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In early twentieth century Paris, the Russian Jewish artist Marc Chagall began a series painting Eastern European Jews in hues of green, yellow, and red. The paintings were based upon Chagall's childhood memories, as well as his personal encounters with Jews in the shtetl. They were also portraits of a universal social type. I argue that Chagall's experiences as a Jew in both France and Russia influenced this series. He repeatedly depicted archetypes of the Jew such as Rabbis and klezmers. Yet he visibly altered these archetypes via non-naturalist hues of green, yellow, and red. This play on skin color served to both signify and destabilize perceptions of racial differences that underscored French and Russian society at the time. These perceptions included a range of Jewish phenotypes, and, particularly in France, took their most extreme form in the dichotomy between blackness and whiteness. Chagall's multicolored images of Jews illuminate the roles of both the individual and the collective imagination in shaping these perceptions of race. As such, these paintings offer a compelling view of racial identity as existing somewhere between the psychic and the social. That is, they reveal racial identities as phantasms—illusions that, despite their immaterial nature, are linked to the social sphere. In emphasizing this phantasmatic aspect of race, they offered a form of political resistance to the racial politics that, coursing through post-Dreyfus France and Russia, would have widespread and devastating consequences on Jews and other dispersed populations throughout Europe in the decades to come. In more general terms, this analysis of Chagall's paintings of Jews demonstrates the power of art and visual culture as a means of both producing and reconfiguring notions of identity within political and social spheres.

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Chagall's Green and Yellow Jews: Painting Race in Russia and Post-Dreyfus France

I had an impression, that the old [Jew] was green; perhaps
a shadow fell on him from my heart.¹

Marc Chagall

Are there really human *races*? I can see that there are white people, red people, and black people. But these are not races, but varieties of the same race, a same species, who between each other join in fertile relationships and who never stop mixing together.²

Anatole France

What is a Jew? [This] has never been resolved, except perhaps by murderers.³

R.B Kitaj

In 1911 the young Marc Chagall, a Russian émigré in Paris, embarked on his *Jew* series (c. 1911–26). The multicolored figures of the bearded, Eastern European Jews that he began painting in Paris, far from home, were inspired by nostalgia for his formative years in the Eastern European *shtetl*.⁴ I argue that, in addition to this personal element, these polychromatic paintings of Jews both reflected and problematized dominant perceptions of race in Russia and France at the turn of the twentieth century. These racial politics included Russian anti-Semitism, which played a role in forming Chagall's self-image as a Jew. They also included repercussions of the nineteenth-century Dreyfus Affair and the French colonialization of parts of Africa. These latter two situations were manifested in French visual culture via archetypal depictions of the Jew and the African. I show how Chagall's *Jew* series played upon these racial archetypes, and also destabilized them—primarily through his Fauvist insertion of green, yellow, and red into the figure of the Jew. This destabilization through color occurs on three levels. First, it

complicates the opposition between black and white that proliferated in French visual culture as a means of differentiating race. Second, it exemplifies the unique way in which Jewish racial identity, through its indeterminacy, disrupts this fabricated abyss between whiteness and blackness. Finally, in revealing this divide's fabricated nature, Chagall's *Jew* series offers a platform for a theory that racial identity is, in essence, a phantasm: an illusion that operates both individually and collectively. Despite their immateriality, phantasms are linked to the social realm. They emerge from a web of cultural influences, create social roles and identities, and can result in unspeakable violence. Chagall's work also demonstrates, however, the potential of phantasms as a means of social transformation.

The *Jew* Series: *Jew in Green* and *The Fiddler*

The *Jew* series is comprised of about fifteen paintings, produced during Chagall's migration between France and Russia in the years 1911–1926. The paintings were based upon Chagall's introspective childhood memories of his uncles, father, and grandfathers, as well as his personal encounters with rabbis and klezmers. They were also portraits of a universal social type.

Jew in Green (1914) (Fig. 1.)

for example, depicts a bearded figure whose countenance droops with sadness or fatigue. The painting was inspired by Chagall's encounter with a rabbi known as the "Preacher of Slouzk" upon his return to Vitebsk from Paris in 1914. "I had an



Figure 1. Marc Chagall, *Jew in Green* (*Le Juif en Vert*), 1914. Oil on cardboard, 98 x 78 cm. Private Collection. (Artwork in the public domain)

impression," he said, "That the old man was green; perhaps a shadow fell on him from my heart."⁵ The impoverished figure also evokes Chagall's memories of his father, who would invariably fall asleep in the flickering light of the Shabbat table after a long week of physical labor. As Chagall described him:

