Jewish Space Reloaded

An Introduction

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Framing the Question

In 1996 the historian Diana Pinto published her often since quoted and discussed article on 'A New Jewish Identity for Post-1989 Europe'. She was one of the first Jewish intellectuals to reflect on the fall of the Iron Curtain and the resulting political changes and their possible consequences for Jewish communities in Europe. In her article, she introduced the term 'Jewish space' that motivates the focus of this issue, as well as the term 'voluntarily Jewish', which describes the construction of identity free of external prescription. Pinto situates Jewish space in the context of the *Erinnerungspolitik*¹ European democracies engaged in during the 1980s, when Holocaust memorialisation began to assume an institutional form through the establishment of Jewish museums, research institutes and exhibitions. Jewish space is a consequence of these memory practices and the product of *Erinnerungspolitik*:

There is now a new cultural and social phenomenon: the creation of a 'Jewish space' inside each European nation with a significant history of Jewish life. The first is the gradual integration of the Holocaust into each country's understanding of its national history and into twentieth-century history in general. And the second is the revival of 'positive Judaism' (Pinto 1996: 6).

The phenomenon of Jewish space is characterised by two related dimensions: on the one hand, Jewish space results from the incorporation of the Holocaust into national histories. It represents a country's acknowledgement of the disappearance of a local Jewish culture, recognising what has been lost, what remains missing and has not been recovered. On the other hand, it denotes a space that contains 'things Jewish', ethnically marked cultural and social products that can take shape independently of Jews or a Jewish community. Pinto describes Jewish space as a decidedly positive development, a forum where Jews and non-Jews can engage with each other anew.

However, her optimism and the sanguine formulation of the concept no longer appear to be suited to subsequent political develop-

ments, such as the increasing anti-Semitism in Europe and the collapse of the Oslo peace process. Under the influence of the spatial turn in Jewish Studies in the late 1990s, the term ‘space’ also shifted meaning in academic circles since Pinto’s initial essay. Contributors to the present issue grapple with the effect of these developments on the concept of Jewish space. Framing the articles are the following questions: How has the concept of Jewish space evolved since its coinage by Pinto? How have recent social, political and cultural developments like the evolution of an *Erinnerungskultur* and the impact of migration affected European societies? An examination of past European experiences with minorities invites reflection on the position of Jewish communities in European societies and the formulation of Holocaust memory, and more clearly situates the role of debates on immigration and integration in the construction of national European histories.

From Jewish Space to Virtual Jewishness

Since the 1980s, the field of Jewish Studies has undertaken an intensive engagement with the problematic of Jewish space and its urban, cultural and memory-related dimensions (Brauch et al. 2008: 18). While Pinto was one of the first to describe the concept of a Jewish cultural space in a European context, she does not explicitly grapple with the theoretical robustness of the term *space*. Twelve years later the contributors to the book *Jewish Topographies* confronted these complexities, attempting unambiguously to differentiate *space* from *place*. In the book, Jewish space is understood less as a cultural product of European *Erinnerungspolitik*, but rather as a spatial environment in which ‘things Jewish’ happen – one that forms and is formed by Jewish activities:

Jewish spaces are understood as spatial environments in which Jewish things happen, where Jewish activities are performed, and which in turn are shaped and defined by those Jewish activities, such as a sukkah or a Bundist summer camp for children (Brauch et al. 2008: 4).

This attempt at defining Jewish space accents its Jewish character: a space becomes a Jewish space because something ‘Jewish’ transpires there or in relation to it. This shift in emphasis away from a focus on the past reflects changes in European *Erinnerungskultur*. Jewish spaces are clearly marked – former Jewish quarters or neighbourhoods, syn-

agogues and cemeteries – but over the past few decades what makes them Jewish is no longer unambiguous. What is ‘Jewish’ about them, and who determines what qualifies as Jewish? A receding and often absent Jewish presence at these sites opens the door for the re-imagination and re-presentation of their Jewish character, often by non-Jewish actors. While questions of agency remain largely in the background in Pinto’s writing, they serve as the focus of Michal Y. Bodemann’s work on the ‘producers’ of Jewish space, *Gedächtnistheater* (1996). In place of Jewish space, he employs the term *judaïsierendes Milieu* (judaising space) to denote spaces that are substantively constituted by non-Jewish actors. In his view, the term Jewish space describes an intellectual arena created through interest in Jewish history and interpretation of Jewish motifs, both by Jewish and non-Jewish participants. For example, Bodemann notes how literature is full of Jewish topics, Germans are reading Jewish stories in an imaginary Yiddish milieu with Yiddish-like gestures, and even Eastern-European Jewish klezmer music is not only popular, but almost exclusively played by non-Jewish musicians (Bodemann 1996: 52).

