Architecture of Memory

Exploring (post-) Jewish spaces in Eastern Europe

Natalia Romik

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Architecture of Memory
Exploring (post-) Jewish Spaces in Eastern Europe

Natalia Romik

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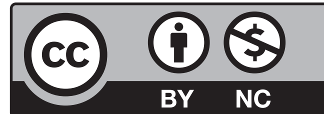

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This book is dedicated to the loving memory of Professor Jonathan Hill (1958–2023), my treasured PhD supervisor with whom I shared a passion for invisible architecture.

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Introduction

No more will you find in Poland
Jewish shtetls
Hrubieszów, Karczew, Brody,
Falenica
In vain will you seek in the windows
lighted candles
And search for the sound of chants
from the wooden synagogue.

The last scourings, the Jewish rags
have vanished
They sprinkled sand over the blood,
swept away the footprints
And whitewashed the walls with
bluish lime
As after a plague or a great day of
fasting.[1]

Antoni Słonimski, 'Elegy for the shtetls' (1947)

Despite the sentiments of Słonimski's poem, I am not so sure that *shtetls* – that is, predominantly Jewish towns that spanned Central/Eastern Europe before the Second World War – are no more. As a small child in 1980s Poland, I went every week with my grandmother to Nasielsk and Nowe Miasto, two former *shtetls*, located 40 kilometres north of Warsaw. We bought chickens, colourful buttons and crystal glasses, which I have been collecting ever since.

Even though Nasielsk had been a typical Mazovian *shtetl* in 1939, when 60 per cent of the population was Jewish, today one would not meet a single Jew living there. Wandering around its crooked streets and one-storey houses, some of which recall pre-war times, an unskilled eye would not be able to detect a single memorial or obvious trace related to Jewish presence.

The former Jewish period in Nasielsk has not been commemorated in a *pinkas* (record book) or by a 'memory map' drawn later retrospectively by émigré citizens. Nor is there a *yizkor* (memorial book) to honour neighbours brutally murdered in the Holocaust, possibly because none survived the war, or no one was interested in writing one. Yet their spectres are everywhere, imbued in the town's architectural details. Looking from another angle, one begins to realise that the shops, workshops and houses have not changed much. Urban redevelopment – a force of historical entropy which replaces old with new – has been weak enough in Nasielsk not to erase a sign of a doorway *mezuzot*, or a Star of David on a rotten but exquisitely carved wooden window, which has not been altered even when inserted into a new frame, made from plastic as a kitschy expression of modernisation.

Instead, the past in these post-*shtetls* like Nasielsk is simply fading away in the slow rhythm typical of remote provincial villages and towns; hence the built traces, neither deliberately kept nor forcefully erased, just silently vanish one by one, in the last stages before disappearing altogether. In 2009, an American writer, Glenn Kurtz, found in the attic of his parents' Florida house an old movie-reel made during a European trip by his grandparents in 1938. This reel, in three minutes of full colour, records pre-war Jewish Nasielsk. It captures a marketplace on a regular day, houses glowing in the sun, painted wooden doors and windows facing a square; a group of kids smiling at the camera, a couple of adults unsure how to deal with this strange novelty. When Kurtz showed this movie in Nasielsk he caused an uproar, with local people genuinely interested in the life of the pre-war *shtetl*, otherwise erased from their cultural memory. Kurtz addressed them in the school, then left, leaving behind the 'present absence' of Jewish neighbours, imprinted in the material texture, in the wooden shacks for pigeons, in *mezuzot* and brick walls, in narrow stairways leading to shops behind which Jewish traders once resided with their families. Now other people live there.

One question has haunted me for years, fuelled by childhood memories and recent trips to Nasielsk: how can one reawaken the cultural memory of these villages and towns among their current inhabitants? How does one show them Jewish life in a town they consider their own, or the faces of people who lived there, kids who went to the schools that their own kids attend, of synagogues where people chanted in foreign tongues, or market squares where wares were exchanged. It is a task made trickier by the fact that local people live now in the same houses that belonged to someone unfamiliar and unrelated: that is, to a Jewish neighbour.

This sense of 'present absence' still permeates these post-*shtetl* villages and towns, caught in a limbo: neither fully re-domesticated by Poles, Ukrainians or Byelorussians, nor just ghost settlements. Rather, they brim with life, which – as so frequent among living people – offers a way of evading the responsibility to commemorate. Yet this also means one is not able to forget. A house or a synagogue was never fully 'ours'; but neither is it really 'theirs' now. Present-day people occupy the properties, but would they decide to make the substantial investment in replacing them? Will they renew the dwellings, or leave them as harrowing ruins – memorials to historical decay? My theoretical investigations and projects react to this dilemma by arguing that new life can settle only by honouring the past, and that to reuse architecture materially, one has to appease the spectral apparition of Jewish *shtetls*, which otherwise blink on the verge of cultural memory.

In the following chapters, I present and discuss conceptual designs and artistic interventions that make extensive use of archives, nomadism and mirrors as tools to challenge the paradox of 'present absence' within former Jewish *shtetls*. My aim is to test new ways of unclogging the forces and channels of urban development there. As a working method, I begin with an

I.1

I.1 Nasielsk, a day on the market square, c. 1970, photograph by E. Mościcki. Image from Olgierd Puciata and Aleksander Gieysztor, *Mazowsze: Krajobraz i architektura*. Arkady, 1971.

intervention at each site, which solidifies into an alliance, usually with local individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or municipalities. These alliances – negotiating between the Jewish spectres and current living populations – start to establish new cultural centres in empty synagogues, pre-funeral houses or other Jewish buildings of significance. Yet my work is not solely about reusing material infrastructure: my ventures also involve subtle interventions into the processes of social memory by activating hidden archives, putting them into the open as mediators that translate between people there in the present and those who once lived there before. To play this role, I resort to the methodological repository of architectural design and conceptual art.

I consider my methods, expanding on Andrew Boyd's insights into the performative borderlands of art and activism, as a form of 'white magic'.[2] I purposefully use mirrors and optical illusions in my designs, not as dishonest tricks, but as useful and enjoyable deceptions – a means to conjure forth memories that my audiences would otherwise be anxious about recognising. So it was in September 2014, when I carried a small mirror-covered box, conceived as an architectural hurdy-gurdy, into the small Polish town of Częstochowa, conjuring up archival materials in front of a bewildered public.

12 September 2014 (17:37)
Warm, sunny, street in Częstochowa old town

– 'Where are you putting these photos and materials? They seem to disappear . . .'
– 'This is . . . a box.'
– 'A magic one?'
– 'Yes, magic.'

Methodological incursions

This book is based upon investigations conducted as attempts to grasp the processes of architectural disappearance, urban remembrance and functional change in the face of dramatic social upheaval. The research focuses upon former *shtetls* which were widespread as villages and towns throughout Central and Eastern Europe before the Second World War. Post-war, these settlements were repopulated by people of other nationalities, living in and reusing what had been mostly Jewish properties. Today, traces of the former Jewish populations have all but disappeared, not only from urban reality, but also from

public discourse and memory. My interest is thus in discovering alternative channels to redevelop the abandoned Jewish architecture of post-*shtetls*, such as the ruins of synagogues, ritual baths, and so on.

Through my experiments, I wish to find a new approach to architectural design and theory that can address the specificity of the former *shtetls*, given that architects have to deal with the residues of historical processes while trying to stimulate urban renewal. I have developed, and tested in the field, design methods which apply disembodied, philosophical concepts like Jacques Derrida's hauntology and spectrology, Walter Benjamin's aura, Gilles Deleuze's nomadology and Slavoj Žižek's parallax view, as ways to address the paradoxes inherent in the 'present absence' of post-*shtetls*. As will be argued in this book, when dealing with the aftermath of such a harrowing event as the Holocaust, such concepts are key in formulating responses to the challenges of post-traumatic urban regeneration. To unblock the redevelopment process, I have to 'defrost' a lost layer of architectural memory through philosophical concepts and artistic interventions/projects that reveal the deposits of cultural memory accumulated within buildings. To achieve my aim, I have assembled an interdisciplinary toolkit that links urban, historical and social studies of former *shtetls* with physical experimentation on the abandoned buildings of lost Jewish communities. Hence, I combine interdisciplinary references to diverse academic practices such as Jewish studies, philosophy, cultural studies, architectural design (vernacular and permanent), public art, urban studies, architectural theory and history, political science and ethnology.

What I therefore present in this book are inspirational and practical methods to synthesise the restoration of Jewish memory in Eastern Europe – focusing mostly on Poland – with current processes of urban regeneration, by preserving and integrating traces of the past into reconstructions of ex-Jewish buildings. This functional reuse of revitalised (post-) Jewish architecture is based on abstract art, thereby developing new visual channels for negotiation and reconciliation. My interventions and installations are hence designed to showcase the former functions of the architectural spaces while embracing a transformative dialogue with current users.

To grasp the intersections between different operational modes (architectural design, conceptual art, public intervention, etc.) and theoretical explanations, I employ separate metaphors to highlight particular aspects of my work. Each chapter of the book is centred upon particular projects. My instruments – which I consider to be my 'helpers', or even 'heroines', as explained later – help to orient the flow of the discourse and dictate the introduction of conceptual elements. For instance, I introduce the concept of 'nomadism' when discussing my project for the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, a mobile archive of Jewish memory, which I toured around former *shtetls* in south-west Poland during 2016. Correspondingly, I talk about 'mirrors' and optical illusions when referring to the design of *JAD*, an instrument of urban protest in the form of a large mirrored

hand deployed in 2012 in sites of architectural decay in Upper Silesia. I expand on 'walking' and 'magic' in the chapter on *Hurdy-Gurdy*, a portable archive, also covered in mirrors, which I took around the streets of Częstochowa in mid-2014. From this it is clear that all my projects are in some sense nomadic, all employ mirrors and white magic, and all involve walking. I will discuss them as if they were separate, yet in my mind they are the same. This unity of design is best seen in the chapter about 'archives', since each of my designs tests out a specific mode of unclogging memory and activating potential redevelopment.

Three states of design: Liquid, gaseous and solid

In my projects, I wish to avoid creating any artificial distinctions – for example, by suggesting that nomadic architectural interventions are less socially embedded than permanent structures. I believe otherwise, arguing for a conceptual continuity between transitory designs and brick-and-mortar investments. To portray this idea of transition, I propose a metaphor of three primary states of design – liquid, gaseous and solid – which helps me to resolve the shift between theory and practice.

Just as water flows, evaporates or turns into ice, my designs either flow nomadically into social contexts, being thought about in the clouds of design references, or else solidify into new interpersonal constellations, as the basis for eventual financial investments. All are embedded in the context of former *shtetls* yet permeate them in different ways.

The liquid forms of my conceptual art performances and installations intervene in the urban reality of the post-*shtetls*: I move along with them, walk and travel from site to site. Through nomadic motion, I am able to liquefy the archives of Jewish memory, transforming them into a flow that enters the daily lives of current inhabitants.

These interventions solidify into new social alliances and evolve into plans for urban regeneration, commencing with investment which enables synagogues to be reconstructed as historical museums or Jewish pre-burial houses to become cultural centres.

The gaseous form of design comes from a cluster of references, concepts and spectres, the vaporous constellation of which I try to capture in my writing: this forms the soul of my design research, imbuing it with the special powers necessary to unravel the knots created by 'present absence'.

All three states of design appear in the book's chapters, albeit to various different degrees. This book proposes no division between theory and practice, intervention and building: these are distinctions that are irrelevant to the process of narration, which duly overcomes them.

The political context of design

I conducted my research amid the worsening political atmosphere created by an authoritarian turn in Polish politics, which has accelerated significantly since the 2016 elections, when the right-wing conservative party called Law and Justice won a majority. Their rise to power was eased by xenophobic rhetoric against Muslims and

other immigrants, from the onset resembling anti-Semitic tropes and nationalist sentiments from the 1930s – the latter then being subsumed by Nazism. What in 2016 seemed a worry, in 2018 erupted into a full-blown international crisis when the Polish parliament voted in legislation to penalise anyone deemed guilty of 'ungrounded accusations of the Polish Nation for the crimes committed by Nazi Germany . . . or any other crimes against humanity.'[3]

This law was openly criticised as stifling public debate about Polish responsibility for some crimes that took place in the Holocaust, blocking thereby the protracted process of reconciliation with Poland's troubled past. Even though the legislation was partially watered down after international outrage, the atmosphere has thickened since, given that the law enables libel cases by Polish citizens against historians whose research is claimed as slander. In 2018, two Holocaust researchers, Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, were accused by a private individual of inaccurately accusing his ancestor of cooperation with the Nazi authorities that resulted in the murder of Jews. The plaintiff was supported by a nationalist GONGO (government-organised non-governmental organisation) which invested significant resources into the case. The two researchers received wide international support, yet in 2021 the court decided the claimant was owed public apologies, since the historical evidence was inconclusive. As Grabowski says, this has had a chilling effect on younger researchers, dissuading them from trying to deconstruct the nationalist mythology of 'innocent' Poles during the Second World War by unearthing evidence of participation in the Holocaust.[4]

The situation is symptomatic of nationalist and authoritarian politics. Today, those advocating the need to shoulder historical responsibility are at risk of prosecution and persecution, while Poland's right-wing government unofficially supports extremist parties who march in public spaces shouting slogans taken from inter-war nationalist propaganda – demanding that a white, ethnically cleansed Poland is 'defended' against what they portray as a common threat from Muslim terrorism, leftist sabotage and Jewish influence (as represented by the European Union, philanthropists like George Soros or even just Polish liberals).

Obviously, this atmosphere is not conducive to my efforts to disentangle the troubled Polish–Jewish past, or to deal with (post-)Jewish architecture and the 'present absence' of former communities. Thankfully, however, there are Polish intellectuals, activists and people of good will who oppose nationalist ideologies and policies, and who help to turn social memory into social struggle. I therefore consider my projects as engaged directly in the politics of memory. Yet I must emphasise that my intention always is to experiment through conceptual designs to avoid direct confrontation, which I find politically unproductive in addressing the complexities of former *shtetls*. Instead, my search is for more subtle instruments, such as nomadic archives, magic boxes and mirror-covered installations, to create subversive methods of reconciling the 'present absence' of Jewish communities and

people in Eastern Europe who now live in post-*shtetls*.

The invisible (post-)Jewish architecture

Here is a selection of comments on the online portal, Gazeta Wyborcza, under a feature it ran about my *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* project, titled 'The Invisible (post-) Jewish Architecture':

- 'Interesting initiative, deserving further attention, a way of countering stereotypes and understanding shared history.'
- 'This "shtetl" idea puts people off, unless someone is a Jew or speaks Yiddish.'
- 'Carry on, lasses! It is a shame that your activities are so limited territorially, one would wish to see it in Jadów, Nowe Miasto, or Nasielsk . . .'
- 'Are you in GW [Gazeta Wyborcza] seriously considering that people will accept this bollocks about Jews? Obviously, only about good Jews. The folks somewhere near Lublin are supposed to worry now about Jews? And why? Why do you need to resurrect them, if they are only part of the past? People in small towns are busy with other things; they do not have time to worry about Jews.'
- 'Very nice initiative. I am sure that soon enough the sewage of xenophobic haters will burst soon, encouraged by the examples given by our government.'
- 'Who pays her?'[5]

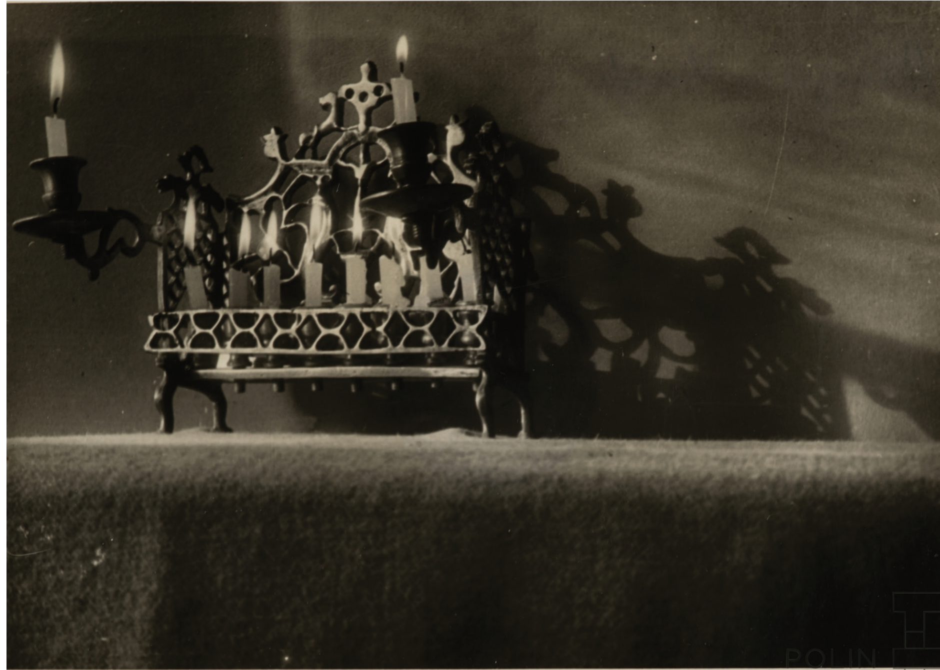
My designs as my *shamash*

Projects for the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD*, *Hurdy-Gurdy* and other designs are my instruments of trade. I do not consider them to be mundane props, mere tools. They are my helpers, assistants, friends. If I spoke Yiddish, I would call them *shames* (assistants), after the ninth candle of the Hanukkah candelabrum, used to light all other candles, and the synagogue assistant who calls people to the service. But to avoid any misunderstanding with the English word, 'shame', I use Hebrew literation to call them *shamash*.

The *shames* is the ninth holder in a *hanukkiah*, the nine-branched candelabrum used during the eight-day holiday of Hanukkah, called the *shamash* ('helper' or 'servant'), for a candle used to light all other candles and be itself an extra light. *Shames* (in Yiddish *shames*, from Hebrew *shamash*) also stands for a synagogue assistant whose duty was to prepare a temple for prayers and to wake up everyone in time for morning prayers. The *Polish Dictionary of Judaism* notes:

> [the *shamash*, i.e. the synagogue assistants] . . . sometimes decided to widen – out of their own initiative – the scope of their own duties, from being a mere court guard, a jurist responsible for preparing the cases and a negotiator who mediated with both sides of the conflict to find a peaceful resolution before the case went to the judge.[6]

I consider my *shamash*, my projects, to be conceptual mediators, with whom I approach the complexities of Polish-Jewish history to find new ways of unclogging memory and redevelopment. Together, they are: *JAD* – a mirror-clad nomadic pointer, a hand which pinpointed the (post-)Jewish sites of urban erosion in Upper Silesia; *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* – a



I.2 The Chanukah candelabra with the additional *shamash* candle, 1918–39, photograph by Tadeusz Przypkowski, from the collection of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

I.2

mobile archive, covered in mirrors, overflowing with archival materials, traversing south-east Poland from *shtetl* to *shtetl*; *Hurdy-Gurdy*, a magic box from which I conjured archival images of pre-war Jewish life in Częstochowa; the refurbishment of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House; and designs to reuse ex-synagogues in Chmielnik and Wojsławice. All are attempts at urban regeneration, grounded in tedious processes of negotiation, investment and construction, yet also spirited, uplifting tributes to the clouds of references, conversing with spectres. Each project is a carrier of archival knowledge, mediating between the no-longer-there and the not-yet-here, between architectural memory and vision, forgetting and remembrance, decay and new life.

Most of my projects move, in that they are transitory, liquid, pushed, pulled and carried. Their rhizomes are in the nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The mirrors are optical tools to cast the parallax views theorised by Slavoj Žižek, on both sides of the 'present absence' of *shtetls*. The mirrored façades of my *shamash* are also instruments of hauntology, providing insights into the spectral side of material reality and producing the ghosts mentioned in Jacques Derrida's writing. Juxtaposing past with present

and future, my *shamash* seek to uncover architectural aura. They are public acts, shared with fellow travellers, audiences and passers-by. Reflections materialise the aura inside the mundane, the usual and common, within everyday life.

The liquid archives set in motion are never enclosed constructs, mustered for an ideological line, against which Michel Foucault and Derrida convincingly argued. Rather, they are open-ended discussions that unfold in the field to help the historical responsibility of unearthing, hopefully facing the truth. No one can open a dialogue by themselves: instead, conversation needs to flow between people, constituting an environment for ideas to grow, sometimes even into new institutions. Hence, my interventions contribute to ongoing communal processes of reconciliation already unfolding in former *shtetls* amongst enthusiasts, local groups, or NGOs like the Brama Cukermana Foundation in Będzin, the Grodzka Gate – NN Theater Centre in Lublin, the Panorama of Cultures Association in Wojsławice, or the Foundation Kulturoholizm in Częstochowa. They became my friends and allies, my fellow nomads, with whom I have established a long-lasting relationship embedded in our shared devotion to reanimate 'present absence' in the post-*shtetls*. They have helped me to carry, pull, push and move my devices around. Sometimes I had a clear itinerary, whereas at other times I drifted, emphatically aligned with the mobility of Jewish fate, on streets in former *shtetls*, between now and then. My equivalents to Baedeker guides – that is, 'memory maps', *Cinnamon Shops* by Bruno Schulz, historical records, philosophical treatises, sociological and economic reports, and so on – served as a gaseous cloud of references and coordinates to guide me through what Umberto Eco might call the 'non-fictional woods' of my study.

Mapping the cloud

While writing this book, I wondered how to give comprehensible form to the intertwined layers of practice and discourse, to capture the three design states – liquid, solid and gaseous – in their unfolding transformations. I experimented with different formats, and eventually developed a format inspired by the graphic layout of the Jewish Talmud, in which different forms of textual expression coexist – samples from the Torah, comments, disputes, anecdotes, codifications, and so on – creating a chorus of voices in a multi-layered narrative. Just as in Talmudic Chidush (*chadash*), which means 'a novel interpretation, or approach to something, innovation outside of tradition',[7] my studies required a new form of presentation. I also conceived this method after reading about 'performing writing', as formulated by Della Pollock, who describes this heterogeneous textual mode as 'metonymic, evocative, subjective, nervous, . . . consequential and citational'.[8]

The format helps to convey knowledge generated through interdisciplinary practice, the rhizomes of which spread through architecture, design, conceptual art, Jewish studies and philosophy. Interdisciplinarity, as Julia Kristeva emphasises, has some risks, and is often a site of 'latent resistance'

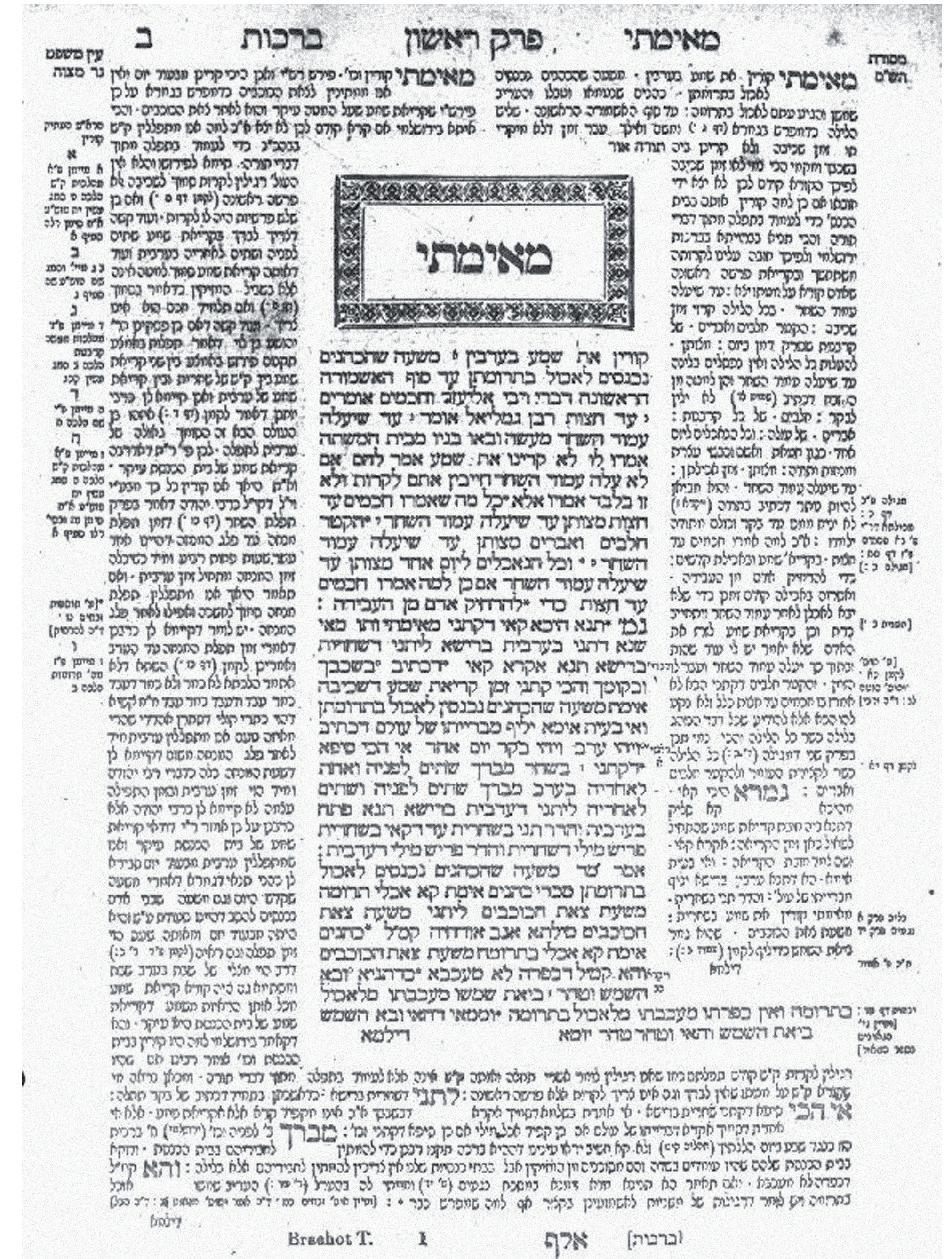
for researchers inescapably locked in their own disciplines, reproduced by academic apparatuses.[9] Yet interdisciplinarity is also a noble effort to understand multifaceted reality, with all its inherent complexities and paradoxes that are usually lost in the gaps between disciplinary borders. Interdisciplinarity is not a fancy name for amateurish research, but instead indicates a scrupulous, parallel development, progressing along interwoven paths that feed into each other. Faced with explaining my rhizomatic assemblage of projects, I had to develop an equivalent mode of expression that combines clarity and poetry in equal measures, to performatively write a diary of my inquiries while accounting for the design practice. For this reason, the narrative of my chapters is organised around the exploits of my associates, my *shamash*, my interdisciplinary projects.

