CHAPTER 3

Who Knew? Using Digital Trade Papers to Explore Ethnic Programming in American Picture Palaces

Judith Thissen and Paula Eisenstein Baker

On 2 April 1915, *Variety* reported "the unexpected sight" of a full house at a Tuesday matinee during Holy Week at the Hammerstein Theatre in New York City. "One person in the rear of the house remarked it must be a holiday of some sort. Someone else walked around asking the staff men and other if there was a holiday, but nobody knew. It was the Jewish Passover holiday that accounted for the attendance," the trade magazine explained.[1]

This remark is only one among the many brief references to the Jewish holidays that we were able to find employing a systematic keyword search in the digitized version of *Variety* from the Media History Digital Library (MHDL). Put together, these ephemeral textual traces reveal an ethnic

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practice of cinemagoing that has been long overlooked by film historians: the fact that in the late silent and early sound era, American Jews went *en masse* to picture palaces, "high-class" vaudeville and the theater to celebrate Passover, Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) and the end of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). These Jewish holidaymakers were big business not only for Broadway but also for up-market movie and vaudeville houses in other American cities with a sizeable Jewish population.

In addition to the computational survey of *Variety* (1905–1940), we gathered archival sources gathered in a more traditional way. Combining insights from distant and close readings of this source material, we have been able to establish how the high end of the American entertainment industry familiarized itself with the Jewish holiday trade and then stimulated this leisure practice by adding extra matinees and including Jewish elements in the shows. This persistence of ethnic programming in the picture palaces that functioned as showcases for the Hollywood majors came as a surprise. In silent film scholarship, culturally specific exhibition practices are seen as characteristic of the pre-Hollywood era, whereas early classical Hollywood is strongly associated with processes of cultural homogenization and standardization in production, distribution and exhibition.[2] In particular, it is usually argued in the historiography about Hollywood's rise to hegemony that the main studios targeted an "all-American" audience with a standardized film product that ensured consumption across social and ethnic boundaries. In the late silent and early sound era, there was undeniably a strong tendency towards cultural homogenization at the production level. However, our research on New York City strongly suggests that at the level of exhibition, the situation was far more diffuse. An earlier study of moviegoing on Manhattan's Lower East Side had already revealed that film exhibitors continued to program Yiddish vaudeville and Jewish-themed film well beyond the nickelodeon era.[3] What has been unnoticed until now is that this type of target marketing was by no means confined to film exhibition in the downtown Jewish quarter and other working-class immigrant Jewish neighborhoods in Greater New York.

During the late 1910s and 1920s, prominent showmen in the American entertainment business—from "Roxy" Rothafel to Loew and the Shuberts—recognized that upwardly mobile second-generation Jews were a prime audience for their upscale theaters and picture palaces and sought to retain their loyalty by acknowledging the major Jewish holidays. The main part of this chapter discusses how 'Broadway' discovered this new

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target audience and sought to maximize the appeal of 'going to a show' during Passover, Rosh Hashanah and at the end of Yom Kippur by ethnic marketing and programming. In our conclusion, we will briefly reflect upon the larger methodological implications of this case study, and discuss, in particular, how digitization and Digital Humanities research can help cinema historians to uncover hitherto unnoticed exhibition and audience practices.

A New Jewish Patronage

Beginning in the early 1900s, Jews constituted the largest ethnic group in Greater New York. By 1920, they accounted for nearly 30 percent of the city's total population.[4] In numbers, we are speaking of 1,750,000 by 1925. The majority of New York's Jews were first- and second-generation immigrants from Eastern Europe who had come to the United States after 1880. As early as the nickelodeon boom, they turned out to be enthusiastic moviegoers. The Lower East Side, Manhattan's largest Jewish neighborhood and the hub of Yiddish entertainment, was dotted with five-cent picture shows. Uptown, there was a smaller and more prosperous German-Jewish community, which constituted the city's Jewish elite. The "downtown Jews" rapidly followed the path of their uptown German co-religionists, rising often within one generation into the (lower) middle class. More than any other ethnic group in New York City, they profited from the economic boom of the 1920s. Many became independent businessmen, set up and invested money in factories, wholesale and retail businesses, and real estate. They also invested in the education of their children, especially that of their sons, thus opening up the path to professionalization.[5]

The rise of this new middle class of Eastern European Jews profoundly changed the geography of Jewish New York as upward social mobility went hand in hand with intra-city migration. This was a pattern that had started in the early 1900s, when the first immigrants crossed the Brooklyn Bridge or moved to Jewish Harlem to escape the poverty of the "East Side ghetto," and the outward movement increased sharply in the following two decades. After the First World War, large numbers of first-generation and, especially, second-generation American Jews moved to new, suburban neighborhoods, attracted by modern apartment buildings and two-family houses. As a result of this geographic and social mobility, the locus of Jewish cultural and social life shifted from the Lower East Side to middle-class neighborhoods in upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx,

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and Queens.[6] What linked these neighborhoods with each other—and with Broadway—was the subway.

