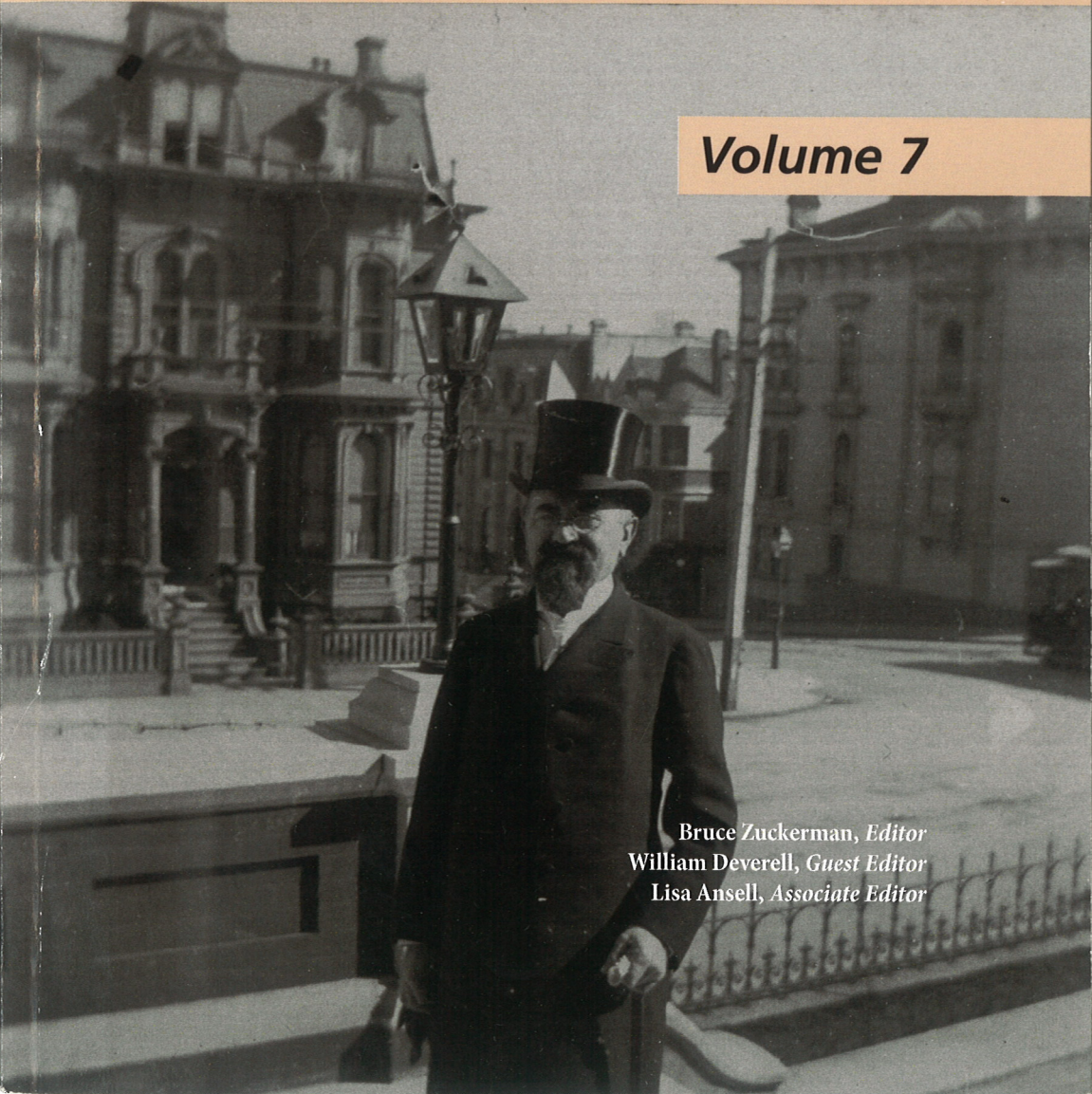


A Cultural History of Jews in California

The Jewish Role in American Life

An Annual Review

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Bruce Zuckerman, *Editor*
William Deverell, *Guest Editor*
Lisa Ansell, *Associate Editor*

Jewish Homegrown History: In the Golden State and Beyond

Marsha Kinder

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BUILDING A TRANSMEDIA NETWORK

In Spring 2006, my colleague Rosemary Comella and I met with Bill Deverell to choose a topic for a collaborative project involving our two research groups—the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West directed by Deverell, and the Labyrinth Research Initiative on Database Narrative and Digital Scholarship, which I founded at USC in 1997 and where Comella has worked as a creative director since 1999.¹ We agreed that whatever subject we chose, the project would draw on the archival resources of the Huntington Library and of USC Libraries' Special Collections and would leverage Labyrinth's ten years of experience producing archival cultural histories as large-scale museum installations, drawing on Comella's expertise as a multimedia artist.

The topic we chose was a cultural history of Jews in California, which would be presented to the general public in three different modes: as an on-line multimedia archive, a traveling museum installation, and a print-anthology edited by Deverell (the volume in which this essay appears). Together these public presentations would comprise (what we at Labyrinth call) a "transmedia network," the use of multiple media to create a series of networked public spaces that enable participants to engage with the same material in different ways. By employing different media, the project focuses the attention of users on the content, where it belongs.

With seed money from USC's Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life, we began the research, commissioned an

extensive bibliography by Jewish Studies scholar Karen Wilson, and broadened our collaborative base to include other partners. With grants from the Haas, Righteous Persons, and NEH Foundations and from the Friends of Tel Aviv University, we expanded the original concept to make it a national project. Although we remained committed to starting with California as originally planned, our ultimate goal is to show how this new information about Jews in the West might alter our broader understanding of Jews in America—a shift that would be best understood if our project had a national scope.

But how could we possibly “cover” such a broad field? We realized that, like many of Labyrinth’s previous installations, this project would be an open-ended database narrative that would create a productive dialogue between what is already known about Jewish cultural history and new information contributed by the general public. We assembled an Advisory Board of historians, Jewish studies scholars, archivists, documentary filmmakers, and museum curators who have assisted us in identifying key issues and contributed passages from their own works that have helped shape the “scaffolding” of published history we are building. Thus, our expanding project and its dialogic history can be based on a system of social networking that relies on contributions not only from the general public but also from scholars, filmmakers and other cultural institutions.

Having named our project, *Jewish Homegrown History: Immigration, Identity, Inter marriage*, we are committed to showing how the concept of the Jewish homeland has continued to grow, as Jewish immigrants have come to America from different parts of the world in different eras and have migrated to and settled within different locations across the United States, where they have interacted with other communities. We decided to explore this expanding concept of the Jewish homeland through three inter-related sub-themes: *Immigration & Migration*, the negotiation of loyalties both to the old country and to the new locations of settlement within the USA; *Identity & Cultural Contributions*, the negotiation of conflicts that arise from identifying both as an American and as a Jew and from assessing what distinctive contributions the Jewish community has made to American culture; and *Inter marriage & Other Alliances*, the negotiation of complex relations, both alliances and estrangements, with other ethnic groups in America, particularly those encountered within the local site of settlement.