I have adopted a polyphonic structure to give space for projects to unfold, sometimes by means of images, other times through texts in a variety of genres – including theoretical treatise, historical narrative, poem, testimony, interview, memory and subjective diary-entry. The use of a Talmud-like format allows different voices and expressive modes to place myself in dialogue with my associates, fellow travellers, people with whom I spoke face-to-face and others that I have never met. All of them partake equally in the story being told. The polyphony of voices is like the original Talmud, with its constellation of disputes, comments and interpretations of Mishnah (Jewish religious laws).[10] I am interested in this format also for another reason. Talmud in Hebrew means 'instruction, learning', and thus is intrinsically related to the everyday practice of believers in their interpretation of religious laws – an agonistic debate spanning through millennia, aiming to acquire a clearer understanding. It is of course one of the most important books in Judaism, in 37 volumes: yet it is not a law itself, but instead a communal dispute that crystallised and was written down between the third and fifth centuries CE.[11]

The graphic layout of the Talmud's attempts to capture this flow of conversations over their long time span, as an intersection of many voices, provides layer after layer of history and discourse. The Talmud is specially designed to transmit this multiplicity of voices. On each page the central column is devoted to Mishnah, formulated as rabbinic responses to interpellations of Jewish believers, the heart of Judaism, and Gemara, the extensive commentary on Mishnah, all mixed with direct references to the Torah. This central column is surrounded by a constellation of other writings that flow around it, consisting of comments, interpretations and polemics often formulated hundreds of years after the original.[12] As Abraham Cohen suggests, despite its literary qualities, the Talmud cannot be considered as a typical book because of its inherently polyphonic character and diverse mixture of disciplines and formats – juristic commentary, legal interpretation, religious anecdote, biblical parable.[13]

The Talmud's layout thus inspired me in my search for how to convey my research. For me, the Talmud has an almost architectural structure, with the

I.3 A page from a Babylonian Talmud, showing the first page of the first tractate. Wikimedia Commons.


מאימתי פרק ראשון ברכות ב

מאימתי

Brahot T. 1 אלף [ברכות]

I.3

underground corridors of the commentary surrounded by the walls of text – like a city plan spread out on paper. It offers the perfect form to capture the polyphonic nature of my own inquiries, and the multiple routes I followed during my nomadic travels in search of post-*shtetls*.

Structure of the book

My 'Talmudic' narrative is divided into five chapters. The first chapter on 'the Shtetl' introduces the historical and current situations of (post-)Jewish villages and small towns. The four central chapters discuss my designs through the concepts of 'Nomadism', 'Walking', 'Mirrors' and 'Archives'. To structure this discourse, I am helped by my *shamash*, since these four chapters focus on my design interventions: *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *Hurdy-Gurdy*, and *JAD*, with the liquid forms of design being set into gaseous clouds of cultural references and theoretical concepts. The final chapter, 'Embedment', explains how these liquid forms solidify into brick-and-mortar investments, mediated by the forming of alliances and friendships during my nomadic endeavours. The conclusion emphasises again the political context of my investigations, set firmly within the ongoing struggle for appropriate (post-) Jewish memory in Eastern Europe's former *shtetls*.

Notes

1. Translated by Antony Polonsky. Polonsky, *The Shtetl*, 3–4.
2. Boyd, 'Reality bending', 153.
3. Kośmiński, 'Ustawa o IPN wchodzi w życie', 1 March 2018.
4. Grabowski, 'History and historiography of the Holocaust encounter a hostile Polish state', 39.
5. Gostkiewicz, 'Niewidzialna pożydowska architektura'. September 2016.
6. *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny*, Szames.
7. Romik, conversation with Rabbi Harry Levin, 13 March 2018.
8. Pollock, 'Performing writing', 91.
9. Kristeva, 'Institutional interdisciplinarity in theory and in practice', 6.
10. Romik, conversation with Rabbi Harry Levin, 13 March 2018.
11. Freedman, *The Talmud*, 2.
12. Freedman, *The Talmud*, 3.
13. Cohen, *Talmud*.

Chapter 1 | The *shtetl*

In this chapter I describe the stage on which I performed with my designs, with my *shamash* deployed to challenge the 'present absence' of former *shtetls*. It will thus emphasise the architectural aspects of post-*shtetls*, and also discuss the current conjuncture which haunts not only these former Jewish towns but also overshadows Polish history generally, thereby structuring its culture and politics.

For exploring these *shtetls*, there are a multiplicity of sources, including extensive academic literature, archival documents, *pinkas* (record books), *yizkor* (subsequent memorial books), literary fiction, poems and personal journals. To define '*shtetl*' a number of seminal texts were used, such as *Studies in Polish Jewry*, initiated by the journal *Polin*, along with tomes like *From Shtetl to Socialism* (edited by Antony Polonsky), *The Shtetl: Myth and reality* (edited by Antony Polonsky) and *The Golden Age of Shtetl: A new history of Jewish life in East Europe* (authored by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern).[1] Of recent publications, I relied much on Jeffrey Shandler's *Shtetl: A vernacular intellectual history*.[2] In addition to academic literature, I also became interested in poems, short stories and novels set in former *shtetls*. Accounts of everyday life are well recorded in many anthologies, for example that edited by Joachim Neugroschel on *The Shtetl: A creative anthology of Jewish life in Eastern Europe*.[3]

My understanding of *shtetls* is also underpinned by knowledge from my professional practice in Poland as an exhibition researcher and designer. I have helped to develop projects like that in 2012 for a gallery within the permanent exhibition of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, titled 'Encounters with Modernity (1772–1914)'. I was also the main designer for exhibitions in the Shtetl Museum in Chmielnik in 2007 and in the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice in 2015. Some of these will be referenced directly, with, for example, the renovation of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House being discussed in the 'Embedment' chapter. Working on these exhibitions, guided by the emphasis of contemporary museology on historical detail, undoubtedly helped to ground my understanding of daily life and material objects in *shtetls*, providing insights into their social and cultural complexity.

Popular imaginary of the *shtetl*

Interestingly, although many people know about these small Jewish towns due to mass-media cultural images in iconic films like *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), offering

a coherent definition of *shtetls* is still a matter of academic debate. In a sense, it is easier to feel a *shtetl* intuitively than to say what exactly it was. This blurriness of meaning is due partially to its roots in daily speech, as '*shtetl*' was a Yiddish term commonly used to denote a small town with a substantial Jewish population – yet could also sometimes be used for a village or even a large urban settlement.

Popular imagery is even more muddied by the tendency to romanticise life in pre-war *shtetls* in the memoirs of survivors, or in literary accounts, which contrast with the actuality of financial hardship, underdevelopment and terrible sanitation. Yet to understand what a *shtetl* was, one cannot ignore any part of the equation. Hence, I openly embrace the contradiction between the factual descriptions of urban reality, including poverty and social strife, and the nostalgic myths about *shtetls*. Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg, authors of a book on Jewish radicalism, describe the *shtetls* as a 'vanished Atlantis': a mythological land of milk, honey, mud and exorbitant inequality.[4] Katarzyna Więcławska in her groundbreaking book, *Zmartwychwstałe miasteczko: Literackie oblicza sztetł* (*The Resurrected Town: The literary face of the shtetl*), analyses this tension in writings about the *shtetl*, countering popular discourses often misinformed by the folksy image of the singing milkman, Tevye, in the village of Anatevka, the main protagonist in *Fiddler on the Roof*.[5] This kind of dualistic vision, slipping towards ignorance, exists not only among people who know these small towns from Hollywood movies, but also among those currently living in former *shtetls*. As my many talks and encounters confirmed, Polish residents today lack any direct knowledge about their murdered Jewish 'neighbours', having just heard it filtered second-hand through pop culture, nationalist historiography or even anti-Semitic prejudice (as will be discussed in the 'Archive' chapter).

But not only is the Polish public unaware of *shtetls*: so too architects, designers, town planners and urban studies scholars are ignorant of this urban legacy. Academic studies of *shtetls* have been near exclusively written by experts in Jewish studies, especially in drawing historical links to the Holocaust. There is no focus on the architecture or urbanism of former *shtetls*, despite the fact that currently millions of people are living in these places, and so this is the major gap in knowledge and discourse that my research seeks to fill. When presenting my projects to architectural peers in Poland, I was surprised that I had to convey very basic information about *shtetls* before going on to point out their double exclusion today as forgotten (post-) Jewish heritage and as peripheral towns laid bare by Poland's neoliberal transformation since the 1990s.

There are, however, a few notable examples of artistic and academic projects which address the past and present conditions in post-*shtetls*. It is important to mention the 2017 monograph by Małgorzata Hanzl, *Morphological Analysis of Urban Structures – the Cultural Approach: Case studies of Jewish communities in Lodz and Mazovian voivodeships*, featuring case studies from Otwock, Góra Kalwarnia and Brzeziny.[6] Wojciech Wilczyk in his 2009 photographic project 'Niewinne oko nie istnieje' ('The innocent eye does not exist') documented the contemporary life of former synagogues and *mikvahs* (bath houses).[7] *Muzeum na Kółkach* (*Museum on Wheels*) is an example of performative intervention, a mobile exhibition that touches upon an explanation of shtetls, organised by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in 2014.[8] Perhaps the most important account of the architecture in *shtetls* is an astonishing atlas recording wooden and masonry synagogues, published in 2015 and 2017 by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, to which I often refer in my projects.[9]

Despite these efforts, the issue is still neglected, if not actively ignored. One reason for this recurring amnesia is given by the authors of *Socialist Spaces: Sites of everyday life in the Eastern Bloc*, who observe that the establishing of Soviet-style communist regimes was often characterised as a radical break with the past.[10] A side effect of this post-war race towards the future in Eastern Europe was widespread neglect of Jewish built heritage.

Definition of *shtetl*

My explorations of the 'vanished Atlantis' were guided by various definitions of *shtetls*, some of them complimentary, others critical, some emphasising geographical scope, others focusing on semantics or population figures. Not only is the character of the *shtetl* disputed, some authors even question the existence of *shtetls* as such. Samuel Kassow points out:

> Legally and politically, there was no such thing as a *shtetl*. Jews had no say in establishing the legal status of localities, and the term 'shtetl' meant nothing to non-Jews. What Jews called a *shtetl* might be a city, a town, a settlement, or a village in Polish, Russian, or Austrian law. In the Commonwealth, Polish law defined a *miasteczko* (small town), but not every *miasteczko* had enough Jews to earn the unofficial sobriquet of a *shtetl*.[11]

This passage opens up a fascinating debate about the status of a *shtetl*. For Jews, it was a lived reality – a self-recognising constituent of their everyday life – yet for non-Jews it was something else, just a small settlement, a *miasteczko* like any other. Another scholar, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, describes the transformed legal status of *shtetls* following Poland's partition by the invading Russian Empire in the eighteenth century. When Russian bureaucrats, whom Petrovsky-Shtern considers 'the earliest historians of the shtetl', began to establish administrative systems in the annexed lands, they spotted the phenomenon of 'the town of the Jews, whom they often saw at the market place'.[12] Their intuition was backed up by a meticulous census in 1802 which established that over half of Poland's urban population was indeed Jewish. When these bureaucrats explored the historical genealogy of *shtetls*, they found that most used to be private, manorial settlements belonging to landowners and magnates who chose to expand their economic operations by inviting in Jewish craftsmen and traders. Hence, it is unsurprising that *shtetls* were centred around

their market squares (as will be discussed later in this chapter). However, the Russian clerks decided against creating a distinct administrative category of *shtetl*, including them all as '*mestechki*', which eventually led to confusion because, for Jews, *shtetls* could be of different sizes – some small, even just a couple of households, whereas others held tens of thousands of people – yet the category of *mestechki* delineated only small towns.[13]

Faced with this confusion, reiterated over and over again in *shtetl* literature, I chose to follow the hints provided by Kassow:

In Yiddish *shtetl* (plural: *shtetlekh*) means a 'small town'. There were hundreds of them, and no two were alike. The term 'shtetl' connoted a Jewish settlement with a large and compact Jewish population who differed from their gentile, mostly peasant, neighbors in religion, occupation, language, and culture. Although strictly speaking the shtetl grew out of the private market towns of the Polish nobility in the old Commonwealth, over time 'shtetl' became a common term for any small town in Eastern Europe with a large Jewish population: these included non-noble towns in Poland, as well as towns in Ukraine, Hungary, Bessarabia, Bukovina and the Sub-Carpathian region that attracted sizeable Jewish immigration during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Underlying the social framework of the shtetl were interlocking networks of economic and social relationships: the interaction of Jews and peasants in the market, the coming together of Jews for essential communal and religious functions, and, in the 20th century, the increasingly vital relationship between the *shtetl* and its emigrants (organized in landsmanshaft).[14]

In addition to Kassow's definition, one must emphasise the specific sociocultural configuration of *shtetls*. Here I agree with Eva Hoffman, who in *The History of a Small Town and An Extinguished World* stresses their intrinsically multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition: 'The shtetl – the word is a diminutive of the Yiddish *shtot*, or town – was where the multicultural experiment was at once most intimate and least tested. The Jewish community in Poland was never homogeneous.'[15]

In discussions about *shtetls*, size matters. Disputes over whether *shtetls* had to be towns, or could also be villages or small cities, recur in literary descriptions like the 1861 short story, *The Headband*, by Yisroel Aksenfeld:

[The] small shtetl has a few small cabins, and a fair every other Sunday. The Jews deal in liquor, grain, burlap, or tar. Usually, there's one man striving to be a Hasidic rebbe. A shtot, on the other hand, a town, contains several hundred Wooden homes and a row of Brick shops. There are: a very rich man (a parvenu), several well-to-do storekeepers, a few dealers in fields, hareskins, wax, honey, some big money-lenders, who use cash belonging either to the rich man, going halves on the profits, or to the tenant farmers and tenant innkeepers in the surrounding area. Such a town has a Polish landowner (the porits) with his manor . . . Such a town has a winehouse keeper, a watchmaker, and a Doctor, a past cantor and a present cantor, a broker, a madman, and an abandoned wife (an agunah), community beadles, and a caterer. Such a town has a tailors' association, a burial association, a Talmud association, and a free-loan association. Such a town has various kinds of synagogues: a shul (mainly for the Sabbath and holidays) a bes-medresh (the house of study, for everyday use), and sometimes even a klaizl (a smaller house of worship) or a shtibl (a small Hasidic synagogue). God forbid that anyone should accidently blurt out the wrong word and call the town a shtetl! He'll instantly be branded as the local smartass or madman.[16]

Following this line, then a *shtetl* could be a mere cottage, while *shtot* is the name for a proper town with bigger and better buildings and institutions. The problem however is that boundaries were always blurred, and *shtetls*, as hybrid entities commonly seen as combining the cosiness of villages and social complexities of urban entities, lay somewhere in-between. From my research on *shtetls*, many of them were indeed characterised by a notable level of institutional and architectural development. In the words of Elie Wiesel:

A *shtetl* was big enough to support the basic network of institutions that was essential to Jewish communal life – at least one synagogue, a *mikvah* [bath house], a cemetery, schools, and a framework of voluntary associations that performed basic religious and communal functions.[17]

It was precisely this civic density that defined each *shtetl*, and this was then carried over from religious into secular organisations. And this density of urban life – specifically Jewish, but also multicultural – still inform contemporary usages of the word *shtetl*, as Jeffrey Shandler notes.[18] In his book on *Shtetl: A vernacular intellectual history*, Shandler explains that nowadays the word *shtetl* can be used to denote something specifically Jewish and related to Eastern European Jewry – or else something multicultural, as an open and tolerant version of Jewish culture. It is used for instance to describe a close-knit Jewish community near Boro Park in New York, or repurposed as a byword for communality, to describe the communal spirit of the US Democratic Party's 2008 national convention in Denver.[19]

Shandler suggests cultural creativity in reuses of this word, and for me, wandering through the 'vanished Atlantis' of former Yiddishland, the *shtetl* becomes a byword for 'present absence': the inverse of liveliness. Brossat and Klingberg have excavated the revolutionary potentials of pre-war *shtetls*, erased from historical narratives and political legacies of those who survived the Holocaust, as neither religious Jews nor Zionists were interested in reviving the memory of leftist, revolutionary struggles that characterised pre-war *shtetls*:

Between the many and sometimes vivid traces of this vanished Atlantis and the present is a blank, a void, an abyss created by the Earthquake of history, which no work of memory, no testimony, no scholarship is able to fill. And so the imaginary, the

emotional and the symbolic necessarily enter into the composition of our attitude towards this vanished world.[20]

It is an evocative quote, and in agreement, I consider my projects as attempts to mobilise the emotional, symbolic and imaginary to bridge between the 'vanished Atlantis' and its current constellation of forms, so as to revive the dormant political energies of post-*shtetls*.

Emergence and development of the *shtetl*

As Polonsky notes, we do not have many sources for the early history of *shtetls*, which seem to have arisen when thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Polish kings invited Jews to settle in towns and hamlets of Poland and Lithuania as 'traders, minters, moneylenders, and bankers'.[21] The number of Jews remained small until the mid-sixteenth century, when their population grew exponentially after the formation of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. Wishing to populate and urbanise the vast eastern and south-eastern borderlands of this new Commonwealth, Polonsky writes: 'Polish nobility invited Jews to settle their estates and stimulate economic development.'[22] Jewish citizens proved very efficient, encouraging trade and economic development of the landed estates, and small towns grew into marketplaces to supply surrounding villages and manors, stimulating the exchange of goods. Jews not only specialised in trade, but also crafts; they worked in mills and distilleries, and collected taxes and tolls.[23] Jewish residents established a symbiotic economic relationship with the Polish aristocracy, which: 'Produced the arenda (leasing) system, wherein landlords leased key economic functions to a Jewish agent (arendar), who in turn engaged other Jews in a varied and complicated network of sub-leases.'[24]

Jews were granted *arendas* to produce and sell alcohol, which constituted a growing share of the Polish nobility's income when trade worsened under Europe's seventeenth-century religious wars, forcing countries to develop internal markets for surplus grain. Those selling alcohol struck gold.[25] Jews were also leased rights to keep taverns, which not only were outlets for selling alcohol to the local populace, but also meeting places where people of different ethnicities intermingled.

Jews were granted privileges denied to Polish residents, since they were not considered by Polish nobles to offer any political competition. Indeed, they were a safe bet, being controlled by landlords who not only leased them *arendas*, but also served as political patrons shielding against anti-Semitism. Until 1918 in Poland, Jews were thus never granted full citizenship rights, yet otherwise, boards of Jewish communities (*kahals*) enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy, being responsible for collecting taxes, providing sanitation, running religious courts and so on. They even had central representation, the so-called Vaad Arba Aratsot (Council of Four Lands), founded in 1580, an institution pivotal for their relative autonomy within the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.[26] Its rule was accepted as long as it limited itself only to Jewish affairs.

Polish landowners thus protected Jews from religiously grounded anti-Semitism, which was often spurred by the Catholic Church in expressing prejudice against Jews as the murderers of Christ, or as people who would butcher Christian children to use their blood to bake *matzah* (these two tenets of 'original' anti-Semitism are still commonplace in Poland). It was significant, as the Catholic Church possessed the right of decision in religious matters and used it eagerly. Hence, synagogues needed to be built at some distance from local churches and had to be lower and located on less prestigious sites. Usually, the building permits granted to Jews carefully described the permitted size of synagogues, and sometimes even their architectural details. For example, in 1592, the Bishop of Goślice – while granting Jews the right to construct a masonry synagogue – meticulously stipulated that:

the aforementioned masonry synagogue should be neither ostentatious nor haughty in its building, that the height of the walls from the ground-level of the street should be no higher than twelve ells. And should it be the case that the proportions of the interior demand that the pavement of the room be sunken, it may be lowered by a level of two or three ells by removing the earth, and the internal width of the synagogue from wall to wall should be twenty ells, and its length thirty ells. The roofs should not be prominent, but low in the Italian manner with guttering around the roofs, and with a masonry wall surrounding the roofs, in order to ensure better safety in case of fire.[27]

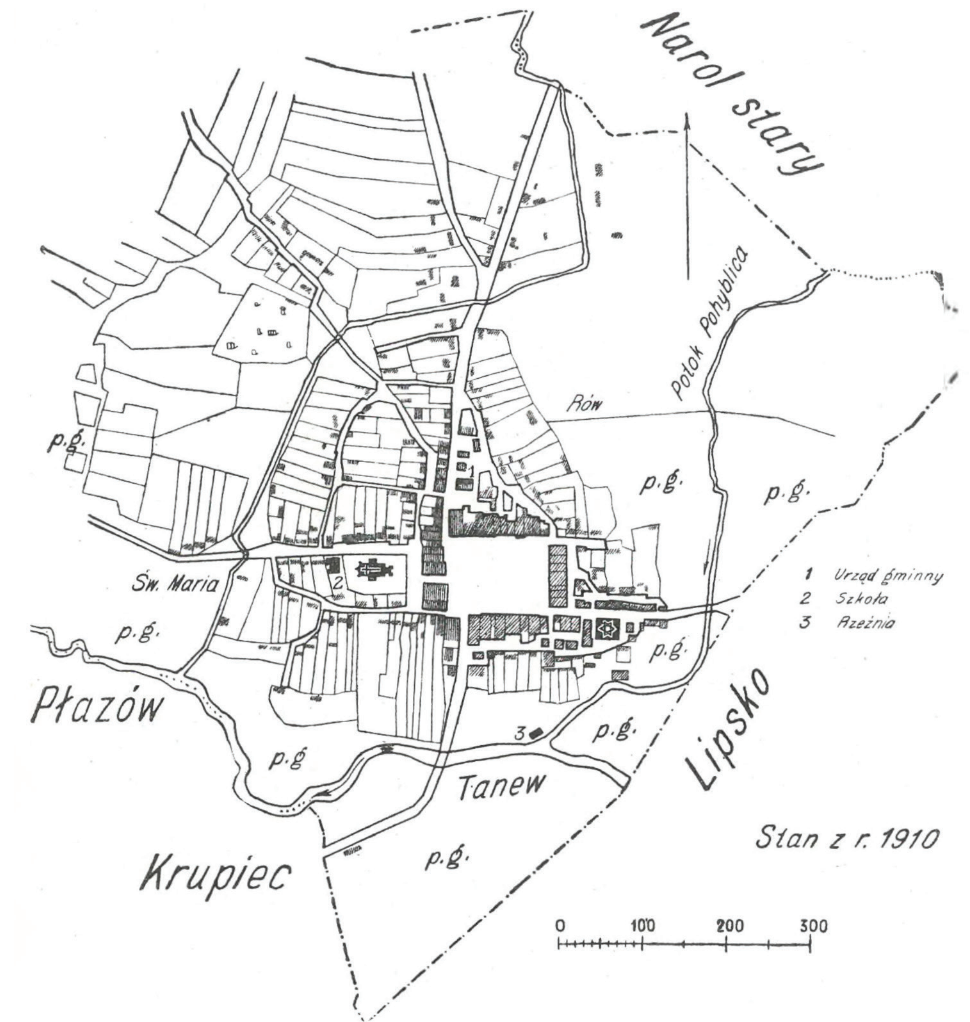
Similar conditional permits were given to Jews until the nineteenth century. So as not to overshadow the power of the Catholic Church, modest synagogues were often built on the far side of central market squares, as in the *shtetls* of Narol or Sambor. *Shtetls* were generally built of wood, with the exception of the more prominent dwellings or buildings of public importance such as the synagogue, *mikvah* (bath house), hospice (*hekdesh*), kosher butcher, school and so on. Another important place was the cemetery, sometimes even two.