Have you sometimes seen, in Florentine paintings, one of those men whose beard is never trimmed, with eyes at once brown and ash-gray, with the complexion the color of burnt-ochre and wrinkles? That was my father...Everything about my father seemed to me enigma and sadness. An image inaccessible.⁶

There are traces of this sad figure in *Jew in Green*, although his ochre and ash hues are splashed with bright shades of green and yellow. While this melancholic Jew arose from the personal space of memory, he also exemplifies certain broader typologies of nineteenth-century Eastern European Jews, thus merging the personal and the political. These typologies are evident in the green Jew's physical features and clothing; his beard, cap, and clothing resembled those worn by many Russian Jews at the turn of the century. His Jewishness is further referenced by the Hebraic text from which he seems to materialize.⁷ The subtle expressiveness and sculptural qualities of the Jew's countenance bear a striking resemblance to Rembrandt's seventeenth-century *Portrait of an Old Jew*. His bowed demeanor, lined face, and contemplative expression reflected a people only slowly emerging from centuries of oppression.

The green Jew's slumped demeanor and shabby attire also point to a Jewish archetype that began to gain prominence in the late-nineteenth-century via works by artists such as Leonid Pasternak and Ivan Kramskoi.⁸ Images of the banished, wandering Jew coincided with the intensification of anti-Jewish legislation in Russia, including the 1891 displacement of thousands of Jews from Moscow.⁹ However, in contrast to

Pasternak's and Kramskoi's stark realism, Chagall's Jewish prototype dissolves into Cubist abstraction in his clothing and background. The characteristics that signify his Jewishness are disrupted even further by the figure's green face and yellow beard. This Fauvist turn distinguishes the work from the naturalism of the Old Masters, and renders it contemporary. In this way, through the use of color and the modernist aesthetics that Chagall encountered in Paris, what initially appeared to be an archetype of the Jew becomes lost in enigma, located tenuously between modernism and tradition, picture and text, figure and abstraction: an "image inaccessible."

Chagall's Jews are not always bowed down towards the earth. In the 1911 painting *The Fiddler* (Fig. 2.), a klezmer cradles a fiddle on his shoulder, and rises up over a town complete with houses, villagers, and the spire of a church. The painting's flatness and hieratic-scale evokes the otherworldly realm of the Byzantine icon, one of Russia's oldest artistic traditions. In a play between the imaginary and the real that is similarly evident in *Jew in Green*, *The Fiddler* was

most likely based on Chagall's childhood memories of his Uncle Neuch, who "played the violin like a cobbler," or even his grandfather from Lyozno, who sat on the roof eating carrots.¹⁰ Like *Jew in Green*, *The Fiddler* emerged from a deeply-personal montage of Chagall's experiences in the *shtetl*. This floating man also embodies another Jewish archetype—that of the *luftmensch* who, as Mirjam Rajner describes, embodied the instability and conflict underscoring Russian Jewish life at the time: he is "a person up in the air,



Figure 2. Marc Chagall, *The Fiddler* (*Le Violiniste*), 1913, oil on canvas, 188 x 158 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (Artwork in the public domain)

detached from reality and floating between a poor and shifty existence in this material world and the spirituality and piety of the inner world.”¹¹ Yet again, like the *Jew in Green*, the fiddler, despite playing upon an archetype, is semi-abstracted and his skin is colored green. Painted in the contemporary Fauvist style, this prototypical figure is reconfigured in modern terms.

What is the significance of Chagall's multicolored Jews? The original impact of these figures has been overshadowed by their popular acclaim today. These portraits (along with the hit Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*) helped to mythologize the lost world of traditional Eastern European Jewry that disappeared in the tumult of the twentieth century. The violence of this transition is difficult to imagine today. However, at the turn of the twentieth century when these paintings were being produced, Jewish identity was the subject of intense debate throughout Europe and Russia, for Jews and non-Jews alike. When repositioned within this historical setting, Chagall's subjective renditions of Jewish types through the use of color and avant-garde aesthetics renders these images as more significant than mere expression. These images of Jews reflect the psychic and social framework through which race was perceived at the time in Russia and France. By psychic and social I mean, respectively, personal perceptions of race versus widespread stereotypes; the individual versus the collective. Chagall's images of Jews underscore the conflicts between these psychic and social perceptions. That is, the paintings reflect Chagall's subjectivity as a Jew, as well as his attempt to reconcile his subjectivity with rigid images of the Jew constructed by the outside gaze. The resulting effect, achieved primarily through the use of color, undermined dominant perceptions of race as a fixed and objective social entity.

Let us first examine the tension between the psychic and the social that formed Chagall's self-image as a Jew in Russia.