As we will see in more detail, it took a few years before Broadway film and vaudeville managers discovered the Jewish "subway public." Before that, immigrant Jews were considered a clientele primarily for the nickel-and-dime movie business and the Yiddish theater. But once the upper segments of the entertainment industry began to realize that Jewish audiences had more disposable income, the picture palaces and the major small-time vaudeville circuits sought to reach out to them through targeted programming and marketing. In particular, Passover (Pesach) and the High Holidays (the period from the beginning of Rosh Hashanah until the end of Yom Kippur) became key dates for Broadway. Going to a picture palace, a 'high class' vaudeville show or an English-language musical during these major holidays epitomized for many second-generation Jews not only a seasonal celebration of ethnic bonds but also their integration into the prosperity and Jazz-age culture of the 'Roaring Twenties.'

Before Broadway

It is important to note that going to the theater on a religious holiday was not an entirely new leisure practice in the immigrant Jewish community. With the growing popularity of the Yiddish theater in the 1890s, widely publicized theatrical events began to develop around Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) and Pesach. In Manhattan's downtown Yiddish theater district, these eight-day religious festivals marked the beginning and the end, respectively, of the winter season. After a pre-season with classics from the repertoire and serious plays, new melodramas with high box-office potential premiered during the week of Sukkot (September/October), supported by extensive advertising in the Yiddish press. On the first two and last two days of the holiday, tens of thousands of immigrant Jews went to the Yiddish playhouses on the Bowery and Second Avenue for special matinee and evening performances. However, during the 1920s, Rosh Hashanah began to replace Sukkot as the official opening of the theatrical season, especially when the New Year fell late in September. Passover (March/April), for its part, continued to mark the end of the high season for Yiddish theater audiences in New York City. For that holiday, too, the playhouses scheduled additional performances and programmed the latest and best they had to offer to please the holiday crowds, before closing their doors for the summer.

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In contrast to the Yiddish theater managers, early movie theaters on the Lower East Side did not single out Passover, Sukkot or any other Jewish holiday as a special occasion for going to the "*muving piktshurs.*" Sometimes film exhibitors billed a special feature for Passover, typically a film with overtly Jewish content or a biblical movie suited to the holiday such as *The Life of Moses* (Blackton, Vitagraph, 1909) or *Joseph in the Land of Egypt* (Moore, Thanhouser, 1914).[7] However, there is ample circumstantial evidence that nickel-and-dime theaters in immigrant Jewish neighborhoods saw their box-office figures increase sharply during Pesach. Already in the nickelodeon era, going to the local picture show dressed up in brand-new clothes had become as common a way of celebrating the holiday as going to the Yiddish theater.[8] Tellingly, a significant number of new cinemas on the Lower East Side opened their doors just before Passover to profit from the increased demand. Loew's Delancey Street Theater, the first genuine picture palace on the East Side, first opened in March 1912, two weeks before the beginning of the holiday. The satirical Yiddish-language weekly *Der groyser kundes* commented on the event and the growing popularity of the cinema and the immigrants' habit of going to the movies for Passover with a biting cartoon that played on the theme of the exodus out of Egypt with the moving picture manager leading the Jews to the promised land of the movies.[9]

Broadway Discovers the Jewish Passover Crowds

We did a systematic examination of the references to Passover and the High Holidays in *Variety* (1905–1940) to establish when the film and vaudeville industry discovered that Jewish holidays caused good and bad days at the box-office in the upper segments of the entertainment market. In this context, it is important to emphasize that patterns of Jewish holiday attendance are not obvious: Jewish holidays start not at sunrise but at sunset on the previous day. For instance, Shabbat starts on Friday night; Passover starts on the eve before the first day with a special meal (the Seder). Moreover, because the Hebrew calendar is based on lunar months, the exact dates of the major Jewish holidays vary, although they remain within a limited time span to respect the fact that they are linked to the seasons (this is done by adding an extra month to the calendar every two or three years). Sukkot was left out of our analysis because a preliminary search revealed that the eight-day holiday had no noticeable effect on

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business on Broadway, in sharp contrast to its effect on Yiddish theater attendance.