Gershon Hundert estimates that 'half of the urban population of Poland-Lithuania in the 18th century was Jewish'.[28] He judges that 44 per cent of Jews lived in south-east Poland (Ruthenia-Ukraine) and another 27 per cent in the north-east (Lithuania-Belarus), with 17 per cent in Lesser Poland and only 12 per cent in Greater Poland. In other words, over 70 per cent of Jews were in the eastern part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the largest concentrations being in Rus (100,111 citizens), Volhynia (50,792), Podolia (38,384), Troki (33,738) and Vilnius (26,977). Very few towns were totally inhabited by Jews, with those with the highest Jewish percentage being Brody (c.7,000 people), Lviv (c.6,000) and Leszno (c.5,000).[29]

As noted by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, the period between the 1790s and 1840s was actually the 'Golden Age' of *shtetls*, shown in economic boom and cultural development. It was paradoxical in that it followed the partition of the decaying Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth by the rival empires of Prussia, Russia

1.1

1.1 Jewish communities in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of the sixteenth century. Map derived from the Permanent Exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko and Natalia Romik.



1.2

1.2 Map of Narol, showing the synagogue located on the opposite side of the market square to the church. Image from Artur Kühnel, *Zasady Budowy Miast Małych i Miasteczek*, 21. Wydawnictwo Polskiego Towarzystwa Politechnicznego we Lwowie, 1918.

and Austria in 1795.[30] This partition was a traumatic experience for Polish people, interrupted by numerous insurrections, in some of which Jews also partook, albeit in small numbers. As an unintended result of partition, it now meant that Russia, Austria and Prussia between them were ruling over the world's largest Jewish population.[31]

Also at the end of the eighteenth century, echoing the Enlightenment, modernising Jews in Eastern Europe prompted the Haskalah movement, which Shandler calls an 'intellectual response

1.3 Row of stores in 1925 owned by Jews near the Great Synagogue (back, centre), Luboml, Poland (now Lyubomil, Ukraine). Photograph by Henryk Poddębski. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

to the challenge of modernity'.[32] Czesław Miłosz says that, in their attempt to 'break free from the religious oppression', more urbanised and modern-minded Jews started sending their children to secular schools, while religious schools (*cheder*) remained more popular amongst poorer citizens.[33] This patchwork scene, with stark contrasts developing within Jewish groups, and between villages, towns and larger centres, is recalled in the gallery I co-designed for the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Interwar tensions

Underlying tensions accelerated after Poland regained its independence in 1918. During the 1920s and 1930s, *shtetls* played an important role as local cultural centres, and as social condensers for Jewish life. Aiming at civilisational development, they hosted small cinemas, youth associations, political parties, libraries and religious facilities. While not developing as fast culturally as rapidly modernising cities like Łódź, Warsaw, Lublin or Lviv, nonetheless they retained a key economic function as nodes for agriculture, industry, trade, craft and services. Modernisation implied also the political emancipation of Jewish people, a campaign that began long before the First World War, with political allegiances ranging from communists, anarchists, autonomists, and other socialists through to conservative traditionalists and Zionists (themselves divided between right and left).[34] Each had their clubs, schools, associations, sport teams and political organisations.[35] While Zionists promoted migration to Palestine, socialists strongly advocated staying in Eastern Europe, speaking in Yiddish and embracing modernity, which they believed promoted international brotherhood and solidarity. As Miłosz points out in his analysis of 1920s Polish society, *shtetls* formed a stage where opposing ideologies could clash in a fervent plethora of ideologies and movements.[36] The atmosphere of these times is well expressed in the revolutionary folk song, *Oy, Ir Narishe Tsienistn* (*Oh, You Foolish Little Zionists*), recorded in 1931 by Moshe Beregovski, and sung by a house painter:

> *Oh, you foolish little Zionists*
> *With your utopian mentality*
> *You'd better go down to the factory*
> *And learn the worker's reality*
> *You want to take us to Jerusalem*
> *So we can die as a nation*
> *We'd rather stay in the Diaspora*
> *And fight for our liberation.*

Hence, the interwar period saw a renaissance in Yiddish culture, one of the main signifiers of the *shtetl*, with an explosion of literature, press, poetry, songs and academic writings. Yet this was also something actively supressed by Zionists, who tended to reject efforts at social and political integration. This struggle over language predates Polish independence. Already in 1899, the Third Party Convention of the Bund demanded not only labour rights but also the right to speak in Yiddish.[37] In a 1910 appeal the organisation stated that it is: 'necessary to secure the rights of the Yiddish language, which is denied these rights more than

any other language and, moreover, is not even officially recognized, while the other non-dominant languages receive at least partial recognition'.[38]

Crucial in these left/right ideological debates were urban versus anti-urban sentiments. Interwar Poland, as Kassow notes, was split between rapid urbanisation – that is, 'one out of four Polish Jews lived in its five largest cities, and 40 per cent were living in settlements of over 10,000 Jews' – and the reality that more than half of Jews were still in *shtetls*.[39] Thus, although Warsaw was from 1870–1910 the largest Jewish settlement anywhere in the world, Polish Jewry was mostly dispersed around the rest of the country (in contrast to France, Germany or Britain, where the majority of Jews lived in their capital cities). Based upon figures from Poland's 1931 census: '43.3 per cent of Polish Jews lived in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants, where they made up 26.4 per cent of the population, as against 29.8 per cent who lived in towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants (28.8 per cent of the population) and 23.1 per cent who lived in villages and in the countryside (3.2 per cent of the population)'.[40]

It is also significant that by the late-1930s, the Second Polish Commonwealth was on the brink of explosion due to ethnic tensions between Poles, Ukrainians and Jews – a proxy conflict brewing in its eastern provinces, leading to rampant anti-Semitism. As noted of the National Democrats, they:

> advocated and implemented a boycott, mainly against Jewish shopkeepers, peddlers, and merchants but also against doctors . . . [and] the policy was translated into a radical attack against Jewish attempts at economic survival, and 'of course' the boycott inevitably led to physical attacks, and pogroms, symbolized in 1936–1939 by the pogrom in the small, largely Jewish shtetl of Przytyk in central Poland. The Kresy were not hit as hard, probably because the Poles were a minority, but there was a pogrom in Brest-Litovsk, in the Belorussian Kresy, on May 13, 1937, and the following days. Three hundred and fifty Jews were reportedly killed in Poland between 1935 and 1939.[41]

The tragedy of Przytyk, which at the time was 90 per cent Jewish, is recalled in 'It is Burning', written in 1936 by Mordechai Gebirtig, a poet writing in Yiddish, as his response to the pogrom:

It is burning, brothers, it is burning.
Our poor shtetl, a pity, burns!
Furious winds blow,
Breaking, burning and scattering,
And you stand around
With folded arms.
O, you stand and look
While our town burns.
It is burning, brothers, it is burning
Our poor shtetl, a pity, burns!
The tongues of fire have already
Swallowed the entire town.
Everything surrounding it is burning,
And you stand around
While our town burns.

Mirosław Tryczyk, author of a book on Polish anti-Semitism before and during the Second World War, collected several

examples of 1930s conflicts between Polish nationalists and Jews, including the infamous 'war for trade'. During court proceedings against the far-right Polish National Movement, one of the latter's brochures declared: 'The Polish holdings recede fast, we are getting poorer with every passing minute, our properties are grabbed ingloriously by Jewish hands. Polish towns no longer have a Polish character.'[42]

In today's Poland, a political association directly relating to the legacy of the National Party was registered in 2015 with the explicit aim of carrying on its interwar traditions; just one in a plethora of far-right organisations in recent years, among them the National-Radical Camp, which harks back to the openly fascist traditions of its namesake founded in 1934. This fascist resurgence is being tackled by many contemporary scholars, amongst them Hannah Kwiatkowska, who records old and new forums for anti-Semitic discourse in Poland.[43]

War and its aftermath

Nazi Germany's invasion in 1939 prompted the grimmest era for Eastern European Jews, who were concentrated in ghettos, murdered in mass executions or killed in Holocaust death camps. Their community was completely eradicated.[44] Only one in ten from three million Jews living in the Second Polish Commonwealth survived the war. *Shtetls* became deserted, given the previously high proportion of Jewish citizens, a grievous impact on their social composition. According to post-war polls collected by the Central Department for Population Census and Statistics of the Central Jewish Committee in Poland, there were only around 240,000 Jews left. Other accounts estimated that some 50,000 Jews still survived among the mainstream Polish population, around 80,000 had survived concentration camps and between 170,000 and 190,000 had gone to the Soviet Union. Those figures too suggest that 250,000–350,000 Polish Jews survived the war, about 10 per cent of the interwar population. Furthermore, the 'vanished Atlantis' of *shtetls* was now in a region partitioned after the war between the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine, Lithuania and Byelorussia. Some migrants from former Polish provinces moved back to Lower Silesia, now taken from Germany, yet many Jews understandably left Poland in the face of anti-Semitism and general despair; their universe was shattered. Some went to Israel, others to Western Europe or the USA. It is estimated that, of those that survived in Poland, around 150,000 Jews chose to migrate between 1945 and 1947.[45] Furthermore, after anti-Semitic purges in 1956 and 1968, another 63,000 Jews were compelled to emigrate. It meant that villages, towns and cities in Poland were all but deserted by Jews.

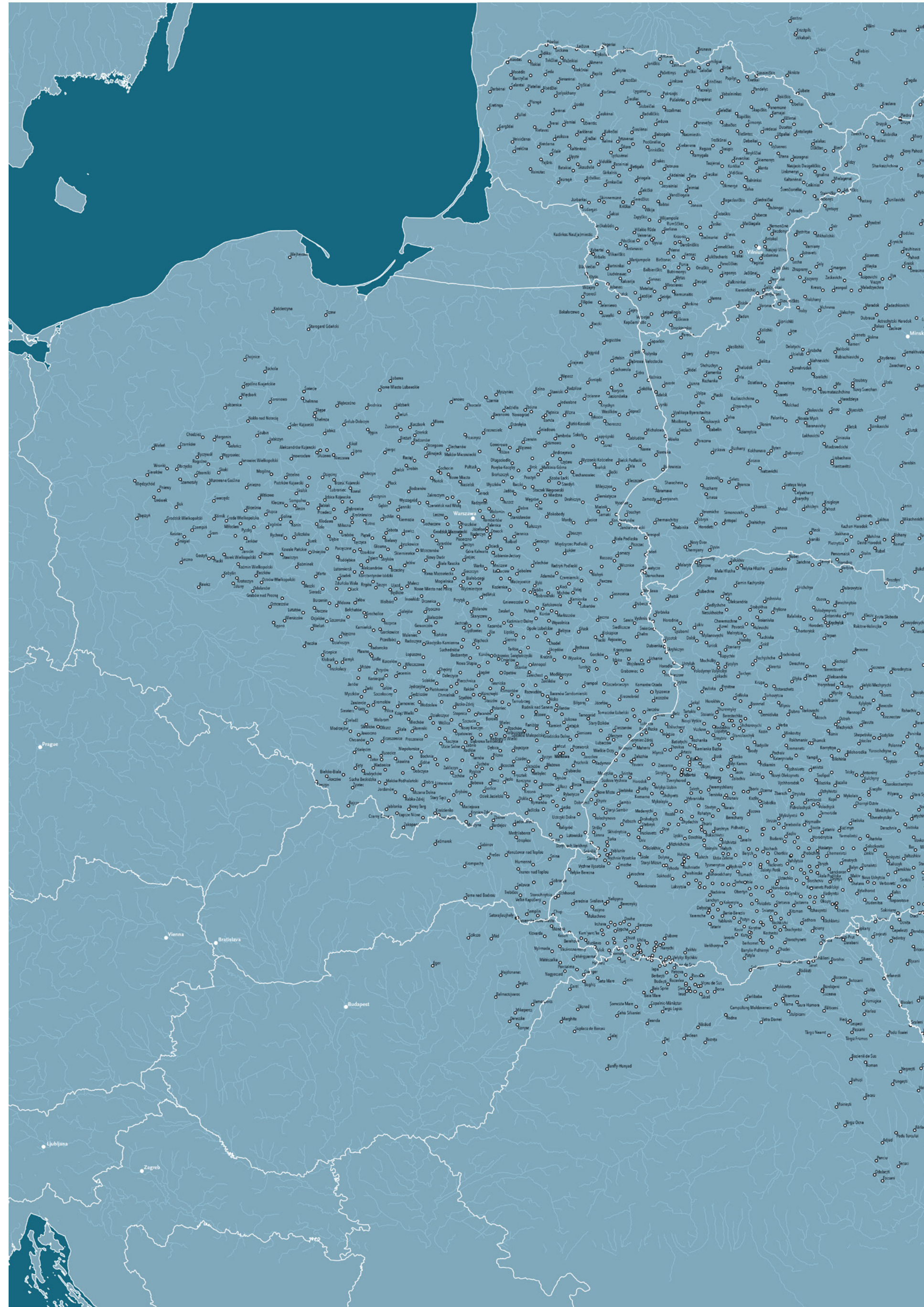
During the Second World War, not only had Jewish *shtetl* citizens been killed, but also their synagogues, bath houses and other important buildings were burned down or demolished. None of the wooden synagogues survived. Some newer masonry synagogues were also targeted by the Nazis, like those in Częstochowa, Tyszowce, Biłgoraj, Sosonowiec, Bytom,

1.4 Map of *shtetls*, or Jewish towns, derived from the temporary exhibition '(post)JEWISH . . . Shtetl Opatów Through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt' at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko and Emil Majuk (Shtetl Routes).

The map presents localities selected according to the following criteria:

- residents spoke eastern dialects of Yiddish
- total population of less than 35,000 residents (acc. to the data from 1931 national census)
- number of Jewish residents was no less than 200 people (based on the JewishGen Communities Database and the Virtual Shtetl portal).

The map also includes towns that do not meet the demographic criterion but are mentioned in memorial book as shtetls.



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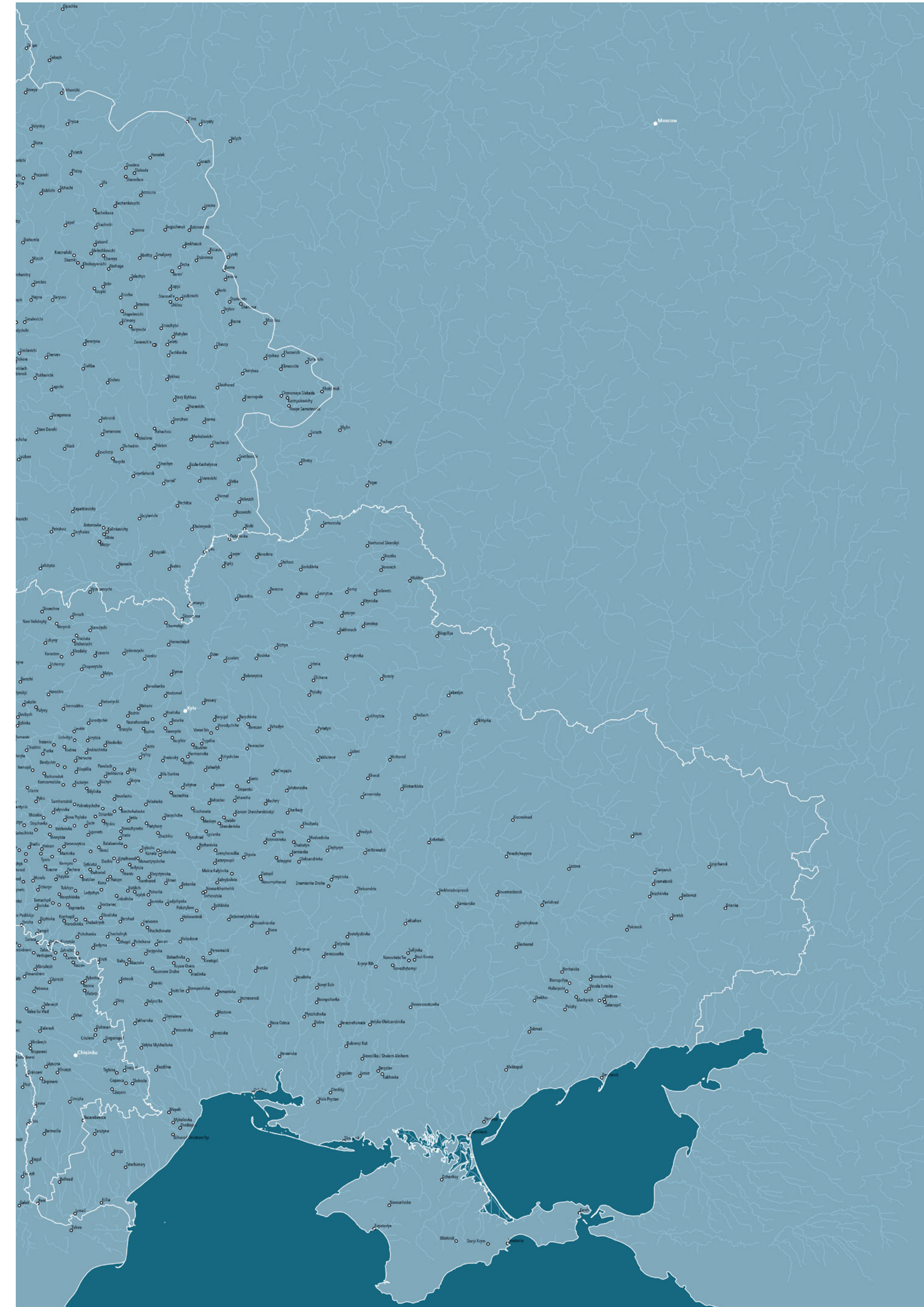
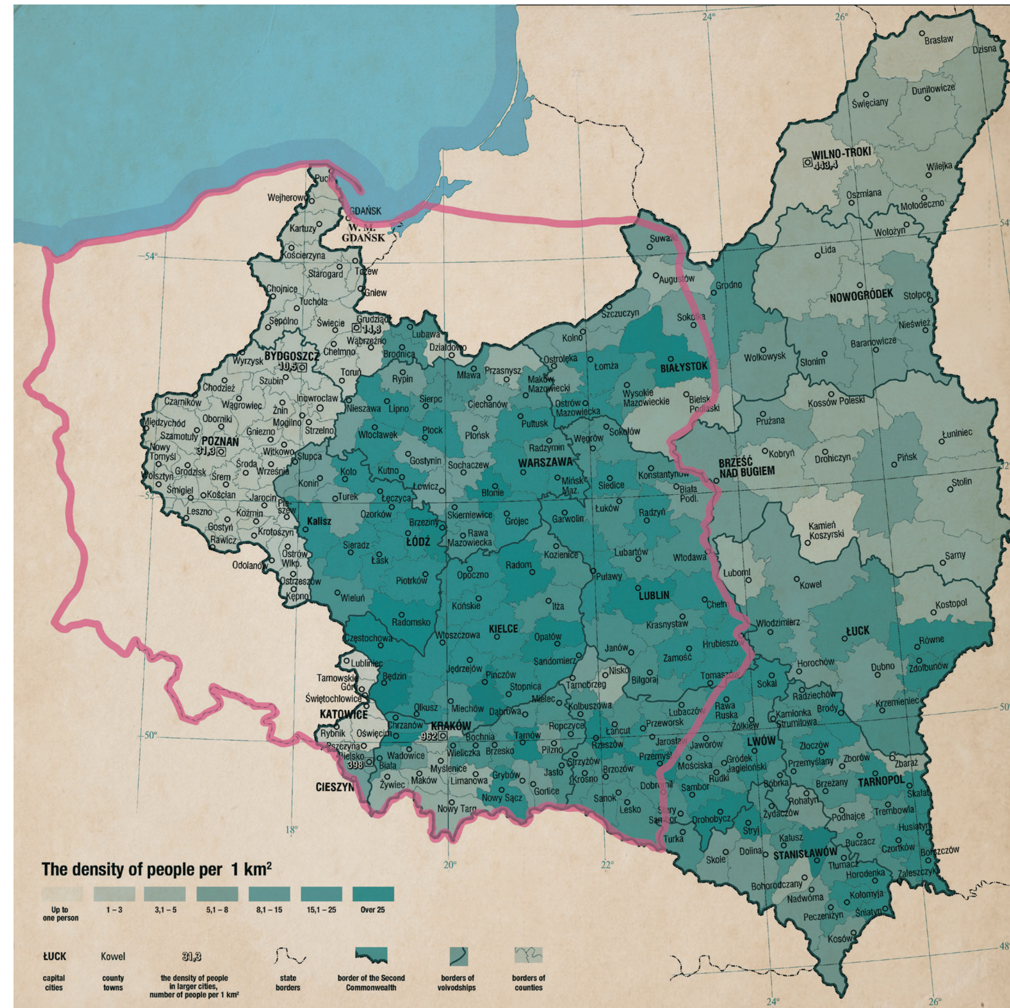


1.5 Density of the Jewish population in the Second Polish Commonwealth. Map derived from the permanent exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, drawn by Damian Mikoda, Piotr Jakoweńko and Natalia Romik.

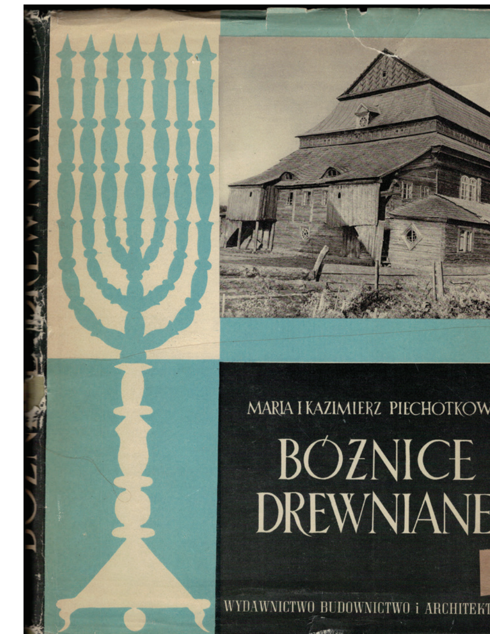


1.5

Będzin, Piaski or the Great Reformed Synagogue in Warsaw.[46] All these are places I visited on my travels, and whose testimonies of 'present absence' are examined in this book.

Research into the heritage of Jewish sacral architecture in the Second Polish Commonwealth is based mainly upon material collected in the 1920s and 1930s by the Central Heritage Registry (Centralne Biuro Inwentaryzacji Zabytków, or CBIZ). This archive was compiled by Szymon Zajczyk, an expert on Jewish architecture later murdered during the Holocaust.[47] His research miraculously survived the war, in the custody of Jan Zachwatowicz

1.6 Cover of my copy of *Heavens Gates: Wooden synagogues* (1957 edition) by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka. Arkady, 1957.



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of the Department of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology.[48] This superb archive, together with other documentation, served as the basis for two seminal books by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka: *The Heaven's Gates: Wooden synagogues in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth* (1957), and *The Heaven's Gates: Masonry synagogues in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth* (1999).[49]

Yet the void left by the decimation of Jewish communities also remains 'untranslatable' and 'incomprehensible', such was the scale and brutality of destruction. After the Second World War, this issue was sidelined in Poland by discussions about post-war reconstruction and resettlement. More thoroughgoing reflection emerged after a few decades. During the 1980s and 1990s, the topic resurfaced in scholarly studies, public discussions and cultural events like the Festival for Jewish Culture in Kraków (originating in 1988). Under the Polish People's Republic, some studies about Jewish architecture were conducted by a team led by Jerzy Malinowski from the Polish Academy of Sciences, who investigated the heritage left by synagogues.[50]

Nonetheless, discussions about (post-) Jewish architecture remained within departments devoted to preserving architectural heritage, centrally and regionally, or in a few specialist sections in academic institutions like the Warsaw University of Technology. In 1984, the Institute for Jewish History and Culture was established at Jagiellonian University, directed by Jerzy Gierowski.[51] These institutes, alongside others abroad (such as Lviv Technical University), organised initiatives like the Flying University for Jewish Studies in the 1970s and 1980s,[52] the Social Committee for Preserving Jewish Cemeteries and Heritage (established 1981), and since the 1990s, the Jewish Historical Institute's collections department, which have created greater public awareness about Jewish cultural heritage.

All this while, outside academia, the question of what to do with ex-Jewish buildings has become an ever more contested social issue, given that ethnic Poles have simply resettled into the abandoned properties in former *shtetls*. Hence, this thorny issue was suppressed, indeed mostly ignored in disputes about architectural

and urban developments. The Jewish legacy has become a controversial hotbed amongst historians and politicians but is downplayed or ignored by architects and urbanists.

Shadow of *shtetl*

In his much-discussed 2014 book, *Prześniona rewolucja* (*Sleepwalking through the Revolution*), the social philosopher/psychoanalyst Andrzej Leder argues that Poland's post-war urbanisation, with the resulting emergence of an ethnically Polish urban middle class, was only made possible due to the social vacuum left after its Jewish population was murdered during the Nazi's Holocaust. This process involved a massive property transfer, as he points out:

Almost all houses, with their facilities and furnishings, inhabited before the Second World War become inhabited again by new owners. Before 1939 there were three million people who had some form of property, real estates, workshops, plots of land and other goods. After they had been murdered, their property did not disappear, but rather found new owners.[53]

Leder goes on to say:

Considering economic and social results, the key moment of this revolution was an extermination of Jews by Nazis. It is not easy to imagine how important it was, as exposed to the current absence of Jews, one is not able to imagine how present they had been before the Holocaust. We all know somehow that there were three million of "them" – ten percent of society – that towns, that trade, that large Jewish districts of Warsaw and Łódź . . .