During the early period of production, several people from within the Jewish community questioned our inclusion of “inter marriage” as one of the principal three subthemes. We explained that we were using this term not only

literally but also in the broader sense of addressing the alliances and oppositions between Jews and other groups, and were showing how this issue was interwoven with the other two subthemes of identity and immigration. Still, several religious people warned us it was too controversial, while other secular Jews (especially from the Bay Area) claimed that intermarriage was now so widely accepted that it did not need to be emphasized. What was clear from these discussions was the emotional heat this issue still generates, which is one of the reasons we decided to include it. We were also convinced by the following statement by Jonathan Sarna (one of our Advisory Board members) in his book on American Judaism:

Freedom, the same quality that made America so alluring for persecuted faiths, also brought with it the freedom to make religious choice: to modernize Judaism, to assimilate, to intermarry, to convert. American Jews, as a result, have never been able to assume that their future as Jews is guaranteed. Each generation has had to wrestle anew with the question of whether its own children and grandchildren would remain Jewish, whether Judaism as a living faith would end and carry on as ancestral memory alone. The history of American Judaism, as I have come to understand it, is in many ways a response to this haunting fear. . . . But the story of American Judaism recounted in this book is not just a stereotypical tale of "linear descent," of people who start off Orthodox and end up intermarrying. It is, instead, a much more dynamic story of people struggling to be Americans and Jews, a story of people who lose their faith and a story of people who regain their faith, a story of assimilation, to be sure, but also a story of revitalization (xiii–xiv).

The ongoing nature of this story and its emphasis on non-linear spatial exploration make it particularly well suited to an open-ended database narrative (Labyrinth's signature genre), which is being presented both as an on-line multimedia archive that will continue to grow as people contribute their own family histories, and as an interactive museum installation that will expand in scope as it travels across the nation.

The on-line archive will be publicly launched in 2010; and the traveling installation is scheduled to open in three California venues in 2010–2011: the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles (September 2010–January 2011), the New Americans Museum in San Diego (January–April 2011), and the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley (May–September 2011). The installation will then travel eastward to Philadelphia, where it will open at the National

Museum of American Jewish History in 2012, as well as in New York and other cities to be determined. Given that this project is still in production, this essay will describe its development and some of the issues it has raised along the way, starting with our choice of database narrative.

DATABASE NARRATIVE AND THE PARADOX AT THE HEART OF COLLECTING

Although Labyrinth's previous cultural histories differ in content, they are all "database narratives," a structure that reveals the process by which certain narrative fragments—characters, events, settings, objects—are chosen from an underlying database and recombined to make stories. Operative in all languages and all narratives (both history and fiction), these interwoven processes of selection and combination are performed both by authors and users, but frequently they remain hidden. By deliberately exposing these dual processes, database narrative diffuses the force of master narratives, which can no longer be seen as merely *natural* or, even more simply, *the truth*, because users are reminded that alternative versions of the story and new combinations of the components are always possible. Instead of master narratives, what emerges is a more open narrative field full of possibilities, which is in turn fueled by an underlying database that continues to grow.

Despite all the hype in the early 1990s about the obsolescence of narrative and its replacement by spatial exploration and database structures, narrative has remained a crucial organizational principle in the digital age. For narrative is a cognitive mode found in every human society. In the broad cognitive sense, narrative contextualizes the meaning of sensory perceptions: it maps the world and our own position within it. That is why narratives are constantly under reconstruction and must remain open-ended—whether they are the public histories of a nation or people, or the personal stories of individuals and their families—since they must continually account for the influx of new data in their latest remix. As historian Hayden White puts it: "Far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (1).

Instead of defining database and narrative as an opposition (as several new media theorists do),² at Labyrinth we see them working together. By combining database (a dominant form in contemporary digital discourse whose politics tend to be discounted or disavowed) with narrative (the traditional

form it supposedly displaces whose ideological baggage is well known), the database narrative actually exposes the ideological underpinnings of both. Like cultural historian Diana Taylor, we believe that every database or archive is designed for a particular kind of knowledge production and comes with specific (if not necessarily explicitly stated) goals; and the decision of which items to include or exclude, what categories to use as structuring principles, and what metadata to collect (or exclude) for later retrieval—all of these decisions serve ideological ends. In our works, we frequently visualize the database structure so that the interface design exposes this process of knowledge production, which is precisely what happens in *Jewish Homegrown History*.

Database narrative raises an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it ruptures the narrative's illusion of wholeness by revealing the gaps (through its lack of closure) and by showing what is omitted (the other fragments not chosen). Yet by exposing the underlying database, it potentially introduces another pleasurable illusion of wholeness—as if all of the possibilities really were contained in the database. Acknowledging this paradox, French theorist Gilles Deleuze sees it as a reason for exposing the gaps:

But sometimes, on the contrary, it is necessary to make holes, to introduce voids and white spaces, to rarify the image, by suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we were seeing everything. It is necessary to make a division or make emptiness in order to find the whole again (21).

In database narrative it is possible to emphasize either side of the paradox—the gaps or the illusion of wholeness. In our work at Labyrinth, we choose to emphasize the gaps because we consider this epistemological tension a great strength of database narrative.

A similar paradox lies at the heart of collecting, an activity featured in all database narratives. On the one hand, collectors dream of making their collection “complete,” of gaining total knowledge of their subject. This is a dream one can aspire to but never really attain—because one never knows what new (or old) data will emerge in the future. On the other hand, rarity is what makes the collectible valuable, and rarity depends on loss—the loss of most of the other objects in this category. If the relic were commonplace and ubiquitous, then one might be less inclined to collect it.

Every collector (like every author of database narrative) is faced with the question: should I emphasize the illusion of wholeness or the gaps. This question is especially pivotal in a field like Jewish Studies, where some enemy

ideologues challenge the existence of material evidence for the Holocaust and even question whether it actually happened. Thus, we can understand the drive to create a comprehensive archive that promises to preserve total knowledge of what happened, as is the goal of the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, for example, where it is not only a matter of producing and collecting thousands of extensive interviews with survivors but also conducting them in multiple languages. We find the opposite tendency in Alain Resnais's powerful thirty-minute documentary on the Holocaust, *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*, 1955), which, despite its display of ghastly footage of the death camps, insists in a poetic voice-over that we can never fully know what it was like to have been there: "No description, no picture can restore their true dimension: endless, uninterrupted fear. . . . Of this brick dormitory, of these threatened sleepers, we can only show you the shell, the shadow." Given that collecting material evidence is crucial in both cases and for the same goal of preventing the repetition of genocide, then, we may ask, what is at stake in the choice between striving for total knowledge versus calling attention to the gaps?