Ruth Ellen Gruber offered a third, universal conceptualisation of Jewish space in the early 2000s. She folded the other definitions into her own formulation and expanded the notion of Jewish cultural space to include media and the symbolic (Gruber 2001). For Gruber all manifestations of Jewish culture that comprise this space, from klezmer concerts to Jewish festivals, belong to examples of virtual Jewishness. She aims to examine all of its strategies, actors, motives and forms, and identify a virtual Jewishness that is substantively independent of social formations and cultural affiliation. Gruber writes:

I think of this ‘universalisation’ of the Jewish phenomenon and its integration into mainstream European consciousness, this emergence of a ‘judaising terrain’ and ‘judaising milieu’ in all their widely varied, conscious and unconscious manifestations, as a ‘filling’ of the Jewish space which encompasses the creation of a Virtual Jewishness, a Virtual Jewish World by non-Jews – ‘Virtual Jews’ (Gruber 2001: 69).

As a term, Jewish space has emerged with a wide range of meanings and conceptualisations (see Leveson and Lustig 2006), many of which have been adopted in Jewish Studies. Despite this substantive acceptance, changes in European *Erinnerungskultur* call for us to revisit our understanding of Jewish space and renew our investigation in the light of these developments.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall and *Erinnerungskultur* in Europe

In the past few decades, memory and memorialisation have become key terms in investigating questions of knowledge and memory production, and have spurred a new interdisciplinary exchange between social sciences, cultural studies and neuroscience practitioners. In history, the forms and functions of, and changes in approaches to collective memory have drawn particular attention (Robbe 2009). The historian Hans-Günter Hockerts defined the term *Erinnerungskultur* as a loose umbrella term for the entire range of not specifically academic uses of history in the public domain (Hockerts 2002: 41). In contrast, the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (2009) has described *Erinnerungskultur* as a space in which history manifests itself, both discursively and normatively – as ‘heritage’ – or as the interaction between material traces of the past and symbolic practices of the present. Thus *Erinnerungskulturen* always reflect a process of public negotiation, grappling with conflicts present in bringing together individual experience and collective memory, and politically normative and socially desirable commemoration of popular narratives and critical presentations of history (see Bohn et al. 2008).

The Holocaust and the assumption of responsibility for its memory by European countries constitute the linchpin of Pinto’s notion of Jewish space. Her work emerges from a phase of *Erinnerungskultur* dating to the early 1980s, and which since has been referred to as the period of *Vergangenheitsbewahrung*, conservation of the past (Assman 1999: 145). Aleida Assman elaborates that this phase is identified by the reproduction of the means of remembering. In a paradoxical manner, the establishment of new and additional museums, memorials, dedicated archives and research institutes reinforced the institutionalisation of memory and, through these exercises of political power and influence, normative understandings of the past. More recently, numerous individual projects and initiatives (for example, artist Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* project) constitute a new development and represent an expansion of the established body of stakeholders in the field of memory and memorialisation. These actors, from municipalities to independent artists and citizen groups, have influenced the form and trajectory of *Erinnerungskultur* as well as the work of academic research and state-supported institutions. This new phase is marked not only by a transition of stakeholders, but also by a generational transition (Reulecke 2003). In contrast to older generations,

young people coming of age at the turn of the last century have not encountered eyewitnesses of the Holocaust nor have they heard their testimony directly. Their sources of information are often digital and media in form, from films (for example, *Inglorious Bastards* [2009] or *Iron Sky* [2010]) to Wikipedia and computer games (for example, *Wolfenstein*). Yet, at the same time their understanding of the past and present is shaped far more by multiculturalism than it was for previous generations.

