

The Fractured Jew

Popular Culture

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The Fractured Jew

*An Exploration of Modern Jewish Ontology via
Identities in Popular Culture*

By

Joel West



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*Dedicated to the memory of my very first teacher:
Elsie West (1933–2020)
Esther Brayneh bat Yeshayahu v' Dobeḥ Mireh Z'L
(26th of Shvat, 5693–2nd Tevet 5781)*



The result of Emancipation was to make Jewish identity a private commitment rather than a legal status, leaving it a complex mix of destiny and choice.

SELTZER, 1980

•••

These are a swinging bunch of people. I mean I've heard of persecution, but what they went thorough is *ridiculous*! There wasn't anybody who didn't take a shot at 'em. The whole world kept saying, "You can't do this" and "You can't do that," but they didn't listen. It's beautiful. They just plain didn't listen. They'd get kicked out of one place, so they'd just go on to the next one and keep swinging like they wanted to, believing in themselves and in their right to have rights, asking nothing but for people to leave 'em alone and get off their backs, and having the guts to fight to get themselves a little peace. But the great thing is, after thousands of years of holding on and waiting and fighting, they finally made it.

DAVIS JR., 1965

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'Jewish', graffiti artwork, San Francisco

PHOTO BY 'KODAK VIEWS', MARCH 1, 2012, [HTTPS://FLIC.KR/P/BZWWW6](https://flic.kr/p/BZWWW6).

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Preface and Acknowledgements

What This Book Is Not

This book began as a fifty-to-seventy-word paper on Judaism, toward completion of my master's degree. Over time it grew and was nourished by several sources, including the tutelage of my master's degree advisor, Professor Kenneth Green, and in discussion with others. While Judaism and Jewishness are not currently the focus of my academic work, I have always been interested in my own Jewishness and the manner in which it manifests itself, and also in the way that others understand Jewishness. So many times, I have encountered possibly good natured or even possibly micro-aggressive misunderstandings of what Judaism is, such as: "So Kosher means blessed by a Rabbi?" or, "Is this the holiday when you fast or the one with the latkes?" or, "Why do you cut your children?" or even, "My other Jewish friend doesn't keep the Sabbath so why do you?" While exhausting, these are examples from the outside, from outsiders looking into Judaism and Jewishness. Due to these misunderstandings, a book about Judaism, written for non-Jews makes sense.

So, why write another book about Jews in popular culture? Why popular culture at all? We know that Jews have seemingly dominated the entertainment industry. Furthermore, as the title of Alan Zweig's documentary, *When Jews Were Funny* (2013) takes for granted, not too long ago, there was a time that Jews seemingly dominated the world of professional comedy. This stereotype that Jews were somehow synonymous with entertainment and culture has been studied and continues to be studied. The lens used in most of these works is from the point of view of the general culture in which we live, and these studies are both important and valid and deserves understanding. So, understanding the place of Jews, as Jews, in popular culture, is not what this book is about.

I was fortunate, while pursuing my master's degree in Religion with a collaborative specialization in Jewish studies, to have had the leeway to examine Judaism itself, as a culture. Judaism, as its own culture, interacts with the surrounding culture. I chose to consider the fact that, from the point of view of Judaism, that the Jew, Judaism, and Jewish culture are not synonymous or congruent with the cultures in which we exist, that instead, there is a complex interaction of some sort going on. It is this interaction between Jewishness and the surrounding culture that is the subject matter of this work. It was my desire to understand that perhaps the goal of Jews within the surrounding culture is not to assimilate, completely, to become swallowed by the culture that surrounds us, and that instead, perhaps Judaism, rather than being merely a

religion, a nation,¹ or a culture, is a completely different thing or an amalgam of these things. This book is an attempt to understand what kind of thing Judaism is, using popular culture as an example.

The question you may now ask is why popular culture? There are a lot of good answers, but the best answer, I think, is just that, that it is popular. If we agree that Judaism is not merely theological, that is has a cultural and national component, then Jewish culture must stand in relief to something. In this case, that thing is the surrounding culture. Over the centuries, the fact is that Jews and Judaisms have appeared in the Christian and Muslim scriptures, in Shakespeare, in poetry, in prose. The issue here is that these depictions are popular depictions of Jews from an outsider point of view. I was interested in understanding Jewishness from a non-Hegemonic viewpoint, and one that was as comprehensive across time.

In terms of age and seemingly paradoxically, Judaism is simultaneously 3500 years old and 350 years old, depending on what one means by the word Judaism. If one wishes to understand Judaism as an ancient nation and as the antecedent of both Christianity and Islam, with roots in Samaria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Greece, Egypt, Rome, and that Jews who are alive today are the descendants of this people, then Judaism is 3500 years old. If, instead, one wishes to understand that Judaism is a modern religion, then Judaism is merely 350 years old. Furthermore, there are those Jews who disclaim Judaism as a religion but insist that they are Jewish by culture and others who's claim to Jewishness may be fraught. I examine these claims to Jewish identity, not just from a popular cultural point of view, but also from the point of view of Judaism. This idea of identity, and specifically of "Jewishness" is complicated, especially when the modern idea of identity as intersectional comes into play, and I explore some of these complications, specifically the idea of being "partly Jewish," "half-Jewish" and the idea of Jewish typology as reflected in modern denominations.

Of necessity, then, I will need to tread on matters historical, cultural and what would appear to be theological, but all of which are in truth "mere" Judaism.² The truth is that, arguably, Judaism can exist without theology, that one rabbinical definition of an apostate Jew is a person who follows all of Jewish and Judaic law including all traditions and yet still denies that there is a G-d. In this sense, Judaism, at least historically has required certain tenets

1 While I do understand that many, especially white supremacists, want to racialize Jews, to construct a Jewish race, we Jews do not construct ourselves in this way.

2 In my usage 'Mere Judaism' I am obviously recalling theologian C. S. Lewis' book *Mere Christianity* (1954).

of orthopraxy, that Judaism requires ‘proper action,’ as opposed to orthodoxy, or proper belief.³ Just as European colonialists named all of the disparate religions that they encountered on the Indian subcontinent as a single monolithic thing, ‘Hinduism,’ which legacy has left us with a historical mess to untangle, Christian and so called ‘mainstream’ cultural encounters with the various expressions of Judaism throughout the world and their attempts to understand it from an outsider point of view, have left us with the problem of understanding that Judaism is a nation, or Judaism is a religion, or Judaism is a culture, or that Judaism is a collection of traditions, or Judaism is an amalgam of some sort.

A religious studies professor of mine stated, years ago and somewhat acerbically, that where academic philosophy departments had funding, then Buddhism was studied as philosophy and where religion departments had the funding, then Buddhism was studied as religion. I would argue that both of these categories, religion and philosophy, are based in a certain kind of Victorian epistemology, because Buddhists in China are certainly different than Buddhists in California. So too, understanding Judaism as a theology is unfair to both Judaism and to theology, which is a Christian category. In many ways, as an ancient cultural practice that has evolved over millennia, Judaism does not fit into modern categories, however since Judaism exists in the modern world, and is adapting to modern conditions, it is indeed proper that we understand how it represents itself and how it signifies. I am using popular culture as my case study to understand how it is that Jewishness and Judaism signify, given that Jews represent approximately one percent of the world population (Pew Research Centre, 2015).

Sill, belief in something is belief. It is by choice that I neglect the term ‘spirituality’ in this book, since the definition of ‘spiritual’ is “relating to religious matters.” I know that many consider themselves to be spiritual, rather than religious, but really, by definition, this argument is tautological. Instead, I am including all spiritual phenomenological beliefs under a single umbrella, that if one has phenomenological beliefs, one is, in some sense, religious. Belief is belief.

I need to acknowledge the funding support of Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC) and also the moral support of the Anne Tannenbaum Centre for Jewish studies at the University of Toronto. I need to thank several people without whom I could not have written this work. Kenneth Green, a man who has encouraged me in my work and is still, in many ways, a mentor to me. Doris Bergen of the Anne Tannenbaum Centre for Jewish

3 Contract with Christianity, which, in a very general sense, only requires proper belief and with Islam, which requires both proper belief and proper action.

Studies. Marcel Danesi my mentor during my undergraduate studies and Brian Baigrie, my current supervisor. Elana Goldfried, Cindy Do and Bianca Grier read the manuscript and offered suggestions. My great appreciation also to Rob Nagus and Rabbi Ariella Rosen of Hillel at University of Toronto and to Rabbi Zalman Oster the Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Lubavitch Toronto. Most of all. I dedicate this book to my mom, Elsie West, who passed last December and who I still miss terribly.

The Fractured Jew

An Exploration of Jewish Ontology and Identities in Popular Culture

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Abstract

In North America there is a marked difference between being a Jew as a nationality, practicing Judaism as a religion, and being Jewish as a cultural identity. These identities intersect, and while they may well be separate from each other they also inform each other and, in a sense, nourish each other. While many books attempt to understand Jewish performance in the surrounding outside culture, asking questions such as “Why are Jews funny?”, this book attempts to understand North American Jewish identity as a Jewish thing, from a Jewish point of view in relation to both Jews and the outside, Gentile, culture. The book starts off by understanding that Judaism as a religion is denominationalized, that even within North America there is more than one Jewish culture, and that Jewish national identity, while existing historically, is also fraught politically. The idea of who counts as a Jew, to Jews, is questioned and while no answers are supplied, this question will be important in the future. It is also noted that some thinkers have questioned if Judaism is a thing at all, where the claim is that Judaism has no Ontology. In this book, it is demonstrated that while Judaism, Jewishness and the Jew as identities are split apart from each other, and while some definitions are fraught, that each one of these identities is essential to the others for a continued existence.

Keywords

Judaism – Jewishness – Jew – Jewish identity – Jewish trauma – Reform Judaism – Conservative Judaism – Orthodox Judaism – Jews in popular culture – Jewish studies – internalized antisemitism – performative Judaism

Introduction

I am a Jew, and moreover I am a Jewish Jew who practices the religion Judaism. While that may seem like a redundant statement, given what I see as the fractured state of Judaism, in some Jewish circles it is increasingly needful to state a pedigree, such as the fact that in my case, I grew up with other Jews in a Jewish neighborhood in the suburbs of Montreal. I had Jewish friends and lived in a community of Jewish Jews, where we, as a Jewish community, all celebrated the various Jewish holy days. Since many of those people who claim Jewish identity today eschew the religion Judaism while still claiming to be Jewish in terms of identity or ethnicity or culture, it is even more needful for me to state that at eight days old I was circumcised, as is required by Judaic law and, not having been born to the priestly caste, which still exist in a vestigial sense and is patrilineal, my father paid cash to a *Kohen*, one born of that caste, to redeem me from my Judaic obligation to serve the priests.

During Elementary school, I attended a public school during the day, and I also attended an afternoon Hebrew school, where I learned about the manner in which to celebrate the various Holy days in the yearly cycle and, as part of the curriculum I also learned some of the more recent history of my people. I learned some Hebrew. I learned the Biblical stories of my people and, I need to add as a caveat that I am making no claim, here, on the relative truth or falsehood of the Hebrew Bible, whether that truth is literal, metaphorical, exegetical, or other. My parents also sent me to a tutor to learn my *Bar Mitzvah* portion and, unlike the norm, they also sent me to a special tutor to learn to speak Modern Hebrew, which while related to, is a different language than Biblical Hebrew. Growing up, I also picked up some of the rudiments of the Yiddish language, which is a Germanic language that was spoken as a *lingua franca* in Europe and amongst many of the immigrants who arrived in North America from the period starting in the late 19th century through to the mid-20th century.

As I grew up and became an adult, I have been both further from and closer to Judaism, but I always knew that I was born a Jew and would die a Jew no matter what, and that Judaism and the formal study of Judaism has always fascinated me. To paraphrase the Talmud, there is always a long, short way and a short, long way to study Judaism and Jewishness (Eruvin 53b), by which the Talmud mans that there is always a simple way to understand Judaism, but that simple way inevitably ends up being snarled, tangled, arduous and complex; that there is also always a longer way which looks harder, but that is inevitably the simpler of the two paths. So, it is in this study of Jewish representation and how it is that Judaism manifests itself, that you and I may take what we see at face value, or we may choose to dig a bit to see if there is more meaning to what is presented, especially on our screens.

I could have made this book a simple study of Jews in popular culture and humor. I could then discuss Jewish humor and try to answer the questions “Why is Seinfeld so funny?” or “Was Jackie Mason a Rabbi?”¹ This type of study has already been done and includes works such as Dorian Joseph’s *Kvetching and Shpritzing: Jewish Humor in American Popular Culture* (2015), Ruth Wisse’s *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor* (Wisse, 2013) and the documentary *When Jews Were Funny* (Zweig, 2013). The topic of the place of Jews in popular culture has been amply studied, however, the questions these studies answer has more to do with the manner that Judaism fits into popular culture and how Jews, as outsiders, make humor. What was missing from the literature and is still important is the manner in which Jews as insiders depict Judaism in popular culture and what that actually means. If one is to dismiss Jews as just “weird Christians who do *Hanukah* instead of Christmas” then this book is superfluous. Instead, I intend to complicate the relationship between Jew and Culture using historical, philosophical, and what might even be called theological narratives,² to explain the fact that a *Hassidic* Jew from Williamsburg and a Montreal Jew eating forbidden food on the holiest of fast days are in some manner related. Of necessity then, while I am interested in how Jews are represented, I am also interested in the history of Judaism and how these representations came to be in Modernity. Because of this kind of distinction, part of my study will be a history of the Jewish religion and will wax theological, since I am interested in Judaism, not as a monolith, but rather as a series of different kinds of representations that exist because of a specific kind of theological history. These representations are then mimetic; they represent by demonstrating.

As a historical idea, the idea of *mimesis*, of imitation to interpret, goes back to Aristotle. We imitate and represent what we see to represent and recreate what it is that we have encountered. I am going to argue, then, that the history of Jewish representation in ‘media and popular culture,’ begins in antiquity, in the third century BCE, where historian Jerry Daniel notes that others write about and against Jews and Judaism (Daniel, 1979). Over time, these representations continue, so, through the turn of the millennium we have extant the works of Titus Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria and, of course, mentions of Jews in the Christian Gospels (Feldman, 1996). In this case, I am interpreting the term ‘Media and Popular Culture’ extremely loosely, since the Ancient Greek’s idea of what was popular culture was certainly very different than what exists today. The context of these creations was different, and was in many cases nationalistic, as opposed to religious, so that what existed was the nation

1 Yes. He was.

2 Since Judaism is not merely a religion, then applying the term theology to Jewish history is an error.

of Judeans, or Jews. Also, since popular media are, in general, created to be ephemeral, those artifacts which have survived the centuries are not necessarily the best representations of what existed but are merely those pieces which have managed to survive.

If we continue into early Modernity, we have such figures as Shylock from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, there is the mention of the "conversion of the Jews" in Andrew Marvell's love poem *To His Coy Mistress* and, later still, in Charles Dickens' Victorian era novel *Oliver Twist* (1838) the character Fagin the Jew. Parenthetically, I should note that, while 'Fagin the Jew' is an unsympathetic character, when Dickens was confronted with the fact that the character was hurtful, he then reportedly attempted to remove all references to Fagin's Jewishness (Johnson, 1952). Also, while these works from early Modernity depict Jews, these depictions are also terribly unflattering, to say the least, and more importantly they are also non-Jewish representations of Jews. So, while these are also historical representations of Jews, and while these representations may be interesting to the historian, it is in today's representations of Jews in popular culture that we will find the way Jews are representing Jews, today.

Having made this decision and, given the manner in which Jews, Judaism and Jewishness are each represented in popular culture today, I think that it is still not clear what it is that we mean we mean when we speak of Judaism. When it comes to definitions, we are faced with a problem: Is Judaism merely a religion, based on a specific monotheistic belief or is it merely an ethnicity, as when we speak of Jewish food? Is Judaism merely a nationality or race, as the Nazis and white supremacists would have us believe, when they speak of the destruction of the Jewish nation and when they demand that "the Jews will not replace us" as they did in Charlottesville, North Carolina in 2017, or is it possible that they merely hate a religious group? In Charlottesville over 100 different groups chanted the slogan "The Jews will not replace us." From context, the chant referred to Jews as a "race" or nationality, not as a culture or religion and this question is important since there are certainly Jews who are racially: Black, Brown, Asian and White. So, because of this issue, and to keep things simpler, for the rest of this work I am going to conflate the notions of race and nationality where Jews of color are just Jews. In this case I do not mean to minimize the issues that Jews of color have in our society today. Rather, I bring this important issue to the forefront but also recognize that I do not have the space to deal with issue in a comfortable manner.

In fact, it is possible if we wished to construct Judaism as a family of sorts, where all Jews, from all places, despite race and origin all belong to a single family, albeit a very large and dysfunctional one. Since Jewish names in Hebrew

are a form of living genealogy, those who convert to Judaism are in a sense ritually adopted by the biblical Abraham and Sarah, the patriarch and matriarch of Judaism and are then known ritually by their Hebrew name and the son and daughter of Abraham and Sarah. Furthermore, if all the aforementioned traits are true, then what are we to make of those actors who represent Jews and Jewishness in the media, specifically those actors who are themselves not Jewish. For example, most of the cast members of *The Magnificent Mrs. Maisel*, specifically those who are portraying Jews are not Jewish and in fact only two of the supporting actors are indeed Jewish? Are these actors merely wearing “Jew-face?”³

Because of the scope of the problem, I will begin this work with an examination of the way Judaism and Jewishness, as different attributes, are represented in the media, on a *prima facie* level. I will then create a theoretical scaffolding from both a Freudian psychoanalytic and from a semiotic point of view to understand how Judaism and Jewishness and Jew are three different things and the way they understand themselves *vis a vis* each other. I will further then attempt to understand how some representations of Jewishness in the media constitute a problem, both theoretically and practically. This understanding will lead me to the problem of who is by definition a Jew and to whom, and how these definitions may be a problem, and what these problems mean. We may well ask, for example, whom the media claims are Jews and given these claims, are the owners of this identity then beyond reproach when they make claims about Jews? Or, contrariwise, are some of these claims questionable, and ultimately, we may even ask why these claims matter anyhow?

As part of my study, I will then continue to look, using the lens of history, at the way Judaism has deconstructed itself into denominations, and how these denominations create a further schism between the concept of Judaism as religion, Jewishness as cultural and ethnic formation, and Jew as a nationality. I will indicate that there is a historical basis for a denominational schism based on each denomination’s understanding of the manner one becomes a Jew and further I will examine the Jewish past in terms of culture, belief, and denomination in an attempt to understand what has become, in my opinion, an intense self alienation from Judaism, Jewishness, and self-identity as a Jew such that some even identify as post-assimilation Jews, where one may identify

3 “Jew-face,” is defined as a situation where a non-Jew impersonates a Jew, especially in a derogatory manner and was coined by Ted Merwin to refer to non-Jews playing Jews on stage (Merwin, 2007). The term has come to mean any attempt to impersonate a Jew in public. See (Hall, 2019) for more on this, especially in terms of popular usage.

as Jewish despite a complete lack of praxis or belief in Judaism and complete transgression of Judaic law. The fact is that many Jews do identify themselves as Jewish, despite these transgressions and lack of praxis, that they call themselves cultural Jews.

The question I begin with is, what does Judaism, Jewish or a Jew mean on North American television today and in what manner do such representations reflect the problems of Judaism, Jewishness, and the Jew in scholarship? So then, as a script would say, we dissolve to Tiffany Haddish a woman, comedian, actress, person of colour and, depending on the authority you have chosen to ask, a person who may or may not be a Jew.

1 Who or What Is a Jew?

On December 3, 2019, to celebrate her fortieth birthday and also to celebrate her Bat Mitzvah ceremony, Netflix released Tiffany Haddish's comedy special *Black Mitzvah* (Mendoza, 2019). The stand-up comedy show begins with the spectacle of Haddish being carried onto the stage while seated on a chair. Haddish sings a stylized version of the Yiddish celebratory song *Hava Nagilah*.

If you do not recognize the song by its name, you will certainly have heard it played at some time. The song *Hava Nagilah* was originally composed a *niggun*, a wordless melody by the *Sadigorer* Hassid sect from Eastern Europe and found its way to what is now Israel in the early 20th Century. Avraham Zvi Idelsohn, the so-called father of Jewish Musicology, transcribed the *Sadigorer* Chassidic melody in 1915, while serving as a bandmaster in the Ottoman Army during World War I. In 1918 he selected the tune for a celebration concert performance in Jerusalem, after the British army had defeated the Turks (Loeffler, 2021). Arranging the melody in four parts, Idelsohn added a Hebrew text derived from Psalms. By the 1940s, the song had become a staple of Jewish weddings, bar mitzvahs, and youth groups, where it was sung and danced as an Israeli-style hora folk dance (Loeffler, 2021). It has been recorded hundreds of times by many diverse artists in many different styles and genres including Jazz, Klezmer, Punk, Ska and Reggae. The main signification of the song is always "Jewish Celebration."

In being carried in on a chair and singing *Hava Nagilah*, Ms. Haddish evokes two of the most typical Ashkenazic Jewish stereotypes. Ms. Haddish's choices are interesting because they treat all Judaism as if it a monolith, as a single thing, when of course, especially in Los Angeles, there are huge Sephardic and Mizrachi communities who do not sing *Hava Nagilah*. Technically, since

Ms. Haddish's claim to Jewishness is through her Eritrean father, one might presume that her customs would not be Ashkenazi, but many depictions of Judaism in popular culture tend to presume that Ashkenazi Judaism is "normal." From this opening she then segues into a rap song which she follows by making a series of declaratory statements which are ostensibly supposed to assert the validity of her new, recently discovered, Jewish identity. Ms. Haddish is not considered, by those denominations which accept her, a convert to Judaism; she is a patrilineal Jew. This is a place for us to start, since patrilineal Jews are accepted as Jewish by the Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish movements, but the Conservative and Orthodox Jewish denominations would completely disagree. The question is then, how does Tiffany Haddish make her case to us that she is authentically, in some manner, Jewish?

As passive viewers of the special, we are supposed to understand that the stage backdrop with its two stylized *Dreidels*, which are tops used at *Hanukah*,⁴ the letters "T" and "H" fashioned to look vaguely Hebraic, are ostensibly some of the trappings which lend a kind of ostensible validity to Ms. Haddish's claim. Furthermore, by singing *Hava Nagilah* and performing as Jewish, by doing stereotypically Jewish things for us in an over-the-top Ashkenazi Jewish manner we are meant to suspend disbelief, to not even think about questioning her assertions. Then, as if this were all not enough, Ms. Haddish then cements her claim by declaring that she is a Jew, and we, having been hypnotized by the music and singing, would appear to be poor sports or just plain mean if we were to not accept her assertions of Jewishness as true. The fact is, however, that Tiffany Haddish makes this claim through descent from her Jewish Eritrean father and, further, that this identity serves as the basis for an over the top and stereotyped spectacle but that for the first five or so minutes of this special Ms. Haddish does not make even a single joke. She then transitions to speak of matters other than her Jewishness, with much more confidence, but the key is what she does not mention. To break it down further, Ms. Haddish conflates the real country Eritrea with her own possibly questionable claim to Judaism, with Africa as a meaningful place to American people of color, and with the fictitious country of Wakanda from the movie *Black Panther* (2018). She then uses this conflation to try and solidify in our minds that she is simultaneously a "real" Jew from an authentic Jewish lineage and an African

4 While Gentiles often wonder if it is spelled Chanukah, Hanukah or Hannukah, in truth the holiday is spelled, in Hebrew letters so that spelling in English depends on transliteration. In truth, it is spelled חַנּוּכָּה and the initial 'h' or 'ch' is pronounced with a Germanic or guttural sound.

American of authentic African lineage. This authenticity of “real” African Americanness conflated with the question of her Jewish identity works in such a manner that the authenticity of one then lends credence to the other, without any assurance that either claim is valid. I am not, by any means, dismissing any of Ms. Haddish’s claims, just understanding how she makes them and how they might be problematic. So, while Ms. Haddish may be using the idea of an urban Black person claiming Jewish identity as a prop to get a laugh, I still believe that there are deeper questions to be answered.

While Tiffany Haddish is a talented comedian and actress, her claim to Jewishness, to Judaism, and to being a Jew is open to question, because, as above, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism claims that descent is matrilineal, and never patrilineal while Reform, Reconstructionist and other branches of Judaism may include those of Patrilineal descent as well. Ms. Haddish only met her Jewish father at age 27 (Diseko, 2019); her mother is not Jewish nor was she raised “culturally” Jewish. My point is not to question her identity claim but to note that she is not Jewish according to “halakhic” sources, however, that Ms. Haddish claims Jewish identity, going so far as to study for, and to celebrate, her Bat Mitzvah. As a side note, this Bar/Bar/Bnai Mitzvah ceremony has become, in some senses, merely a performance of Jewish culture, rather than an affirmation of Jewish religion. To contrast, comedian Eric Andre is the child of a Haitian, non-Jewish man, and a Jewish woman. Andre has always considered himself both Black and Jewish and, because his claim to Jewishness is matrilineal there is no question that all Jewish denominations would accept him as a Jew.

In fact, of the entire sixty-minutes of Ms. Haddish’s show, perhaps the first seven minutes of *Black Mitzvah* is “*Mitzvah*,” and contains any Jewish content which is literally a musical song and dance production number. The rest of the hour is much less serious in tone, but of more substance, pertaining to matters of being “Black” or to other parts of Ms. Haddish’s identities where she apparently feels more confident. Essentially then, at least for the sake of her TV special, Haddish’s Jewish identity is in many senses a kind of show business sleight of hand, whereby she uses her newly claimed Jewish identity, which she discovered after “she took a DNA test confirming her Jewish ancestry (Diseko, 2019).” She uses this ancestry in a shallow manner, as a kind of theatrical prop, which serves an excuse to make a big musical entrance, one which is an adjunct to her existing stage *persona*. We would do well to recall that the word *persona* derives from the Latin for ‘mask’ and that the stage persona of an entertainer is in many ways just that, a mask. We may then wonder in what manner Ms. Haddish’s Jewish identity is also a mask. Tiffany Haddish has embraced a

public Jewish identity of some sort, or, at the very least she has adopted performative Jewishness or performance of Jewishness⁵ as a cultural adjunct to her stage persona, even though according to some sources she is not even Jewish. We need to question then, for the sake of argument, is Ms. Haddish's identity that of a Jew, or being Judaic or even Jewish or indeed is she none of these, and why is it a problem?