The earliest remark in *Variety* appeared in April 1908 and referred to a dip in theatrical attendance on the eve of Passover (i.e. the night of the first Seder). Discussing a new vaudeville act at the Colonial Theater, *Variety* noted that a double event had affected attendance considerably: "Besides being the center of the Holy Week, it was the commencement of the Hebrews' Passover."[10] Plummeting attendance at the start of Pesach comes as no surprise because more American Jews celebrated a Passover Seder than kept kosher or observed the Shabbath.[11] But the holiday also brought a rise in attendance. This double-sided pattern—a strong dip on the eve preceding the holiday followed by a sharp rise—was characteristic of the Jewish holiday trade. In the case of Passover, instead of respecting the diasporic tradition of having another Seder on the second night, many Jews went to the movies or the theater. The reports in *Variety* leave no doubt that attendance of Jewish holidaymakers peaked on the first and second day of Pesach, both matinee and evening. The evidence also suggests that throughout the holiday Jews went more frequently to Broadway and upscale movie and vaudeville theaters in their own middle-class neighborhoods, again with a sharper rise in attendance during the last two days. Thus, the holiday pattern that had characterized the Passover business in the downtown Yiddish theater district had moved uptown and into the suburban entertainment districts in the Greater New York area.

While the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur were discussed as box-office factors on their own account, *Variety* referred to Passover audiences primarily in years when the holiday (partly) coincided with Holy Week and compensated for losses resulting from the Christian holiday. Holy Week, and more generally Lent, were frequently noted as factors that influenced box-office figures negatively. "Hebrew Holidays Proved Big Help During Holy Week," read the headline of the lead article about business earnings in New York in early April 1915, which observed that "the Holy Week was *a wonderful surprise* [our emphasis] to the managers, it happening the Hebrew holiday attendant to the Feast of Passover fell coincidently, with the result business held almost at normal."[12] Cut-rate prices because of Lent probably added to the attraction of a trip to Broadway and may have attracted Jewish customers who would otherwise not have been able to afford such an outing.[13] Reducing prices during this low season seems to have been a common practice in the theatrical business, especially in the case of older hit shows. When many Broadway shows were sold out on

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Good Friday in 1923, *Variety* explained the unexpected run at the box-office by the fact that people knew that there would be plenty of seats at popular prices. It did not note that many New York Jews might already have been in a festive mood because the first Seder would take place the following night.[14]

In its early years, *Variety* was apparently less familiar with the Jewish religious holidays than with the Christian liturgical calendar. Despite the large numbers of Jews in the entertainment industry, especially in New York City, this ignorance seems to have been quite widespread.[15] In the 1910s, the trade magazine occasionally informed its readers about the dates: “Passover commenced Monday night and will end Monday night next (24 April),” but this was rare.[16] However, the insiders knew about the Jewish holiday habit of going out for Passover and adapted their programs and marketing well in advance. As early as the early teens, some small-time vaudeville houses around Herald Square/East Fourteenth Street advertised in the Yiddish newspapers before and during Passover, announcing special matinee performances for the holiday.[17] In later years, many Broadway theaters and picture palaces did the same. Also, it can hardly be a coincidence that the Strand Theater opened its doors with a gala performance on the night of the second Seder (11 April 1914). Two years later the opening of the Rialto was scheduled to profit both from the Passover trade and box-office boost caused by Easter Monday.

The industry’s knowledge of the attendance patterns of Jewish holiday crowds grew over the following decade as the practices themselves took on more importance and developed into family rituals for many American Jews. In 1922, for instance, *Variety* reported that Keith and Moss had agreed to a suggestion by the priest of the Actors’ Church not to give performances on Good Friday between noon and 3 pm, a period that Catholics consider sacred as the hours of agony of Jesus on the cross. However, when the vaudeville company realized that it was also the second day of Passover, Keith and Moss abandoned that plan because “it would have complicated matters in Greater New York where thousands of vaudeville patrons are of Jewish faith.”[18] By the end of the decade, *Variety* assumed that its readers knew all the ins-and-outs of Jewish holiday traditions. The magazine referred to Passover as “the matzoh period” and, in the late 1930s, even included the Hebrew dates of Jewish holidays in its Showmanship Calendar (e.g. “Rosh Hashanah, first day, Tishri 1”).[19]

