

The Corporeal Turn

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WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED the “corporeal turn” in recent Jewish studies is provoking anxiety. If “Judaism’s mind has been more interesting and more influential than Judaism’s body,” a distinction worthy of study in its own right, critics are calling for “a swing back to its more traditional mooring in the text (which, in any case, has often dealt with the body).” But those who took the corporeal turn never left the text behind. Rather, they brought a concern with the body to the text and found new ways to read and think about those texts. What troubles the critics would seem to lie elsewhere. Reviewing several books published in the 1990s, Hillel Halkin characterized the trend as “feminizing Jewish Studies,” which he did not intend as a compliment.¹ The problem was not that their authors ignored the text.² Rather, it was the way they read the texts; their approach was marked, in his view, by “postmodern thinking,” skepticism, a “non- to anti-Zionist” stance, an affirmation of “Diaspora Jewish identity,” and above all an open embrace of feminism and feminist theory (and, though he does not say so in so many words, a preoccupation with sexuality and homosexuality). Non-Orthodox Jewish America is, in his view, suffering from deep confusion, exacerbated (if not caused) by the “sexual revolution,” and this kind of work just makes things worse. A firestorm ensued, fueled a few months later by Gabriel Schoenfeld’s wholesale condemnation of “the voguish hybrid known as gender studies” in Holocaust scholarship.³

1. Hillel Halkin, “Feminizing Jewish Studies,” *Commentary* 105 (February 1998): 39–45. For an alternative perspective see Matti Bunzl, “Jews, Queers, and other Symptoms: Recent Work in Jewish Cultural Studies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6.2(2000):321-41.

2. Indeed, they extended the notion of text, treating, for example, Jewish history as a text — “a text to be read between the lines,” of course. Halkin, “Feminizing,” 41.

3. Gabriel Schoenfeld, “Auschwitz and the Professors,” *Commentary* 105 (June 1998): 42–46; 44.

Claiming that this trend “does not yet have a name,” Halkin called it “the new Jewish scholarship.” A year earlier, Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin had announced “the new Jewish cultural studies,” and a year later *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published its own assessment of “the new Jewish studies.”⁴ In an endorsement for the Boyarins’ book, Eric Santner defined the new Jewish cultural studies as work that brings “to bear recent innovations in the study of gender and sexuality on readings of canonical Jewish texts.”⁵ While this may represent a corporeal turn in Jewish *textual* studies, it does not represent the full potential for a corporeal turn in Jewish studies more broadly conceived, a topic to which I will return. What is new in “the new Jewish cultural studies” is not only the concern with gender and sexuality (corporeality is not to be limited to these important topics in any case) but also the cultural turn in literary studies and the emergence of cultural studies.⁶ Text has not gone away. Rather, the corporeal turn has intensified interest in text and offered new ways to think about text as a social, corporeal, and material practice.⁷

4. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, eds., *Jews and Other Differences: The Jewish Cultural Studies* (Minneapolis, 1997); Scott Heller, “The New Jewish Studies: Defying Tradition and Easy Categorization,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 45.21 (January 1999): A21–22.

5. Personal communication, August 12, 2004. When I indicated to him that I was writing this response, Santner, raised a virtual eyebrow: “But concerning the ‘corporeal turn’: My sense is that it has already begun to fade. Is that your sense, too?”

6. Cultural studies (and fields that model themselves on it, for example, visual studies) has come in for its own fair share of criticism. See, among others, Scott Heller, “Visual Images Replace Text as Focal Point of Many Scholars,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 42.45 (July 19, 1996): A8–9, 15; Rosalind Krauss, “Welcome to the Cultural Revolution,” *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 83–96; Meaghan Morris, “Banality in Cultural Studies,” *What Is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. J. Storey (London, 1996), 147–67; Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies,” *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler (New York, 1992), 277–94.

