

*Thinking Jewish Culture in America*

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Edited by Ken Koltun-Fromm

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To Arnold Eisen and the students enrolled in Modern Jewish Thought at  
Haverford College, Spring 2011

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## Chapter Seven

# Aura and the "Spiritual in Art" in the Age of Digital Reproduction

Zachary Braiterman

Of course it is a cliché that by the end of the twentieth century and at the start of the twenty-first century contemporary culture has been constituted by technology and by photographic images in museums and galleries, at home, at work, and in the places in between on the street. But what about Judaism, and what does it look like inside the society of spectacle? If it is even possible to ask this question, it is because artificially enhanced nexi between culture, art, religious thought and practice emerge out of sensate materialities—visible, sonic, and also tactile, olfactory, and gustatory. Relative allways to some historical time and geographical situ, these emergent nexi make it possible to say that any form of secular and/or religious culture looks, sounds, feels, tastes, or smells like "something." All of this has gone under-theorized in contemporary Jewish thought and philosophy, including the importance of culture and place, and how the nexus between ideas and physical sensation conditions the dynamic possibilities at the intersection between religion and culture. In these pages to follow, I want to consider what contemporary Jewish religion or "spirituality" might look like through the photographic medium. I do so based on the presumption that, in our own image-saturated culture, photographic images are central to how one might realize commitments to religious and to secular thought, to religious enthusiasm and critical realism. My contention will be that art and technology are key to understanding (Jewish) religion and secularism in modern and contemporary culture; and today, that interface has to include photography in its purview.<sup>1</sup>

To illustrate the impact of the visual arts on modern religion, consider the case of early twentieth-century German Jewish philosophy. Paying attention

to its ideational-cultural matrix (the way ideas emerge out of flesh and the way ideas loop back to shape it) allows one to say that German Jewish thought “looked” like something. And if a critic wants to say, no, modern German Jewish philosophy does *not* look like anything, it may be because he or she does not know where or how to look. To read the German Jewish corpus is to bump constantly into literature, and also art, into Michelangelo, Monet, E. M. Lilien, Leser Ury, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Hermann Hesse, Rilke, Stefan George, Kafka, Agnon, William Morris, and Mahler. Steeped in the imagination and in the dramatic arts and saturated by eros and color, the conceptual work of Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, or Gershom Scholem assumed a highly “visual” character, formed around plastic figures such as God and man, fellow-man and world, the prophet, the Shulamith, the Hasid, the Jew, the messianic, Palestine. Modernist Jewish thought and culture were part of a larger cultural reception history of antique sculpture, baroque form, classical music, lyric poetry in the arts of impressionism, arts and crafts and *Jugendstil* design, cubism, expressionism, and *neue sachlichkeit*.<sup>2</sup>

In comparison, modern and contemporary Jewish thought in the United States stands out as visually poor, with no countenance to meet the eye, no plastic frames of reference, and pale erotic force. Where even to begin? An American Jewish thought worthy of the name emerges out of works by Kaplan, Heschel, and Soloveitchik in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In his own important study of “material culture and Jewish thought in American,” Ken Koltun-Fromm locates the place of their thought in the cities and suburbs.<sup>3</sup> But what do American Jewish thought and philosophy look like? Jewish thought and philosophy never developed a distinctive look apart from a *retardataire* decorative expressionism that drew on woodcuts and on late works by Chagall with a little Rembrandt thrown into the mix. With no visage, mid-century modern and contemporary American Jewish thought and philosophy do not look like anything. Formless, there has been no conversation between Jewish philosophy and postwar and postmodern styles, not with Abstract Expressionism, and not with Pop Art, Conceptualism, Minimalism, photography, or performance art; and for that, modern and contemporary American Jewish thought lack liveliness. Largely concept driven, it has none of the perspicuity that only plastic intuition can lend to thought.

In and after the age described by Walter Benjamin as “the age of mechanical reproduction,” anyone who is going to explore the relationship between religion-art-culture would have to consider possible lines of convergence between photography, technology, and theology. But Benjamin’s essay mostly underscores that this is not a simple venture. The problem immediately confronting any attempt to think through the relation between religion and the particular art form of photography is the problem of “aura,” which photography, according to Benjamin, has systematically stripped away. As

the exemplary art of mechanical reproduction, photography as understood by Benjamin would have dead-ended religion and religious thought; but only if it is true that the former has destroyed forever the sense of aura so integral to the latter. Even without Benjamin’s famous analysis, one would be hard-pressed to see how photography contributes to any discussion about religion, religiosity, or religious experience; at first glance, photography would seem to have its purview limited to the empirical things of the material world and to their “iconic” representation or resemblance. Of course, photography can document the visage of religious actors or ritual objects, place, and practices. But what about spiritual “things” or states; what about those phenomenal states of consciousness that do not lend themselves to mimetic realization? Can one photograph God? And what special effects would this require?

My argument in this chapter proceeds as follows. As we will see below, Adorno rejected Benjamin’s claim that so-called mechanical art simply destroys aura once and for all, arguing that Benjamin had failed to negotiate the dialectical tension between photography and aura. Following Adorno’s lead, I will look to the dialectics between religion and technology in the thought of Joseph Soloveitchik, and then explore the sense of aura technologically caught in the “straight photography” and epistolary musings of Alfred Stieglitz. A pioneer in America of art photography in the first half of the twentieth century, Stieglitz provides the first bearings for these thoughts about technology and aura, photography and the spiritual in art. I will then turn to the intensified sense of aura, its visual rhetoric, in the digital photography of Neil Folberg. A student of the great naturalist Anselm Adams, Folberg brings Judaism and Jewish “religiosity” directly into a digitally produced photographic milieu. His photographs allow one to consider how, under the right affective and cognitive conditions, technologically enhanced digital images turn out to be familiar and disorienting, worldly and other worldly. Indeed, “spiritual” values seem always to seep into claims made by theorists writing about photography, seeping into the interplay between realism, anti-realism in relation to the indexical character and cult-value of art-photography. The upshot is this: the most mimetic of art forms turns out to be non-mimetic, lending itself to a kind of thinking about religion that is invested in the worldly structures which the image simultaneously outstrips. That modern Jewish thought has been unable to say anything about photography—the art form that has come more and more to dominate postwar aesthetics—is to have left modern Judaism out in a kind of cold that the more visually informed doyens of German Jewish thought and philosophy never once allowed Judaism to suffer.

## AURA

To even begin to think about photography in relation to contemporary Jewish thought and culture, one must do some necessary preparatory spadework around the heavy blockage set up by Walter Benjamin's argument about photography and aura in the 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." First appearing in English translation in 1968, this essay, by now a cultural studies classic, quickly became one of the most cited texts in photo-theory. It is in this essay that Benjamin famously identified and called for the "liquidation" of "aura" in the interest of revolutionary criticism. About this thesis and its claims, so much has been written, but almost none of it has come from the perspective of modern religious studies and certainly not from Jewish philosophy. In light of the nimbus of hagiography and genius hanging around his image, it most often seems to be that writers writing about Benjamin's thesis tend to accept it at his word. Any interest in pursuing the intersection between art, religion, and technology is thus instantaneously brought up short by the essay.

The dogmatism expressed by him about the liquidation of aura is ironic, seeing that one of the abiding points of interest about Benjamin for modern religious studies and contemporary religious thought might have more to do with how images and their idea frame his project overall than with the particular *patois* of messianism, redemption and revolution for which his work is also known. According to Gerhard Richter, the "thought-image" in Benjamin's work is one built up as an assemblage of "philosophical miniatures," "as conceptual engagements with the aesthetic and as aesthetic engagements with the conceptual."<sup>4</sup> No matter what the object of analysis, or the metaphysical or anti-metaphysical temper at this or that stage in his life, the methodology was remarkably consistent. Benjamin develops and critically deploys the image mediated via the photograph, cinema, the historical past, the metaphysical, language, art, hashish. He does so in order to shock, break, and become free from individuated bourgeois consciousness, society and habit, the cultural petrification of things, the rigormortis of modern culture, commodity markets, the complete absorption of things into names, the sign character of language, instrumental reason, and so on. As critic, Benjamin unlocks the redemptive force in the image of whatever stripe, following, as per Susan Buck-Morss, the movement of thought from the dream image into political awakening.<sup>5</sup>

The theo-political edge to the work of the thought-image relates to what Benjamin understood to be the necessarily mediated character of the absolute. All the attention paid by Benjamin to the image, to profane illuminations, and the redemptive potential of shock aesthetics would have seemed ready-made for the kind of crypto theology haunting Benjamin's profile as a heterodox Marxist. In his early theological musings, the absolute or truth

appears as the extra-mundane force of pure expressivity inscribed into language and images. In his more mature work, he turned to historical materialism, and also to surrealism, without quite abandoning religious frames of reference. From either side of the scholarly divide, many have simply concluded that the attempt to fuse theology and historical materialism was an unhappy one. Rather than enter into the scrum between mysticism and Marxism, one might prefer instead to follow the lead set by Buck-Morss and "remember that theology animates historical materialism, but to keep this knowledge invisible because to call it by name would cause its truth to vanish."<sup>6</sup>

Central to the argument about religion and politics in his work, "aura" and technology constitute the two key terms undergirding the ambivalence in Benjamin's thought regarding religion and the place of religion in the modern world. And if aura is key to understanding this ambivalence, then the fate of religion in Benjamin's writing would be bound up with photography. Aura, not messianism or redemption, is the thought-image that brings Benjamin deepest into "religious" discourse, even as the thought of its liquidation keeps him distant from religion. Crystallizing his call for the "liquidation" of aura, photography took him far from the dream world of religion and into the political awakening promised by historical materialism, the gross form of which remained forever foreign to his own thought and worldview. Belief that photography has destroyed aura put the brake on that very religious impulse identified by Buck-Morss and others animating the image work in his thought-world.