To start, we must begin to differentiate this idea of 'being a Jew'; that is to say, a Jew in an ontological sense, versus, what we now call "identifying as a Jew." How does the difference between being and identifying manifest itself?

Many of those in the performing, literary and plastic arts attempt to bracket part of their identities, including Jewishness, when it is needful to create the stage illusion of an identity which is distinct from the other parts of who they are. I am using the term "bracketing" in a manner similar to the sense Husserl does in terms of the phenomenological sense, where Husserl defines the term 'bracketing' as a suspension of trust in the objectivity of our senses and also the setting aside of questions about objective reality (Husserl, 1977). I differ from Husserl's usage, where I mean the term bracketing to understand that one is setting aside any objective understanding of the performer via their performance, or vice versa, and so that we may then understand that, while the performer may use material from their lives to create artistic or creative material, that the relationship between their lives and their performances are discontinuous. This bracketing is an extremely common occurrence within popular culture and is common of especially comedy writers and comedians who use material from their own lives as material with which to create comedic narratives.

This is to say, that an artist is not their art, and the art is not the artist, so that the craft of the artist may derive from some other subjective reality which we may not know. For the sake of this work, I am bracketing this idea of artistic and of critical objectivity to understand that any objectivity that we may pretend to have only exists, asymptotically to two different things: 1. any phenomenon that the performer actually experiences and 2. any experience which the performer relates in performance. An asymptote is a term used in calculus to describe a line which continually approaches toward a curve and which however long it is will only get closer and closer and never actually reach it. This means that any pretense to objectivity is only asymptotic to its object, that it will never reach it. The artist and the art may appear to be exactly congruent or similar, but they are two different discontinuous phenomena and, while they

5 I will be discussing 'Performative Jewishness' and how it differs from the 'performance of Judaism' in later sections of this work.

may appear to be equivalent, they are never equal. To differentiate between the two, art is crafted or rehearsed and then performed, while experience is spontaneous and perhaps even non-discursive an idea which will be discussed more fully later in this work. For the moment I can say that, while we may represent some phenomena, that those representations are only models of the phenomena; they are not the phenomenon.

This bracketing of identity to create humorous discontinuities is a tool that is used often, especially in so-called Jewish humor, so as to create ironic or absurd incongruities. In fact, using Jewish identity, itself, as a kind of prop for humour is very much how the television show *Broad City* operates. In the first broadcast episode, the protagonists, Abbi, and Ilana advertise as “two Jewesses” on Craigslist (Jacobson & Glazer, 2014). The incongruity of the term ‘Jewess’ and the protagonist’s ironic reclamation of the term is what makes the usage of the term a joke. Abbi and Ilana’s relationship to and with Judaism, their own identity as Jews and their Jewishness vis a vis the surrounding culture, is often a source of humour within the show, especially in terms of their acceptance of these identities versus their alienation and isolation from parts of these identities. Contrarywise, while the character of Brooklyn 99’s Jake Peralta, is ostensibly “half Jewish,” this identity only exists when it serves to make a joke. Jake does mention that he would happily fall in love with a woman who is “half Jewish,” there is a quick flashback sequence to his Bar Mitzvah party and, at his wedding to gentile Amy Santiago, when Peralta’s aunt demands to know why there is no Rabbi, Peralta turns and says to an actress portraying his aunt, “not now, Aunt Linda (Goor, Shuur, Del Tradici, & Hallm, 2018).” Mentions of Peralta’s Jewishness pepper the series, sporadically, but not in any substantive sense. While Jake Peralta is half Italian and half Jewish, we do not see him embracing either of these identities, not overtly so. Captain Holt is a black gay man, Amy Santiago is Hispanic, Rosa Diaz is also Hispanic and Bisexual. These identities inform their characters, so, one may presume then that Peralta’s character is informed by his assimilated Jewishness, but this Jewishness is only ever played for laughs as a joke and we, as viewers, lose the Italian side completely.

For Jake Peralta and for Abbi and Ilana, Jewishness is parenthetical to the rest of their identity, since they ostensibly celebrate the various holidays of the surrounding culture, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. The traditional Jewish holy day cycle of *Rosh Hashana*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Hanukah*, *Purim*, *Pesach* (Passover) and *Shavuot* is completely ignored, since they have subsumed themselves to the larger external gentile culture. The question we may then ask is, why we make characters Jewish at all, if they are not representative of the manner in which Jewish people represent themselves to each other. While the answer is that while we wish to attempt to create a certain kind of

diversity on television, the problem with this answer, if this is true, is that Jews are then overly represented in popular culture, since according to the latest Pew research centre, Jews only compromised, and were projected to continue to comprise less than 1% of the world's population (Pew Research Centre, 2015). An inordinate impact for such a small group.

So, the characters who are portrayed as Jews or Jewish on most popular television shows may well be Jewish, but they are, as the phrase goes, 'not that Jewish.' Notably Orthodox Judaism, and to a lesser extent Conservative Judaism, do not recognize partial Jewishness or degrees thereof and for these denominations, one is either Jewish or one is not. Furthermore, some religions, such as Buddhism see no problem with additions of other religious identities, where Judaism, at least Orthodox and Conservative Judaism understand Judaism to be exclusive. When formerly Jewish philosopher Edith Stein, who had converted to Catholicism, was formally canonized as Saint Teresia Benedicta a Cruce OCD, many Catholics presumed that she would be embraced as a Jewish Martyr, since she had been born and had been killed by the Nazis as a Jew. The truth is that Judaic terms, Edith Stein was a Catholic, not a Jew, despite what the Nazis and the Catholic church might say. Her racial identity may have been Jew, but I have decided to subsume the idea of Jewish Race into nationhood. The difference is that 'race' as a category is foreign to Judaism while Judaism also categorizes itself as a that nation which was exiled from Judea circa 200 CE.

Still, the Jews and Judaism which is usually portrayed on television and in the movies, is a post-assimilation Judaism, that exists as palatable fare. The rare examples which present Jews and Judaism as other than just a different version of the surrounding culture, such as *A Stranger Among Us* (Lumet, 1992) and *Les Aventures de Rabbi Jacob* (Oury, 1973) present Jewishness as exotic and other. *Shtissel* (Elon & Indursky, 2013), which occurs in an ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem, is a rare example of a full and respectful treatment of Orthodox Jews as fully three-dimensional people with full emotional responses, as opposed to props. So, because of a fuller emotional story, even *Fiddler on the Roof* (Stein & Harnick, 1964), is cross culturally palatable enough that it has been playing non-stop in Japan, in Japanese, for over fifty years (Hoffman, 2018). The difference is that these cases depict Jewish people as fuller realized characters rather than a placeholder for jokes.

We may wish to note that that mentions of Jewishness plays a larger part of the part of Abbi and Ilana's lives, in *Broad City*, but that these mentions of Judaism are jokes on Judaism. Really then, Abbi and Ilana's relationship to their own Judaism and Jewishness is very much ambivalent and separated from a religious, cultural, or nationalistic Jewishness. Yes, Judaism for them is a

thing, but they are unsure what this means to them or how this identity relates to themselves in relation to this Judaism and how this Judaism relates to their Jewishness as Jews. I want to make clear here that I am not criticizing the way anyone has chosen to manifest their Jewishness and their relation to Judaism, rather I am cataloguing. In fact, rather than remarkable, this kind of alienated portrayal of Jewishness as a performance in the world, reflects what actually goes on in the world, that as Jews who live secular lives in a secular world with secular ideas and a tenuous relation to Judaism, that Abbi and Ilana are in many senses typical Jews. Some have even deemed this kind of blended identity as a kind of “post-assimilatory Judaism” and this alienated and yet participatory relationship to Judaism is common enough to have been noted by such authors as Hannah Schwadron (2018). The term “post assimilatory Judaism” is used to describe those Jews who claim Jewish identity as a culture and also use this identity to form a cultural hybrid. Some examples include Jewish Comedy Shows, Jewish Book Fairs, and even Jewish Drag shows. The essentially Jewish part of any of these events is the nature of the participants, some of whom may not be considered Jews by Orthodox or Conservative authorities. Another example is “Queer Judaism” which espouses a kind of post-Stalinist view of Judaism, learning the Bundist form of Yiddish, denial of Israel, and the belief that Judaism and Jewishness is merely cultural (Paratis, 2007).

This “Post-assimilatory” Judaism is a description of the ambivalence in the relationship of some postmodern Jews to their own identity, which then finds its performance in an amalgam of both philosemitic and antisemitic words and actions, Jewish jokes, and a kind of faux nostalgia for those things Jewish. The post-assimilatory Jew’s relation to their “heritage” is both affectionate and alienated, which is to say that while some of these people are *halakhically* Jews, and some may not be, that they are at the very least culturally Jewish and that their relation to said Jewishness and Judaism is a kind of performance, in the sense that Jewishness and Judaism is not who they are or what they believe, but is, rather, something that they do. They do not believe in the Jewish religion but instead they do Jewish things. They do not attend services, but they do eat bagels and *matzoh* ball soup.

So then, we must understand that both Abbi and Ilana from *Broad City* are Jews, and they have spotless “Jewish” identity or lineage, they are both *halakhically* Jews, however, when they parody Jewish institutions in the show *Broad City*,⁶ as much as we may want to, we still cannot surmise Abbi’s and

6 See “Jews on a Plane” first Broadcast April 20th, 2016, where “Birthright” is parodied as “Birthmark.”

Ilana's real-life connection to anything, merely from watching the show⁷ and this question is especially apropos since they demonstrate antipathy toward Ultra Orthodox, observant Jews who exist outside of their postmodern Jewish experience. In the episode, *In Heat*, first broadcast January 14, 2015, Abbi and Ilana walk through a subway car full of men dressed as ultra-Orthodox Jews and when they arrive at their stop, Ilana smacks one of the men on the rear end. One may question if Ilana is punching up or punching down, depending on the way you categorize recognizably ultra-Orthodox Jewish men, vis a vis, recognizably assimilated women, who share identities of Halakhically Jewish, culturally Jewish but also visibly and enthusiastically part of the surrounding culture. I am going to suggest that reason for Abbi and Ilana's antipathy toward ultra-Orthodox Jews is based, specifically, in the New York experience. Some parts of New York, including such places as Borough Park, Flatbush, Crown Heights and Williamsburg are highly populated with Ultra Orthodox Jews and in some cases, the non-Jewish population has clashed with the Jewish residents of the area. Anecdotally, at one time Williamsburg was inhabited mostly by Hassidic⁸ Jews, but because of low rents, a younger and more artistic crowd started to move into the area, which caused antipathy and clashes between the two groups. In an "us versus them" situation, ultra-Orthodox Jewish men are seen as "them."

Ultimately what I am questioning than are problems that derive from ideas about culture and Jewishness, Judaism and religion, self, identity and being a Jew and how these identifications manifest and create meaning, how they are semiotic, and the relation of these identities to the surrounding outside culture and to Judaism itself. How is it that Judaism as a religion informs Jewish cultural identity and then how this identity is made manifest in popular culture?

For the sake of this work, I understand that Judaism is a religion which, while it traces its way at least as far as Judea c.586 BCE, the Judean exile to Babylonia, is for all intents and purposes a modern creation. Jewishness is a cultural manifestation of the religion Judaism. Furthermore, the identity Jew is a nationalistic statement that a person may trace their genealogical lineage back to the group of people who formed Rabbinic Judaism after the Roman

7 According to their Wikipedia pages, Ilana Glazer comes from a Reform Jewish household and that Abbi Jacobson is Jewish. While this may mean that they are Halakhically Jewish, it tells us nothing about their own beliefs or personal practices as Jews.

8 Hassidic Jews belong to one of several ultra-Orthodox groups and are a visible minority, specifically because of their anomalous, often archaic clothing styles. The men will dress only black and white, have facial hair, and wear long side curls on either side of their faces. Hassidic women will dress more stylishly but will only wear skirts below the knees and tops that cover the elbow. All married women cover their hair, usually with wigs.

invasion of Judea c.136 CE, which is the date of the defeat of Bar Kokhba's army. I also understand that the ideas of "Jew" "Jewish" and "Judaism" are, at least in North America, interdependent, and further, that as Freudian and psychoanalytic theories teach us, the negation of any one of these identities is meaningful both psychoanalytically and semiotically since even negation of self in terms of self is in itself an indication to us about the relation of the whole individual to their Judaism, to their Jewishness, and to themselves as a Jew and, importantly is also indicative of their relationship to these *vis a vis* the surrounding structure of non-Jewish religions and cultures.

One might wish to question why I use the terminology of "performance" of Judaism? The answer is that Judaism is in many cases performative, not in the current Butlerian usage, but rather that Jewish daily rituals are performances. Jewish men put on leather *tefillin*, or phylacteries, in the morning when they pray, women cover their hair, men cover their head and wear tassels, called *tzitzit*, even Jewish prayer is an action where men and women move their lips as they pray, it is all through the day a kind of performance. I do need to ask, why do Jews perform publicly as Jewish Jews at all? Further to this then, I need to ask, what it is that separates "performance as Jew" from "Jewish performance" or "being" a Jew? Is there indeed a difference between any of these?

I then need to define what it is we mean when we say "Jew." Facetiously I might answer that, "In the dictionary a Jew is one who is descended from the ancient tribe of Judea, but ... you and I know what a Jew is: one who killed our Lord (Bruce, 1965, p. 151)." Lenny Bruce was a Jew, and his joke is dated, not because it is offensive, but because the society in which it existed no longer exists. In fact, if we agree with Freud that humour is caused by repression (Freud, 1927), then Bruce's joke could only work in a culture that was repressing antipathy toward Jews. Bruce's joke was meant to shock the audience and to make them laugh based on their own unconscious anti-Judaism; such humour was meant to make Bruce's audience laugh at their own tacit assumptions. These days such a joke would be considered banal because it is meant to work where religious belief and religious ideology are considered the norm. Lenny Bruce was not merely a Jew on stage, he was also performing specifically as a kind of a Jew, that his performance of Jewishness onstage, whether it is actually congruent with the real Lenny, as above, was not the "real" Lenny Bruce or "real" Judaism. We can then say the same about any performance on stage, even if it is about or of Judaism, no matter how biographical or autobiographical is intends to be, so that despite congruency between the stage persona and the act of being of stage, that performance of Judaism on stage is just a performance, one which is not congruent to living, since it is a form of *mimesis* that it is an interpretive copying, to display some aspect of the thing

being copied. This act on stage only may or may not represent the person who is being portrayed on stage and this performance represents the character and may approach the character, may even be equivalent to the character without being equal.

History, on the other hand, is not a performance, and while at our time we may only understand historical events as discontinuous events, objectively, I intend to understand Jewish history and the way Judaism as religion and identity evolved and formed, specifically in modernity, and in so doing I will trace the history of representation of Jews from the Jewish point of view as an organic matter. I mean that the way Jews saw themselves as Jews and then represented it as representations changed diachronically.

I also want to understand Jewish history as a counterpoint to and separate from the surrounding non-Jewish history, that these are not the same matter. So, I will understand that Jewish culture then derives from both an internal Jewish need to express Jewishness to Jews in Jewish culture and also that it grew as a reaction to living as an external other sub-culture while being surrounded by gentile culture. One could then propose that the rise of “non-Jewish” Jewish expression derives from the outside culture, such as the *Hanukah* Burlesque shows and Jewish film and book festivals. This action and reaction have both generated, what Haim Soloveitchik calls a “Rupture,” where this breach manifests itself as a split between Jewish identity as practiced and Judaism itself as manner of understanding the cosmos, and has manifested itself in terms of Jewish praxes (Soloveitchik, 1994). While Soloveitchik meant a very specific matter, the split between mimesis as a method of instruction versus book learning as a method of instruction in Modern Orthodox Jewish households, Soloveitchik writes mostly about the manner in which this phenomenon manifests, rather than the reasons that this phenomenon occurred. If we were to explore further, we would discover that Soloveitchik’s rupture occurred, not just amongst the Modern Orthodox but throughout the Jewish world, although this rupture manifested differently in each Jewish community. However, where Soloveitchik sees the fallout of this fissure in modern Orthodox cultures in terms of performance, I do need to note that that Soloveitchik’s rupture has also manifested itself as a form of schism in the denominations of Judaism and the manner in which these relate to authority. This split is, at least in most cases, not yet a complete schism, since Reform Judaism recognizes Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Judaism recognizes some reform Jews, however distastefully, as Jews, although the recognition is not fully reciprocated. Furthermore, while Soloveitchik was interested specifically in the split between a mimetic Judaism as compared to a taught Judaism in the Modern Orthodox movement, other splits also exist, and it is my belief that these splits are, in some cases, are

attempts for the various denominations of Judaism to adjust to Modernity and Post Modernity. These ruptures, which in my opinion exists in some sense in all the manifestations of Judaism, are also an opportunity to explore some of the variations of Judaism, as they exist today, and as they are expressed through some of Judaism's religious denominations, through history, and also as they express themselves today.

Of necessity, I will also need to define certain words, such as "Judaism," "Jewish" and "Jew," both in a *Halakhic* sense, pertaining to traditional Orthodox Jewish law, and also in a non-*Halakhic* sense, keeping in mind that in this case *Halakhah*, itself, only applies reflexively to Judaism, and really only to several specific types of Judaism. I also need to caution that my definitions are exploratory in nature, they are 'soft,' not rigid, definitions, because Judaism as a religion, Jewishness as a culture, and identity as a Jew, as identified a member in the nationhood of those who are descended from those who survived the Judean Exiles in 586 BCE and again in 136 CE, that all of these exist together simultaneously and inform each other; paradoxically, at the same time while all three of these identities are also absolutely separate and unique and defy unification.

The dimensions on which these identities exist are interdependent and at the same time interrelated, so that, while they may not exist without the other, that also they do exist completely separately and not as a unity. To make it clear then, I am asserting that Judaism, as religion, Jewishness, as culture, and the Jew as a nationality are only pieces of an individual's identity and these identities only exist in relation to other and in relation to the outside culture. Moreover, because these outside cultures are also extremely different from each other, Jews from New York, depending on their Jewish affiliation, are very different than Jews from Ethiopia, who are different than Jews from England, or from France. So, even the terms Jews use to delineate Jewish cultures or ethnicities, "Ashkenazi,"⁹ "Sephardi,"¹⁰ "Mizrachi"¹¹ are just approximations, because not all Ashkenazi cultures, Sephardi cultures or Mizrachi cultures are the same but are instead, are quick descriptions of purported geographical origins. They are cultural approximations which are based on ancient and medieval history¹² and may no longer be useful except when painting with a thick brush. The conditions of these differences in Judaism may well be based on Jewish religious

9 Referring in general to the Jews descended of the Jews of Eastern Europe.

10 Referring in general to the Jews descended from the Jews of Western European Jews.

11 Referring in general to Jews descended from the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa.

12 I have notably missed out on several other "ethnic" groups of Jews such as the Jews of India, the Jews of Ethiopia and the *Hai Feng* Jews of China, the latter of which are no longer extant.

affiliation; there are fewer differences between *Haredi*, or ultra-orthodox, Jews from various countries, than there are from more assimilated Jews. In North America, because of the patterns of Jewish diaspora, this homogenization of Judaism and Judaic praxes, as opposed to Jewish cultural praxes, is partly the responsibility of some groups who insist that Ashkenazi praxis is “normal.”

However, it is in popular culture that we see the way Jews see themselves and in which they wish to be seen. Jewish representation in popular culture, as a cultural minority, is not a new thing, even in mainstream American popular culture the first of which was probably the Broadway play, *Abie's Irish Rose* (Nichols, 1922). The first motion picture that featured sound was *The Jazz Singer* (1927) which featured Al Jolson's portrayal of Jackie Rabinowitz, a young Jewish boy who defies his parents to be an entertainer. Jackie's Jewishness was integral, not parenthetical, to the character and was also extremely crucial to the plot and we can say that the theme of Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* is about assimilation and about identity, where assimilated Jackie who now calls himself “Jack Robin,” chooses Judaism, Jewishness and being a Jew and his family over assimilation into the American melting pot. Because the love of family, filial piety and love of Judaism itself demanded the cancellation of a Broadway show, Jackie cancels his performance on Broadway and, at the dramatic climax of the film, he performs the *Kol Nidre* prayer on the evening of *Yom Kippur*, the evening of atonement and arguably the holiest night of the Jewish year. While Jolson was a Jew portraying a Jewish character, the only other Jew in this version of this film was cantor Yossele Rosenblatt, who gained fame and who toured because of the film's success. At that time and even much later, it was common for film and theatre of that time to have different races and ethnicities portrayed by white actors.¹³ Representation and inclusion were not considered to be necessary ingredients of production. Contrast with today where inclusion and representation are considered necessary components for casting actors. In a historical context, we are meant to understand that this ending would have been satisfactory both those new Americans who had just emigrated to North America, who were themselves afraid of being melted into the pot of American culture and thus disappearing. At the exact same time, this theme would have also satisfied the mores of those who were already settled in America and had some American lineage because they saw certain “family values” being upheld. What the movie's commercial and artistic success then demonstrates is that, while there were indeed mitigating factors in the plot, that it was still plausible in 1920's America to be religiously and culturally

13 Two infamous examples were “Amos and Andy” two Black characters played by White men and also “Charlie Chan” an Asian character played by Swedish actor Warner Oland.

idealistic, even in matters which may have appeared strange to those who had been born in America. One could be true to one's own roots, as portrayed in the film, and one may then presume, also true to those roots in real life.

The ending of Jolson movie contrasts with the remake of the *Jazz Singer* (The Jazz Singer, 1980) where Neil Diamond, whose character was born Yussel Rabinovitch, and who assimilates into Jess Robin, a man who at the climax of the film does not sing *Kol Nidre* in a synagogue surrounded by family and who instead sings the song "*Coming to America*," over a montage of groups of immigrants entering America and, we are to believe, assimilating into "good" Americans. So, rather than uphold older immigrant values, of religion, family and filial piety, the remake of the movie normalizes the assimilation experience where all become, simply American. In Jess' world the show goes on and it is assimilation which is the key to success. Assimilation is portrayed as the end goal. It is demonstrated that complete annihilation of one's old roots and complete assimilation into mainstream culture is desirable. Specifically, Al Jolson's character was willing to give up a role on Broadway and chanted holy prayers; Neil Diamond sang about assimilation. Al Jolson portrayed as Jew who lives to be Jewish; Neil portrayed a Jew who assimilates into the surrounding culture, still a Jew, but also eager to be rid of the exterior trappings of Jew, to be an American. The difference is not clear, and therefore, I will of course need to question what it means to be visibly a Jew in public, and the difference between public and private Judaism, as such.

Lenny Bruce, as an entertainer was a Jew in public, but he was so for comedy reasons, and his ostensible Jewishness does not seem to have informed his private life; he does not seem to have been a Jew in private. Being able to disguise one's identity well enough so as to cover Jewish identity in public has been the topic of many Jewish jokes, where the relative success or failure has been the point of the humor. My father changed our last name from 'Weisbrot' to 'West,' so that he could pass as gentile, which was important in the 1950's as many places had quotas by which they could exclude Jews. In our current world, it is still the case that unless otherwise stated or visually obvious, that a person is white¹⁴ and gentile (Gottdiener, 1985) and one of the tell-tale clues in the 1950's and 1960's included last names. This phenomenon is similar to the 'closeting' that was happening at the same time within the Queer communities.

Further to the above discussions, while we cannot guess what Judaism means to Tiffany Haddish in her private life, the first seven or so minutes, and just those seven or minutes, of her performance is very publicly Jewish. For

14 I am still resisting the racialization of Jews, as white, since Jews do not, fall into this spectrum.

both Lenny Bruce and Tiffany Haddish, Judaism and Jewishness seem to be, in a sense, theatrical props, objects which are useful to performance, but when no longer useful may be dropped, aside until again useful. We may also contrast Tiffany Haddish with Actress Mayim Bialik who states that she is “aspiring Modern Orthodox (Glassman, 2015)” and whose identity as a Jewish person is not contestable, *halakhically*. At this point I am not going to question Tiffany Haddish’s self identification as Jewish, so much as to explain that her *Halakhic* status is not Jewish but is instead *Zerah Yisroel*, literally the Seed of Israel. This is to say that while her status as a Jew may be questioned, she is of Jewish descent. Compare that the identity of both Lenny Bruce and Mayim Bialik as Jewish people is not contestable, and in fact is firmly established in terms of *Halakhah*, in both cases. This question of Jewish identity and of identifying as Jewish, specifically where *Halakhah* is an issue, is a problem of modernity, where authority, specifically of identity in this case, has become contestable, partially due to the fact that multiple identities are themselves permeable, however I will suggest that Ms. Haddish transitions from identity to identity, from Jewish woman to Black woman with discontinuity, where Mayim Bialik embodies her identities of Woman and Jewish contiguously. This is not, again, to critique Ms. Haddish’s identity, only to note that it is stilted for her, that it is still a rehearsed thing, and this question of rehearsal leads to yet another question, which is whether or not there is a congruency of self in public with private belief and praxis. I will not presume that just because Ms. Bialik “performs” as Jewish publicly that these performances mean anything in terms of her private life, although she has chosen to share that she is “aspiring Modern Orthodox” which allows us to presume certain practices in her private life. Of necessity, the next few sections of this work will then look at how Judaism, qua Judaism, is constructed in modernity, as well as the several problems created by separating Jewishness from Judaism and a resolution will be attempted by understanding that this “rupture” is an artifact created by the various forces of modernity.