7. See the imaginative work of Kathleen Biddick, “Paper Jews: Inscription/Ethnicity/Ethnography,” *Art Bulletin* 78.4 (1996): 594–99, and, most recently Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia, 2003). See also Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Cut That Binds: The Western Ashkenazic Torah Binder as Nexus between Circumcision and Torah,” *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. V. W. Turner (Washington, D.C., 1982), 136–46. The 2005–2006 academic year at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania will be dedicated to “The Jewish Books: Material Texts and Comparative Contexts” and will consider such themes as the materiality of Jewish texts, Jewish book production as a business,

If anything, text is everything. So powerful a metaphor for culture has text become that anything usefully understood as text has become fair game for “reading,” including film, performance, landscape, image, fashion, the city, and last but not least, the body—note that Daniel Boyarin’s appointment at the University of California is in “Talmudic culture” and *Carnal Israel* is subtitled “*reading sex in Talmudic culture*” (emphasis added).⁸ Scholars speak of “writing the body.” They speak of the body as “the inscribed surface of events.”⁹ “Socially inscribed,” the body “becomes the text that is written upon it.”¹⁰ But, as Elliot Wolfson has demonstrated so eruditely in *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, the textualization of the body and embodiment of text are not new Jewish preoccupations. The people of the book are also the people of the body, to paraphrase Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, an early contributor to the new Jewish cultural studies, and, as even canonical Jewish texts amply demonstrate, the body is not only good to think about, it is also good to think with.¹¹ Has an interest in the body lessened the “textualist” emphasis in Jewish studies? No. But it has altered “its traditional mooring in the text” by changing where and how scholars are dropping the anchor.

What is at stake is the identity—some might say the soul—of Jewish

and cultures of readings—topics and concerns that have been vigorously explored by Roger Chartier.

8. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993). And see note 6 above.

9. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (London, 1984), 83.

10. Quoted in Pippa Brush, “Metaphors of Inscription: Discipline, Plasticity, and the Rhetoric of Choice,” *Feminist Review* 58 (1998): 22–43, from Elizabeth Grosz, “Notes towards a Corporeal Feminism,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 5 (1987): 2. See also Elizabeth Grosz, “The Body as Inscriptive Surface,” *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 138–59.

11. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany, N.Y., 1992). Several essays in this volume were first published in journals during the late 1980s and several contributors to this volume were already publishing in this vein before or at the same time as *The Body in Judaism*, including Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York, 1991) and David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York, 1992). Others went on to write books of their own, chapters of which first appeared in this book, including Boyarin’s *Carnal Israel*. Others include Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia, 1998); Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston, 1998); and Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston, 1999).

studies itself. There is a difference between Jewish studies and the study of Jews. Jewish studies as it has developed in the United States over the last thirty years is still multidisciplinary, with an emphasis on textual analysis and history. Those studying Jews in other ways—in the social sciences and the arts—do so largely on the margins of their respective disciplines, not in Jewish studies proper.¹² In contrast, the new Jewish studies is interdisciplinary—even postdisciplinary—and this in itself poses a threat. As Susan M. Kahn pointedly asks: “Can Jewish studies survive an intense interaction with other disciplines?”¹³ Such interaction—and the particular interdisciplinary formations that emerge from it—have profound implications for how subjects are constituted for study, the assessment of their importance, the value accorded theory, the analytical tools available, and the kinds of objects that get analyzed. Moreover, much that is not new in other fields may seem new—and even threatening—to Jewish studies as presently constituted.

The result is a culture war, as Naomi Seidman characterizes the situation in her review of David Biale’s edited volume *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, which won the 2003 National Jewish Book Award.¹⁴ On the one side is the “Berkeley school” (or, California school, to include Stanford) and on the other, the position articulated by David Roskies in his review of the same book. Roskies takes issue with the goal of *Cultures of the Jews* to make Jewish cultures (in the plural) rather than Judaism (in the singular) the object of study. Biale articulated this position some eight years earlier in the first issue of *Jewish Social Studies* to appear under the editorship of Aron Rodrigue and Steven J. Zipperstein.¹⁵ Roskies takes issue with three aspects of Biale’s approach, all of which flow from the premise that Jewish studies would be better served by a more inclusive and pluralistic view of Jewish cultures rather than by the longstanding “notion of a unified, normative entity termed ‘Judaism.’” First, the inclusiveness of Biale’s approach places too much emphasis on vernacular, rather than elite, culture. Second, his pluralism makes too much of the

12. For anthropology, see, for example, Virginia R. Dominguez, “Questioning Jews,” *American Ethnologist* 20.3 (1993): 618–24, and *AJS Perspectives: The Newsletter of the Association for Jewish Studies* (Fall/Winter 2003), which is devoted to interdisciplinarity.

