FROM DESTRUCTION TO PRESERVATION: JEWISH SITES IN GERMANY AND POLAND AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

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In late 2001, I happened upon a small book in the stacks of Potsdam's public library. It was a reprint of a publication prepared for the unveiling of the city's synagogue in 1903. A short chronology of the building's history was added at the end. The last entry noted the building's destruction in 1958. "That's late," I thought to myself. To be sure, I had been thinking about urban reconstruction for some time; otherwise I probably would have just put the book back on the shelf and moved on. The summer before I arrived in Potsdam—fresh out of undergraduate studies on a Fulbright—I was reading any book I could find on urban space, historic preservation, and memory, feeling liberated to explore a new topic after my senior thesis and keeping my mind awake during a sleepy summer job. So I checked out the book, walked downstairs, and started looking for where the synagogue once stood, which ended up being just a couple of dozen feet away. I came across a block apartment building, constructed in the late 1950s like many across the Soviet bloc in the wake of de-Stalinization. I suspected that this was the spot, but was not certain. I had the synagogue's prewar address, but no prewar map. It did not take long, though, before a small plaque, erected I discovered later in 1979, was staring at me: "The synagogue of the Potsdam Jewish community stood at this location. It was plundered and destroyed by the fascists on the night of November 9–10, 1938." No mention of the wrecking ball in 1958, I noted curiously.

Several months later, I traveled to Cracow. I had studied East European and German history as an undergraduate, but was more of a "Germanist" at the time; a few phrases were all the Polish that I knew. Like just about every American in Cracow, I was a tourist, but I walked through the city's preserved "Jewish district" with interest as a budding urban historian. I was struck that, after so many decades of neglect, this area was now being refurbished in a city with almost no Jewish population. Although Cracow never became one of "my" cities, it pushed me to think comparatively. Indeed, when I arrived back in the United States, I had a topic in hand. I now just

had to learn Polish and figure out how to frame it. The Polish would come, and I knew that I wanted to think broadly across space and time: I wanted to connect my two Potsdam and Cracow discoveries, to think about the destruction and preservation of Jewish spaces across national, political, and local borders. My dissertation is the outcome of my efforts to do that. It studies the material traces of Jewish life in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the Polish People's Republic (PPR) in the five urban landscapes of Berlin, Warsaw, Potsdam, Essen, and Wrocław (I decided against Cracow because it is an exceptional case in Poland, and in Europe, for that matter).

When I returned to Europe in 2005 to conduct my dissertation research, I initially thought that I was going to analyze these cities through the prism of memory. It gradually occurred to me, though, that my project involved more than just memory. It also involved tourism, nostalgia, historic preservation, urban modernism, and cosmopolitanism. It meant thinking as much about block apartment buildings as about debates on the Holocaust. I also realized over time that I was not just writing "Polish," "German," and "Jewish" history. The postwar history of Jewish sites is, at its core, about non-Jewish Germans and Poles encountering the material traces of Jewish life in the wake of genocide and ethnic hatred. But as I went from archive to archive, I discovered that many other figures acted in this postwar story—that the history of Jewish sites was transnational and multivocal, with roles for tourists, Jewish leaders, politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and dissidents. Similarly, I first thought that my argument was going to be about national and political differences; that the handling of Jewish sites would fall distinctly along the lines of the Oder-Neisse border and the Iron Curtain. But the deeper I probed, the more I realized that national, political, and local differences shaped a similar history across a diverse region. My aim became to explain the parallels as much as the divergences.

I have attempted to do so by focusing on Germany and Poland. I have selected these two countries not just because I happen to be more familiar with their histories, not just because they were the two countries that caught my traveling eye, or because the Fulbright commission wisely placed me in Potsdam rather than my first choice of Berlin. I have chosen them because several empirical factors bring these two cases together into a sensible comparison around, as the

historian Marc Bloch put it, "differing and, at the same time, related realities."[1] Few societies have faced the burden of the Holocaust—encountering those empty synagogues, streets, and cemeteries—quite as intensely as Germans and Poles have. It was, after all, in Germany that the "Final Solution" originated, and in Poland that it unfolded with the greatest brutality in the midst of its occupation by the Nazis. Moreover, no other European countries have received the amount of international attention regarding the legacies of the Holocaust that Germany and Poland have; Germany because of Nazism and Poland because it was once home to the world's largest Jewish diaspora community. Finally, Jewish sites have dominated postwar German and Polish history as in few other places. To be sure, the problem of shattered Jewish spaces emerged across the continent after the Holocaust, but it has proven to be particularly palpable in Germany and Poland over the past sixty years.