Chagall in Russia: Psychic Perceptions of Race

Chagall's experiences as a Jew in Russia were a microcosm of the conflicts facing many Russian Jews in the late nineteenth century. At this time, most of the world's Jewish population resided in Europe, with more than half of these restricted to Russia's Pale of Settlement. The Pale of Settlement consisted of fifteen provinces in the western portion of Russia that had been annexed from Poland at the end of the eighteenth-century. This annexation included half-a-million Jews who, while subject to Russian rule, were not granted Russian citizenship.¹² Life for the majority of Russian Jews confined to the Pale was fraught with poverty and hardship. By the end of the nineteenth century this way of life was on the verge of collapse. This was due in large part to modernization and mass emigration. Despite its sharp decline, the *shtetl* maintained a cohesive culture bound together by deep traditions. Chagall's own experiences being raised in a tightknit Hasidic community in Vitebsk exemplified this situation. Although he found the *shtetl* stifling, and eventually abandoned it in order to pursue his artistic career, he was imbued with its traditions and would never fully rescind his Jewish heritage; his preoccupation with traditional *shtetl* life would significantly shape his artistic career. As he stated, "If I were not a Jew [...], I wouldn't have been an artist, or I would be a different artist altogether."¹³ Summarily, a combination of close family ties (including his half-dozen uncles, his grandparents, and his immediate family) and shared traditions (from the weekly Shabbat to the various Jewish feasts

and holidays), instilled in Chagall a deep sense of his Jewish identity that shaped his art.

Chagall's appreciation of and entrenchment in his heritage was countered by a pervasive sense of being an outsider in Russian society; as he describes in his memoir *My Life*, "Back there [Russia], still a boy, at every step I felt—or rather people made me feel!—that I was a Jew."¹⁴ He was not alone in this sentiment. Russian/Jewish relations had fluctuated since the 1772 incorporation of millions of Jews into the empire, depending on the whims of the ruling czar. Chagall's formative years were marked by the aftermath of a series of economic and political reforms under Czar Alexander II (r. 1855–1881). These sweeping reforms had eased restrictions on Jews and encouraged their integration into Russian society. Paradoxically, the growing visibility of Jews in Russian society had also ushered in a modern form of Russian anti-Semitism that pervaded both the right and the left.¹⁵ As Israel Bartel notes:

The new Russian hatred of the Jews cuts across all Russian political streams of the 1860s and 1870s. On the radical left-side, the Jews were portrayed as Western urban foreigners who lived at the expense of the Russian people. [...] On the conservative side, the situation was not much different. Here too, the Jew was perceived as representative of the West, introducing modernism in Russia. [...] The Jew was portrayed as undermining the old order.¹⁶

The rise of mass media exacerbated the situation, and helped shape an image of the Jew as both a capitalist exploiter and an internationalist threat.¹⁷ Alexander II's assassination in 1881 intensified these anti-Jewish sentiments. This was followed by explicitly anti-Jewish legislation under Alexander III, who severely restricted the Jews' economic and social freedoms granted under his predecessor.¹⁸ These anti-Jewish sentiments exploded into a series of pogrom waves beginning in 1881, which

catalyzed a mass emigration of Russia's Jews from the Pale of Settlement to Western Europe, Palestine, and America.¹⁹

Chagall's experiences offer a personal glimpse into this volatile situation. In 1906, he left Vitebsk for St. Petersburg, the artistic capital of Russia. This was no minor endeavor. The 1905 Revolution had triggered several pogroms in the area.²⁰ Additionally, Jewish movement was restricted in Russia and in the city itself. He describes the difficulties of relocating as a Jewish non-citizen:

To live in St. Petersburg, one needs not only money, but also a special authorization. I am a Jew. And the Czar has set aside a certain residential zone in which the Jews were obliged to stay.²¹ [...] Lawyers have the right to keep Jewish servants. But, according to the law, I must live in his house and take my meals there...I realized then that, in Russia, Jews are not the only ones who have no right to live, but also many Russians, crowded together like lice in one's hair. My God!²²

Chagall's descriptions paint a stark picture of Russia's oppressive environment. It appears to have had a dehumanizing effect for Jews and the lower strata of Russians alike—even reducing them to the lowest animal form (i.e. lice in Russia's hair). Given this environment, along with his desire to further pursue his art career in Paris, Chagall left St. Petersburg for Paris after four years. He carried with him a conflicted sense of his Jewish heritage—both a source of inspiration and humiliation—shaped by his formative years in Russia. This sense of conflict would be exacerbated in France, which, despite being founded on more egalitarian ideals than Russia's autocracy, was still reeling from the aftermath of the nineteenth-century Dreyfus Affair.

