypertext and the hypermedia possibilities of the World Wide Web, especially well suited to “giving dates their physiognomy” (*AP* 476).

Therefore, it is all the more striking that in both the 2000 and 2009 discussions of “the future of German-Jewish Studies” there is virtually no consideration — with one notable exception — of the media in which German-Jewish Studies will be carried out in the future.<sup>25</sup> The medium is assumed to be print and the method is assumed to follow in the long lineage of history-writing as an authoritative, scientific, academic discipline, still very much in line with the nineteenth-century codification of the discipline of history as a “Wissenschaft.”<sup>26</sup> By going to the archive, building on the work of other scholars in the field, and assembling evidence into a coherent, well-documented narrative, the manifold histories that comprise the German-Jewish pasts can be known and preserved with ever more nuance in a cumulative, expansive, transnational, and comparative perspective. This is an enormous and admirable goal, and I do not wish to impugn the important, erudite, and comprehensive work being done in the field writ large. After all, there are many “gaps” to be filled and definitive studies still to be written. My concern lies elsewhere, namely with what Moshe Zimmerman intimated in his concluding remarks for the LBI’s “future of German-Jewish Studies”: “To write the history of the nineteenth and twentieth century without relating to photography and film is clearly outmoded” (*LBIYB* 54.3 [2009]: 56). In other words,

historians must engage with media history and the archive of materials in various media forms, including, but certainly not limited to, print cultural forms. Perhaps analogously, a historian of the twenty-first century must engage with the complex media of the digital world, not just our cultural heritage, which is rapidly being rendered into multiple digital formats, but also the fundamental assumptions about the medium in which scholarship is produced, disseminated, and accessed. In other words, we cannot be responsible historians in the twenty-first century (even if we are historians of antiquity) without an awareness of the media-specificity of both our objects of study and our scholarly practices.

While Zimmerman insists that historians must engage with other media forms, he does not apply a media-specific analysis to the practice of history. Like the literary scholar N. Katherine Hayles, I find myself wondering why it is so difficult — as we ponder various possible futures for German-Jewish Studies in the second decade of the twenty-first century — to rouse ourselves from the “somnolence [of] five hundred years of print.”<sup>27</sup> Of course, there is nothing neutral, objective, or necessary about the medium of print; rather it is a medium that has a long and complex history connected to the formulation of academic disciplines, institutions, epistemologies, and ideologies.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the medium of scholarship or history cannot be assumed simply to be print. As Benjamin did in *The Arcades Project*, it is necessary, I believe, to begin to disaggregate *Geschichte* from the *writing* of history; in other words, a written narrative would be just one of many choices for producing history and, hence, studying German-Jewish culture. What happens when print is no longer the normative or exclusive medium for producing historical studies?<sup>29</sup> One might make a series of maps, a montage, a railway network, an exhibition, a hypermedia website, a relational database, a collaborative authoring platform, Midrashic interpretations, or something else entirely. How do these various media forms enable new scholarly questions, new modes of authorship, new levels of engagement with communities and institutions, and new forms of scholarly publication?

While the term “People of the Book” (*Am HaSefer*) is, of course, widely applied to the Jewish people as a whole and specifically in relationship to the Torah, it is important to underscore, even here, the changing notions of mediality: parchment scrolls, illuminated manuscripts, codices, printed books, digitized paper, and heebster blogs are very different media artifacts in terms of their materiality, in terms of their technical conditions of production, dissemination, and preservation, and in terms of their meaning-making strategies, authorship, interpretation, and legitimacy. To understand what I mean, just imagine Jews as “People of the Blog.” This is why it is necessary to examine the future of German-Jewish Studies vis-à-vis the changing nature of textuality and mediality, ranging from contemporary notions of the text in the digital world to



long-standing practices of biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, and midrash. Perhaps nothing is betrayed as strongly in the Jewish exegetical tradition than the changing nature of textuality and its fundamental connection to authorship and scholarly authority. To that end, let me now turn to a series of examples within the history of Jewish scholarly practice in order to provide some signposts for contextualizing our digital present as well as for thinking about the changing nature of the medium of historical scholarship. I will begin with a brief discussion of the variance of textual practices before turning to non-textual media and the proliferation of digital research projects that have the potential to revolutionize the future of German-Jewish Studies.