Although special matinees for Pesach became standard practice on Broadway and in upscale entertainment districts in other cities with large

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Jewish populations, we found no evidence in *Variety* or other sources that the picture palaces and small-time vaudeville theaters added specifically Jewish elements to their stage shows to attract Passover audiences. This is probably because the holiday frequently fell during the Lent-Easter period, which was more likely to be acknowledged by the entertainment business. For instance, Rothafel often included hymns or other religious elements into the program in the weeks before Easter.[20] In 1925, a year in which Holy Week and Passover overlapped, Roxy's Capitol Theater honored the Christian holiday with the song "The Palms" by Charles Schenck and the Capitol ensemble, which was staged in a church setting. *Variety* noted that "it proved to be as effective this Lenten period as it has been in the past."[21] That same week, the Rivoli Theatre fitted its program "into the Easter scheme of things" with Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, while the program surrounding the feature film at the Strand suggested an "Easter atmosphere without rubbing it in."[22] No mention was made of Jewish music or acts.

Vaudeville Stars and Sacred Songs for the High Holidays

Because in the autumn there was no major Christian holiday affecting attendance, the box-office impact of the High Holidays was more visible in the entertainment industry than the effects of Passover. Throughout the 1910s, and with ever more enthusiastic detail in the 1920s, *Variety* reported "big business," "standees in all aisles," "excellent takings" and "unusual good matinee business" during Rosh Hashanah and at the close of Yom Kippur. And the effects on the box-office were substantial not only in New York City, but also in Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Newark, Boston and New Orleans.[23] Attendance patterns during the two days of Rosh Hashanah were similar to those at the beginning of Passover. The drop in attendance on the eve of the holiday was compensated for by a sharp rise in attendance on the first and second days, for both matinee and evening shows. When the holiday fell just before the weekend, the festive mood and impact on the box-office figures continued through Saturday and Sunday.

For of Rosh Hashanah, most Broadway theaters adapted to the increased demand, adding extra matinees and raising their ticket prices. *Variety* noted in September 1923:

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> While the Jewish New Year celebration hasn't been declared a legal holiday in New York as yet, it already seems to have been regarded as one in the Loew houses. On this day, the holiday scale goes into effect and four shows are squeezed into the day's routine.[24]

Because managers did not have to reckon with Christian religious sentiments around the Jewish New Year, attendance was stimulated not only by extensive publicity in the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press but also by integrating Jewish elements into the stage shows that preceded the feature film. As early as 1912, William Fox capitalized on Rosh Hashanah at the Academy of Music on East Fourteenth Street and in his Washington Heights theater (Bronx). "Perhaps the bookers knew what was going on in the way of [Jewish New Year] celebrations," *Variety* observed, because "nearly every act on the bill had one or more Hebrew artists."[25] Over the next years, many up-market movie theaters and vaudeville theaters in New York City included Jewish acts in their bills for Rosh Hashanah. During the 1920s, the big attractions were Sophie Tucker, the Marx Brothers, Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson.

Of all the Jewish holidays, it was Yom Kippur that had the greatest impact on public life in New York City. Traditionally, the Day of Atonement is observed with a 24-hour period of fasting and prayer in synagogue, and even the most secularized American Jews respected the holiday in some way, refraining from work and entertainment. Stores and businesses in Jewish neighborhoods closed for the day, no Yiddish newspapers were published, Yiddish playhouses and moving picture theaters remained dark or were turned into makeshift synagogues to accommodate the large number of "Yom Kippur Jews." On Broadway, agency ticket sales decreased considerably, and few Jews were seen in the auditorium and on the stage. *Variety* explained that the holiday was "generally observed in the show business," because "most of the leading managers in every branch are of the Jewish race." Some actors, vaudevillians and singers preferred not to perform on the day that was considered the holiest of the Jewish year.[26] But at the end of Yom Kippur, moviegoing peaked again as many people went out to a show after breaking their fast, and the close of Yom Kippur was the exact moment that Warner Bros. picked for the gala premiere of *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) on 6 October 1927. The timing was perfect not only because the most dramatic scenes in the narrative are set on the Day of Atonement but also because the end of the holiday was a red-letter day for New York film exhibitors. Indeed, Warner's first

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feature-length talkie was developed and promoted as a holiday special for Jewish audiences.[27]

