

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 31 – Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Enhancing cultural understanding of and raising 'Jewish questions' in the history of photography, music, and theatre through performance and dialogue		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Michael Berkowitz	Professor of Modern Jewish History	September 1997 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: December 2013 – 31 May 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Professor Michael Berkowitz's research demonstrates the importance of Jewish lives to the histories of creative economies, particularly the integral parts played by migrants and refugees during the first half of the twentieth century to photography, music and theatre. This research has led to the co-development of two stage productions – a revival of Kurt Weill's opera <i>The Tsar Wants His Photograph Taken</i> and a new musical, <i>Man & God</i> – which have stimulated new interpretations, new works, and new trajectories for creative practitioners (including directors, musicians, and singers). In addition, Berkowitz has shaped theatre performances, recitals, popular exhibitions, public talks, and related media coverage that have enhanced cultural comprehension of Jewish vocations and identities. He has enabled cultural institutions such as the Wiener Holocaust Library and the Lithuanian Embassy to stimulate public engagement with significant historical and cultural issues. His expertise in historically informed performances shaped and significantly influenced the staging of the critically acclaimed National Theatre play <i>The Lehman Trilogy</i> (total audience c.150,000).</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Prof. Michael Berkowitz's research showed how a better understanding of photography as a predominantly Jewish space in Europe (until the Second World War) helps us to comprehend the worlds that Jews and non-Jews made together, and appreciate the breadth of Jewish vocations and identities across the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly those lost during the Holocaust. His research extended beyond Britain to other parts of the world, such as Lithuania, and also encompasses the importance of Jewish lives within the histories of music and motion pictures, to demonstrate how integrating the stories of Jewish pathbreakers radically alters the usual historical narratives underpinning these creative fields.</p> <p>While 'Jewish contributions' to society, generally and in the realm of entertainment for the masses, are widely acknowledged, little attention has been paid to the important roles of Jewish women and men in the photography industry. Berkowitz's research has shown that from the 1850s to the 1950s, photography was one of the most open avenues for Jews to make a living in Britain, as well as contribute to mainstream culture. Berkowitz's 2015 book, <i>Jews and Photography in Britain</i> [R1], was the first historical investigation of this topic, showing how in addition to bringing new photographic ideas and methods to Britain, Jews imagined entirely new forms of creative expression. Important examples include sophisticated political and news coverage by Stefan Lorant that also incorporated biting satire through photography, and the emergence of photographs of architecture and artworks as works of art in themselves by Helmut Gernsheim. Jewish men and women were crucial to the growth of both studio and press photography in Britain, advancing these sectors economically and creatively as well as facilitating the integration of the Jewish community into British society. Berkowitz's book chapter, <i>Émigré photographers</i> [R2], further emphasises the importance to the British photographic scene of Jewish and political refugees who had fled Nazi persecution. Berkowitz explained that these émigré photographers and other significant figures – such as Gernsheim, who was also a foundational historian of photography – spurred new developments in the UK, such as the integration of photography into institutions such as the Royal Academy and the V&A, and the application of photography to the study of the fine arts (exemplified though the work of the Warburg Institute).</p>		