This continual absence of 'them' – that is, Jewish 'others' who used to inhabit our 'own' homes, workshops or shops – as imprinted on the breathless, amorphous society of post-war Poland, is captured in a 1956 documentary, *Miasteczko* (*The Town*), by Krystyna Gryczełowska and Jerzy Ziarnik.[54] The movie aims to portray the social and architectural composition of Staszów, near Kielce, half of whose pre-war population were Jews. Yet in their film, not even a single sentence refers to the town's Jewish legacy. Instead, it tells a harrowing story about hopelessness and unemployment among the Polish inhabitants: 'Everyone – who still has at least a bit of hope and courage left – emigrates from this town . . . of five thousand people living here, one thousand looks for work.' As illustration, the camera films former Jewish workshops, with the narrator merely observing that 'it used to be a town of shoemakers' – thereby omitting to mention that those shoemakers were in fact Jewish. It is a telling example of cultural denial. Ironically, the movie was censored by apparatchiks of the Polish People's Republic because it was not optimistic enough, its critical tale about the plight of small towns being unwelcome amid the rose-tinted image of a socialist paradise.[55]

Nonetheless, a few pioneering researchers into the post-war transformation of post-*shtetls* were active immediately after the Second World War, as witnesses to the mass process of property transfer

conducted by former neighbours of murdered Jews. Unsurprisingly, the writings of these pioneers were marginalised within official Polish history and memory – an amnesia which conveniently facilitated the seizure of Jewish properties to create new monoethnic townhoods. One of the early counter-testimonies was Josef Tanenbaum's book, *In Search of a Lost People: The old and the new Poland*, published in 1948, an indignant protest against emptiness in wake of the Holocaust. However, a book by the journalist Mordechaj Canin deserves special attention here. It was published in Yiddish in 1952, translated into Polish, and then republished in 2018 as *Przez ruiny i zgliszcza: Podróż po stu zgładzonych gminach żydowskich w Polsce* (*Through Ruins and Ashes: A journey through one hundred exterminated Jewish communities in Poland*).[56] Canin, a correspondent for the Yiddish *Forverts* newspaper, operating under a false name and pretending to be a British journalist, travelled around dozens of Polish *shtetls* and extermination camps in 1946–7, collecting information about former Jewish properties in places like Kock, Kazimierz Dolny, Łomża, Tarnów or Chęciny. Canin was hence an eyewitness to the second phase of the appropriation of Jewish property (the first having taken place during the Holocaust).[57] He meticulously described the architectural landscape of former *shtetls* and their derelict synagogues and cemeteries, and he entered Jewish homes taken over by Poles. He viewed (post-)Jewish furniture, objects of everyday use and patches still nailed to the walls in these reoccupied houses.[58]

He wrote:

When you go through towns, you don't see Jews, Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, but Jewish things, Jewish clothes and ornaments. And the same picture everywhere. In all cities and towns, the same hostile faces of people dressed in Jewish clothes . . . They burst into Jewish houses, smashed furnaces in search of Jewish gold, dug up Jewish graves to pull out Jewish teeth from the mouths of corpses, they grabbed matzevot.[59]

The tragedy of Canin's journalistic research is that to gain insight into what was happening in these ex-Jewish towns, he had to pretend to be a non-Jew. Indeed, his research was only made possible thanks to his disguise as a British journalist. Even then, two years after the war, a curtain of silence had fallen over the Jewish heritage of *shtetls*, with no one wanting to remember the murdered neighbours whose properties they had claimed.

In other words, cultural erasure in Poland began immediately after the Second World War. Under its Soviet-controlled communist government, Polish society had no chance to publicly discuss the social transformations it had undergone through modernisation, related as that was to the mass urbanisation of a population previously imprinted by feudalism. As Leder suggests, even though this social revolution implied colossal transformation not only in property structures, but also in class hierarchies and social distinctions, it was never consciously absorbed in Poland. Historical suppression thus

arose partly due to the censorship of public discourse under communism, and partly due to denial about the unspoken 'original sin' of primary accumulation by taking properties of exterminated Jews. Leder talks about a conflicted stance of interpassivity among Poles, one that mixes a sense of guilt with satisfaction brought about by the violence inflicted by German oppressors.[60] Here, an interpassive Pole is defined as someone who neither murdered nor saved his Jewish neighbours, just a bystander or witness who then benefited from those crimes. Actually, even this notion of 'interpassivity' is now contested by many scholars – such as Jan T. Gross, Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Jan Grabowski, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir or Tryczyk – who each undermine claims about the innocence or heroism of Polish people, pointing out that individual Poles often took active roles in crimes committed against their Jewish neighbours.[61]

Today, it would seem that the hour of reckoning has arrived in Poland. There is heated public debate, underpinned by a conservative/nationalist backlash, with two visions of Polish history and identity clashing. Nationalists stress a one-sided story of Polish heroism and self-victimisation, denying the existence of Polish anti-Semitism, to mobilise the surge of right-wing sentiment. Liberal contestants propose a more nuanced account of Polish history, painted in tragic shades of grey, trying to shoulder the 'responsibility by confronting the real' in the spirit of Leder's psychoanalytical analysis.[62] One of the most inspiring research strands is by Magdalena Waligórska into what she calls the 'discontinuity of inheritance'.[63] Her paper on 'The second life of Jewish belongings' is based on fieldwork in former *shtetls*, focusing on the economic and symbolic cycles of those properties, including personal belongings of Jews – objects which 'have been identified, demanded back, passed down from generation to generation, commodified, and, finally, collected, traded, and exhibited in Poland and Belarus'.[64]

I firmly situate my own research within this struggle for a more nuanced understanding of Polish–Jewish history, confronting both the spectral and the real, given that the two are indivisible in the 'present absence' today in ex-Jewish *shtetls*. Leder goes further, emphasising that Polish society can only mature and quell its own traumas by confronting inconsistencies in its self-image. Otherwise, as he says: 'a strong sense of guilt always resurfaces through cracks and fissures'.[65] Leder's concerns about intentional amnesia are not merely a figure of speech, as one can see today when visiting a ruined synagogue, hitherto a leaky storage space, to talk with a Polish entrepreneur who earnestly plans to install a restaurant in a 'Jewish style'. This is the 'reality' that any architect and designer must confront, underpinned as it is by the socio-economic conditions in these small and under-invested Polish provincial towns.

(Post-)Jewish

Here it is useful to discuss the notion of 'post-Jewish', which, especially in Poland, has an ambivalent meaning. This term is often unreflectively applied to hundreds

of towns and thousands of properties known as '*pożydowskie*' ('post-Jewish'), in a neutral sense, thereby naturalising and obfuscating the horrific processes that engendered 'post-Jewishness'. As Piotr Forecki argues: 'The formula "mienie pożydowskie" ("post-Jewish property") is, however, convenient for the Polish national community, because it obscures and erases something much more serious than just the plundering of post-Jewish spaces – anti-Semitism and murders committed on Jews in the process of this realised appropriation.'[66]

Therefore, I will adopt a different definition of '(post-)Jewish' in this book. The prefix 'post' – from the Latin *positum* – typically signifies a kind of succession, which unfolds in time.[67] My addition of parenthesis to the term '(post-)Jewish' is intended to express the 'present absence' of Jewish communities, thereby articulating the spectral form of presence that haunts *shtetls*. As Dariusz Stola argues in his analysis of the term:

> The term 'pożydowski', which one can translate as 'formerly Jewish' (or Post-Jewish) is in itself remarkable. Words beginning with the Polish prefix 'po-' refer to a kind of legacy involving something that is no longer present in a certain place . . . It should be noted that the expression conveys first the explicit information that the object in question is no longer someone's property, second, that the former owner was Jewish . . . ; and third, for every Pole familiar with the historical context, it implies that the owner had lost the property as a consequence of the Second World War. Thus, the Holocaust in sense remains hidden within the term.[68]

An inspiring take on this issue was adopted by translators of a 1979 poem by Jerzy Ficowski, originally called 'Pożydowskie', which they call 'once Jewish' to further estrange its harrowing meaning:

> **ONCE JEWISH**
>
> *she has a wardrobe from which the*
> *gowns*
> *managed to get out*
> *but anyway went out of fashion*
> *an armchair from which someone*
> *sometime stood up*
> *just for a moment*
> *that became the rest of his life*
> *serving bowls, pots filled with*
> *hunger*
> *still there to be used*
> *to the full*
> *a portrait of a killed girl*
> *in living color*
> *additionally she could have had*
> *some sort of black table*
> *in good condition*
> *but it just wasn't pleasing*
> *something so sad.*[69]

Looting of Jewish property was the typical mode of accumulation by dispossession conducted by the Third Reich. As Barbara Engelking observes, it was made possible from the very beginning of occupation in Poland, following the resettlement of Jewish populations into ghettos.[70] Such acts, including the takeover of Jewish

houses and workshops, happened with participation of the local community, former neighbours. Saul Friedländer writes:

Plunder started, organised and implemented throughout the continent primarily by the Germans, spread to local authorities, police, neighbours and random passers-by, from Amsterdam to Kaunas, and from Warsaw to Paris . . . This includes the seizure of works of art, libraries, clothes, underwear, bed linen, as well as confiscation of bank accounts and insurance policies, robbing shops or commercial or industrial enterprises, and looting bodies.[71]

It was thus by no means a Polish speciality, but rather a feature of Nazi occupation, which happened in places far away from European *shtetls* such as Thessaloniki – of which Jan Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross observe: 'as soon as they [Jews] were marched away, people rushed into their houses, tore up floorboards and battered downs walls and ceilings, hoping to find hidden valuables'.[72]

In interwar Poland, nationalist anti-Semitic parties already placed on their banners – alongside well-known slogans like 'Poland for Poles' or 'Don't Buy from a Jew' – demands for Jewish property to be seized. This pressure intensified during Nazi occupation, with the Polish National Party warning in 1943 of the post-war danger were Jews to regain their property, noting that they will 'doubtless try to return to their tenement houses, shops, brokerages and profiteers'.[73] Immediately after the war, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust returning to Polish *shtetls* found their homes already inhabited by local people who had become the 'beneficiaries of the Holocaust'.[74] This phrase of Łukasz Krzyżanowski's was based on his research into Radom, a town inhabited by 24,745 Jews in the 1930s yet with only 1,740 people registered by the Jewish Committee after the war.[75]

Krzyżanowski also points out that three post-war acts and two decrees obstructed the restitution of Jewish property.[76] In 1946 legislation came into force that enabled the takeover of branches of the economy by the state, effectively to nationalise private enterprises in Poland. The state could also decide whether Jewish properties should be transferred to the Jewish Committee or the Jewish Religious Congregation.[77] In fact, without even informing the Jewish community, many of their buildings were simply seized or demolished. Radom's synagogue was one such, and in reaction, in 1947 local Jews decided to build a monument commemorating the victims of the Holocaust on the square where the synagogue had stood. Other documents about 'abandoned' properties in Radom reveal that while the names of pre-war Jewish owners were included, the buildings were already being described as 'post-Jewish'.[78] Soon enough, the takeover of Jewish property in Poland was complete.

Shtetls after 1989

Neglect during the 40-plus years of communist rule in Poland meant little happened in expropriated Jewish properties. Rather, it was socio-economic

transformations from the 1990s, following the collapse of the Polish People's Republic, that triggered alterations to post-*shtetls*, causing visible impact. Architecture generally in Poland takes on the appearance of liquefied contrast spawned by inequality between urban centres and peripheral settlements, and a similar imbalance exists between metropolitan and peripheral ways of remembering Poland's Jewish heritage. Major representational showpieces like synagogues and *mikvahs* that are located along tourist routes or in former Jewish districts in larger cities are being renovated. However, less prominent buildings, including private houses, located off the beaten track – especially if in economically depressed small towns – are left to decay.

This schizophrenic regeneration policy has many contributing factors. A 2006 report by the Polish Academy of Sciences into the predicament of small towns lists several problems. In addition to expected causes, such as the main trade and entertainment functions now being located outside urban centres, the report also notes a lack of respect for built heritage tainted by the unresolved ownership of ex-Jewish properties. With so many former owners either killed or migrated – in either case leaving no paper trail – it is hard to ascertain whether a given property still has a legal owner, and hence current neglect and devastation can partly be attributed to uncertain legal status.[79]

Regulations and legal processes which hinder the restitution of Jewish properties have been analysed by Yechiel Weizman and Dariusz Stola, who point out the complex legal situation of many (post-) Jewish properties, given that communal buildings like synagogues, *mikvahs* or cemeteries might potentially belong to the Jewish religious community, to the Polish state, or to private owners who bought the property deeds.[80] Difficult circumstances surrounding former Jewish properties are also documented by the historian Stanisław Tyszka:

According to the 1997 law [on the return of religious communal properties], only individual Polish-Jewish communities and the UJRC are entitled to file restitution claims . . . In June 2000 the WJRO (World Jewish Restitution Organization) and UJRC (Union of Jewish Religious Communities) signed an agreement to establish the Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage (FPJH) as a partnership between the two organizations. The FPJH was registered in Poland in 2002. By creating this foundation, representatives of local communities agreed to allow the WJRO to benefit from the return of communal property in Poland . . . The Foundation owners and managers returned properties in the remaining twenty-seven districts (60% of Polish territory).[81]

The FPJH is an agency of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland. According to its 1997 legal statute, the Union has right to claim, administer and sell real estate, either independently or by delegating duties to the FPJH. According to Monika Krawczyk, the FPJH's director, the foundation has reclaimed ownership

of over 5,500 properties which before the Second World War had Jewish religious functions. Yet if one scratches these figures, the picture becomes worrying. Until 2017, only about 55 per cent of restitution claims had been legally resolved, with less than half yet actually returned. Plus, it means that around 45 per cent of claims have simply been rejected due to the lack of legal documents or property deeds – which, according to Krawczyk, were often deliberately destroyed by Nazi Germany during the occupation or were lost after the war.[82]

Regrettably, in most post-*shtetls* visited during my travels, Jewish communal property has been already sold on by the Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage, who thereby devolve its custodianship to private owners with no legal obligations whatsoever placed on the latter. This results in the frequent neglect of these now-privatised buildings. It is amplified by the misplaced priorities of Poland's conservation policy, which all but ignores Jewish built heritage: only a few ex-Jewish properties have made it onto the national heritage list. Thus, with the exception of some community centres (Szczebrzeszyn), libraries (Piotrków Trybunalski) and museums (Świętokrzyski Sztetl in Chmielnik, Museum of Mazovian Jews in Płock, museum in Tykocin), each housed in renovated and well-kept synagogues, most (post-)Jewish buildings are left without any protection or investment, facing slow erosion.

There is correlation also between the type of ownership and the fate of ex-Jewish properties. Those synagogues and other religious buildings that remain as public property are better preserved, given that their custodians are more open to revisiting their former functions and reviving Jewish cultural legacy. For example, in the synagogue in Józefów there is now a public library which co-organises the Singer Festival; in Piotrków Trybunalski, a library and reading room sits within an ex-synagogue; while in the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice, the Museum of Upper-Silesian Jews was established as a branch of the local history museum (as described in the 'Embedment' chapter). In contrast, privatised religious buildings are usually crudely repurposed, with the owners rarely displaying any penchant for Jewish heritage or possessing the kinds of resources and expertise to genuinely protect these structures.

Regardless, the FPJH sells off synagogues and other buildings that just deteriorate further with every passing year. In the void left by the erasure of Poland's Jewish communities, these properties have few users who might look to restore their previous functions. Instead, the real estate is listed on the FPJH's website, careful not to place too many obligations on purchasers. For instance, the FPJH never defines the future function of any building it sells (only butchers and brothels are forbidden!). Conversely, in certain cases, the FPJH does attempt to build coalitions with municipalities, communities, public institutions and private investors to undertake the renovation of synagogues, mikvahs, cemeteries, and so on.

One success story praised by the FJPH's director is the 'Hasidic routes' project, aimed at stimulating regional

1.7

1.7 The synagogue in Józefów Biłgorajski in 2013. Wikimedia Commons. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Józefów_synagoga_DSC01503.JPG.

tourism.[83] The Foundation has also managed to rebuild a few synagogues in Zamość, Przysucha and Kraśnik. In 2015, a programme to 'adopt Jewish cemeteries' was started, with the FJPH encouraging potential supporters to take these into their custody.[84] Yet many of these renovated synagogues, as in Kraśnik, were carried out without local allies (who are not easy to find or make) and are thus not operational; instead, they sit separate from local communal life and cater mainly for tourist traffic, as I witnessed when visiting. Similarly, some renovated cemeteries, such as that in Józefów Biłograjski, are positive contributions by the FJPH, whereas others, like the Jewish cemetery in Szczebrzeszyn, are testaments to neglect. It all leads to a complicated and ambivalent situation.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland defines the restitution of communal Jewish property as:

the regulatory proceedings that constitute the process of transfer of ownership by the Polish State to one of the Jewish religious communities or the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland of the real property or parts thereof which on 1 September 1939 were held by the Jewish religious communities or other Jewish religious legal entities. It is thus a process that addresses the issue of the Jewish communal rather than private property. The Jewish Religious Communities and the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland were provided with a five-year period, running from the date of entry into force of the law (11 May 1997), in which to submit

1.8

1.8 The interior of the synagogue in Józefów Biłgorajski, currently reused as a municipal library. Courtesy of the Public Library in Józefów Biłgorajski. www.mbpjozefow.naszabiblioteka.com/o-bibliotece.

to the special Regulatory Commission of an application for instigation of the relevant regulatory proceedings. The definition a Jewish religious legal person adopted by the Regulatory Commission encompasses associations, societies and foundations established by legal and natural persons for the purpose of performing the statutory activities of the former Jewish religious communities, and in particular for organisation and development of synagogues, cemeteries and other religious worship, educational, and charitable social care facilities.[85]

The market squares

Frequently, when visiting with my *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, I stopped in market squares because they offer not only public venues for my interventions, but also a vestige of the once-beating heart of *shtetls*. I remember standing with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in the marketplace in Krasnobród during a hot summer day, the inside of the box thick with heat, listening to locals who could not find a bit of shade because – back in the 1990s – the square was 'renovated' by cutting down all its trees. 'For heaven's sake, look what they have done to this market', said an old lady. 'It is like a desert, with not even a single tree around', agreed a young man on a bike. The market square has since been paved with T-shaped concrete setts (of the Bauma-stone type seen as the cheapest option, picked for economic reasons), composed in a greyish-red grid. This urban regeneration scheme, enacted in 2010–2015, selected the market square as the target

1.9

1.9 The synagogue in Tykocin in 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.

for strategic investment by asserting that: 'the market square lacks important functions of urban centre – shopping, services, gastronomy, etc. There is no space devoted to cultural events neither. It is necessary to renovate the surrounding buildings and set a style for the newly built Krasnobród architecture.'[86]

Unfortunately, the extensive use of concrete setts feels more reminiscent of an airstrip than a functioning public space. Consequently, Krasnobród's marketplace is an empty space – a stage filled only occasionally with mass events, diminishing the architectural values of the one-storey, wooden pre-war houses around the square, which are modest yet elegant with their narrow arcades.

A similar architectural mistake unfolded in Szczebrzeszyn, which in the interwar period had a 47.6 per cent Jewish population. I visited there also with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. The market square is a typical rectangle, 150 m × 100 m in size, on the town's south-eastern axis.[87] There is a parish church and Franciscan monastery, and a seventeenth-century synagogue that now serves as a local cultural centre. The town hall is in the centre of the market square. An urban report into Szczebrzeszyn, written in 2005, pointed out factors of urban degradation, including war-time destruction and car transit that disrupts the space.[88] More surprisingly, the report identified another problem as the 'uncontrolled planting of trees, which overshadow architectural assets'.[89] During Poland's communist era, the urban philosophy was to plant trees in market squares, setting them against civic monuments as the means to revitalise these spaces. When communism collapsed, however, the contrary doctrine was adopted, identifying trees as a component of urban decline, as Katarzyna Mazur-Belzyt notes: 'After 1990 the perspective on aesthetical components of market squares has changed. The adopted course of action is to regain a representative character, enhance composition and reduce greenery.[90]

This new principle informed the project for Szczebrzeszyn, where trees were chopped down, the marketplace was paved with granite setts, and some benches and flowerpots and lanterns inserted. The first stage cost 2,600,000 złotys (c. £520,000) and the second stage 2,000,000 złotys (c. £400,000), with 15 per cent coming directly from the local municipality, 10 per cent from the Ministry of Development, and 75 per cent from the European Regional Development Fund.[91] In wake of expensive investments like this one, nobody can find a trace of shadow or semblance of shelter

1.10

1.10 Percentage of Jewish population in the *shtetls* where I conducted my research, drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko, Agata Korba and Natalia Romik.

in Szczebrzeszyn today. Like other post-*shtetls*, its market square is now a 'concrete desert' from which people escape hastily to hide in surrounding bars and shops.

Yet, in fairness, there are some good examples of urban regeneration in Poland's former *shtetls*. An example is Tyszowce, which in the interwar period had 55 per cent Jewish inhabitants, and where I also took the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. Here, the square is not devastated by hard paving and the trees grow in peace, continuing the older way of doing things. The mirrored façade of my mobile archive blended seamlessly into the background, becoming one with the surrounding foliage. My diary notes read: 'The archive disappeared, it is all in green. These must be chestnuts and beeches . . . [and] we are surrounded by a small crowd of children and cyclists.

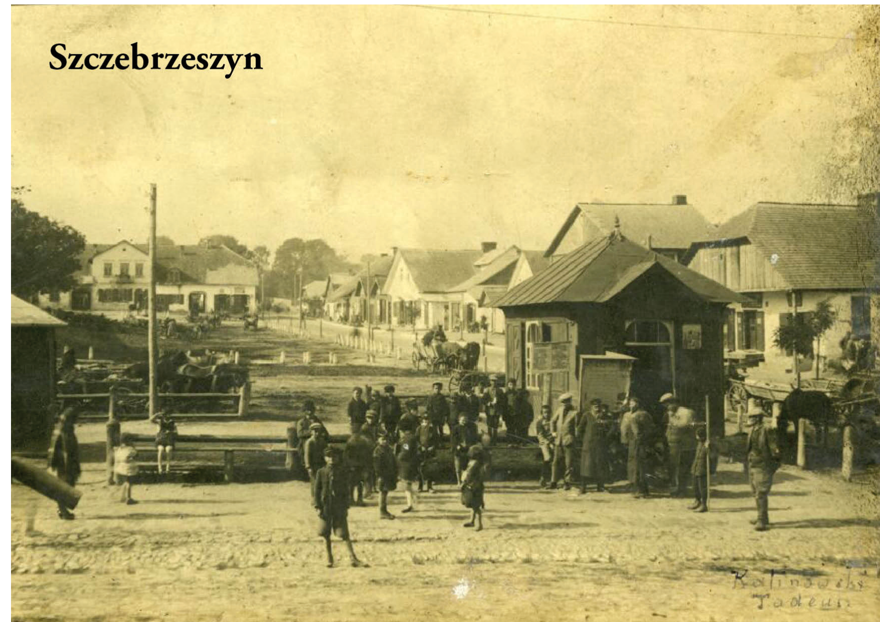
1.11 Krasnobród's wooden houses with verandas in 1935, photograph by Janusz Świeży, from the collection of the State Archive in Lublin, Department in Zamość.

1.11

1.12 Krasnobród's market square today. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krasnobród_plac_Siekluckiego.JPG.

1.12

1.13 Szczebrzeszyn's market square before the war in 1939, photograph from the collection of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre. https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/publication/131204/edition/125144.



1.13

1.14 Szczebrzeszyn's market square today, looking towards the town hall. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Szczebrzeszyn_town_hall#/media/File:Szczebrzeszyn,_Urząd_Miasta_i_Gminy_-_fotopolska.eu_(235274).jpg.

1.14

1.15 Market square in Tyszowce in 1917, photograph from the collection of Robert Horbaczewski, in custody of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre. http://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/dlibra/docmetadata?id=19963&from=&dirids=1&ver_id=&lp=9&QI=.

1.15

1.16 Tyszowce market square with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.

1.16

They seem to live in these trees.'[92] Trees not only provide respite for citizens, recreating the atmosphere of post-*shtetls*, but also help to beautify the often rows of ugly post-war terrace houses built in Tyszowce after it was heavily bombarded during the conflict.[93]

Over the centuries, market squares have evolved in response to changing political situations in Poland in all towns. For example, the favourable political and economic climate during the reign of Russia's Empress Catherine II, who liberally granted commercial licences, stimulated prosperity in many *shtetls* and helped to enhance their urban tissue (for example, older wooden buildings being replaced with costlier ones made from bricks). Yet in 1870, in retaliation after the 1863 Uprising, the charters of those towns which supported the rebellion against Tsar Alexander II were revoked, thus stripping them of rights to organise local fairs and resulting in their unmitigated decline.[94] However, mostly the typical *shtetl* market square prospered and was surrounded by dense rows of buildings, the fronts of which faced onto spaces where merchants' wooden stalls were positioned so that, on market days, farmers could display their stock.