By emphasizing the illusion of total knowledge, one creates a sense of mastery—particularly when that comprehensiveness is based on a new combination of different fields of knowledge. Think of the combination of classical and medieval knowledge that helped generate the Renaissance, with its ambitious totalizing projects, such as Sir Walter Raleigh's five-volume *History of the World* (1614), which did not even get past 130 BCE, or Roger Bacon's encyclopedic *Major Opus* (*Operis Majoris*, 1268), which was to include everything known. Or consider the combination of sensory knowledge and formal abstraction in Friedrich Schiller's concept of the "play drive," which yields a unique sense of wholeness and mastery that may explain some of the pleasures of contemporary game culture and why so many multimedia works cultivate the illusion of wholeness:

It is precisely play and play alone, which of all man's states and conditions is the one which makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once. . . . Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays (15th Letter, 425).

When database narrative is combined with digital culture, it potentially promises a similar utopian mastery. For example, when Labyrinth was designing *The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River*, an earlier installation on

Jewish history produced in collaboration with Hungarian artist Peter Forgács, we went from his sixty-minute video documentary, aired on European television, to an immersive installation based on some forty hours of footage. Yet, we still considered the value of this expanded footage to be more dependent on its rarity than its abundance, and therefore chose to emphasize the gaps. As a consequence, museum visitors had to take a more active role in generating narratives that could accommodate the images, sounds and words they encountered in the exhibition's expanding narrative field.

This emphasis on the gaps is also well suited to *Jewish Homegrown History*. That is why we begin with Jews in California, where the cultural history is especially full of holes. This project collects new data from ordinary people (having them tell their stories) and creates a dialogue between these personal memories and what is already known (through published history). Never relying on any single authority or any authoritative "voice-of-god" documentary, our history repeatedly confronts users with conflicting data from multiple sources. As in our previous Labyrinth projects, the primary challenge for the individual user is to find a new narrative premise that can accommodate the data that our project collects and remixes, or at least as much of it as the user has seen and heard.

THE ON-LINE DIALOGUE BETWEEN PERSONAL MEMORIES AND PUBLISHED HISTORY

Unlike other on-line participatory sites where users can record their family histories, our multimedia archive focuses on generating a productive dialogue between the personal memories being contributed (stories, family photos, home movies) and the broader published history (based on scholarly books, essays, newspaper articles, interviews, archival photographs, newsreels, documents) that contextualize these personal contributions. Thus, it creates a unique mode of interactive history that enables contributors to see the immediate effect of their own digital storytelling on the public record and the process by which it enriches, complicates or challenges what is known. The experience provides two kinds of pleasure—an immediate narcissistic engagement with one's own genealogy and experience but also a broader interest and engagement in understanding the implicit, larger historical patterns. By encouraging families to collaborate on telling their stories and to "publish" them through this user-friendly interface, this narrative mode of data collection fosters a meaningful form of trans-generational learning.

This unique dialogue also generates for each user a personalized database narrative on the fly—not only by gathering historical modules from the public record that are relevant to an individual's own family stories but also by empowering the user to choose which modules to watch or preserve. It makes historiography accessible to the general public, enabling them to become active participants in the dynamic interplay between past and present, and between personal memories and collective history.

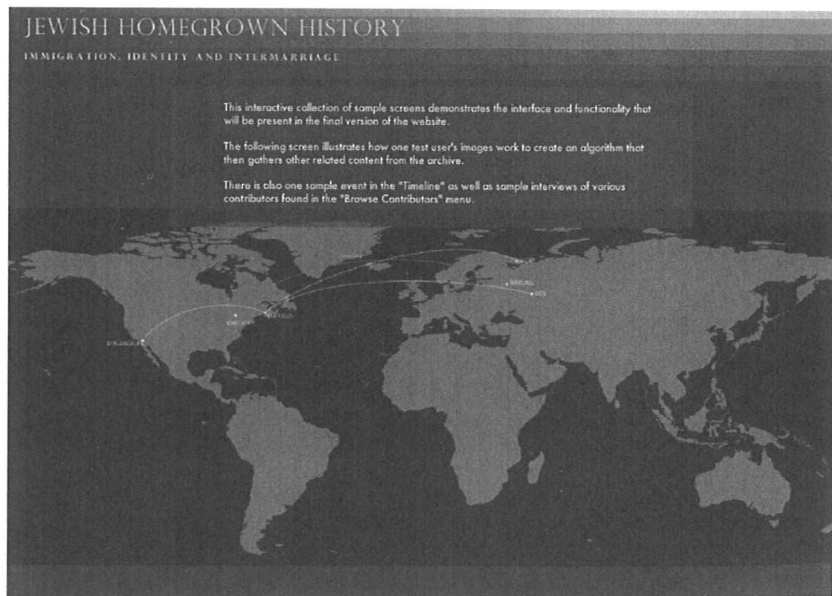
This unique dialogic process is made possible by our “homegrown history” application, which we are making available to others as free open-source software. Thus, our project has two goals: to present a visually compelling and historically rigorous cultural history of Jews in America, and to provide an innovative national model that can be applied to other subjects. Although this “homegrown history” software was originally designed to show the distinctive nature of the Jewish experience, we have developed it so that it can easily be adapted to other ethnic groups. We believe this duality helps to demonstrate how Jews are deeply connected to the rest of the world.

When we began this project, we saw this dialogue as analogous to the struggle described by post-colonialist theorist Homi Bhaba—between an official “pedagogic” history imposed on a nation to create unity and order versus a “performative” history emerging from disempowered people on the margins to reaffirm their own complexity and difference.³ But instead of emphasizing this binary relationship between top-down and bottom-up forms of history, we realized (after discussions with many historians on our Advisory Board) that it was more productive to challenge the fixed boundaries between personal and “official” history. We used three strategies to blur these boundaries: featuring excerpts from scholarly histories and documentaries that use personal testimonies as primary evidence,⁴ allowing contributions of other users to function as published history, and asking scholarly interviewees to describe their own family histories. We remain committed to an open-ended performative history that leverages the gaps in our knowledge as a driving force of inquiry.

What does this mean in concrete terms for users of the on-line archive? If users choose the **Collecting Mode**, they fill out a brief questionnaire that enables them to contribute information about themselves and their families.⁵ The first set of questions asks them to trace their family immigration trajectories from the earliest known point of origin, to the location where they are now living. An open text-box enables them to explain the reasons why each person left each particular site, and why they chose the next location. Depending on their knowledge of family history, they can fill out this information for as many

individuals as they want and for as many locations as they need. Alternatively, they can return to and revise their stories after they have gathered more information. After inputting this information, their family trajectories appear on the map as color-coded lines connecting the various cities where they have lived (see Figure 1). This interactive map enables users to see how their own storytelling becomes part of the public record. They also see how their trajectories intersect with those entered by other users.

Figure 1: *The family trajectories of contributors appear on the map as color-coded lines connecting the various cities where they have lived. This interactive map enables users to see the impact of their own storytelling on the public record.*



The second set of questions concern the current location of oneself and one's family. After naming the city and state where they now reside and the year when they first settled there, they are asked to describe their first neighborhood in this city and how it has changed. The third set of questions concern identity. Where did you go to school? What kind of work do you do? How would you describe you or your family's relationship to Judaism? Are you currently a member of a synagogue? Do you speak Yiddish or Hebrew? Is there intermarriage in your family? What is your own attitude towards intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews? You are then asked: what story best captures you or your family's experience as Jews living in your city.