In *Photography as Jewish space* [R3], Berkowitz demonstrated how, particularly prior to the Second World War, photography was a disproportionately Jewish economic and creative realm in Central Europe, as well as Britain. Photography was a vital network that cut across generational and national lines and was crucial to intra-Jewish relationships and those with non-Jews. It was a diverse and expansive space that encompassed men and women who were prominent photographers and editors, as well as individuals who owned and staffed photographic laboratories and equipment stores. However, photography was not deemed a respectable vocation during this period and so leading figures' participation has been obscured and marginalized. Berkowitz used the example of Lithuania, where approximately 95% of the Jewish population was murdered, to show how researching the photography industry assists in the reconstruction and interpretation of Jewish daily life prior to the Holocaust. Berkowitz's catalogue foreword for the Wiener Holocaust Library's 2019 exhibition *Berlin-London: The Lost Photographs of Gerty Simon* [R4] identified, for the first time, that Simon was one of the inspirations for the character of the strong, articulate and highly competent Jewish woman photographer who runs her own studio in *The Tsar Wants His Photograph Taken*, a comic opera by Kurt Weill and Georg Kaiser (1928) suppressed upon the Nazis taking power in 1933. His essay *Kodachrome's (rather) Jewish musical history* [R5] introduces how the invention of the Kodachrome film process in 1935 was inextricably tied to developments in classical and jazz music – and interwoven into Jewish history. Kodachrome's main creators, Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky, Jr, were classical musicians and related to the Gershwins and Damrosches (founders of the New York Philharmonic).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1** Michael Berkowitz, *Jews and Photography in Britain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015). Reviews: Lisa Silverman (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) praised how Berkowitz “provides excellent, nuanced responses to each of his inquiries, and then some, in this richly detailed study of a woefully under-research topic”. Deborah Dash Moore (University of Michigan) called it “prodigiously researched.”
<https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1077310/1>
- R2** Michael Berkowitz, “Émigré photographers” in *Insiders-Outsiders: Refugees from Nazi Europe and their contribution to British visual culture*, ed. Monica Bohm-Duchen (London: Lund Humphries, 2018), pp. 63-76. Peer reviewed.
<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10062415/>
- R3** Michael Berkowitz, “Photography as Jewish space” in *Space & Spaciality in Modern German-Jewish History*, eds. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), pp. 246-62. Peer reviewed.
<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1570210/>
- R4** Michael Berkowitz, ‘Foreword’, *Berlin-London: The Lost Photographs of Gerty Simon*, Barbara Warnock and John March (London: The Wiener Holocaust Library, 2019).
<https://iris.ucl.ac.uk/iris/publication/1661136/1>. Named a “book of the year” in 2019 by Peter Parker, *The Spectator*.
- R5** Michael Berkowitz, “Kodachrome’s (rather) Jewish musical history” in *Colour & Poetry: A Symposium*, ed. Jo Volley (London: Slade Press, 2019), unpaginated.
<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10089289/>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Berkowitz's research into the importance of Jewish lives within the histories of photography, music and theatre led to the co-development of two stage productions, stimulating new interpretations, works, and trajectories for creative practitioners (including directors, musicians, and singers). Operatic and theatrical performances, including his role in the innovative staging of the critically acclaimed National Theatre production of *The Lehman Trilogy*, as well as recitals, exhibitions, public talks, and related media coverage have drawn on Berkowitz's research and thereby enhanced cultural comprehension of Jewish vocations and identities. These activities have challenged established norms and modes of thought in understanding how performance

and visual culture can stimulate engagement with historical and cultural issues for cultural institutions such as the Wiener Holocaust Library and the Lithuanian embassy.

Influencing and enhancing creative practice through co-production

Building on his research into Jewish photographers [R2, R5], Berkowitz produced three stagings of the comic opera, *The Tsar Wants His Photograph Taken* by Kurt Weill and Georg Kaiser (1928), with a total audience of 570. Through his sustained collaboration with director Leo Doulton, Berkowitz has demonstrated that history can be better understood through creative practitioners reviving and explaining creative work that germinated and was received in the context of ethnic difference, with distinct ideas emerging in each one. This learning process benefitted performers, audiences and cultural institutions alike. Berkowitz's research into the Jewish engagement with photographic technology and science, specifically the link between Kodachrome and Jewish musical history [R5], served as the main basis for a new musical, *Man & God*. Written by Doulton and composed by Jacob Dorfman, it was performed as a work-in-progress in York, Leeds, and London in 2019 to a total audience of 140. It communicates the relationship between evolving forms of musical interpretation and the science of colour photography, specifically regarding the invention and history of the Kodachrome colour film process.

The performances of both the opera and musical involved 52 performers and creative practitioners in total, broadening their musical experience and fruitfully developing their professional practice. Doulton's directorial practice, in particular, has been enhanced by working closely with Berkowitz, calling it **"a really rewarding creative partnership"** that has **"influenced me a lot, particularly in terms of how rigorous I am in researching productions, and going to primary sources rather than other people's interpretations of them"** (A). Performers expressed how **"the academic research made the musical really engage with the complexity of history"** and drawing upon Berkowitz's expertise made the production **"feel like a real luxury and rare opportunity"** (A). Cast members also noted that the academic component enhanced creative practice by refining and deepening performers' understanding of the historical nuances and significance of the opera, as well as their comprehension of links between the political context and the creative decisions (A).