Chagall in France: Social Perceptions of Race

When Chagall arrived in Paris in 1910, at the age of twenty, he spoke not a word of French. However, the foreignness of his Russian-Jewish background was mitigated by his multicultural surroundings in Montparnasse (the Bohemian quarter of Paris) and the artist's colony of *La Ruche*. As Chagall described it:

[*La Ruche*] was the name given to a hundred or so studios surrounded by a little garden and very close to the Vaugirard slaughterhouses. In those studios lived the artistic Bohemia of every land. While in the Russian ateliers an offended model sobbed, from the Italians' came the sound of songs and the twanging of a guitar, and from the Jews' debates and arguments.²³

La Ruche (or the Beehive, so called because of its unusual structure) was experiencing a surge of immigrant artists from all over Europe, a significant number of whom were Jews from the Pale of Settlement. However, France, where Chagall would spend the majority of his life, was far from immune to anti-Semitism. The proliferation of emigres to Bohemian Paris was regarded with apprehension by the general public. They were even viewed by some as *meteques* or "dirty foreigners."²⁴ By the late 1920's, Montparnasse was described by a French novelist in the journal *Le Figaro* as "the filth of Paris," inhabited "by 80 percent Semites and every one of them a loser."²⁵ In this respect, Chagall found himself in a parallel situation to that in Russia. He inhabited a close-knit community—this time, the eclectic array of artists, poets, and intellectuals that constituted Bohemian Paris. Yet, like the *shtetl*, *La Ruche* and its constituents existed on the margins of the larger culture—which, like Russia, was experiencing a surge in anti-Semitism.

Although France's ideals were ostensibly egalitarian, this particular surge of French anti-Semitism was linked to the

nineteenth century Dreyfus Affair. This Affair was catalyzed in part by France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to the Prussians. The international controversy involved a French-Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus, who was convicted of treason. Despite his eventual exoneration, the Affair severely polarized French-Jewish relations. Dreyfus, who was of Alsatian descent, embodied the "outside" invader who threatened to undermine the already fragile French body politic. Similarly to Russia, the mass media via journals and newspapers played a significant role in transforming this specific situation into general anti-Jewish sentiment.²⁶ In the wake of the Affair, these anti-Jewish sentiments emerged in both far-right and far-left political parties. Outspoken anti-Semites disseminated their views to the public via derogatory tracts and political cartoons. For example, the mainstream socialist journal *La Revue Socialiste* reiterated Marx's idea that capitalism was of Jewish origin. Its editor, Benoît Malon, claimed that socialism "is a Franco-German creation, Aryan in the fullest sense of the term."²⁷ On the other end of the political spectrum, Edouard Drumont (1844–1917), the right-wing editor of the French anti-Semitic journal *La Libre Parole*, claimed that the Jew was "the most powerful agent of destruction that the world had ever seen" and that "wherever Jews appear, they spread disorder and ruin in their wake... the Semites excel in their politics of dissolution."²⁸ Despite their contradictory ideals, both socialists and nationalists constructed an archetype of the Jew as an agent of social unrest—again, echoing the image of the Jew concurrently being formed in Russia.

These sentiments carried over into visual culture. The 1896 cover illustration for Drumont's tract *La Libre Parole* depicts a Jewish caricature with a small skull and large, hooked nose. According to physiognomy, which was quite popular in France at the time, these features implied cowardice and dishonesty.²⁹ Although physical typologies of the Jew, such as the hooked

nose, had emerged as early as Medieval Germany, modern physiognomy (the pseudo-scientific claim that physical features manifested the invisible qualities of the person) was justified by its alleged basis in scientific inquiry. As a signifier of the invisible, physiognomy proved exceptionally useful in categorizing Jewish difference—particularly in France, in which universalist ideals (instated in the post-Revolutionary Republic) called for assimilation and the elimination of difference.³⁰ This situation had a unique impact on French Jews, who were considered the most viable receptors of these universalist ideals. One reason for their receptivity to these ideals, which resulted in their relatively-successful assimilation into French culture, was their physical indeterminacy, or their ability to appear European (or white). In this sense, this radical strand of post-Dreyfus anti-Semitism pushed against French universalism, and utilized physiognomy to render both Jewish visibility and difference.³¹

In addition to physiognomy, other images of the Jew abounded in post-Dreyfus literature that sought to emphasize Jewish difference. It was also common to depict Jews as half-animal. Drumont in particular took advantage of evolutionary theory to create a schism between human civilization and the animal world, as a means of illustrating social categories of belonging (or not).³² As David Jones notes,

The idea of the animal has often been constructed as a signifier of the natural world, as opposed to the "civilized," human world [...] The emergence of a teleological evolutionary theory in which organisms developed towards a kind of human perfection can be traced to early nineteenth century.³³

Evolutionary theory became a springboard for a spectrum of social and biological aberration, with animals signifying a subhuman state. This was also used to target Jews. For example, a cartoon in *La Libre Parole Illustrée* combines physiognomy and Darwinism, and depicts an archetypal Jew

encountering a caged elephant. The elephant exclaims, "What a nose on him! Is he a Jew?" As the Jew attempts to offer him a cheque, the elephant grabs him by the nose.³⁴ The cartoon implied the Jew's physical and psychological deviance. It also positioned him on the same level as, or perhaps even subservient to, animals caged in zoos. These pseudo-scientific claims were rendered all the more destructive by their allegedly empirical justification.