13. Scott Heller, “The New Jewish Studies: Defying Tradition and Easy Categorization,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 45.21 (January 29, 1999): A22.

14. Naomi Seidman, “Culture Wars of the Jews,” *Tikkun* 19.4 (July/August 2004): 77–79.

15. David Biale, “Confessions of an Historian of Jewish Cultures,” *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s. 1.1 (1994): 40–51.

interaction of Jews with their neighbors. Third, the questionable outcome is a shift from “the People of the Book” to the “People of the Body.”¹⁶ To save Jewish identity from the new Jewish studies, Roskies calls for a return to the “value of approaching Jewish history the old-fashioned way, by looking closely at great men, great texts, and great ideas” and celebrating “true and lasting [Jewish] achievements.”¹⁷ He also warns that without the premise that “uniquely Jewish ideas and forms of behavior” arise from “internal Jewish drives,” “both the Jewish body and the Jewish soul [will] stand before us draped in foreign garments.”¹⁸ So, too, will Jewish studies itself.

The problem with the new Jewish studies, however, is not that the body is displacing text or a concern with the mind, which it is not. What makes the critics uncomfortable is that the new approaches do not feel “authentic” or “indigenous” to Jewish studies in the way that certain kinds of textual study do. Note, for example, how earlier studies of Jewish sexuality characterized their own approach. In *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (1948), “the author has sought merely to present the historic facts without bias and without preachment.”¹⁹ In *Marital Relations, Birth Control, and Abortion in Jewish Law*, first published in 1968, “the texts are allowed to speak for themselves; the interpretation offered is consistent with and documented by the processes of legal and literary developments in Codes, Commentaries, and Responsa.”²⁰ This is a long way from Matti Bunzl’s *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna* (Berkeley, Calif., 2004) and even further from recent landmark anthropological studies of the lived experience of contemporary Jewish

16. David Roskies, “Border Crossings: *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*,” *Commentary* 115 (February 2003): 64.

17. Roskies, “Border Crossings,” 66.

18. Roskies, “Border Crossings,” 64.

19. Louis M. Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York, 1948), xxii. But also note, a few lines earlier: “To find in a report of the sexual behavior of the American male an indication that the conduct of the orthodox Jew rates high according to accepted norms of chastity and purity is sufficient recommendation for our supposedly antiquated code with all its shortcomings” (xxi). The Kinsey Report (Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* [Philadelphia, 1948]), which appeared in the same year as Epstein’s book, was widely discussed at the time.

20. David M. Feldman, *Marital Relations, Birth Control, and Abortion in Jewish Law* (New York, 1974), v–vi. Feldman states his contribution as the “mustering of otherwise inaccessible classic and contemporary sources” on a subject, that despite its “intrinsic importance” has “until now been left virtually untouched in any systematic sense” (p. v).

marital relations, sexuality, reproductive practices, and kinship, examples of which include Susan M. Kahn's ethnography of assisted conception in Israel and Susan Starr Sered's account of maternity, modesty, and militarism in Israeli society.²¹ Phenomena new to the field, if not new to the world, can alter the disciplinary subject and ways of thinking about all that went before, but not as long as *the study of Jews* remains marginal to fields marginal to *Jewish studies*.

Anthropology, which remains marginal to Jewish studies, has played an important role in the cultural turn in history and literature, as evidenced over the last thirty years in the new historicism (spearheaded by literary scholars and inspired by the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz), the new cultural history, microhistory (*microstoria*), the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*), and even experiential history (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*).²² *Carnal Israel* was written in the context of the new historicism. In 1986, *Representations*, the journal of record for the new historicism, devoted a special issue to "the making of the modern body," explaining that

Scholars have only recently discovered that the human body itself has a history. Not only has it been perceived, interpreted, and represented differently in different epochs, but it has also been lived differently, brought into being within widely dissimilar material cultures, subjected to various technologies and means of control, and incorporated into different rhythms of production and consumption, pleasure and pain.²³