Increasing understanding and prominence of cultural traditions and community histories

The performances of *The Tsar* with related discussion of Weill's opera and its themes at the Bloomsbury Theatre Studio (audience 97, February 2016), Bloomsbury Theatre Main Stage (audience 394, May 2019), and the Wiener Holocaust Library (audience 40, September 2019) were either sell-outs or close to capacity (B, C). These London shows engaged performers and audiences with the possibilities for live performance to animate research and show that university-based research can inspire new artistic projects. Audience responses demonstrated how staging rarely-seen work fostered cultural understanding. Performing and discussing lesser-known historical matters, according to one surveyed audience member, meant **"nothing but learning and enjoying."** 57% of the audience that provided feedback at the Bloomsbury Theatre attested that they learned about the significance of Jewish women as photographers about which they were previously unaware (D). The audience response to the performance of *Man & God* in London emphasised how Berkowitz's on-stage introduction (that drew upon [R5]) heightened cultural comprehension: it **"enhanced the experience for a deeper understanding"**; it **"was a fun way to learn about"** the historical figures and **"informative"**; **"the talk beforehand was great in setting the scene"** (E).

Media coverage demonstrated how both productions informed a wider public about these obscured aspects of European culture. A substantial 2019 article in the *Guardian* (multiplatform readership 6,076,000) identified how the revival of *The Tsar* **"marks a significant act of defiance against the Nazis, even eight decades after the once popular comic opera was pulled from the German repertoire by the authorities"**, demonstrating new awareness of what the crusade against so-called 'degenerate' Jewish influence entailed (on p3 of F). A review in *Opera* (the world's leading opera magazine, monthly circulation 40–50,000) introduced *The Tsar* to a more specialist audience, observing that on the basis of the Bloomsbury Theatre performance **"Weill's intricate, ambitious little grotesque certainly merits more regular exposure"** (on p10 of F). Both articulated genuine enthusiasm for further staging of Weill's work.

A review of *Man & God* on theatrical website *The Upcoming* emphasised the staging's success in enhancing cultural understanding: **“the story they seek to tell is an important one, and they give voice to an aspect of history that has been horrendously overlooked” (G).**

Supporting and enhancing critically acclaimed creative endeavour

Berkowitz's expertise in narrating and interpreting Jewish culture from the 19th-century to the present, as evidenced by [R1], and experience of staging historically informed performances, led to him shaping the radical staging of the Sam Mendes/Ben Powers' production of *The Lehman Trilogy* for the National Theatre. The play, an epic that spans the Lehman family history from their arrival in New York from Bavaria in 1844 to their firm's collapse during the 2008 financial crash, drew audiences in London (April—October 2018 and May—August 2019) and New York (March—April 2019) of at least 150,000. Through a pre-rehearsal consultancy, Berkowitz advised that the play was such a departure from the known history that Mendes and Powers should make no pretence to historicity and not attempt 'historical' staging. As acknowledged by the National Theatre, his “expertise in the cultural, social, and religious traditions of the Jewish community” [...] especially **“influenced the play's ultimate ‘timeless’ setting” (as opposed to the conventional, historical stage set and props as indicated in the initial script) and “was incorporated into the final staging of the play” (H).** Reviewers ardently praised this decision, including Ben Brantley, the leading theatre critic for the *New York Times* (March 2019, daily circulation 571,500): “the audience are [not] likely to forget what they've seen. The real magic of “The Lehman Trilogy” has nothing to do with numbers. It's the miracle of three men, on a nearly naked stage, resurrecting vanished lives and worlds, leaving an oddly indelible afterglow in the final fade into darkness” (I, on p3).

