



## Inside Jewish Journalism

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AT THE HEART of what it is that any credible journalist does is listening to things otherwise unsaid and to reveal things that might otherwise be kept secret. How does this work, when what is at stake are family secrets and, in this instance, the news about one's own Jewish people? This challenge is addressed in several articles. Other essays turn to very new matters: the interplay between reporting and blogging, the influence of new technology on the future of communications, and, in still more general terms, what it is that technology can do to connect and also disconnect people from one another. This issue is published to coincide with the annual meeting of the American Jewish Press Association.

## Participatory Journalism

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

CONSIDER THE DEMOGRAPHICS. Fewer people are reading print newspapers, and readers of the Jewish press are aging. While the mainstream press is consolidated in a few corporate hands, there is an explosion of what is variously known as grassroots or citizen or participatory journalism: people are not only reading the news, but also writing, editing, and publishing it in an unprecedented range of media. How are Jews participating in this movement?

The Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion at the Center for Religion and Media, New York University, has been studying just such emergent cultural phenomena. Given

our concern with what Jews *are* doing, rather than with what they *should* be doing, we are interested in developing a research agenda for studying such media practices, which we view as social practices. These practices give rise to distinctive forms of community, as well as to media specific generational divides: younger technologically savvy Jews are increasingly drawn to digital media for their news, while their parents continue to rely on print media.

Whereas it has long been assumed that strong ties are the key to Jewish continuity, social software activates a broad range of weak ties that have value in their own right.

Judging by three recent studies of American Jewry — American Jewish Identity Survey (Graduate Center of the City of New York and Center for Cultural Judaism, 2001), OMG! How Generation Y Is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era (Reboot, 2005), and Assessing the Impact of Culture and the Arts on Jewish Identity Building (UJA-Federation of New York, in progress) — young Jewish adults, particularly those who are not connected to the organized Jewish community, are of particular concern to the sponsors of these studies.

Attention to the media practices of this born-digital generation reveals a tectonic shift in the ways that Jewish youth and young adults relate to one another and understand themselves. Their comfort with what has been called "social software" (blogs, bookmarking tools, wiki-server software that allows anyone to add and edit web content, whether for a wikipedia [encyclopedia] or most recently wikinews), is central to their involvement in participatory journalism, which offers not only alternatives to mainstream news media — whether print or broadcast — but also alternative modes of community. A large proportion of this extremely diverse generation prefers the many-to-many mode of communication over the one-to-many (or broadcast) mode, a preference that is consistent with their attraction to informal kinds of association over formal affiliations with Jewish organizations. Whereas it has long been assumed that strong ties (family, close friends, local community) are the key