Racial Indeterminacy and Color

It is important to note that the figure of the Jew was not the only racial fantasy envisioned in France. By the time Chagall was painting this series, a clear delineation between races through phenotypes was already in effect in modernist art, as evident, for example, in the difference between the black maid—so black, that she seems to disappear into the shadows—and the glowing white prostitute of Manet's *Olympia* (1863). The resulting effect (what Matthew Rarey describes as the "racialized framing of subservience"³⁵) offers a candid glimpse into the correlation between color and status that formed French culture at the time. In addition to trends in modernist art, the pervasive role of color in race politics, specifically in the sense of the demarcation between whiteness and blackness, was at a peak in early twentieth century popular visual culture. Whereas the Jew was differentiated via physiognomy and a distorted view of evolutionary theory, natural history and climate theory were used to study the pigmentation of African colonial subjects as an aberration from whiteness. This had its roots in the Enlightenment.³⁶ By the nineteenth century these scientific claims had morphed into an opposition between black primitivity and white civilization that justified the French colonialization of countries in West and Equatorial Africa (such as the Congo and Guinea). Like the image of the Jew, the configuration of Africans into a singular specter

(i.e. that of the primitive) offered a specific social category of difference—particularly through the color black. For example, as imports from French colonies in Africa began to pour into Paris at the turn of the century, all objects and textiles deemed primitive (regardless of whether they were from Africa, Oceania, or pre-Colombian America) were referred to as *l'art nègre*, or black art.³⁷

This conflation of blackness with primitivism was also evident in popular visual culture; like the physiognomic archetypes of the Jew, images of the black African were disseminated in the form of political cartoons and imperialist propaganda. This is demonstrated in a 1911 cover of *Le Petit Journal* (Fig. 3), which features a white personification of France being met by black natives upon landing in Morocco. In comparing this illustration with that of *La Libre Parole*, the contrast between these two archetypes is striking—whereas the Jew symbolized infiltration and the social unrest incumbent with modernity, the African symbolized the premodern—cultural backwardness and savagery—and the necessity of civilization and pacification. Yet both archetypes show how the use of phenotypes and color were used as a means of reinforcing in-group/out-group status.

It is unclear the extent to which Chagall encountered these racial politics in France. At this point, however, the social perceptions of Jews shaped by this strand of French anti-Semitism clearly aligned with his experiences of being a Jew in Russia—which, again, he likens to being an outsider and an animal. What is striking is the extent to which Chagall directly addressed images of Jews in his work—particularly in comparison to many of his Eastern European Jewish contemporaries in Montparnasse.³⁸ Given the political climate, this was likely a difficult or even dangerous thing to do in post-Dreyfus France, and perhaps even more so when he returned to Russia in 1914 in order to reunite with his fiancée Bella.

The Russia that Chagall returned to was on the brink of Revolution and civil war. This unstable social situation proved even more precarious for Jews; pogroms were now a common occurrence.³⁹ Shortly after his return, Chagall himself encountered a pogrom in Vitebsk, and narrowly escaped losing his life by renouncing his status as a Jew. He describes it as such:

The street lamps are out. I feel panicky, especially in front of butchers' windows. There you can see calves that are still alive lying beside the butchers' hatchets and knives. Locked up for their last night, they are bleating piteously. Suddenly, around the corner, come a gang of four to five looters. They are armed to the teeth. The moment they catch sight of me, they ask "Jew or not?"

My pockets are empty, my fingers sensitive, my legs weak and they are out for blood. My death would be futile. I so wanted to live"

"All right! Get along!"⁴⁰

This anecdote is illuminating for several reasons. First, Chagall's identification with the slaughterhouse animals suggests that he had incorporated, to an extent, the dehumanizing effect of anti-Semitism into his psyche. Further, Chagall's ability to deny his Jewishness points to Jews' physical indeterminacy in Russia (as well as France). Finally, given that at this point being a Jew could be a matter of life and death, it is significant that Chagall seemed ever more intent on depicting Jewish visibility—following



Figure 3. Cover of *Le Petit Journal*, November 1911, Artist Unknown. (Image in the public domain)

this, he even draped a prayer shawl on a beggar in order to paint him as a Jew.⁴¹ Why was Chagall so intent on this?