Appearing throughout his literary career, Benjamin's understanding of aura was surprisingly consistent. Like a nimbus, aura would refer to something distinct but intangible, to a radiance or color surrounding objects, persons, or gods. The properties evoked by aura for Benjamin include these associations but prove more idiosyncratic. Already in the book on the German Baroque, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), aura is steeped in religion and images, defined by the sense of distance, authority, and transcendence in a work of art and associated with ritual. Like the idea of "the holy" in the Hebrew Bible, an auratic thing is spatially set apart from the regular world of ordinary material objects. The same base meaning is developed across the Benjamin oeuvre. Released from the "baroque," aura haunts "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), an essay in which Benjamin toyed with the fancy that aura invests the image or object with the power to look back at us.<sup>7</sup> One notes as well the apparition of aura in the essay "Kafka" (1934) when aura is said to appear in the beauty of hopelessness, in allusions to doctrine and to hope, but never present, not for us, as per Kafka's famous quip.<sup>8</sup>

While aura haunts the reading of these two modernist writers, Benjamin's claim is that aura has burnt out in modern times. The discussion at the end of

"The Storyteller" (1936) locates this thesis as a case of secularization theory—the notion once popular among social scientists that religion served to integrate simple, so-called "primitive" societies but now begins to dissolve in the more complex social formations of modern secular life. "The Storyteller" would then present a melancholic tale about the disenchantment of modern life as the collapse of experience, the causes of which are as varied as the trauma of World War I, the distractions of urban life that keep boredom away, the decline of handicrafts, the sanitization of death, and the disappearance of chroniclers in whose tales there is no clear distinction between religious and worldly elements. The fate of storytelling and aura is also attributed to the novel, which displaces epic memory and isolates the reader. Enmeshed in the romance of fairy tales, Benjamin regrets the inability today to link higher and lower things and to invest them with "mystical depth."<sup>9</sup>

While the mood in "The Storyteller" is melancholic, more revolutionary elán was demonstrated in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Here again, aura is associated with tradition and authority, with "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."<sup>10</sup> But how does this square with the more well-known argument that mechanical reproduction detaches the image from tradition and originality: "the quality of its presence is always depreciated. . . . By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."<sup>11</sup> Mechanical reproduction is said to work against aura by bringing the image, or rather a copy of the image, up close "spatially and humanly," enabling us "to get a hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."<sup>12</sup> The original cult value of the object or image is first magical and then religious, before giving way to the modernity of exhibition value and art for the sake of art. No longer esoteric, no longer invisible to the optical eye of the ordinary person or limited to the gaze of the connoisseur, the image is now exoteric and visible, transferred to the general public. What excites "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is the revolutionary enthusiasm with which Benjamin brings to the unhappy secularization story. It is in the liquidation of aura, of authority and distance, introduced by photography and consummated in cinema that Benjamin identified with the more politically groping, haptic, hands-on forms of critical looking than the kind of absorptive contemplation characterized as bourgeois art and society.<sup>13</sup>

About the attempt to craft a hard-edged Marxist analysis of culture, I'll pass over in silence except to note that "liquidation" is a violent word with unpleasant historical connotations. Adorno accused Benjamin of an "archaic romanticism," a blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat,<sup>14</sup> while Richard Wolin tells us the communism was actually toned down in the published version of the essay.<sup>14</sup> What Benjamin was unable to see was that the line between the fascist "aestheticization of politics" and the communist "politicization of aesthetics" is but a fine one, and he was no

doubt naïve in believing one could sequester the one from the other. Less damning but just as confusing is how the secularization-modernization theory implicit in these thoughts about mechanical reproduction reflect the very idea of progress that Benjamin rejected in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," an essay in which the bourgeois notion of historical progress is swept away by radical, apocalyptic images of historical rupture.

With no place for aura and religion, the rupture heralded by Benjamin was specific to the radicalization of the cultural and aesthetic milieu in 1920s Germany, marking the shift from Expressionism, suffused in the language of spirit and "the spiritual in art," for the more hard bitten materialism of the new sobriety (*neue Sachlichkeit*). In 1914-1915, when Kafka first wrote *The Trial*, "the Cathedral" could still be the place of negative revelation. At the Bauhaus in 1919 in its "early" period, the black and white woodcut "The Cathedral of Socialism" was one the most important visual emblems for the new school of architecture before the transformation at the school to the machine aesthetic for which it is better known. By the mid 1920s there was no place among critical thinkers committed to intellectual rigor for this kind of stuff. Siegfried Kracauer, a scholar-theorist also associated with the Frankfurt School at the Institute for Social Research, understood that this was the age of the anonymous Hotel Lobby, not the "House of God." Photography itself was an important element in the turn from the rhetoric of invisibility to the rhetoric of the visible in the aesthetic theory and culture of post-Expressionism.

But perhaps mechanical reproduction was never a serious threat to the cult value of an image, assuming against this kind of apocalyptic secularization theory that religion and technology, even modern mechanical ones, always carry over into each other. As Jeremy Stolow insists, religion and technology have never been external to each other, technological media serving religion as a condition of possibility.<sup>15</sup> And clearly, Benjamin's entire argument, based as it is on mechanical reproduction, has been outmoded by the new arts of digital production and reproduction. Benjamin's exemplary reflections on photography belong to the period of its gestation in interwar Germany, and it makes sense that Benjamin could not have been able to see how religion, ritual, and the cult value of an image might actually survive the age of mechanical reproduction, or even how the photograph might not be simply a work of mechanical reproduction. Benjamin was unable or unwilling to consider how photography, at least after its early period, might carry within its practice and its discourse that impulse identified by Kandinsky in 1912 as "the spiritual in art." The notion that photography was simply mechanical, both in its reproduction and production, was a widespread one against which modern art-photographers struggled.

Today, almost eighty years later, Benjamin's thesis has gotten a little tired around the edges. I would offer three points around which to reconsider its

eology to auratic art. The first point is in part dogmatic, in part quirky form of historical materialism that inspires this essay may have made intuitive sense to Benjamin in the 1930s. Less clear is how it pans out today in a post-ideological age. The attempt to harness art to revolution enjoyed a renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s, but the politically radical gesture constitutes a wobbly leg in that it overstates the significance of historical transitions by framing them as ruptures. Secondly, against the secularization cum modernization theory, there is a general recognition that religion, with or without aura, has adapted itself to the age of mechanical and now digital reproduction.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the aesthetic theory undergirding Benjamin's critique of aura belongs to a distant time and place, the "shock" registered by new urban spaces and media technologies having long since waned. Their aesthetic, psychological, social and political effects are more easily integrated, and no longer carry the radical force of surprise, disorientation, rupture, rapture, and revolutionary promise they once did. In other words, it is quite clear that technology was never going to "liquidate," in any final sort of way, the place of religion in modern life or of aura in modern art.

Against Benjamin's radical negation of aura, Adorno suggested that "the simple antithesis between the auratic and the mass-reproduced work, which for the sake of simplicity neglected the dialectic of the two types, became the booty of a view of art that takes photography as its model and is no less barbaric than the view of the artist as creator."<sup>17</sup> About all of this, we will see more below in my discussion of aura and index. For now I want to note that, for all the dialectic in Benjamin's thought relating to the past and the future, the refusal to introduce dialectic into the relation between technology and aura falls flat. There should be a better, more complex way to think through the relation between religion and photography, understood either dialectically or synthetically, as opposed to antagonistic or one-sided. On what basis, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, would it even be possible to find aura in photography?

#### TECHNOLOGY (ON SOLOVEITCHIK)

If we turn from Benjamin to the Jewish philosophy of Joseph Soloveitchik, it is because of the premium placed by the latter on the possible interface between technology and religion, which Benjamin was unable to imagine. More so than Benjamin, Soloveitchik would seem to have captured the nuance carried in the lived relationship between technological and religious values; and more than any twentieth-century Jewish philosopher, Soloveitchik is the one who most deeply adapts religion, and with it aura, to the question of technology and technological culture. This has a lot to do with neo-Kantianism and something to do with his work's peculiar aesthetic, also

Kantian. About aesthetics, Soloveitchik expressed great ambivalence. On the one hand, he reacted sharply against unbridled aesthetic pleasure; on the other hand, his own thought relating to *halakhah* (Jewish law) is enmeshed in a form of aesthetics based on abstract patterns and the play between sense and perception and a conceptual apparatus. It is the technical apparatus that is of interest here in our discussion of photography, assuming that any relation between photography and religion would depend upon the relationship between religion and technology. About technology, we will now see, Soloveitchik was also ambivalent. On the one hand, he expressed great openness toward technology as a general system; yet on the other hand and in the end, he sought to close off Jewish religion from the particular instantiation of modern technological society.