Even more common than integrating Jewish vaudeville acts into the program was the practice of staging sacred or semi-religious Jewish songs. By far the most popular was 'Kol Nidre,' the famous prayer that is chanted in the synagogue on the eve of Yom Kippur. Based on available evidence, Rothafel seems to have been the first to include a performance of Kol Nidre at the Rialto Theatre in 1918. *Variety* did not review that show, but *Motion Picture News* described it in great detail. To "get the Yom Kippur effect," the magazine noted, the chant was preceded by views "From Jerusalem to the Red Sea" and followed by *The Bells* (Warde, 1918), a Jewish murder drama set in France. At the end of the travelog, the curtains parted and revealed "in the side panels the sacred laws of the Jews on the tablets, with the effect of windows of the synagogue." Unseen, Joseph Mann sung Max Bruch's Kol Nidre with "a cello obbligato." According to the *News*, it was "an effective way to mark the day," although the reviewer also remarked that the combination of the tribute to Yom Kippur and the rather gloomy feature film, gave "a rather dismal air to the bill."[28]

When Roxy left the Rialto to run the even larger 5500-seat Capitol Theater in 1920, he took with him the tradition of staging Jewish songs for the High Holidays. In September 1923, for instance, he eliminated the comedy picture at the end of the program to make room for tenor William Robyn to sing Kol Nidre. "It was a decidedly interesting touch to the program which very fittingly carried a slight religious tinge at the finish in keeping with the beginning of the Jewish holiday period," *Variety* remarked, explaining that Robyn performed the prayer in "a sort of pulpit in front of a star cloth with a light effect suggesting rays coming through a temple window."[29] In 1927, Alan Crosland would use a very similar décor for Cantor Rosenblatt's guest performance in the so-called music hall scene of *The Jazz Singer*.[30]

Competition for the High Holiday Public

A study of trade reports, theater programs, newspaper clippings, radio play lists and advertisements for the 5000-seat Capitol Theatre showed that throughout the 1920s and 1930s the house marked either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur (or both) with Jewish music. Kol Nidre was a standard act on the program, either in its traditional liturgical version or in Max Bruch's adaptation for cello and orchestra. In addition, the High Holiday shows

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included secular Jewish songs that played on religious sentiments. In 1925, during the week prior to Rosh Hashanah, for instance, the Capitol's show featured 'Eyli, eyli' (My God, My God). Originally a Yiddish theater song from the late 1890s, it had been popularized by Jewish vaudeville star Belle Baker. Jeffrey Shandler describes it as "an emotional avowal of faith and plea to heaven to protect Jews from persecution."[31] 'Eyli, eyli' was repeated in 1926, but the program in 1927 featured Rhea Silberta's 'Yahrzeit' along with Max Bruch's adaptation of Kol Nidre for cello and orchestra.

In the context of growing competition between the picture palaces on Broadway following the opening of the 6000-seat Roxy Theatre, the managers began to try to outdo each other with ever more elaborate live performances for the High Holidays. At the Roxy Theatre, *Kol Nidre* was routinely included in the show during the week of Yom Kippur. A simple décor that evoked the ambiance of a synagogue seems to have become the standard setting for the prayer. But for Rosh Hashanah, Rothapfel spared no expense. In 1928, the Jewish New Year program featured Mana-Zucca's '*Rachem*' (Mercy) sung by soprano Gladys Rice and the Roxy chorus, with musical accompaniment by orchestra and organ (Image 3.1). On each side of the theater, the women of the choir appeared in white robes in the balconies holding candles and singing, while the men of the chorus clad in traditional costumes were lined up across the stage against the backdrop of the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem. For the finale, the drop flied, disclosing a glittering pageant with Moses bearing the stone tablet of the Decalogue. *Variety* was enchanted by the "outstanding item."[32]

In 1929, the Capitol Theatre responded with a novelty. Managing Director Major Bowes had house composer and arranger Leo Zeitlin (1884–1930) create a special orchestral overture for Rosh Hashanah. The result was *Palestina*, a highly dramatic and monumental work of almost twelve minutes employing easily recognizable Jewish tunes and songs, with a blockbuster ending in which every instrument in the orchestra plays loudly, close to the top of its range. *Palestina* was played in the theater during the entire week leading up to the High Holidays and broadcast from the stage on the radio on Sunday evening by WEAF (the flagship station of the NBC Red Network). It was played again on 24 November 1929, on the WEAF program celebrating Major Bowes's seventh anniversary of broadcasting, reaching an audience that probably numbered at least ten million. The Capitol used Zeitlin's *Palestina* once more in the