When it comes to being Jewish, in an ontological sense, by the same token we cannot presume that just because Ilana and Abbi from *Broad City* are Jewish women that this means anything about the actresses who portray them even though they are also Jewish, and that while Jake Peralta is a “half” Jew it is merely coincidental that he is portrayed by a Jewish man. So, then we cannot say anything about Haddish the performer on stage and her congruence with Haddish the woman. Instead, if we are to be honest, we must look at Jewish representation diachronically, in a wholistic way, to understand how Jews and Judaism understood themselves and the way these understandings changed and why it does matter that Abbi, Ilana, Jake and even Haddish are portrayed

by Jews. However, before we understand the manner in which these representations have changed, we must also understand the manner in which representation works and we need to understand the basics of representation.

In the next several parts of this work I will then understand that the history of Judaism, as a religion, is in some sense a historical object that exists in relation to and outside of mainstream history. This is to say that Jewish history is different than mainstream history, although the two do intersect. I will also argue that Judaism's existence in modernity is based on a historical Judaism which was transmitted from the country of Judea, before the Judean Diaspora of 176 CE. Also, instead of taking the approach that Judaism, Jewishness, and the Jew are separable identities, which is a common thread in much modern criticism, I will attempt, rather, to recombine these identities, as fractured as they are and to understand that these separate identities rely on each other for meaning, that they exist in a historical context with an eye to Jewish history. Moreover, I will also assert that modern and postmodern Judaism, Jewish practice and the Jew have been "created" in existing historical continua and that these continua are partially based in the external ostensibly once Christian, now ostensibly secular, external culture, but, that these continua are also based in Jewish reaction to these external continua, but it is specifically on these internal cultural pressures that I will attempt to concentrate.

The next sections will also concentrate on Jewish 'performance' as Jewish, specifically as alienated from Judaism and as depicted in popular culture, in North America. As such, I will explore alienation from Judaism and to demonstrate that the need for performance as Jews and Jewishness and even of Judaism are signs, the manner of which we may decode, to understand that these three identities are inseparable and that attempts to separate them lead to acculturation and assimilation into the surrounding culture, or annihilation but also that any attempts to denaturalize them leads to a reification. I will then demonstrate that the artifacts that a culture creates tells us much about that culture and also includes clues to the manner in which we may understand those artifacts and, that as Umberto Eco tells us, this meaning points to the artifact without ever reaching it (Eco, 1976). The purpose of the work, from my point of view, is to understand those artifacts from Jews performing as Jews for other Jews, and the manner that those meanings or chains of meaning are created. When Jews perform Jewish for non-Jews, it must be in a manner that is capable of being understood by these non-Jews, so that a cultural translation occurs. For example, cultural "translation" may be seen in the relative importance of Hanukkah compared to Christmas, the Christian winter holy day. Historically, according to Jewish traditions, *Hanukah* is considered a minor holiday of little import however through this 'cultural translation' *Hanukah* has

become of much greater importance, to Jews and, oddly, almost as important to non-Jews. So, while this “translation” means that Jewish praxis has somehow entered the mainstream, it also means that non-Jewish understanding of what Judaism or Jew or Jewish means in the mainstream is different than what Jews may consider to be Jewish, Judaism, and that these misunderstandings may even occur when understanding who counts as a Jew to Jews and who counts as a Jew to non-Jews. First, though, we must better understand the way we may understand Jews and historical trauma, specifically from a Freudian psychoanalytic point of view so as to understand the manner in which, as the analysts say, Judaism may have split from itself.

2 A Fractured Framework: Trauma, Identity, Ethnicity

Is the Jew whom we see on the television today in any way comparable to the Jew who existed in history, or, to frame the question differently, how did the Jews construct themselves, historically, as Jews and how does this construction differ from the manner Jews construct themselves today? Does the term Jew today mean something other than what it did historically or even fifty years ago? Moreover, how does the term “Jew” signify in a semiotic manner and in what manner has this meaning shifted relative to recent history? When it comes to meaning, then, and especially meaning slippage¹⁵ in terms of history, one of the frameworks via which I have chosen to understand Jewish history is in Freudian psychoanalytic terms, and specifically in terms of the theories of analyst Betty Joseph. Joseph was a follower of the theories of Melanie Klein, “and was considered to be one of the greatest psychoanalysts of her day (Daily Mail, 2013).” Joseph’s work on developmental psychology is apropos to understanding the manner in which untreated trauma may work in the human psyche.

My further reasoning is as follows: that as early as the Enlightenment, Spinoza understood Judaism as the Nation of Jews (Spinoza, 1999) and that after the Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn understood that this nationality had somehow transformed, or at least partially transformed, into a mere religion (Mendelssohn, 2017) with the nationhood somehow repressed. I am proposing,

15 While specific signs may delineate specific meanings, these meanings are really a field of ideas rather than a one-to-one exact meaning. Since the sign is now a field of meaning, the signifier and signified may “slip,” which is to say that a single signifier may signify different things, none of which are exact. These signified signs may then continue to signify yet other things using the same signifier. “Slippage” is the term, borrowed from linguistics, used to understand how this kind of change of signification, or meaning, changes over time.

therefore, that it is due to the many catastrophic historical traumas that this idea of “nationhood” became repressed, so that the singular nationality “Jew” was then split into the religion Judaism, the culture Jewishness, and the nationality Jew, each as disparate identities. I further propose that throughout modernity and postmodernity attempts have been made to reconstruct these identities into some kind of unity, and yet, we can also see demonstrated today that these identities also resist reunification. There are still those who call themselves “cultural Jews” to separate themselves from the “other Jews” and there are those who identify as “Jew in name only.” So, while historically, a unity of these identities, Jew, Jewish and Judaism did exist, I will attempt, as part of this work, to understand how and why these identities split and further why these identities resist reunification into a cohesive whole. I am therefore stating that today, these identities of Jewish as culture, Jew as nationality and Judaism as religion co-exist in a quasi-unstable and yet mutually dependent relationship, whereby each of these identities informs and feeds the other and yet each remains separate. It may also be that historically these elements existed separately but were able to exist in a kind of harmonious interrelation which is no longer possible because of historical conditions, and these destabilizing historical conditions would also constitute some kind of trauma.

As above, one possible reason for the etiology of this split Jewish identity is to understand that over recent history, Jews as a nation have suffered many traumas and that these “splits” of identity may well indeed be a national reaction to these several traumas. The word “Trauma” is also polysemous and, according to Howard B. Levine may mean:

1. The noxious cause of a complex process;
2. The resulting acute, internal state of being injured, helpless, terrified, or overwhelmed;
3. The immediate damage inflicted; and/or
4. The longer-range sequelae that these earlier stages may produce.

LEVINE, 2014

I need to make very clear here that numbers 3 and 4 above do not differentiate between physical trauma and psychological trauma, and that psychological trauma may also have physical epigenetic effects on the trauma sufferer which may be visible several generations after the fact (Yehuda, et al., 2015). This is to say that emotional trauma may have a definite physical effect and that this effect is intergenerational, however, even though mental trauma correlates to a physical imprint, that even if this correlation means causation of these

physical changes, we still have no way to measure what these changes actually mean. The change is a sign of trauma and correlates to trauma, but this puzzle ends here.

Other signs of trauma include narrative. The Jews have many historical and quasi-history narratives of national survival, which then serve as historical remnants of the attempts of this nation to mentalize¹⁶ these traumas and to find a methodology to survive, albeit, always in some changed manner. Historically, one might even suggest that the Jesus Movement, that later became Christianity, and Rabbinical Judaism, as it developed over time, were both reactions to the trauma caused by the Romans, with unsuccessful reactions to this trauma, or ‘heresies’ disappearing. One possible outcome of these historical traumas was the redaction of the ‘oral law’ the *Mishna* (West, 2021). In today’s world, these Judaic identities, the Jew, Jewishness, and Judaism, exist together and separately, similar to a schizoid, or split personality, where sometimes these parts are silenced or sometimes do not even communicate consciously with the others. However, unconsciously, these parts may also inform each other.¹⁷

This section of this work is then an attempt to recover and to “reconstruct” Judaic identity, not in Mordechai Kaplan’s denominational sense,¹⁸ but instead, in the sense that the religion which we call Judaism, the people we call Jews and the culture that we call Jewish are human artifacts and that these religious expressions which have found their way into modernity, are the artifacts of generational traumas, and also of more modern ones. I need to make clear that I am not denying the fact that, so-called religious experiences may have occurred, and that there is a phenomenology of religious experience, but I am proposing, rather, that these phenomenological experiences find expression in terms of religion. As an example, I am not insisting on the historical veracity of the revelation at Sinai as recounted in Exodus, but I am saying that an experience happened to someone at some time, and while the narrative may not be historically true, that it is psychologically true. Jews, as a nation, have historically suffered many traumas and fractures and have had, to survive, to

16 Mentalization, is, in a sense, the ability to digest traumatic experiences mentally or emotionally and so to live with them in a relatively stable state. When a problem occurs and a problem may even become ‘unthinkable,’ which in this sense means that the memory is not available to conscious thought (Joseph B., 1987).

17 I do not mean unconsciously in Jung’s sense of collective unconscious, but rather in the strict Freudian sense, where parts of Jewishness or Judaism or Judaic nationality do not know what the other parts are doing.

18 Mordechai Kaplan (1881–1983) was a Jewish scholar and innovator who founded both the Young Israel movement of Modern Orthodoxy and Reconstructionist Judaism.

form into many different and disparate parts, some of which no longer even communicate with the others and some of these splits occurred in reaction to many historical and modern traumas.¹⁹

As a quick aside, I choose to understand that both positive and negative events may be traumatic, in the sense that both may have similar psychological effects. So then, we may then also divide some of these “traumas” into historical ostensibly “negative” trauma such as the atrocities performed during the Khmelnytsky Uprising and “positive” trauma, such as the *Haskalah*, or Enlightenment and “Modern” trauma, would include “negative” ruptures such as the Shoah²⁰ in the middle of the 20th century and the expulsions of Jews from Middle Eastern and African Nations which occurred in the late 20th century, and also positive trauma, specifically the Establishment of the Modern State of Israel.^{21,22} These traumas are both exciting and terrifying.

To explain the theory behind this further, psychoanalyst Betty Joseph, while not defining the word trauma, explains that it results in the subject no longer having the ability to mentalize, or to ‘digest’ these traumatic experiences (Joseph, 1987) and that these experiences do then remain in the psyche as a psychic phenomenon. Furthermore, these non-mentalized objects create “a constellation of a particular type of object relations, anxieties, and defenses against them, typical for the earliest period of the individual’s life and, in certain disturbed people, continuing throughout life (Joseph B., 1987).” This is to say that in the individual, and I am proposing in the exiled Judaic nation, and in the soon to be Judaism, these experiences remain in what Melanie Klein calls the “paranoid schizoid position (Joseph, 1987),” that they are split off from the individual and may or may not be available to the conscious mind. However, Joseph also asserts that all these experiences still belong to the subject’s psyche and their subjectivity, and that this subjectivity then manifests

19 Any attempt to enumerate or name all of the traumas that the Jews have suffered is Sisyphean but is beyond the scope of this work.

20 Rather than use the term Holocaust, that derives from the Greek for ‘burnt offering,’ I have chosen to use the Hebrew word, ‘Shoah,’ which means destruction or disaster.

21 I have chosen to call the Enlightenment and the establishment of the State of Israel both positive and trauma. The reason for this choice is that while both of these events were *prima facie* “positive” events that these events also were and are historically problematic. In the case of both *the Haskalah* and the establishment of the modern State of Israel, there are still many Jews who view both events as a tragedy. While these opinions are not mainstream today, history has yet to judge on the matter.

22 While Israel exists and has a right to existence, this is not an endorsement of the policies of that state, and the fact that I need to disclaim the state every time it is mentioned is in itself a problem of those who would deny the Judean people our home.

itself in the conscious affect the subject. In this case, our subject is the historical narratives of the Jewish nation and that the traumatic and un-mentalized material of the nation's traumas serves as a kind of collective unconscious. To be clear, I mean the term 'collective unconscious' not in the Jungian sense, but rather in the sense that the psyche of the Jewish nation, as a single subject, has an unconscious, in the Freudian sense. Just as the individual has multiple parts which collectively form a single psyche, so do groups, and these traumas form part of the Jewish unconscious.

The Jewish national collective unconscious trauma, since it is not and may not be mentalized, still exists in the sense that nations, as subjects, while made of individuals, also reflect subjectivity. These traumas make themselves manifest in the various actions of the various Jewish peoples, over time and have manifested themselves in modern and postmodern North American Judaism as what Jacob Neusner calls "the complete and acute ethnicization of Judaic religious systems (Neusner, 2003)." To extrapolate from what Neusner is saying, the various historical traumas which have been inflicted on the Jewish nation have manifested themselves, for many Jews in North America, as a denial of Judaic religion and nationhood and have instead made themselves known as an ethnic and cultural Jewishness. While Neusner's view is pessimistic, since it is nihilistic and leads to sense that anything may then call itself Judaism, I can also agree with Neusner's point that, while American "Judaic systems," in far too many cases, have been for the most part reduced to what Neusner calls "sociological data (Neusner, 2003)."

To continue with Neusner, however and to understand fully where he is going, Neusner further problematizes this idea of "ethnicization." Neusner further asserts that many of those people who call themselves as Jewish in North America and who define Judaism as their religion are so alienated from this religion "Judaism" that they fail to define Judaism in any useful manner. As Neusner explains, for these Jews, Judaism:

Is defined by the theological consensus that prevails from mainstream Reform Judaism through Reconstructionist, Conservative, secular-humanist, and "modern" or culturally-integrationist Orthodox, Judaisms. To all of them, Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people, whatever that may be, whoever those who profess to be Jews and therefore speak Judaism are. And to the constituents of that consensus one must add the Jews for Buddha, the Jews in the Unification Church and among the Latter-day Saints, the "Jews for Jesus" and "Messianic Jews," who, in the tradition of the apostle Paul, differentiate between "Israel," the Jewish

ethnic group, and Judaism, and maintain that one may be a good Jew and practice a religion other than Judaism in any of its versions.

NEUSNER, 2003

To underline Neusner's point, he notes that, for these inclusionist Judaism's, all that is necessary is to profess Judaism.

As a case in point, Kohenet Annie Matan's Congregation, *Matanot Lev*:

Offered a deconstructed model of *Yom Kippur* with discrete ritual modules for each of the key components of the liturgy. Each was woven with chanting, mindfulness, and hands-on activities. We had 20–30-minute breaks between each one and people were encouraged to come and go, rest and even eat, as needed for a day of deep connection and presence.

MATAN, 2018

The manner in which Matan suggests that *Yom Kippur*, the most solemn and holiest fast day of the year, be broken down into activities, self-care and snacks fits very well into the modern paradigm of what is in essence an ironically self-reflective spirituality, but it has little to do with historical Jewish understanding of the manner in which one should celebrate *Yom Kippur*. I should also note that the title "*Kohenet*" is in itself extremely problematic, since it relates to both the traditional Jewish masculine role of Kohen, or Priest and also to what is understood by traditional *Halakhic* Judaism understand as idol worship.

Given Matan, we need to understand that in Neusner methodological construction, that to any of these inclusionist, Modern groups of Jews, Judaism is merely the religion of Jews, that it is the religion of the Jewish people, where, importantly, Neusner does not define "Jewish People." This lack of definition is important, because, Jewishness, in my working definition, is the cultural expression of Judaism as a religion combined and intertwined with the expression of the Judaic nationality as descended from the exiled people of Judea after the destruction of the Second Temple, where, in Neusner's case, he is including those who are culturally Jewish, but who also may or may not be Halakhically Jews and also those who may only be pretending for whatever reason to be Jewish. Furthermore, some of these pretend Jews believe themselves to be Jewish, but without any authority. Some like Rachel Dolezal, contend that they are 'transracial' or are perpetrating a fraud, but some sincerely believe that they deserve to be Jewish just because they identify that way. For more on these pretend Jews, see Debbie Hall's January 2019 blog post in the Times of Israel (Hall, 2019).

To continue with Neusner, he also says, that we must understand that these inclusionist groups understand Judaism, as the religion of said Jewish people

but that those Jewish people are defined as those people who define themselves as “those who profess to be Jews.” Logically then, for this construction of inclusionist Jews, a Jewish person is a person who professes to be a Jew and a person who professes to be Jewish is a Jew. This is a tautology, but the ramifications are also severe because there is no standard via which to include a person as a Jew, either culturally, ethnically, religiously, or other. For Jews by Neusner’s definition, there is no discrimination on any terms since there is no basis for possible discrimination. All are welcome, despite beliefs, ancestry or other.

Again crucially, Neusner states that this group of self-defined Jewish Jews may also include such groups that may not even be Jewish in the *Halakhic* or Judaic sense, but no matter, because they belong to this group of people who profess to be Jews. So, finally, Neusner asserts that this group of people who define themselves to be included as those who qualify within Judaism, for groups and that those groups may even be dedicated to wiping out of supplanting traditional Judaism, such as Messianic Jews and “Jews for Jesus” and that such a group does not even require any historical connection to Judaism at all. Any group may claim to Jews, and this includes groups such as Black Hebrew Israelites or Black African Hebrews, groups that, despite no historical or genealogical connection to historical Judaism and Jewishness, claim that they are the only “real” and authentic Jews. There are huge differences between Jews who are Black and the BHI movement which is further discussed in Michael Miller’s article *Black Judaism(s) and the Hebrew Israelites* (Miller, 2019).

What Neusner has then demonstrated is that inclusionist Judaism in modernity, as a “Modern” religion, may be constructed so absurdly so as to even be dedicated to wiping itself out and this demonstrates that inclusion, *qua* inclusion, for the sake of more “inclusiveness,” may ultimately be extremely detrimental to Judaism in itself. Most importantly, what Neusner demonstrates is that there is no real single authority within inclusionist Judaism to answer questions about Jewishness, Jewish praxes, or Jewish law, or even questions about Jewish identity as a member of the Jewish nation, so that these inclusionist Judaisms, especially in North America, have a problem.

Really then, inclusionist Jews have no real guide from which authoritative Jewish answers may derive nor any Rabbinic authority. If one chooses this inclusionist approach, then there is no single authority as to what is Jewish Judaism and each one does what feels so that each Jew becomes authoritative of his or her own Judaism and Jewishness. For these Jews, any answer may do. It is obvious to us that Neusner considers this possibility of multiple authorities a problem but he does not suggest any solutions. On the other side of the coin, there are also numerous Jewish groups whose members are exclusionist and who live, as much as possible, outside of mainstream society as kind of an antithesis to inclusionist Judaism, such as the Hassidic and Haredi

movements. There are the Modern Orthodox who try and balance Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy with Modernity. Each of these groups also has its own issues.

When it comes to explaining these schisms and splits, Freudian psychoanalytic theory will also only get us so far. It may help to explain the etiology of what we can see are diverse denominations of Judaism (West, 2021), but it does not explain the manner in which these groups differ. It also does not explain the way these groups relate to each other. To do this, we need to understand how Judaism changed in Modernity.

3 Diachronic Denominationally Jewish

Given Neusner's descriptions of a certain kind of popular Judaism, we can see that Judaism as a religion certainly changed over time, despite the protests of various more Orthodox denominations. This section attempts to define Jews in terms of historical context, although it does delve into some theological issues, because, to understand Jewish history, from a Jewish context, one must understand the theological issues that existed as cultural and vice versa. So when Neusner mentions some specific denominations of Judaism that were created specifically because of modernity, such as Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and even Modern Orthodoxy we need to understand the cultural issues that forced their formation, both in terms of theology and in terms of culture. For Judaism the two are inextricable from each other.

The issue is that, as we have seen above, the manner in which Judaism has changed over time is such that different Judaisms themselves, depending on whom you ask, may not have one single authority, but instead, have multiple authorities or even no authority at all. To take this notion to an absurd end, perhaps, as some would then say, that Judaism, as thing just does not exist and is merely a construction of imagination. While I note that this approach is nihilist, there are authorities such as Daniel Boyarin who argue that "the statement 'Judaism exists' makes no ontological sense (Boyarin, 2018)," because, for critics such as he, Judaism, as a concept or as a religion was only constructed in relation to the European Enlightenment. Notably, Boyarin ignores all of Sephardi, and Mizrahi Judaism, which certainly existed at that time, were recognizably Judaism and existed in relation to themselves and their own cultures. For Boyarin, and for others like him, prior to this period, what existed in Europe was a loosely defined nation of "Jews," and that this nation was itself just a creation of the state in which these Jews resided. These critics continue that Judaism, as a religion, and as opposed to this nation of Jews, only began to construct itself as that specific religion at that time in history when Jews

started to speak non-Jewish languages (Boyarin, 2018). This is to say that Jews only recognized themselves as a group who were not the ruling majority, that they were “other,” only when they themselves had a manner of reflecting on the differences between Jew and not Jew.

The problem with Boyarin's definition is that, historically and amongst themselves, most Jewish cultures did not speak the language of the country in which they lived, but instead spoke Jewish versions of these languages. Thus, today we have Yiddish, which is a contraction of Yiddish Deutsch, or German Jewish, which is a dialect of Middle German, Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Portuguese, also known as Ladino, and also Judeo Arabic. These languages are spoken and written languages, and that alphabet used is the Hebrew alphabet, rather than the native base language. For example, Yiddish sounds German, but it is written in Hebrew letters. To continue this argument, if one wished to dig into history, at the time of the diaspora from Judea, Jews spoke Aramaic, which, along with Hebrew, Syriac, and Phoenician. In the Middle Ages, Maimonides wrote in Arabic, Hebrew and in Aramaic. Later commentators wrote in Hebrew and in Aramaic. While Jews may have learned other languages, Jews never stopped speaking Hebrew and Jews never stopped learning Aramaic. One might argue that in North America and across Europe, at the turn of the 20th century, the Jewish *lingua franca* was Yiddish. Even secular Jews spoke Yiddish, there were plays and original works written in Yiddish. Even the name Yiddish means Jewish. It is not German, or Polish or Hungarian, although Yiddish does carry loan words from these languages, as it still carries loan words from Latin. Many Jews still speak or are learning Yiddish today and the state language of Israel is Hebrew. At what point in time, Maimonides who wrote in Arabic in the 11th century, or the Jews of early modernity who spoke Yiddish and German, or the Jews today of Israel who speak Hebrew, at no point in time did the Jew's language become indicative of “mere Judaism.” Boyarin's idea is based on a “genealogical” view of Jewish history and while this “genealogical” historical view is certainly in vogue today and is certainly useful in understanding the manner in which certain traits may have made their way through history, it also tries to understand history as a thing in itself, rather than a tool via which we may understand things.

Historically, prior to the Enlightenment, it was not just Jews and Judaism, but it was also the Gentile societies outside of Judaism who all constructed the Jews as a nation. I contend that Jews were in a sense, and semi-redundantly, the Jewish nation of Jews. Shakespeare speaks of “Shylock the Jew” in *The Merchant of Venice* and, Jewish thinker, Baruch Spinoza, who, notably, lived outside the Jewish Ghetto in Amsterdam, states in his *The Theological Political Treatise* that “The sign of circumcision is, as I think, so important, that I could persuade

myself that it alone would preserve the Jewish nation for ever (Spinoza, 1999).” Judaism was at that time understood to be a nation, not a religion, the nation of the Jews.

This view changed, so that only one hundred years later, in his opus *Jerusalem*, Moses Mendelssohn was able to construct Judaism as a “Church,” by which synecdoche, Mendelssohn means “Religion (Mendelssohn, 2017).” In modernity, this idea of Judaism as a merely religion was important, and Jews were constructed, at least in some ways, as religiously Jewish but nationally part of whatever nation they happened to reside. In Germany this “Jewish Church” later became what we know today as “classical” Reform Judaism. They acknowledged, in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, that “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any laws concerning the Jewish state (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1885).”²³ It is important to acknowledge that this Reform Judaism arose as an attempt to stem assimilation due to the Emancipation,²⁴ that these “Reformers admitted openly that observing Jewish law made it hard to be both a Jew and to be a person of the modern world (Dorff, 1977).” And so, in the attempt to “modernize” Judaism and to make it acceptable to both Jews and to German society, attempts were made to make Judaism and Jewishness palatable, thus “Reform” Judaism was born.

This “reformed” Judaism was not, however, the only Jewish voice at the time. One group who countered the reformers were the “Neo” Orthodox Jews, forefathers of the current Jewish denomination called “Modern Orthodoxy” which arose in reaction to this Reform Movement. Another group who existed at that time was what one might call “mainstream” Judaism, those Jews who wished to live and who were, in general unaffected by either the Reform or the Orthodox. These folks just lived their lives as Jews. A fourth group, those who later formed the *Haredi*, or Ultra-Orthodox movement, arose under the aegis of Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Hatam Sofer. These wished to freeze Judaism as it was then and there, without any changes whatsoever.

Historically, there is one more group which is often ignored, since they do not fit into the simple denominational picture, but we must also remember that, at the time and co-existing with these groups, aside from these theistic Jewish movements, were secular Jewish movements, “freethinkers” some of whom considered themselves culturally Jews, and that these “atheist Jews” even lived alongside the believers. These non-theistic or atheistic groups existed in tension

²³ This is not necessarily the view of current Reform Judaism.

²⁴ As did the denomination Orthodoxy.

with “Religious” Reform and Modern Orthodox, and Orthodox Judaisms. As a case in point, Eddie Portnoy notes in his book *Bad Rabbi* (2018), that since Jews, both religious and non-religious, while no longer required to live in Ghettos together, they did however continue to live together, and this mixing often led to tension, especially when these non-religious and areligious Jews transgressed *Halakhah*, the 613 commandments required of every observant Orthodox Jew. Portnoy mentions, for example, a Yom Kippur “Dinner” attended by Jews who were not observant that was held in New York City in 1915, where some of those who were following Jewish law grew so angry that, reportedly, one of them threw a rock through a Jewish restaurant window which ensued in a brawl and which was reported, at the time, in the *New York Sun* (Portnoy, 2018). Notably, and we must note this strongly, that Reform, Orthodox, Freethinker, or Anarchist, they all called themselves and all agreed that they were all Jews. Religious praxis and belief alone were not defining matters to this identity. The important point to underline here is that Jews, practicing, non-practicing and other all still lived together in the same parts of town, speaking the same language, Yiddish, and that despite their varying praxes and beliefs, they all called themselves Jews. Further, both the religious and non-religious Jewish “free-thinkers” had newspapers in Yiddish (Portnoy, 2018) and all continued to live in Jewish communities, so that even in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there is documentation that it was possible to be culturally “Jewish” and also not religious and still live amongst Jews in a Jewish neighborhood.