Collaborating with institutions to enhance communication and engagement

Berkowitz has collaborated with curators and archivists at the Wiener Holocaust Library, one of the world's leading and most extensive archives on the Nazi era, to help them achieve their mission of engaging people of all ages and backgrounds to enhance understanding of the Holocaust and its historical context. The Wiener Holocaust Library hosted an exhibition (30 May—15 October 2019), *Berlin-London: The Lost Photographs of Gerty Simon*, which featured a set of recently acquired images not seen in public for over eighty years and brought their significance to light. Berkowitz served as a key consultant for the exhibition, wrote the Foreword for the exhibition catalogue [R4], and gave a public talk on Simon and other Jewish women photographers, throughout drawing upon his expertise to, as the Curator put it, **“guide us upon the significance of the collection, and to help us to understand Gerty Simon's status as a photographer” (C).** Sales of the catalogue were higher than average; the first print run sold out and another was printed; 198 were sold in total. The exhibition was the Library's second most popular to date, attracting 3,300 visitors (two thirds of the visitors who attended exhibitions there in 2019). A further 610 people visited for events connected with the exhibition.

An abridged staging of *The Tsar* in the exhibition space realized the Library's goal of using their archival materials as a living memorial that works in service of the future. Warnock attests that the sold-out event was an **“unusually entertaining and compelling way of illustrating a life such as Gerty Simon's [that] revealed some of the connections [Berkowitz] had discovered between Gerty Simon, who was possibly a model for one of the characters in the opera, and Kurt Weill and (singer) Lotte Lenya”,** as sitters for Gerty Simon, and made **“a significant contribution to the Berlin-London events series” (C).** The audience reported that they learned about an outstanding artist, about whom they were previously unaware, and about the larger, important cohort of Jews as photographers: **“the production and my experience of it was enriched by the presentation of historical context”,** and **“I would like to take a fresh look at Weill's music” (D).** Prior to this, Berkowitz's research informed the development of the Wiener exhibition *Fragments of a Lost Homeland: Remembering the Armenian Genocide* (8 October 2015—24 March 2016) and contributed to the associated events programme, which enabled archivists to more clearly communicate photography's “profound implications for the memory of genocide” for both Armenian and Jewish communities (C).

Berkowitz's research led to long-term collaboration with the Lithuanian Embassy (London), including concerts and recitals as part of the annual *Litvak Days* events programme (December 2013—May 2020). These events that celebrated and explored the culture and memory of the

Lithuanian Jewish ('Litvak') community were informed by Berkowitz's research, for example [R3], and each attract audiences of between 60 and 200. The ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the UK observed that Berkowitz's **"knowledge and insights into key cultural figures helped underpin the success of these events"** (J). The regular events series, co-curated by Berkowitz, explore how Lithuania's almost entirely lost Jewish community and Litvak diaspora continue to stimulate and inform contemporary Lithuanian culture. According to the embassy, the **"programme enabled attendees to better understand the past as well as appreciate contemporary incarnations of Litvak culture"** (J). The success of these events **"has led to an increase in embassy investment into this and other cultural programmes"**, such as a 2018 concert and CD by Aerogram of Litvak music, and a commitment to the Litvak Days as a permanent regular fixture of the embassy's activity (J). The ambassador describes how **"Berkowitz's contributions have therefore supported and extended the Lithuanian government's commitment to preserving the culture and memory of Jewish people, specifically through ensuring historical justice, undermining antisemitism, and promoting research into and preservation of Jewish culture and heritage"** (J)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Cast focus group transcript from *The Tsar* and testimonial from Leo Doulton
- B. Performance figures from Bloomsbury Theatre, *The Tsar*
- C. Testimonial from the Senior Curator and Head of Education at the Wiener Holocaust Library and follow-up email
- D. *The Tsar* 2019 performance feedback
- E. *Man & God* performance feedback
- F. Media articles about *The Tsar Wants His Photograph Taken*: Vanessa Thorpe, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2019 (see p3); Jenni Frazer, *The Times of Israel*, 17 May 2019; Christopher Webber, *Opera*, July 2019 (see p10).
- G. Media articles about *Man & God*: Abbie Grundy, *The Upcoming*, 18 May 2019; Robert Hugill, *Planet Hugill: A world of classical music* [blog], 14 May 2019
- H. Testimony email from the Press Officer of the National Theatre, concerning Professor Berkowitz's consultation role for *The Lehman Trilogy*
- I. Ben Brantley, "Review: A Magnificent Road to Ruin in 'The Lehman Trilogy'", *New York Times*, 28 March 2019 (see p3).
- J. Litvak Days 2020 attendee feedback and Testimonial from the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Kingdom