

Jewish Media

The Jews/Media/Religion Working group, founded in 2003 with the support of the Center for Religion and Media at New York University, comprises an international group of scholars dedicated to study, discussion, and debate about how uses of media figure in Jewish religious practices, how Jews discuss the opportunities and challenges new media pose to religious life, and how the engagement with media engenders new notions and experiences of Jewish community, continuity, and spirituality. The working group's mandate is to chart the uses of new media with an historical perspective on how a diasporic people, over the course of more than two millennia, has used media, broadly defined, to constitute, sustain, and mobilize itself across wide geographic areas. In addition to considering works of mass communications media (newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, films, sound recordings), the Working Group has examined other forms of mediation ranging from manuscripts to modern analog and digital technologies, including amateur photographic documentaries of community and life cycle events, as well as mediating practices encountered in live performances, philanthropy, museums, and tourism. Similarly, the Working Group defines Jewish communities broadly to include everything from ultra-Orthodox to ardent secularists. It considers not only the role of media within Jewish community life, but also the role of media in Jewish/non-Jewish relations. An organizing principle of this wide-ranging inquiry is the interrelation of media and religion. In addition to considering more obvious interrelations--use of media in the study of sacred texts or to facilitate worship--the project explores examples of Jewish civil religion (exemplified by Holocaust remembrance and support for the State of Israel) as well as engagement with media as a kind of devotion akin to religion (as in the case of people who characterize their attendance of Jewish film festivals as the equivalent to going to synagogue). My contributions to the Jews/Media/Religion working group (where I was hosted as a visiting fellow for the 2003-2004 academic year, at NYU), has focussed on the study of ArtScroll, the largest and most important Orthodox Jewish publishing house in the English-speaking world. I have been studying the public life the press and its books. My interest has been to understand such things as: the ways prayer books are acquired by local communities; the enthusiasm (and sometimes the controversy) they generate: the role of intermediary figures (such as booksellers and librarians) in the spread of ArtScroll books; the modes of address, generic conventions, and matters of concern shared by diverse ArtScroll books (including liturgical works, Bibles, religious commentaries, legal guides, self-help books, biographies, cookbooks, adventure novels, and children's literature); and the material agency of the books themselves, in which things like typesetting, illustrations, binding, and other design elements help to shape the ways readers and other users interact with books. I have published a number of texts on these topics, culminating in my 2010 book, *Orthodox By Design*. (see "About Jeremy Stolow" for bibliography). For more on Jews/Media/Religion working group see their website: Modiya <http://modiya.nyu.edu/>