Houses in *shtetls* tended to be low in height, usually one-storey, typically occupied by Jews, and served a double-function of dwelling and shop/workshop, depending on whether their occupants specialised in trade or craft. Gershon Hundert estimates that by the nineteenth century, Jews inhabited between 60 and 85 per cent of houses around the market squares of most *shtetls*. For instance, in Chmielnik, there were 285 houses in 1860, of which 73 were brick-built. Jewish inhabitants, numbering 2,724 persons, lived in the town's centre, while 764 Poles occupied its outskirts. Jewish inhabitants worked in trade and craft, whereas the Poles were farmers.[95]

Shtetls were filled with rushing crowds during fairs, for which they gained regional repute. Images of *shtetls* in books or paintings indeed normally depict these temporary peaks of bustling activity. An example is *From the Fair* by Sholom Aleichem, an autobiographical novel written in Yiddish from 1914–16. Aleichem claimed the fair was a metonymy of life 'because life resembles a market place', and hence something to be proud of:

> Which large city – Odessa, Paris, London or even New York – can boast of such a large market with so many Jewish shops, stands and stalls with mountainsful of fresh aromatic apples and pears, cantaloupes and watermelons? Goats and pigs (constantly shooed away by the market women) loved to nuzzle these fruits, and the schoolboys too liked all these goodies but couldn't get near them.[96]

As the beating heart of every *shtetl*, marketplaces created a melting pot for Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, for farmers and traders, who exchanged and bartered, creating mutual relationships.[97] It was a platform where – otherwise separated by custom, religion and division of labour – these diverse communities met. Petrovsky-Shtern emphasises that most stalls were owned by Jewish traders, quoting Russian clerks who back in 1790 observed that:

1.17 The large market in Chmielnik in 1917. Image from Chmielnik 'memory book': Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library. 'Chmielnik'. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1960, 30. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ef850730-649f-0133-8b0a-00505686d14e.

1.17

> four stone and six wooden stores in the center of the marketplace in Nemirov, sixteen stone and fifty-five wooden stores in Tulchin, and thirty stone and sixty-five wooden stores in Trostianets. In Satanov, they observed, thirteen Jews had their stores sheltered under one shingled roof. In Felshtin, the marketplace arcade encompassed twenty-two stone stores, and the Central trading square in such *shtetls* as Dunaevtsy, Kitaigorod, Chernyi Ostrov, and Iarmolintsy had a similar number of trading stalls either leased or owned by Jews.[98]

Oleh Rybchynskyi's *Market Squares of Ukraine's Historic Cities*[99] stands as one of the most interesting examples of urban and architectural analysis of town market squares in the present-day Ukraine (from the sixteenth century to the present). Rybchynskyi emphasises that the market squares retain the architectural and stylistic features bestowed upon them by the multicultural heritage of their former Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, Tatar, Russian and Austrian inhabitants.

Many historical accounts of *shtetls* repeat that, in these market squares, people exchanged almost everything. On the other hand, each *shtetl* also had its signature trade in which it specialised. For example, Chmielnik was renowned for hops, along with goose farms and related products like

fat and feathers, which people were ready to travel longer distances on a weekly basis to purchase.[100] This 'microcosm of merchandise' created an individual atmosphere for *shtetls*:

Each marketplace offered 'everything one's heart desires,' as the 19th-century Russian counting rhyme put it. The Vinnitsa marketplace with its one stone, twenty-four wooden, and thirty-nine mobile stalls on wheels traded in textiles, spices, wax, and candles, and varieties of smoked fish and caviar from the internal Russian provinces.[101]

Artur Kühnel, a Polish engineer, published a book in 1918 titled *Zasady budowy małych miast i miasteczek* (*Urban Guidelines for Small Towns and Hamlets*), which focused on the requirements of *shtetls* and identified a formal taxonomy of market squares such as rectangular (like that in Stary Samobor) or trapezoid (in Janów Lubelski). He observed that as towns grew around their marketplaces, houses became denser, separated only by narrow passages ('*miedziuchy*').[102] Kühnel notes that whenever a market square was small, streets began at its ends (e.g. Szczerzec, Biecz, Pilzno, Limanowa, Czhów, Mościska); or if it was larger, they also entered midway along its sides (e.g. Sambor, Głogów, Łańcut, Radymno).[103] He also poetically depicted *shtetl* market squares as 'gravitational centres' which, in his words, 'assemble everything'.[104]

Hanna Adamczewska-Wejchert and Kazimierz Wejchert, authors of a mid-1980s book about small Polish towns – including many post-*shtetls* – confirmed this dominant form for market squares. Most were rectangular (out of 256 towns surveyed, 86.5 per cent were of this type), with a few being triangular (like in Opatówek), or else were widened roads (as in Sępolno).[105] They argued that the worst problem of market squares was being criss-crossed by roads, as traffic disturbed the other functions, and hence they recommended banning cars from town centres.[106] Adamczewska-Wejchert and Wejchert identified other problems too, including bad hygiene and poor quality of buildings around market squares, which should be 'cleaned of wooden sheds, shacks and other shambolic constructions'.[107] It is telling of the time it was written that their book mentions not one single word about former Jewish communities who had lived in these towns, nor about the fact that so many buildings were part of (post-)Jewish heritage.

Road traffic is the perennial problem identified by urbanists. Indeed, already in 1918, Kühnel complained about haphazard congestion in *shtetl* town squares, declaring that:

public safety demands that the market squares and streets leading to them should be wide and accessible, and not congested by carts and people. They are main arteries of the town, and as such they should not be blocked, which could have tragic consequences in case of fire or accident.[108]

Sanitation was also important, with him complaining about the 'faeces of animals and humans alike, straw, animal food, rotting vegetables . . . the odours are unbearable'.[109] Yet if these are the inherited problems, what should be done with post-*shtetls* today? According to Wojciech Jarczewski, Director of the National Institute for Spatial Policy and Housing in Poland, a 2009 survey of over 200 local regeneration programmes revealed that the most commonly adopted priority was to renovate older districts (market squares, major streets, etc).[110] One can find positive examples of redevelopment, like in Kock, where services, restaurants and shops remain in a lively market square. Conversely, however, Poland's neoliberal dogma promotes shopping malls as the solution for an emergent consumer society, without any consideration for the civic and cultural roles of market squares. The discourse is regrettably fuelled by scholars like Krystian Heffner and Małgorzata Twardzik, who write:

up-to-date shopping centres become like the miniature cities themselves, the alleys of shopping malls are contemporary passages, its central points like former town squares, sharing similar characteristics and functions. Just as regular urban squares, the elements of small architecture are located there, and the shopping malls fulfil not only commercial functions, but become new urban centres.[111]

Viewed more critically, many problems in former *shtetls* are being caused by this shift of functions over to bland shopping malls, stripping market squares of sufficient urban density and financial investment. It is a fate these (post-)Jewish *shtetls* share with counterparts worldwide, as capitalist redevelopment often triggers the decline of urban centres. In small-town Poland, the situation feels particularly desperate. In Szczebrzeszyn, for instance, a grotesque postmodern edifice called the Shopping Mall Roztocze was built just 200 metres from the market square, worsening the latter's desertification.

Conclusion: The 'present absence' of historical consciousness

In this chapter, I dissected historical processes that have resulted in the 'present absence' of Jewish communities in post-*shtetls*. The notion that *shtetls* represent a 'vanished Atlantis', or 'lost continent', in previously revolutionary Yiddishland is underpinned by complex dynamics between cooperation and conflict, shattered by the tragic events of the Holocaust. Yet for me as a researcher, this 'lost continent' has not disappeared entirely: instead, it still haunts the Polish politics of memory and also the lives of current inhabitants of ex-Jewish towns. These former *shtetls* provided a historical stage on which processes of modernisation unfolded, the repercussions of which have been absorbed only subconsciously by Polish people and remain urgent today. I enter into this half-forgotten, half-remembered history with my projects, trying to find new paths within a crooked landscape, navigating around the material traces of 'present absence' that abound everywhere – and which still shape the urban policies in these underfunded small towns.

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6. Hanzl, *Morphological Analysis of Urban Structures*.
7. Wilczyk, *Niewinne oko nie istnieje*.
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9. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba* (*Heaven’s Gates*), 2015; Piechotka and Piechotka, *Heaven’s Gates: Masonry synagogues in the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, 2017.
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12. Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl*, 13–14.
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16. Aksenfeld, ‘The Headband’, 49–50.
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32. Shandler, *Shtetl*, 7.
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54. Film Polski, *Miasteczko*.
55. YouTube, ‘Miasteczko Staszów 1956’.
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63. Waligórska, *Klezmer’s Afterlife*, 66.
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66. Forecki, ‘“Mienie pożydowskie”’.
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68. Stola, ‘The Polish debate on the Holocaust and the restitution of property’, 245.
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85. Jewish Community of Warsaw, ‘Restitution’.
86. Municipality of Krasnobród, ‘Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Gminy Krasnobród na lata 2017–2023’, 113.
87. Municipality of Szczebrzeszyn, ‘Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Miasta Szczebrzeszyn’, 7.
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Chapter 2 | Nomadism

The geographical vastness of the 'lost continent' of *shtetls* clearly requires a creative design approach in response. I thus needed to experiment conceptually with interventions that would highlight the 'present absence' of architectural memory in selected towns, and at the same time also traverse the gap between the Jewish residues and the current urban conditions in Poland's often mundane peripheries. The idea of nomadism – in various forms of walking, driving, carrying, pushing or traversing – proved the answer to my dilemma, emerging during a process of exploration and testing. The idea of creating a nomadic form of archive came to me when travelling along the *shtetl* routes in 2015, passing through small Eastern European towns, visiting ruined synagogues and other ex-Jewish buildings, and talking with the people currently living there. I found not only inspiration, but also allies with whom I then created the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* and set it in motion.

The main aim of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* is to preserve and rejuvenate memory by 'liberating' surviving archives so that they can reactivate the spectral architecture of these small towns. In travelling to several post-*shtetls*, I started to experiment. At first, this was by moulding architectural forms in my imagination, using spectral designs to match ghostly urbanities, and later by working with real forms, eventually constructing them. By inventing and testing my concept of a mobile archive, the intention was to contribute to public awareness and to create discourses and methods to address the architectural erosion of (post-)Jewish towns – dealing with suppressed collective memory, anti-Semitism, and the harsh economic and political conditions in Poland's eastern periphery.

The form of the travelling archive, set upon wheels, remained a vibrant unknown from its very inception through to production and application in the field, the only constant function being processual testing. Nomadism, which is also key in my other projects such as *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy*, offers the most appropriate mode of exploring the layers of urban memory and probing the spectral atmosphere of abandoned (post-)Jewish properties. The archive thus became a piece of mobile architecture that, back in summer 2016, travelled with me through south-east Poland. Over a period of 10 days we parked the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* on the market squares of Kock, Piaski, Bychawa, Biłgoraj, Tyszowce, Szczebrzeszyn, Józefów, Krasnobród, Kraśnik and Wojsławice – each, with a population of fewer than 50,000 people,

previously had large inter-war Jewish populations and now had tight-knit Polish communities. The archive's sense of mobility was combined with its participatory openness, which expanded through a process of collective investigation and animation, activating oral histories and weaving social connections. The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* thus enabled a mutually beneficial exchange of memory – we displayed archival materials, while in response, local amateur historians led guided tours through the towns.

The design

The notion of an archive having a social purpose within vibrant public processes of memory also informed the architectural form of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. The archive was built on a BS 750 double-axed mobile trailer (4575 mm long, 2030 mm wide and 915 mm high), weighing 240 kilos. Logistics of purchase and legislation were dictated by my funding arrangements: the trailer came from a factory in Niewiadów, the mobile archive was built on top in Warsaw and then registered in Będzin in Silesia, where a friendly organisation called the Cukerman's Gate Foundation helps protect Jewish heritage. We chose this model of trailer because it could carry a heavy load, of up to 750 kilos, an important feat considering the heavy wooden frame and mirrored façades of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. The archive's daily routine – connecting and disengaging it from the tow-car – were facilitated by a system of smaller wheels and hooks, with the car being connected to the mobile archive via an electric 12-volt cord to provide power.

In drafting the design, I was inspired by the historic architecture in *shtetls* in the early Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, imagining the archive as a tribute to a past long gone. At the same time, I also wanted a sober and modern minimalist form, having realised that the use of mirrors would be my main design medium. I dreamed of how the mobile archive could scatter and 'devour' the market squares of post-*shtetls*. Yet the outline form of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was drawn from the silhouettes of lost wooden synagogues documented by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka. In particular, I developed a sympathy for a type of roof that once topped the synagogues in Suchowola, Olkienniki, Gwoździec or Janowiec. Quoting from *Bramy Nieba*:

Since the middle of the 17th century the combined roofs had been popularized. From the 1650s sloped roofs were used that were characterised by equal pitch, so-called Cracow-style roofs with wooden panels nested in the building, that divided the roof into an upper (principal) and lower part. From the 1750s so-called Polish-style roofs came into fashion, very similar in construction, but with slopes divided.[1]

Even though it was not easy to build, I therefore decided to include in my design a narrow cornice along the edges of the mobile archive's roof, creating an illusion of splendour and adding a rhythm to the mirrors which clad the structure. Without this otherwise unpretentious element, the mobile archive's roof would have appeared more trivial.

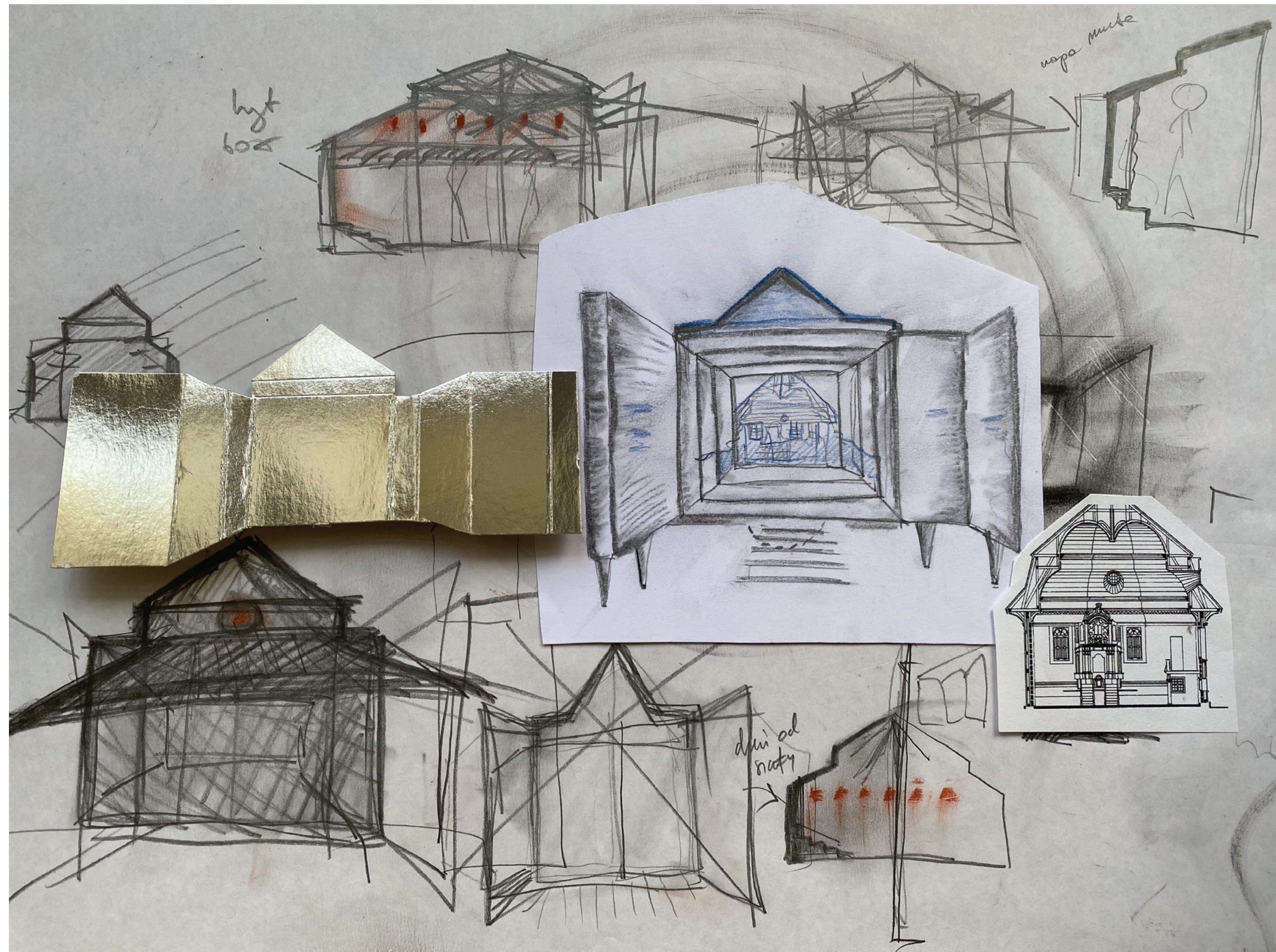
2.1

2.1 The wooden synagogue in Suchowola. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, while referencing old wooden synagogues, also touched on an even more fundamental legacy of nomadic architectural forms within Judaism. As Mimi Levy Lipis observes, the symbolism of 'portable houses' – the archetype of which is of course the Ark of the Covenant itself – has long been a popular thread in Jewish culture, ever since the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. This is because, as Lipis writes: 'Judaism has no longer been bound to a particular architecture or geographical location. The independence from a specific location was the prerequisite for the survival of the community in the diaspora.'[2] Hence, the visual representation of a mobile house, four walls covered by a pointed roof, became a popular motif of exquisite Jewish craft objects such as the Havdalah spice box, Hanukkah candelabra, or ceremonial marriage rings.[3]

We constructed the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in Konstancin, near Warsaw, from May to July 2016. The frame is in timber, the walls are unlaminated MDF. From ground to top the archive measures 3.5 metres in height. Its façades and roof were clad with plastic mirrors (the technicalities and meaning of which is discussed in the 'Mirrors' chapter). The main aims in using mirrors were to play on the notion of disappearance, to merge with urban surroundings as we moved around and to emphasise the significance of unveiled memories. The roof of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, including its overhangs, was sealed with silicon. At the top of the front and rear sides were two triangular mirrors (blue in front and red at the back) to accentuate the archive's outline and enable it to be ventilated during hotter days. The external doors, mounted on hinges, had four panels opening outwards. Internal panels were clad with wood, painted black, as an impromptu exhibition system on which to present architectural drawings, posters and archival materials about each post-*shtetl*.

The design and construction of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was realised in cooperation with Sebastian Kucharuk, with whom I work under the banner of the SENNA Collective (in Polish, '*senna*' means dreamy). We had established SENNA in 2013, along with Piotr Jakoweńko and Agata Korba; as will be noted, among our other commissioned projects is the adaptation of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House. To make the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*,



2.2

2.2 Sketches for the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* by Natalia Romik.

we in the SENNA Collective had thankfully many supporters: the Panorama of Cultures Association, Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, the Brama Cukermana Foundation, the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, and the Virtual Shtetl portal. Furthermore, we received financial backing from University College London's Bartlett School of Architecture, the Koret Foundation, the Taube Foundation and the Polish Ministry of Culture. All in all, the budget to create the archive and run its public programme totalled around £11,000.

The entrance to the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was covered by a heavy red velvet curtain, in the centre of which shone a Star of David embroidered with blue sequins. It was inspired by a pre-war photograph of a *parokhet*, the decorative curtain that separated off the *aron kodesh* in the Odelsk synagogue. In Hebrew, *'aron ha-kodesh'* means literally 'Holy Ark', and so it is the most holy place, a niche or an ornamental closet, located in the eastern wing of any synagogue, facing Jerusalem, where, behind doors covered by the *parokhet*, the holy scrolls of the Torah are stored and secured within the Torah Ark.[4] George Loukomski notes in his treatise on Jewish art in European synagogues that the splendour of the *aron kodesh* corresponds in visual richness to Christian altars.[5] This means that the *aron kodesh* is typically the most elaborately decorated element in a synagogue's interior – with a shorter curtain, the *kapporet*, hung onto the Torah Ark itself. In the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, our entrance *parokhet* curtain hence evoked the spectral interior of a synagogue (albeit instead of a *kapporet* we installed a portable screen on which to project archival movies). My inclusion of the *parokhet* was however more than merely decorative. I was advised by some to avoid such an overt reference to Judaism, in fear of inciting anti-Semitic reactions. But I was adamant about its inclusion, as this element firmly set the archive where it belonged in paying tribute to the communities of Polish Jews who for centuries contemplated the veil of the *parokhet* and the holy mystery stored behind. This clear identification indeed facilitated – rather than prevented – the reactions I experienced from people living in former *shtetls*. It did not provoke anger or negative emotions. On the contrary, when playfully mirrored on the façade, it enticed interest in Jewish traditions long gone.

2.3 Painting the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* on the inside, photograph by Sebastian Kucharuk.

2.3

For the interior of the mobile archive, the walls were painted black to accentuate the maps, drawings and photographs being shown. It was illuminated by a central lightbox supplemented by straps of LED lights (red and white), powered by the car's 12-volt battery. The lightbox featured the architectonic plan of a synagogue, explaining the elements of its design – *aron kodesh*, women's gallery, *mehitza* and *bimah* – which proved to be a special attraction for younger visitors. Also inside the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* were shelves to store and exhibit prints and books, archival boxes,

2.4

2.4 Construction of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, photograph by Sebastian Kucharuk.

chairs and a table, fastened safely during transport. In each town, we presented a site-related exhibition of archival material from *shtetls* – photos, movies, texts, *pinkas* and *yizkor* books, memory maps, literature and poetry, even a couple of theoretical and historical essays. Next to the archive, which usually was parked in a central location in town, we held discussions, workshops and screenings. Additionally, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* served as a mobile base for architectural interventions and performances, and as storage for artistic props, designs and materials activated in various public situations. On unfolding, its right-hand door panel presented the history of Jews from a given *shtetl*; the left-hand one a memory map reprinted from a *yizkor* book, examples of which are shown below.

Yizkor books were published after the Second World War by former Holocaust survivors. Often they include memory maps as an attempt to recall the *shtetls*. Quite frequently these are the only remaining documents that describe the former layouts, functions and locations of buildings of importance to Jewish communities in the pre-war era. The maps are usually hand-drawn and focus their attention on the key Jewish spaces within the urban tissue of *shtetls*, including building types such as synagogues.

The exhibition inside the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was thus constantly in motion, its form liquefied, following the physical travels of the vehicle in how it changed and transformed. At every stopover, the exhibition was adjusted to the context of the post-*shtetl* being visited, and was also enriched by that town's citizens, who brought us gifts for our travels – memorabilia, pieces of unknown stories, curiosities related to local Jewish heritage. Thus, the local inhabitants did not merely passively absorb the documents we presented but also played an active role as co-researchers. They helped us recognise the actual locations in archival photos or look for missing names, providing information not found in official state archives. They brought their elderly relatives, people who could remember times from before the traumas of the Second World War. They invited us into their homes and dwellings.

2.5

2.5 The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* on the market square in Kock, the façade view, photograph by Natalia Romik.

2.6

2.6 The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*'s interior showing the lightbox with a drawing of the synagogue in the background, photograph by Natalia Romik.

Conversations in each post-*shtetl* were different, yet some topics resurfaced: problems with the 're-privatisation' of property (some locals feared that Jews will return to claim back their houses), lack of historical knowledge about their town, the unfortunate currency of Polish anti-Semitism, pogroms during the 1920s and 1930s, and socio-economic problems caused by neoliberal policies in Poland from the 1990s – not just their effect on the legal status and condition of former Jewish properties, but also generally. The spectral presence of Jewish populations shrouded us all like a veil, albeit being visible nowhere.