In this case, and at this time, to be very simplistic, I will describe this as several parallel continua of Jews. First there are those Jews who lived as “Religious Jews” and who remained culturally Jewish in a Jewish manner and who attempted to follow the *Halakhah* who are the progenitors of modern *Haredi* Jews. Second there are those Jews who are “Religious Jews” who are more Modern in philosophy but still try to live in “Modernity.” We call these “Modern Orthodox Jews”. There are those Jews of the “Mosaic faith,” as described in the Pittsburg Platform, who are the progenitors of modern reform Judaism, and finally, there are those Jews, who while identifying as Jews, lived a contrarian or secular life, as Jews in the Jewish community. Unfortunately, those “simple Jews” who were unaffiliated with any stream have been lost to history, because of pogroms and the Shoah, and tracing them is beyond the scope of this work.

Some Jews attempted to find a manner within which to “conserve” Judaism and at the same time to be modern, so that in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a particularly American form of Judaism formed in reaction to an observed need. While I acknowledge the German roots of the Conservative movement, I am compressing several ideas here for the sake of brevity, moreover, it is in North America, where the Conservative movement

really came unto its own. Conservative Judaism addressed the need to, on the one hand live as Americans in America and, on the other hand, to “Conserve” Judaism as practicing Jews in America. Historically, though, a number of events led to the ultimate formation of a separate “Conservative” Judaism. The first event was the graduation of the first class from Hebrew Union College, the Seminary of Reform Judaism. When the first class graduated, a number of Rabbis were invited what later became known as the infamous ‘*Trefah* Banquet’ where almost all the other foods, such as frog’s legs and shellfish, were by definition not kosher and therefore inedible to some of those invited. Arguably, while this meal was not the defining moment for the founding of the Conservative movement, it was divisive and a seminal moment in understanding the antagonism which was held by the Reform movement of that time for *Halakhic* Judaism, a disdain which is still held today.²⁵

The real defining moment of the schism between the Reform and the Conservative movements was the Reform movement’s release of the Pittsburgh Platform (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1885), and it was arguably, this document, that caused Rabbi Solomon Schechter to form Conservative Judaism, a movement, which “while rejecting both what it sees as the fundamentalism of Orthodoxy and the untraditionalism of Reform, adopts a positive religious position of its own in which Jewish piety can be fully at home in minds open to the best of modern thought (Jacobs, 1995).” This was a crucially important innovation in Judaism as it centered *Halakhic* Judaism, or piety, while at the same time, allowed for the vagaries of modernity. We must note that at the time it was founded most Jews who called themselves “Conservative” were *Halakhically* observant, so that, while there are major philosophical and theological differences between Conservative Judaism and Modern Orthodoxy today, at the initial inception of Conservative Judaism the major practical difference between the two movements lay in mixed seating in Conservative synagogues and the role of women in prayer. Today the opposite is the case, most so-called Conservative Jews are not fully observant, but at one time, Conservative Judaism was the largest denomination of Jews in North America. One reason for this shrinkage is perhaps the Conservative Jewish philosophy, where the Rabbinical Assembly votes on changes or additions to the understanding of *Halakhah*; however, if there is not unanimity on a decision, rather than go with the majority decision, individual Rabbis may

25 In 2018, a “Trefah Banquet 2.0” was held where bacon and lobster were served. While in some senses Reform Judaism has returned to a more Ecumenical approach with the Jewish denominations, this Trefah Banquet 2.0 is certainly a slap in the face. See <https://www.jweekly.com/2018/01/08/tradition-transgression-trefa-banquet-2-0/>.

pick and choose between majority and minority opinions. Therefore, some Conservative Rabbis will allow the use of electricity on the Sabbath and other will prohibit it. This seeming lack of internal consistency, combined with the demands of an informed and engaged lay membership, the constant need to keep learning at a specific level, would be disconcerting for most.

Who then do these groups consider to be a Jew and under what authority? For the purposes of this work, I must choose under what authority you and I will consider someone a Jew. Furthermore, under what authority may we decide what constitutes Judaism and Jewishness? From this point onward we must ask in what manner we may consider what “Jewish” means in terms of representation. We need to define our terms so as to decide what might be considered authoritative in Judaism, for only then may we understand how it is each Jewish group both constructs its own Jewishness, a point which will allow us to then understand in a better manner exactly what is “Jewish” in terms of “Jewish” representation. A key question is then to ask what is the relation of the Jew and Jewishness to Judaism?

We can state, for example, that eating *Matzo* on Passover is without a doubt Judaism, since eating *Matzo* on Passover is a direct positive commandment derived directly from Exodus 12:15, and as such, this commandment or “tradition” is almost universally observed by all Jews, both religious and cultural. On the other hand, eating potato *latkes*²⁶ and deep fried *Sufganiyot*²⁷ during *Hanukkah* is certainly some kind of a Jewish behavior, but it is mandated only by tradition and not by law. While eating fried foods is normative for most Jewish cultures at *Hanukkah*, this custom is not commanded in scripture. It is a custom, or a tradition, rather than a law. Strictly speaking, the observance of Hanukkah itself is not based on scripture, or the Hebrew Bible, but is based on later sources, including Talmudic ones. The other issue is that, given the above examples, in what manner then are we to classify Jewish cinema, Jewish art shows and even Jewish comedy and Jewish burlesque shows? Is it enough that it is “Jewish” themed or has a number of nominally Jewish participants to be called “Jewish?” What constitutes “Jewishness” in terms of popular expression and popular culture? How about *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* where most of the actors depicting Jews, including the actress playing Mrs. Maisel herself, are not Jews?

Even in popular culture, there are some who classify Judaism as a “mere” religion, and that this “religion” is, for them, something different than the historical “Judaism.” Perhaps “Judeanism,” whereby the Jewish people separate

26 Yiddish for pancakes.

27 Hebrew for fried jelly filled doughnuts.

themselves solely as a nation is another way that we may create a division. This is an important point because, while historians may demonstrate that this nation originated in Judea and Babylonia, they also make very clear that Judaism, as Judaism, has changed over time. Those Jews who lived after the exile from Judea who formed the roots of what we call Judaism today, may only bear a cursory relationship, if any at all, to those Jews who are Jewish and who practice Judaism today. So, that the problem with the historical and genealogical construction of Judaism is that while it is on balance a historically true narrative, and while Judaism may have indeed changed over time, the point of the cursory relationship is moot. “Jews” today are related to those historical Judeans, and there are indeed genealogies to defend it, and, moreover, the schism between historical Ancient Judaism and Modern Judaism is a simplistic one. Nobody is asserting that Christianity as practiced in Antioch in 350 CE bears any relationship to Christian beliefs and practice today.

The problem is that this construction brings us back to Boyarin’s assertion which proposes that Judaism as a modern “religion” is completely ahistorical and “was only adopted by Jews with the coming of modernity and the adoption of Christian languages (Boyarin, 2018).” If at all, this statement is only partially true, for the reason that those scholars like Daniel Boyarin who endorse this viewpoint fully, miss the fact that Judaism does not only exist in reference to the surrounding Christian cultures, but that Judaism, as a nation and as culture and a religion, also exists in terms of itself, and in terms of those Jews who specifically rejected the Enlightenment, specifically, as Leora Batznitsky tell us, the Orthodox Haredi and Hassidic Jews (Batznitsky, 2011). On the one hand, Boyarin’s construction of Judaism as existing only in terms of a religion and as such merely in reference *vis a vis* the outside Christian culture is completely limited, and to be honest, ultimately pessimistic and reductionistic. Judaism is not merely this kind of a religion. On the other hand, Jacob Neusner’s construction of Judaism and Jewishness as merely an ethnicity is also pessimistic and equally reductionistic, since as he says, it reduces Jewishness to sociological data. Both of these constructions, if taken to their extremes, see Judaism and Jewishness, both diffusing itself and being diffused into nothingness and merely as other ways of doing culture without referencing the Jews who defied and who denied the Enlightenment and remained *Haredi*.

We also need to understand that if we identify Judaism merely as a “religion,” that the term “religion” itself carries much historical baggage, specifically in terms of the academic study of religion. We need to recognize that the term, “Religion,” in the English language, developed out of a particularly Christian, European, colonialist context and we do need to understand then that Judaism, as defined by those practitioners of the academic study of religion, may not

even qualify as a religion in the context of “World Religions.” To explain, while the etymology, origin and history of the word “religion” has been contested historically. Even the definition of “religion” has been haggled over by modern scholars since the time of publication of Jonathon Z. Smith’s seminal essay, *Religion, Religions, Religious* (2004). We must even understand that there are those who believe that the entire field which we call religious studies is itself merely a Western colonialist construction (Nongbri, 2013) and may not fit other the manner in which other cultures define themselves. Brent Nongbri has demonstrated that the way we think about “religion” is determined by history, such that the way we think about “religion” was constructed from a particularly white European and Victorian mindset (Nongbri, 2013). But we must remember that Nongbri is writing about a specific view of religion, one that is Christian and Modern in nature. It is only if we agree with Nongbri and his writings about the term “religion,” an argument that is constructed from a particular, conventional kind of white Protestant Christian point of view, that we may agree that these views are also congruent with what we understand Judaism to be.²⁸ If we step outside of Judaism and Jewishness to view “religion,” from Nongbri’s viewpoint, it is only then that Boyarin’s construction is correct. From an internally Jewish point of view, both Boyarin and Nongbri are merely interesting but not relevant, and unfortunately, while interesting, the same is true of Neusner. Thus, we may dismiss the arguments about Jewish religion or ethnicity as merely constructions.

If, however, we were to understand Judaism and Jewishness as merely an ethnicity, without religion, we run into another issue. The word ‘Ethnic’ means “of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background (The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary).” First then, just as religious group, Jews may construct themselves as an ethnicity, according to the above definition. A problem here is that Jews, as an ethnicity, construct themselves, or are constructed by others as an ethnicity, but to be fair, if we look hard enough, we will see that Judaism and Jewishness encompass multiple ethnicities. We may argue that there are three “main” Jewish ethnicities, Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi, we may even go further than that and claim that there are Ashkenazi ethnicities, based on geography and the kind of Yiddish²⁹ they speak or spoke

28 The term “Judeo-Christian” is still commonly used in many places but is a problem since it implies that Christianity’s “New Testament” has superseded Judaism’s “Old Testament.” Instead, the two are different theologically historically and otherwise. In religious studies Jewish scripture is referred to as the Hebrew Bible.

29 Yiddish is, in itself, a dialect of late middle German which, according to the YIVO institute for Yiddish research, may be further subdivided into three distinct geographical dialects

and that we could even divide Ashkenazi groups by differing religious practices on various holy days. During Passover, for example, some Eastern European Jews forbid the eating of cabbage, where others forbid garlic and still others forbid fish. I will note that while Jews, themselves, do not construct these variations in praxes as ethnicity, that these differences may well be constructed in this manner. I will note that, for example, that many of the first Jews in North America named their synagogues after the town from which they originated, such as Toronto's Minsker *Shul*,³⁰ where the congregants came from Minsk in Russia, and the First Narayever Congregation, where the congregants came from Narayev in the Ukraine. Also, one of the criteria which matchmakers in the Orthodox community still use is that of pedigree, and ethnic origin, who your ancestors were and where they came from. It would seem then that Jacob Neusner's issue of ethnicization, while in one sense a real concern, is mostly centered around those Jews of varying praxes who are of Ashkenazic origin, or from the Ashkenazi centric point of view. To complicate Neusner further, it then becomes confusing to understand what it is that we mean when we speak of Jewish ethnicity and culture. Is Jewish ethnicity merely an issue of Jewish cultural praxis or does anything and everything a Jew does become Jewish? This problem highlights Neusner's dilemma, where, in North America, Jews who descended from the roots of Judaism can no longer delimit, definitively, what "Jewish" means for themselves, even in terms of ethnicity. This is to say that for Neusner, and for us, that term "ethnicity" alone is not sufficient to determine what Jewish is and that there must be other criteria, as in 'having Jewish descent.' If this is true, then, we have a culture defining itself in terms of its own religious criteria, which brings us back to where we started.

Another criterion I must add to help our understanding of "Jewishness," aside from ethnicity and religion, is "nationhood." To explain further, while the Hebrew bible has no word for Judaism or Jewishness, it does call those descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, "Israel" or the "Children of Israel" interchangeably, where Israel is another name for Jacob. The *Torah*, the Hebrew Bible, also addresses the people as a "nation of priests (Ex 19: 6.)" and as a "Holy nation (Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 7:6–8; Deuteronomy 14:2)." In the liturgy, Jews refer to themselves as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I am not qualifying the relative historical or even historiographical truth or falsehood of that statement, but instead, I am stating here that Jews then construct

(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2014). So, while the language spoken by Jews was Yiddish, the kind of Yiddish they spoke was different, similar to the different English language which used to be spoken in different parts of England.

30 Yiddish for Synagogue.

themselves as a kin group, a family, descended from historical ancestors and a single patriarch whom Martin Buber calls *Abraham the Seer* (Buber, 1956). This is to say that Jews were a family descended historically from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, and this view has informed the manner in which Jews and Judaism have regarded themselves and itself since its inception 3500 years ago. This conception of Jewish nationhood as family is pervasive historically in Judaism. We could speculate that this attempt to separate “Modern” Judaism from the historical practices of the Jewish people is also an attempt to separate classical Jewish yearning for redemption in Zion from modern Zionism, and in fact Boyarin who is a proponent of these theories is a self-admitted antizionist (Boyarin, 2018), which then makes sense in this context. Since, according to Boyarin, Jews and Judaism and Jewishness are discontinuous, have no connection, then any claim to a Jewish history or a history of Judaism, or historical claims to a Jewish land are also nonsense, in this context. However, we see that even Spinoza refers to the Jewish nation (Spinoza, 1999) but does not define who belongs to that nation; even for Spinoza, Jewish nationhood was *a priori* that member to the nation was self-evident. Further this construction of “Jews as a Nation” is responsible for the rise of Modern Zionism and the Modern state of Israel. I need to make it clear that Modern Zionism as a movement is based on the historical Jewish religious claim of a return to return to Zion, so that while “Modern” Zionism is clearly a modern phenomenon, that Judaism, qua Judaism, contains, at the very least, the religious and historical seeds of modern Zionism. It is only in modernity where attempts have been made to separate the Jew from Judaism, Jews from Israel, and Israel from Judaism, and to date these separations have been unsuccessful.

What remains is still very much unclear. We can state that the religion Judaism is that religion which is practiced by Jews. The Jewish culture, as a culture, if we are honest, is truly many different cultures, and what is called “Jewish culture in North America” is often Ashkenazi centric, and we must also notice that this Ashkenazi centric Jewishness is a pastiche of traditions from many other different cultures that have been adopted and made Jewish. While we do have the possibility of denying that “Jewish culture” exists, we may instead agree with Haim Soloveitchik who recognizes that Judaism, specifically in the twentieth century has suffered from *Rupture and Reconstruction* (1994). While Soloveitchik means to write only of Modern Orthodoxy, we may note that the Jewish Jews of Judaism in North America have been the recipient of many “ruptures” from many locales, including the survivors of the Shoah, the “refuseniks” from then Soviet Russia, the Moroccan Jews, Syrian Jews and others, and all of these groups use the same holy books and claim the same history as Jews living in North America. All have suffered from many different and

assorted historical traumas which have affected their communities, and all are equally Jews. Using the word “religion” in Boyarin’s sense is Ashkenazi-centric and ahistorical.

We are still left with the question of Jewishness. Despite the lack religiosity, or even the lack historical association with Jewish events, how is that a film-festival or even a burlesque show is “Jewish?” The answer is that these events are reflections, or even representations, of something “Jewish,” something that reflects Judaism and something that is done by Jews, who are related to other Jews, in a sense a family of Jews. A Jewish event represents something that is both universal and intrinsic, on the one hand cultural on another hand and at the same time, personal, one that encompasses self, the Jew as familial, as expressed in a matrix of Judaism to represent Jewishness. Judaism in this case is a kind of phenomenon which creates meaning in some way. And it is here that we must then examine semiotics and the manner in which it works.

4 North American Semiotics: Jew, Jewish or Judaism as a Sign

Problems of representation and the manner in which signs and symbols represent other things, is mostly a problem of modernity and of the postmodern age.³¹ According to Charles S. Peirce a sign is defined as “Something that stands for something else to someone in some capacity (Peirce, 1831–1966).” While prior to Modernity prior to modernity, a sign and the meaning it carried often had a strict one to one relationship based in the interpretive authority of either the sovereign state of the church, we must recognize that these signs as representations are themselves polysemous, that they themselves may carry multiple meanings, and that there is no longer a one-to-one relationship between a sign and what it means. A single sign may carry multiple meanings or none. While we will be addressing Judaism and Jewishness as kinds of signs, we must also understand that it is only in modernity and postmodernity where the relation between a sign and its meaning is not fixed, so that the meaning of “Judaism” and “Jewishness” and the thing which these words represent, the “Jew” is not fixed, and that Jewishness and Judaism have in turn become signs of their own. Philosopher Jacques Lacan called this fissure between a sign and its meaning “the split” between the signified, or the meaning of the sign, and the signifier (Lacan, 1985).

³¹ Where, prior to modernity, a sign and its meaning often had a strict one to one relationship based in the interpretive authority of either the sovereign state of the church.

Lacan based his ideas on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who in his seminal work, *A Course in General Linguistics* (1959), theorized that the sign and its meaning exist in into two separate parts, the signifier and a signified, for example “a rose” and “love,” so that in this case, “a rose” means “love.” De Saussure asserts that the relationship between the sign and its meaning is arbitrary and that together these two, signifier and signified, create a sign, where the rose carries the meaning “love,” but that a rose only means love because we say it does, the meaning is not intrinsic to the rose. This arbitrariness is a problem, because logically, for de Saussure, since the meaning of a signifier is arbitrary, any sign, or any rose, can then mean anything, to anyone. A rose may mean love, hate, fear, disgust, thirst or sadness. I mean “love” by sending you a rose, however, there is no reason you may not read my rose as fatigue or hungriness. So, while de Saussure is interesting, his formulation of the sign has a problem, one which is at least partially solved by Peirce.

Peirce calls the object of representation, which is to say, the object which is represented, “the grounds of representation (Peirce, 1831–1966, p. Vol 2 pg 228)” and for Peirce:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representation.

PEIRCE, 1831–1966, pp. Vol 2, pg 228

For Peirce, the meaning of a sign is not arbitrary, because a sign is meant to carry a specific message to a specific audience. Peirce proposes that since the relationship between a sign and its “ground,” or meaning, are not arbitrary, and that signs are created, at least, exist to create some sort of meaning to a specific audience where a sign stands to somebody specific in some respect that the recipient of any sign is equally as important, in the relationship of meaning, as the sender and the ground of the sign. Further, the sender is as equally important to the recipient as the ground of the sign and the ground of the sign is as important in this relationship as the sender of the sign and its recipient. It is not enough to send a “rose” that means “love” and instead I must send a “rose” that means “love” to a specific individual or audience, one who is capable of decoding that the rose which I sent actually means love.

Umberto Eco expands and enlarges on Peirce's work and notes that signs also describe cultural units which approach their meaning in an asymptotic manner (Eco, 1976). A "rose" is not in itself "love," it only means love in a specific set of cultural circumstances. A rose only means love because we have previously agreed that it does, or I have sent a rose within a narrow enough cultural context so that it may be decoded by the recipient as love.

Signs and their meanings all exist in contexts, which are cultural and, as Eco tells us, signs are also units of that culture: signs only signify in their cultural context. Change the cultural context and the sign changes meaning and perhaps even becomes meaningless. So then, Eco proposes that although these signs are created to have specific meaning, that the sign and the meaning of that sign only approach each other in an asymptotic manner (Eco, 1976), so that they will never actually meet. There is always a split, however infinitesimal, between a sign and its meaning. Then, Eco also believes that there are limits to interpretation that the meaning of a sign and that the criteria for decoding the sign "successfully" are encoded within the texts themselves so that interpretations of texts "are by no means indefinite and must be recognized as imposed by the semiotic strategies displayed by the text (Eco, 1979, p. 36)." Eco. What Eco means by a successful decoding, is that both the encoder and the decoder can agree on the meaning of the sign. I need to be clear that a text, in this sense, is something that has been encoded and exists to be decoded. While a book may be a text, other things such as works of art, films, architecture or even dance or pro-wrestling may be a text. Indeed, anything that may be "read" to have meaning is a text.

We also need to note that the limits of reading a text are important. These limits mean that despite meaning which we may wish to read in a text or sign, we must then strategize the rules via which we may interpret these texts so as to understand them in their context and without too much distortion. Eco does not mean that we limit all interpretation, but rather that we understand that some interpretations are problematic. As an example, while we are free to interpret the Marquis de Sade's book *120 Days of Sodom* as a book written for children, such an interpretation is torturous, just as we are free to presume that William Shakespeare's writings are queer coded or that the Hebrew Bible contains codes. In these senses, we are free to interpret anything in any manner, but then we must also be responsible for our interpretations, based in the context of the texts themselves. For more see Eco's *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1990).

For the purposes of this work, the "texts" which we will be reading together are in fact Judaism, itself, as a religion, which manifest themselves as the human

artifacts created by the manifestations of the religion as a culture. This culture, separate but entangled with the religion, is what we will call Jewishness. Add to these the artifacts and manifestations of those who claim nationhood, of the nationality Jew, both as these existed in the past, in archeological finds, and also as manifested in popular culture today. I will then be basing my “readings” of Judaism, Jewishness and Jew, based on the criteria and limits proposed by Peirce and by Eco and also in terms of the theory of trauma that I have delineated earlier in this work. I will also try to be fair in my interpretation by understanding these representations synchronically, as they manifest today, but also in understanding that there is a diachronic history to these representations, where meanings certainly have changed over time. I do need to note that I am also not, on the other hand, going to take a fully materialist approach to religion, where we understand the meaning of religion as different from its practitioners, but instead, I am rather, going to understand religion as having some kind of intrinsic and phenomenological meaning to its practitioners despite the lack of external evidence. Therefore, following Eco, I will use the context of culture and attempt to balance both the emic and etic approaches to understanding the cultural meanings of Judaism, Jewishness and Jewish nationality as a product of one culture existing inside the other, where emic approaches try to understand the meaning of culture from inside the social group while etic approaches try to understand the meaning of culture from outside.

Another semiotic, method to understand Judaism, Jewishness and Jew as separate identities is to contrast them to what they are not. One may question in what manner are Jews different from non-Jews, how does Jewishness differ from being a Gentile and how is Judaism different than non-Judaic religion? Remember here that we must be careful to note that for the sake of this comparison, Jewishness only refers to “Jewish culture.” In my definition, I am differing from Jacob Neusner and separating the “Jew” and “Jewishness” both from each other and from the religion “Judaism,” so that Judaism is the religion of those people who practice the religion of those people and who are also nationally Jews, not merely culturally Jewish. It is key to note here that because “Jew,” “Jewish” and “Judaism” do not exist in a vacuum, that these expressions exist in terms of a minority group who exist in a larger culture so that the manner in which these identities are represented are generalized in terms of behaviors and actions, as well as beliefs. For the sake of relative simplicity and brevity, I am going to proceed via the fiction that all those cultures that are not Judaism, Jewish or Judaic, are all one thing, since New York City is different than London or Moscow. Even in North America, the surrounding culture of Houston, Texas is different than that of New York City, and even the surrounding cultures in

various parts of Brooklyn, for example Bedford Stuyvesant and Williamsburg, are also very different.

Given that we have an ideal, a person who is a Jew who practices Judaism, Jewishly, I then must question if there then exists, separate from the practitioner, an idealized Jew, an idealized Judaism, and an idealized Jewishness, not in the Neo-Platonic sense of essences, but rather in a phenomenological sense. Perhaps Judaism, Jewishness and Jew examples of Susanne Langer's conception of discursive and presentational forms which we intend to represent in a culture. As Langer states "This kind of semantic may be called 'presentational symbolism,' to characterize its essential distinction from discursive symbolism, or 'language' proper (Langer, 1957)." Langer differentiates between discursive forms and experiences and presentational ones where, in general, discursive forms are things which may be represented fully and presentational forms, which are, in general phenomenological. For example, presentation would be listening to a great symphony, and which is also non discursive. Imagine describing the entire symphony, beat by beat, note for note, instrument by instrument, and including all the feelings and emotions present. We do describe things, but these descriptions are imperfect and for Langer reminds us that some forms defy representation. Langer also cautions against mistaking the description for the thing itself, or as Alfred Korzybski stated "The map is not the territory (Korzybski, 1933)." Just because we can describe something does mean that we can know what it is nor can we describe it fully. As Eco says above, representation is asymptotic.