Most of these questions are open-ended, which means users decide how brief or how long to make their stories. They also decide whether they want to upload a series of photographs or excerpts from home movies (see Figure 2). They are asked to include a caption for each photograph and to provide some basic metadata (year, location, names of people, themes, events), which will function as searchable key words for these contributions. Before any of this data can become part of the “public record” on the website, the contributor must check a box granting Labyrinth non-exclusive world rights to exhibit these materials on-line and in its installations and to make them part of USC’s Digital Archive. The data will also be reviewed by monitors to make sure that the content is not obscene, inflammatory or libelous, and by Labyrinth’s staff to select those materials that will be included in the museum installation.

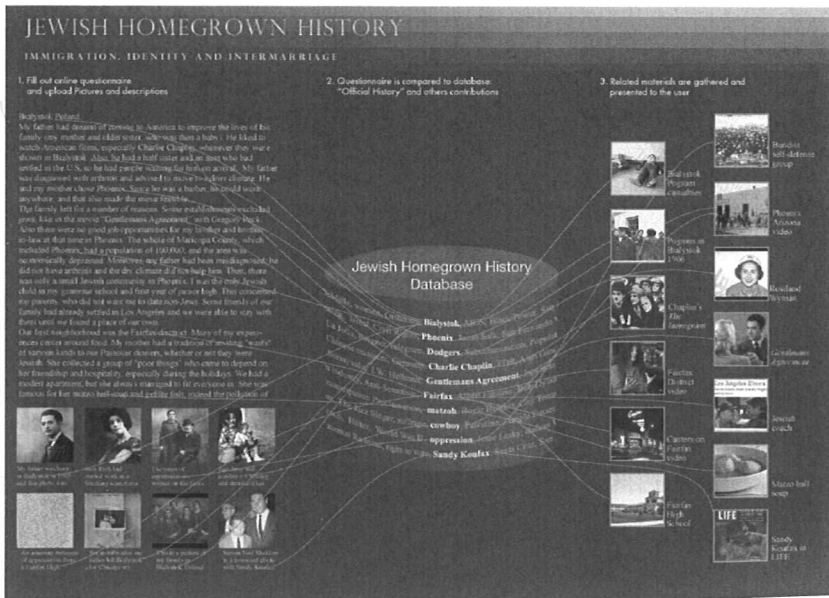
Figure 2: Contributors decide whether they want to upload a series of photographs and whether they want to contribute excerpts from home movies. They are asked to include a caption for each photograph and to provide some basic metadata (year, location, names of people, themes, events), which will function as searchable key words for these contributions.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://jewishhomegrownhistory.com/questionnaire/upload>. The page title is "JEWISH HOMEGROWN HISTORY" with the subtitle "IMMIGRATION, IDENTITY AND INTERMARRIAGE". The main heading is "Upload Your Photographs and Video Here". Below this, there is a section for "shortTitle" with the text "Friends and Family, Bialystok, Poland, 1927". A photograph of a group of people is displayed. To the right of the photo, there are input fields for "year" (1927), "place" (Bialystok, Poland), "name of people pictured (optional)", and "events (optional)". Below the photo, there is a "Description (please be as detailed as possible)" field with a text area containing a story about a family in Bialystok. At the bottom of the form, there is a checkbox for "By checking this box, I grant the University of Southern California non-exclusive electronic rights to use my images and text in the online and installation versions of Jewish Homegrown History and in the archive of the USC Libraries." and two checkboxes for "Agree" and "Disagree".

Once a contributor completes the password-protected questionnaire and uploads family photographs and home movies, our “homegrown history” software follows a programmed protocol to collect materials from the archive that are related to these contributions. Using pre-selected key words (e.g., events,

themes, places, proper names), the program uses an algorithm to make these automated selections (see Figure 3). The user is then able to select and view any of these materials in the **Content Viewer**, or save any of them for later retrieval. Providing an historical scaffolding of archival information about a particular period and place, these collected materials contextualize the user's own personal experience; and, conversely, the user's personal contributions give Labyrinth an opportunity to enrich, complicate or qualify what is already in the existing database.

Figure 3: This diagram shows how the dialogue between personal contributions and historical modules works. Once a contributor completes the questionnaire and uploads images, our "homegrown history" software follows a programmed protocol to collect materials from the database that are related to these materials. Using pre-selected key words (e.g., events, themes, places, proper names), the program uses an algorithm to make these automated selections.



We see this encounter as "dialogic" in the Bakhtinian sense: examples from both kinds of history (the personal and the published) become enriched through juxtaposition, and their meanings are redefined in the process. As M. Bakhtin puts it: "The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments" (281).

THE CASE OF ROSALIE NEWELL

To consider how this dialogic process works for individual users, we will examine a few specific stories, photographs, and home movies contributed by one user and see what materials they call up from the archive and how meanings are changed in the process. As our case study we will use Rosalie Newell, a 71-year-old Jewish woman currently living in the Fairfax district of Los Angeles (see Figure 4).

Rosalie's descriptions of her family's experience in Bialystok call up vivid passages from *The Bialystoker Memorial Book*, with accompanying images and detailed accounts of the deadly pogroms that made her parents want to flee Poland. This source also describes the historic role played by the Bund (the Jewish Union) in Bialystok, including their efforts to save fellow Jews from these anti-Jewish race riots. The Bund is described as secular and anti-Zionist, yet committed to Yiddish culture, which might help contextualize Rosalie's own combination of secularism (what she calls "missing the faith gene") and her immersion in *Yiddishkeit*, a combination she previously found difficult to explain.

Figure 4: Rosalie Newell's stories and family photographs call up historical modules from many different sources, each represented by a thumbnail image. She can choose which ones to open and which ones to preserve.



Although her family first settled in Chicago where Rosalie was born, most of her vivid childhood memories come from Arizona, where they moved because her father was asthmatic. Rosalie's stories about her family's experience in Phoenix during the 1940s begin with the rush of pleasure she felt when first experiencing the wide-open spaces of Arizona (particularly in contrast with the urban density of Chicago). These stories are accompanied by a photograph of her and her niece dressed in cowgirl outfits. This image calls up a passage from Sean Griffin's essay "Kings of the Wild Backyard: Davy Crockett and Children's Space," which explains how suburban parents during the post-war period tried to give their children a sense of liberty while still carefully restricting their spatial mobility to the backyard. The image also retrieves a similar period photograph from another contributor, showing her participation in the same Western costuming fad. Griffin's text might encourage Rosalie to search these two photographs (and her memories) for signs that would support (or contradict) his claim that "girls used the 'cowgirl' in order to complicate the gender boundaries that were already impinging on them. . . . [for] at least some girls were ignoring how the adult world would have preferred them to use Davy's image" (Griffin 115–17).