I.

Indeed, the history of Jewish sites has unfolded in rather distinctive ways in Poland and Germany. In the early postwar decades, urban planners, historic preservationists, and local officials in both countries completed the destruction of numerous damaged Jewish sites, or allowed them to ruin by neglect, despite numerous protests from local and international Jewish leaders. International organizations, such as the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization, and the American Joint Distribution Committee, worked with the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the State Association of Jews in the GDR, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, and the Religious Association of the Mosaic Faith in Poland to urge local and national officials to preserve Jewish sites. Jewish leaders were successful at times, particularly in West Germany. In 1956, after years of negotiations, the West German federal government finally agreed to maintain Jewish cemeteries as part of Konrad Adenauer's policy of restitution. In East Germany and Poland, both Communist parties pursued policies toward Jews that oscillated between benign neglect and outright hostility. Jewish leaders encountered many difficulties in both Communist countries, but occasionally succeeded in protecting some Jewish sites.

The different political contexts of the Cold War shaped, then, the handling of Jewish sites, although not always as one might predict. In fact, the protection of Jewish cemeteries in West Germany proved to be an exception. Numerous synagogues were destroyed across the

1 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York, 1953), 42.

Federal Republic just as in East Germany and Poland. In all three countries, Jewish leaders had little power to stop this destruction from happening, not least because they did not legally own these properties. In West Germany, restitution laws returned Jewish communal property to newly created successor organizations, which sold most of it to local governments with the idea of distributing the profits to Holocaust survivors throughout the world. West Germany's Jewish communities could only reclaim the property that they were currently using (a tiny amount given the small size of the postwar communities). In East Germany and Poland, the party-state rejected restitution and confiscated all Jewish property. But while the reasons differed, the effect across the Iron Curtain was the same. In the FRG, GDR, and PPR, municipal officials controlled Jewish communal property and were the ones who decided what to do with it.

Their decisions led to destruction across the region throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Urban modernism and Stalinist socialist realism dominated urban reconstruction at this time in divided Germany and Poland. Both approaches had little regard for preserving much of anything, but many non-Jewish historic sites were reconstructed. Germans and Poles made deliberate choices about what to preserve from the ruins of war. In selecting what was culturally valuable, they were also making choices about what was not. In the 1950s and 1960s, Poles and Germans rarely perceived Jewish sites to be part of the national or local heritage worth maintaining.

In Warsaw, for example, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or PZPR) restored the old town, while using the former Jewish district to construct a massive socialist-realist housing complex. In an eclectic blend of old and new, urban planners combined modernism, socialist realism, and historical reconstruction into one single rebuilding project. Historic preservationists meticulously rebuilt Warsaw's old town in one of the largest historical reconstruction projects of postwar Europe. The old town became lined with staged "historic" buildings, which displayed the cathartic, redemptive survival of the city after the Nazi occupation. The old town became a space to experience, photograph, and witness reconstructed markers of the nation. This restorative impulse denied the irreversibility of time by claiming that Warsaw's past had never truly been lost.

Brushing against the perimeter of the old town, Warsaw's main Jewish district, Muranów, was never slated for restoration. It was