In an address delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary on January 9, 2005 (and later published as “The Task of the Jewish Translator: A Valedictory Address”), David Roskies, the editor of *Prooftexts*, discussed the media history of this twenty-five-year-old English-language journal on Jewish literary history and its role in the development of “a modern Jewish hermeneutics.”<sup>30</sup> The title of the journal calls upon a particular interpretative tradition — namely, “the scriptural passages used by the Rabbis to legitimate a new interpretation” (TJT 264) — and functions both as a “medium” and a “message” (TJT 264): not only in McLuhan’s sense but also in the institutional, disciplinary sense of gaining legitimacy for Jewish literary criticism in the academy. As such, Roskies details the numerous media-specific decisions that were made in the printing of the journal, ranging from the choice of cover and page layout to font, orthography, system of Romanization, and affiliations with university presses and, eventually, the online distribution platform, Project Muse. The physical artifact and the interpretative practice point to a long textual and media history that Roskies calls “inner-biblical midrash, . . . intertextuality, . . . the art of quotation . . . the creative recycling of a textual tradition, the invention of something new out of something very old” (TJT 270). Such a textual space that supported “a marketplace of voices” (TJT 270) could only be created by an attention to the multivocality of the Jewish interpretative tradition, foregrounding and preserving debate, citation, and revision at every moment in the ongoing (and never-ending) hermeneutical process. Although ostensibly a standard print journal, *Prooftexts*, as Roskies argues, is really part of a diverse and long tradition of media-specific analysis within Jewish hermeneutics, a tradition that foregrounds constant critical reappraisal, cumulative authorship, and attentiveness to the very platform in which research is instantiated, preserved, and disseminated.

As scholars of codicology have made clear, the Jewish tradition provides a wellspring of artifacts for media-specific analysis long before the advent of the digital or even the print age. Such artifacts — ranging from stone, pottery, and papyrus to leather folios, scrolls, bound codices, and, finally, printed prayer books — betray a variegated “process of

mutual influence between the medium and the message,” not to mention the community of authors, scribes, copyists, illustrators, and institutions involved in the production, preservation, and dissemination of scholarly work.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the history of the medium also betrays the history of reading practices, namely the ways in which the technologies were encountered, comprehended, and understood by a public capable of reading the work. The history of the Masoretic Bibles, for example, is deeply connected, as David Stern argues, with the evolution of a public (the masorettes) capable of reading the text on a written, spatial surface, as opposed to hearing it read aloud.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the recognition and adoption of the form of the codex by Jewish scribes represented “the emergence of a new type of literary space in Jewish literature,”<sup>33</sup> which was made possible by a new writing technology, a new form of inscription or “writing-down.”<sup>34</sup>

While I cannot do justice to these media forms here, I want to mention a couple of other examples because they underscore the variance of the Jewish scholarly tradition and help us historicize the challenges posed by the digital age. The first is the “open book” in Medieval Hebrew literature, a book that was meant by its authors not “to serve as final statements but rather as presentations of an interim state of knowledge or opinion, somewhat like our computerized databases, which are constantly updated and which give the user a summary of the data known at the time of the latest updating.”<sup>35</sup> Likened by Israel Ta-Shma to databases, the “open” book is more like a “wiki” because it supports revision, versioning, and development, not only from the author but from, potentially, any copyist, scribe, or critical member of the reading public. Maimonides, for example, regularly revised his Commentary on the Mishnah; others, such as Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, released versions of his work to his disciples who variously oversaw updates, variants, and diffusions of the text.<sup>36</sup> This is, roughly speaking, the problem — but also the great possibility — of Wikipedia: an open platform for authoring, copying, revising, and contesting scholarship in a public arena, where there are no absolute standards for authorizing a particular interpretation (other than the authority granted by the community of users, editors, and monitors).

This multivocality is, in fact, one of the hallmarks of the Jewish hermeneutical tradition and arguably nowhere more pronounced in an enduring form than on the printed pages of the Talmud. Here, following upon the printing of the Gutenberg Bible, we have the invention of the Talmud page, which stages the Mishna (the laws codified by Talmudists between 30 and 200 CE) and the Gemara (the discussions and debates assembled by rabbis over the next three centuries), in a fractal, intertextual structure, surrounded by marginalia, indices, and other commentaries.<sup>37</sup> While the Talmud page is sometimes seen as an early modern precedent to hypertext and the internet given the abundance of possible interpretative pathways and