So, in this sense, the religion "Judaism" as an expression of religion and of "Jewishness" as a form of cultural ontology are then representations of the historical "Jew" who is descended from those who were exiled from Judea. These "Jews" are constructed and construct themselves, ontologically, as a nationality, the Jewish nation of Jews. This nation is constructed of diverse groups of people who exist in a historical continuum, who tell narratives about themselves and, rather than challenge the veracity of these stories, it is more useful to understand the manner in which these narratives, historically true or not, relate to the construction of identity. It is the relation between these narratives and verified history that form Eco's asymptote, that some things may not be verifiable in the common sense, but instead are mythologically and psychologically sound. Perhaps we cannot ever know the "real truth." It is as Langer states, that "The Kantian challenge; 'What can I know?' is shown to be dependent on the prior question: 'What can I ask?' (Langer, 1957)." Further to this idea, "The implication is that there are indeed questions which I cannot ask, and therefore things that are unknowable, at least in a conventional sense (West, 2020)." This lack of discursivity is a reflection of Eco's point that a sign and its

meaning, being asymptotic, only exists paradoxically and so that signification only occurs when a sign and its meaning are not unity. Langer is not saying that there are questions which may not be asked, rather that there are some questions for which the quality “ability to be asked” simply does not exist. It is these forms which are what Langer calls “presentational,” as opposed to discursive, in nature. So then, in many senses “Jew,” “Judaism” and “Jewishness” are non-discursive, presentational forms and that “Jew” as a national identity, “Judaism” as a religion and “Jewishness” as a culture are then discursive representations of the presentation, or non-discursive manner in which Jews exist as Jews in the world.

In a more practical sense, as above, in modernity and in postmodernity, a disconnect now exists between the signs “dance, song, film, prayer” and their various meanings and connections to “Jew,” “Judaism” or “Jewish,” but, given Eco and Langer, we at least now have several choices, whereby we may perceive a disjunct or not between the expressions of “Jewishness,” “Judaism,” and the “Jew” and the artifacts of meaning such as “dance, song, prayer, film,” which are then created in their wake. This acknowledgement, that the meaning exists but that it exists in an unstable relationship with being, is one which is not satisfying. If this position is taken to extremes, it is ultimately nihilistic since any of the possibilities of meaningful Jewish history become indeterminate.

If we are to insist that “Judaism,” “Jewishness” and the “Jew” are all expressions of the same thing, then anything and everything a Jew does may be construed as Jewish or as Judaism. We might include, then, as an extreme case, that watching two Jews eat non-kosher food on *Yom Kippur*, the holiest fast day of the year, in a non-kosher restaurant while having a meta discussion about eating that same non-kosher food in a non-kosher restaurant on *Yom Kippur* in the *Yiddish* language. But, if we wish, we can see this very scene portrayed for us, in the first episode of the web series *Yid Life Crisis* (Elman & Batalion, 2014). While the entire scene demonstrates the antithesis of the Judaic religion, it is an expression of Jewishness and Judaism as a form of disobedience and the ironic absurdity of the scene is very Jewish, as it is mockingly affectionate of the religion Judaism. Perhaps it is the fact that the web series *Yid Life Crisis* is completely in *Yiddish* that allows to understand that it is mockingly and transgressively affectionate of Judaism at its core. Less affectionate is comedian Ari Shaffir’s public mocking and transgressions of Jewish law for the sake of “comedy.” On a poster for his show, “JEW,” Shaffir furtively eats a piece of bacon, which is forbidden by Judaic dietary law, while surrounded, in an almost fetishistic manner by an over-the-top collection of Jewish ritual artifacts. My point is that is the fact that, while both of these examples are transgressive of Judaic law and traditions that both examples only exist in terms of

a “positive” Judaism and that neither would be shocking or humorous, except in relation to Judaism. Judaism is the context and Jewishness of some sort is being expressed, however outrageously it may be.

We now have another problem because if we were to collapse these identities of Jew, Jewish and Judaism together into a unity, then we would only construct those Jews those who follow Judaism as *Halakhah* and who live their lives “Jewishly” in terms of culture and identify as part of a nominal Jewish nations. A problem with this definition is that there are so many different manners of interpreting a *Halakhic* lifestyle and so many ways to do things “Jewishly,” so that we are left with a problem of authority, as above. Even were we to choose a single authority and we somehow agree that they would decide exclusively in what manner we shall live, we would notice that we had created robots who follow *Halakhah* all of whom who would all live Jewishly in exactly the same manner. The result would be a “flattening” of what Jew, Judaism and Jewish are moreover living in this manner is not conducive to a living culture.

I have, therefore, chosen a third path, which is to acknowledge that Judaism is a very large and complex field and that Jews themselves have some very real disjunctive and cognitive beliefs and practices, that these disjuncts exist between the understanding of the manner in which Judaism the religion exists and the very praxes of this religion in terms of religious, cultural and national expressions of identity. Further, as above, that these disjuncts are the result of multiple historical traumas and that instead of divorcing Jewishness, Judaism, and the Jews, or artificially forcing them together to reify them, that our model will understand that Jews, Judaism and Jewishness are still evolving separately and not necessarily at the same rate, and further that these changes exist in history and interdependently of each other, like a dance of sorts. I also understand that these three identities, while they must remain separate in most cases also continue to feed and nourish each other in such a way that they are mostly inseparable. When these identities are separated, ultimately, they disappear. I believe, then, that any re-unification of all three of these parts would require the existence of, and habitation in, a Jewish state of some sort, because otherwise it would be impossible to unite Judaism as religion, Jewishness as culture and the Jew as a nationhood. These statements are not to be understood as an endorsement of the politics or of the policies of the modern Israeli state or its policies, but absolutely is an endorsement of the right for Jews who are indigenous to this state, historically, to exist, in Israel. As a caveat, I must also note that some Jews deny nationhood and insist that it is merely a religion or merely a culture or merely a heritage and some ultra-Orthodox Jews, such as the Naturi Karta, view the modern Zionist state as a secular aberration.

Still, I must ask, what about the phenomenon of religion within the religion of Judaism. Does G-d exist in the religion of the Jews? This is a problem where, some might say that Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as culture are tied up in each other and are merely performative, in the Butlerian sense, so that Judaism itself as “religion” only makes sense as “an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition (Butler, 1988).” This idea makes sense in the idea that a Halakhic conversion to Judaism recognizes, not a catechistic belief, but instead judges the convert on performance as a Jew. One becomes a Jew by performing as one, however, we must also note that there is no phenomenology in this identity, no mysticism, and no G-d. In Butler’s sense, the Jew, Jewishness, and Judaism are immanent, tied to their performance of their identity here and now and doomed to repeat and to rehearse and to reiterate these tropes of humanity discontinuously. This Butlerian G-d, in very much immanent in the Christian sense: G-d is here and now. As a spectator to this religion, from the outside looking in, a Jewish G-d, as understood by Jews, appears to be interested in ritual for the sake of ritual, in doing and performing actions, in an epistemology based only in the existentialism of performance: I do therefore I believe.

The problem with this type of understanding, is that it limits humans to the eternal moment of now. There is only immanence, if at all, and all ritual exists as a performance of the self in the now so that the self also exists as spectator of self, all here and all now. This thought misses the idea that performance may have also have transcendent meaning, that performance is a sign, which, as above, is performed to carry some meaning to someone else. For performance to mean anything at all, performance of ritual must, at the very least, aspire to transcendence, it must try to reach beyond itself, to another, if not to G-d. This grasping beyond self, this search for transcendence, at its best, transcends discursivity and is in Langer’s sense performance, in the sense that it is non-discursive. Therefore, Butler also denies the possibility of phenomena; however, since phenomenology is possible, that both art and religion contain an erotics, a sense of life and living that transcends mere meaning then Butler has a problem. To quote Susan Sontag, “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art (Sontag, 1966).” If we are to include more about Butler’s style of performativity, we would see that, even when acting as audience, she denies the community a sense of shared liminality or experience, since the audience collectively is performing, reflexively for themselves, as audience; she denies the community *Communitas* because the audience is immanent, not transcendent. With Butler every possible action is a reflexive and rehearsed performance, so that the context of performance, the substrate in which meaning takes place,

is fully denied. All the world may be a stage, but as Eco has told us, even that stage must exist in a context, or in a set of contexts. Religion, as performance, then must also occur in some kind of a context. When it comes to actors and actresses on stage, we know they must rehearse, however, instead of privileging actions which are “rehearsed” consciously, we also know that trained actors and dancers, performers of all kinds, understand that performance is a liminal activity, that it both is and is not a hundred percent conscious.

To further counter Butler, Canadian director, and playwright Keith Johnstone discusses an unrehearsed element to performance, one that may even be controversial. A section of his book *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (1987) is entitled “Masks and Trance.” This section includes such topics as *Trance*, *Induction* and *Possession*. Johnstone discusses esoteric rituals to explain the manner in which stage masks behave. Johnstone proposes that the wearer of the mask is possessed by the mask; the wearer, also called a “mask” knows, somehow, intuitively how to behave (Johnstone, 1987). In a still earlier section on “Spontaneity” in the theatre, Johnstone notes that “An artist used to be seen as a medium through which something else operated. *He was a servant of the God* (Johnstone, 1987).”³² This is the context of theatre and derives from its history, where live theatre was a live ritual and participants were, at times, possessed by the divine. This point is so crucial to our discussion that it is worth highlighting again, that at one time all human creativity used to be viewed as a divine gift and that theatrical performance was possession by the divine. While I am not suggesting that actors are actually possessed by spirits, I am suggesting that, as Shakespeare’s Hamlet stated “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy (Hamlet, 1,5),” that we still have little understanding how cognition works, and, as Lacan says above, that we cannot assume that we know what we are doing, even from moment to moment. I also need to make very clear that, while I am not advocating for Johnstone’s ideas on possession, I am saying that even stagecraft has religious roots, and that there may be things about creativity, including religion about which, going back to Langer and Kant, we do not even have the capacity to ask questions. In modernity we have removed G-d, transcendence, and phenomenology from the study of religion, and I propose that we need to understand that not everything is utilitarian. Not everything, especially human, while rationalizable, must have a rational root. Even Orthodox Jews understand this idea and separate their 613 commandments into two broad types: *Mishpatim* are laws which have a rational basis or from which a rational basis may be

32 Italics mine.

derived and *Khukim* are those laws which do not have an obvious rational basis but must be observed anyhow. Even in so-called and supposedly rational religion, the irrational exists.

My point is, though that when practitioners of religion are “rehearsing” religion, they are not truly performing, they and we are watching them perform, in a reflexive action. When practitioners truly perform religion, after having rehearsed it, they can, perhaps momentarily achieve a kind of “mask” or “trance” state, a kind of transcendence. If we are judging the performance, if we are reflexively watching ourselves, then we are also trapped in an ironic mode. When we unselfconsciously perform, we no longer have to engage in a stylized repetition. We just act, similar to the difference between a child learning to walk and an adult walking. We stumble at first but then, over time and with practice, we learn to walk over many different kinds of terrain and similarly we no longer rehearse Judaism or Jewishness but instead embody the identity. Thus, the convert to Judaism or the returner to Judaism also rehearses Judaism, over and over and over again, and their performance is stilted and stylized, but equally importantly, their performance is unironic. It is meaningful in some manner to them. What does also matter to them is the reason for the performance, which is phenomenological, and while the performance is important, it represents, via *mimesis*, certain historical thoughts, beliefs, and patterns which we, in turn, say constructs, but more importantly, signifies and means Jew, Judaism and Jewishness.

5 North American Jews: Alienations

To be clear, these artificial ellipses where we separate Jew as nationality, Jewish as culture and Judaism as religion only really exist if one regards these identities from an external viewpoint, where these identities of Jew, Judaism and Jewishness are a kind of alien other in reference to what one might call the mainstream, non-Jewish or non-Judaic culture. Using Judaism and Jewishness as the center, there is not one single monolithic “outside” religion of culture, but in this case, I am still insisting that Judaism and Jewishness are impossible to separate from the identity of Jew and from each other and that it is impossible to separate Jewishness or Judaism from each other without each harming each other and without harming the Jew from whom these identities derive. Some Jewish groups, specifically exclusionist ones, instead believe that there is only unity, which is to say that one is a Jew or one is not, and that there are no varying degrees of Jewishness. At the same time, it is impossible, within the current

mainstream, so-called secular society in North America to construct a union of these identities, a culturally Jewish, nationally Judaic Jew who practices the religion Judaism.

As a thought experiment, if I were to create as a diagram, a sphere within three dimensions, we could picture that all three of these identities would merge together at the absolute center and that, at least in terms of North American Jewry, the center point is imaginary center. The reason this unity is imaginary is that, in my opinion, the closest to unity a North American Jew could achieve is an infinitesimally small sphere which is asymptotic to that center. manner of visualizing the various dimensions of identity and that it has nothing to do with the manner in which Judaism sees itself. While this construction purports to be an outsider, or etic, view it is impossible to view Judaism in a fair and just manner without combining these views with the insider view. Elvis Presley, as seen from the outside was not at all Jewish but from Judaism's point of view and depending on the authority you ask, he was completely a Jew (Green, 2015).

I suggest a sphere because it exists in three dimensions, so that we may visualize the manner that these three identities exist relative to each other in terms of full expression. I propose that at the very center Jewishness, Judaism and the Jew exist in a unit, all together as a kind of an ideal singularity, and that as we sphere gets larger and larger, that whatever exists outside of the sphere are the extremities of the external, completely non-Jewish, outside culture; The gentile world encapsulates Judaism, the Jew and Judaism, without subsuming it, and the Jewish world exists as a kind of spheroid surrounding this imaginary center. None of the poles is "pure," as even Haredi Jewish culture has been infiltrated by modernity. An objection exclusionist Jews might make is their belief that Judaism exists separately from this outside world; it is, however, also obvious that despite this belief, that despite protests to the contrary, that both the positive and the negatives of modernity have influenced, at least the periphery of even the most exclusionist Jews.

We may ask here, in terms of history, what cultures and places exist where Jews have not existed or had even minor influence, and how do we understand Jewish influence? We may be tempted to say that, for example, because of historical reasons, all Christian cultures are Jewish in some way. We must answer this by saying that while Rabbinic Judaism and the Jesus Movement had similar historical beginnings, that historically Christianity has had a much greater influence and also tried, in many different times and places, to destroy Judaism. Similar historical arguments can also be made for Islam. What exists along each of the radii of this sphere are both modern and postmodern representations of Jew, Judaism and Jewishness. Each Jewish person or Jewish

institution then has its own spheroid or ellipsoid, as each of the three dimensions, Jew, Jewish and Judaism may have different radii.

Closest to the very center of the sphere are the *Haredi* or Ultra-Orthodox Jews who live in communities outside of the mainstream; this is to say not merely those Jews who have rejected Modernity and cling to a quasi-medieval Judaism mindset but also those who live in towns such as New Square or Kiryas Yoel, inhabited, and at least semi-governed exclusively by Jews. For these exclusionist Jews, Judaism, what we have constructed as religion, is for them not a religion in the modern sense. But is really just the manner in which they live. It is not a belief system; it is a living system. For these Jews, it is such that Judaism as religion and Jewish as a culture is close enough to be approaching unity, moreover, they regard themselves as directly descended from those Jews who were exiled from Judea, which means that they are part of Jewish nation. Since these Jews are, in general, isolationist and exclusionist they do not, except in extreme circumstances, encounter the outside surrounding culture. They must really want to encounter the outside or are in some manner driven to do so. One exception to this rule is Chabad Lubavitch, a group of Hassidic Jews who go on extensive "missions" to other Jews. This group of Jews now forms a small tight sphere closest to the center of the larger delimiting outside sphere.

To the other extreme and an equally imaginary reference, I am proposing a delineation of the outside of our sphere; inside of the sphere still contains some manner or some sort of detectable Judaism, or Jewishness or Jew as nationality and that just outside this imaginary border of the sphere is completely not Jewish at all. While I imagine that it is almost impossible to find any place in our current world, much less in North America, that even one of these, Jew or Judaism or Jewishness, has not been involved in some manner, so further to this ubiquity, I will also propose that most Jews who accept the nationality Jew, people who practice Jewishness as a culture and those who follow the Jewish religion Judaism in North America all exist somewhere inside this sphere. As above, the residents of towns like Kiryas Yoel and New Square live, as close as one may in North America, as to close to as one may at the center of the sphere, that as Jewish Jews doing Judaism, they live in a place geographically which is as close as may be possible, in North America, to Jewish, but living in the state of Israel which defines itself as a Jewish state would bring this closer to unity. Someone like Elvis Presley exists just on the inside of the sphere, since, while he was arguably, *Halakhically* a Jew, but otherwise, culturally, nationality, and especially religiously, Elvis was not a Jew at all. In between, in this sphere, the various Judaic, Jewish and practices of Judaism exist. The reason that a sphere is useful as an illustration is because of its multidimensionality. The sphere includes Judaism as a religious practice, whether Reform, Reconstructionist,

Conservative or, Orthodox, as one of its vertices, where most guides to “Jewish Culture,” attempt to remove the practice of the religion Judaism from the idea of Jewish culture. At the center, Judaic identity, Judaism as religion and Jewish culture are subsumed by each other, by which we mean that “Jewish” culture and “Judaism” subsume each other and the notion of nationhood of the “Jew” exists, in the sense that Jews are a nation who exist and are still very much in exile. On the outside of the sphere is a world completely devoid of Jews, Judaism and Jewishness but, as above, I must also be clear that in modernity that there are few places, cultures or spaces which are completely devoid of Jewishness or Judaism. Cases in point include the Kai feng Jews of China, the Bene Israel and Malabrese Jews of India, and the Jews of Ethiopia. Therefore, most Jews, and those who would call themselves Jews or Jewish or those who practice Judaism would then exist on a point somewhere along the radius and non-Jews would not. It is important to note that “Denomination” is not important to this scale. A Conservative or Reform Jew who practices Shabbat and Kashrut, even nominally, is very “Jewish” and does well at “Judaism,” where, a Jew for Jesus, one who does not practice *Halakhic* Judaism, then scores the same as a nominal Christian. This is not about intention or phenomenological considerations but is about praxis and history. It is also important to note here that number of Christian sects in North America have even taken on the trappings of Judaism and Jewish practice (Sales, 2017). These items are fetishized, not for any intrinsic value but for their closeness to “Jews” and “Jewishness,” which are conflated with “the Living Christ.” In these senses these Christians are appropriating Jewish culture, where cultural appropriation is defined as an offensive or other adoption of the customs of a minority group by the more dominant and surrounding society.

My question is then, while a Jew is indeed a Jew, and the *Halakhah* is the *Halakhah*, is there such a thing as when a Jew is not a Jew? The question is serious, because as we have seen above, that there are those who call themselves Jewish but who's identity a Jew is at the very least questionable. To clarify then, when is someone doing Jewish representation and when is it a form of cultural appropriation? Elvis Presley, while technically and *Halakhically* a Jew, was not at all Jewish, despite the fact that according to Judaism he unquestionably qualified *Halakhically* as a Jew, so that were he to have taken on the trappings practices of Jewish culture and considered himself to have been of the Jewish people, without other affirmations his claim might have been seen as problematic. For Elvis, and some would say Tiffany Haddish, conversion would not be required to make them Jewish, in terms of the religion Judaism, since for these people they were already Jews. But, had Elvis taken on the identity of a Jew in public, Jewish Jews would also have expected him to take on some

performative sorts of Jewish praxis in public. In fact, the expectation would have resonated similarly to the practices of Tiffany Haddish, thus lending some cultural, if not complete religious credence to her claim to Judaism. It is important to note here that some Judaisms, as the religions of the Jewish people, do not in many cases construct Jewish identity as a form of belief or theology, but rather as a twofold matter of education and of action. Thus, while Judaism, as a religion, may be defined within the taxonomy of religions, by which is understood a system of belief, Judaism also finds its expression, at least in terms of personal identity, as the individual Jew expressing Judaism in Jewish praxis and more specifically that these practices exist in a community of Jews. Therefore, Jewishness is not divorced from Judaism, nor is it divorced from the identity of a Jew.

Even at a bare minimum, Jewishness and Judaism are all tied to the Jew who expresses them in a community of Jews, and a Jew, aside from being a member of the nation of Judea, is a person who does Judaism publicly, in a Jewish manner. But, while someone who is born Jew learns to do Judaism in a Jewish manner via *mimesis* while growing up, one of our exemplars, Elvis Presley, as a discovered Jew, who wished to claim the identity, would have been “expected both to adopt Jewish religious norms and to identify with the historical experience of the Jewish people (Wertheimer, 1997).” He would have been expected, not merely to be a Jew but to act as a Jew. Notably, when we speak of “expectation” we mean that there are behaviors and beliefs which are considered normatively Jewish to Judaism, just as there are behaviors and beliefs which are not “normative.” Converts and found Jews, as well as Jews who were born Jews, are expected to, at the very least, adopt those behaviors which are then considered to be “Jewish” in their chosen community. A Jew does not live alone, but does Judaism in a Jewish milieu, which includes both religious worship in a group and also participation in Jewish culture. It does not matter if the person is Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox or other: Jewish and Judaic expression find their expression in relation to other who practice Judaic Jewishness.

6 North American Jews: Denominations as History

Jews do appear in popular in various forms. While Al Jolson portrays a young, assimilated Jew, we presume that his Jewishness is “Orthodox.” Today it is less likely to see Orthodox Jews portrayed in media. It is at this point that we therefore must address the manner in which Judaism and its various denominations construct Jewishness in North America. I do not mean to say that

Jewish denominations do not exist elsewhere, but that these denominations are more important, sociologically, as manner of constructing Jewish identity, in North America. The way these denominations changed through the 20th and 21st centuries will allow us to consider what beliefs and practices are considered “normative” for each of these groups Jews today, and also then which practices, and beliefs are considered to be Jewishness and Judaism. We look backwards from today in the 21st century, and we may see that one initial problem is the fact that each denomination varies in terms of its expectations of what it considers Jewish practice: we must then consider this question of what Jewish practices do exist across denominations and the way they signify as Jewish. Also, because as I have demonstrated above that there is no one manner in which we may delineate those beliefs and practices we want to be called Jewish from those which are not, I cannot even state that belief in G-d is required to be a Jew, Jewish or Judaic, because some of those denominations identify even identify as atheistic or Humanistic. The question remains whether we speak of Humanistic Judaism as a religion at all, although we still do count those nontheistic branches of Hinduism and Buddhism as religion. Still according to the Pew Research Centre this group of non-theistic Jews is still small enough so as not to be counted in our question of denominations (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

The example I will use to start the discussion on denominationalism in Judaism is the manner in which the denominations differentiate on “Sabbath observance” since Sabbath observance for all Jewish denominations involves, at the very least, of abstaining from labor on the Sabbath and all Jewish denominations define the Sabbath as the time period between sunset on Friday evening lasting until three stars appear Saturday night. To quote Walter Sobchak in *The Big Lebowski* “Saturday, Donny, is Shabbos, the Jewish day of rest. That means that I don’t work, I don’t drive a car, I don’t fucking ride in a car, I don’t handle money, I don’t turn on the oven, and I sure as shit don’t fucking roll! (Coen, 1998).” While work is defined in the conventional sense, it is also defined, rabbinically as specific kinds of crafts, so that while one must abstain from working at one’s profession, one must also not perform ‘labor’ such as cooking or kindling flame.

The key differentiating issue in each case is that the manner in which the Jewish denominations define labor; each denomination has its different definitions, and these differences leads to differences in practices. All Orthodox Jews prohibit the use of electricity on the Sabbath because electricity is understood as a cognate of fire and so turning on a light switch is understood to be the same kindling a flame, where lighting a fire is prohibited as a kind of “work or

labor.”³³ Some Conservative Jewish authorities agree with these prohibitions, while other Conservative authorities and all Reform and Reconstructionist Jews will, however, use electricity on the Sabbath, since, for some of the Conservatives, electricity is not viewed as a cognate of fire but as water flowing in a stream, while Reform and Reconstructionist Jews believe that the laws, unto themselves, may be archaic or have little to no intrinsic meaning. What would seem to be a minor theological disagreement is a relatively simple example of the possibilities for problems in definition and delineation amongst the existing major Jewish denominations. Using the above as a case in point, we also need to again underline the fact that different Jewish denominations have different rules to decide how a Jew is constructed in terms of lineage. Orthodox *Halakhic* Judaism insists on matrilineal descent as does Conservative Judaism, but in 1968 the Reconstructionist movement (Staub, 2001) and following them, in 1983 the Reform Movement (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983), both decided to also accept those children of patrilineal descent as Jews.

Thus, we revisit our problem from earlier, where some Jews will conclude that, because her father is Jewish, Tiffany Haddish is Jewish, while Orthodox and Conservative other Jews will say that she is not Jewish, because her mother is not Jewish and she has not converted to Judaism. This idea of conversion to Judaism is in itself a problem since different denominations also have differing criteria and rules of conversion. The point here is that there is still a divide in between the Jewish denominations over acceptable praxis and over acceptable beliefs; that there is no one single authority to decide on these matters for all Jews. To decide questions of ritual praxis Orthodox Jews will consult a Rabbinical authority, where members of the other denominations may choose to make their own decisions on an *ad hoc* basis. So, where historically, all Jewish boys were circumcised at eight days of age, many Jewish parents are declining to have this ritual performed. Some Jewish denominations may easily state that “belief in Judaism as the religion Judaism” has gained more importance, where other denominations, specifically Orthodox ones, would insist that practice of the religion Judaism supersedes all. Some Orthodox Jews would even deny that there are other forms of practice at all and that all Judaism is constructed of those Jews who follow Halakhah together with those misguided Jews, who do not.

As we saw above, the notions of “Jewish” and “Jew” and “Judaism” have become so fraught and fragmented that unless we circumscribe specifically

33 There is no prohibition on using a pre-existing flame or a light that is already turned on, only in kindling or turning on a switch.

what we mean by these words, that these words can and will signify both anything and nothing, so as to become devoid of meaning. For example, so called 'Messianic Jews' and 'Jews for Jesus' are groups who, while nominally calling themselves Jews, not only worship and believe in Jesus and follow the Christian faith, they actively proselytize non-Messianic Jews. This issue exists because, since some Jews believe that there is no authority to define Judaism what Judaism is and is not, or since they define Judaism as a nation of Jews, the definition of Jew may well include the worship of Jesus, or other. Given these problems, we may well inquire then if it possible to rescue these words, "Jew," "Jewish" and "Judaism" from a kind of nihilistic erasure of meaning and also from linguistic slippage, where the meaning of Jew or Jewish may come to mean any belief or practice at all? As an example of this slippage. a signifier such as the word 'ice' can mean more than one thing based on its context; it can mean solid frozen water, something cold, diamonds and even some kinds of illicit drugs. As context changes so does meaning, so that this meaning can then continue to slip. Jew used to mean someone who had a historical claim to lineage. Today it seems that it may be meaningless.