With this question in mind, let us return to *Jew in Green*, which Chagall painted when he returned to Russia from Paris. Having contextualized the psychic and social perceptions of Jews that Chagall encountered both in Russia and France, we can see how the title of the painting itself marks the figure as a Jew, and the subject matter adheres to a certain extent to the widespread tendency to align Jewish identity with visual attributes that represented a collective population. In comparing *Jew in Green* to the physiognomic illustration in *La Libre Parole*, for example, the rabbi is racialized through certain visual stereotypes such as the Old World clothing, beard, physical features, melancholic demeanor, and the background of Hebraic text. Yet whereas the archetypes' goal was to dehumanize Jews, the green Jew's tragic demeanor evokes empathy. Empathy, which I understand as the antithesis of dehumanization, evokes an identification with and recognition of the other as a person. Those who are discriminated against often direct a desire for this recognition—or visibility—towards the discriminating group.⁴² This desire for visibility—as a means of evoking empathy rather than contempt—elucidates Chagall's growing preoccupation with depicting Jewish types. Further, the disruptive effect of color and abstraction on this archetype also suggest that, while the figure of the Jew may be constructed from without, it is also determined from within. That is, the painting imagines archetypal qualities of the Jew. However, Chagall visibly alters these qualities, thereby transcending their rigid parameters and, in doing so, revealing their phantasmatic nature. Thus, Chagall's images of Jews articulate the interplay between the psychic and the social that shape racialized identities, as well as attempting

to integrate his own understanding of his Jewish identity with that of the dominant perspective.

In the French context, Chagall's play on skin color in the context of a specific racial type (the Jew) is important to consider. As David Beriss notes, racialization is simply the process by which difference is naturalized—the question is, how is this process deployed, and by whom?⁴³ The non-naturalist, green hue of both figures' skin is clearly Fauvist—perhaps a metaphorical allusion to the transformation of traditional Jewish life into modernity. However, Chagall's Fauvist insertion of the color green into the figure of the Jew also complicated the opposition between black and white constructed by French colonialism. As a Jew, Chagall's insertion of a secondary color into the archetype disrupted the use of pure colors (primary, as well as black and white) as signifiers of difference. This situation reflects the disruptive effect that Jewish racial identity had on this fabricated abyss between whiteness and blackness. That is, the ambiguous racial status of the Jews revealed the slippage underlying the European/non-European dichotomy.⁴⁴ In this respect, the allegorical use of color in Chagall's *Jew in Green* and *Violinist* troubled this symbolic divide between white and black, emphasizing, again, the intangibility of Jewish identity as an identifiable racial type. All of this indicates that Chagall seems to have perceived his Jewish identity in phantasmatic terms.

Racial Identity as Phantasm

What, then, is Jewish identity? By "identity," I mean the way that people define themselves and others in relation to a group. This might involve historical or religious factors, stereotypes, and so on. Identity itself is construed here in two ways: identity as it relates to material conditions, and also as an abstraction configured in both the individual and collective imagination: a phantasm. By definition, phantasm is simply an illusion or apparition. According to Aristotle, it is the distorted, or

subjective, sensory construction of an objective reality.⁴⁵ In terms of racial politics, Franz Fanon suggests that image and fantasy exist, transgressively, between the borders of history and the unconscious. It is these fantasies that evoke the colonial condition, in that the colonized figure is always determined from without.⁴⁶ The phenomenologist Jean Paul Sartre focused on the phantasmatic nature of anti-Semitism, suggesting that it was the imagined existence of the Jew, not actual interactions, that gave rise to the anti-Semite. This in turn played a role in forming the Jews' own sense of identity. This suggests that Jewishness itself, as an identity or as a form of identification, exists only to the extent that it was experienced, and defined by those around it. While Sartre's analysis provides a compelling account of the racist pathology, it is also problematized by its removal from the tangible riches of Jewish culture and history, and its suggestion that Jews have no real identities other than those created by the anti-Semitic gaze.⁴⁷ Yet as this reading of Chagall's images of Jews show, his sense of identity was shaped both by his heritage, as well as by anti-Semitism; a specter formed by both internal and external forces—a phantasm.