Rosalie's claim that her family decided to leave Phoenix partly because she had no Jewish friends and they feared she might end up marrying a gentile, calls up an excerpt from Isaac Artenstein's documentary, *Frontier Jews*, on the history of Jews in Tucson, Tombstone and other parts of Arizona. The oral histories in this excerpt might make her question whether her family's fears were well-grounded. Yet her story makes us notice that Artenstein's film does not cover Phoenix. In other words, both her family story and Artenstein's clip call attention to gaps in their respective contributions which we might otherwise fail to notice.

When Rosalie claims her father wanted to move to Los Angeles partly in hope of meeting Charlie Chaplin, she then adds "probably he was just joking." These comments call up three items that suggest he may not have been kidding after all: a textual passage from J. Hoberman's essay, "The First 'Jewish' Superstar: Charlie Chaplin" which explains why Chaplin (a non-Jew) appealed to so many Jewish immigrants; a brief segment from an on-screen interview with USC historian Steven J. Ross claiming that Chaplin was frequently identified as a Jewish immigrant; and an excerpt from *Three Winters in the Sun: Einstein in California*, an earlier Labyrinth project, indicating that the person whom Jewish scientist Albert Einstein most wanted to meet in California was also Charlie Chaplin, with whom he closely identified.⁶

Rosalie's description of her teenage years in the Fairfax district, a Jewish enclave of Los Angeles, calls up related passages about the neighborhood from Stephen Sass' book, *Jewish Los Angeles—A Guide* (1982), Lynn Kronzek's "Fairfax: A Home, a Community, and a Way of Life" (1990), and Deborah Dash Moore's *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (1996), each with accompanying archival stills from USC Libraries' Special Collections. It also retrieves recent interviews with Nira Levy Maslin, a Yemenite Jewish émigré from Israel who runs a tea-shop on Fairfax Avenue that features African drumming and is part of the "Jewish Renaissance"; and with independent scholar Lynn Kronzek, who describes the early suburban days of the Fairfax area before it became a Jewish enclave and tells how living in that district in the 1980s helped make her husband decide to become a rabbi.

In addition to her stories and photographs, Rosalie contributed two home movies she made herself in 1995, both featuring her mother at age ninety, still living in the Fairfax area. One shows her mother making a potato kugel, which calls up a passage by cultural historian Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (whose family also came from Poland), describing typical Jewish food preparations from Eastern Europe. This excerpt comes from a book she wrote with her father, the painter Mayer Kirshenblatt, which makes us attend to the collaborative dimension in Rosalie's movie as well. While highlighting her mother's talents as a cook, Rosalie was also developing her own new talent as a videographer. Rosalie's second movie shows her mother reading an article in Yiddish from the *Forward*, a Jewish-American newspaper published in separate Yiddish and English editions. Describing the influx of Russian émigré Jews moving into the Fairfax district during the late 1980s and 1990s, this article evokes a clip from Lynne Littman's film *In Her Own Time* (1985), which documents Barbara Myerhoff's ethnographic study of the Russian orthodox Jewish community living in the same Fairfax area. While Rosalie's 90-year old mother sympathized with these orthodox Jews, yet felt distant from them culturally, Myerhoff was drawn to their spirituality and strong sense of community, particularly as she herself was in a final battle against lung cancer. Still, both collaborations show the filmmaker (whether a professional like Littman or an amateur like Rosalie) expressing her love for her vibrant subject by documenting her courageous engagement with the outside world—even while nearing death.

Within her stories about living in the Fairfax district, Rosalie gives a detailed account of her own experience at Fairfax High School in the 1950s when the student body was predominantly Jewish and when she had teachers who were intellectually demanding. This description brings forth a brief film (made

by Labyrinth), citing a passage from Moore's *To the Golden Cities* that confirms Fairfax was one of the few places in Southern California where one could find a Jewish public school and that it was also one of the first to offer Hebrew as a foreign language. Yet this film also points out that neither the Wikipedia entry on Fairfax High, nor the school's own official website mentions its past associations with the Jewish community. Instead, these contemporary websites describe Fairfax as an inner city school that experienced "white flight" during the 1980s and that now has a predominantly Latino and African American student body. In making this participatory history, we feel it is essential to include excerpts not only from scholarly sources but also from popular participatory sites such as Wikipedia. But, as in this example of Fairfax High School, we also feel compelled to show what is sometimes omitted from those sites. As if to reconcile the differences among these various accounts, the program also calls up an interview with a young "Jewish Latina," who attended Fairfax in the 1980s, and claims it was very diverse from an ethnic standpoint, and, in particular, included Jews from all over the world. It also retrieves a front-page article from the *Los Angeles Times* (Getlin) about Rosalie's favorite history teacher Marty Biegel, an Orthodox Jew who later became the basketball coach. In 1969 Biegel played an historical role in easing the city's racial tensions, when he helped integrate Fairfax High by encouraging the new black students (then being bussed across the city) to play on the basketball team. This started a new era of athletic achievement for Fairfax, which had formerly been known only for its champion chess team.

One of Rosalie's most "treasured" contributions is her family photograph of her nephew with Jewish pitcher Sandy Koufax, who played for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Besides being ardent baseball fans, her family admired Koufax for refusing to pitch at the opening game of the World Series, when it fell on Yom Kippur. This photograph brings forward two historical modules from the archive that present a less favorable perspective toward the Dodgers' move to Los Angeles and toward some of the Jews who made it happen. One is an archival photograph showing Los Angeles Councilwoman Rosalind Weiner Wyman from the Fairfax District (the youngest person and first Jew to sit on the Council), with the city fathers, signing the agreement that promised to build the new Dodger Stadium that would bring them from Brooklyn. This photograph is accompanied by a passage from Moore's *To The Golden Cities* that describes the bitter conflict that developed between Weiner (who received death threats) and her former liberal Latino ally, Edward Roybal of Boyle Heights, over the destruction of public housing in Chavez Ravine, which

was done in order to make way for the stadium. The program also brings up an archival photograph of Rose Chernin (Executive Director of the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born [LACPFB]) with an excerpt from historian George Sanchez's award-winning essay "What's Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews," which provides an even harsher account of Weiner's break from her former liberal stance and her alleged alliance with leftist causes in Boyle Heights.

Often discussed as the second liberal on the council in the 1950s—joining Edward Roybal from Boyle Heights—Wyman critically shaped her political ideology from the postwar suburban sensibilities of Los Angeles's Westside liberalism. While this liberalism included moderate support for civil rights efforts in the city, it also was staunchly anticommunist. Wyman joined the vast majority of her colleagues after 1952 in viewing public housing, for example, as a suspicious socialist experiment, and she led efforts within the city council from 1956 to 1958 in handing over Chavez Ravine to Walter O'Malley to facilitate the move of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles (653).