Nomadism in theory

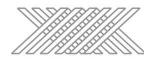
It is a complex task to assemble a theoretical apparatus of nomadism – embodied in the shape of architectural performance, and directing intuitive experimentation and research – especially within a territory so tainted by the extermination of Jewish peoples. Even though my work is not directly focused on the tragedy of the Holocaust, the desolate landscape of empty synagogues in Poland, frequented only by tourists and ghosts, and of resettled post-*shtetls*, is heavily burdened with injustices not only committed by Nazi occupation but also before by 'native' pogroms. To me, nomadism is a visual and intellectual machine, a 'sling' to shoot probes to test the *shtetls*. From the 1970s, nomadology emerged as a science of resistance and opposition, practiced and theorised most prominently by Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. As Rosi Braidotii suggests, 'nomadism becomes a metaphor for a certain mode of critical inquiry'.[6] Jonathan Noyes defines it as social dissent that is always in opposition to the centralising forces of the contemporary capitalist 'empire':

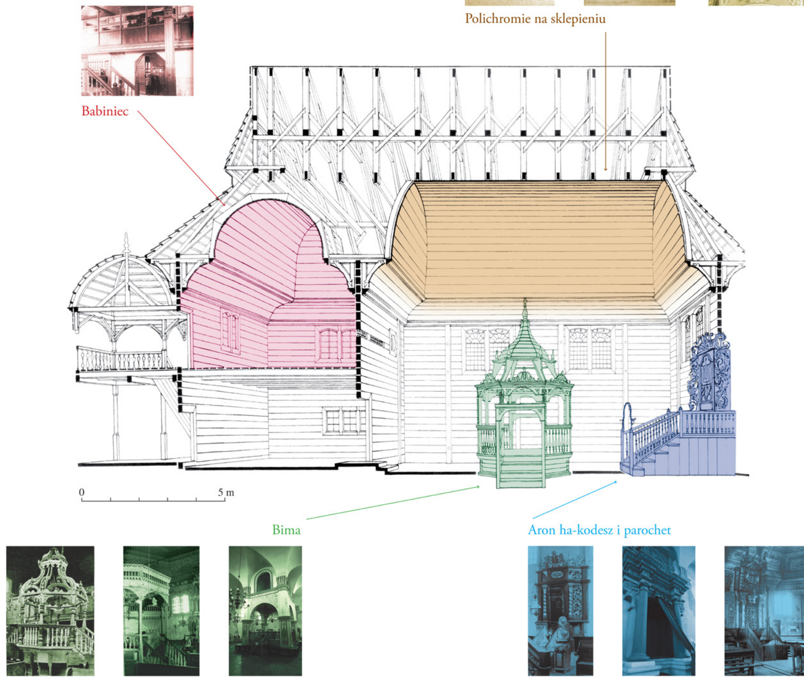
> Instead, it would have to be because the concept continues to present itself in precisely the same sense it has been articulated since antiquity – as a social (dis) arrangement and a subjective (dis)order on the fringes of empire, as a regime of technological, social, and conceptual innovation that is fundamentally opposed to empire but that can also serve as a repository of resources on which empire can draw for its own perpetuation.[7]

I read nomadic opposition between 'empire' and periphery on a different level – sometimes intuitively as a movement on the verge of a historical vortex, at other times literally in relation to my own travels, a direct reference to the peripheral zones of Polish neoliberal society, as I walked through the desolation of re-privatised properties, derelict synagogues turned

2.7

2.7 The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* on the market square in Kock, photograph by Natalia Romik.





2.8

2.8 Drawings of the synagogue as presented on the lightbox, featuring elements of sacral architecture, used during the workshops with children. Drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko and Natalia Romik.

into storage spaces or shops, and saw that the unemployment rate serves as a barometer indicating the mood in a post-*shtetl*. Behind these references, there also glitters a primordial sense of nomadism, of mobility unimpeded by borders, of free people going wherever their desires lead them. As suggested by Hans Barnard and Willeke Wendrich, editors of *The Archaeology of Mobility: Old world and new nomadism*:

The etymology of the word 'nomad' goes back to the ancient Greek nomades, pastoral tribes, related to the verb nemo, which means to distribute, to pasture or to graze flocks (Liddell *et al.* 1958). The term is, therefore originally linked to pastoralism but has achieved a much broader meaning in which the most important aspect is that of a (residentially) mobile existence.[8]

Another important definition of nomadism – which contextualises my research into the urban substance of *shtetls*, especially in their paradoxical relationship to social conflict – is provided by the *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*:

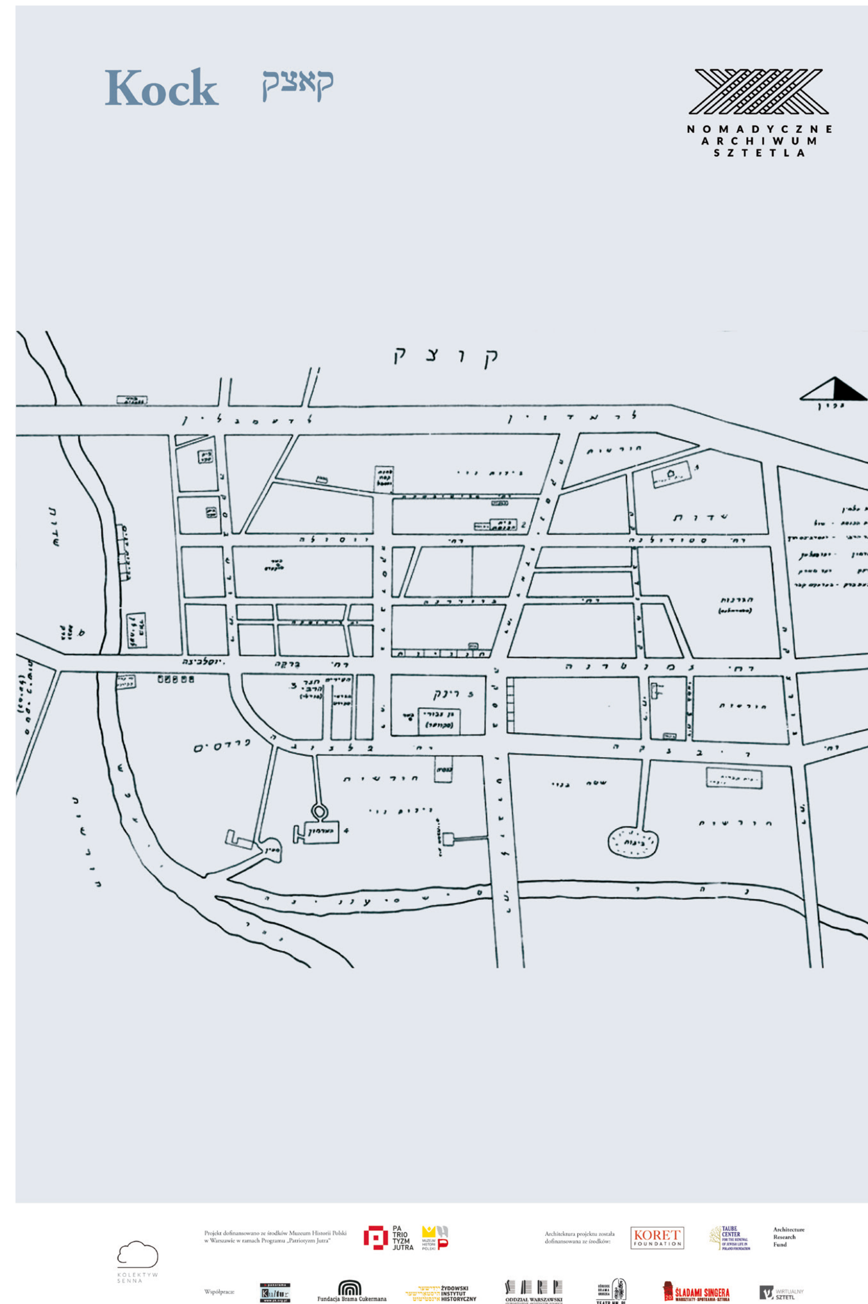
Nomads move, from one place to another, taking their families and homes . . . and avoiding the threats of enemies and supporting their allies. Whether there is a permanent 'home' site or not, mobility of the household requires a technology of travel and transport, including baggage and in some cases burden animals, and of shelter, either mobile dwellings, such as tents or yurts, or the ability to construct dwellings from local materials . . . If people cannot get along or are in conflict, they can easily separate one from another and resolve the difficulty through avoidance.[9]

Nomadism as a mode of conflict resolution through dispersion: this suggestion makes me rethink my own architectural and artistic practice. Does nomadic architecture inherit an aura of counter-domination, decentralisation and anti-hegemonic struggle against the urge to overpower nature and other people by economic, political or other means? I prefer to leave this question open, as it resurfaces often during my travels, directing

2.9 Tableaus mounted on the doors of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in Kock. Drawn by the SENNA Collective. Featuring a description of the town, information about its Jewish history, and a memory map from the local 'memory book'. After completion of the project, the tableaus were gifted to the local schools and cultural houses.

2.9

2.10 Another photograph of the tableau presented on the doors of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in Kock. Drawn by the SENNA Collective.



2.10

my experiments rather than offering easy answers.

In reviewing the concept of nomadic architecture, one realises that mobile projects can serve an ambiguous double function of being simultaneously a 'relayer' and 'resistor' of social and political transformations. They negotiate urban effects of processes unfolding at the scale of globe, continent or country, such as mass migration, economic austerity, climate warming or rising inequality. Nomadic architecture can respond to what surrounds it, contingent within its context. Those favouring nomadic interventions often refer to these concrete, local situations – they drift in their own processes (fieldwork) to establish contact with a public, ensuring its participation. Nomadic architecture becomes a catalyst for activism, mobilising people in response to a perceived problem.[10]

In this respect, nomadism can be contrasted with designs by star-architects like Rem Koolhaas, which depend on a complicated system of production, cost and profit within capitalism, which ossifies the architectural process into forms alienated from urban life. Even if star-architects pretend to embrace mobility, in fact they are only responding to a very specific form of it, as encapsulated in financial flows. They cater to the demand for unrestrained accumulation of capital, and only rarely do they respond to the needs and desires of people who inhabit the spaces dominated by the very capital that star-architects help to accumulate. Ignored are the nomads of the contemporary metropolis: the homeless, migrants, temporary workers and so on. If star-architects ever penetrate the conflict zones of cities, they do so to exploit them even further; meanwhile, the bruises of the capitalist metropolis are healed by social movements of displaced people, who are the real nomads of today.

Even star-architects such as Bernard Tschumi, in pretending to be looking for other tactics, have their hands tied by the fact that real-estate investment is too tight to be able to mediate sufficiently between different modes of action. Instead, they adopt a bird's-eye view of financial flow as if it were a natural one, hovering too high above a metropolis to speak with its citizens, as seen in Tschumi's quote:

> Architects act as mediators between authoritarian power, or capitalist power, and some sort of humanistic aspiration. The economic and political powers that make our cities and our architecture are enormous. We cannot block them but we can use another tactic, which I call the tactic of judo, that is, to use the forces of one's opponent in order to defeat it and transform it into something else . . . To what extent can we move away from a descriptive critical mode to a progressive, transformative mode for architecture?[11]

A dedication to progressive transformation is a historical tendency of nomadic thinking in both architecture and art. Indeed, dissent with static and dominant architectural forms is historically anchored in the rebellious energies of modernity itself. It was evoked in its purest form in the 'Manifesto of Futurist Architecture' in 1914, formulated by Antonio Sant'Elia:

We have, in fact, lost our sense of the monumental, the ponderous, the static; we have enriched our sensibilities with a taste for the light, the practical, the ephemeral and fast-moving. We no longer feel ourselves to be men of cathedrals, palaces and ancient assembly halls, but of great hotels, railway stations, immense highways, colossal ports, covered markets, luminous galleries, straight roads and salutary demolitions.[12]

Lightness, transience, practicality have thus become the modalities of nomadic projects until today. They are purposefully anti-monumental, despising static forms and preferring to be animated by unseen flows.

Nomadic architecture dialectically embraces nomadism as a trait of contemporary life while reclaiming primeval forms of nomadic existence, as analysed by Francesco Careri in his seminal book on 'walkscapes' when he discusses moving in space as both a political and an artistic act. Nomadic subjects freely traverse spaces regimented by the state and capital, unmaking settled hierarchies. Careri's writings on nomadism are particularly interesting for me in the context of Jewish architecture, since he refers to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, which he believes represents an archetypical conflict between nomads and settlers – people who move freely following their flock and those who toil the land.[13] Cain, a settled farmer, envied his brother, a nomadic shepherd. Abel, freed from daily labour, had time to think, explore and make art. Cain had nothing of that, being bound to the land and tending his crops. But after killing his brother, he was doomed to roam the earth, with this time nomadism becoming not a blessing but a curse, as Careri observes: 'Abel's nomadism is transformed from a condition of privilege to one of divine punishment. The error of fratricide is punished with a sentence to err without a home, eternally lost in the land of Nod, the infinite desert where Abel had previously roamed.'[14]

The deadly struggle for recognition, being respected and appreciated by God himself, is according to Careri a metaphor about the human conflict for space, the components of which are not decided upon by Cain and Abel but defined by their Creator. The opposition between settlement and transience is the division between accumulated capital (resources, power, hierarchies) and its dispersal. It is telling that it was Cain, the one who settled, who envied Abel, the one who roamed freely. In punishment for his crime, Cain was doomed to move endlessly on the deserted land, his desires never satiated, his longings never satisfied. In this regard, this nomadism is reminiscent of the movements of capital – always hungry for its continuous accumulation – exploiting settlers to move on.

Could anti-nomadism, as settled existence, separated from nature by its very toil, and which concentrates production instead of dispersing and distributing its results, be considered a specific form of enslavement? Karl Marx, in his early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* from 1844, emphasised the dialectic relationship between production, expropriation and nature:

The worker can create nothing without nature, the sensuous exterior world. It is the matter in which his labour realizes itself, in which it is active, out of which and through which it produces. Thus the more the worker appropriates the exterior world of sensuous nature by his labour, the more he deprives himself of the means of subsistence, firstly since the exterior sensuous world increasingly ceases to be an object belonging to his work, a means of subsistence for his labour; secondly, since it increasingly ceases to be a means of subsistence in the direct sense, a means for the physical subsistence for the worker.

Thus in these two ways the worker becomes a slave to his object: firstly he receives an object of labour, that is he receives labour, and secondly, he receives the means of subsistence. Thus it is his object that permits him to exist first as a worker and secondly as a physical subject.[15]

From a historical and literary viewpoint, when nomadism is physically embodied in architectural form, it serves a double function. In the first instance it is oppositional to dominant, persistent socio-economic structures by being potentially destructive (for example the Trojan Horse). In the second, it is a 'concealing', 'stealthy', 'containing' device, bonded with what it holds inside, a 'treasure', which it protects and carries to a destination (like the Ark of the Covenant). These two modalities of nomadic architecture (destructive and protective) rely upon each other. Hence, the Ark of the Covenant can be seen as a multi-layered example of the 'treasure in motion', wrapped in multiple interpretations and commentaries, from its inception until disappearance. It is of course a significant symbol in many faiths – Judaism, Islam, Christianity – as well as in literary tradition and pop culture. The travel writer Bruce Chatwin, who popularised the idea of *The Nomadic Alternative*, describes a parable in which the Ark is one of the nomadic puzzles of Judaism, representing the 'moral ambiguities of settlement'. He writes:

Their God is a projection of their perplexity . . . Yahweh, in origin, is a God of the Way. His sanctuary is the Mobile Ark, His House a tent, His Altar a cairn of rough stones. And though He may promise His Children a well-watered land . . . He secretly desires for them the Desert.[16]

The architectural dimension of the Ark was meticulously described in the Torah, as is its process of construction: 'Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.'[17] In this description of the Ark, special attention is paid to the golden cladding covering it:

It is to be 2½ cubits in length, 1½ in breadth, and 1½ in height. It is to be overlaid within and without with gold, and a crown or molding of gold is to be put around it. Four rings of gold are to be put into its corners – two on each side – and through these rings, staves of shittim-wood overlaid with gold for carrying the Ark are to be inserted; and these are not to be removed. A golden cover, adorned with golden cherubim, is to

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2.11 Engraving in the Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria (244–5 AD): in the foreground is Ark of the Covenant, set on a wooden cart with two wheels. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DuraSyn-WB4-Ark_and_Temple_of_Dagon.jpg.

be placed above the Ark; and from here the Lord says He will speak to Moses.[18]

Gold and light were thus embedded in the Ark's very structure: it was exquisitely crafted, unique and holy. For centuries the Ark, reputedly created by an artist/craftsman named Bezalel, inspired generations of rabbis and cabbalists as the epitome of both material and spiritual treasure. On the ancient engraving in the synagogue of Dura-Europos in Syria (244–5 CE), which depicts a biblical story about the Philistines kidnapping the Ark, who took it to the Temple of Dagon, the Ark is depicted much more mundanely, on a cart carried on wooden wheels, under a modest canopy, concealed from its enemies, unassuming. In this instance, the Ark looks a bit like a mobile market stall.[19] This more everyday image of spiritual treasure carried on a cart, under a concealing canopy, is what informed my thinking about the design of *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. I was attracted to the cart's simplicity and minimalism.

This kind of nomadic structure, destined to carry a treasure to its destination, disguised if circumstances demand it, is intertwined as mentioned with the nomadism of war machines, of tribes, warriors and conquests. In the Bible, the Ark of the Covenant was also used as a siege machine, helping Israelites to conquer the Promised Land. Interestingly, the most canonical of siege machines in Greek mythology – the Trojan Horse – was both a machine of war and of wit, built by Epeius and commissioned by Odysseus. Thus, the Trojan Horse on one hand played a role of treasonous gift, a key to open a walled city from inside. On the other hand, military siege machines, such as *helepolis* (Greek for a 'taker of cities'), a mobile siege tower plus battering ram, were among the most advanced inventions of ancient warfare, a way to aggressively overcome, to open what is sealed, to create a breach.[20] In this way, *helepolis* becomes a suitable metaphor for my agonistic artistic and architectural projects, those aimed at rupturing settled symbolic structures, provoking and creating a stir, such as *JAD* (as will be discussed in the 'Mirrors' chapter). The *helepolis* as an architectural engine was also described in detail in the Bible:

When Demetrius Poliorcetes besieged Salamis, in Cyprus, he caused a machine to be constructed, which he called 'the taker of cities'. Its form was that of a square tower, each side being 90 cubits high and 45 wide. It rested on four wheels, each eight cubits high. It was divided into nine stories, the lower of which contained machines for throwing great stones, the middle large catapults for throwing spears, and the highest, other machines for throwing smaller stones, together with smaller catapults. It was manned with 200 soldiers, besides those who moved it by pushing the parallel beams at the bottom.[21]

I therefore consider the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, and others of my *shamash*, to be akin to nomadic 'war machines' discussed by Guattari and Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* as assemblages which mutate and transform, never controllable by the centralised powers, destabilising the state apparatus.[22] I employ my *shamash* to reassemble social memory in opposition to the historical policy of the Polish state and wilful amnesia of its citizens, both of which block potential reconciliation with post-*shtetls* – which will only ever be possible by shouldering the responsibility for the 'present absence' of the former Jewish community.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to nomadism as a relational construct and define interventions formulated in opposition to empire as 'nomadological'.[23] As Noyes notes, this 'figure for a certain relationship of critical thought to the activities of the State and the movements of capital has found widespread resonance in critical and postcolonial theory'.[24] But is it sensible to claim that the war machine, in its spatial and geographic transversion, is – as Deleuze and Guattari argue – by necessity an extraterritorial arrangement, only serving its dialectic function if it is external to the state apparatus? The answer looms in how we see a nomad interwoven with the war machine. The nomad, constantly redeploying from one space to another, does not ignore the space in-between territories: instead she/he negotiates and inhabits that space, since it constitutes a real 'intermezzo' of nomadic life. It is inscribed in the membrane of exclusion and conflict, in which the nomad intervenes not only directly, by deploying war machines in conflict zones, but also by staying alert in the time of 'intermezzo'.[25] This 'intermezzo', the state of being in-between, emergent, in the process of development, is important for all nomadic projects – and so one needs to keep in mind this fundamental inconclusiveness while trying to define or evaluate such projects, including those which attempt to cope with the exclusion, homelessness or the spectral presence of Jewish communities.

Art of nomadism

While reflecting on nomadic architecture which might resist the current sociopolitical order, it is apt to refer to the iconic works of the Polish artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko. He invented and popularised the concept of 'critical vehicles', mobile barometers that were responsive to social and political vibrations, many of which he tested in the USA and Poland. One of the best-known is *Homeless Vehicle*, designed by Wodiczko in the 1980s in response to a plague of homelessness ravaging New York once neoliberal urban policies began taking their toll. Estimates in 1987–8 were of over 70,000 rough-sleepers in one of the world's wealthiest metropoles.[26] The aim of his project was simple – to provide for a basic need of a homeless person, which is shelter, while countering social ostracism and stigma, legitimising their status as equal members of society. By using supermarket trolleys as the inspiration for his design, Wodiczko alluded also to the practices of homeless

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2.12 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Homeless Vehicle*, New York, 1988. Courtesy of Profile Foundation, Warsaw.

2.13 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Pojazd*, Warsaw, 1973. Courtesy of Profile Foundation, Warsaw.

people, who often subvert those same trolleys for their own purposes.

According to Wodiczko, his vehicle was not designed to be a utopian solution, a prototype to be widely implemented, but instead a critical art project, a contribution to the public debate about homelessness. The project itself, constructed on a mobile platform, certainly reminds one of an elongated shopping trolley. The upper part is designed as a waterproof shelter, suspended on an aluminium-and-steel frame, while the lower construction contains plenty of safe storage spaces and multifunctional drawers.[27] The vehicle served as public interface, signifying the presence of a homeless person within the shared space of the city, which due to the visibility of the vehicle could not be easily dismissed or ignored. To arrive at his design, the artist consulted with homeless people and scavengers, testing along with them pilot versions of his design. Between 1988 and 1989 four variants of *Homeless Vehicle* were created, trialled in different places in New York, including City Hall Park, parks across from the Criminal Court in Tompkins Square Park, Wall Street, Battery Park and Greenpoint Park in Brooklyn. Wodiczko discussed his projects as interventions into everyday life, to which they apply methods of critical analysis and ideological performance.[28] According to Wodiczko, the term 'critical vehicle' was directly related to the notion of a 'carrier':

The word vehicle is associated with the concept of a carrier. In some dictionaries, it is described as 'a person or a thing' used

as a medium 'to convey ideas or emotions'. It is commonly understood as a means of transmission, display and expression. The term critical suggests judgment, an act of pointing out shortcomings, defects or error. It implies indispensability and an alarming or dangerous situation, as well as risk-taking. A critical vehicle is, therefore, a medium; a person or a thing acting as a carrier for displaying or transporting vital ingredients and agents. It is set to operate as a turning point in collective or singular consciousness.[29]

Homeless Vehicle unearthed a fundamental conflict about urban space: the latter is both a cohesive and antagonistic space, a melting pot that integrates different groups of people, yet also an arena where their conflicting interests need to clash. This agonistic relationship is fundamental to democracy, guaranteeing a truly public character for urban space, as Chantal Mouffe suggests in her analysis of the role played by public art in social struggles.[30]

Another notable project by Wodiczko, which continued his line of inquiry, was *Poliscar*, the function of which was to facilitate communication between homeless people, thus enhancing their mutual ties. Here the vehicle was of a different ilk – in resembling a 'war machine' more than an interface for communication, its austere façade and dynamic lines made it look like a surveillance device, not a mediator. Yet despite its unwelcoming appearance, it contained everything needed for urban survival such as food, shelter and medical supplies.[31] Even in his earliest works, Wodiczko had referred explicitly to the political context in which his art unfolds. In a 1973 project, called simply *The Vehicle*, he critiqued the Polish economic policy of that decade. This mobile wooden platform was placed on four bicycle wheels and looked a bit like a coffin; it was propelled by the artists' movements, slowly moving steadily straight forward. In order to move just 10 metres, the operator had to make 20 steps, an ironic comment on the economic futility of Soviet-controlled socialism.[32] Unfortunately, all of Wodiczko's 'critical vehicles' remained as 'just' art projects, serving more like commentaries than substantial interventions. His projects remained constrained by the conventions of the contemporary art market, which emphasises the value of original artworks to be exhibited, sold and collected. In this circuit social application does not really translate, whereby it differs from both social design and nomadic architecture. Wodiczko was clearly trying to shift beyond the boundaries of the art market, yet still found himself limited by thinking about his inventions not as prototypes to be disseminated, but as unique contributions to public debate.

Another example of addressing the problems of homelessness and migration by means of artistic nomadism, again mainly in a symbolic vein, is the work of a British artist, Lucy Orta. *Habitent* from 1992 is an interesting hybrid between a nomadic intervention, portable shelter and fashion design.[33] It resulted from Orta's experiments with 'body architecture', designing clothes that can serve as tents – all made from silver fabric, and distributed among

homeless people in Paris and Monachium. Interestingly, Orta also designs mobile architecture based on cargo trucks (e.g. Piaggio Ape) or bikes (e.g. Chinese tricycles), an instance of which is a project from another of her series, the *Mobile Reservoir*. Even though this latter project lacks any utilitarian function within public space, it is a critical figure and mobile sculpture which addresses the problem of water distribution.[34] In contrast to Wodiczko, Orta does not engage in engineering work, but deals with more sensuous interactions between body, architecture and the condition of enforced nomadism, the lack of a shelter constitutive for migration or homelessness. Similar to Wodiczko, however, her interventions remain as pilot projects or symbolic punches rather than actual attempts at resolving social problems. Obviously, the impact of this kind of project on debates in art and architecture should not be underestimated, yet in my understanding nomadic architecture should not limit itself to being 'just' a discursive intervention.

Today, there are a plethora of nomadic projects that implicate architecture in their treatment of mobility, often using trucks or trolleys. They are being produced by numerous collectives worldwide that specialise in this type of architecture, with particular inspiration for me coming from practices like raumlabor in Berlin and Public Works from London. I personally contributed as an artist and crew member for one of raumlabor's nomadic projects, *The Knot*. It was designed to travel between Berlin, Bucharest and Warsaw in summer 2010, intervening in public spaces in those cities.[35] As the hub for this mobile artistic centre, raumlabor decided to use a medium-sized truck to form an office, stage and resting place, being additionally the means of transport to move related pieces of equipment between the three cities. Public events were thus hosted in three inflatable structures and on a large urban mattress: this mobile settlement also consisted of a kitchen compound, tables, benches and small tents. A different take on the challenges of nomadic urbanism was raumlabor's *Kitchen Monument*.[36] It consists of a translucent balloon that serves as an intermittent canteen, inflated by large vents, located inside a steel cube, which provides an entry point to the balloon, the foundation of which is set on a trolley. This bubble can be adjusted to various urban spaces; it was placed under bridges or in commercial passageways, inflating itself to fit their shape, and serving as a temporary zone for collective gatherings, dinners or conferences.