This concern, the writer continues, arises from a particular interdisciplinary convergence (history and anthropology—and, even more importantly

21. Susan Martha Kahn, *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception in Israel* (Durham, N.C., 2000); Susan Starr Sered, *What Makes Women Sick? Maternity, Modesty, and Militarism in Israeli Society* (Hanover, N.H., 2000). For recent contributions to the history of Jews and medicine, see John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), and Lisa Rae Epstein, "Caring for the Soul's House: The Jews of Russia and Health Care, 1860–1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1995).

22. See Harvey Goldberg, "Coming of Age in Jewish Studies, or Anthropology Is Counted in the Minyan," *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s. 4.3 (1998): 29–64. For a lucid account of the differences between microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte*, see Brad S. Gregory, "Is Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life," *History and Theory* 38.1 (1999): 100–110. See also Lynn Avery Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History: Essays* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989).

23. [Editor], "Introduction," *Representations* (The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century) no. 14 (1986): vii.

it should be added, literature), greater interest in culture on the part of historians, “the thematization of the body in modern philosophy (especially phenomenology), and partly from the emphasis on gender, sexuality, and women’s history that large numbers of feminist scholars have brought to all disciplines.”²⁴ The new historicism is also characterized by the inventive use of a wide variety of sources, textual, visual, and artifactual, and the engagement of art historians, among others.

Whereas Boyarin, following Stephen Greenblatt, characterizes the new historicism (also called cultural poetics) as a sensibility more than a theory, the theoretical stakes are clearly set out in microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte*, which focus on the concrete details of everyday practices.²⁵ There is of course a legacy of Jewish inner-life histories—Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (1896), Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (1971), to mention but two—that describe family feasts and fasts, dress, etiquette, hygiene, child rearing, dancing and games, and ailments and remedies. But they differ from such recent books as Ivan G. Marcus’s *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (1996) not only in terms of their larger argument (even when they cover some of the same empirical ground), but also in that they are not informed by the theoretical and methodological concerns that drive microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte*.²⁶ At stake is nothing less than the issue of historical agency and explanation. Is the answer to be found in a close examination of the embodied practices and lived experience of ordinary people in their everyday lives or in macrostructural forces over long periods of time? And what is the relationship between them?

24. Ibid.

25. The inaugural statement for the new historicism can be found in Stephen Greenblatt’s introduction to a special issue of *Genre* 15.1/2 (1982): 3–6, and is elaborated in Stephen Greenblatt, “The Poetics and Politics of Culture,” *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York, 1989), 1–14. See also Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, eds., *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000). For a recent statement on what might be called the new Jewish cultural history, see Moshe Rosman, “A Prolegomenon to the Study of Jewish Cultural History,” *JSIJ Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 1 (2002): 109–27, <http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/1-2002/Rosman.pdf> (accessed August 19, 2004). For a recent Jewish example of *Alltagsgeschichte*, see Marion A. Kaplan, ed., *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618–1945* (New York, 2004).

26. Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1896); Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, Conn., 1996).

These issues have been richly theorized in the social sciences around notions of habitus, embodiment, experience, practice, and feeling.²⁷ Nor are these concerns alien to Jewish studies, as a corporeal or embodied reading of the scholarly record, attentive to experience and practice, would reveal. This is precisely what Lawrence Fine sets out to do in *Judaism in Practice*, an edited volume that explores the “embodied nature of Jewish religion,” using literary, anthropological, and phenomenological approaches, as well as drawing upon gender studies and comparative religion.²⁸ Complementing the historical record are ethnographic studies of the lived experience of contemporary Jewish communities, their synagogues, religious fellowship, study circles, domestic life, and popular and public culture.²⁹ This approach, by paying special attention to women and

27. See, for example, Alexandra Howson and David Inglis, “The Body in Sociology: Tension Inside and Outside Sociological Thought,” *Sociological Review* 49.3 (2001): 297–317; Nick Crossley, “Merleau-Ponty, the Elusive Body and Carnal Sociology,” *Body and Society* 1.1 (1995): 43–63; Margaret Lock, “Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 133–55; and Victor Witter Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana, Ill., 1986).