instead turned into a housing complex. In the late 1940s, the project's main architect, Bohdan Lachert, initially sought to articulate the trauma of the area, which the Nazis destroyed as they crushed the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. He decided to build his apartments directly on top of the ruins, dramatizing the idea of Warsaw coming back to life from destruction. Lachert connected Muranów to Warsaw's resurrection not just materially, but also symbolically; the project would serve as a kind of oblique architectural encounter with the abject past of the Holocaust. He left the front of the buildings unstuccoed with a dark red, rusty brick that would capture the somberness of the ghetto space. As Lachert explained, "the history of the great victory of the nation paid for through a sea of human blood, poured out for the sake of social progress and national liberation, will be commemorated in the Muranów project."[2] But his ideas were strongly criticized in the early 1950s, as socialist realism swept across the Soviet bloc. Socialist realism aimed to document the triumph of communism over capitalism. In the built environment, it aimed to transcend the "cosmopolitan," "bourgeois" functionalism of urban modernism by constructing buildings socialist in content and national in form. What this meant in practice was the construction of large, monumental, and ornate buildings across Eastern Europe. The PZPR decided to stucco Lachert's buildings, and painted small designs with decorative ornaments on the white surface. Muranów was now to be a cheerful, bright, and colorful place for the working class. "New, bright houses grow on the ruins of the ghetto," the main party newspaper wrote. "These houses and the forest of scaffoldings that are rising up throughout all of Warsaw are evidence to the constantly growing power of peace and socialism."[3] Whereas Warsaw's old town was perceived as a great national loss that must be restored, its rubble sorted through for even the minutest architectural piece, Muranów was seen as scattered debris that could be shoveled up for the construction of the socialist future.

In Berlin, a similarly grandiose rebuilding scheme never emerged, in large part because of the city's division. The large-scale competing Cold War projects of the *Hansaviertel* and *Stalinallee* were exceptions, but for the most part, rows of plain housing complexes dominated the postwar urban landscape of both Berlins. Numerous damaged historic buildings were demolished, including Berlin's many synagogues. Jewish leaders in divided Berlin—home to the largest Jewish communities of West and East Germany—contested

2 Bohdan Lachert, "Muranów–Dzielnica mieszkaniowa," *Architektura* Nr. 5 (1949): 132.

3 *Trybuna Ludu*, "W ósmą rocznicę powstania w ghetcie," April 19, 1951.

this demolition. When the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or SED) decided to tear down the sanctuary of the New Synagogue in 1958, the East Berlin Jewish community was able to save the building's façade. In West Berlin, the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) often had conflicts with district officials about Jewish sites.

The "New Synagogue" on Oranienburgerstrasse in East Berlin in 1961. Photo: AP Photos.

The most striking example was the synagogue on Fasanenstrasse in the Charlottenburg district. The massive stone structure survived the war intact, but the Nazis heavily destroyed its interior and roof. After the war, district authorities showed no interest in providing basic forms of protection after repeated cases of vandalization. By the early 1950s, the synagogue had become so run-down that the police deemed it a public safety threat and demanded that the JRSO erect a fence around the building. The JRSO was hardly amused. In a lengthy reply, it stated that it was not responsible for providing security for a building that the Nazis had destroyed. "The fact that the building is currently in such a condition that it provides safe haven for asocial elements and prostitutes is not because of wartime destruction but because of *Kristallnacht*," it wrote. "We assume that your letter to us was processed just routinely without taking into consideration the peculiarity of this case."[4] In 1957, the synagogue was demolished. A parking lot was to be built in its place, but at the last moment the SPD-dominated government of Berlin intervened and decided to erect a Jewish community center instead.

4 JRSO to Building Inspection, January 5, 1954, Landesarchiv-Berlin, B Rep. 207, Nr. 143.

Similarly, in Essen, the city's towering stone synagogue remained abandoned for years after the war and fell into deep disrepair. Essen's small Jewish community had no interest in maintaining the building, and the city government did nothing to protect it. Finally, in 1956, city officials decided to do something with the synagogue. In an odd move, they turned it

The Destruction of the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in West Berlin in 1957. Photo: Ullstein-Bild / Granger Collection.

into the House of Industrial Design. The interior of the building was changed to exhibit the wonders of the German economic miracle. This transformation of Essen's synagogue starkly uncovers the ambivalence of one local community to the absence of Jewish life after the Holocaust. In contrast to the GDR and Poland, the West German state developed an official policy of restitution and German-Jewish cooperation, but this shift on the federal level did not penetrate deeply into local society and politics during the 1950s. The few protests that emerged in Essen never broached the issue, which remained eerily absent as the synagogue remained in damaged form, trees and grass growing out from its charred cupola, pieces of stone falling off its façade onto the nearby street—why no one was around in the first place to take care of the building. The Essen synagogue marked the murderous expulsion of Jews from the city. It symbolized an anxious, abject past that reminded Esseners of their own involvement in a dictatorship of war and genocide. Turning the synagogue into an exhibition of consumer products was an attempt to control this anxiety by sanitizing the building of its past.