My answer to this problem is to take a simple diachronic, historical approach, and to then contextualize the meaning of these denominations in terms of their individual socio-historical context. As an example, while the Reform Judaism of today is not the Reform Judaism of the late 19th century, the two are related to each via historical concatenation and we can create a direct lineage from one to the other over time. More importantly, the earlier version actually forms the socio-historical context of the other, so, while it seems obvious, early Reform Judaism leads to Reform Judaism today. We may therefore say things about the manner in which Reform Judaism has changed since the 19th century. We may then contextualize what Reform Judaism meant at that time, in terms of history we may attempt to create narratives of the way things changed, and we may then note how it exists today. Furthermore, now that we have located reform Judaism in a historical context, we may then demonstrate how the movement was responsible for much of the Conservative movement's inception and growth in North America. Having demonstrated the above will also then allow us a much clearer means to delineate the differences between different Jewish denominations and the manner in which these denominations grew apart from each other, while still staying interdependent.

I must also note that in discussing the denominations of Judaism, I will make some very broad generalizations about these denominations in general which, if I was describing these denominations in detail might not be completely true, but I will be doing this for the sake of brevity; I will be painting with primary colors and a very thick brush. I am also going to consider

what I think are the major four largest denominations of Judaism in North America, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist, while noting that there are as almost as many Jews who do not consider themselves to be part of a denomination in North America. According to the Pew research Center thirty percent of Jews in North America consider themselves to be non-denominational, while thirty-five percent consider themselves to be Reform Jews (Pew Research Centre, 2013).³⁴ It is also important to note that what I say about one group of Orthodox Judaism may not be one hundred percent consistent with all groups of Orthodox Jews and so these generalizations may not always be true at a detailed granular level. However, that being stated, if I were to start with the main tenets of Orthodox Judaism as it exists today, I would say that one basis on which it understands itself is in terms of the manner they believe that history functions, that the cosmos was created with a purpose and that Jews, Jewishness and Judaism exist outside of “normal” history, in the Hegelian sense of history as teleological. I also need to be clear that the denominational lines I am creating are artificial, since one may attend an Orthodox synagogue and be nominally reform or non-denominational.

With the above muddying the waters, I can state that Orthodox Judaism, as a religion, as opposed to culture or nation, believes that the cosmos was created *ex nihilo* by divine utterance and further to this purposeful creation of the cosmos, that G-d, the divine creator, and the Jewish nation have a purposeful relationship, one which is based in several historical covenants, or contracts, and as part of this relationship that G-d revealed Himself directly to the Jewish nation, at Sinai, and gave to them a holy set of documents as a blueprint to live their lives. To compare, observant Conservative Judaism believes that despite the fact there is no historical or archeological proof of authenticity in the historical documents known as Torah, that this authenticity is, in itself, not actually important; what is important is that the Jews, all Jews have a common history as a nation and that this national history is expressed as the religion “Judaism.”³⁵ While Judaism may deal with older problems, such as Sabbath observance or of dietary *Kashrut* in the old ways, that when it comes to new brand new cultural and scientific situations, that Judaism must be conserved and as such that new decisions may be made based on the old laws. As above,

34 Pew research does not define what they mean by Reform or non-denominational Jews, and I suspect that the large number of non-denominational Jews may also encapsulate other denominations.

35 This view is compatible to Mordechai Kaplan's view of *Judaism as a Civilization* (Kaplan, 2010) with the difference that Kaplan was looking for new meaning in old rituals, where Conservative Judaism saw its role as conserving meaning based in the precedent of tradition.

while Orthodoxy may view electricity as a flame for the purposes of Sabbath observance and while some Conservative authorities do agree with this view. Some Conservative authorities view electricity a novel situation not covered by previous *Torah*; they view electricity as more of a fluid in a pipe, with light switches not necessarily kindling flames but allowing for the flow of the fluid and they therefore allow the limited use of electricity on the Sabbath. As above, Conservative and Orthodox view Judaism as matrilineal, only so if we consider Orthodox and Conservative Judaism to be authoritative, Tiffany Haddish is not considered to be Jewish, while Comedian Eric Andre, whose mother is Jewish and whose father is not, is considered to be a Jewish by all denominations.

Reform Judaism bases itself on the idea that Judaism is merely a religion, a belief system, and that as such, this Modern religion, and notes that historically the religion Judaism may have had ties to the Jewish nation, as a unique and singular people, but that this formulation does not work well today in Modernity. So, while Sabbath observance is absolutely encouraged, the *Halakhic* laws of Shabbat, are deemed to be archaic and based in an equally archaic textual history, one which is not objectively true. Since *Torah*, is just a history of the Jewish nation and not objectively true, and while the Sabbath is one way Jews differentiate themselves as the religion of the Jews, Sabbath is observed, the laws are not. To greater extent, classical Reform Judaism, that of the late 19th century, sees itself as the church of the Mosaic people, the Jews, who, while they have a common religion a common past, are working toward steering the entire world toward a better future, and that given the scripture may itself be questioned, so too may, Jewish practices. While Modern Reform Judaism still has its roots in the Pittsburgh Platform (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1885) it has also changed course several times. Essentially though, when it comes to how it is that Judaism is to be observed, both Reform Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism do not rely on authority as much as they do on what is Progressive, historically.

Reconstructionist Judaism was co-founded by Mordechai Kaplan, who studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the home of Conservative Judaism, before he received ordination as an Orthodox rabbi. Kaplan was also an advisor to the, then burgeoning, Young Israel Movement, which is a movement that locates itself within Modern Orthodoxy. and is an attempt to marry Jewish practices with Modernity, first, by reforming and removing those practices which no longer have meaning, as in Reform Judaism, but also by attempting to marry praxis to modernity. The essential difference between Reform and reconstructionist Judaism is that, while Reform Judaism might deny certain beliefs and remove certain practices as no longer scientific or Modern, Reconstructionism would attempt to re-signify these practices, to give them

new meaning in Modernity so as to be in concert with modern scientific belief. Reconstructionism wishes to “reconstruct” what it sees as archaic Jewish beliefs, to fit a modern world. As a case in point, prior to the founding of the Reconstructionist movement, only boys celebrated achievement of the age of majority. In the year 1922, Kaplan’s daughter was the first woman to ever celebrate a Bat Mitzvah, which, at the synagogue she attended, was completely egalitarian to what young men celebrated. Reconstructionist Judaism was also the first denomination to recognize patrilineal descent. To demonstrate the permeability of these denominations, this Bat Mitzvah ceremony is now practiced amongst most Jewish denominations, except the absolutely ultra-ultra-Orthodox. The terms Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist are only of limited use as descriptors since any Jew is welcome to any of these denominations.

Still there is one other “denomination,” that some Jews today are merely Jews in the nominal sense, such that they do not practice Judaism or believe in Judaism in any manner; some may contend that they are culturally Jewish or Jew-ish. Many of those who consider themselves to be ‘of Jewish heritage’ and the like are so assimilated, in terms of beliefs and practices that they may as well be practicing ‘Sheilaism’ which is described by Robert Bellah et al. as highly individualistic kind of religious belief where even if one is theistic that:

I believe in G-d. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice ... It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each.

BELLAH, MADSEN, SULLIVAN, SWIDLER, & TIPTON, 1985

‘Sheila-ism’ is similar to those who are ‘Jew-ish.’ The behavior of these Jews may include eating Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies, along-side a Passover Seder, or to have a Christmas tree with Hanukah ornaments and also to perhaps light a Menorah and make latkes at the same time. While such intercultural Ecumenicism is admired in the mainstream culture, some of those who celebrate Jewish Holy days and call themselves Jews do not even qualify, to some Judaisms,³⁶ as Jews.

Tiffany Haddish, then, as a patrilineal Jew, is only Jewish according to the Reform and Reconstructionist denominations, while she is *Zerah Yisroel* to

36 I am borrowing Jacob Neusner term, “Judaisms” which he uses to describe those people who have a claim to be a member of that people or religion called Jews (Neusner, 1990).

Conservative and Orthodox Jews. Eric Andre is matrilineally a Jew and so, unquestionably a Jew, despite what other cultural issues may exist. These distinctions are important mostly in North America, where denominationalism and ethnicization have allowed these fractured remnants to remain part of the Jewish whole. In North America, what we see happening is a liberalizing of distinctions and definitions, specifically in Jewish institutions where, according to the Pew Research Centre, of those Jews who claimed a denomination of some sort in North America, the majority of those who responded claimed to be Reform Jews, outnumbering both of those Jews who claim to be Orthodox, or Conservative and almost equaling those who claim no denomination (Pew Research Centre, 2013).³⁷ In a sense, Neusner's warning that Judaism will be reduced to mere sociological data has come true. The number of Jews without denomination plus the number of Jews who claim non-Orthodox or more liberal denominations is ten times the number of Jews who claim to be Orthodox. I should also note that while "Liberal" Jewish denominations, such as Reform, Reconstructionist and Humanistic may exist elsewhere in the world, it is in North America, specifically, where Jewish denominationalism and ethnicization has taken root as virulently as it has and has come to be meaningful in terms of creating and separating Jewish spaces. It is also important to note, at least here, that "Denominationalism" in Judaism is a mostly Ashkenazic phenomenon. Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews are content to, despite praxis, denote themselves simply as Jews and to all attend the same Synagogue, usually of their own community. In 2020 we have inclusive, liberal, open Jewish spaces which welcome those who identify outside the gender or sexual boundaries, which are considered anathema by more right-wing or conservative, with a small c, Jewish denominations. I am even going to propose that this denominationalism is a sign of assimilation because a Jew who is involved in the Jewish practice of Judaism is not really worried about what kind of Jew they or others are. In other spaces, such as in Europe or in Israel, aside from ultra-Orthodox groups, liberal Judaism exists, not as a separate denomination, different than other Judaisms, but rather as one of the pluralistic manners in which one may express Judaism and Jewishness. Shmuel Rosner and Camil Fuchs contends that, Haredi Judaism aside, Israeli Jews are reinterpreting Judaism in such a manner that a new form of Judaism, a new national Judaism, is being formed where the intersecting identities of Jew and Israeli are forging a hybrid. For more on this topic see Rosner's book *#IsraeliJudaism: Portrait of a Cultural*

37 Of those polled, 35% claimed to be Reform Jews, 30% claimed no affiliation, 10% claimed to be Orthodox, 18% claimed to be Conservative and 6% claimed to be "Other." The numbers do not add up to 100, due to rounding (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

Revolution (Rosner & Fuchs, 2019). Really though, it is in North America that Jewish denominationalism has fractured what was once considered a singular community into many different groups all claiming to speak for that one community.

While historically, Jews lived in that same Jewish communities together, the twins of denominationalism and affluence allowed some Jews to move away from these communities and to create, in a sense, secular Jewish communities. Orthodox Jews do not use motor vehicles on the Sabbath and Holy days and so must live within a reasonable walking distance of their places of worship. These neighborhoods contained amenities that were deemed necessary such as a volunteer ambulance services, הצלה (pronounced Hatzalah), easy access to kosher grocery stores, ritual baths, Hebrew bookstores, Kosher restaurants and even burial services. Because Reform, Reconstructionist and even some Conservative lay Jews do not need to live within walking distance of their place of worship and all of the other amenities which are needful or have been deemed needful by some communities and, since these more liberal Jews often went away to colleges, where they lived in proximity of non-Jews, and further, since these more liberal Jews had no longer felt the need to observe the Jewish holy days in a strictly *Halakhic* manner, the result was that these Jews then had a tendency to fraternize with, to date and even to marry non-Jews. Even those Jews who married Jews moved away from these densely Jewishly populated communities and tended to become Jews in name rather than Jews in practice. This assimilation was less of a problem, but also occurred, in Orthodox communities where many younger people, if they attended colleges and universities, often attended them in their hometown. In New York City, qualifying men could go to Yeshiva University and women to its sister institution Stern College. My point is that from densely populated Jewish neighborhoods, these communities started to grow apart. On *Broad City* and on *Brooklyn 99*, none of these Jews lives with other Jews. They live in the non-Jewish world.

We might question, then, how cultural, and religious assimilation might be different for Jews in North America than it is for others. This issue again comes down to praxis and the idea of modernity. How do we describe a Jew who has not eschewed Judaism and yet who for all other purposes is indistinguishable from a non-Jew? The answer, *Halakhically*, is that this person is still a Jew, but only in the sense that Elvis Presley was a Jew, that this person had assimilated from Judaism and from Jewish praxis but that at the same time they were still Jewish. This was, what some would call a danger, that in North America, it was finally possible to both repudiate Judaism as a religion and Jewish cultural practices without relinquishing the identity of Jew. This led to some “falling off the edge” and leaving Judaism completely where, for example, popular

music legend Bob Dylan famously converted from Judaism to Christianity for a period of time in the late 1970s, before returning to Judaism in 1982 (Lister, 2017). One could fry *Hanukkah* latkes and light a *Menorah* and have a Christmas tree, eat *Matzo* on Passover and hunt for Easter Eggs, all of these in the name of celebrating one's "authentic" identity. As writer Jeffrey M. Green states:

I was fascinated by the characters in *The Sopranos*, because they are Italian in almost exactly the way that American Jewish people of the parallel generation—my generation—are Jewish. They have the food, the religion (which they don't necessarily take very seriously), and the family connections, but they have lost the language and the culture in which their grandparents were rooted. Like other assimilated ethnic groups, in return for trading in their family's traditional culture, Italian Americans gained the chance to excel in America, not—despite the stereotype—as criminals, but as doctors, lawyers, engineers, business people, politicians, entertainment professionals (like David Chase, the main writer of the series, and the excellent actors), and as academics. Nevertheless, as *The Sopranos* makes clear by sending Tony to Italy, by having him fantasize about an Italian girl, and by bringing an Italian mafioso to New Jersey, these people are not entirely comfortable in America.

GREEN, 2019

The anomie and acculturation Green describes, is where Italian Americans and Jewish Americans are alienated from their own culture and yet, at the same time, do not feel that they completely belong in and to the surrounding mainstream culture.³⁸ This *anomie* is such that many Jewish Jews, Jews who claim Judaism as their religion and Jewishness as their culture are still not precisely sure about the way they themselves relate to their identity or to Judaism or to the outside world.

However, as philosopher Emil Fackenheim notes, while there was a Greek diaspora, and yet, that the Greeks do not yearn for return to Greece. The Jews experience is different because, as Fackenheim points out, that with noted exceptions, North American Jews treasure historical ties, not to their ostensible places of origin, Poland, Russia, Morocco, Syria, France, Hungary, but instead they treasure ties to Israel, which is the place they view as their

38 Coincidentally, another intersection of both Italian and Jewish cultures, historically, is in organized crime.

place of origin and their home (Fackenheim, 1990).³⁹ In our time, most Jews, those who continue to have ties to Jewish organizations, also have, in one way or another, ties to the modern state of Israel, which they recognize as the indigenous land and ancestral home of the Jewish people. There are Jews and there is Jewish land and there is Judaism as a religion and Jewish religion and Judaic religion, and we are left with a mess. There are false assertions that Ashkenazi Jews, the so-called White Jews of Eastern Europe are actually derived from Khazar, stock based on mythology. While many cite the Medieval text, Yehuda Halevi's (1075–1141) *Kuzari*, or in the original Arabic, *كتاب الحجة والدليل في نصره الدين الدليل*, as evidence, genetic evidence is conclusive, that Ashkenazi Jewish Genotypes so closely related to those of Palestinians that, "Our recent study of high-resolution microsatellite haplotypes demonstrated that a substantial portion of Y chromosomes of Jews (70%) and of Palestinian Muslim Arabs (82%) belonged to the same chromosome pool (Nevel, et al., 2000)." This is to say that despite the intervening years, that either both Ashkenazi Jews, along with all other Jews and those Palestinians are both indigenous to Israel or neither are indigenous to Israel.

The issue again is that we make a mistake and conflate Jewish Culture, Jewish Ethnicity and Jewish Land for Judaism. Moreover, since, at least in North America, most Jews have no good sense what Judaism itself is, that we then hypostatize the practice of Judaism the religion for the ideas behind the thing. This is, in a sense, similar to the problem posed by Langer's assertion about asking questions. If Judaism is inclusive of all, or if Jewishness means everything and nothing in the North American context, then finally, we cannot question, in a very real sense what Judaism is or is not because it is not.

I have amply demonstrated that the issue of who or what counts as a Jew is so fraught that any unequivocally stringent answer will lead to more questions than answers and any sufficiently lenient answer would mean that anyone might qualify as a Jew. A Russian journalist who lives in the Netherlands, Yegór Avraham Osipovv-Gipsh, has decided, despite rabbinic authority of any sort, that even without Jewish Conversion, or Jewish parents, that he is Jewish and

39 Jewish anti-Zionism and Jewish anti-Israel sentiment are forms of compliance with modern forms of antisemitism, in the sense that this sentiment complies with the "not anti Jewish but anti-Israel" stances of anti-Judaism and is also a form of internalized self hatred. I am not saying that one must agree with every decision that the Israeli government makes, however I wish to make a very firm statement that Israel is the ancestral homeland of the Judean people, and that Jews alive today are descendants of those people and are indigenous to that land, despite any ahistorical assertions to the contrary.

somehow deserves some sort of secular conversion to Judaism (Osipov-Gipsh, 2019). While we might consider this claim to be absurd, his point is that identity as a Jew has become so fraught such that some claim that a cultural conversion should be available. Who decides what and who is a Jew?

To simplify the question by reducing the possible answers to three and then choosing one of these answers:

- 1) We, together, may decide that anyone who chooses to identify as a Jew is a Jew, like Osipov-Gipsh.
- 2) We may agree that both patrilineal and matrilineal Jews are Jews.
- 3) We may decide, for the sake of this study, that only those whose identity is derived matrilineally are Jews and that the children with one Jewish father are called *Zerah Israel*, not Jews.

The simplest answer, for our sake, is to choose that third answer, even though some may claim that it has problems, that instead of inclusive that it excludes many. However, the first reason to exclusively accept matrilineality that, being the most stringent, anyone who is matrilineally a Jew is also *Halakhically* a Jew and will be accepted universally as a Jew, for any Jewish group, no matter what. According to all accepted Jewish laws, anyone with a Jewish mother, or who has had an Orthodox conversion, will be accepted as a Jew by any other Jew or Jewish group. This statement not true of patrilineal Jews or those who have converted outside of Orthodoxy. While accepting all others who might claim Judaism as *bona fide* Jews would seem to make Judaism more inclusive and available, historically, Judaism has not ever really been inclusive; Jews, at least for the last thousand years, have not sought converts or proselytized in the same way the other Abrahamic religions have done so. According to my understanding, Tiffany Haddish in the family of Jews, *Zerah Israel*, but not a Jew herself.⁴⁰

While it might seem then that we are at an ideological impasse, we may use the solution as presented above which is to understand these separate religion Judaism, cultural Jewishness, and identity Jew as mutually dependent semiotic signs which, in *Galut*, the exilic diaspora of the Jews, are mutually asymptotic. This means that Jew, as a nationality, is dependent on Judaism, the religion, which are both dependent on cultural Jewishness but that these, at least in modern North America, may never combine fully and so are always in tension. This interdependence means that, despite assertions to the contrary, one may not be merely a religious Jew, a cultural Jew, or a citizen of the Jewish nation because of these are dependent on the other for meaning. Thus, any statement

⁴⁰ What I see occurring more and more is a true schism in Judaism and Jewishness where more Liberal Judaism's separate themselves from more Halakhically stringent Judaism's.

of mere “cultural” Jewishness can be understood to be untenable since Jewish culture is ultimately dependent on the religion Judaism and on the nationality of the Jew.

7 Preforming Jew, Jewish, Judaism

The above reasoning then explains that while it is important that we understand the manner in which Jewishness, as a specifically cultural phenomenon, is impossible to successfully separate these identities from each other, because they inform each other. This fact is true whether the representation is a performance in in media or a performance in real life, with the caveat that these performances may be practiced, they may be rehearsed, but they are never perfected. The manner in which these separate identities project themselves so as to manifest as a kind of singular identity is the reason that depictions of the Jew as Jewish often appears one dimensional. For example, in the comic book *Ms. Marvel*, we are introduced to Naphtali, a *Yeshiva* student, where a *Yeshiva* is a senior high school or junior collegiate institute. Naphtali is in many ways a stereotypical Jew; he is loud and brash. If we do some digging, we can discover that G. Willow Wilson, the writer of the comic added Naphtali because the comic book took place in New Jersey, “That we did not have an acknowledged, openly Jewish character in *Ms. Marvel*, yet” and also that “north central Jersey was probably one of the only majority Jewish places outside of Israel (Rosenberg, 2018).”⁴¹ Rather than tacking on a Jewish identity to an existing character, such as when Ben Grimm of the Fantastic Four was suddenly revealed to have been Jewish all along, Marvel comics agreed to centralize Naphtali’s observant Orthodox Jewish identity, which is fine, but the manner in which Naphtali is Jewish is one-dimensional, almost like a caricature. This one sidedness is not the fault of the author nor is it one of the media, it is that fact that the identity Jew is so polysemous that any conventionalized representation appears to be lacking depth.

However, if Jewishness is merely a performance, and Naphtali of *Ms. Marvel* certainly performs as an observant Jewish stereotype, then what we see that exists on the page, on stage and on film is a performance of a performance, which is a kind of a meta-performance. Moreover, the further we get from “authentic” Jewishness, the more performativity of Jewishness we have. This results in less “authenticity”, so what is then left over for us is what Jean Baudrillard calls a

41 Aside from New Jersey, there are many areas of New York City, Chicago, Montreal, Toronto, Dallas, Los Angeles and Houston that have a majority Jewish population.

“simulacrum”. Baudrillard defines a simulacrum a representation of an object which no longer has an original (Baudrillard, 1983). The implication here is that there is no longer an original “Jew” to be “Jewish” or to practice “Judaism” that Jews just represent something that at one time had meaning but that no longer has referent. This idea is, at least existentially, absurd since modern constructions of religion as lacking phenomenology, and critics such as Boyarin aside, either Judaism exists as a thing, or nothing that humans have created is real in any ontological sense.

It is possible to argue that all human artifacts are “not real” in the sense that they are all creations, from the hammer to the concept of the self. While this argument is certainly beyond the scope of this work, I will suggest that we follow the lead of Giambattista Vico who asserted that “*Verrum factum est* (Vico, 1984),” that the truth is an artifact or created. My point here is that all of humanity, including tools, religions and civilizations and cultures are indeed human created artifacts, but that this artifactuality does not destroy the fact that these things also do indeed exist in some manner. So then, if we agree that Judaism and Jewishness are expressions of the Jew who is acknowledging that in some manner that they are different than the surrounding outside culture, then Judaism and Jewishness are indeed expressions of something real and that Judaism, Jewishness and Jew have some kind of even nominal existence, however tenuous, and that that whatever these expressions are then express the identity of the Jew, as a Jew.

When Tiffany Haddish claims Jewish identity, we have a choice whether or not to accept her claim, with or without questions or even to reject it. We could say that she is merely performing a construct of Jewishness as a kind of a culture, is, in her case, a representation of a representation of a representation. Still, discussing culture and constructions and claims is all well and good, but we are still left with a problem. Tiffany Haddish’s assertion that she is Jewish, based on her paternal line, contradicts entertainer Josh Groban’s denial of being Jewish based on exactly the same criteria the Haddish uses (Kantor, 2020). Groban’s father is a Jew, *Halakhically*, and his mother is not at all a Jew so that Groban’s claim to not be Jewish meets exactly the same conditions of Haddish’s claim to Jewish identity. Haddish claims that she is a Jew and Groban claims that he is not. And here is the problem with Reform and Reconstructionist authority. According to these authorities Ms. Haddish is Jewish. What about Mr. Groban? While he states that he does not feel that he qualifies as a Jew, what about the Jewish point of view? Is he Jewish or not? It would seem then that the only denominations that have a definitive answer to this question are the Conservative and Orthodox denominations, but they would also deny Ms. Haddish Judaism, unless she converted. The issue here,

again, is lack of authority, that outside of *Halakhah* there is no one rule to state what Jewishness is and what it is not. So, for the purposes of the work, I am choosing to understand both of their claims in terms of *Halakhah*, that they are both not Jewish and instead are *Zerah Yisroel*.⁴²

Specifically, then, since Ms. Haddish's identity as a Jew, within the religion Judaism and the culture Jewishness is unstable, we can at the very least state that her representations of Jewishness as a culture or Judaism as a religion must also be overdetermined and unstable and further that, we must add, also, that because her identity as a Jew is at the very least questionable, that her representations of what she considers to be "typical" Ashkenazi Judaism may also therefore be a performance of a performance of Jewishness. This is as opposed to an "authentic" Jewishness, that because of her position as a kind of Schrödinger's Jew, her performances are tokenizations of a culture to which she is *Halakhically* adjacent, but of which she is not actually part. Her Judaism and Jewishness are performances of something Jewish, as if a stranger would say "Demonstrate your Jewishness for me now." Even if we were to agree with Reform and Reconstructionist authority and to propose, as a thought experiment that Ms. Haddish was *Halakhically* a Jew, I believe that it is equally noteworthy that the form of Jewish culture that she chose to perform on her special is Ashkenazi.

Granted that while Ashkenazi Judaism is arguably the largest community of Jews living in North America, we need to understand that by birth Ms. Haddish, if she was really hoping to be authentic to her real roots, might rather be celebrating Ethiopian Jewish culture, which is a real thing. Ethiopian Judaism is not Hollywood Judaism. Ethiopian Judaism, or Beta Israel, differs significantly from both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Judaism in significant ways. Rather than Hebrew, the language of scripture is *Ge'ez* and this scripture contains several books which are not considered canonical to other Jewish groups (The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Ms. Haddish is seemingly wearing Judaism as a costume on top of her other identities. This is not to deny Ms. Haddish's belief that she may be performing Judaism in a Jewish manner, or even to deny her, perhaps over extended and mistaken belief that she is a Jew. Ultimately, her performance is over the top and finally I wonder, finally, if she is trying to convince us, her audience, or just herself of her Jewishness.