Soloveitchik's conception of technology and modern science was anti-empirical. As he understood them, modern science and technology provide for a "functional duplication of reality," "reproducing the dynamics of the cosmos by employing quantified-mathematized media which man [*sic*] evolves through postulation and creative thinking."<sup>18</sup> Mathematical science "whisks us away from the array of tangible things, from color and sound, from heat, touch, and smell . . . into a formal relational world of thought constructs." This is a world that is "woven out of human thought processes, functions with amazing precision and runs parallel to the workings of the real multifarious world of our senses. The modern scientist does not try to explain nature. He only duplicates it. . . ." Through science, the modern person "constructs his own world and in mysterious fashion succeeds in controlling his environment through manipulating his own mathematical constructs and creations."<sup>19</sup>

For Soloveitchik, technology as a system does not pose a threat to religion because he saw the two as both separate and isomorphic. Soloveitchik was heir to the rationalist tradition in Jewish and western philosophy, coupling the rationalism of Maimonides and the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen. More under the influence of Cohen than is often presumed, we see it in Soloveitchik's tendency toward system, science, and anti-empiricism. As such, he shared none of the animus against technology and other mediated forms of consciousness and culture characteristic of the neo-romanticism, anti-romanticism, and post-romanticism of thinkers like Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel, or Benjamin and Heidegger. In Soloveitchik, there is neither a predilection for ecstatic experience of the Eastern European Hasidim or their modern, German-trained imitators, nor the melancholic musings about the destruction of aura and the future of technology in works by Benjamin and Heidegger. Soloveitchik's is the more sober style that characterized the opponents of Hasidism, or *mitnagdim*, whose brand of orthodox religion stressed the centrality of Torah study, in particular the study of *halakhah*, as the epitome of Jewish piety. For Soloveitchik, *halakhah* is dedicated to the



manipulation of the natural order to purposeful ends, and it was this openness to reason that opened Soloveitchik to technology, although only up to a very sharply delimited point.

In *Halakhic Man*, Soloveitchik set out to couch Jewish law in terms of human dignity and power, and it is this which already brings Judaism close to technology. Indeed, *halakhah*, as seen by Soloveitchik, resembles nothing less than a technological apparatus. In the ideal types sketched by him, two basic types of human consciousness are identified. The *halakhic* person combines the cognitive-scientific-technological type of human consciousness with *homo-religiosus*. Like the former, the *halakhic* person is not interested in transcendence or metaphysics. The attitude is a worldly one focused on simple things such as torts, contracts, leases, and technical details regarding ritual observance, forbidden foods, forbidden sexual relations, marriage, divorce, and so on. *Halakhah* provides the working tool, a parallel mechanism of *a priori* concepts with which to apprehend reality and to negotiate one's way in this world. It is a technical filter with which to constitute a world and its experience. The appearance of a "natural" spring of water, sunrise, sunset, mountains, trees, plants, animals, colors, and other spatial arrangements have all been processed by means of a technical grid, transformed into *halakhic* objects. The natural object world is transformed by the *halakhic* system into the super-cool clarity of a modern photographic image.

To cite Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum, for Soloveitchik the *halakhic* medium is the message, a message that is not predicated upon slavish and dry rule following rote behavior. The *halakhic* person is also a type of *homo-religiosus*, and also a bit *homo aestheticus*. *Halakhah* is a system that combines heteronomous and autonomous drivers. On the one hand, the system is revealed by God. *Halakhic* persons seek redemption and desire eternity. They too thirst for transcendence. But rather than seek to enter into supernal realms, they endeavor to purify this world, and this desire is at the heart of *halakhic* worldliness. As I have described it elsewhere, "beauty" and *halakhic* concepts mingle freely at highpoints in Soloveitchik's text. But even more to the point, the technical apparatus is that which secures freedom and dignity of the person who knows how the system works and how to code it. It is this freedom, the freedom enjoyed as technicity, and the power and confidence *vis-à-vis* that which outstrips all of the cognitive capacities of the understanding, that make the *halakhic* apparatus a sublime one.<sup>20</sup>

The idealist-phenomenological reflections about *halakhah* and technology were written over against the searing realities of the Second World War and the massacre of European Jewry. They came close to crashing down to earth in *The Lonely Man of Faith*, an essay that first appeared in *Tradition* magazine in 1965, some twenty years after the original Hebrew publication of *Halakhic Man* in 1944. The reflections are now suspended, precariously, midway between heaven and earth. Nothing had perturbed "*halakhic* man,"

whose system construction in bold primary colors is as implacable as a grid by Mondrian. In contrast, the "lonely man of faith" has been shaken, deeply, by Kierkegaardian existentialism, by modern secularism, and, presumably, by the Holocaust. The "lonely man of faith" moves between abnegation and affirmation, despair and ecstasy, letting each side of the polarity persist as ideal compliments, one to the other. We see in these reflections a modern orthodox version of the critique of contemporary society circa 1950-1960 in the image of existential loneliness confronting technological, victorious, utilitarian culture. Conservative religious community and religious values figure into the critique of liberal, secular society.

As in *Halakhic Man*, Soloveitchik attempts valiantly in *The Lonely Man of Faith* to integrate the two polar aspects of human existence. There is the aspect of human existence figured in the image of Adam-1, drawn from the first creation story in the first chapter of Genesis. This is "technological man" as sovereign, creative, functional, practical, dignified: a world-creating creature who lives in a natural community, in a work community motivated by distribution and consumption of goods. In stark contrast, Adam-2, drawn from the second creation story in the second chapter of Genesis, does not create his own world, but is rather confronted by a world not of his own making. Alienated from the world, the ontological awareness is that "to be" is to be lonely, incomplete. Unlike his counterpart from the first book of Genesis, Adam-2 seeks redemption from loneliness in a new type of companionship, but never completely finds it.

There is in this essay a third type of person who is not identified as such, not by Soloveitchik and not in the scholarly literature. Adam-2 gives way to an Adam-3, as it were. This third type is a mediating type of "covenant man." The "lonely man of faith" is only complete, only promised redemption in and only in covenant community. The community is the place where metaphysical questions are ultimately answered not in cosmic confrontation or propositional contents, but in the form of covenant itself, where "accidental" human existence dovetails with "the necessary infinite existence of the Great True Real Self."<sup>21</sup> (It was never the case that Soloveitchik actually eschewed metaphysics as much as he bracketed them.) In genuine covenant communities such as prophetic and prayer communities, two partners confront each other on supposedly equal terms. The conception is surprisingly non-hierarchical and non-hieratic. As a formal institution, covenant is marked by mutual recognition and mutual consent, even between God and human persons, whose meeting in covenant is between virtually co-equal comrades and fellow members—at least for those who are recognized from within the institution as bona fide members of the *halakhic* covenant community.

*Halakhah* is the hinge mechanism that binds as one into a single machine-assembly what would otherwise be two different aspects of human existence. The "man of faith" is allowed no complete immersion into covenantal

community. Over and over, he is thrown back into, indeed obligated to return to the world of majestic, technological culture in which colloquy with God has no place. It is the "*halakhic* gesture" that makes this work: "When man gives himself to the covenantal community the *halakhah* reminds him that he is also wanted and needed in another community, the cosmic-majestic, and when it comes across man while he is involved in the creative enterprise of the majestic community, it does not let him forget that his is a covenantal being. . . ." <sup>22</sup> Conceived felicitously, this mechanism makes for "a steady oscillation." Ideally, it should not be sharp edged, meaning that technological-secular culture and the life of religious devotion are not supposed to be at odds with each other as a contradiction. <sup>23</sup> Soloveitchik rejects "the philosophy of *contemptus saeculi*." But the upshot is tragic. Because of the "movement from center to center, man does not feel at home in any community. He is commanded to move on [even out of religion] before he manages to strike roots in either of these communities, and so the ontological loneliness of the man of faith persists." <sup>24</sup>

Had it been left at that, this would have been a remarkable place for an orthodox religious thinker to end his ruminations on modern religious life and technological society. The combination of aura and techné, the virtual embrace of *halakhah* qua mechanic aura, would have stood out as far superior to Benjamin's more dogmatic assertions about mechanical reproduction and the "liquidation" of aura, providing a launch point from which to consider photography in relation to religion. But Soloveitchik did not leave it at that. The symmetry carefully maintained between the techno-scientific and the religious forms of existence is only ideal. In practice, the complementary gets lost at the very moment when Soloveitchik turns to consider his ideal typology in the real-time of postwar society circa 1965. As soon as he does so the mood immediately sours and the oscillation abruptly stops: "the dialogue between the man of faith and the man of culture comes to an end." This because modern man is said to no longer recognize the true faith of the community with its "absolute moorings" dedicated to God. <sup>25</sup> Modern man is perceived by the conservative critic to be not just out of balance; modernity projects a "demonic image" of the human condition. <sup>26</sup> Like the biblical prophet Elisha in the book of Second Kings, the man of faith must therefore withdraw from the secular world. This demands a brand new modality, a "solitary hiding" and "abode of loneliness," from which there might be no return back into the world of general, secular culture.

To be sure, Soloveitchik did not want to end the story at this unhappy cul-de-sac. Elisha's withdrawal from society was not final, nor is the one intended for the contemporary "man of faith" who still, "in spite of everything, continues tenaciously to bring the message of faith to majestic man." <sup>27</sup> However, it is in no way clear how a contemporary "man of faith" can continue to do so if, in fact, the dialogue has ended. Soloveitchik may have continued to hun-

ger for action and movement in history, but he did so from an enclavist position. <sup>28</sup> It remains unclear how "the lonely man of faith" can participate in technological society if, as contended, the worldviews are so incompatible and "incommensurable." <sup>29</sup> After such a sharp withdrawal, how can "the man of faith" return, and on what basis and by what right can he expect a hearing? There are too many inconsistencies. While mutuality between God and human persons is basic in covenantal community, from (liberal) modern religionists Soloveitchik would like to demand nothing less than absolute obedience. <sup>30</sup> The world as imaged by Soloveitchik is indeed a technical marvel, a parallel, virtual world in which rabbinic authorities can demand absolute obedience from others. Soloveitchik insists that the withdrawal from secular society is not final, but I do not see how that can be. There is no modality upon which return might be constituted if faith cannot be transposed into secular categories except by dint of sheer imposition. <sup>31</sup>

The common feature at play in the work of Benjamin, the heterodox Marxist and Soloveitchik, the Kantian-Kieckegardian orthodox thinker is the same marked ambivalence as to the conditions of modern life. Benjamin was not sure if he wanted to advance or mourn the liquidation of aura. Soloveitchik wanted to embrace technological life, but fled, rhetorically, from its modern instantiation. No doubt, the unease affecting both thinkers had everything to do with the world-political situation preceding and immediately following in the wake of the Second World War. Our own cultural moment is very different. With the ubiquitous proliferation of photographic images and new media technologies, there is much less discomfort with either technology or photography that once marked theoretical discourse at midcentury. Much of the discomfort that one continues to find in the critical literature seems faked. Writing in response to Heidegger's rumination on technology, Michael Fried comments upon the "at-homeness" in contemporary art-photography, with "the way in which technology . . . provides the framing structure for a mode of being-in-the-world, of everydayness, toward which, at least seen from 'outside,' the artist feels positively drawn." <sup>32</sup> This at-homeness is fundamentally distinct from the dialectical antipathies with modern life expressed by Soloveitchik and Adorno, and the mix of nostalgia and utopianism expressed by Benjamin. It's the starting point for any discussion regarding the relation between photography, aesthetics, and contemporary religious thought and culture.