Sanchez shows that Wyman's conflicts with the more radical Jewish community in Boyle Heights were not limited to the struggle over Chavez Ravine. He reports how in 1958 she presented a citation to two FBI undercover agents, Marion and Paul Miller, who gave evidence about the "inner workings of the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born" during the early 1950s. This citation incensed the LACPFB and "especially its executive director, Rose Chernin, who . . . orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to the city council, particularly directed at Wyman." This incident also brings forth a related interview with Esther Raucher, who grew up in the leftist Jewish community of City Terrace (near Boyle Heights) but who attended Fairfax High in the late 1950s, where she became friends with Rosalie Newell. In the interview Raucher describes a class reunion in City Terrace where she confronted the son of FBI agents (like the Millers), who had been responsible for sending the parents of some of their schoolmates to prison. Interestingly, although Rosalie Newell and Esther Raucher were allied to different sides of this conflict, they had never discussed these episodes from Los Angeles Jewish history until this program brought the relevant modules together.

What emerges from this particular collection of historical modules is a database narrative about the Fairfax district as a Los Angeles neighborhood that became an important Jewish enclave around the end of World War II. Fairfax remained so in later decades, as it continued to attract more Orthodox

Jews (particularly from Russia during the 1980s and 1990s), many of whom sent their children to Jewish schools rather than to public schools like Fairfax High. Yet ever since the late 1960s, this Fairfax district also continued to display a growing range of ethnic diversity, especially encompassing Latinos and African Americans, whose relations with Jews became more complex. While Rosalie Newell might choose to watch and read only some of these contextualizing materials, they would all be available as possible modules for her own personalized database narrative.

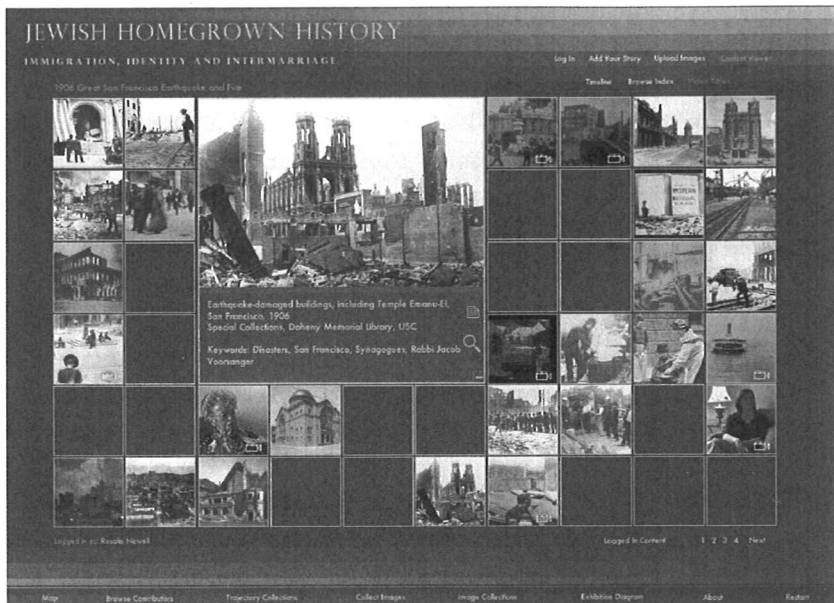
BROWSING THE TIMELINE

Instead of contributing their family stories like Rosalie Newell, some users who come to the on-line archive may choose the **Browsing Mode**, which enables them to explore the historical materials we have already collected. A **Search Engine** enables them to request specific names, places, and themes, a request that brings forth all relevant archival materials (texts, images, interviews, charts, film clips, sound files—both from the published history and personal stories) related to a given key word or words. From these targeted materials, the user then selects the ones she wants to see and in what order, selections that can be played within the **Content Viewer**. The browsing user can also choose historical events from the timeline, whether they are global, national or local in context. Given that the archive will be accessible worldwide, a drop-down menu will enable users to select which location will be designated the local site, to which all other data will be related.

For example, if a user selects the “1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire” from the timeline as a local California event (see Figure 5), the program will gather the following modules: Ava Kahn’s 1988 interview with the late Reva Aronson, who was six at the time of the earthquake and whose family sought refuge in Golden Gate Park; a brief movie that features a passage from Harriet Lane Levy’s memoir, *920 O’Farrell Street: A Jewish Girlhood in Old San Francisco* read in voice-over, describing what she saw when she returned home to San Francisco after the fire, with archival images showing the devastation and what buildings later replaced her home; an excerpt from our interview with Frances Dinkelspiel (author of *Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias Hellman Created California*, a meticulously researched biography of her great, great-grandfather; see her article elsewhere in this volume) explaining the impact of this disaster on Hellman and his family and on the banking industry, a number of brief period films of the devastation and its

aftermath from the Library of Congress collection; a montage of stills of the damage from the USC archive, which are combined with first person accounts (including one by movie mogul Sol Lesser) collected by Rabbi William Kramer and by Ava Kahn; passages from Fred Rosenbaum's book *Visions of Reform: Congregation Emanu-El and the Jews of San Francisco, 1849-1999*, with accompanying still images, concerning the impact the earthquake had on the construction of synagogues in San Francisco; and an excerpt from an interview with California historian Kevin Starr, on how the devastation gave Jews in San Francisco a second chance to participate in building the city.

Figure 5: If a user selects the "1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire" from the timeline, the program will gather from the database an array of historical materials, including archival images, interviews, historic films from the Library of Congress, first person accounts of those who survived it, and excerpts from published histories.



Although we have had to "seed" the archive during the early period of its development in order to collect the assets for the events listed in the timeline and to create the interactive dialogue between Rosalie's personal stories and the related published history modules they call up from the database, as the project grows, the making of connections of this nature will become easier because many of the associated materials will be coming from contributions by other users and by scholars who contribute excerpts from their own works. Yet,

before the on-line archive is publicly launched, we will have modules of “official history” for all of the themes and for all of the events listed in the timeline.

JEWS IN THE GOLDEN STATE: THE CALIFORNIA PILOT

While this dialogic dimension between personal and public history is the unique feature of the on-line archive, it is our particular focus on the California perspective that distinguishes the traveling museum installation from other cultural histories of the Jews. By starting with the history of Jews in California (as opposed to Jews in New York, Chicago or Philadelphia, about which a good deal more is known and which is therefore far more familiar to the public), we leverage this gap in our knowledge as a rationale for developing a new line of inquiry.