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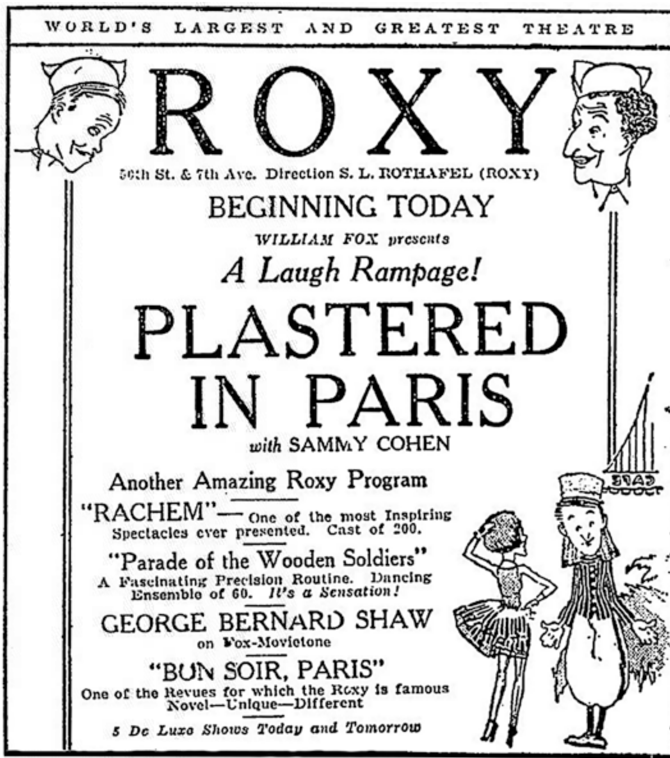

Image 3.1 Advertisement Roxy Theater. (*New York Times*, 22 September 1928)

spring of the following year, this time to mark the Passover holiday; it was heard during their Sunday evening radio program on 13 April 1930.[33]

During the Great Depression, Jewish New Year celebrations on Broadway took a more sober form. Elaborate tableaux disappeared from the shows. More important, *Variety* discussed both Passover and the High Holidays primarily in terms of a fall in attendance. Many Jews avoided expensive outings altogether as the economic recession hit hard in the community. Film exhibitors tried to get them back into the pre-Depression habit, but to no avail. From 1937 on, the Jewish holiday business seems to have picked up a little, but the practice never fully regained its former popularity.[34]

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Methodological Reflection: The Needle and the Haystack

Trade magazines like *Variety* were crucial agents in analyzing and making sense of the entertainment business. They provided a framework that allowed film exhibitors to understand and play upon changing market conditions and consumer behavior. The many weekly trade reports in *Variety*—ranging from a few sentences to much longer reviews—informed them about what was going on in the film field and in the entertainment industry as a whole (vaudeville, legitimate, burlesque, etc.). For the cinema historian, it is more difficult to see in retrospect the forest (the market) through the trees (the trade reports) and to understand how film exhibition and audience practices changed over time and in relation to each other. The question is if the digital—and more precisely the transition from analog to digital searching—can help us to make sense of the messy historical past? Can Digital Humanities help us to see the forest through the trees?

Needless to say, data mining and visualization tools like Lantern and ArcLight (both developed for the MHDL)[35] are a tremendous help in excavating information in trade magazines and other digitized film periodicals. At its most basic level, the digitized and searchable version of *Variety* allowed us to map the emergence and evolution of the Jewish holiday trade over time. A page-by-page reading of a micro film copy of the magazine would have taken months because each volume contained at best a handful of references to box-office impact of Passover and the High Holidays. Moreover, most of these references are very brief and could easily be overlooked. Even if the search engines are not 100 percent reliable due to OCR problems, we could locate most references in a few seconds. And it was the cumulative effect of the digital search—distant reading rather than close reading—that allowed us to grasp the scale of this subcultural phenomenon. Furthermore, ArcLight also enabled us to see how particular terms for Jewish holidays changed over a longer period of time (e.g. generic terms like 'Jewish holiday' and the more precise use of Passover, but rarely Pesach). Such charts and trend lines do not give historical explanations, but they did provide us with a chronological framework for further interpretation and investigation.[36]

Because this research project combined analog and digital searches, it encouraged us to think about the differences between the two modes and to reflect upon the impact of Digital Humanities upon our engagement