## AURA AND INDEX

The possibility for which neither Soloveitchik nor Benjamin seemed able to account was the intimate, seamless imbrication of aura and technology. The place to look for aura, as conceptualized by Benjamin, might be inside the

structures of technological culture and the photographic image, not outside, as presupposed by Soloveitchik. Against Benjamin, Adorno argued that the anti-mimetic values of so-called autonomous art, the refusal in modern art to abide by the canons of copy realism, preserve the distance between art and reality that is essential to both aura and cultural-political criticism.<sup>33</sup> But what does anti-mimetic modern art have to do with photography, and what does photography have to do with aura? Photography, after all, would appear to be the mimetic art par excellence, an art whose reference is worldly, not religious. The first point to clarify is that the mimetic relation of photography to the natural order of things does not obviate the distance of the photographic image from that reality. It is this complex relation between realism and anti-realism that contributes to understanding the relation between religious and aesthetic values, and the way aura, which depends upon that very distance, might mingle in photographic art. The relation between it and its referent is not "iconic," for it is not a relation of likeness and resemblance. A photograph or photographic image has no material or structural property in "common" with its object. A parallel thing with its own autonomy, the photograph is an "index."

What is an index? In her oft cited, two part "Notes on the Index," critic and art historian Rosalind Krauss applies this key term in the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce to the photographic image. By "index," she means "that type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples." Qua index, the photographic image does not resemble its referent as would an "icon." The example of an index typically given is the way a weather vane manifests the presence of wind,<sup>34</sup> or perhaps the impress of a chalky hand on a blackboard. Krauss explains that, "every photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface." The trace of a departed object is not "symbolic." It is an impression made by the thing or object itself. Pre-symbolic, it "[cedes] the language of art back to the imposition of things."<sup>35</sup>

While these "things" impose themselves upon the photographic image, it is important to keep in mind that image and thing bear no resemblance to each other. This distance or gap between image and thing is, I suspect, the place of aura in photographic art, one that Krauss herself does not recognize, but one which nonetheless seems to seep into her own writing. Krauss traces the manipulation of photographic index back to Duchamp's *Large Glass* and to Man Ray's development of the "rayograph" in the 1920s. The rayograph is particularly instructive. By placing objects (everyday objects like feathers or combs, needles, buttons, and other industrially produced things) on light-sensitive paper and then exposing them to light, Man Ray produced photographs whose ghost-like appearance highlights for Krauss "photography's existence as an index." Its index character gives to the photographic image an un-real or un-natural character that brings it close to the distant aura of supra-

natural religion. The index, while invested in the order of things, does so always from at least one remove from reality—and that is what might make it "religious."

While Krauss writes in the cool detached style of an iconoclast, the enthusiasms, which border uncomfortably on the spiritual in her own writing, are indicated the more she lets thought about photography and art slip into the register of anti-realism. Citing Roland Barthes, she wants to make sense of the photograph's "real unreality." Krauss continues citing Barthes in order to explain that the photograph's "unreality is that of the here . . . it is nothing but a *presence* (one must continually keep in mind the magical character of the photographic image)." The reality of the photograph "is that of a *having-been-there*, because in all photographs there is the constantly amazing evidence: *this took place in this way*."<sup>36</sup> The keywords to mark here are "magical" and "amazing." In assimilating her own thought to Barthes, who only a little apologetically referred to his own reflections on photography as "stupid metaphysics," Krauss comes just up to the point of viewing the impact of the physical index as "spiritual," understood as the experience and ontology of objects free from time and space. About Duchamp, she writes in a similar vein: "This language of rapid exposure which produces a state of rest, an isolated sign is, of course, the language of photography. It describes the isolation of something from within the succession of temporality." Here the image is "suspended" as a physical substance.<sup>37</sup> Despite their close indexical relation to things, photographic images begin to lose their status as physical substance in the language of photography. They begin to re-secure the distance and aura that Benjamin denied the photograph.

Against the surface of her own intentions as a writer, Krauss' writing begins to approach the kind of enthusiasms signaled by the dematerialization of physical objects in twentieth-century abstract art. About this she is deeply ambivalent. Why, for instance, did so many artists with a spiritual bent choose to paint grids—that most scientific of things? Krauss notes that, like the photograph as described in "Notes on the Index," the grid in works by Mondrian or by the postwar American artist Agnes Martin is meant to conjure supercharged stasis, an imperviousness to time that is anti-narrative, anti-mimetic, and anti-real.<sup>38</sup> As to her own skepticism about all this, Krauss writes quite bluntly that even to mention "the spiritual in art" is to open a Pandora's Box.<sup>39</sup> Supposing instead an absolute rift between spirit and matter, Krauss thinks we have to choose between the sacred and the secular. Krauss observes "our" late twentieth-century embarrassment with linking art and religion, before going on to discuss the art of Martin and Ad Reinhardt who themselves were not embarrassed at all by the topic. Indeed, Krauss herself writes so convincingly of the grid as "myth," a mode of presentation that combines incompatible elements, that one could just as reasonably conclude that the grid is both spiritual and techno-scientific at the same time.<sup>40</sup>

Krauss wants to resolve the tension by deciding against the spiritual, but it is by no means clear how helpful her use of the term "schizophrenic" is to describe attempts to square or hold on to both sets of value—namely (1) the spiritual-dematerialized-centrifugal-transcendent direction in which the meaning of a grid is pushed beyond the material frame of the canvas and, (2) the techno-scientific-materialist-centripetal-immanent reading of the same grid-form in which the force of the motion is compressed inside the immanent frame of the canvas. Krauss understands myth as "repression," in this case repressing what is seen as an irreducible tension between the spiritual and the scientific. There is something strangely hardheaded and regressive in appealing to this structuralist account of myth by Levi-Strauss, as if there is a "true tension" masked in the mythic persistence of two ostensibly contradictory elements to a system (one spiritual, one scientific). Clearly, the artists about whom Krauss writes with such obvious power do not force these kinds of choices. The tension in her own writing about photography comes from wanting to deny or disavow the persuasive readings that she herself marks out as strange, almost mystical moves made in modern art and photography.

#### STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY (ON ALFRED STIEGLITZ)

In the mid-1930s, when Benjamin wrote his essay, up through the 1960s when the essay became famous in the English speaking world, photography had not yet been fully established or recognized as an "art" by the broader institutional public. The essay reflects how, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the first attempts at setting up photography as an independent art depended upon maintaining a firm distinction between it and painting. This was a long standing assumption about photography advanced by its earliest champions, to emancipate the photographic image from painting. Indeed, this commitment drove modern masters of the new art such as Alfred Stieglitz to reject anything in photography that might have resembled "pictorialism"—the attempt to make photographs look like painting, exemplified by the staged Victorian tableaux in photographic works of Henry Peach Roberts in the middle of the nineteenth century and including the misty impressionism in Stieglitz's own early New York cityscapes around the turn of the century. The point, as it emerged by the 1920s, was not to reproduce the effects of painting, but to promote "straight photography," whose values were the crisp, clarity of a new visual presentation. Krauss' own writing on the unique indexicality of photography reflects the values of straight photography, in the putatively direct investment in the world of things that should have set the photograph free from the painting.

The spiritual in art was always based in a type of enthusiasm, and Americans were particularly enthusiastic about the new technology from the

very start. It may have had something to do with democracy, an impulse rejected most famously by the poet Charles Baudelaire from his continental perch. His view was that photography placed truth over beauty and imagination, only confirming to him the general public's lack of faith in painting. As a mimetic based art enslaving modern man to nature, photography represented a "form of lunacy," "strange abominations, sacrilege, obscenity, and idolatry, as if the peepholes of the stereoscope were "skylights of the infinite."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, for practitioners of this new thing, which Baudelaire would not even recognize as an art, photography was able to elicit the very enthusiasm condemned by the poet. Oliver Wendell Holmes realized how the photograph was able to fix fleeting, unstable, and unreal images. He saw in it "the miraculous quotidian thing, the way in which 'the lesser details' of an object such as a building might be of greater import to us than the picture's main motif."<sup>42</sup> Edgar Allen Poe saw in the photograph, the independent action of light, "miraculous" beauty, and the absolute truth of identity of aspect and things, perhaps just as Baudelaire feared.