This assumption that little is known about Jews in California is a conviction shared not only by the California historians on our Advisory Board such as Bill Deverell, Frances Dinkelspiel, Marc Dollinger, Ava Kahn, David Kaufman, Fred Rosenbaum, Kevin Starr, and Karen Wilson, but also by Jewish studies scholars based in the East—such as Hasia M. Diner, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Deborah Dash Moore, Jonathan Sarna, and Jeffrey Shandler. For example, when we interviewed California historian Kevin Starr, he argued that the “instant urbanism” experienced by San Francisco and Los Angeles was not characteristic of the growth patterns of large eastern cities like New York and Philadelphia, and that this acceleration was partly driven by the urbanism of German Jewish immigrants who came to California very early. When we interviewed “bicoastal” Jewish Studies scholar Moses Rischin, who had lived both in New York and California and later migrated from Los Angeles to San Francisco, he claimed that the concept of Jewish community was quite different in each of these locales—differences we plan to explore in detail. As we examined the complex interactions between Jews and Latinos in Los Angeles neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and the Fairfax District and in the border zones between San Diego and Tijuana, we realized these stories have not yet been told in depth and they are quite different from the interactions between Jews and Puerto Ricans, for example, in New York. We are contextualizing these gathered stories not only with work from Jewish studies scholars who are focusing on the west (like Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger) but also from historians of the West (such as Bill Deverell, George Sanchez and Kevin Starr) whose previous works have not focused primarily on Jews. We are also searching the Shoah Institute Archives, now housed at USC, seeking testimonies of Holocaust survivors who settled in California after World War

II, finding out why they chose to come here, what kinds of Jewish communities they found, what kinds of experiences they had, and how they both enrich and complicate the story of Jews in the Golden State. We will follow the same strategy for selecting testimonies from those survivors who settled in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and other cities, once the installation moves to the east.

By starting with a less traditional site for Jewish history like California, we also draw greater attention to the interplay among the local, the national, and the global aspects of the story. After the California pilot, each new exhibition will feature the locale in which it is exhibited (devoting around twenty-five to thirty percent of its materials to that specific location), while still retaining the national scope of the Jewish experience in the U.S. (which will then include the materials on California) and networked connections to international sites where Jews have lived throughout the world. The project demonstrates that all three contexts—the local, the national, and the global—are shifters whose meanings change, depending on the perspective of the viewer.

The installation will differ from the on-line archive by featuring a large-scale, multi-screen, curated presentation. In many ways, it will be modeled on *The Danube Exodus*, which premiered at the Getty Center in 2002 and has been traveling worldwide ever since. We believe the success of that earlier installation was based primarily on the immersive power of its images and sounds and the richness of the historical narrative they convey. These are also the qualities we are seeking in the installation version of *Jewish Homegrown History*, whose interactive dimensions will not be as central as they are on the on-line archive but whose sensory presentation will be far more compelling.

When visitors first enter the exhibition space, they will pass by a kiosk that invites them to use a very simple interface to enter basic information about the immigration trajectories of their own families. Once submitted, this information will be instantly displayed as animated lines that are visible on a world map, projected onto the floor. The display of this personal information will not only establish the groundwork for what is to come but also make the visitor feel more personally involved in the exhibition. Ten visitor trajectories will be visible on the floor with only the latest being highlighted at any given time. All of the trajectories will be collected over the run of the exhibition, and an updated summary of this data will be displayed at all times within the exhibition space.

The installation will also feature a series of documentary film screenings on related subjects, along with the best of the home movies we collect. These screenings will take place in a separate room (with seating) near the primary exhibition space.

Once visitors move deeper into the main exhibition area, they will see three large (six foot by eight foot) screens, each fronted by an accompanying touch-screen monitor. The individual monitors will display at least ten icons per screen. If no one has made a selection from one of the touch-screens, each main screen will display a brief (five to seven minute) film loop on one of the project's three main sub-themes. The screen on the left will display a film loop about "Immigration & Migration," the center screen about "Identity & Cultural Contributions," and the screen on the right about "Intermarriage & Other Alliances." These three film loops will have little or no dialogue (though they might have an occasional brief text or inter-title), and will all work with one ambient sound track that will be heard throughout the space.

As soon as a visitor selects an icon displayed on a touch-screen monitor, a mini-narrative (what we call a thematic "orchestration") will interrupt all three film loops (starting with the large screen that the interactor is directly facing and then spreading to the others) as it plays out across all three large screens. Since this selection will control both the images and sounds and determine what everyone in the room is experiencing, the user will suddenly be positioned as a performer. The selection process will work like a jukebox, with the chosen orchestrations (each no more than three to five minutes in length) queuing up in sequential order for playback. Although it will not be possible to interrupt an orchestration while it is playing, other selections can be explored and chosen on the other two touch-screen monitors. This dynamic ensures that visitors take turns and that no single person gets two choices in a row. Given that each monitor will have a different set of icons that trigger different orchestrations, users will be encouraged to move from one monitor to another.

Each thematic orchestration will combine archival images and footage, excerpts from documentaries and original interviews, brief textual quotations and voice-over commentaries, music and ambient sounds, and the best of what we have gleaned from family photographs, home movies and stories collected on the website and during "home-movie" collection days we are hosting throughout the state. New modules will be added during the four-month run of the exhibition, so that more recent contributions to the website can be incorporated into the installation. This "updating" process will also enable us to adapt the installation more easily to new exhibition sites—not only in California (in Berkeley and San Diego) but also in Philadelphia, New York and other venues across the nation, thereby enriching the interplay among the local, national and global contexts for the various themes.

Given that each touch-screen monitor displays approximately ten icons,

each of which triggers a brief thematic orchestration (three to five minutes in length), there will be a minimum of ninety minutes of video. Whenever a visitor rolls over an icon, a brief text will appear that explains what that particular orchestration will cover, thereby helping the user make a selection.

Although each large screen and its accompanying touch-screen monitor will be linked to one of the sub-themes, all of the thematic orchestrations are designed to demonstrate the rich interplay among these issues of Immigration, Identity and Intermarriage. Similarly, although the issues of *Immigration & Migration* stress global connections, while *Identity & Cultural Contributions* emphasize the Jewish legacy for the nation, and *Intermarriage & Other Alliances* explore attitudes and close relations with other ethnic groups within a specific locale, the installation is constructed to show that all of these positions are shifters whose meanings depend on the user's perspective and point of view. In this way, visitors experience the installation as a database narrative, whose meanings keep changing depending on how the thematic orchestrations are remixed.

Some orchestrations in the installation will leverage discoveries that open new lines of inquiry. For example, one theme that emerged during our research is the important role that Jewish Americans have played in the information, computer and communications technology industries, particularly within California—a story that has never been fully told. We started to address this issue in our interview with Jack Tramiel (now in his 90s), the founder of Commodore Computers, who later bought Atari and who witnessed the dramatic rise of Silicon Valley. We are now following this up by doing interviews with several other figures in this field, including USC Viterbi Professor of Engineering Solomon Wolf Golomb, who, while supervising a telecommunications research group at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in the late 1950s, played a major role in designing deep-space communications for lunar and planetary explorations. Perhaps best known to the general public for his invention of polyominoes, that inspired the popular computer game *Tetris*, he has received many awards for his exceptional contributions to information sciences and systems over the past four decades, and more specifically, for applying advanced mathematics to problems in digital communications. Golomb claims that his early Talmudic training helped him master mathematics and information theory, not because it followed the same logic but because it was another kind of logical system that was equally demanding. We are exploring how extensive the role of Jewish Americans has been in this field; what, if any, has been the role played by Israeli émigrés; and what aspects of Jewish culture have contributed to this pattern.

