

**Shiff, Melissa and Kaplan, Louis**

### **Mapping Ararat: Remembering an Imaginary Jewish Homeland**

What if an autonomous Jewish homeland had been founded in 1825 on the Canadian-U.S. border? Mapping Ararat stages an historical fiction using digital multimedia and geo-locational software including augmented reality in order to image and imagine Mordecai Noah's unrealized dream to transform Grand Island, New York into Ararat, a city of refuge for the Jews. Through the creation of vernacular cultural artifacts and the staging of an on-site augmented reality walking tour, the project playfully summons the cultural memory of an imaginary Jewish homeland.

**Melissa Shiff** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Toronto, a video installation and new media artist, and the director and lead artist on *Mapping Ararat: An Imaginary Jewish Homelands Project* which was awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant. Her work engages Jewish cultural memory, the relationship between religious ritual and performance art, the repurposing of museum collections, and animating the archive using digital technology. Her highly acclaimed video sculpture ARK was the keynote project for the Jewish Museum in Prague's centennial year celebration (2006). She has also created a number of projects and installations that reinvent the Passover ritual including *Passover Projections: Slaves to Memory* and *The Medium is the Matzo*. Her work on Jewish cultural memory has been exhibited in such institutions as the Jewish Museum New York, the Contemporary Jewish Museum San Francisco, and the Israeli Museum for Digital Art in Holon. Website: [www.melissashiff.com](http://www.melissashiff.com)

**Louis Kaplan** is a Professor of History and Theory of Photography and New Media at the University of Toronto. He is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Jewish History in New York where he is completing a manuscript about the cultural discourse related to Jewish wit and the Jewish joke from Weimar Germany to the Holocaust. Professor Kaplan is recognized internationally for his innovative historical and theoretical contributions to the field of photography studies in such areas as spirit photography, photography and community, photographic humor, the New Vision, and photography theory. His books include *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minnesota, 2005) and *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* (Minnesota, 2008). Professor Kaplan is the chief historian and theorist on the *Mapping Ararat* project and he views augmented reality as an extension of his research interest in spectrality. Webpage: [www.utm.utoronto.ca/dvs/louis-kaplan](http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/dvs/louis-kaplan)