Despite their immaterial nature, phantasms are linked to the social sphere. Karl Marx noted the social power of the phantasm as a commodity form when he said that "(t)he value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition."⁴⁸ The same, I argue, is true of identities. They are intangible, yet they play a significant role in the unfolding of history. Jewish identity in particular, as a troubling paradigm of twentieth century oppression, illuminates the relationship between phantasms and material history. This is because the unique nature of Jewishness, which can be construed as a racial, religious, genetic, ethnic, or even class characteristic, reveals the dialectical rather than oppositional relationship between the

abstract and material social realms. That is, notions of Jewish identity were and are constructed by phantasms and also by concrete historical circumstances. Phantasm and history collided with unprecedented scale in twentieth century Jewish life—as seen in the nineteenth century Russian pogrom waves instigated in part by the mass media, as well as the post-Dreyfus wave of anti-Semitism, which would unfold with devastating effect in the deportation of French Jews under the Vichy regime. As this history shows, Jewish identity reveals the play between the illusory and the real that underlies phantasms of race and difference—regardless of what color or form these phantasms take.

Yet phantasms, because of their immateriality, are also malleable. This malleability is demonstrated in Chagall's work. As a modern artist who identified with his marginal status as a Jew, Chagall produced multifaceted, polychromatic images that, being neither real nor unreal, unveiled the fabricated specter of difference emblemized by the Jew. Through this, these images offered a form of political resistance to the ethno-centrism and anti-Semitism that, coursing through post-Dreyfus France, would have widespread and devastating consequences on Jews and other fringe populations throughout Europe in the decades to come. The *Jew* series' fusion of old archetypes with modern, colorist forms also envisioned the profound transformation of Jewish life and identity that would occur in the twentieth century. In their dislocation of fixed identities, in which universal types were lost in such particularities as green or yellow skin, these phantasms were formed by the crucible of modern Jewish life. Simultaneously, they suggest the possibility of its transformation; these metamorphic figures show the visceral power of art and visual culture as a means of both producing and

reconfiguring notions of identity within political and social spheres.

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- 1 Experiment Station, "Marc Chagall's Powerful Portraits: Part Two," In *The Phillips Collection*, 2015, <http://blog.phillipscollection.org/2015/12/29/marc-chagalls-powerful-portraits-part-2/>.
- 2 Anatole France, *The White Stone*, trans. Charles C. Roche (England: John Lane; John Lane company, 1910), 25.
- 3 Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art* (London: Lund Humphries, London in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1990), 106.
- 4 Vitebsk, a provincial town in Russia's Pale of Settlement, was located in the area near the Black Sea that is today the Republic of Belarus. Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Marc Chagall 1887-1985* (London: Taschen, 1998) 13.
- 5 Op. cit., Experiment Station, <http://blog.phillipscollection.org/2015/12/29/marc-chagalls-powerful-portraits-part-2/>.
- 6 Marc Chagall, *My Life* (New York: The Orion Press, 1960), 2.
- 7 These texts include The Kaddish, a prayer which includes the words: "He who makes peace in the heights, may He make peace for us and all of Israel." Op. cit., Experiment Station.
- 8 Mirjam Rajner provides a more in-depth analysis of these artists' depictions of the Wandering Jew in her 2008 article: "Chagall's 'Jew in Bright Red,'" *Ars Judaica* (2008): 68-71.
- 9 Ibid., 69.
- 10 Op. cit., Chagall, 13,17.
- 11 Op. cit., Rajner, "Chagall's 'Jew in Bright Red'": 64.

Benjamin Harshav described this motif in Chagall's work:

He is the embodiment of the fantastic luft-mentshen (people of the air), created in Yiddish literature by Mendele Moykher Sforim and Sholem-Aleichem: they are people who have no income from productive work and live "on air" as well as "in the air," with no ground under their feet, unlike a healthy nation rooted in its own soil. This expression became a key image of self-criticism of the Jewish diaspora existence in most Jewish ideologies, from Zionist to Socialist, as well as by Western Jews in Berlin or New York vis-à-vis their Eastern brethren. Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.), 58.

- 12 John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.
- 13 Chagall wrote this in 1922 Moscow for the Yiddish literary-cultural journal, *Shtrom* (translated as "stream" or "current" and referring to the strong current of the Revolution occurring in Russia at the time). Benjamin Harshav, ed., *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 40.
- 14 Ibid., 105.
- 15 Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 135.
- 16 Ibid., 135-36.
- 17 Ibid., 141.
- 18 Ibid., 147.
- 19 Ibid., 144.
- 20 Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Marc Chagall 1887-1985*. (London: Taschen, 1998) 21.
- 21 Op. cit., Chagall, 66.
- 22 Ibid., 81.
- 23 Ibid., 103.
- 24 Stanley Meisler, *Shocking Paris; Soutine, Chagall, and the Outsiders of Montparnasse* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 83.
- 25 Ibid.