This democratic enthusiasm about quotidian, trivial things, the almost religious faith in straight photography championed by American photographers such as Stieglitz, Lewis Hine, Paul Strand, and Walker Evans was part of a program promoting the cause of progressive politics. In particular, Alan Trachtenberg writes about the intimate links between early twentieth century American photography and the Progressive Era, making special note of Strand's work at the Ethical Culture Society of New York.<sup>43</sup> Strand himself celebrated the birth of the machine and, indeed, worshipped it as a new god. Unlike Baudelaire, however, Strand recognized the extremely plastic nature of the new medium, the possibility of creative control as a source of vision and intuitive knowledge. Strand's faith was in the ability to humanize the machine, the challenge of photography being to integrate "a new religious impulse," the combining together of science and art against the materialism of the one and the anemic fantasy of the other.<sup>44</sup>

Part of the early enthusiasm surrounding photography was theoretically sophisticated and avowedly "spiritual." Indeed, the realism in so many of "the classic essays on photography" edited by Trachtenberg is awash in the language of mystery and wonder. In this context, the painting-like effects of pictorialism that Strand and Stieglitz rejected in photography is worth revisiting, if only for a moment. What matters is not the faked tableaux, mawkish conflation of death and beauty, or other maudlin images staged by Robinson. What draws our attention is the theoretical insight brought to bear in his practice. It is well known that in our own era in the aftermath of the digital revolution, the photographic image has been almost completely un-tethered from the direct kinds of optical reference and objectivity championed by straight photography. The point that Robinson understood better than Baudelaire was that photographic values were not limited to realism. Rejecting the

prejudice that photography was a mere form of mechanical realism, he saw it as an idealist medium, “add[ing] truth to bare facts.”<sup>45</sup> Tired of the “sameness” of the photograph, Robinson wanted something “more,” namely mystery, from a photograph.<sup>46</sup> No one takes Robinson seriously today, but they should, just a little. In his photography, he espoused the very antirealism espoused by Baudelaire without the actual artistic flair.

As for Stieglitz, he might have rejected the tradition of pictorialist idealism, insisting that a photograph must never resemble a painting, but his own pictures strained no less than Robinson’s against mimetic realism. Precisely as he was working out the idea and praxis of straight photography, Stieglitz was also speculating about the spiritual in art *vis-à-vis* his own work under the direct influence of Wassily Kandinsky. For Stieglitz, photography had nothing to do with mechanically representing the mimetic surface of things, because for Stieglitz, the technological mechanism was flexible, plastic, and, most importantly, open to the elaboration of ideas.<sup>47</sup> The point for him was to get at the essence, to get closer and closer to a thing and to abstract it out from its surrounding contexts, to look so hard at a thing as to draw every last ounce out of an object, to get at “a reality—so subtle that it becomes more real than reality.”<sup>48</sup> What interested Stieglitz in a photograph were not documentary or other mimetic contents, but rather the undergirding forms, tensions, conflicts, changes, and forces shown in opposition.<sup>49</sup> About the cloud photographs that he was to take up at Lake George in the Adirondacks, the important thing to note is the spiritual freedom of the photographic medium from subject matter such as trees, people, streetscapes, and buildings. Stieglitz claims to have wanted to make photos that might seem to say, “Music! music! Man, what this is music!” And when Ernest Bloch did see these pictures, Stieglitz reports that’s precisely what the composer said *verbatim*.<sup>50</sup> Or in a letter to Hart Crane, Stieglitz writes that several who saw the photographs remarked that it was as if he had painted God. “Maybe,” Stieglitz adds in the letter, very tongue-in-cheek.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from the rhetoric, in part overheated and in part playful, where in the actual photographs should one look for what one might call the spiritual in art? In the “chiaroscuro” effect found in western forms of religious art going back to the Baroque, divine presence is signaled by an intense inner light encased in an enveloping black background. In the case of Stieglitz, the chiaroscuro effect is reversed. The place of aura is found in undoubtedly erogenous, dark patches surrounded by light. One sees the dark, spiritual presence in early works like *The Hand of Man* (1902) or *The City of Ambition* (1910), or *Steerage* (1911). Dark spaces dominate these pictures, lending to the photographic image a mystery, an index to which the technology can signal but never illuminate. Viewed more critically, these early photographs belong to a style which Stieglitz was to abandon in favor of a more straight photography. The early style in his work is neo-romantic, deliberately in-

tended to alienate the viewer from lived reality of ordinary life. Programmatically, these lovely pictures are incoherent. They are so suffused with mood that they ultimately resemble in more consummate form both the art of painting as well as the painting-based photographic pictorialism from which Stieglitz and other modernist photographers and photo-theorists sought to distance the new art of photography.<sup>52</sup>

Pressing further into Stieglitz’s photographic universe, one notes how the dark spiritual spots continue to mark the more fully realized modernism of his work in the 1920s and 1930s. Consider for instance the unlit recess of the castrated horse in *Spiritual America* (1923), a photograph read widely as a critique of American materialism. Or consider the more simple black shutters in relation to the white clapboard house in *House and Grape Leaves* (1934). For a more realized synthesis of aura and technological wonder, consider also the shadows falling across the New York cityscape in pictures shot by Stieglitz from his home with Georgia O’Keeffe at the Shelton Hotel from around this same period—including *Looking Northwest from the Shelton, New York* (1932), *From my Window at the Shelton West* (1931), and *From the Shelton* (1931). The buildings are best described by Wanda Corn as “dark and sober, but at the same time sublimely majestic, mountains of steel, unsullied by the noisy riffraff in the streets below.”<sup>53</sup>

What we see in even these mature photographs is the lingering influence in photography of symbolism and “the spiritual in art” that open up in a free, non-dogmatic way the relation between art, technology, and religion. Corn points out how Stieglitz in his work combined beauty, the material, and the technological without submitting these to what we might call ideological materialism.<sup>54</sup> In their sublime majesty and distance above the street, the buildings suggest the idea or semblance of “aura” participating in works of majesty created by Soloveitchik’s technological Adam and superimposed over or alongside the natural world. In Stieglitz’s vision, it is darkness, not light that conveys those spiritual values. In photos from the Shelton, the effect of technology and shadow works simply, without the intrusion of a church or landscape effect. Dark, geometrically peculiar shadows fall like a big black blanket over and between the buildings. Their uncanny and death-like presence overlay the technological wonder of the modern cityscape. These black blankets participate in that very urban, architectural order which they simultaneously obscure. By obscuring visual objects like an intrusive foreign element, they complicate modern and modernist values of clarity and light. The almost immateriality of the shadow belongs to a different order in the world. As Weston Naef suggests, these photographs are not technically virtuosic pictures as much as they are “deeply emotional.”<sup>55</sup>

## DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY (ON NEIL FOLBERG)

The relation between religion and photography has always depended upon the theoretical twists and turns relating to the indexical relation of the photographic image vis-à-vis the physical world known to the senses. As we have seen in our discussion of Krauss and the straight, analog photography of Stieglitz, the twist and turn feeding into the idea of aura in photography is made possible by the tension between the real and unreal aspects of an image. As much, however, as the index might twist, turn and stretch out the distance between image and thing, the analog image will always remain tethered to a physical spatial-temporal presence or object. With the digital image, the image finally attains the freedom to twist free and snaps off from its base in the physical world. The digital image does not necessarily represent the world as it is to the senses. It can now present a parallel world of its own making. In this, there is no structural difference between the digital image, a painting, or a cultic symbolic system. As icon, the digital image resembles first and foremost only itself. As index, the digital image can mean anything to anyone. In the hands of viewers and users inclined to look for religious significance, the digital image will be used to capture or provoke a supernatural presence not "really" committed to a place in the physical world.

With the development of new technologies, the photographic image recoups its cult value as it comes more and more to resemble painting. Modernist theorists writing about photography and film such as Bazin, Cavell, and Savedoff had sought hard to sustain the difference between photography and painting, but the distinction is harder to maintain of late. This is the thesis argued by Michael Fried, who points to the introduction starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s of the large-format tableau style of exhibition, a technical innovation with which Fried effectively reintroduces the distance that Benjamin thought had been overcome between the photographic subject and the person who comes to look at the image. For Fried, what matters most in photography is the importance of the object, always the object, and not the viewing subject. Too large to hold in one's hand, the sheer size of the large print format allows the image to take on its own objective life independent of the viewer, who stands before the photograph as she or he would before a painting.<sup>56</sup> Fried also comments as to how the introduction of digital technologies complicates the relation between the digital image and physical reality. Pixilated, the resulting images are more abstract, and more distant from physical reality than would have been the case with analog photographs. Writing about the massive scale in works by Andreas Gursky, Fried notes how the photographic image begins to lose much of its indexical weight.<sup>57</sup> With no clear perceptual ballast, the image assumes what one might imagine

as otherworldly values insofar as the relation to the physical world becomes more and more attenuated.<sup>58</sup>

Another factor contributing to the relation between spirituality and technology is what James Elkins calls "the strange place of religion in contemporary society." One can trace back to the 1980s, contemporaneous to the technological shift from straight photography to digital imaging, the shift to more spiritual-supernatural "effects" in the culture at large. From the movies *Exorcist* and *Ghost* to the music of Arvo Pärt, the philosophical explorations of Jacques Derrida, and films such as the Coen brothers' *Serious Man* and Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*, examples are too numerous to list. Sometimes serious, often coy and tongue-in-cheek, they fall under the lowbrow to highbrow rubrics of New Age religion, the rise of the religious right in American politics, the inundation of religion or "spirituality" in popular film and television, as well as art-film, art and contemporary classical music, and the so-called religious turn in continental philosophy.