28. Lawrence Fine, “Introduction,” *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. L. Fine (Princeton, N.J., 2001). See also David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York, 2002).

29. Samuel C. Heilman’s *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago, 1976), with chapters on gossip, joking, and singing, swaying, appeals, and arguments, is an early example of detailed attention to embodied practices as a way of understanding experience and meaning. Chava Weissler, *Making Judaism Meaningful: Ambivalence and Tradition in a Havurah Community* (New York, 1989), and Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit, 1989), offer pioneering studies of alternative congregations, while Jack Kugelmass’s *The Miracle of Intervale Avenue: The Story of a Jewish Congregation in the South Bronx* (New York, 1986) explores how a hardy band of elderly Jews, barely enough for a minyan, creatively improvises in an effort to hold on to the last synagogue in the South Bronx. Moshe Shokeid’s *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York, 1995) is the first ethnography of a gay congregation. There are also ethnographies of Reform congregations and most recently a Moscow synagogue. Jenna Weissman Joselit’s work is exemplary for its attention to material culture: Jenna Weissman Joselit and Susan L Braunstein, eds., *Getting Comfortable in New York: The American Jewish Home, 1880–1950* (New York, 1990), and Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950* (New York, 1994), while Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), offers a fresh perspective on American Jewish immigrant life, as does Joelle Bahloul on North African Jewish immigrants to France. See *Le Culte de la table dressée: Rites et traditions de la table Juive algérienne* (Paris, 1983) and *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria, 1957–1962* (New York, 1996).

vernacular culture, has offered a more inclusive approach to Jewish life and attention to a wider range of Jewish and other texts.⁵⁰

That said, attention to habitus, embodiment, experience, practice, and feeling are worthy of study in their own right and for other reasons as well. The question “Has Judaism’s mind been more interesting and more influential than Judaism’s body?”—if indeed this is the most interesting question to ask—can only be answered by studying “Judaism’s body” and by examining the ways in which it has already been studied, not by determining in advance what is of greater intrinsic interest, as if disciplinary subjects and their objects are already given and not constituted under particular circumstances.⁵¹

We might ask instead: How does a topic come into view? Under what circumstances does it become “interesting” and even urgent? Or too dangerous to broach? Why, for example, were American anthropologists, many of them Jewish, unable to constitute Jews as an anthropological subject until after the Holocaust? In a word, the answer resides with the Jewish body. American anthropology during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century was so preoccupied with race that the only way concerned anthropologists could protect Jews from racism was to protect Jews from anthropology. As a result, Franz Boas, a German Jewish immigrant and one of the founders of American anthropology, devoted the better part of his career to trying to disprove anthropological theories of race and, more specifically, to demonstrate that Jews were not a race by any definition.⁵² So urgent did this issue become, with the restriction of immigration during the 1920s and rise of fascism during the 1930s, that Boas systematically eliminated any basis for distinguishing Jews on any grounds, physical or cultural. He literally erased the Jewish subject by demonstrating that there was nothing to study, a strategy that

30. See Paula E. Hyman, “Feminist Studies and Modern Jewish History,” *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, ed. L. Davidman and S. Tenenbaum (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 120–39.

31. See, for example, Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), which explores early rabbinic Judaism on the basis of the routine everyday practices of spinning and weaving, as evidenced in texts and in material culture, as well as their symbolism.

32. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Introduction,” *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog (New York, 1995). See also John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven, Conn., 1994); Eric Louis Goldstein, *Race and the Construction of Jewish Identity in America, 1875–1945* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2000); Mitchell Bryan Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, Calif., 2000).

might be characterized as constitutive negativity—that is, it was in the negation of Jewish difference that Jews were constituted as an anthropological subject. There were, however, some fascinating, if unintended, outcomes, including David Efron’s groundbreaking study of Jewish gesture, which he undertook under the direction of Boas during the thirties, shortly before Boas died.³³

Efron had wanted to write a comprehensive study of gesture, but Boas wanted him to demonstrate that gesture was learned, not innate, and therefore yet another indication that bodily dispositions were not racially determined and that Jews were not a race. Efron therefore narrowed his focus to a comparison of two generations of Italian and Jewish immigrants in New York City. Predictably, he showed, in the introduction and conclusion to his dissertation, that while the gestures of the first generation of Italian and Jewish immigrants were very different from each other, the gestures of the second generation of Italians and Jews were more similar to each other (and to other native-born Americans) than to the gestures of their parents. But between the first and last pages of his study, Efron provided the richest account ever of the gesture system of East European Jews and made a lasting methodological contribution as well.