These developments present a substantive challenge to current strategies of talking and teaching about the Holocaust. They unsettle not only the forms but also the contents of current practices and pose a diverse set of questions: How can one relate this understanding of the past to children of immigrants for whom questions about involvement in the Second World War are not part of their familial or communal experience, and who bring with them a different history? How does the conflict in the Middle East influence what is regarded as 'Jewish', as the conflict for many represents the sole representation of what is Jewish? Processes of digitalisation and the globalisation of images generate not only new visual representations of what is Jewish, but above all also influence the practices and strategies of remembering. The importance of visual and digital representation for this generation gives rise to an additional question: What images will ultimately, in a reductive manner, come to shape perceptions of what is 'Jewish'?

Generational transitions (Frei 2005) focus attention on an additional factor – an increasingly prevalent sense of self-satisfaction at successfully navigating torturous straits of history and memory. The often intense public debates surrounding the establishment of commemorative sites particularly in Berlin, such as the Berlin Holocaust memorial or the Jewish Museum Berlin, have broadcast a sense of self-satisfaction at 'successful handling of the past'. It is also visible in various efforts to 're-construct' Jewish culture, from new published volumes compiling texts and photos memorialising the past, to festivals and museum exhibitions. This sense of self-satisfaction has been particularly palpable in the political arena, but is evident among the general public as well. The research that led to the present journal issue² also confirmed this, with interview partners active in the cultural scene in Berlin repeatedly emphasising, as in this typical quote: '*Wir haben uns unserer Schuld gestellt, die Therapie ist beendet*' ('we have confronted our guilt; therapy is over'; interview with S.D., 12 March 2012). This retreat from the previous set of political obligations and, to a certain extent, moral principles signals the start of a new era.

(European) Jewish Space

Pinto concludes her 1996 piece with a pithy remark: 'Europe is not Australia' (1996: 16). She seeks to underscore the persisting and powerful influence of two thousand years of Jewish history in Europe on the manifestations of Jewish life and Jewish space today. In doing so, she also underlines the distinctly European quality to her formulation of Jewish space. Yet the challenge multiculturalism poses to liberal, democratic, Western societies is not exclusive to Europe. The difficulty in integrating minorities, both immigrant and native-born groups, and the progress indicated by accepting and integrating their narratives into a larger national history, as indicated in Pinto's formulation of 'Jewish space', can also be applied more broadly.

One might compare the conditions in Europe that facilitate the cultivation of a Jewish space with those in the United States. In both areas, Jews occupy unique positions that have enabled them to explore new configurations of minority-majority relations. Despite their often small numbers, Jews in Western Europe have occupied a formidable position, in light of the Holocaust, which has allowed them to challenge the establishment on questions of tolerance and inclusion. While relations of Jews with mainstream society in the U.S. were never as fraught as they were in Europe, with no event in Jewish history comparing to the Holocaust in Europe, the barriers they confronted to access resources and opportunities were substantial. Their efforts were not only particularly successful, but often blazed a path other minorities and traditionally excluded groups could follow (Alba 2006; Steinberg 2001).

The privileged position of religious organisations in both sets of societies has also benefited the experience of Jews in the decades following the Second World War, and in part enabled them to integrate, and at a faster pace. In Western Europe, the state often recognises and offers varied levels of direct and indirect support to religious organisations, in different configurations, depending on the national context. Across the Atlantic, although religious organisations receive far less state support, affiliating with an immigrant or ethnic church (or synagogue) has long represented a legitimate way of becoming American and offered newcomers access to needed material and social resources (Hirschman 2004). Immigrant churches and their religious practices have often, however gradually, become 'Americanised', so that rather than representing a foreign element, they too came to constitute part of the native institutional landscape (ibid.). Judaism in the post-war

era benefited, both in Europe and the U.S., from its perceived affinity to Catholicism and Protestantism, as compared with the greater social distance evident in relation to Islam (Foner and Alba 2008). Jews' ability, in both contexts, to access a religious identity and the resources made available through these organisations, regardless of community members' actual religious practices or devotion, offered them a particularly effective platform with which to transact with the mainstream.