Part of this more general trend is the relationship between "Jews and Photography," the title of an essay by photographer William Myers. It will be noted that, historically, most of these first works centered on "the Jews" rather than "Judaism" per se. Noting that twentieth-century American photography before and at mid-century was dominated by Jews, Myers observes how, for the children of immigrants, ambitious newcomers on the social-cultural scene, the proclivity towards new technologies and their industries (movies, records, radio, television) combined with the intense interests in progressive politics. Like Trachtenberg, cited above, Myers has his eye here on the Photo League, active in the 1930s and 1940s, and the New York School of Photography. The aesthetic was an urban anti-aesthetic, gritty and beautiful, never pretty. The preferred subjects were almost always "negroes," gangsters, working class people—the photographers identifying themselves as leftists, not as Jews. Starting in the 1980s, Jewish content begins to center the photographic work of artists such as Bill Aron, Lori Grinker, Joan Roth, Penny Diane Wolin, and Yves Mozesio.<sup>59</sup> A case in point would be French photographer Frédéric Brenner's *Diaspora Project*, a photographic record of more than 80,000 photographs shot all over the world. Brenner pictures are pictures of Jews and ritual objects, Jews doing Jewish "things." With its eye on social history and documentary, photography was largely the medium with which to explore Jewish cultural diversity, not claims about God in relation to the worlds of time and space, creation, revelation, redemption or to any other aspects relating to the mystical aura of Jewish religion.

Viewed from the particular angle of aura and photography, the digital images of American Israeli photographer Neil Folberg is of particular note. A student of naturalist-landscape photographer Ansel Adams, Folberg provides a photographic lens with which to understand "the spiritual in art" from the

perspective of Judaism. "Place" is central to Folberg's conception of photographic aura, most specifically in two projects—in the nightscapes, star-scapes, and landscapes of *Celestial Nights* (2005), and in the historical synagogues shot in *And I Shall Dwell among Them* (1995). Almost to a photograph, there is not a single Jew in them. We are given to see instead an image of the trace and place of God in the physical world, digitally enhanced by a complex technological apparatus; the illusion and vision of aura are made possible only by the undergirding technical mechanism.<sup>60</sup>

Folberg's pictures take us from the clear light of the American west in works by Ansel Adams to darker places deep in the platonic cave of the Jewish imaginary. The visions in *Celestial Nights* swoon darkly over desert and semi-arid landscapes, scrub forests, orchards, groves, archaeological ruins, all of which, identified by name-place names, are meant to carry ancient biblical, oriental, and mystical charges. The al-Aqsa Mosque, ancient synagogue ruins at *Gush Halav* or on the Golan, an olive press, groves, paths, and vistas are rendered thick with presence by starlight and moonlight, by the immense starry skies that frame these places. Their illumination is dark. In each black and white image, individual objects, down to the slightest pebble, stand out discretely in full clarity, like liquid things gelled, then frozen magically and rendered unnaturally brittle. In the tradition of landscape painting and landscape photography, the trace presence of God, if that is what it is, is made possible by the absence of "man," who has been scrubbed from the picture.

One reason that Benjamin announced the liquidation of aura was that photography at the time was, as a medium, entirely dependent upon light. Sounding very much like Novalis ("Hymns to the Night"), Benjamin complained in "The Short History of Photography" as to how new and advanced optical technologies destroy the aura of darkness that he could still find in old nineteenth-century photogrames. Benjamin saw the aura in early photography residing in the "absolute continuum from brightest light to darkest shadow." It was Benjamin's judgment that improved optical technologies had "completely conquered darkness and distinguished appearances as sharply as a mirror."<sup>61</sup> But photography never expelled darkness, not in the work of Peach Robinson, not in the inky, dark patches in Alfred Stieglitz's pictures, and certainly not in Folberg's digital works, in which the idea of aura will fall between the dark tonal values that dominate them.

Benjamin was clearly unable to anticipate the possibility of photographic darkness and images in the dark. Well after Benjamin's own time in the historical emergence of photographic technologies and art photography, Folberg's work shows how one might capture the continuum between nighttime darkness and the clarity of objects in stellar light. As we saw in the photographic images shot by Stieglitz *From the Shelton*, aura is maintained by the negative chiaroscuro effect; instead of dark enfolding over inner light, dark-

ness is encased in the light that is its "place." The technique is an interesting trick. In contrast to the bright, daytime naturalism of straight photography of Stieglitz, Folberg pursues the aura of light into the darkest night, which only enhanced photographic technologies make possible.

As to the obvious relation between religion and photography intended in these pictures, Folberg himself reveals his hand at the beginning of the volume containing these fantastical images with an epigraph from tractate Bava Batra of the Babylonian Talmud. The larger Talmudic text from which the epigraph is taken details the fanciful travel tales told by Rabbah b. Bar Hana, how once when travelling in a desert he was joined by an Arab who showed him and his companions sites related to the biblical story of the Israelites in the desert. What the guide tells them serves as the epigraph to Folberg's project, "Come look and I will show you where heaven and earth kiss" (b.Bava Batra 74a). Clearly the viewer is intended by the photographer to search out in these pictures that obscure line between heaven and earth. In the book's epilogue, Folberg explains that the "metaphor of these photographs" speaks to "the horizon between knowledge and imagination, between the present and eternity, between substance and spirit, certainty and doubt." Photography is meant to mark the point, to occupy the point, or to provide for a point where heaven and earth meet, the vision intending to "encompass the universe—and sometimes more" at "the human edge of the cosmos."<sup>62</sup>

It would be easy for an unfriendly critic to lampoon this artist's statement were it not for the remarkable self-scrutiny to which Folberg submits his own practice, revealing the mechanism that opens out the digital illusion. What, after all, are we supposed to think about the character of that line between heaven and earth, or about those darkly illuminated objects on that line? Do these pictures belong solely to the order of nature which they simultaneously bend? Or do they, perhaps, establish a more supernatural frame of reference, and if so, then on what basis does one pretend to introduce natural-supernaturalism into a digital contrivance? Folberg's pictures would seem to subvert the entire order of the pictorial universe established by his teacher Ansel Adams. In the dark stellar light, there remains nothing natural about these frozen, liquid land-nightscapes, and about the distinction between reality and artifice, the viewer is asked to suspend his or her own critical incredulity. Perhaps these images are too easy to interpret in the religious register intended them by the artist. Yes, we are meant to see spiritual places, God's trace presence in the order of creation, the semblance of an absent trace in the world; or is this the way creation looks through the eyes of God?<sup>63</sup>

What complicates the sense of aura in Folberg's celestial photographs is the epistemological caution reflected in the artist's own remarks about the technical construction of his pictures. These allow the reader-viewer to intrude critically into an illusionistic scene that would otherwise present itself as simply untouched, natural, spiritual, and primordial. What we learn,

though, is that the aura of the image might lie not in the image itself, but in the technique that makes the image possible. About the “tenuous” relation to natural or spiritual orders of reality in these pictures, Folberg states it quite clearly:

Every one of these photographs is either something I saw or something I thought I saw but couldn't photograph due to the technical limitations of photography, or something I wished to have seen but didn't. If I saw it and photographed it, it was because a photo could be made with the photographic materials available—or because I was able to make it in two exposures, reconstruct it using digital imaging techniques, and then print it on standard photographic materials. . . . And sometimes it is pure imagination—but imagination based in the very concrete reality [of these ancient places].<sup>64</sup>

In other words, it is not entirely clear what it is that we are looking at. The relation between this world and the physical world is tenuous at best. What matters most is not the truth of the image itself, but rather the distance created by the digital effect between these two worlds.

Writing at the height of the 1960s drug culture about the general relation between hallucinogens and mystical experience, LSD researcher Walter Pahnke listed five types of experience associated with both. I mention them here for the almost perfect sense they make of these pictures by Folberg, who grew up in this era. The types of experience listed are: (1) psychotic, (2) psychodynamic (“in which material that had previously been unconscious or preconscious becomes vividly conscious”), (3) cognitive (“characterized by astonishingly lucid thought), (4) aesthetic (“[marked by an] increase in all sensory modalities, changes in sensation and perception”), and (5) psychedelic peak or mystical.<sup>65</sup> The relation between technology and aura brought out in the relation between religion and psychedelics has to do with the animation of materials, the clarity of information, artificial interfaces and interventions, the introversion and extroversion of sensation and consciousness, the intensification and other transformations of optical impression, synaesthetic color-sound inversions, and repetition of visual patterns. And indeed, Folberg's landscapes exercise a hallucinogenic, perhaps even “psychotic” quality that brings the values of “religious” or “spiritual” aura squarely into techno-psychedelically enhanced art-photography.

In contrast to the visionary quality of the nightscapes in *Celestial Nights*, the pictures of synagogues in *And I Shall Dwell among Them* would seem to demand less critical credulity on the part of the viewer. The subject matter in these photographs is simply synagogues. Physical places, there is nothing metaphysical about them. The pictures do not necessarily seek to convey or conjure the order of creation or the trace of God, and at first glance there is nothing to recommend them beyond the very beauty of their site, structure, and the composition of the shot. And yet, the tension between the real and the

ideal is very much alive in these pictures, perhaps even more so than in in *Celestial Nights*. With the nightscapes, the viewer knows immediately that, no, these places are not real, that they are unreal, that the images have been technologically enhanced. The synagogues, on the other hand, only look real. That is part of the trick. Yes, this is a synagogue; but no, this is not a synagogue. It is a picture, and as a picture, it too is composed, it too is structured, it too is artifice, it too is visionary. These too are composited digital images.

No longer outside under starry skies, the synagogue portraits present large format pictures of interiors from around the world, spanning the globe from Italy, North Africa, Uzbekistan, India, northern and eastern Europe, the United States, and Israel. In contrast to the mix of organic and archaeological materials in *Celestial Nights*, in these pictures the stone, wood, plaster, stucco, brass, and silver are completely architectural, the colors drawn from a deep palette of blues, reds, browns, yellows, creams, and whites. For Folberg, the synagogue stands as an antipode to the Christian cathedral. Inside and outside, the cathedral magnifies God's greatness and beauty by making the person small and insignificant, unlike the synagogue space, which is small and humble.<sup>66</sup> Instead of that vertical thrust, the strong horizontals of the wide frontal view define Folberg's synagogue portraits. With this, Folberg means to say that the general horizontal standard at work in his pictures reflects the diminutive liturgical architecture of a small people in exile, a people the sole trace of which in these photographs can be found only inside the empty synagogue space.