In Potsdam, the synagogue was not transformed but torn down. The building, erected in 1903, survived both *Kristallnacht* and allied bombs. With a mere two survivors after the war, a Jewish community did not reemerge in the city until decades later, after the collapse

The Interior of the Essen Synagogue as the House of Industrial Design in the 1960s. Photo: Stadtbildstelle Essen.

of Communism, with the migration of Russian Jews to reunified Germany. The synagogue remained standing until 1958 when the city decided to tear it down to build an apartment complex. Few in Potsdam voiced much concern about the decision. The GDR's Institute for Historic Preservation, which for years had been challenging the destruction of Potsdam's historic buildings, made no effort to save the building; it did not perceive the synagogue to be a site worthy of preservation. In the early postwar years, most preservationists understood their task largely in terms of "age value," and emphasized the protection of buildings predating the mid-nineteenth century. In Potsdam, the youngest structure on its list of historic monuments was a home built in 1838.[5]

But the synagogue's young age was not the only reason for its exclusion. In the 1950s, East German preservationists adhered to a classical understanding of protecting "national" heritage. The canon of historic sites in the GDR often included traditional examples such as town halls, castles, and churches. The party used historic preservation to emphasize the distinctly "German" aspects of its regime. At the same time, the SED aimed to develop "a progressive, democratic culture" that stood in direct opposition to cultural developments in West Germany, calling for "a resolute and ruthless fight against all manifestations of neo-fascist, reactionary culture and decadence." It involved, in a phrase, "resistance against all cosmopolitan tendencies."[6] After the SED's campaign in 1951–52 against "cosmopolitanism," Jews and their cultural heritage became suspiciously linked to the West.[7] In short, city officials, party leaders, and historic preservationists ignored the synagogue partly because it was a Jewish site. The synagogue fell outside the culturally constructed boundaries of the historic; it never received the kind of attention that other historic structures in Potsdam did.

5 "Objektliste der künstlerischen Baudenkmale (Einzelobjekte)," 1956, Potsdam Stadtarchiv, file 388.

6 "Verordnung zur Entwicklung einer fortschrittlichen demokratischen Kultur des deutschen Volkes und zur weiteren Verbesserung der Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen der Intelligenz vom 16. März 1950," Gesetzblatt Nr. 28, March 23, 1950 in *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin, 1950).

7 Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

Prejudice against Jews was clearest, though, in Communist Poland. Wrocław, a city with a shifting history under Piast, Bohemian, Austrian, Prussian, and German rule, became part of Poland in 1945 with the westward shift of the country's border. Portrayed after the war as having eternally "Polish" roots, Wrocław expunged its most recent status as Breslau and became "Polish," complete with the expulsions of Germans and the forced resettlement of Poles. As the most important city on Poland's new frontier, Wrocław was key to the regime's integration of the "recovered territories" into the rest of Poland. As Gregor Thum has shown, the state carefully reconstructed the city's old town and churches to make Wrocław "Polish."[8] None of the city's Jewish sites fit into this national recovery. In 1954, the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland noted after a visit

The Apartment Building Constructed on the Site of the Potsdam Synagogue in 2006. Photo by author.

to the Jewish cemetery on Lotnicza Street that its grounds were "in a condition of complete neglect."[9] It also discovered disturbing signs of vandalism: "It was found that countless graves had been dug up with scattered human remains. The graves have been systematically dug up in search of gold teeth and valuables."[10] The city's only surviving synagogue also fell into terrible condition after years of neglect. In 1966, local officials even closed the building down as a physical hazard, forcing Wrocław's small Jewish community to vacate their own synagogue. In 1973, the state confiscated the building. Thereafter, the synagogue continued to suffer from vandalism and neglect, as the city did nothing with it for the next two decades.

II.