Similarly, if we examine the photo advertising Ari Shaffir's one man performance which is entitled "*JEW*," we see way too much stereotypical typical

42 While I understand that this choice is controversial, there is no one size fits all solution in the matter, unless one chooses the *Halakhic* methodology. Furthermore, I must state here that I am not agreeing nor am I disagreeing with Ms. Haddish's assertion.

Ashkenazi Jewish representation. We see Shaffir, an ostensible Jew, wearing a Kippah, surrounded by stereotypical Jewish ritual objects, furtively eating bacon, and drinking milk out of a crystal glass, with the glass presumably having been used for ritual purposes.⁴³ Shaffir has piled Jew on Jew on Jew so that in this case there are way too many representations of Judaism, including some conventionally antisemitic representations. The “Money and Investing” newspaper which Shaffir created just for this poster is in itself antisemitic as it invokes the supposed Jewish obsession with money. Really the poster screams “JEW” in an incoherent and ugly manner, much like a piece of supremacist propaganda or on a poster for the Ku Klux Klan. Shaffir is a former Yeshiva boy, who now claims to be an avowed atheist, and he goes overboard to denigrate his former Orthodox past and makes it an object of disgust and pity. One imagines that while some of Shaffir’s religion baiting New Atheist fans may find his display pleasing in some manner, all it really depicts a sad self-hating Jew. Shaffir merely demonstrates that there is something about his own identity of a Jew, of a Jewish person, who once did Judaism that disgusts him but by demonstrating this self-hatred, he also shows us that even he cannot escape being a Judaic, Jewish, Jew, and that at least for him, it is an essential quality, even as he hates it.

Given this construct then, Shaffir demonstrates that even according to *Halakhah*, one may not escape from being a Jew. According to the *Babylonian Talmud*, one of the canonical Jewish holy books, even a Jew who “converted” to another religion is still a Jew (Sanhedrin 44). Shaffir goes to such lengths to disavow the identity of “Jew” or “Jewish” that I wish to examine Shaffir a bit closer, so as to help us to understand this kind of self-dismissal in terms of meaning and representation.

Shaffir is still very much trapped in dialogue with his own Jewish identity as a Jew in Judaism who repudiates that very Jewishness. In whatever manner his own alienation manifests and in whatever way he chooses to repudiate himself, he still is in some kind of a dialogue with this Jewishness and Judaism. To compare with other examples of Shaffir’s work, when basketball great Kobe Bryant recently died, tragically, in a helicopter accident, Shaffir reportedly tweeted that, “Kobe Bryant died 23 years too late today. He got away with rape because all the Hollywood liberals who attack comedy enjoy rooting for the Lakers more than they dislike rape. Big ups to the hero who forgot to gas up his chopper. I hate the Lakers. What a great day! (Zinoman, 2020).” This quotation comes from the New York Times instead of Twitter itself because Shaffir’s comment caused such furor that he made his account private for his

43 The poster is available at <https://www.facebook.com/events/the-garrick/ari-shaffir-jew/2560006140717251/>.

own protection. The comment on Twitter caused enough furor that Shaffir was fired by his show business manager and several upcoming performances were cancelled. As comedy critic Jason Zinoman continues, Saffir performs “troll” comedy and “Its purpose is not to come up with a clever line that gets laughs, but to upset people, create discord and then laugh at that discord (Zinoman, 2020).” In other words, Shaffir, in general as an entertainer or comedian has no intention to entertain or to edify, that his desire is to get attention, to upset the audience and others and to laugh at this upset which he causes in others. Zinoman also notes that this is a highly valued skill in our culture (Zinoman, 2020). Shaffir is all about creating outrage, so, when he mocks Judaism, as much as it is self-hatred, it is also to create a specific kind of outrage which is called entertainment, and one may presume is that it is offensive enough to entertain Mr. Shaffir and others. Ari Shaffir has in a sense, objectified his Judaism and turned it into an object for trolling others and if he would be honest, for trolling himself. While one might even possibly argue that Judaism and Jewishness may mean nothing to Shaffir, it is obvious that he has found a cultural sore spot, an inflamed appendix if you would, and has, in a metaphorical sense, poked his thumb into it hard. Having done so, Shaffir may retreat, at least in the case of his show, the relative protection that he himself is a Jew. In a sense, Shaffir’s spectacle is a form of internalized and institutionalized antisemitism, and Shaffir, at least in the case of his one man show plays to the antisemitism, internalized or other, of his audience.

It is then possible for Jew to be anti-Jew this phenomenon certainly manifests itself in popular culture. We may start with Groucho Marx’s seemingly self-deprecating joke “I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.”⁴⁴ Again, if we dig a bit deeper, we will find that Groucho’s comment was commentary on the historically common occurrence of barring Jews from private clubs because of anti-Judaism, a term I prefer to antisemitism. While much has been about the history and reasons for anti-Judaism, there has been much less written about Jews own internalized antisemitism and the manner in which Jews have looked down on other Jews, Jewishness and Judaism.

To define the matter, internalized anti-Judaism is a form of ‘internalized oppression,’ which “involves a devaluation or *inferiorization*⁴⁵ of oneself and one’s group (David & Derthick, 2014).” We may see this type of thing happen when a Jewish person values the beliefs of the outside, non-Jewish culture and non-Judaic culture more than their own, or even when a Jew attempts to demonstrate that Jewish values and non-Jewish values are the same, instead

44 This joke is normally attributed to Groucho Marx and is quoted by Woody Allen in the movie *Annie Hall* (Allen, 1977).

45 Italics are from the quote.

of merely congruent to these outside values. This form of self-deprecation commonly occurs in all diaspora communities, not just Jewish ones, and is not limited to North America, however, this type of devaluation is endemic to North America, where cultural and other values are replaced by “a desire and preference for Western culture and worldview (David & Derthick, 2014).” Love of one’s own culture is subsumed and replaced by a desire to assimilate away from that culture. This is, in a sense, the difference between the Al Jolson version of *The Jazz Singer*, and Neil Diamond’s version. Jolson returned to his culture and to his religion and to his family; he concludes the film with an emotional crescendo which, if one understands the cultural nuances of singing *Kol Nidre* on *Yom Kippur*, the holiest night of the year for Jews, creates a catharsis of great proportion. Neil Diamond’s Jazz singer concludes with a modern American pop song which became a popular hit, “*Coming to America*.” The accompanying video of the song depicted people from all over the world coming to America and, one presumes, assimilating. The juxtaposition of *Kol Nidre* with *Coming to America* signifies that in some senses, Jewish assimilation into the surrounding culture, something that Jews both tried to avoid and also aspired to, was in many ways already a *fait accompli*.

Still, historically, this Jewish assimilation into the surrounding American culture was, in many cases, not absolutely complete, hence “post-assimilatory Jews.” Because Jewishness is seen as different from Judaism, that Jewishness is cultural versus Judaism is religious, that one could lose or subordinate the Judaism and the religion, whilst maintaining the Jewish cultural identity. The border line between assimilation into the surrounding culture versus maintaining some kind of Jewish identity is not, as I have been demonstrating, as simple as it may seem. As I have shown, as in the case of Elvis Presley one may assimilate completely into the surrounding culture, not even acknowledge being a Jew and yet still maintain a kind “aura” of Jewishness which I believe is similar to Walter Benjamin’s aura of authenticity. Benjamin describes:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

BENJAMIN, 1969

So, in a sense being a Jew or the attributes of Jewishness and Judaism, separately, are phenomenological, based in an authoritative historical narrative. It

is possible that Jewish film festivals, comedy shows and even neo-burlesque reviews, in North America, may express cultural Jewishness without strictly defining what that means and without the express need to include the religion Judaism. Moreover, none of these require the national identity Jew or the religion Judaism.

I will then propose that this identity of Jew, as a nationality, may really only be ultimately expressed today in reference to the modern State of Israel as a positive, or as a negative. Even a denial of self-affiliation to the State of Israel is still a legitimization that some identities do affiliate with this. In this denial of Israel still exists a is a legitimization of other's claim, because some claims must then be valid. As an example, the ultra-Orthodox Naturi Karta deny the legitimacy of modern Israel as a Jewish state, since as a group they are waiting on a Messiah to restore the Davidic monarchy in the land of Judea and Israel. In their denial of the legitimacy of the state, they still acknowledge, at the very least, that the state exists. Still, the main problem here is the alienation of these Jewish identities from each other. So, when the religious identity and the cultural identity of the Jew become too far removed from each other, many times a form of self-alienation and self-denial, in the form of self-abnegation arises, for example, the oft heard phrase, "I'm not that Jewish," or "I'm not that kind of Jew."

The issue then is the manner in which the portrayal of these identities as stereotypical in some ways may be viewed as a form of self-hatred as opposed to an ironic repurposing and reappropriation as Hannah Schwadron demonstrates in her *The Case of the Sexy Jewess* (Schwadron, 2018). As a side note, while the term "Jewess" in and of itself may have at one time been pejorative, Schwadron's reappropriates the term, as do Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson, in the first episode of *Broad City*, where the two advertise as "two sexy Jewesses (Jacobson & Glazer, 2014)." The difference in their usages of the term is that while Glazer, Jacobson and Schwadron are also assimilated from Judaism in the religious sense, they maintain their identity because of their insistence that they are Jewish and because of lineage and perhaps culture. They are all "Jewish Jews," however, they may or may not ever participate, except or even nominally, in the religion Judaism as a religious expression. Glazer participated in television's Saturday Night Seder (Kantor, 2020); her participation was meant to be comedic. She and her real-life brother traded ostensible jokes about the amount of alcohol that are consumed ritually at the Seder, in a manner that presumably was meant to be funny.

So, culturally, there exists the phenomenon of those who are even Jewish Jews who deny Judaism as their religion, Jewish Atheists, and conversely there are those Jews who practice Judaism devotedly, who also deny the cultural

importance of living Jewishly as a form of culture, and, who instead look to Jewish law as the reason via which they identify as a Jew. These are both problematic and both untenable extreme views because of the fact that many Jewish cultural practices stem from religious praxes and also that much Jewish law is based in culturally interpreted practices.

What then do we make of the self-deprecating or self-abjuring Jew? How do we understand the manner in which self-identity as a Jewish person, as a Jew, as a practitioner of Judaism becomes too much? Moreover, what about lesser cases, where instead of actual self-denial or self-hatred, instead one plays along with various cultural stereotypes, as when Ilana “jokes” about a free trip to Israel as decidedly not Jewish, in the “*Jews on a Plane*” episode of *Broad City*? What of her spanking an ultra-Orthodox Hassidic man on a crowded subway train? What of those Jews who laughed along?

8 The Jew Is a Joke—Internalized Antisemitism

A problem remains. How do we understand the dichotomy of Jewish joke, versus Jew as joke, which is a conundrum which Ilana and Abbi of *Broad City* have left us? Further, what are we to make of Tiffany Haddish acting like, or at least trying to act like, an Ashkenazi Jew by singing and dancing onstage? Is she acting like a Jew, making fun of Jews or perhaps both? Is her portrayal of Jewishness appropriate, is it appropriative, affectionate, satirical, incongruous, or is she perhaps fetishizing the Jewish identity for her own purposes? Is her performance some of these, all of these or is it something else? After the raucous and bold display of Ashkenazi Jewishness, in a sense, the showbiz grand entrance with a song and dance number, she states “I am a Jew, that’s right, I’m Jewish (Mendoza, 2019).” At this point of her show, the mainly black audience seems to be confused, rather than accepting, or perhaps they are waiting for the punch line of a joke that never appears. Perhaps her stating that she is a Jew was supposed to be the joke? Her audience is there to see a specific Tiffany Haddish, whom they know as someone like them, a black person, and at her claim of Jewish identity they are uncertain how to react. Her announcement, rather than funny, presents the audience with a puzzle. Unless one has chosen to research Tiffany Haddish’s claim to Jewishness prior to the show, one would have no information with which to understand her display. To Jews who may not know of her claim, or who may disagree with it, Haddish looks appropriate and perhaps even a bit silly and it is simple for them to merely dismiss her.

Even if one had the foreknowledge that Ms. Haddish had made a claim to be Jewish, and even if one knew that her claim had been ratified by a Reform Rabbi, it still appears to us in the audience that Ms. Haddish’s affectations of Judaism

and Jewishness are merely mimetically stereotypical; a central core of Tiffany Haddish, the person who is Jewish, is missing from this *persona* and instead what she presents is Jewish stereotypes. We are missing the manner in which Tiffany Haddish relates to and is affected by this Jewishness. If we watch further, after her big song and dance number Haddish states, incongruously, that “I am here to teach.” The audience, me included, seemed uncertain what exactly it was that she was teaching; she did not actually teach anything. Perhaps the line was to serve as a bridge between her display as Jew to transition into her performance as a black woman, but it was instead the culturally tone-deaf equivalent of talking in a broad, Brooklyn style, rabbinical accent to try and convince us, and even herself, that her Jewishness actually exists. Comedy comes from digging inside and finding the uncomfortable truths which are universally funny, so Tiffany Haddish could have demonstrated to us the vulnerable truths about her journey to find her Jewish roots in a comedic manner. Instead, she danced, sang *Hava Nagilah* and merely told us that she is Jewish.

If we were to contrast Tiffany Haddish with the women of *Broad City*, Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer embody their Judaism and Jewish identities, but even their embodiment of these identities is ironically problematic. While the two women own these identities, they are also, at the same time, alienated from them. Neither of them is comfortable with their identity of “Jewess,” even as they declare and possess it; they are free to use the identity and they display it publicly in manner which is meant to be enticing to those who fetishize Jews and Judaism. At the same time, their own relationship to the identity is alienated. Yes, they are Jews who are comfortable with their religion and culture, but Judaism is adjunct, rather than integral, to their lives. As an example, in the very first episode of the show, Ilana and Abbi need money and as such advertise as “two Jewesses,” thus harnessing the potential fetishistic power of the terms for their own uses, however, the manner in which they do so is so extremely awkward so as to negate the power that they attempt to claim. In his article *The Rise and Fall—and Rise—of “Jewess”* (2008) journalist Daniel Krieger noted that the term ‘Jewess’ is an archaic term but that it has made a return to the lexicon as a form of reclamation. Krieger notes that the term is not offensive in itself, however, that historical usage of the word consisted of multiple layers, some of which were offensive. Krieger also notes the ‘Jewess’ has made its way back into the lexicon, partially through the fallout from the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal, that women saw that a young Jewish strongly sexually liberated woman, rather than being sullied by her sexuality, could be powerful and bring down a presidency.

Today, many young Jewish women see the definition of Jewess in terms of feminine sexual power and potency. Further to this reclamation, Hannah Schwadron, in her book *The Case of the Sexy Jewess* (2018), acknowledges this

feminine potency and prowess in terms of Jewish women's femininity and sexuality in our culture today, but only when this potency also exists, simultaneously, in non-Jewish culture. Per Schwadron's title, the Jewess is sexy, but she is only sexy if she is also a post-assimilated Jewess who is no longer religious or too Jewish. Schwadron's examples of the sexy Jewess are understood to be Jewish women who exist, not for the male gaze, but rather for the Gentile gaze. This is to say, they are sexy Jewesses only because they have in some manner transcended their Jewishness and exist outside of Jewish culture and religion, or that they relate to it ironically.

Glazer and Jacobson's Jewesses are also sexy, as is Amazon's *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (Sherman Paladino, 2017–2019).⁴⁶ All of these women characters are strong, feminine and sexually active women, who, while they may nominally participate in Judaism, are more culturally Jewish, than religious, even when we join them at a festive meal or in synagogue. They perform the religion Judaism. Mrs. Maisel may go to temple, she may choose to eat or not to eat on *Yom Kippur*, but in a perverse sense, even the choice of transgression of Judaism is, for all these women, an example of this enculturated intersectional Jewishness, and is also a reaction to the culture of Jewishness as a form of embodied Judaism.

Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 that refers an analytic framework which examines structures of different identities and the manner in which these identities create discourse (Cooper B., 2015). While this framework can be useful in a descriptive sense, 'intersectionality' may not be useful when analysis is needed since its basic presumption is based on an oxymoron: It presumes that identities are based in cultures and merely constructed of parts, but then it presumes that those parts of which identities may not be further deconstructed, that constituent parts of identities are real. Since the constituent parts of identities may also be deconstructed ad infinitum, these identities may disappear under the microscope. Intersectionality, while useful as a descriptor, is useless to perform analysis since any analysis is also based on identities which also do not exist. This is what happens to Midge Maisel's Jewishness; it disappears except when useful as a prop or plot point.

Midge Maisel's Judaism disappears suddenly when the plot requires her to transgress. We also need to remind ourselves that transgression of the laws of Judaism as expression of a cultural Jewishness is not merely a contemporary phenomenon, that in the turn of the 20th century "freethinker" Jewish groups

46 Although the show is meant to portray Jews, only two of the reoccurring cast are actually Jews.

held *Kol Nidre* banquets with entertainment on *Yom Kippur*, so that, as previously mentioned, when fasting and solemnity are the religious norm, these groups celebrated *Yom Kippur* with entertainment and food (Portnoy, 2009). As an aside, the fact that these banquets could happen at all is an indicator that there must be more to Judaism than mere “religion” since, while again this manner of celebration is a travesty, that these Jews were indeed “celebrating” *Yom Kippur*, however perversely. Further, as depicted in the documentary *One of Us* (Ewing & Grady, 2017), we see another example of this kind of Jewishness minus the Judaism. The late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen the establishment of “support groups” for those Jews who are “Off the *Derech*” who have left ultra-Orthodox Judaism to find another life. Groups such as “Footsteps” support Jews who were at one time Orthodox and who, sometimes for desperate reasons, have decided to become secular with educational and vocational support.⁴⁷ Further, a cursory search on Facebook reveals several support groups for “Off the *Derech*” Jews. Remarkably, these Jews, who have left the observant religious path, are still craving some sort of contact with other Jewish people. Some will even meet on Friday night, for the Sabbath, have a communal Sabbath meal and even sing the familiar Sabbath songs, then watch a movie or drive home in a car, which are against the rules of the Sabbath. My point here is not the plight of Orthodox Jews who wish to leave Orthodoxy, which another topic, but rather that even those Jews who break with Orthodoxy still return to those Jewish practices which are, for them, still meaningful, in some way. There would seem to be something intrinsic or essential about Jewishness as an identity, the aforementioned “aura” which resists reification. While we may be tempted to define each of these identities as things which are separate, as above, not only are they asymptotic to each other but also in combination they create a synergy so that while they resist each other, they also rely on each other for meaning.

To return, however, to Amazon’s *Magnificent Mrs. Maisel*, Miriam “Midge” Maisel, played by non-Jewish actress Rachel Brosnahan, is a twenty-six-year-old housewife from a well to do family, who becomes a stand-up comedian. Midge’s Jewishness is central to her character and to quote non-Jewish, co-executive Producer Dan Palladino:⁴⁸

47 Although born and raised in North America, many of the people from these communities cannot read or write in English, as their common tongue is Yiddish.

48 Amy Sherman Paladino is Jewish, and her husband Dan is not.

We knew that if we show a Jewish family at temple—if we show them and talk about Yom Kippur and all those kinds of things—there are going to be people who are going to nitpick at specifics that maybe we didn't get exactly right. But we do it all lovingly. A lot of television shows will say "here's a Jewish family" and you'll never see them doing anything specifically Jewish.

BURACK, 2020

Ostensibly this statement looks good as "they did it lovingly" however something about this statement did not sit right with me, and so I decided to unpack what it actually had to say. To restate, Dan Paladino and his wife Amy Sherman-Palladino, the show's producers believed that it was needful to portray Midge Maisel as accurately as possible, as a living Jew, to include more than just a single token Hanukah episode, but rather they wanted to show a fuller character who was Jew living in in a secular society, and, to start I think that trying to depict a well-rounded and truthful character is commendable, especially for television. However, at the same time, Palladino says that "there are going to be people who are going to nitpick at specifics that maybe we didn't get exactly right." So, while on the one hand, Paladino is unhappy that many shows merely tokenize Jewish representation and, while he states that he and his co-executive producer wish to portray a more full and more truthful Jewish identity on television, on the other hand he then states that when it comes to these fuller portrayals that they do not necessarily care for accuracy in these portrayals. Palladino then blames his own viewers and his audience, which is to say the Jews in that audience, for not forgiving the producers and the writers for the very lack of accuracy that a fuller and more realistic portrayal demands, which is to say, for "nitpicking." In short, Palladino is saying that if Jews see inaccuracies in the show, then it is all the Jews fault for being "nitpicky," because the writers and producers probably meant well. Really then, this depiction is a kind of tokenization. Compare this description to Season 5 episode 2 and Season 6 episode 16 of *Brooklyn 99*, where Detective Charles Boyle dresses as a Hassidic Jew to be undercover, but we may also presume to get laughs.⁴⁹ Boyle claims that he has gone undercover or to dress up for the annual Halloween Heist, a tradition at the 99th precinct. His colleague Amy Santiago points out that there was no reason for him to have done so, that there really was no reason for Boyle to have dressed as a conventionalized minority, except to demonstrate Boyle's ineptness. While we understand that it is not acceptable to dress Boyle

49 At least two of the three writers of the credited writers of these episodes, Dan Goor and Michael Schur, are Jews.

in ‘Black face’ or in traditional native garb, somehow conventionalized outsider Jewish dress, wearing “Jew-face”, is considered okay, simply because the writers are Jews. Imagine Paladino claiming that inaccuracies in the Christian religions were done lovingly. Imagine claiming that inaccuracies about Black or Native history were being done lovingly.

As an example of Paladino’s “nitpicky” inaccuracies, when Midge and Joel Maisel’s marriage falls apart, they must get a civil divorce; furthermore, Jewish law would also state, that they require a Jewish religious divorce, called a *Get*. Getting a civil divorce in the late 1950s was an arduous matter and the difference between a divorce then and the relative ease of a divorce in the 21st century is played for laughs. Despite the fact that Paladino wants accuracy, there was never a mention of a *Get*. While I do understand that the writers may have found that adding this fact of Jewish life could have been cumbersome and that this addition might have hurt the tone or pacing of the storyline, we need to understand that Midge Maisel’s status under Jewish law without a *Get* means that she was still considered married, religiously and that she might not marry another Jew. If she did marry another Jew or even had any children with a non-Jew, those children would have been in an extremely difficult position according to Jewish law.⁵⁰ My point is that Judaism and Jewishness are treated here as merely an adjunct to the greater outer culture, that it is not even given the dignity of a religion.

While Midge Maisel’s Jewishness is played front and center as part of her identity, when it comes to accuracy, this Jewishness and the religion Judaism are both subordinate to the plot and to the whims and the convenience of the writers and producers.

This subordination also demonstrates that, while the show is nominally set in the 1950s and 60s, and while the show plays homage to real people such as Lenny Bruce, that any correlation between the real 1950s and 60s, and correlation between the character and the real Lenny Bruce, is for verisimilitude. Just as Midge’s Judaism seems to be real and then disappears, The Maisel version of Lenny Bruce seems to be real, but this fictional Lenny exists only to give credence to Midge Maisel as a fictional comedian and as a fictional woman ostensibly of the 1950s, who really exists as a fiction of the 21st century. Lenny Bruce, the historical figure is not the same as Lenny Bruce, the character in

50 In terms of the Judaic code, these children would be called ‘*mamzer*’ a term which is nominally translated to mean “bastard,” or illegitimate, however, the term has a specific designation and refers to children born of specific prohibited relations, including Biblically prohibited incest and those children who were fathered by another man, while the woman was already married. Children of an unmarried woman are, by definition, not ‘*mamzers*.’

Mrs. Maisel, and that any resemblance and congruence between these two is to lend verisimilitude to the fictional narrative. As I state of the Joker in another publication, Mrs. Maisel, is not alive, she is merely intellectual property to be manipulated and ‘rebooted’ as the market demands, as is this fictionalized version of Lenny Bruce who exists merely as a model of the real Leonard Schneider, also known as Lenny Bruce (West, 2020). These fictionalized people do not exist. There is only the correlation between a fictionalized version of a real person and the real person themselves, such as when physicist Stephen Hawking appeared as himself on both *The Simpsons* and *Big Bang Theory*. These fictionalized versions point to a real Hawking, one who supplies an ontological basis for the real thing but ultimately what exists is the voice of Hawking the character, a character who merely represents Hawking (West, 2020). Lenny Bruce, the character, is only indexical to Lenny Bruce the comedian. Midge Maisel is just not there.

Ironically, on Mrs. Maisel, the one character who is “too Jewish,” who attempts to be as authentically Jewish as possible, is played for laughs, so while “Mrs. Maisel” does depict Jews, doing Jewish things in Jewish situations, the only seriously devout religious Jew amongst the Maisel and Weissman families is Astrid Weissman, Midge’s sister-in-law, played by Justine Lupe. Astrid is a convert to Judaism and her role, at least until the end of season three, was, seemingly, merely to supply comic relief, when cultural situations got ‘too’ Jewish. Even though Mrs. Maisel is a show about Jewish people, we must make no mistake, it is not about real Jews; the show is careful to make us understand that these are Modern mostly assimilated Jew-ish Jews, give ironic lip service to Judaism, but, as the producers say, “done lovingly.” The show, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* has a problem with antisemitism, both internalized and other, because it does not want to get too Jewish and, where the writers and producers of Mrs. Maisel might denigrate Judaism or portray it inaccurately, we are to understand that even this is ‘done lovingly.’