As a 2007 project by a British collective, Public Works, *Folk Float* was an interesting example of mobile archive, refurbishing a decommissioned milk float. The operational centre for *Folk Float* was the town of Egremont, from where it toured the villages of Cumbria in north-west England, gathering and exhibiting people's stories, memorabilia, significant objects and becoming a living archive of the region's oral history. It was equipped with a coffee machine, workshop table, protection screen and also provided covered shelter for meetings on rainy days.[37] This participatory project also existed in a virtual space,

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2.14 Photograph of *The Kitchen Monument*, raumlabor, Berlin (2006), photograph by Rainer Schlautmann. http://raumlabor.net/kuchenmonument/.

as the documentation of collected objects could be viewed on the internet page of this nomadic gallery.

A truly provocative take on nomadic vehicles was Jeremy Deller's *It Is What It Is*, a mobile museum of the Second Gulf War that showcased a wreck of a car-bomb brought from Iraq being placed in front of diners, supermarkets, on parking lots and in plazas and toured 14 US cities. It crossed America from coast to coast, a road movie made in everyday life, a surreal juxtaposition of a material witness to humanitarian catastrophe presented to US citizens amid their daily surroundings, rupturing peaceful existence with images of a war waged by their country thousands of miles away.[38] Likewise, Ewa Majewska and Kuba Szreder, two Polish theoreticians of contemporary art, interpret the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* as an expression of anti-authoritarian resistance that subversively opposes what they call – after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari – 'everyday micro-fascism' (with strong foundations in xenophobia). They regard the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* as an example of 'weak resistance', a non-heroic form of political opposition, which intervenes in daily life not by political posturing, but by modest yet meaningful gestures, engaging in dialogue with various audiences, not just limited to the cultured visitors to metropolitan galleries. According to Majewska and Szreder, such projects are like temporary zones of everyday resistance. They do not bring social change in themselves but can be seen as constitutive to wider social transformation, to which they contribute alongside more stable institutions and political associations. *Crazy Gallery*, a mobile venue for exhibiting contemporary art, set up by an anarcho-artistic collective, Goldex Poldex, travelled similarly to *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* through small Polish towns around the same time. Shaped after the peripatetic exhibitions of the Communist era, it reached out to audiences beyond the main artistic centres. It was also built on the back of a truck that stored a portable exhibition infrastructure, stage and outdoor cinema, assembled and disassembled on each site. In organising their programmes beyond the conventions of 'white cube' galleries, Goldex Poldex thus reframed art as an act of imagination that intervenes in and transforms everyday environments.[39]

There are multitudes of similar projects emerging worldwide, and their

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2.15 Photograph of the project by the British collective Public Works titled *Folk Float* (2007). www.publicworksgroup.net/projects/folkfloat.

'explosion' over the last 20 years embodies the creative resistance of artists, designers, architects and urban sociologists. Mobile architecture is able to move between urban centres and peripheries, to those places which lack a cultural and academic infrastructure, where frequently there are no museums or galleries of contemporary art at all, nor research institutes or discursive platforms, and where the local populace is frequently unused to or even sceptical of contemporary art and academia. Mobile projects hybridise contemporary art practices in urban peripheries, thereby challenging both the conventions of the contemporary art market and a public audience unfamiliar with it. Certainly, they are not formalist artworks, to be exhibited, contemplated, sold or collected. Instead they are used and cherished in their practical applications for the communities engaged. They are what Stephen Wright terms 'projects in one-to-one scale' – that is, not 'just' art, but artistic propositions that put their own imaginative potentials into practice.[40] This kind of art lies beyond the conventions of the art world, with Wright noting:

It is certainly possible to describe them as having a double ontology; but it may be more closely in keeping with their self-understanding to argue that this is not an ontological issue at all, but rather a question of the extent to which they are informed by a certain coefficient of art. Informed by artistic self-understanding, not framed as art.[41]

Importantly, the use-values of such realisations are not voided by their off-the-scene locations: on the contrary, their aesthetics and applications are reciprocally enhanced, and the more used they are, the more aesthetically charged they become. In this way, the concept of 'double ontology' unpicks the usual fixation on uselessness predominant in Western aesthetical thought since at least Immanuel Kant. Yet this opposition between aesthetics and use is deeply Eurocentric, and very specific to that particular strand of Western thought. Alfred Gell, an anthropologist of art, rebukes the claims of Arthur Danto that the distinction between the aesthetically charged and the merely useful is a universal human constant. He disagrees with Danto's claims that 'artworks have meaning apart from their use, and insofar as they are art they are not useful but meaningful'.[42] Instead, Gell describes animal traps invented in various cultures as instances of both useful and meaningful objects, eventually coming to compare artistic objects with traps: 'Every work of art that works is like this, a trap or a snare that impedes

passage; and what is any art gallery but a place of capture, set with what Boyer calls "thought-traps", which hold their victims for a time, in suspension?'[43]

My own design practice supports this viewpoint fully. If an artwork is a trap, then indeed the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* is a mobile trap, a thought-trap, or even a ghost-trap, which impedes the passage of people who simply want to pass by. Instead, it entices their curiosity, lures them in, grabs their attention, at first leaving them bewildered, but later more thoughtful and reflective.

The mobile nature of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*,[44] *JAD*[45] and *Hurdy-Gurdy* – or my other projects like *RUMB* (2011),[46] *Sauna* (2015)[47] or *The Knot*[48] – creates a platform for building alliances in the sense of temporary assemblages of people, architecture, thoughts and images. It works like a relay race: a torch passed from organisers to artists, and then to users and community organisers, who become local allies. An idea can be planted and grow into yet another project or even into a building. Nomadic architecture hence differs from 'mere' art in that it is used by others, by a nomadic tribe – a nomad is rarely by her/himself – who can use it collectively, make it accessible, activate it and modify it in the process of use.

JAD can thus be used and activated by local associations according to their own needs and desires, since the configuration of nomadic architecture and community of users differs in each of the artworks and their audiences. Jonathan Hill observes that, in artistic practice as it is understood by the mainstream art world, authorship is conventionally attributed only to a single creator, whereas in architecture authorship needs to be distributed between different agents in the process – designer, client, engineer, urbanist, user and so on – and hence is negotiated through their cooperative exchanges.[49] Nomadic architecture, when working at a one-to-one scale, is able to test concepts in practice, and materialise what otherwise would remain intangible or just plausible. In this respect, it negotiates between the – often too elusive – world of conceptual 'art for art's sake' and the more material realm of architecture. This nexus is also animated by practices of daily use, with Hill noting: 'everyday use brings the building's materiality to the fore. It is touched, marked and scuffed. The habitual and tactile experience of the building sits uneasily with the concept that ideas are superior to matter, limiting the building's status as an art object.'[50]

This fact of being used, put into action, was thus a central tenet of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*: only because it was practiced was it able to melt into the towns that it traversed, blending with their communities, forging new alliances. In this paradoxical manner, this piece of mobile architecture, which passed through many sites, became genuinely, and not superficially, site-specific. Can the specificity of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* and the unexpected impact of this project be attributed to the unprecedented, weird, even outlandish performance of a mirror-clad cart on wheels travelling through Polish landscapes? To what extent did the design of its external elevation contribute to the overall success of the project? The archive

was an example of liquid motion, being quite lyrical despite the heavy burden of themes it carried – problematic memories, desolated communities, restitution of property – all of them protected and concealed by its mirror-clad architectural design.

Motion/action

When travelling between *shtetls*, those were the moments when the external landscapes melted, providing glimmering escapes from the static urban tissues, so hard to capture. In the transitions between towns, surrounded by green trees and illuminated by patches of sunlight, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was optically rendered invisible by its mirrored surfaces – this illusion being amplified by velocity, borderlessness, converging with its surroundings. We were not there. Days and nights evaporated. Sometimes, when in open space, our vehicle strongly reflected sunbeams, raising fears of whether it might blind other drivers and pedestrians. Because of its semi-invisibility and concerns for safety, we avoided – as much as possible – driving after nightfall. The roads in south-east Poland are very dark. There are relatively few settlements en route, and roads typically pass through a rolling landscape of dense woods, dusky valleys and gentle hills.

The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, in its nomadism, thus embodied a dialectic between 'motion' and 'respite' that directed our every step. Unresolved conversations with residents of towns we visited began from the moment we parked our vehicle there, and continued later, all around. We talked whenever we set up the archive, or changed the exhibition, went for walks, opened our doors – in doing so, we responded to queries about the invisible/visible elevation of the archive, the contents it carried and its public programmes.

The mobility of archive was interrupted by stationary periods of sleep, stopover and respite. It was also interwoven with logistical questions (e.g. the need to find an experienced driver, decent roads and a safe place to park), travel preparations (e.g. before hitting a road, to make sure that loose items like books, speakers, chairs or tables were tied to something stable), power supply (the need for connection to an electricity grid), inevitable malfunctions (once, just before Tyszowce, our brakes stopped working), archival contents (in each town a new exhibit had to be set up) and daily general maintenance (such as our perennial problem with a broken hinge). This dialectic of movement and sleep is an ancient one, from when humans first formed settlements but were still ingrained in primordial forms of nomadism. As pointed out in *The Archaeology of Mobility: Old world and new nomadism*, periods of sleep were very important, closely associated with mobility, combining different modalities of time.[51]

The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* stayed watchful: even our periods of rest were made shorter by informal discussions into the small hours, feasting with our hosts, people with whom we shared an interest in Jewish heritage. These informal interactions were followed by exchanges in which we discussed the challenges they faced in their daily work or talked about cultural life in peripheral regions. Assembling and

disassembling the installation, including the exhibition elements, typically lasted for an hour each time. The main challenge was parking (due to the archive's bulkiness) and bumping over kerbs (potentially damaging to our speaker system or other loose elements inside). The repetitive rhythm of this process, in every town, day after day for two weeks, imprinted the details of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* into our minds. Our small support team (Monika Tarajko, Aga Szreder, Agata Korba and Alina Sulowska) even shared dreams about hooks, hinges and suspension systems.

While preparing the visits, I not only collected materials for our archive, but also acquainted myself with the social history and current problems of each post-*shtetl*. To link with local people, one needs to know about current rate of unemployment, be able to engage in conversation about failing industries, understand how the town voted in recent elections, and discuss the causes of social ills haunting these communities, such as alcoholism or mass migration to Western Europe. These mobile variables followed in our footsteps, with statistics from Poland's Central Office for Statistical Research paving our way.

My first visual inspiration for the design of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was an old photograph depicting settlers from the Colony of Isaac.[52] People are shown standing near a cart, packed with a couple of rectangular, wooden boxes – possibly beehives. This weathered cart, employed in the daily toil of the colony (an interesting hybrid between town and village, prefiguring the Israeli *kibbutz*), inspired me for unknown reasons. It is hard to guess what the Jewish citizens in this photo are doing: what are they carrying, where are they going? All we know for sure is that they are working very hard and looking satisfied with their labours. Somehow this image of a cart and productive toil triggered two versions of the archive – a small cube that I carried with me as the first iteration, and then the full-blown mobile cart moving between the former Jewish *shtetls*.

The Colony of Isaac (Kolonia Izaaka) was established in Poland in 1849 by 26 families as a farming community.[53] The land, covering 422.4 hectares, was donated by the Russian Treasury, and the candidates for future farmers were recruited mainly from the population of nearby Odelsk. The settlement no longer exists, yet previously it was located south-west of that town. Agriculture was the main income source for this experimental community. Settlers farmed the land (wheat, barley, rye), planted fruit trees and engaged in crafts. The settlement did not weather the Second World War; instead the inhabitants were transported and murdered in the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their wooden houses were also destroyed.

Within this photograph I found a new perspective that led me to enlarge the small architectural cube, *Hurdy-Gurdy*, which I had used in Częstochowa in September 2014. The steadiness and endurance of this Jewish colony was inspiring, and the mystery of what was in the cart intrigued me. The cart, the wheels, the rectangular boxes (with hard-acquired treasures) – all led me to think about a nomadic archive that could carry what I am not able to carry myself, and travel to where

2.16

2.16 Colony of Isaac, from Salomon Salit, *Kolonja Izaaka: Wieś powiatu sokólskiego*. Państwowy Instytut Naukowy Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Puławach, 1934. https://pbc.biaman.pl/dlibra/publication/1397/edition/1540/content.

I could not go on foot. I used this photograph during numerous presentations and lectures as an insight into what *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* might be, before it came into being. During a site-writing workshop with Jane Rendell in 2016, when I shared this image with my fellow students, the kernel of an idea appeared that developed into the fully fledged project.

The *shtetl* routes

The voyages of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* began – at least on a conceptual level – a long time before it hit the roads of south-east Poland. In July 2015, I was accepted to partake in a programme titled 'Shtetl Routes: Vestiges of Jewish cultural heritage in cross-border tourism in the borderland of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine'. A couple of weeks later I found myself among 20 fellow travellers from Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Germany and Israel, who were invited to go to remote and otherwise barely accessible Jewish heritage sites in Eastern Europe.[54] It was an intense research trip, accompanied by lectures by experts, site scans, mapping exercises and meetings with local activists. It was embedded within a strategic development programme of the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin, the aims of which are to preserve the Jewish heritage of that region, to generate and promote knowledge about it, and to animate cross-border cooperation.

The 'Shtetl Routes' tour was for me personally very important. It was the longest and most intense excursion into the *shtetl* heartland since my adventures in the region began in 2007, when I was working on part of an urban regeneration scheme for Chmielnik – repurposing a synagogue – for an architectural firm, Nizio Design International. I had visited *shtetls* before, and I had documented the afterlife of synagogues, and then later I started on my PhD research. Yet the 'Shtetl Routes' tour proved totally special due to the intensity of its 24/7 exchanges, the flurry of images and impressions, the friendships forged, many lasting until today, the ideas seeded and the projects started. My nomadic archive is thus rooted there, in the 'Shtetl Routes' initiative. Not only did my voice recordings and sketches direct my subsequent design, but also the alliances made, in this in-between space, proved crucial for the realisation of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. I met the facilitators for my mobile archive – Monika Tarajko and Emil Majuk – on this trip. We shared a fascination with the architectural legacy of *shtetls*, which evolved into cooperation and then into a project.

The legacy of architectural tours of this kind is of course a long and persisting one. 'Shtetl Routes' was my own modest version of a European Grand Tour, popular since the seventeenth century among the wealthier classes and people of free trades in Britain, Germany, Switzerland and France. Nineteenth-century architects like John Soane, Robert Smirke and Karl Friedrich Schinkel all went on their own Grand Tours, to gather inspiration, widen references and become more erudite.[55] As underlined by Davide Deriu, Eduardo Piccoli and Belgin Turan Özkaya in their essay, 'Travellers in architectural history', Grand Tours were directly related to the meaning of the word 'sightseeing' – and especially of 'sight' – since that was also central for the production and reproduction of knowledge generated by the travellers.[56] On the 'Shtetl Routes' trip, our 'sight' involved spotting a sequence of living images: blurred landscapes, towns, buildings, people and so on. Only at the end was this blur separated into concrete forms that emerged after hours of archival research in the Jewish Historical Institute, as well as collective discussions during the postgraduate module led by Jane Rendell at the Bartlett School of Architecture. A reading of her book on *Site Writing*[57] helped to disentangle my 'sights' and condense them into new forms explored in the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. I started to dream this journey, weaving together architectural theory and archival images of former Jewish towns. Allegorical. Not bound by borders. Not weighed down by the burden of history. Learning how to write about sites and how to write sites with my practice, defiantly and critically.

There is no such thing as a synaptic start. My obsession with the resistance of architectural deterioration and with the urban conditions of small ex-Jewish towns in Poland started to grow in summer 2007.[58] *Uncategorised collections of slides, maps, performances, video installations and such like were – and still are – concentrated in the 'moving cloud' of my architectural/art notebooks. The 'Shtetl Routes' trip that I took through Poland, Ukraine and Belarus was organised by the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in September 2015 and was an opportunity for imaginary testing of my not-yet-existent project for the* Nomadic Shtetl Archive.

*This trip inspired me to think about a mobile structure which would traverse post-*shtetls, *gathering archival materials, documenting present conditions of Jewish heritage and conducting a series of public art interventions. I envisaged the* Nomadic Shtetl Archive *as a structure with mobile fundamentals. I imagined its façades, reflecting and chameleonic, covered in mirrors, merging into an architectural environment. I fantasised about a small library, containing archival materials, books, maps, videos, a container for generated materials. I felt it important to have facilities that could encourage public interactions, discussions and workshops. At the beginning the archive's substance was mediated by the constellation of grant applications, budgets, cover letters and presentations, of which I needed to write several before the* Nomadic Shtetl Archive *materialised and ventured forth.*

2.17

2.17 Interior of the synagogue in Chmielnik, looking at the *bimah*, photograph by Natalia Romik.

During the 'Shtetl Routes' trip, I floated this not-yet-existent idea, tested its future potentials and sourced people's opinions, setting off on an imaginary travel. I was in a good company of archivists and dreamers: we were a diverse group of travellers – Marxists, Bundists, Yiddish singers, historians, professors of Jewish studies, professional tour guides, travel managers and enthusiasts. Passing from one town to another, with 50 former shtetl towns visited during that week of journeying, our days started at 7 am with a coffee and ended after midnight with a glass of vodka. We tried to reflect on what we saw, the urban reality filling our thoughts and dominating all our senses, critically absorbing the socio-economic landscapes of Eastern European capitalism, with its predominantly ugly face of urban deterioration.

My baggage was too small, as usual. I'm never properly prepared for weather changes. I brought a box full of architectural maps from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. I gave them to everyone, prompting many conversations. Jan Jagielski, an archivist and a friend, introduced me to the secret knowledge of a bygone beauty of synagogues, mikvahs and cemeteries in pre-war eastern Poland. I added to my travelling kit a Russian dictionary, voice recorder, motion sickness pills and bottle of Polish vodka. They followed me until the end (with the obvious exception of the vodka). We arrived in Podhajce in early morning. I was impatient to see finally the synagogue overgrown by scrub. Yet before I went there, I got lost in a derelict blue house – possibly a Christian Adventist church – trying to find a mezuzah sign. I started to imagine an invisible archive just here, at the city walls surrounding the former Jewish marketplace. There was too much happening inside to describe in a short description, so instead of using words, I brought back with me pieces of sandstone, debris that had fallen from synagogues in Dubno, Ostróg, Tykocin and Indura – material witnesses of my journeys.

In 2007, I worked on a project to redesign the eighteenth-century synagogue in Chmielnik, adapting it for the Shtetl Museum by adding new functions – a museum and cultural centre – for the local population and visitors. The former prayer room became a concert hall: in another space, a small conference room was inserted, and the women's space on the balcony was redesigned as a theatre. The heart and symbol of the synagogue was a reconstruction of the bimah, destroyed by the Nazis during the Second World War along with other elements. It was my task to supervise their reconstruction. Even though we had very good documentation at our disposal, I decided it would be unethical to simply rebuild the original as if nothing had happened. Eventually, therefore, the bimah was reconstructed from an 'invisible' material – glass. This five-tonne sculpture is otherwise a detailed replica of the pre-war bimah, meaning that one can contemplate the translucent bunches and twigs of hops which climb all around the eight plinths, albeit now made out of optiwhite float-glass. The joints were made from imperceptible adhesives suspended in Plexiglas and cured with ultraviolet radiation. I designed an accompanying exhibition, 'Shtetl in Świętokrzyskie Region', to tell the story about the old Jewish community living there, from their initial settlement through to tragic demise.

Day 1

6 September 2015, Sunday

07.00–09.30 travelling from Lviv to Rohatyń (74 km)
09.30–11.30 excursion in Rohatyń (2 hrs)
11.30–12.30 travelling to Podhajec (58 km)
12.30–15.00 excursion in Podhajce and dinner (2 + 1.5 hrs)
15.00–16.00 travelling to Buczacz (40 km)
16.00–18.30 excursion in Buczacz, supper (2.5 hrs)
18.30–20.00 travelling to Tarnopol (70 km), lodging

Day 2

7 September 2015, Monday

06.00–07.00 breakfast
07.00–09.00 travelling to Krzemieniec (72 km)
09.00–11.00 excursion in Krzemieniec (2 hrs)
11.00–12.00 travelling to Dubno (38 km)
12.00–14.30 excursion in Dubno, dinner (1 + 1.5 hrs)
14.30–16.00 travelling to Ostróg (80 km)
16.00–18.30 excursion in Ostróg (2.5 hrs)
18.30–19.30 travelling to Równe (48 km), supper, lodging

Day 3

8 September 2015, Tuesday

06.00–07.00 breakfast
07.00–08.30 travelling to Berezne (126 km)
08.30–09.30 excursion in Berezne (1 hr)
09.30–15.00 travelling to Stolin (126 km) Crossing the border in Horodyszcz (travelling 2 hrs, dinner 1.5 hrs, border pass 2 hrs)
15.00–17.00 excursion in Stolin (2 hrs)
17.00–18.00 travelling to Pińsk (65 km)
18.00–20.30 excursion in Pińsk – supper, lodging

Day 4

9 September 2015, Wednesday
06.00–07.00 breakfast
07.00–09.30 travelling to Słonim (150 km)
09.30–11.30 excursion in Słonim (2 hrs)
11.30–12.30 travelling to Zdzięcioł (50 km)
12.30–15.00 excursion in Zdzięcioł, dinner (1+1.5 hrs)
15.00–15.30 travelling to Nowogródek (36 km)
15.30–18.00 excursion in Nowogródek (2.5 hrs)
18.00–19.00 travelling to Iwie (40 km)
19.00–20.00 excursion in Iwie (only centre) (1 hr)
20.00–21.00 travelling to Lida (42 km)
21.00–22.00 Lida – supper, lodging

Day 5

10 September 2015, Thursday
06.00–07.00 breakfast
07.00–08.00 travelling to Żełudok (45 km)
08.00–09.00 short excursion in Żełudok (1 hr)
09.00–10.30 travelling to Indura (100 km)
10.30–11.30 short excursion in Indura (1 hr)
11.30–16.00 travelling to Krynek (62 km)
Crossing the border at Kuźnica-Bruzga
(travelling 1 hr, dinner – 1.5 hrs, border pass 2 hrs)
15.00–17.00 excursion in Krynki (2 hr)
17.00–18.00 travelling to Michałowo (42 km)
18.00–19.30 Michałowo – a visit in the workshop
of Old Film and Photography (1.5 hr)
19.30–20.30 travelling to Tykocin (65 km)
20.30–21.30 Tykocin – supper, lodging

Day 6

11 September 2015, Friday
06.30–07.30 breakfast
07.30–10.00 excursion in Tykocin (2.5 hrs)
10.00–11.30 travelling to Siemiatycz (101 km)
11.30–12.30 excursion in Siemiatycze (1 hr)
12.30–13.30 travelling to Międzyrzec Podlaski (60 km)
13.30–16.00 excursion in Międzyrzec Podlaski, dinner (1+1.5 hrs)
16.00–17.00 travelling to Kock (48 km)
17.00–18.00 excursion in Kock (1 hr)
18.00–19.00 travelling to Lublin
19.00–21.00 Lublin – supper, visit the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, lodging

Day 7

12 September 2015, Saturday
06.00–07.00 breakfast
07.00–08.30 travelling to Szczebrzeszyn (80 km)
08.30–10.00 excursion in Szczebrzeszyn (2 hrs)
10.30–11.00 travelling to Biłgoraj (31 km)
11.00–12.30 excursion in Biłgoraj (1.5 hrs)
12.30–14.00 travelling to Łańcut (81 km)
14.00–17.00 excursion in Łańcut – dinner, conclusion (1+2 hrs)
17.00–22.00 RETURN A: trip to Lviv, border pass in Medyka (150 km)
17.00–20.00 RETURN B: trip to Lublin, through Rzeszów (180 km)

2.18

2.18 Interior of the synagogue in Ostróg in 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.

7 September 2015 (5.13 pm), Ostróg synagogue

As though there had been a whole different world on the other side of the door, the *aron kodesh* was crumbling and barely visible. I took a few pieces of limestone from the cavity. In the main chamber, remnants of a bonfire and broken glass from a cheap wine bottle were present. There were dead pigeons everywhere. The smell of urine contrasted with the gusts of wind coming in through holes in the pillar-supported roof, so big that it was surprising the building hadn't yet collapsed . . .

