

From the Editors

When is a project finished? Scholars, artists, and artisans of all types have grappled with this problem for generations. Plato argued that every human project was only an incomplete imitation of an immaterial ideal. The ancient rabbis, too, saw Torah study as an infinitely generative project that could never be finished. On the other hand, for them, a physical tool or vessel could be finished simply by means of “a thought” -- the craftsman’s decision to stop working on the object automatically renders the object “complete” (b. Shab. 52b). Modern theorists ply us with enticing models for thought such as eternal recurrence, *différance*, unfinalizability, and rhizomatic expansion that all resist and defy completion. And yet novels continue to be published, paintings continue to be framed and hung, and symphonies continue to be played (even the unfinished ones). Scholarship continues to be filed away as articles and books, completed, and **are** represented by static lines on a CV, with only new projects, **often still in imagined form, listed as to be** “in progress.”

→ And let’s not forget about the “in progress” rule of Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, a tenure that seems to continue indefinitely, without any finishing date in sight. This, despite massive Israeli street protests against his rule. And so for us, **T**he concept “in progress” can prove to be both hopeful and daunting; hopeful for those scholars who experience the research and writing process as energizing; daunting for those who write under a cloud of anxiety that only lifts once the book or article is in print. And even then, the race to the next continues; **and one’s life’s work often remains unfinished even after one’s death.**

a ajs perspectives
11:59 AM Aug 18

Mira, this is a REALLY fascinating insight, and I really do love how you connect the theme of this issue (and, honestly, all of our issues) to the Israeli political landscape, but I don't know -- and it really just could be me being oversensitive here -- I feel like it feels a *little* forced and possibly politicizes the issue in a way that may not be necessary? I think maybe take it out? -CH

a ajs perspectives
12:13 PM Aug 18

Are you actually trying to suggest that without these lines this column is “apolitical”? Politicization, Shmolticization. Or as David Ben-Gurion famously said, UN-Shmu'en (well, he really said Oom-Shmoom, as in the Hebrew acronym for the UN. Did you know that Israelis always make their acronyms into whole words? Maybe we could have our next issue's theme be The Acronym Issue. Catchy, huh? I can see why you think the Israeli politics insertion might be a TINY BIT of shoehorning...but really...I live and breathe Israel/Palestine and I think you underestimate how much our readers do -- or should -- too. -MS

a ajs perspectives
8:06 PM Aug 17

Love the reference. Gosh, that reminds me that I am so behind on Daf Yomi. So behind that I know I'll never finish. Getting anxious: gotta go for a snack. -MS

a ajs perspectives
8:08 PM Aug 17

Chaya, I'm getting a nosebleed up here in the OED gods! Which reminds me, are your kids still watching British footy these days? At my house, it's all about hockey (the Vancouver Canucks). Might as well go downstairs to check the score. It's the playoffs, which means the best snacks in the house are housed in front of the TV this week, being guarded by my husband and son. Hope they haven't finished all the organic cheezies. Come to think of it, are cheezies -- those crunchy, cheese-flavoured snacks -- Canadian? I better try to find a good equivalent for our American readers. Gimme a few more minutes while I climb down the snack-food internet rabbit hole to figure out the code switching here...-MS

a ajs perspectives
9:37 AM Aug 18

Isn't it spelled Chee-Z? I thought here they were pronounced chee-zeds. And I'm kinda insulted you didn't like all my theory references. -CH

a ajs perspectives
9:49 AM Aug 18

Ah! Did you know he has an *unfinished* book on Marx? I need to work that in somehow...-CH

a ajs perspectives
8:09 PM Aug 17

Add: “are”

a ajs perspectives
9:42 AM Aug 18

Wait, “scholarship” is singular isn't it? Or is it one of those words like “the government” -- the government is taking a catastrophic decision? The government **are** taking a catastrophic decision? Ack! - CH



Mira Sucharov & Chaya Halberstam

a ajs perspectives
11:57 PM Aug 18

Did we manage to reference all the essays? I don't want anyone to feel left out. But people should read all of them anyway! And, frankly, no one really reads the editors' intro, so... -CH

a ajs perspectives
8:13 PM Aug 17

Delete: "dynamic"

a ajs perspectives
9:39 AM Aug 18

I liked dynamic!! -CH

a ajs perspectives
12:17 PM Aug 18

I liked it too, but I was concerned readers would take it as generally "dynamic" – like Dy-No-Mite! and I wanted to hone in on the technical aspect of digital humanities. Speaking of Dy-No-Mite, the Norman Lear documentary was fascinating in terms of bringing to light the problematic racialized dynamics on some of his sets, especially Good Times. We could have another issue called The TV Guide (Issue)...?? -MS

a ajs perspectives
12:25 PM Aug 18

TV Issue would be so good! Not really sure how we'd get the ancient Judaism research area involved but I'm confident we can figure it out! -CH

a ajs perspectives
12:39 PM Aug 18

... or Medieval Judaism...

a ajs perspectives
12:41 PM Aug 18

... or Modern Judaism before 1929...

a ajs perspectives
12:42 PM Aug 18

But no worries! We'll figure it out! -CH

In this time of Covid lockdowns and unexpected duties of care – *never mind our own illnesses* –; many of us have struggled with finishing projects we had imagined would be completed by now. *Some of us have concluded, or come to the conclusion* that projects we had hoped to finish may never be completed. *Some of us may have felt daunted by the perceived gap between our own specific research interests and the enormous issues pressing down on us – also known as the "F--- 2020" phenomenon.* In other cases, we have been compelled to stop working on a project and *instead just* put it out there before we feel it is truly finished. But even *in* the best of times, we leave projects unfinished. Sometimes we do so intentionally, to embrace the unresolved and open-ended, blurring the distinction between making and unmaking. Sometimes we do so unintentionally—we run into *conceptual or empirical* dead ends or *simply* run out of time.

This issue of *Perspectives the AJSP* celebrates the unfinished, recognizing that even a *book or essay* project that has just begun is an achievement. Some of these essays explore projects we have left *unfinished* out of necessity: unfinished research interrupted by illness, an unfinished dissertation left behind in the wake of a successful career, or a job application abandoned by scholars overwhelmed by the odds. Others ask whether *something can ever be considered finished*—when do we finish *penning writing* our diary? When is an *interactive* dynamic digital project ever finished? When have we completed our ethnographic studies of a living people? Still other essays grapple with the practical and pedagogical implications of *incomplete* unfinished *study-abroad programs* courses and interrupted learning.

a ajs perspectives
8:15 PM Aug 17

Chaya, how should we finish this? Endings are always the toughest part of our editors' column, aren't they? -MS

a ajs perspectives
11:45 PM Aug 18

Let's come back to it after layout, but before it goes to proofs. -CH

a ajs perspectives
11:45 PM Aug 18

OK, remind me... -MS

(with the help of Google Docs annotation)