Still, the Jewesses of *Broad City*, while both claiming a non-questionable Jewish identity, and while obviously quite affectionate toward it, are also quite alienated from that identity. Again, I need to assert here that I am not claiming any knowledge of Abbi Jacobson’s or Ilana Glazer’s toward Judaism or Jewishness, and that the only knowledge that I can have, based on viewing the show, is that of their characters. On the episode *Abbi’s Mom*, the eponymous mom, who is played by non-Jewish actress Peri Gilpin, comes to visit Abbi in her New York apartment for the first time ever. While the fact is that Abbi’s mom is played by a non-Jew, for the sake of brevity, I am going to presume that Ms. Gilpin’s character is indeed a Jew because one of the objects that Abbi is careful to have in view, for her mom to see, is a *Menorah*. This *Menorah* is

telling for Jews since it is completely incongruous; *Menorahs* are recognizably Jewish objects that are only used for *Hanukah*, so while the *Menorah* is in its own way signifying ‘Jew here’ it is also completely out of place. It is obviously not wintertime so displaying the *Menorah* would be like putting out a fully decorated Christmas tree in mid July. We can presume one of several things: either Abbi does not know that it is not winter, that she knows it but she does not care, that she does not know when the *Menorah* is supposed to be used, or that she is so intimidated by her mother’s upcoming arrival that she needs to display some sort of conventionalized signal of Jewishness and the only one she has is the *Menorah*. We may even guess that Abbi associates the *Menorah* with home and with being “good” so the conventionalized representation also has personalized meaning for the character.

Because a *Menorah* is polysemous: while it is a ritually significant Jewish object that stands, conventionally, for Judaism and specifically for *Hanukah*, in this case, semiotically, the *Menorah* also stands for nostalgia and relationship. The *Menorah* then signifies for us, the audience, the way Abbi wishes her mom to relate to her as a person. While Abbi lives a generally normal hedonistic life, which consist of a job, use of cannabis, alcohol, and sexual exploration, she wishes for her mom to think of her in some sense as good. This is not to criticize any of what some might call Ilana or Abbi’s “excesses;” this is to identify a generational and cultural gap, where compared to previous generations, today, especially for urbanized and assimilated young Jews, many of these practices are *de rigueur*. Therefore, in displaying the *Menorah*, Abbi is also displaying to her mother that she is still Jewish and also that she is still, in a conventionalized sense, a good girl.

To contrast, Ari Shaffir’s use of the *Menorah* is also as a conventional object, but where Shaffir denies his Jewishness and affiliation to the past, both Ilana and Abbi embrace their Jewish identities, but in an extremely post-assimilatory and alienated manner. Further to above, I cannot speak to the manner in which Glazer or Jacobson themselves relate to Judaism or Jewishness or that they have anything but affection for Judaism or Jewishness, however the characters Abbi and Ilana are, from a strictly religious Jewish point of view, alienated from those identities. As a further case in point, in the episodes *Getting There* and *Jews on a Plane*, both Abbi and Ilana attempt to travel to Israel under the auspices of a program called ‘Birthmark.’ The name Birthmark is an obvious parody of the current *Taglit* program, which is also called Birthright, where young Jews are offered a free trip to visit and to tour Israel. I need to note here that almost all of the humour in *Broad City* is based on over-the-top situations and on stereotypes; we are supposed to laugh at the hyperbole of the various situations.

So, when Abbi and Ilana are dismayed at being seated apart on the airplane, and when they question the tour guide, we are supposed to laugh at his explanation that on Birthmark all participants have been seated together “according to match potential”, we understand that the joke in this case is not about Birthright but, rather, about a typical Jewish stereotype (Glazer, Jacobson, & Ekperigin, 2016). The joke continues when individuals from the group are called to the front of the plane to “sell” themselves to “potential matches” but it enters further into cringe worthy territory when an extremely effeminate young man admits to the group that he is gay, to which the other young Jews on the plane look puzzled and uncomfortable. However, everyone in the entire group nods in appreciation when the young man admits that the only reason that he is looking for a heterosexual match is so that he can then access money that was left to him as part of a trust fund (Glazer, Jacobson, & Ekperigin, 2016). While this joke is ostensibly funny, this is also a reference to the anti-Jewish assertion that Jews all love money. While it may well be an over the top, reappropriation of an antisemitic trope and meant as a joke, I still need to point out that, given other assertions above, this joke is an example of internalized antisemitism. The joke may even be meant affectionately, it may be just a joke and yet I still need to ask, on whom is the joke supposed to be? Obviously, the Jews.

Further, Abbi and Ilana make clear in *Jews on a Plane*, that they are not part of the average middle-class Jewish experiences, that while they are Jewish, there is something incalculably different about their urban, New York City, postmodern Jewishness, which renders them apart from the other rank and file Jews of America. We only have to look back at the aforementioned episode *In Heat*, where Ilana smacks a *Hassidic* Jewish man on the rear end to understand that her character does not identify as ‘one of those Jews,’ that she wishes to both be Jewish and yet not be Jewish at the same time, that her Judaism is something intrinsic and at the same time something from which she is alienated.

It is this alienation from and yet intrinsic Jewishness that form a dialectical antinomy, the process of attempting to mitigating the existence of a Jew in the non-Jewish world as a full member of that non-Jewish world while at the same time not being completely subsumed by that world and at the same time maintaining a modern existence in the Jewish world as a full member of the modern world in the Jewish world but not forgetting one’s Jewishness and Judaism.

The results of these kinds of alienations, as we see in the cases of Ari Shaffir, *Mrs. Maisel* and *Broad City*, are that even in the alienation from it, that Jewish identity will not be denied but that it will be, even not intentionally, bruised and battered. The manner in which this self-alienation from Judaism manifests itself is in the form of self-deprecating Jewish jokes but it must also be clear

that, while the jokes are self-deprecating, that the tropes which they invoke are based in internalized antisemitic, that these tropes have been propagated by anti-Semites for years. It is by internalizing these tropes, unlike attempting to re-appropriate them, as in the use of the word Jewess, that Jews perform a form of self denigration, rather than self deprecation. Even passing jokes such as a bit of dialogue from the Netflix show *Medical Police* where one character asks “What kind of G-d can be so cruel?” and the other answers “Maybe the Jewish one (Cordry, Johnson, Stern, & Wain, 2020),” could be called edgy, where edgy is synonymous for “offensive, racist or antisemitic.” I must note that one of the co-writers of the episode is named Jonathan Stern, who is Jewish, so that while the joke is offensive, it is also a form of internalized antisemitism since it denigrates Judaism as a religion. And with these so-called jokes that we finally come to the crux of the matter.

In all of the above cases each of the writers or characters owns their Jewishness, the ethnic expression of a group of people, including Shaffir who despite his hard attempt to be a troll cannot help but acknowledge that it is his own Jewishness against which he rails. In general, each of the above examples really has no issue with their own Jewish cultural affiliations, that is to say with those actions and observances which differentiate those who claim to be Jewish people from those who do not. However, in every case above, each group has a problem with the religion Judaism, that Jewish cultural expression finds itself to be ‘too religious’ in whatever manner this religiosity manifests itself in modernity and postmodernity. I do need to note that. in this case I am conflating all of the Jewish religions into a single thing, which is, for the sake of this example and, properly put, the dysfunctional family of all of those people who claim to be monotheistical Jews, who share the genealogical history of the Jews and who do not make claims about Judaism which derive from texts which Jews do not accept as exclusively Jewish. What happens when we mock this religious expression, what we mock, denigrate or even disregard is the religion Judaism, or the manifestation of Jewishness of those Jews which are derived from the religion Judaism, and the practitioners of those manifestations are then seen as alien, not from non-Jews, but from Jews who reside outside of Judaism and who are looking inward.

Of course, it is these religious expressions which are also those things that make Judaism different from other so-called ‘Abrahamic religions, Islam and Christianity’. As above, Judaism does not in many ways have a requirement for a specific belief, or set of beliefs, that Jewish theology is difficult, even impossible to find, even within Jewish holy texts and commentaries. The problem is not Judaism’s, it is the problem of those scholars, and even those Jewish observers

who observe Judaism from the outside, those who attempt to equate Judaism with other religions, or to understand Judaism as a confessional religion, or as a religion that has a creed or catechism, which elements it lacks. Furthermore, this view tries to understand Judaism in relation to the world while abnegating the internal Jewish view of the self. Jews who are alienated from Judaism do not have a problem with Jews; their issue is those ways in which Jews and Judaism differ from their perceptions of the mainstream. Instead of the admission that Judaism may, because of its nature, never become like the mainstream secular and Christian culture which surrounds Jewish practice, the attempt is instead then to absorb Jewish practice into the mainstream. Thus, we have the explanation of Jewish book festivals and burlesque shows, which unto themselves are not “Jewish” *per se* but are instead manifestations of Jewishness as interpreted by the outside culture. Judaism, as Judaism, is just different than the other Abrahamic, or even, Mosaic religions. However, since Judaism, Judaism, or indeed the various Judaisms will not subsume completely into the mainstream culture or cultures, the mainstream has instead absorbed bits of Jewishness. As an example, many Yiddish words have entered the North American English lexicon, and this is especially true especially in geographical areas of high Jewish population or in businesses and industries of high Jewish participation. Furthermore, even the most ultra-Orthodox Jews have adopted some modern Western modes of dress. Most Orthodox Jewish religious authorities do allow Jews to wear “Gentile clothing” with the stricture that they are not promiscuous clothing, that they not be clothing of “an idolatrous practice” or that the clothing is not worn because of “a superstitious practice (Yoreh Deah 178.1).” I am going to question how this ruling actually played out in the real world, since, even today, many Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Jews are easily recognizable by their non-conventional and distinctive dress. Still in many larger cities with large Jewish populations, kosher food is readily available and is often for sale at amusement parks and sporting events.

Those entertainers who are both publicly Jewish and also ostensibly live in the mainstream outer culture often demonstrate ambivalence, in terms of their reactions to Judaism and Jewishness, or being descended from Judea. The Saturday Night Seder (Kantor, 2020) as an example, was an extremely Ashkenazi centric portrayal of American Jewishness. While it is historically true that for many of these Jews, America was indeed the “golden land of opportunity,” the show also implied that assimilating into American culture and remaining Jewish culturally, not as members of the nation of Jews or as practitioners of traditional Judaism, was what America was about. Notably, the traditional Jewish finale of the Seder “Next year in Jerusalem” was made more palatable and universal. Instead of stating “Next Year in Jerusalem” the statement was

truncated. The Jew's desire to return to a land from which we have derived, to return to Israel, was universalized to "Next Year (Kantor, 2020)." Given that the show itself only was produced to raise research funds toward a vaccine for the Covid-19 virus and, given that most people in North America were still in some sort of isolation at that time, the term "Next Year" might have resonated in a more universal manner. At the same time, however, the truncation of the "in Jerusalem" while universalizing, also reeks of an attempt to de-Judaize or de-Zionize the show, so as to make it more palatable to the American public. The ending does not resonate for Jews, it resonates for Gentiles. It is a public performance of Judaism and Jewishness; a kind of "minstrel show" where the Jews show off for the Gentiles.

Any kind of performance is a complex thing, a kind of a dance, which is related to both the *persona* that the performer has crafted and projects and also to the performers own artistic and other personal sensibilities. I will therefore say that the above displays of internalized antisemitism are most often based in a kind of misplaced affection for the internalized objects, Jew, Jewishness and Judaism, identities that that have been separated from the self and objectified. Even gross self-antisemitism, as in the case of Ari Shaffir, is an attempt to relate to those objects as external to him and to reclaim them, in Shaffir's case in a grossly pathological manner. Even the affectionate "reclamation" of antisemitic tropes such as those by the writers and actresses of *Broad City* and of *Mrs. Maisel* starts as affectionate and seemingly authentic but at the same the ultimate effect is distancing, because all of these examples of internalized antisemitism are intrinsically based in an attempt to pander to both the sensibilities of the outside non-Jewish world and to the Jewish world at the same time. The issue, to quote the Christian scriptures ironically, is that "No man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24)," and the attempt to do so, to entertain a Jewish audience in a Jewish manner as Jews and a gentile audience in a gentile manner as gentiles, both at the same time, in our current culture, panders to the alienated Jew and almost always damages Jewishness and Judaism and is almost always at Judaism's and Jewishness' expense and ultimately, then, to the Jew.

This is not to say that Jewishness, Jews or Judaism should not be portrayed in the media, but rather that we Jews need to reconsider the manner in which we appear, because the deprecating and self-defeating manner in which we Jewish Jews of Judaism have thus far portrayed ourselves in popular media is ultimately damaging. As a question in point, what is the difference between the avaricious Jew jokes told by the women of *Broad City* and Shakespeare's Shylock or Dickens' Fagin the Jew? Aside from the fact that Shakespeare wrote in Elizabethan England and the Dickens wrote in Victorian England, the only

substantive difference is that Shakespeare and Dickens were Christians writing about Jews and that Ilana and Abbi are Jews telling similar Jew jokes. Granted that there is an American subgenre of “Jewish humour” that speaks to a kind of self-deprecating frugality and avariciousness, we can understand that historically, when the second and third waves of Jews came to North America from Europe, that they were anything but rich and that this internalized antisemitism was a way of coping with what was believed about Jews, but in an ironic and humorous manner. Some might even say that if we are offended by Shakespeare or by Dickens that we are not the target audience or that their portrayals of Jewishness and Judaism, but that while they are genuinely antisemitic, Dickens’ and Shakespeare’s idea of Jews is based in a specifically cultural and historical idea based in a specific historical context. But, then, what then are we to make of *Broad City* or *Saturday Night Seder*? We could say that Abbi and Ilana are portraying these historical antisemitic stereotypes in an ironic manner, that they do not mean what they say or that somehow, they are being antisemitic, as above, in the same “loving manner” as the Paladinos portray Jews in *Mrs. Maisel*.

Similarly, on the streaming special, *Saturday Night Seder*, the real-life Ilana, now transmogrified into a comedian—not a *Broad City* character—along with her real-life brother joke about the Passover ritual. Several of the jokes they make imply that the entre point of the *Seder* meal is to drink as much as possible and to become as drunk as one can (Kantor, 2020). Certainly, while that may sum up the *Seder* experience for some Jews, one must understand, that, based in its historical context, that the *Seder* does indeed have some roots in the ancient Greco-Roman formal drinking party known as the Symposium. So, I must insist here that the point of the *Seder* meal, historically, was not inebriation but rather study and the stylized format was based on a historical idea. The point of the *Seder* was not Hedonistic drunkenness, the point was that in the time and place in which they lived, the Rabbinical sages “simply made the *Seder* into a fancy meal, using the normal customs of their time. The goal was to act like free people, and that is how free people of their time engaged in festive meals (Student, 2009).” And, while according, to the *Mishna* one must drink four cups of wine (*Pesachim* 10: 1) one is also not precluded from drinking non-alcoholic grape juice. So, while the *Seder* takes its shape or form from Greco Roman *Symposia*, the content of the *Seder* itself is meant to be didactic. Further to this point, the content of the modern *Seder* derives from so many different places and times that it is really an error to mistake the form of the ritual for the content. The point of the *Seder* is not to be a boozy bacchanal but instead that it is in itself a ritualized re-creation and remembrance of redemption and revelation.

To make cheap jokes about the *Seder* ritual without understanding the context, is, in my mind, at least as cheap as Tiffany Haddish's making the statement that she is Jewish by dancing and singing *Hava Nagilah*. Neither statement has much if any substance behind them and both are based in the idea that Judaism or Jewishness is something that one displays at the surface but that does not have any real significance or depth. One may be Jewish, one may have the religion of Judaism, one may or may not be a Jew, but the actual meaning of this Jewishness or Judaism or being a Jew on one's life in any real or intrinsic manner is actually negligible because, these identities are merely that, identity, and they ultimately have no history or real meaning. At their essence this experience is nihilistic, and, because of this generalized lack of intrinsic meaning, one might as well get as drunk as one can at the Passover *Seder*, because the concepts of redemption and freedom no longer possess intrinsic or extrinsic reality.

Conclusion

And finally, the showbiz curtain drops and, as they say in the entertainment industry, we fade to black. In all the above, I have tried to explore the way in which the identities of Jew, Jewishness and Judaism have come to exist in the 21st century, from a singular nationality of Jew. I have used many examples from film, television, theatre, and comic books as way to show how the Jew lives in show business, that this fragmentation from a singular identity as a nation shows itself in popular media. We may try and speak of these identities, Jew, Jewish and Judaic, as if they exist independently, but in truth they are interdependent and at the same time they resist unification. While we can talk about the Jew and Jewishness as existing separate from each other and from Judaism these identities not only rely on each other for existence, but also inform the manner in which each one carries meaning.

Further I have then tried to find a link for these popular portrayals to understand something real about Judaism, Jewishness, and the Jew so as to say something about the manner in which these identities exist in the world, as they are portrayed in media. And, while my study is by no means exhaustive, I also believe that I have chronicled, in a small way, the growing schism between the various denominations of Judaism, where a religious and cultural split has formed based on the idea of Jewish identity and who has the authority to decide, and indeed on what basis such authority may decide who it is that qualifies as a Jew. This rupture is reflected in the manner in which Jews see themselves in media, *vis a vis* Judaism and Jewishness and as I have shown, while this split, on a more practical level, is ostensibly based on denominational

grounds, that really it is a commentary on Jews understanding of Jewishness as a social practice versus Judaism as a religious one, and that this understanding is based on the manner in which Judaism and Jewishness is understood in relation to the Jew.

The problem is that if we agree that these identities, Jew, Judaism and Jewish, are in themselves kinds of performances, without intrinsic meaning, we must agree that they are performances of something, because, if they are not, the fact that we study them at all becomes a form of absurdity. Why try and understand meaningless ephemera that only exists without any meaning? As I have further proposed above, what Judaism, Jewishness and embodying the Jew as a nationality all represent, together, are kinds of phenomena, that they are more than a feeling but are instead the manifestation of something that is humanly irreproducible. Furthermore, while these phenomena are real, they represent both the transcendent and the immanent sides of belief.

We might then well ask, what phenomenon or phenomena do Judaism, Jewishness and Jew represent? I think I can be safe here and state that I do not know what specific phenomena are represented, moreover that these phenomena are presentational, not discursive, and since they are lost to history, I will also say that we are all free to speculate, within the criteria as afforded us by Umberto Eco, *et al.* As above, we know that the Jewish people suffered from more than one collective trauma, and while we speak, wisely, these days of the manifestation of generational trauma, I am uncertain that even trauma experts are able to explain the manner in which over two millennia of many different traumas might manifest themselves in a historical manner.

What better performance of Jewishness, Judaism and Jew to use as examples, then, but actual stage and screen performances of Judaism and Jewishness by ostensible Jews? It When we looked at performances of Judaism by those calling themselves Jewish, we discovered that we had an issue, especially when a person's claim to being Jewish or Jew could come under scrutiny and even countered.

The answers to the above question is, of course, based in the manner that one chooses to construct a Jew or Jewishness or Judaism and while, as I have demonstrated, prior to modernity all three identities were viewed as a unity which was the nationality of Jew, that, since modernity Judaism is constructed as a religion and Jewishness as a culture, with the nationality of Jew either usually taking a lesser place or being pre-empted by the usage of white nationalists and other antisemites and philosemites. While many of those who consider themselves Jews today would be loath to define themselves as a member of the Jewish race, they would be more than happy to consider themselves

members of “*Klal Yisrael*,” the nation of Israel. While the reasoning behind the abhorrence of racialized Judaism is beyond the scope of this work, I will propose that one reason for this fact is based in the recent Shoah, where racialization of Jews and Judaism was the Nazi’s rationale for genocide. Another speculative reason is that, at least in North America, race identity has followed colour lines rather than ethnicity, so that Jews, in North America are generally identified as White, racially, with a separate racial group created for Jews of Colour, a portmanteau for Jews who are non-Caucasian. All racial theory is a manifestation of 19th century science and, as such, is really not useful, except perhaps sociologically, if at all. There are problems with defining Jewish identities along colour lines, and to be fair, the idea of Jews identifying along these lines, rather by denomination or by culture, is mostly an issue of those Jews who have, in many ways, assimilated into and have accepted the surrounding culture, almost exclusively, as their own. Thus, as above, in such a home one may also find non-denominational celebrations with accoutrements such as Easter eggs along side Passover *Seder* plates, Christmas trees adorned with *Hanukah* decorations, and a claim to both cultures or heritages, not religions, because in such spaces, while there may be room for organized religious practices, inclusion is the watchword, where most practices more resemble Sheilism as mentioned above, than any named religion.

Ultimately, what appears to have happened to Judaism as a religion, through the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries is a kind of very slow schism, where the various denominations of Judaism are recognizing that even though that each solitary denomination was historically grounded from one thing, that the differences between these groups are slowly becoming irreconcilable, although, notably, I have until now not seen this split formally designated such in the literature. This split is one that will be need to be reckoned with before too much time passes because the more liberal Judaisms such as Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanist and other branches which do not accept *Halakhic* authority will finally need to decide if they wish to be associated with those groups which do accept *Halakhah*, or if they wish split off completely and insist that their own religion is different. There is a gulf now which is growing between groups which do not, in general, follow the *Halakhah* and instead follow a more “meaning” based approach and those which do. Since meaning, at least in the spiritual sense, has become the realm of the individual, Judaism, at least for this group, is a matter of individual preference and the role of the Rabbi has, unsurprisingly, become more pastoral, advisory and, in a sense, ministerial. These modern Jews, even if they are theistic in their beliefs, are interested in a kind of personal Judaism experience which is afforded by the *Halakhic* Jews, but in a

different sense. Perhaps the split in terms in manners of worship could be broken into Orthodox “Apollonian,” or individual Judaism and Reform “Dionysian” or group worship Judaism. Another study might be afforded to understand the manner in which worship differs between the Jewish denominations to understand this phenomenon in a fuller manner.

Conservative Judaism, on the other hand, which, while important earlier in the 20th century must decide if it wishes to join the more liberal movements and drop any pretense at *Halakhah* or, if this is not a reality, it must then somehow educate its members to, even nominally, observe that Judaism which the movement purports to conserve. The issue here is not with Conservative Judaism’s philosophical basis, but with the manner it has worked out practically. While it had large promise, Conservative Judaism turned out to be a traditional form of Judaism, intellectually, but one that apparently lacked some sort of substance or central heart. The philosophic basis of Conservative Judaism’s requires a long-term intellectual commitment to understanding the issues, and living within a plurality of possible responsa, but over time, and from the outside in many cases could be regarded as an intellectual compromise. When it looked like a more lenient Orthodoxy it was palatable to some, it ultimately it did not really satisfy anyone, such that even the Conservative responses to *Halakhah*, when there was no clear majority, would allow both majority and minority opinions to carry, and such compromises appeared to be wishy-washy and to not carry any authority at all. Metaphorically, Conservative Judaism was like Ulysses sailing between Scylla and Charybdis, where Orthodoxy was there for Jews who are looking for an authoritative and stringent practice, and, where the more liberal Judaisms, such as Reform and Reconstructionist, were there for Jews who just wanted to be modern and Jewish both culturally and who considered *Halakhic* Judaism to be old fashioned or out of step.

We may see an example of this change as demonstrated in the versions of *The Jazz Singer*, where, in the first version, the hero returns to his roots and where, in the second, we see assimilation as the goal, with the proviso that “assimilation” in this case is not the complete abnegation of one’s roots but instead, trading the substance of the roots for the superficial appearance of the thing, so that the spiritually emotional crescendo of *Kol Nidre* becomes the nationalistic chorus of “*Coming to America*” a sign that for many Jews, it was America, that symbolized a kind of freedom and redemption. It is for this reason that the writers of *Saturday Night Seder* could truncate the historically meaningful and more Jewishly resonant “Next Year in Jerusalem” to a more worldly and universal message “Next Year.”

It is at this idea of “universality” that Reform and Reconstructionist Judaisms meet non-theist Judaisms such as Humanist Judaism, which is ironic, since

both Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism are strictly theistic at their core. Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, although perhaps not intending to do so, have a tendency to reduce Judaism to mere religion, or at best, to a religion with a set of historical cultural practices that need to be reinterpreted for the Modern Age. Further while they do admit some historical and national contiguity, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism are then hard pressed to explain why one must retain one's Judaism, or even the manner in which Judaism is unique. At best, Judaism for these groups is just another choice, and based, really, in preference or in ancestry of some sort. While the observance of Passover and eating matzo is universal to Judaism, as is eating sweet foods on Rosh Hashanah, the issue here is that they become equivalent traditional acts, although matzo is mandated by *Halakhah* and eating sweet things is merely tradition. What happens next is that both actions become levelled, such that on the Orthodox side both are then strongly mandated while on the Reform and Reconstructionist side both become relegated to mere tradition. Meanwhile, at the same time "cultural" Humanistic Judaism have reduced Judaism to a group of cultural practices, practices which are indeed particular to a group of people, but that there is no intrinsic meaning behind these practices; they are in themselves only meaningful in the moment. These Humanistic groups are very generally Ashkenazi centric in terms of practice, even though they would explain that it is the traditions themselves which hold the meaning, not the belief behind the action.

As we have also noted, the term Orthodox Judaism, is also polysemous, at least in North America, so that I must be careful with any conclusions that I draw. It is a fact, however, that no matter which group of Orthodox Jews we speak of, such that most of the Orthodox Jewish groups are based in the idea that Judaism is not, in any sense, universal, but rather the opposite, the Jews are in some manner a separate group who have been chosen for the teleological responsibility to perform G-d's commandments. Please note that I am taking these statements at face value and that, moreover, Orthodox Jews will contend that these rules are not universal, that they belong to Jews, as a nation, not a religion or a culture, alone.

It is the tug of war between Jews, Judaism and Jewishness, and the world outside, between the universality, dare I say "catholicism" of Modernity and the particularity of the various Judaism where we see Tiffany Haddish singing and dancing, where Jake Peralta misses his mom's brisket, where Abbi and Ilana smoke pot, get drunk, high, and have adventures and yet remain "Jewesses," it is here that we see the tug of war expressed in public. It is all around us, this antimony, where we see "Jewish" burlesque and drag shows, but also Jewish book and festivals, where, over time, Jews will choose to be Jewish

and to express that Jewishness in a manner that will define Judaism for the postmodern age.

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