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with the past and our archival source materials. From an epistemological perspective, doing digital history seems to have implications about the nature of what constitutes historical evidence. This needs to be theorized, but we would like to share our first thoughts from the work floor. In the 'old days' (before search), we would have used the term scattered evidence for the type of sources that we collected and analyzed. But when documents are transformed into digital data, the term 'scattered' no longer reflects the essence of the researcher's quest. Scattered evidence is a spatial metaphor, which implies that the researcher collects the source materials and brings them together. But that work is now done by search engines and algorithms. The term 'ephemeral evidence' may be more appropriate with the type of study we did, because it reflects both the transitory nature of the information itself and the phenomenon that is described. Still, we are hesitant to use the term. Recently, Charles Acland has warned film historians that the growing focus on the ephemeral is that researchers might be "making too much of so little." He points out that the mobilization of the "single ephemeral fragment" is often done "not so much in the service of the fullness of historical record, nor the investigation of concrete ideological or discursive structure, but for the purpose of poetic flights of fancy about 'pastness,' ruins and romanticist longings."[37] One could indeed argue that the Jewish holiday trade is not more than a side note in the economic history of American film exhibition and perhaps not worth an entire chapter in a book about movie magazines. However, if we approach cinema history as social history (and we do), then the phenomenon of tens of thousands of American Jews celebrating their holidays in picture palaces gains a cultural significance well beyond the field of cinema studies. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that a full appreciation of the meaning of the Jewish tradition of going to the movies in celebration of Passover and the High Holidays was only possible because we took into consideration the broader context of Jewish culture and religious practices in the early twentieth century. This brings us to a more critical note on the use of digitalized archival sources to building a new cinema history.

Digital tools facilitate the 'excavation' of seemingly marginal exhibition and reception practices and can help us to enrich our historical understanding of the diversity of American film culture and its relationship to the dynamics and politics of everyday life. Put differently, Digital Humanities can "make cinema history matter more."[38] Yet it seems to do the reverse. One problem is that for good reasons but with wrong

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outcomes, collections like the MHDL contain primarily specialized magazines and other medium-specific source materials. Hence, they tend to isolate the film industry and the experience of cinemagoing from its broader historical context (unlike digitized newspapers). The scope is further narrowed by the way most scholars search these collections. The shift from analog to digital search has huge repercussions. By using search engines we not only outsource the time-consuming browsing and searching for source materials, but we also outsource to large extent the decision what data are relevant in terms of evidence for our particular research question. Thus, we not only have less 'debris' but also narrow down the scope of interpretive possibilities and limit our field of vision—often in a very literal way because of the zoom operations involved in reading the digitized materials on screen. From an epistemological perspective, then, keyword search affects the very nature of the evidence and this transformation calls for critical reflection. Analog history was about looking for small needles in a big haystack and this messy haystack helped us to understand the relationship between the individual needles. Digital history is about blowing up the needles. We locate single instances of historical processes—'events'—we may see them sharper but we risk to see them only in isolation. The problem in our view is not that the ephemeral "gets resituated as worthy of archival and scholarly attention,"[39] but that in the process of blowing up the needles, the hay stack is reduced to a small hay bale (the article or the full page). Put differently, the relation between the 'event' and its context is profoundly altered in the process of changing from analog to digital research. Digitalization and digital search tools enable us to access and process large data sets. No doubt that this is a major revolution for cinema historiography. It is also a huge challenge. As we take the digital highway, we better keep the old tool kit in the back of the car.

Notes

1. Nobody Knew, *Variety*, 2 April 1915, p. 7.
2. See, for instance, Hansen, M. (1991) *Babel & Babylon: Spectatorship in Early American Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Maltby, R. (1995) *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
3. Thissen, J. (2007) National and Local Movie Moguls: Two Patterns of Jewish Showmanship in Film Exhibition, pp. 13–23 in Buhle, P. (ed.) *Jews and American Popular Culture. Volume 1. Movies, Radio and Television*. Westport: Praeger Perspectives.