If race stopped Boas from allowing Jews to be constituted as an anthropological subject, psychoanalytic studies of the impact of culture on the formation of personality prompted great interest in what Marcel Mauss called techniques of the body, and especially in such early childhood practices as swaddling, weaning, toilet training, hygiene, affection, corporal discipline, comportment, and the like.³⁴ During the early 1930s, Max Weinreich pursued this approach under the direction of the anthropologist Edward Sapir and the sociologist John Dollard at Yale and brought it back to the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna, where he established the Youth Research Project and introduced the principles of interdisciplinary social science. Weinreich, who translated Freud into Yiddish, saw the body—its gendering, sexuality, regula-

33. David Efron, *Gesture and Environment: A Tentative Study of Some of the Spatio-Temporal and “Linguistic” Aspects of the Gestural Behavior of Eastern Jews and Southern Italians in New York City, Living under Similar as Well as Different Environmental Conditions* (New York, 1941). Efron would no doubt have found of great interest the chapter on gesture in Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London, 1972).

34. Marcel Mauss, “Body Techniques,” *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, trans. B. Brewster (London and Boston, 1979), 95–123. First published in French in 1935.

tion—as critical to an understanding of Jewish youth, in whom he placed his hope for a Jewish future in Eastern Europe.⁵⁵

Boas died in 1942 and by the end of World War II two of his most illustrious students, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, inaugurated a major effort to study prewar East European Jewish culture—also from a personality and culture perspective—within the framework of Cold War anthropology. They paid close attention to the body, consistent with their interest in how specific cultural practices, particularly those connected with enculturation and socialization, form personality and national character. The result was *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (1952).⁵⁶ This important, though flawed, achievement notwithstanding, Jews have remained a marginal subject in anthropology to this day. As Virginia Dominguez recently asked, “Does anthropology have a Jewish problem?”⁵⁷ The answer is yes and the history of anthropology’s Jewish problem is fraught with anxiety whose genealogy leads back to the body. To this day, most of the work on the Jewish body engages in one way or another with the problem of race, enriched of late by considerations of gender, sexuality, and class. Even after American anthropology and other fields repudiated the race “science” of their early years, the Holocaust ensured that the subject would be one of enduring concern. The study of the Jewish body has been conducted ever after under the sign and shadow of the Holocaust.

If there is “a mind/body problem in Jewish studies,” is it the same as the “text/body” problem? The implication here is that the mind is in the text—or the text is the Jewish mind at work—and the body is somewhere else, unrecoverable and less consequential in any case. As Carlo Ginzburg notes, such abstract notions of text arose through processes of disembodiment and dematerialization as technologies of writing and printing separated the text from its oral and gestural performance, while reading and interpretive practices made the physical characteristics of the text irrele-

55. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Coming of Age in the Thirties: Max Weinreich, Edward Sapir, and Jewish Social Science,” *YIVO Annual*, ed. D. Dash Moore (Detroit, 1996), 1–103.

56. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Grenebaum Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York, 1952). When the book was issued in paperback by Schocken, the subtitle was changed to “The Culture of the Shtetl.” See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s introduction to the 1995 edition for a detailed account of the history of this project.

