



Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion Highlights

Led by **Barbara Kirschenblatt-Kimblett** (NYU) and **Jeffrey Shandler** (Rutgers), for the past five years the working group has explored the intersection of Jewish life and media through various trajectories: the role of media in Jewish religious practices, the advantages or challenges new media poses to religious life, and the effects of media engagement on Jewish community and religiosity. Last year, members organized panels on “Jews and Technology” and “Engaging Contemporary Art in Jewish Studies: A Scholar’s Roundtable with Three Contemporary Toronto Artists,” for the 39th Annual Association for Jewish Studies Conference (Toronto, December 2007). Co-sponsored with the Jewish Music Forum, the colloquium “Creating ‘New’ Jewish Sounds” (February 2008) featured presentations and roundtable with **Josh Kun** (University of Southern California), **Judah M. Cohen** (Indiana University), **Daniel Saks** (NYC band member, DeLeon and The LeeVeas). They explored how “Jewish” music exists in a milieu that relies on a combination of philanthropic and journalistic attention, as well as its concrete objects (CDs) and intangible qualities (“hipness”). At the Jewish Museum, Working Group co-conveners Barbara and Jeffrey facilitated a closing night panel on the installation “Off the Wall: Artists at Work” (March 2008). The Working Group continues to produce *Modiya*, an online archiving and pedagogical project: <http://modiya.nyu.edu/>

COLLOQUIUM

April 13, 2008

OBJECTS OF AFFECTION: JEWISH WEDDING IN MEDIA AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Weddings are the most elaborately celebrated of Jewish life-cycle events, employing a wide array of customs (rituals, songs, dances), objects (canopies, rings, clothing), professions (entertainers, caterers, photographers), and works of cultural creativity (representations of weddings in plays, films, visual art). Some of these phenomena are centuries old and widely familiar; others are rare, highly localized, or very recent innovations.

Thus, weddings provide abundant opportunities to consider the intersection of media and religiosity in Jewish life. Scholars, artists, and curators discussed the visual and material culture of weddings including photography, videography, music, and their portrayal on stage and in film, literature, art, and museum display.

How do all these media practices enhance this ritual or serve as opportunities for critique? What other aspects of Jewish life—gender, family, religious authority, economic concerns, aesthetic desires—do these wedding practices engage? How do the various media involved help articulate notions of spirituality, sexuality, memory, and religious tradition or provide a means for transformation? From the Jewish wedding’s graphic representation in a medieval manuscript to avant-garde performance, this gathering of scholars, artists, and performers probed such issues in an effort to understand what this rite—one that is so central to Jewish communality and continuity—may reveal about Jewish life.

The colloquium began with welcoming talks by **Faye Ginsburg** (CRM, NYU) and **Judith Siegel** (The Center for Jewish History) and introductions by colloquium co-conveners **Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett** and **Jeffrey Shandler**. **Sally Charnow** chaired “Images,” the first session which featured presentations by **Marc Michael Epstein**, “Marriage Procession, Italy, 1465 – *Realia* or *Fantasia?*,” **Nahma Sandrow**, “Weddings in S. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk*,” **Edward Portnoy**, “Four Weddings and a Funeral: Cartoons of Weddings from the Yiddish Press,” **Edna Nahshon**, “Nechama Golan: Between Sacredness and Feminism,” and **Rachel Kranson**, “The ‘No Chuppa, No Shtuppa’ T-Shirt: Mocking the Jewish Wedding.”

The second session centered around performative projects chaired by **Brigitte Sion**. Panelists included **Olga Gershenson**, “*Benya Krik* (1927): How It Was Done in the USSR,” **Alisa Solomon**, “*Fiddler on the Roof*: Sunflowers, Bottle Dancers and the Invention of Tradition,” **Ilana Abramovitch**, “Wedding Videos: Performing Ritual for the Camera,” **Irit Koren**, “My Wedding Video: An Atypical Modern Orthodox Feminist Wedding,” and **Susan Chevlowe**, “Nikki S. Lees *The Wedding*: Performing a Jewish Bride / Casting a Jewish Bridegroom.”

The final panel, “Practices,” chaired by **Chava Weissler**, included papers by **Hankus Netsky**, “Uncovering Jack Levinsky’s Complete New York Russian Sher Medley,” **Jill Gellerman** and **Mark Kligman**, “‘Yidden’ on YouTube: The Mediation of Mordechai Ben David’s Music and Wedding Dance Moves,” **Juliana Ochs**, “Wedding Menus: Nagamaki on the Smorgasbord,” and **Vanessa L. Ochs**, “Jewish Wedding Booklets: Tweaking Tradition for Personal Meaning.”

The sessions were followed by an artist presentation by **Melissa Shiff** and **Louis Kaplan** entitled “Postmodern Jewish Wedding: Rejuvenating Jewish Ritual.” The colloquium concluded with a screening of *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969) and the closing remarks of **J. Hoberman**.