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4. Jackson, K.T. (ed.) (1995) *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 622.
5. Moore, D.D. (1981) *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 22–23; Prell, R.-E. (1999) *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 104–112.
6. Idem.
7. Advertisement American Movies Theater, *Jewish Daily Forward*, 25 April 1914.
8. Grand St. revels in its own parade, *New York Times*, 12 April 1912.
9. For a detailed analysis, see Thissen, J. (2007) Next Year at the Moving Pictures: Cinema and Social Change in the Jewish Immigrant Community, pp. 113–129 in Maltby, R., Stokes, M. and Allen, R.C. (eds.) *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
10. *Variety* 18 April 1908, p. 17. See also *Variety*, 5 April 1923.
11. Weissman Joselit, J. (1994) *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950*. New York: Hill and Wang, p. 227.
12. *Variety*, 9 April 1915, p. 11.
13. Idem; see also *Variety*, 21 April 1916, p. 8.
14. *Variety*, 5 April 1923, p. 11.
15. Nobody Knew, *Variety*, 2 April 1915, p. 7. See also "Forgot about Yom Kippur", *Variety*, 7 October 1911, p. 4 and the misspelling of the name in "Yum [sic] kippur's only closing", *Variety*, 6 October 1916, p. 16.
16. *Variety*, 21 April 1916, p. 8.
17. See, for instance, theatrical advertisements in the *Jewish Daily Forward*, 7 April 1912, 13 and 14 April 1914, 24 April 1916.
18. *Variety*, 7 April 1922, p. 1.
19. *Variety*, 11 April 1933, p. 45 and 1 September 1937, p. 44.
20. Melnick, R. (2012) *American Showman: Samuel "Roxy" Rothaphel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 77, p. 261.
21. House reviews, (Capitol) *Variety*, 8 April 1925, p. 36.
22. House reviews, (Rivoli) *Variety*, 8 April 1925, p. 36.
23. *Variety*, 21 September 1917, p. 11, 13–14, 51. See also, for instance, 17 September 1920, pp. 17–19; 7 October 1921, pp. 4–5, 16, 23, 38.
24. *Variety*, 13 September 1923, p. 48.
25. *Variety*, 20 September, 1912, p. 27.
26. *Variety*, 15 October 1910, p. 6. See also 6 October 1916, p. 16.
27. Thissen, Kol Nidre on Broadway: New York Jews and the Success of *The Jazz Singer*, forthcoming.

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28. Seeing Rialto and Rivoli with Rothapfel, *Motion Picture News*, 28 September 1918, p. 2011. See also Written on the Screen, *New York Times*, September 15, 1918, XXX-1.
29. *Variety*, 13 September 1923, p. 35.
30. For a detailed analysis, see Judith Thissen, Kol Nidre on Broadway: New York Jews and the Success of *The Jazz Singer* (forthcoming).
31. Shandler, J. (2009) *Jews, God and Videotape: Religion and Media in America*. New York: New York University Press, p. 19.
32. *Variety*, September 19, 1928, 37; See also *Jacobs Orchestral Monthly*, November 1928, p. 46.
33. WEAF playlists for 24 November 1927 and 13 April 1930, Red Network Master Books, History Files, NBC Archives, Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. For a detailed analysis see Eisenstein Baker, P. (2001) Leo Zeitlin's Musical Works on Jewish Themes for New York's Capitol Theatre, 1927–1930, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 20(1): 74–93; and Eisenstein Baker, P. and Nelson, R.S. (eds.) *Leo Zeitlin Palestina: An Overture for the Capitol Theatre, New York*. Middleton: A-R Editions.
34. For example, *Variety*, 24 March 1937, p. 71; 31 March 1937, p. 61; 8 September 1938, p. 9 and p. 58; 29 September 1938, p. 9.
35. See http://lantern.mediahist.org/; http://projectarclight.org/; http://mediahistoryproject.org/.
36. For instance, a spin-off project will focus on the declining use of the adjective Hebrew (which in the entertainment business was often associated with stereotypical portrayals of immigrant Jews in vaudeville sketches) in favor of the more neutral "Jewish." Was this development related to the growing prominence of Jewish entrepreneurs in the American entertainment business or a result from outside pressures from Jewish organizations (or a combination of both)?
37. Acland, C.R. (2016) Low-Tech Digital, p. 136 in Acland, R. and Hoyt, E. (eds.) *The Arclight Guidebook to Media History and the Digital Humanities*. Reframe Books. Online http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/reframebooks/archive2016/the-arclight-guidebook-to-media-history-and-the-digital-humanities/.
38. Maltby, R. (2007) How Can Cinema History Matter More? *Screening the Past*, 22. Online: http://www.screeningthepast.com/2015/01/how-can-cinema-history-matter-more/
39. Acland, Low-Tech Digital, 136.

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