- 26 David C. Jones, "'A Beastly Affair': Visual Representations of Animality and the Politics of the Dreyfus Affair." *Canadian Journal of History* 46, no. 1 (2011): 38.
- 27 Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, 116. This claim reproduced the Medieval linkage of Jewry with usury and financial exploitation, and converted it into a powerful, modern myth that fixed the Jew as a symbol of predatory capitalism (*A Lethal Obsession*, 110).
- 28 Chad Alan Goldberg, "The Jews, the Revolution, and the Old Regime in French Anti-Semitism and Durkheim's Sociology." *Sociological Theory* (2011): 251.
- 29 The separation of people into different classes and races, based on such qualities as the shape of the head, had gained impetus in the early-nineteenth-century through the anthropological studies of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840). Blumenbach claimed that Jews were recognizable through such factors as the peculiar shape of their skull. By the turn of the twentieth century, craniometry, the science of the measurements of the head, was respected as an objective, empirically-based science. The Dutch physician Wachter reported on several more peculiarities of the shape of the Jewish skull and nose, which affected an "odd" way of speaking. The alleged intimacy between these Semitic physical features and mental traits was established by J.C. Lavatar, the founder of physiognomy (the interpretation of facial features), who claimed that these atypical physical traits of the Jews accounted for a specifically Jewish manner of speaking. Characterized by swiftness, this trait served to conflate the Jew with dishonesty (as a "fast talker"), as well as with femininity, as women were believed to speak more quickly than men. Klaus Hoedl, "Physical Characteristics of the Jews." n.d. http://web.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_hoedl.pdf.
- 30 Cécile Bishop and Zoe Roth, "Introduction: Race and the Aesthetic in French and Francophone Cultures." *L'Esprit créateur* 59, no. 2, (Summer 2019): 4.
- 31 Scott Specter, "Modernism without Jews: A Counter-Historical Argument," *Modernism/Modernity* 13, no. 4 (2006).
- 32 Op. cit., David C. Jones, 42.
- 33 Ibid., 41.
- 34 Ibid., 43
- 35 Matthew Francis Rarey, "And the Jet Would Be Invaluable: Blackness, Bondage, and the Beloved," *The Art Bulletin*, (September 2020), 41.

- 36 Andrew Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011.), 214.
- 37 John Ward Monroe, *Metropolitan Fetish: African Sculpture and the Imperial French Invention of Primitive Art*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2019), 6.
- 38 These artists included Chaim Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani—both of whom rarely referenced Jewish themes in their work, and did so in far more oblique ways than Chagall. One of Modigliani's earliest critics, Lomberto Vitali, established a link between the artist's work and his Jewish heritage, see Emily Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics under Fascism," in *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2004), 30. However, it is through recent exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan (*Modigliani: Beyond the Myth* [2004] and *Modigliani Unmasked* [2017-18]), that the most in-depth exploration of Modigliani's works' relationship to his Jewish heritage has been undertaken. My comparative analysis of his work was made possible by the scholarship of Mason Klein (curator at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan, New York) as well as Emily Braun's essay *The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics Under Fascism*, written for the catalogue of *Modigliani: Beyond the Myth*.
- 39 It is important to note that, despite this rise in pogroms, the Revolution also brought about Russian-Jewish emancipation and made Jews legal citizens. This emancipation resulted in a major cultural and artistic revival for Russian-Jews, which Chagall would become deeply involved in—particularly in his work for the Moscow State Yiddish Theater between the years 1920-21. Benjamin Harshav, *The Moscow Yiddish Theater: Art on Stage in the Time of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008); Jeffrey Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington Indian: Indiana University Press, 2000).
- 40 Op. cit., Chagall, 133.
- 41 Ibid., 120.
- 42 Thomas Fuchs, "Empathy, Group Identity, and the Mechanisms of Exclusion: An Investigation into the Limits of Empathy," *Springer Science+Business Media LLC* 38, no. 1 (2007): 240.
- 43 David Beriss, "Culture-as-Race or Culture-as-Culture: Caribbean Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Cultural Identity in French Society," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, eds. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 113.

- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Alexander I. Stingl, "Alexander I Stingl's Blog: A Nomadic Scholarship Entity," September 24, 2011, <https://alexstingl.wordpress.com/2011/09/21/what-is-a-phantasm-second-approach-towards-tackling-this-travelling-concept/> (accessed Apr. 17, 2019). The theoretical relationship between phantasms and history outlined here is linked to a recently developed field revolving around the notion of "haunting" and ghosts or specters. Avery Gordon's 2008 book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* discusses these notions as a means of re-defining sociology and our understanding of history. Gordon observes, "The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention." Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: New University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.
- 46 Homi K. Bhaba, "Foreword to the 1986 Edition," in *Black Skin: White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), xxvi.
- 47 Robert S. Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, (New York: Random House), 23.
- 48 Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Capital, Volume 1*, Marxists.org (1887), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>.

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