While Jewish museums, Jewish studies departments and celebrations of Jewish culture have also proliferated across the United States, they have not taken the form of Jewish space. As Pinto (2010) notes, American Jews have filled most of these non-Jewish institutions, while in Europe non-Jews often play key roles. The potential settings of Jewish space in the U.S. often aim to serve Jews, among a variety of target populations, and often actively contribute to the country's Jewish life. Jackie Feldman and Anja Peleikis, in this issue, note the possible emergence of this phenomenon in places like the Jewish Museum Berlin, but in the U.S., rather than a nascent and yet uncertain occurrence, museums and Jewish studies departments represent established locations for Jews to socialise and be socialised. The reverse is true as well. As Eszter Gantner explores in her piece in this issue, an important driver of Jewish space in Europe is related to tourism, urban branding and the rise of consumable urban lifestyles. While offering the prospect of creating bridges between German and Jewish culture, they do so largely within the frame of commercial transactions. They make fewer demands on participants, and are mediated by a highly abstracted financial currency. As a result, the interactions that occur within these often trendy and ethnic settings are more fleeting and less substantive. These occur in the U.S. as well, from a visit to Katz's Delicatessen, one of the few remaining Jewish delis in New York City, or the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Tourist and transactional settings are constitutive of Jewish life in the U.S. as well, albeit playing a less prominent role. What differs, in part at least, are the proportions that one finds in the U.S. compared to Europe. In the former, Jews are more prevalent as actors, while in the latter not only are non-Jews more likely to be found in key roles, but the institutions they fill are more closely tied to a tourism economy.

The prospect of Jewish space in a contemporary context is the subject of several of the contributions to this issue. Irit Dekel and Victoria Bishop Kendzia, from very different angles, explore the emotional dimensions of Jewish space. Dekel accompanies tour groups at the Holocaust Memorial in the centre of Berlin and explores how non-

Jewish German visitors seek to relate their experience there to contemporary politics on often emotional terms. Bishop Kendzia reflects on her own research experience working with high school students at the Jewish Museum Berlin and examines the different forms of memory produced by the visit.

Concentrating on the possibilities for shaping identities in Jewish space, Jackie Feldman and Anja Peleikis also use the Jewish Museum Berlin as their research site, examining how the museum attempts to relate the Jewish experience, and particularly the prospect of minority integration into German life, to that of students of Muslim-Arab or Turkish background. Like Dekel and Bishop Kendzia, they underscore the degree to which visitors not only pass through these institutions, but make and remake them as they do so. Alina Gromova explores how young, secular Jews in Berlin go about seeking a mate. While Berlin has many Jewish religious institutions, Jewish spaces often characterise its more secular ones and constitute poor choices for those seeking not only to explore what it is to be Jewish, but also to meet other Jews. While many take for granted that the large number of Jewish sites in Berlin yield a particularly vibrant cultural life, Gromova's work emphasises a more differentiated view that considers the type and needs of the resulting space.

Eszter Gantner analyses the re-emergence of Jewish quarters across European cities as sites of culture, branding and consumption. She traces the increasingly marginal position of Jewish communities in the construction of Jewish space alongside the rising prominence of claims of both their authenticity and their exoticism. The examination across the East–West divide – first with a study of Jewish spaces in Budapest and Berlin, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, and then in her contribution here – has created a unique platform from which to launch investigations of the range of political, economic, social and cultural changes that have occurred since Pinto's initial formulation of Jewish space nearly two decades ago. Jay (Koby) Oppenheim concludes by examining the shortfall of the concept of Jewish space, whose promise did not bear fruit as initially hoped, as Diana Pinto herself noted at a workshop convened by Eszter Gantner and Wolfgang Kaschuba that planted the seeds for this journal issue.³ He investigates the controversy surrounding ritual male circumcision, a symbolically potent practice of both Muslims and Jews, as it unfolded in Germany in late 2012. The debate highlighted both the proximity of Jewish and Muslim vulnerabilities and the continued need for an expanded multicultural discourse in Germany, despite the progress

registered since Pinto published her first article on Jewish space. Most notably, his analysis, alongside that of the other contributors in this issue, suggests that a meaningful measure of a public sphere characterised by multiculturalism is not the institutions attributed to it, but the experiences of those inside and outside of these who lay claim to both national and ethnic identities.

Notes

1. *Erinnerungspolitik* and *Erinnerungskultur* are referenced throughout this Introduction and represent a complex of political, social and cultural – particularly, of course, historical – factors that relate to the memory and memorialisation of the Holocaust. The former emphasises their political dimensions and the latter focuses on the cultural ones.
2. *Jüdische Räume: Historische und symbolische Landschaften in Berlin und Budapest* (2010–2012), located at the Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
3. The workshop 'Jewish Spaces Reloaded' was held on the 3rd of May 2012 at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University of Berlin.

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