But the ravages of time and the bulldozer did not destroy every Jewish site in postwar Germany and Poland. Jewish sites were, in fact, some of the last ruins of the war located on otherwise reconstructed streets. By the early 1970s, a growing number of Germans, Poles, and Jews started to become interested in preserving them. Their efforts were small and local at first: East Berliners cleaning up tombstones at the Jewish cemetery in the district of Weißensee; Varsovians doing the same at their Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street; Esseners demanding that the synagogue be returned to its

8 Gregor Thum, *Die fremde Stadt: Breslau 1945* (Berlin, 2003).

9 TSKŻ to Ministry of Culture and Art, July 15, 1954, Archiwum Akt Nowych, 22/43.

10 Ibid.

prewar interior. This interest in Jewish sites gradually expanded beyond the local level. By the mid-1980s, Jewish sites were attracting national and international attention. A number of restoration efforts soon followed: In Essen, city officials, local citizens, and historians restored the city's synagogue to its original interior design; East Germany's political leadership decided on the 85-million-mark restoration of the New Synagogue in East Berlin that had been left bombed-out for four decades; and the PZPR restored Warsaw's only remaining synagogue and staged a massive international event at the former site of the ghetto, its rubble buried under apartment complexes and tree-lined avenues constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. In a region with almost no Jews, a veritable renaissance of Jewish culture started to take place in the built environment.

This transformation unfolded for a number of reasons. In the late 1960s and '70s, longings for a "lost" past swept across parts of Europe and the world. Global protest, economic insecurity, and disillusionment challenged the modern, optimistic belief in progress. Modernity had not just failed to produce constant improvement, but had caused death, inequality, imperialism, and repression in both its democratic and communist guises. In the built environment, modernity's destructive impulses were on clear display in the rows of plain, functional buildings that

The Restored Interior of the Essen Synagogue in 1988. Photo: Stadtbild-stelle Essen.

replaced the city's historic, particular form. This critique of modernity was expressed in multiple ways, but one of the most common was an interest in the historic. In the built environment, people became concerned about the few ruins left around them.

The rediscovery of Jewish sites was part of this broader postmodern embrace of the historic, but it also emerged for specific reasons across national and political borders. In East Germany and Poland, Jewish sites became a politically contested issue, as ruling elites experienced growing pressure, both domestically and internationally, to rethink their earlier anti-Jewish policies. Just as the SED and PZPR were looking to improve their image abroad in the early 1980s, Jewish

The Wroclaw Synagogue Slowly Being Restored in 2006. Photo by author.

sites started attracting attention from tourists, Jewish leaders, and foreign journalists. International interest turned Jewish sites into a political issue that the SED and PZPR had to mitigate. Both parties selectively restored Jewish sites in their capital cities and held events commemorating the Holocaust. But in doing so, they only made the problem worse, as international attention grew stronger, and segments of society dismissed their sudden embrace of Jewish culture as insincere. Jewish sites became another issue that divided state and society as Communism weakened across Eastern Europe.

This conflict over Jewish sites was particularly strong in Poland because of its "anti-Zionist" campaign. In 1967–68, the PZPR targeted Jews in the largest anti-Jewish assault of post-Holocaust Europe.[11] Some 13,000 Jews fled the country. Several factors contributed to the rise of this campaign: fractional divisions in the PZPR, resistance to Communist rule, the nationalization of Polish Communism, conflict in the Middle East, and the anti-Zionism that swept across the Soviet bloc in 1967–68. What is important here, though, is that it stimulated a substantial debate among intellectuals, writers, and dissidents about Polish-Jewish relations. The year 1968 reawakened the "Jewish problem" (*problem żydowski*) among segments of Poland's intelligentsia and general population. The anti-Zionist campaign shattered the postwar notion that Jews

11 Anat Plocker, "Zionists to Dayan: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968," (Ph.D diss., Stanford University, 2009); Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968* (Warsaw, 2000).

had vanished from Poland. Few Jews lived in the country anymore, but their absence increasingly provoked discussion and reflection. By the early 1980s, Poland was experiencing its most intense dialogue about its Jewish minority since 1945. Most of those involved in the discussions were associated with the opposition and/or the progressive Catholic intelligentsia. Some Poles became interested in discussing Polish-Jewish relations in part as they worked through what a more humane, post-Communist Poland might look like.