57. Virginia R. Dominguez, “Questioning Jews,” *American Ethnologist* 20.3 (1993): 618–24; 621. See also Jeffrey D. Feldman, “The Jewish Roots and Routes of Anthropology,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 77.1 (2004): 107–25.

vant. As a result, the text was “gradually purified at every point of reference related to the senses.”³⁸ But, as Samuel Heilman shows in his detailed ethnography of study circles and religious fellowship, the texts are performed.³⁹ They are voiced in the presence of others and embedded in densely textured social worlds. They do not move telepathically between minds, but interpersonally in space and time, under particular material conditions, and in physically coded and embodied ways—dramatically. They are not just thought. They are sensed and felt. They are experienced. And, as Jeremy Stolow demonstrates in his study of the ArtScroll publishing house, they continue to be significant as material objects.⁴⁰

Rather than reasserting these binaries and weighing in on the side of the mind in the text, we might hang the pendulum somewhere else and let it swing in all directions. This would require a rethinking of what is “important.” If “God is in the details,” then even an apparently trivial detail—of no great importance or influence in its own right—might be the clue to a profound puzzle. Some of the most interesting historical work has proceeded on nothing less than this principle.⁴¹ Qualitative sociology, anthropology, the history of everyday life, and phenomenology are premised on the understanding that the ordinary is an achievement and deserves to be studied in its own right. Nowhere is this clearer than in Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, understood as “durable, transposable dispositions” that are embodied, taken for granted, and function as “structuring structures.”⁴² Haym Soloveitchik’s essay on mimetic Judaism, while not cast in such terms, is an important contribution to the study of Jewish *habitus*—to the idea, following Bourdieu, of practical belief as a “state of the body” rather than a “state of mind,” the body being a “repository for the most precious values.”⁴³ Studies of the role of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* in the embourgeoisement of Jews as part of the

38. Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, Md., 1989), 102–08.

39. Samuel C. Heilman, *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago, 1983).

40. Jeremy Stolow, “Communicating Authority, Consuming Tradition: Orthodox Literature and the Jewish Reading Public,” *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, ed. B. Meyer and A. Moors (Bloomington, Ind., in press). See also the new journal *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art, and Belief*.

41. Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*.

42. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif., 1990), 53.

43. Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28.4 (1994): 64–130; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 68–69.

emancipation project, a concern of longstanding interest in Jewish studies, are also matters of habitus.⁴⁴ The Zionist project, as explored by scholars such as Anat Helman and Tamar Katriel, attempted to create a new kind of habitus in the Yishuv (and later).⁴⁵ We have the new Jewish scholarship to thank for an appreciation of the historical and cultural specificities of Jewish habitus in relation to gender and especially women.

What might a more embodied Jewish studies look like? While *sensuous histories* would be attentive to sensuous aspects of Jewish life, *sensory histories* would examine the nature of the Jewish sensorium itself, its structure and hierarchy, in all of its specificities and variations.⁴⁶ Until now, attention to the senses in relation to Jews has focused on pathologies—on negative representations (for example, the Jewish stench—*foetor judaicus*) and deficits (the “artless Jew”). There are important exceptions, including Kalman Bland’s attention to “the well-tempered sensorium” in *The Artless Jew* and Robert Bonfil’s *Jews in Renaissance Italy*, which, under the heading “Structures of Mentality,” includes chapters on time and space, sounds and stillness, colors, tastes, and odors.⁴⁷ The only Jewish sense to receive sustained attention in its own right is the visual, whether its purported underdevelopment or the historically specific ways it figures in the Jewish mystical tradition, for example.⁴⁸

Similarly, a more affective Jewish studies would attend to the emo-

44. See George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Bloomington, Ind. and Cincinnati, Ohio 1985).

45. See, for example, Anat Helman, “Was There Anything Particularly Jewish about ‘The First Hebrew City’?” *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times: Essays on Jews and Aesthetic Culture*, ed. B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and J. Karp (Philadelphia, forthcoming), and Tamar Katriel, *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli Settlement Museums* (Mahwah, N.J., 1997). I count David Efron’s work on gesture, discussed above, as an important contribution as well, even though he did not conceive his study in these terms.

46. For an indication of what a sensory Jewish studies might address, see David Howes, ed., *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto, 1991), and his two most recent books: *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2003), and Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2004), which is part Sensory Formations, the series he is editing.

47. Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, N.J., 2000), 71–91; Bland explicitly positions his work in relation to visual studies and “body studies” (p. 10). Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994).

48. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), on visualization in Jewish mysticism.

tional dimensions of Jewish life, as well as to the history of the emotions themselves, in ways that would rethink the mind (thought) / body (feeling) binary.⁴⁹ With the rare exception, for example, James Matisoff's study of psycho-extensive expressions in Yiddish, the emotions that have received the most serious and sustained attention to date are those related to trauma.⁵⁰ Not surprisingly, it is around Holocaust memory and memorialization (and studies of them) that we find the richest, as well as most self-conscious and contentious, efforts to address affective—even somatic and visceral—experience, as can be seen in the protocols for viewing videotaped interviews in the the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University; the dramaturgy of *March of the Living*, which often culminates with "The Israel Experience"; the proprioceptive and kinesthetic design of Holocaust museums and memorials; and the embodied nature of witnessing and memory.⁵¹

Last but not least, what are the boundaries of the Jewish body, in all its variations, and where might such a question lead? Just as there are more than five senses—the number of senses, now calculated by scientists

49. For a sociological approach, see Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago, 1999). For anthropological approaches, see John Leavitt, "Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions," *American Ethnologist* 23.3 (1996): 514–39, and William M. Reddy, "Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions," *Current Anthropology* 38.3 (1997): 327–51.

50. James A Matisoff, *Blessings, Curses, Hopes, and Fears: Psycho-Ostensive Expressions in Yiddish* (Stanford, Calif., 2000, first published in 1979).

51. See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, 1991); Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York, 1999); James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn., 1993); Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst, Mass., and Boston, 2003); and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Learning from Ethnography: Reflections on the Nature and Efficacy of Youth Tours to Israel," *The Israel Experience: Studies in Youth Travel and Jewish Identity* by Harvey Goldberg, Samuel Heilman, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (Jerusalem, 2002), 269–331. On what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling" in relation to klezmer music, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility," *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, ed. Mark Slobin (Los Angeles, 2002), 129–73. For affective aspects of life in the Yishuv and in contemporary Israel, see Tamar Katriel, *Dialogic Moments: From Soul Talks to Talk Radio in Israeli Culture* (Detroit, 2004). I have argued elsewhere that the museum is a school for the senses and that its sensory curriculum has a history: see "The Museum as Catalyst," *Museum 2000: Confirmation or Challenge?* ed. Per-Uno Ågren (Stockholm, 2002), 55–69. On the embodied nature of memory, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989) and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, N.C., 2003).

as nine, is itself a research topic—so too are the body's boundaries not given: the body does not begin and end with its biggest organ, the skin, or the limits of sensory perception. In 1992, the anthropologist Emily Martin asked, "Why is the body such an intense focus of attention in the academy today?" Her answer pointed to fundamental changes in how the body is organized and experienced, including transformations in body percept and practice, such that the very boundaries of the body and concomitant notions of personhood are put into question.⁵² Such changes in our own circumstances, intensified by new medical and communication technologies, produce a heightened awareness and scholarly concern with the body and prompt a rethinking of mind/body, text/body, thinking/feeling, hearing/seeing, and even the animate/inanimate dichotomy, nowhere more dramatically than in Bruno Latour's actor-network theory. An actor-network includes anyone and anything (objects, texts, technologies) that can act. Intelligence is distributed across the network.⁵³ Kathleen Biddick's work on graphic technologies in relation to circumcision and baptism is inspired in part by Latour.⁵⁴

Where then will the statement that the Jewish mind is more important and influential than the Jewish body take Jewish studies—indeed, where has this position taken the field to date? Are there no paths not yet taken—along the margins of the field as presently constituted—that might lead in unexpected, yet productive, directions, even if that means taking Jewish studies beyond its current, carefully guarded borders?

52. Emily Martin, "The End of the Body?" *American Ethnologist* 19.1 (1992): 121–40. Technology plays an important role here as it does in Sander L. Gilman's work on the medicalization of Jewishness in *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (Baltimore, Md., 1993) and in Susan M. Kahn's work on assisted conception in Israel, cited above. On the role of technology in literary representations of the Jewish body, see Daniel Novak, "A Model Jew: 'Literary Photographs' and the Jewish Body in Daniel Deronda," *Representations* 85.1 (2004): 58–97.

53. Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996): 369–81.

54. Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary*.