As with *Celestial Nights*, there is an obvious and less obvious interpretation of these pictures. The obvious ethnographic interpretation is to read these images as an invitation into the spiritual glories of Jewish architectural space, and this despite the artist's comment regarding the humble character of the synagogue. However, a closer look will suggest that something else is at foot other than an ethnographic recording of real, physical sites. There are phenomenological and indexical intentions at play undergirding all the geographical details and historical diversity of the synagogues. Again Michael Fried guides my discussion. About the baroque interior shots in the work of German photographer Candida Höfer, Fried spots the tension between the historical and geographical specificity in the diverse details in the photograph, and the timelessness and placelessness conveyed by the still pictorial image. The same thing holds here in this body of Folberg's work. This is not just a synagogue. This is *the synagogue*, an interior kind of celestial space, in time and timeless, in place and placeless, where ordinary materials are transformed into sacral objects.

But invitation to enter is not quite the right word either. As Fried also notes about Höfer's work, the values in the installation shot are purely visual, not tactile. They do not invite the viewer inside, but rather exclude, powerful-



ly, the gross physical presence of any human subject, including the viewer who comes to look at the image from outside the pictorial frame. In both Höfer and Folberg's interior shots, the eye of the viewer confronts an unnatural clarity that she or he is forbidden to touch. Folberg's picture of the entrance to *Bikur Holim Synagogue*, *Izmir Tur-key* should remind one of almost any painting by Vermeer. Its calm is set by the whitewashed walls, a table with simple patterned tablecloth, and the bright hand towels over a stand with a brass "oriental" pitcher and basin. The scene is simple, clean, just a little shabby. The point about such a space is the one made, also by Fried citing Brian O'Doherty, about another kind of cool interior, the "white cube" of the modern art-gallery space with its simple, almost Platonic, quiet box-like structure and white-washed walls. In the installation photo-shots from inside the gallery, no spectators are ever shown. Just like in Folberg's synagogues, "You are there without being there."<sup>67</sup>

In his seminal meditation, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986), O'Doherty argues against the values presupposed by this kind of space. Inside the white cube of the modern art-gallery, viewers are said to have lost their sense of being human. With his eye on mystical states of transport, O'Doherty knows that with no dust, no eating, no talking, no dirt there, one must die to enter this space—which, of course, cannot be literally true, at least of the commercial gallery space.<sup>68</sup> I would argue, nonetheless, that neither the white cube nor the Folberg synagogues are so anti-life. These spaces, the pictures of these spaces, and the hush of the objects enjoy a different kind of life. And the spectator is not as befuddled, dominated, and lost as O'Doherty suggests. Left outside of and excluded from the frame, the viewer learns to negotiate these kinds of places. In the white cube of modern society, organizing frames get tighter and tighter. The synagogues are empty. The Jews in Europe have been murdered, or have moved out of Uzbekistan or India and onto Israel. Folberg's synagogues are not white boxes. They are richly textured, full of ornamental objects. But the ideology of the photographs is just as abstract, imbued with a sense of timelessness, and just as invested in modern art values, practice, and histories.

The illusionism in these portraits allows the viewer to think he or she is looking at a synagogue. But as with the celestial nightscapes, no one should be too sure about the reality of this place. The first doubts begin to filter in with "light," with the unnatural lighting of these pictures. The pictures are vision much more than place, and about this, Folberg is, again, completely candid as an explicator of his own work and best practice. Defining "light" as the leading *topos* in the synagogues project, Folberg explains how artificial lighting technologies were employed to create mood and clarify objects. So it is no longer natural light or the imitation or image of natural light that provide an index to natural-supernatural illumination. None of the lighting effects in the pictures are natural. Folberg illuminates the synagogues with

his own equipment in order to override every bit of existing natural light and to fill in every dark shadow. Each photo-shoot involved about one hundred kilograms of gear, two cases of electronic flash equipment, and all kinds of stands, tripods, extension cords, and country-specific plug adapters. The physical place of each synagogue was literally wired up. Prepping the site demanded mopping and polishing floors, dusting furniture, and hanging of the lamps so they might look just right. The polishing makes the place "gleam," with not a speck of dust or dirt out of place. Finally, each image is composed out of multiple exposures, sometimes as many as fifty exposures for a single image, layered on top of each other on a single sheet of film, and blended into a single image. This is the only way to convey "absolutely" stable objects. Every object in any of these pictures is fixed and immobile or, in the case of chandeliers, has been tied down in order to be rendered as such.<sup>69</sup>

Every image and the aura in every one of these digital images are complex composites made possible by modern imaging and computational technologies. To understand the technical apparatus undergirding the work is therefore to understand that none of these images are real or even realistic. To be sure, a passing glance of these pictures reveals a real, ordinary synagogue, images of which one has seen before in big picture coffee table books about the history of the synagogue. But the more lingering look these pictures deserve underscores just how peculiar these image-places actually are. One begins to see how frozen, fixed, and luminous these images are intended to be at their best. What one begins to see the longer one looks is the visionary quality of each individual picture. These are not realistic representations, even though they look that way. As for the actual physical site, what does it look like? Folberg explains it in this way: "It looks a little bit like the photograph, depending on what time of day or night you visit it, how much you know of its people, customs, prayers, and history—and what you had for breakfast. In short, it looks the way you see it. These photographs, then, show the way I saw it." As he says, the "synagogues" exist only in his mind.<sup>70</sup>

Confusing the line between ontology and vision, Folberg's synagogues form that part of twentieth-century art highlighted by René Magritte's famous surrealist painting *This is not a Pipe* (1926). Widely recognized as a signature slogan for the anti-mimetic impulse in modern painting, Magritte's picture-pun is a rather drab realistic depiction of a pipe. It looks like a pipe, but is not itself a pipe. The joke works as effectively as it does, in part, by introducing the language of the legend directly inside the pictorial space. With Magritte as our guide, we can now say "this is not a synagogue." But the pictures are not even that simple. While this may not "be" "a synagogue" or while that is not "a pipe," it may very well be that this is precisely how we perceive a pipe or a synagogue as a web of composite associations, memories, and anticipations built up over and into time as an object of intentional

consciousness. If the composite character of images and imagining is already true in early stereoscopic images and in surrealist painting, it becomes even more the case or more apparent in the age of digital production and reproduction. Subverting the platonic hierarchy that descends vertically from ideal form, to material thing, to poetic representation, in Folberg's synagogues, "representation" as horizontal vision is prior to and supersedes the dull, mundane reality of a historical site and gives to that reality its ideal-phenomenological cast, as simulacrum.

In his classic discussion "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945), André Bazin makes this point about photography and realist ontology: "The photographic image is the object itself." This is the major statement on photographic realism for which Bazin is most often panned by contemporary theorists, who mostly neglect that his essay on realist photo ontology actually builds upon the ideality of the photographic image. Bazin's complete statement is: "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it."<sup>71</sup> The same coupling of realism and idealism-spiritualism (the creation of "an ideal world in the likeness of the real") that Bazin sees in painting is recapitulated in the photographic image.<sup>72</sup> For all the object-like character he attributes to photographic realism and to surrealist photography, Bazin understood how, the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear. Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, a hallucination that is also a fact. The fact that surrealist painting [and here Bazin could also have added surrealist as well as digital photography] combines tricks of visual deception with meticulous attention to detail substantiates this.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Concluding these reflections on the relation between art, technology, and religion, we have argued that Adorno and Benjamin's analyses regarding aura and modern technologies were insufficiently "dialectical." Soloveitchik struggled valiantly to maintain a creative equilibrium between technological society and culture, on the one hand, and religious consciousness and halakic-covenantal community, on the other hand. What we begin to suspect, however, is that "dialectic" or equilibrium may not be the right terms to understand "the look" that technological culture and cultural objects give to religious thought and culture. What we learn from photo-theory of Krauss and Fried, and what we learn from looking at pictures by Stieglitz and Folberg is that what one might have thought were two ostensibly separate things—art and technology, religion and technology—are in fact always al-

ready intermediated into each other. Religion begins to "look like something," both real and unreal, both in and out of this world, and it takes on this appearance in the shifts between dark and light revealed by the photographic lens and enhanced by digital technologies. What this means for American Jewish thought is a self-knowing form of religion that takes shape between illusion and criticism.

At the turn of the twentieth century, photography was commonly said to have freed painting from mimesis. There was now no need for painters to render realistically what a photograph could do with much greater precision. Certainly many of the most prominent contributors to twentieth-century photography theory insistently maintained the difference between the two arts in order to uphold either the purity of painting or the autonomy of this strange new art. But the strict division between photography and painting was and remains too simple. In the staged tableaux photographed by Henry Peach Robinson, photography was always idealist, and in this respect, always already close to painting. Stieglitz and his colleagues sought a more straight form of photographic practice, even as he insisted that there was nothing mechanical or automatic about the art of photography, and even as he also insisted upon the importance of ideas in his own photographic practice. All the questions about ontology, vision, representation, and ideas that were once asked about painting by symbolists and expressionists, all the questions that would have given painting a metaphysical cum religious-spiritual coloring, all these come flooding back into photography. Most pointedly in digital imagining, the line between what is real and what is unreal has become so blurry that the ontological difference between the two arts is almost rarely maintained, along with values such as autonomy and purity.