As in the on-line archive, knowledge production in the installation will depend primarily on a montage of images. But, how does one develop an argument primarily through images while still retaining the plurality of meanings that every photograph and filmic image carries? As Roland Barthes has argued in his essay “The Rhetoric of the Image”:

In every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques . . . The caption . . . helps me to choose *the correct level of perception*, permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding. . . . The text has thus a *repressive* value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested (38–40).

While we want to direct the readings of these images, we do not want to suppress their pluralistic meanings through the imposition of too many voice-overs and inter-titles. Instead we want to broaden the range of meanings through interplay between text and image, sound and visualization. This interplay also demands a reliance on dialectic montage—where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This concept was theorized not only by the great filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (whose subject was always history), but also by Bakhtin, whose ideas on the dialogic potential of multi-voiced forms laid the groundwork for intertextuality and also for database narrative.

For example, as we take the cluster of historical modules that are retrieved from the database for the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire in the on-line archive, and transform them into a brief (three to five minute) orchestration (or mini-narrative) for the three large screens in the installation, our editing of these materials will develop a particular reading of that event. The combination of image, voice and sound might emphasize that this natural disaster gave Jews an opportunity to participate more fully in rebuilding the city and in designing a more dramatic presence for the Jewish community—a perspective that would be particularly apparent in tracing the impact of what happened to the synagogues (as described by Fred Rosenbaum). On the other hand, it might also be possible to see these disastrous events as unifying all San Franciscans, because they all had experienced the same trauma. According to Frances Dinkelspiel, even a rich Jewish banker—like Isaias W. Hellman and his family—stood in the soup lines and sought refuge in Golden Gate Park. And once they had endured and survived this disaster, what kinds of new safety

measures and new public pleasures were designed for the rugged citizens of this city? In what ways did this disaster and its aftermath contribute to the increasing assimilation of Jews in San Francisco? Our orchestration will interweave both readings, as they play across the three large screens.

Montage will also be central to an orchestration on generational conflicts between parents and children, particularly over issues of orthodoxy and religious practice. As a starting point we discovered striking parallel sequences from two of the documentaries that will be included in our series—Lynne Littman's *In Her Own Time* (1985), which documents Barbara Myerhoff's ethnographic study of orthodox Jews living in LA's Fairfax district, and Lisa M. Kors's *Shayna Maidels* (1991), which tells the story of teenage Jewish orthodox girls attending YULA (the Yeshiva University of Los Angeles) and the religious conflicts they have with their parents who are less orthodox than they are. Both films feature a powerful sequence in which a mother and daughter confront each other, yet the religious alignments are reversed: in Littman's film it is the mother who is orthodox, whereas in Kors' film it is the daughter. Yet both evoke an equally intense resentment in the other. While working on how we would use these parallel sequences in the orchestration and draw on their similar visual compositions, we discovered by sheer coincidence that the mother in *Shayna Maidels* was the ex-wife of historian George Sanchez, whom we had interviewed a few days after first watching the film but without knowing the connection. Following our strategy of asking all scholars we interview to tell us about their own family history, I asked Sanchez to describe his own relationship to Judaism. He told us that he had converted from Catholicism to Judaism while he was married to his ex-wife who was Jewish, and he also spoke with pride about having two Jewish step-daughters, one of whom (the orthodox teen featured in Kors's film) was now living in Israel.

This coincidence involving Sanchez strengthened the connection of these two films (neither of which mentions intermarriage) with a more recent documentary that does, Lisa Leeman's *Out of Faith* (2008), which focuses on generational conflict within a Jewish family in Chicago. While the first generation (the grandmother and grandfather) were Holocaust survivors, the second generation was born in Israel, and two from the third generation married outside the faith. Although the grandmother accepts her granddaughter's marriage to a Christian, she disowns her grandson for doing the same thing. Still, the film presents the grandmother in a sympathetic light. We can understand her reasons for condemning intermarriage, particularly in light of her own experiences in the death camp and the promises she made to those who

did not survive. Though the grandson refused to be interviewed on camera, we hear his speech at his grandmother's funeral. While watching these moving scenes with the grandmother from *Out of Faith*, I could not help thinking of an anecdote (recounted with some irony and humor) in our interview with USC Historian Steve Ross, whose mother (also a survivor of Auschwitz) told him, when he asked her, at the age of thirty, whether she would mind if he married a non-Jew: "No, I won't mind, I'll just stick my head in the oven and turn on the gas."

By reading *Out of Faith* in juxtaposition with the other two films (*Shayna Maidels* and *In Her Own Time*), I realized that the basic transgenerational dynamics were far more important than they might otherwise have appeared. Instead of following the anticipated generational alternation between orthodoxy and secularism (as occurs in *Shayna Maidels* and *In her Own Time*), the family in *Out of Faith* continues to move farther away from orthodoxy. Perhaps that helps explain why the grandmother was so much harsher on her grandson than she was on her granddaughter, because *his* father had also married a Christian, but one (unlike her daughter-in-law) who had converted to Judaism. Thus, although the grandmother had suppressed her anger toward her son in light of that conversion, it was now unleashed with double intensity on her grandson. These transgenerational dynamics are perhaps best understood when one looks at all of these texts together, and in light of the passage from Jonathan Sarna already quoted at the beginning of this essay (see p. 97).

ON WORDS AND IMAGES

From these descriptions of how the interactive on-line archive and the immersive installation will function, it becomes clear that we are not really *writing* a cultural history about Jews in California, or Jews in America. Rather we have designed a transmedia structure—an information system—that gathers and combines the contributions of scholars, archivists, documentary filmmakers and the general public in productive ways and that engages this social network in an on-going process that will continue generating new historical narratives about Jews in America long after the California pilot closes. This is another sense in which our project becomes *Jewish Homegrown History*.

Notes

- *. For a link to larger versions of this and other illustrations see http://casdeninstitute.usc.edu/resources/publications/the_jewish_role_in_american_li_6/.
- 1. For a brief history of the Labyrinth Project, see Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel, eds., *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*, 342–59. Also visit Labyrinth's website: <www.thelabyrinthproject.com>.
- 2. For example, in *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich writes: "I prefer to think of them as two competing imaginations, two basic creative impulses, two essential responses to the world. . . . Modern media is the new battlefield for the competition between database and narrative" (233–34).
- 3. Bhabha also acknowledges the productive interplay between these two kinds of history: "In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*" (297).
- 4. Two examples are *Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush: A Documentary History, 1849–1880*, a wide range of first-hand accounts collected and edited by historian Ava F. Kahn; and Harriet Lane Levy's *920 O'Farrell Street: A Jewish Girlhood in Old San Francisco*, a lively memoir of an affluent young Jewish woman from San Francisco who was a good friend of Alice B. Toklas.
- 5. Although not a complete version with full functionality, a prototype of the questionnaire can be found at <<http://jewishhomegrownhistory.com>>.
- 6. To learn more about Labyrinth's *Three Winters in the Sun: Einstein in California*, see: <<http://college.usc.edu/labyrinth/einstein/einstein.html>>; Teicholz; and Kinder, Kang and Kratky.

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