Such direct tension between state and society was less overt in West Germany. Jewish sites in the FRG never became a nationally or internationally contested problem that the federal state had to step in to resolve. West Germany had developed strong relations with the United States and Israel during the postwar years. Thus, Jewish sites remained largely a local issue. As the Holocaust became widely discussed in the 1980s, historians, religious leaders, politicians, and ordinary citizens, typically on the Left, challenged the early postwar handling of Jewish sites, and conflicts over neglected or transformed Jewish sites erupted across the country. Their sheer number is striking: the synagogue in Kippenheim was renovated and turned into a Jewish museum after serving as storage for agricultural products for over three decades; a citizens' coalition fought to preserve the archaeological remnants of Frankfurt's earlier Jewish community; a controversy erupted as a new mall was built on part of the Jewish cemetery in Hamburg; the synagogue in Rendsburg was turned into a Jewish museum after functioning as a fish smokehouse since 1939; local residents pushed city officials to place an exhibition on the Third Reich in Essen's synagogue; a group of citizens in Berlin-Schöneberg researched the history of their district's Jewish past and developed a memorial route to inscribe the absence of the Jewish community in the urban environment. The list could go on much longer.

In three different states, then, Jewish sites became of interest to a variety of social actors who contested dominant memories and politics. The 1980s proved to be pivotal years in West Germany, Poland, and East Germany. In the PPR and GDR, intellectuals, dissidents, and ordinary citizens got involved in efforts to restore Jewish sites in part to contest the regime, while in the FRG leftist politicians and activists acted in part to challenge the Christian Democratic demand for normalizing the Nazi past. At the same time, Jewish tourism and international attention about the Holocaust were increasing in the two Germanys and Poland. By the early 1980s,

tourists, international Jewish leaders, and foreign journalists began to pay attention to the material traces of Jewish life. This interest was strongest in Poland in the wake of 1968 as American and Israeli Jewish leaders became concerned about the state of Jewish life in the country. But divided Germany also received international attention, and the two states competed with each other over embracing "Jewishness" in the 1980s. West Berlin finally approved the construction of the Berlin Jewish Museum at the height of the GDR's celebration of *Kristallnacht*, while Erich Honecker's regime restored the Adass Yisroel Cemetery in East Berlin in response to West German newspaper coverage about its neglected condition.

Since the collapse of communism in 1989, this growing interest in Jewish sites has only increased. Tourists in the tens of thousands from the United States, Israel, Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere have been traveling to Poland and, increasingly, Germany in search of the "Jewish past," while Germans and Poles have continued to be drawn to almost anything perceived to be "Jewish." People both far and near have become attracted to Jewish spaces for a variety of reasons—heritage tourism, growing transnational discussions about the Holocaust, postmodern fascinations with the historic, nostalgia for a lost past, and longings for cosmopolitanism in a globalizing world. While the motivations are varied, the effects are clear. Jewish culture has now become something to be touched, photographed, preserved, and displayed. Jewish sites have become what they were not just a few decades earlier: pieces of "heritage" that must be saved, "historic monuments" marked for their historical importance and perceived authenticity.

Some have bemoaned this restorative impulse for creating virtual Jewish worlds on a continent with no real Jews. Tourism and preservation have produced kitschy Jewish Disneylands of Klezmer music, restaurants, museums, and anything else that can be marketed as "Jewish."[12] Of course, this involves constructions, productions, and reifications of Jewishness, but it does not produce a fake variant of Jewish culture. For what is "really" Jewish and what is not? Who makes these distinctions in a world of multiple meanings of, and identifications with, Jewishness? Indeed, the contemporary obsession with what one imagines to be Jewish cannot simply be reduced to kitsch. A deeper impulse for something seemingly real underlies it. Authenticity is not some stable, measurable quality; it is above all an affective desire for what one perceives to be real and unique.

12 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley, 2002).

Walter Benjamin once defined authenticity as the "aura," or the perception of distance and authority, that we give to works of art.[13] Although he believed that modern technological reproduction was freeing art from this culturally endowed uniqueness, the opposite has actually occurred in our globalizing, capitalist world. The desire for perceived temporal distance and uniqueness has only increased through "the fear of inauthenticity" that global technological reproduction and consumption have provoked.[14]

III.