It is no longer the image now that gets called into question, especially in view of what seems to be the fact that reality imitates art and other design formats. The ontological question has been turned around. It is the being of the referent itself that is no longer obvious. Is the object presented in the image a real thing or is it unreal? And if the relationship between the image and the thing imaged are no longer direct and natural, to what degree then can one say that the photograph is supernatural—without being credulous and dumb? Are we supposed to see in Folberg's digital photographs a less cold and distant starscape, or perhaps one that is even colder still and now very distant? Herein lies the aura of art in the photographic age of digital reproduction, what Benjamin called the "strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close at hand."<sup>74</sup> This is only to say that works by Stieglitz and Folberg make claims about the spiritual in art, from which it is but a short leap into the aura denied to the photograph by Benjamin. What is the status of such claims? I have sought here only to consider how a photograph, and with it technology,

might open itself up to religious interpretations, and to identify some of the pitfalls therein.

One problem with modern religious interpretations of art or of language is that those who pronounce upon the topic tend to overreach hermeneutically. Consider the art religious criticism of Paul Tillich or Jean-Luc Marion, or even the same preening about the ontology of poetic language from Heidegger. Perhaps guilty of it myself, I have nevertheless offered elsewhere similar reservations about Buber and Rosenzweig when they write about language, scripture, and revelation.<sup>75</sup> For these religious thinkers, every signifier, every image gets forced into an interpretive frame portending to some doctrinal or some carefully packaged post-doctrinal theological or phenomenological concept—"the unconditional," "ultimate reality," "Being," "the call of being," "the ground of being," "revelation," "gift," or "the infinite." About these things, a little critical distance is always in order. In contrast, artists will sometimes prove to be more skeptical than philosophers. A case in point are Folberg's own self-critical remarks about the constructed nature of digital images; or Stieglitz, who also understood, tongue-in-cheek, the difference between a spiritual "equivalent" and the actuality of having photographed God.

Practically this may not be so, but why should it be theoretically "impossible" to photograph God or perhaps the presence of God? Of course I too say this tongue-in-cheek, but it would have to depend upon the theory. In fact, the best photograph of God ever taken is the one by Magritte himself, which he called *God, the Eighth Day* (1937). In the photograph, God is shot sitting on a chair. His torso and face are obscured by a piece of cardboard decorated with a crude, child-like drawing of a door and two clouds. We see the hat perched on God's head, his legs, and his hands. He sits behind a picture of a house, a white jug lying on the ground. Here is the image of God. It is certainly a joke, but a very serious theological joke, one that alternatively respects and pokes fun at profound canons and taboos that plumb the stuff of religious life and thought. How does one do this? Not with overtly pious images. What Magritte's image offers is either an intentional form of blasphemy undermining old, orthodox forms of religion and art, or new critical forms for both religion and art; or perhaps both at the same time.

As for the future of contemporary American Jewish thought and culture, at issue, perhaps, is *not* the need for new "language." Its theological language has been talked to death in modern Jewish thought for some two hundred years. There is already plenty of language to go around—rational, mystical, aesthetic, ethical, sociological, political. Perhaps today's cultural environment requires something in addition to and other than language. My guiding assumption in this essay has been that new media have the potential to transform Judaism and its religious thought in new and even revolutionary ways. Or maybe not. This remains to be seen, not vis-à-vis more language,

but rather new datasets of images, new ways to composite and frame visually what contemporary Judaism and contemporary religion might look like under new cultural conditions. In part, the confusion in Jewish philosophy lies in not knowing where to look, whereas the trick is in knowing how to assess new forms of expression. Increasingly, the kinds of theological expression that shaped modern Jewish religious thought and philosophy from the late nineteenth and twentieth century belong to a distinct historical moment upon distant European shores. If, in general, old forms of thought continue to circulate in a more contemporary culture, it will have done so in carefully mediated packages. That is what happened to the Bible in early twentieth-century Jewish thought, or to French bourgeois culture in Benjamin's arcades project. These formats have always been technological, involving old media, then, and new media, today. Religion, including Jewish religion, almost always insinuates itself into technological expression, meaning that new technologies might actually enable the turn to new forms of aura and the spiritual in art in the age of new media.

## NOTES

1. See Zachary Braiterman, "Photographic Index, the 'Spiritual in Art,' and the Ethics of 'Downcast Eyes,'" *Philosophy Today* 55/4 (2011), 348-60.
2. Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). For general overviews, see especially the introduction and epilogue. See also Asher D. Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo: Jewish Variations on a Modern Theme* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).
3. Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Material Culture and Jewish Thought in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), especially chapters 1, 3, and 4.
4. Gerhard Richter, *Thought Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2. On Benjamin's imagistic-photographic conception of history, see Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xxi and chapter 1.
5. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), 260-1, 337.
6. *Ibid.*, 152.
7. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 188.
8. *Ibid.*, 116.
9. *Ibid.*, 107-8.
10. *Ibid.*, 222.
11. *Ibid.*, 221.
12. *Ibid.*, 223.
13. Published in the same year as "The Storyteller," it is impossible to attribute this to some shift from melancholy to enthusiasm regarding the liquidation of aura.
14. Theodor Adorno, letter to Walter Benjamin, March 18, 1936 in Ronald Taylor (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate Within German Marxism* (London: Verso, 1977); Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183. On the larger dispute between Adorno and Benjamin, see Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, chapter 6.
15. Jeremy Stolow (ed.), *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and The Things In Between* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 1-2, 4.

16. For an important corrective to this neglect, see Stolorow (ed.), *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and The Things In Between*.
17. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 55.
18. Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), 12-13.
19. *Ibid.*, 17-18.
20. Zachary Braitterman, "Joseph Soloveitchik and Immanuel Kant's Mitzvah-Aesthetic," *AJS Review* 25/1, (2000/01), 1-24.
21. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 75.
22. *Ibid.*, 78.
23. *Ibid.*, 79.
24. *Ibid.*, 81.
25. *Ibid.*, 100.
26. *Ibid.*, 97.
27. *Ibid.*, 101, 105.
28. *Ibid.*, 102, 106.
29. *Ibid.*, 96, 105.
30. *Ibid.*, 42-3, 46, 98.
31. *Ibid.*, 93-6, 91, 99.
32. Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 62.
33. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 45, 79.
34. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), 211.
35. *Ibid.*, 203.
36. *Ibid.*, 217 (emphasis in the original by Barthes).
37. *Ibid.*, 205.
38. *Ibid.*, 158.
39. *Ibid.*, 10.
40. For a similar instance in which Krauss writes with tremendous verve and insight about the spiritual in art which she herself rejects, see Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998), 6-8. In this case, the reference is to Michael Fried's commentary on baseball and "the metaphysics of grace."
41. Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 86-7.
42. Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 72-3, 78-9.
43. *Ibid.*, 109, 141.
44. *Ibid.*, 151.
45. *Ibid.*, 92.
46. *Ibid.*, 96.
47. Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 15, 186-9; also see Weston Naef, *In Focus: Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: J. P. Getty Museum, 1995), 26; Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 262; and Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life* (Lebanon, NH: University of New England Press, 1989), 108.
48. Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 21, 205, 208.
49. *Ibid.*, 26.
50. *Ibid.*, 207.
51. *Ibid.*, 208.
52. Mary Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye: Photographs and the American Built Environment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 20-1.
53. Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 28. For a pessimistic reading of the city in the 1920s, see Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye*, 53. Woods talks about the dislocations in New

- York architecture prior to the Second World War, and the complete usurpation of the past by the present against which Stieglitz reacted (12). In a similar vein, see Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Connor reads the Shelton photographs as representing dark, retributive judgment against the city (164; cf. 52, 56). She also highlights the distance of life in the Shelton with O'Keeffe over and above the maddening city (158-9). In contrast, Sarah Greenough writes about Stieglitz and the city in a more effusive vein. See Sarah Greenough (ed.), *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, 1915-1933*, Volume 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 360.
54. Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 32.
55. Naef, *In Focus: Alfred Stieglitz*, 134. Note the informative and insightful dialogue between the curators in this text is titled "An Affirmation of Light," which obscures the operation of darkness in the pictures discussed here.
56. Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, 288.
57. *Ibid.*, 165-6.
58. *Ibid.*, 158, 161-3.
59. William Myers, "Jews and Photography," *Commentary* January (2003), 45-48. www.williammyersphotography.com/words/jewsandphotography.pdf.
60. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), 208-9.
61. Found in Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 207.
62. Neil Folberg, *Celestial Nights: Visions of an Ancient Land* (New York: Aperture, 2005), 58-9.
63. See the introduction by Ferris in Folberg, *Celestial Nights*. As if to cut off the critics of religion at the pass, Ferris claims to see "in the artifice [of Folberg's] creation and the naturalness of its results" an interface between human mind and nature, between art and science (15). I too see the artifice described by Ferris, but I'm not sure about the naturalness.
64. Folberg, *Celestial Nights*, 13.
65. Walter Pahnke, "LSD and Religious Experience," in *LSD, Man, and Society*, eds. Richard C. DeBold and Russel Leaf (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1967), 61-3. Pahnke distinguishes the last feature as religious, while noting the overlap between all five types. I would also think "the religious" extends across all five types, spanning the psychotic to the mystical.
66. Neil Folberg, *And I Shall Dwell Among Them: Historic Synagogues of the World* (New York: Aperture, 1995), 13, 105.
67. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 15.
68. *Ibid.*, 9-10.
69. Folberg, *And I Shall Dwell Among Them*, 10, 19.
70. *Ibid.*, 10-13.
71. Found in Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 241.
72. *Ibid.*, 238.
73. *Ibid.*, 243.
74. Found in Trachtenberg, *Classic Essay on Photography*, 209.
75. Braitterman, *Shape of Revelation*, conclusion.

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### Part III

## Theology and Culture