This impulse to restore Jewish sites represents a rather peculiar twist in postwar European history. Two societies that violently expunged Jews forty years earlier started inviting them back into the built environment. What are we to make of this change? I see in it a number of tensions, especially in the appropriation of Jewishness for the celebration of cosmopolitanism and tolerance in a post-fascist and post-communist world. Jews have long been linked to cosmopolitanism, for better or worse , depending on who is doing the interpreting. In the late nineteenth century, Jews were often portrayed as city-dwellers with innumerable undesirable characteristics: the rootless cosmopolitan who has no ties to the nation; the city-dwelling banker who causes economic misfortune; the urban criminal who brings prostitution, pornography, and incest. In an industrializing world, Jews were scorned and scapegoated for the social, cultural, and economic anxieties of modernity that they allegedly symbolized—what Shulamit Volkov long ago termed "antisemitism as a cultural code."[15]

In contemporary Europe, the opposite is now more often the case: The presence of Jews, or more precisely Jewish "heritage," has become code for what one desires rather than dislikes. Restored Jewish sites have turned into public representations of imagined Jewish-gentile symbiosis and cosmopolitan tolerance. They are transformed into spaces of what I call more precisely redemptive cosmopolitanism. The recovery of material traces atones for the Holocaust, and displays tolerance for local, national, and transnational consumption. Jews are brought back into contemporary Polish and Germany society—they become "Jewish co-citizens" and "co-stewards of this land" (*Mitbürger, współobywatele, współgospodarze*). One speaks of their "enormous contribution" to a "joint history" of symbiotic, harmonious relations broken only by brief periods of catastrophic and ethnic nationalism. This redemptive cosmopolitanism has a

13 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

14 Andreas Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," *Grey Room* (Spring 2006): 11.

15 Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, no. 23 (1978): 25-46.

cathartic appeal and effect. The recovery of Jewish culture promises to absolve Germans and Poles of past sins by recalling the past, and reconstructing a tolerant, democratic society in the present. Jewish sites become signifiers of successful rehabilitation and respectful mourning. Tolerance manages the anxiety of the traumatic, abject past; it controls discomfort and aversion by displaying the Holocaust in public space.[16] Whereas in the early postwar decades, Poles and Germans controlled the abject past by expelling it, they now manage the Holocaust by publicly embracing it.

In two countries on a dark continent that has seen genocide, war, expulsions, and ethnic hatred, redemptive cosmopolitanism has appeal, all the more so in Germany, as the primary source of Europe's violent half century, and the country where the leftist belief in redemption through "enlightened knowledge" has deep roots stretching back to the early years of the Social Democratic Party.[17] Redemptive cosmopolitanism is perhaps not altogether that harmful, given its alternative. But, at a moment when Jewish life in both countries is growing, Jews remain a "problem" to be discussed, used, and examined. Just as Jews are embraced, they are held at a distance. Jews are not "citizens" but "co-citizens" who are tolerated and used for political rehabilitation. Redemptive cosmopolitanism reinforces ethnic difference, even as it strives to overcome ethnic nationalism. It is rooted solipsistically in a politics of national recovery, even as it aims to imagine beyond the national collective self.

Indeed, redemptive cosmopolitanism harnesses the Holocaust for a kind of European utopianism as Germany and Poland return to "Europe" precisely at a moment when the continent remains divided socially and politically. Jews are now part of Europe in a way that some other minorities are not.[18] The social, cultural, and legal position of immigrants who have come to Europe through postcolonial, labor, and asylum migration remains precarious. As these conflicts unfold, the embrace of the "Jewish co-citizen," the display of restored Jewish sites, and the building of Jewish museums provide brief reprieves of imagined cosmopolitanism, pluralism, and tolerance.

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16 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, 2006).

17 Michael Geyer, "The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany," in *Radical Evil*, ed. Joan Copjec (New York, 1996): 170.

18 John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton, 2007); Rita Chin et al., *After the Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor, 2009); Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging* (Durham, 2008); Jeffrey M. Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (New Brunswick, 2006); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, 2007).