Ostróg (Polish), Острог (Ukrainian), אוסטרוג (Yiddish)
Jews settled in Ostróg, a seat of the Ostrogski family, back in the fifteenth century. It became one of the most economically vibrant Jewish communities in Wołyń. By the end of the seventeenth century, the prominent local trades for Jews were brewing and malting. As in other privately owned, so-called princely towns, Ostróg was granted privileges to hold markets, which economically stimulated the *shtetl*'s growth. By the end of the eighteenth century, Ostróg was the main centre for Jewish printing in the Russian

2.19 Ostróg synagogue, photograph by Szymon Zajczyk. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

2.20 Location of Ostróg (Ukraine), drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko

Empire.[59] According to inventories from 1708, there were 58 Christian and 40 Jewish houses, 9 free houses and 14 noble manors in the small town.[60] After partition, and by the mid-nineteenth century, there was a religious school (*Talmud Torah*), 19 prayer houses and three synagogues. Between 1920 and 1939, Ostróg belonged to newly independent Poland. According to the census in 1921, there were 7,991 Jews living in Ostróg out of a population of 12,795 people, some 63 per cent of the total.[61]

The trend continued, and by 1939 there were around 10,500 Jews. That year, however, Ostróg was occupied by the Soviet army, which closed down the synagogue and other Jewish institutions; in spring 1940 many Jewish families were exiled to the USSR. In July 1941 the Nazi German army entered Ostróg, immediately shooting 300 members of the Jewish intelligentsia, and in two mass executions they killed another 5,500 Jews. After the Second World War, Ostróg was annexed by the Soviet Union, together with other Polish eastern regions, to become part of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (because of this, it is now located in Ukraine). Following the war, a couple of dozen Jews returned to Ostróg, some of whom were members of the Communist guerrilla resistance in the region. Today, the Jewish community of Ostróg has only around 30 members, yet its leader, Hrihorij Arszynow, managed to secure funds to renovate the local Jewish cemetery. He is also currently trying to revitalise the old synagogue, and there is also an academy with an active Centre for Jewish Studies.[62]

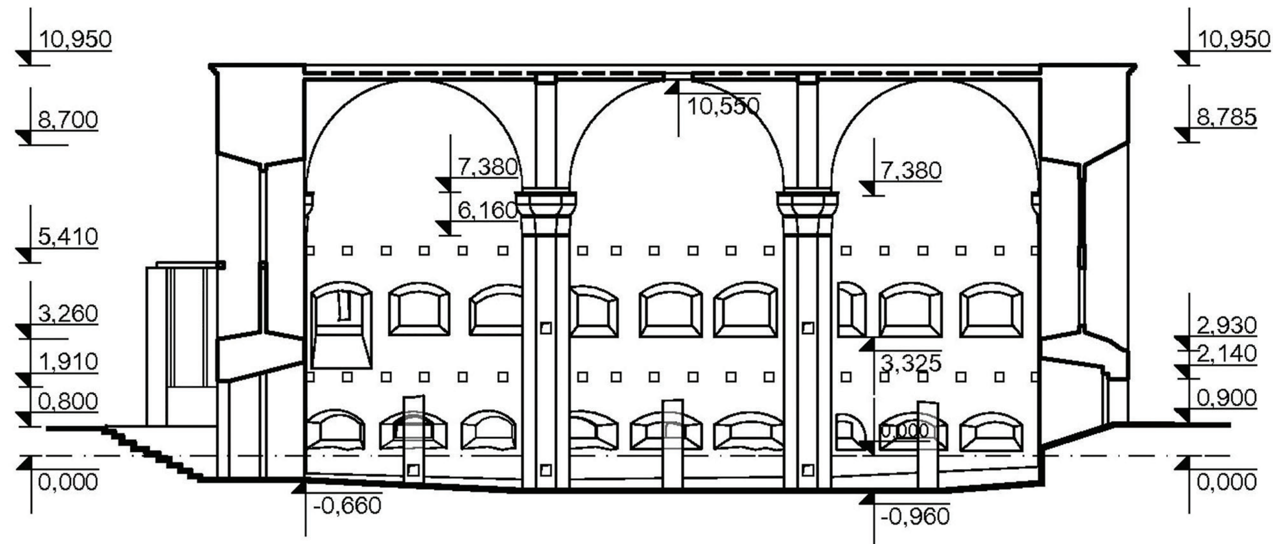
The Great Synagogue in Ostróg is located near the market square on Tchaikovsky Street. It was built in 1632 and has been refurbished many times. According to the 'Shtetl Routes' guide, 'the resemblance of this building to the Great Suburb Synagogue in Lviv suggests that it has been designed by the same architect – Giacomo Medleni from Lviv'.[63] The synagogue is built of brick on a rectangular base (21.4 metres long and 18.2 metres wide) and is 11 metres tall. On the two side walls are 12 windows, symbolising the original 12 tribes of Israel. The building used to be surrounded by lean-to structures serving as utility rooms and women's gallery. Like

the synagogue in Vilnius and the Great Suburb Synagogue in Lviv, the main hall of the synagogue is divided into nine bays, with pilasters dividing each room into three bays: 'Octangular pillars, typical for the local Lviv architecture of the turn of the 17th century, Doric capitals, all bays formed by the pillars were evenly spread. Groin vaults divided with transverse ribs.'[64]

The Piechotkas believe that a tower used to be located in the synagogue's southwest corner.[65] Otherwise, information is scarce. It is only thanks to some pencil drawings made in 1914 that we have any knowledge of its Torah Ark:

Wooden, supported with two columns, adorned with richly decorated wood carvings depicting, among others, floral motifs, the Tablets of the Law, hands, birds, and a two-headed, crowned eagle. The *bimah*, placed on a platform with stairs on two sides, was situated in the centre of the hall, between four posts.[66]

Ostróg's synagogue served as an indicator of sociopolitical tensions. During the Chmielnicki Uprising in the second half of the seventeenth century, Cossacks killed over 900 Jews, burning down their houses, with the synagogue turned into a stable.[67] When the Jewish community had grown in prominence in the 1920s, the façade of the attic storey was covered in Renaissance-style bossage (uncut stone ready for ornamentation). After the Second World War the synagogue was used for storage, the roof was damaged, the lean-tos dismantled and the interior furnishings stripped out. Until now, as with the



2.21

2.21 Drawing of the main hall of the synagogue in Ostróg. Image from the conservator's report. Облікова Картка 295/104 (13 May 2004). Courtesy of Hryhorij Arszynow.

majority of other Ukrainian synagogues, it has not been listed as a piece of national heritage.[68] People that I talked with about this ignored heritage, such as Siarhei Pivavarchyk, archaeology dean at Hrodna State University, often contrasted the grim situation in Ukraine with what they perceive as a more favourable one in Poland, given that the influx of European Union funds to the latter is finally supporting the renovation of (post-)Jewish historical buildings. As Hryhorij Arszynow states in a documentary about Ostróg's history:

I was really surprised about some projects in Poland. Synagogues, cemeteries, social buildings were reconstructed at governmental and EU expense. Moreover, everything had been done in towns where there are no (Jewish) communities and people who will take care of these landmarks. The authorities decided to name these places as an inalienable part of the Polish culture.[69]

According to inventory documents – also called the 'monument passport' – the roof of Ostróg's synagogue, plus its windows, doors, interior and exterior decorations, are all lost. The only preserved elements are sculpted capitals of stone columns and pilasters, as well as small fragments of rib-vaults. Records describing the synagogue's technical condition say the mortar used to construct the vaults has weakened due to temperature variations and exposure to water.[70] Plasterwork on the vaults has gone; there are holes in the vaulted roof, which is at high risk of falling down. It is stated that 'the building is on the brink of collapse and will be completely lost within the next several years if not subjected to immediate conservation works'.[71] My first-hand experience confirmed that assessment. Then, in 2018,

2.22 Interior of the synagogue in Ostróg looking at the *bimah*, photograph by Szymon Zajczyk. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

2.22

2.23 Ostróg synagogue in 2016, photograph by Hryhorij Arszynow.

2.23

2.24 Ostróg synagogue under reconstruction in winter 2017, photograph by Hryhorij Arszynow.

2.24

despite Ukraine's dire economic situation, the synagogue began to be renovated due to Arszynow's enthusiasm: he not only mobilised the sparse local Jewish community, but also managed to solicit external funding (albeit from unidentified sources). The synagogue has acquired a new roof, the Renaissance-style attic is renovated and the interior has dried out. It will now have a mixed function: there will be a religious part, as well as a micro-museum about Jews in Ostróg, dependent on finding additional funds. Work on the restoration of the synagogue and the design of an exhibition in its interior is being continued by Dmytro Arshynov. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has continued since early 2022, had put the process on hold for some time.

Travels of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*

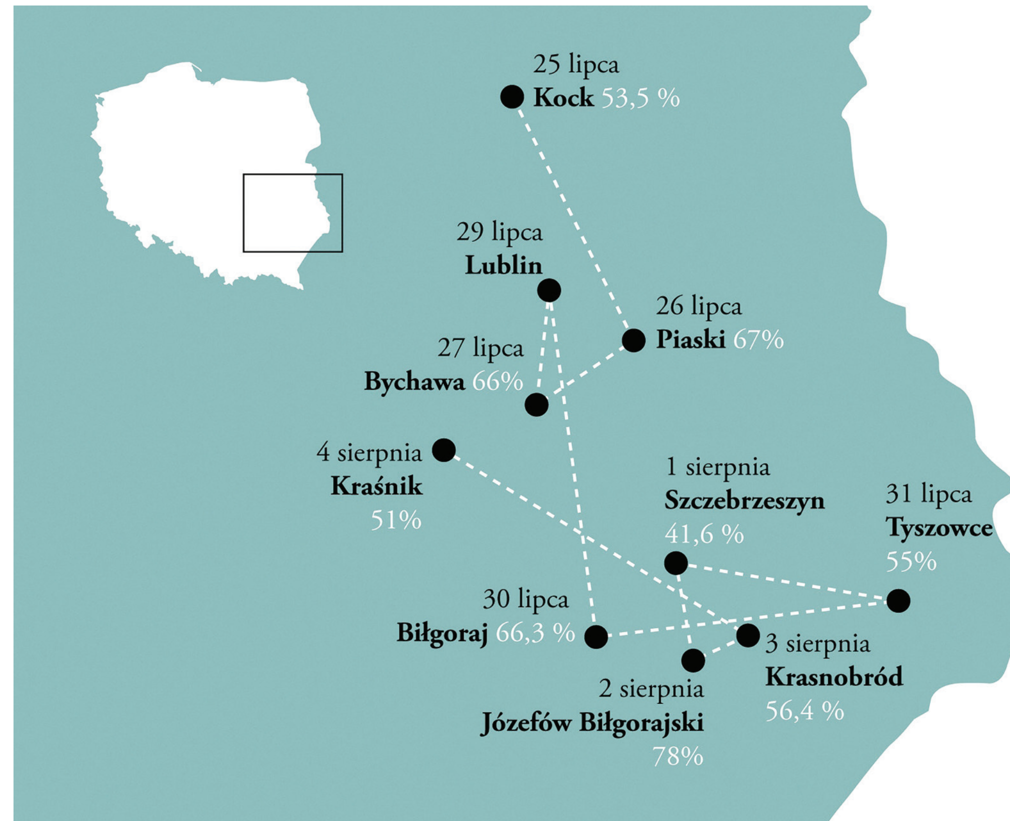
The journey of our 'invisible' archive began in Warsaw. Together with Aga Szreder (driver and technician), Agata Korba (project researcher) and Monika Tarajko (project coordinator), we embarked on our voyage without any major troubles. On the first day, 25 July 2016, we parked the mobile vehicle on the main market square in Kock, which currently has around 3,500 inhabitants, yet in 1939 half its population were Jews.

Kock

The nomadic mobilisation of the archive's 'outside' social space was immediately tested in practice. We were guided by Maria Kowalewska, one of the town's senior citizens, who showed us old houses and shops, even recalling the surnames and professions of Jewish neighbours. We went to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern's former house, also called *Rabinówka*. The building is now privately owned. The roof is covered with dark-brown rusty metal sheeting. The door eaves and the front door have simple ornamental decorations. Before the Second World War, Kock was one of the most prominent centres of Hasidism in Eastern Europe. According to a legend, after his religious awakening, the local *tzaddik* burnt all his manuscripts and spent the rest of his life in seclusion in this exact house. In the 1930s the building was turned into the court of the last generation of Kock's *tzaddiks* – the grandchildren of Menachem Mendel.

Kock's synagogue did not survive the war, and in the cemetery (desecrated in the 1950s) only around thirty *matzevas* (gravestones) remain. As in other post-*shtetls* we visited on our journey, there used to be political parties and associations, among them Zionists, Communists, Bundists and the Hashomer Hatzair scout movement. There were trade unions, and especially active were tailors and purse-makers.[72] No traces of these activities are left. While walking through the town, we talked with our guide and others, wandering through a landscape filled with Jewish absence/presence.

In Kock and other post-*shtetls* our public programme looked quite similar. We had vivid talks with locals about the town's history, we took private memory-trips to see former Jewish houses inhabited currently by Polish people – juxtaposing these explorations with maps from *yizkor* memorial books, short lectures on synagogue



2.25

2.25 The route taken by the Nomadic Shtetl Archive. Drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko. Figures refer to the Jewish population of each town before 1939.

architecture, and public walks with local historians, enthusiasts and children. Every evening, there was a documentary film projection.

Bychawa

On 27 July we reached Bychawa, previously 66 per cent Jewish. In the early afternoon, during conversation about the location of its bath house, somebody brought me documents relating to a Jewish pupil that were found in the attic of a house during renovation. It offered a good example of how the local population played a role as co-researchers. On the one hand they were reluctant to face this troublesome past, yet on the other hand they were encouraged to do so by the presence of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. Usually, it did not take much convincing to start a fruitful conversation, as somehow the mirror-clad vehicle established a platform for open discussions. In this way, my *shamash* helped me to build trust. The

2.26

2.26 Kock on a market day: in the background is the west side of the market square, photograph from the collection of Maria Kowalewska, in the custody of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre in Lublin. http://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/dlibra/docmetadata?id=12132&from=&dirids=1&ver_id=&lp=3&QI=

2.27

2.27 View of the former *tzaddik*'s house in Kock (currently private property), photograph by Natalia Romik.

results of this coproduced research were sometimes very consequential. One particular revelation from the documents left by a Jewish pupil who was possibly hiding in an attic – according to informal testimony from the finders – set me off on an entirely new research track to explore the architecture of Jewish hiding places during the Second World War (as a result, in 2022 I organised an exhibition on that topic which I will refer to in this book's concluding chapter). In terms of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* and its stopover in Bychawa, thanks to the courtesy of Antoni Wieczorkiewicz – the private owner of the synagogue in Bychawa, which dates to the nineteenth century – we were able to explore its interior, where it is still possible to spot traces of polychromatic decoration

2.28 The market square in Bychawa in 1918, photograph from the collection of Tomasz Wiśniewski, in the custody of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre in Lublin.

2.28

with motifs featuring musical instruments and Hebrew inscriptions. The synagogue was sold to Wieczorkiewicz in 2007 by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. Despite our questions about the synagogue's future use, he did not give any concrete answers. A local rumour is that he is planning to create an exclusive restaurant in a supposedly 'Jewish style'.

Biłgoraj

On 30 July, we headed to Biłgoraj, currently with 26,724 inhabitants: before the war, around 60 per cent of its citizens were Jewish. Back then, the Jews in Biłograj worked mostly in trade, especially handicrafts and brewing. By the end of the 1930s, due to the economic crisis and fierce competition with Polish merchants and craftsmen, plus rising anti-Semitism, the situation in the *shtetl* deteriorated. In June 1940, Nazi Germany established the Biłgoraj ghetto, to which Jews from surrounding villages were forcibly displaced. The ghetto was closed in 1943 with all Jewish occupants being moved to concentration camps or murdered on the spot. Some 60 per cent of Biłgoraj's inhabitants ceased to exist.[73]

In Biłgoraj, there are almost no traces of this tragic past. In fact, around 80 per cent of the town, including its Jewish architecture, was destroyed during the war.

2.29

2.29 Interior of the synagogue in Bychawa, photograph by Natalia Romik.

Looming in a vacuum, it feels as if Biłgoraj is still defined by this spectral, ghostly presence, leading to peculiar reverberations. A proposed housing development describes itself as 'the settlement on the route of borderland cultures'. Indeed, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*'s sojourn in Biłgoraj consisted mainly of visiting and talking to the promoter of this new hybrid estate, Tadeusz Kuźmiński. His intention is to mix references to the idealised architecture of Jewish *shtetls* along with modern features. If and when completed, it will be a private estate in folkloristic style, with a 48-room hotel, restaurants, a replica of an Orthodox Christian church, a mill and a spectacular reconstruction of the monumental wooden synagogue from Wołpa in Ukraine, which is to be placed – in a bizarre, uprooted fashion – in the centre of a stylised 'market square'. Real synagogues were never located in such a manner.

This wooden reconstruction will be beside luxurious semi-detached houses decorated in the '*shtetl* style'. Despite such oddities, my ethical and aesthetic opinion about this project is ambivalent, as the estate – although undoubtedly a financially profitable and extravagant example of cultural appropriation – is nonetheless a site of remembrance in a place of forgetting. It would be, in fact, the only really visible

2.30 A document found in the attic by an inhabitant of Bychawa, photograph by Natalia Romik.

2.30

trace of Biłgoraj's former existence, not counting a small remaining fragment of the Jewish cemetery. During discussions, it also became clear that many inhabitants consider it as an authentic opportunity to preserve Jewish memory in Biłgoraj, hoping that if it can become a dynamically functioning cultural centre, then this would prompt the town's economic resurgence.

On the web page of the foundation that Kuźmiński has established – titled 'Civic entrepreneurship for the benefit of integration, economic development, culture, tourism and sport, and for the preservation of the traditions of borderland regions: Biłgoraj XXI' – the claim is that the scheme 'serves as a cultural base, provides sports and leisure facilities as well as hotel and catering facilities. Moreover, it acts as the future centre of logistics and information for projects related to the development of tourism and recreation in the region.' While the website features extensive information about the multicultural heritage of Biłgoraj, this is juxtaposed with adverts for a real-estate stock that is to include apartments in various sizes from 33–80 square metres, the design of which 'harks back visually' to Jewish Biłgoraj.[74] In a press interview, Kuźmiński stated that: 'I decided to preserve this memory from total erasure . . . It is not a folkloristic park. People can live here normally, in serene surroundings. We have sold six flats already, and during the summer a pizzeria, a hair salon and a grocery will open there.'[75]

The national daily newspaper, *Rzeczpospolita*, estimates the development's cost will amount to 30 million Polish złotys (approximately £6 million), half of which is buying the land. Eventually, the development is planned to span over 35 hectares.[76] If the intention is to revive the urban life of nineteenth-century Biłgoraj, the problem is that there are neither Jews nor Ukrainians there today, and none are even involved in financing the project. The wooden shacks of former *shtetls* bore little resemblance to the sanitised environment of this stylish gated community. Thus, the scheme romanticises the past, preferring not to deal with its darker side, unable to cope with Poland's widespread amnesia and creeping anti-Semitism today.

2.31 The market square in Biłgoraj, showing the north side before 1939, photograph from the collection of Jerzy Serafin, in the custody of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre in Lublin.

2.31

2.32

2.32 Drawing for 'The settlement on the route of borderland cultures'. Image from Foundation Biłgoraj XXI. https://miasteczkokresowe.pl/fundacja/. Accessed 20 April 2017.

2.33 Photo of the houses in 'The settlement on the route of borderland cultures' under construction, photograph by Natalia Romik.

2.33

Kraśnik

On 4 August, we arrived in Kraśnik, which had a 40 per cent Jewish population in 1939. Together with Mariusz Bieniek, a local history teacher, we went to see the Grand Synagogue – since 2005 under the custody of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland – and its *beit*

2.34

2.34 The reconstruction of the Wołpa synagogue located in the centre of the newly reconstructed market square in Biłgoraj, photograph by Natalia Romik.

midrash (prayer house). The synagogue was devastated during the Second World War and became the workshop for a local labour camp; this use continued after the war, with the building also used for storage. Only the prayer house with a niche for the Torah Ark survives today to give an idea of the original design, with some polychromatic details remaining on its eastern wall; we were astonished to find paintings portraying the Tablets of Laws, with animal motifs and vistas of Jerusalem.[77]

Typically, both the synagogue and prayer house are closed to visitors. For some local inhabitants who joined our tour, it was their first opportunity to see the interiors. In Kraśnik, as elsewhere, local people frequently complained about the lack of access to former Jewish buildings, opened only occasionally for tourists. In the evening, after discussing archival photographs we had brought with us, the town's citizens showed us around. We went to the site of the former *mikvah* (now

2.35 The former Jewish district in Kraśnik. Collections of Photographs and Survey Drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

2.35

2.36 Interior of the synagogue in Kraśnik, looking towards the *bimah*, photograph by Natalia Romik.

2.36

2.37 Wall paintings representing the Torah in the Kraśnik synagogue, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

private property) and the Jewish cemetery. Together we searched for traces of *sukkah* (temporary shelters used during the week-long Jewish holiday of Sukkot).

Wojsławice

The last trip of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* came in late autumn 2016, to Wojsławice, now a small village of only around 1,000 inhabitants.[78] In 1921 there were 2,770 inhabitants in Wojsławice, of whom 835 were Jewish.[79] Characteristic wooden buildings with shaded arcades create a strong atmosphere, and people from Wojsławice are also exceptional in their devotion to sustaining Jewish memory. The Panorama of Cultures Association, a supporter of my *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, is located in the former House of Fawka the Cobbler, who lived there until 1942. Our archive's visit was even announced by the priest during a Sunday mass in the local Catholic Church. In the evening we presented at a meeting held in the old synagogue (dating to 1903) with many of Wojsławice's inhabitants, with whom we reflected about the possibilities of rejuvenating Jewish heritage.

Through such actions and meetings, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* tries to negotiate between the dual needs to commemorate former Jewish life and to respect the rights of present inhabitants. It is intended as an ongoing investigation that does not resolve matters, but instead opens up further questions. Faced with an urban vacuum of such magnitude as that in Poland's post-*shtetls*, what should be the appropriate method, scale and goal for a project of this kind? Can architectural intervention retrace lost memories and open the 'social outside' of the archive? Can the process of commemoration turn into a revival of Jewish absence/presence? Can vernacular building, if defined in a thoughtful and striking idiom become part of what I term 'architectural homeopathy'?

'Travel Diary'

The nomadism of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, including its mirrored exterior, was then the key motif of a special exhibition which concluded this project. The exhibition, simply called 'Travel Diary', was displayed in three places: the headquarters of the Association of Polish Architects in

2.38 Our walk around Kraśnik, photograph by Aga Szreder.

2.39 Wojsławice before 1936, photograph taken by Kazimierz Czernicki, from the collection of the Grodzka Gate—NN Theatre Centre in Lublin.

2.39

2.40 The former House of Fawka the Shoemaker, photograph by Natalia Romik.

2.40

2.41 Discussions held in the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

2.41

Warsaw (20–29 March 2017);[80] the orthodox Synagogue Nożyki in Warsaw (29 March–10 May 2017)[81] and finally the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin (11–28 May 2017).[82] Produced along with my colleagues, the exhibition's design negotiated between the stabilised, territorialised form of gallery spaces and the mobility of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. The main display was shaped as a triangular prism, 2.5 metres tall. It was mobile as well, set on three wheels; on top there was an LED light. The prism's sides were clad with plastic mirrors, attached to which were chronologically arranged photographs from the post-*shtetls* we had visited, like a wall calendar. On the adjacent wall were two small screens with looped presentations: the first featuring archival photos of the towns, and the second showing blueprints, diagrams and digital drawings of synagogues, *mikvahs* and so on.

The first site for the exhibition was in Warsaw in the neo-Renaissance building of the Polish Association of Architects – previously it was the Palace of Konstanty Zamoyski, completed in 1878 to designs by Leonardo Marconi, also the architect of a Reform Synagogue in Warsaw. The installation was set in a 'mirrored' room used frequently for architectural juries. The opening was well attended by a crowd of over 200 people, including architects, urbanists, curators, artists, scholars in Jewish studies and representatives of the aforementioned organisations who

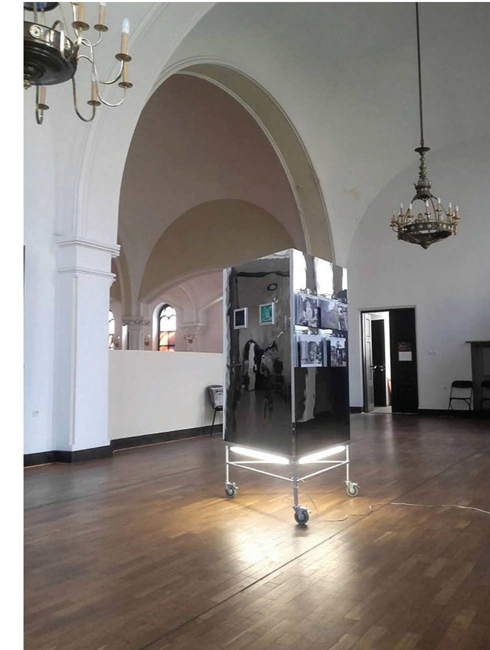
2.42

2.42 The synagogue in Wojsławice after dark, photograph by Natalia Romik.

supported the project. Unexpectedly, the exhibition continued to another venue when the Jewish Community in Warsaw requested it to be presented in the Nożyki Synagogue, a functioning temple of Orthodox Judaism.[83] The installation was set up there in the women's gallery – an atypical place, yet it worked well, the displays contrasting with the white ceiling vaults. This meant that the exhibition was seen by women praying during Shabbat and Passover as well as by tourists.[84]

The final stop for the exhibition was in Lublin, at the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, a public institution devoted to the preservation of Jewish heritage in Lublin and surrounding post-*shtetls*.[85] It is a special town, connected with the project from its inception by helping to plan the travels of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* during the Singer Festival in 2016. Grodzka Gate acts as an archive, publisher, producer and training centre, organising ambitious initiatives like the 'Shtetl Routes' tour. The

2.43 The 'Travel Diary' exhibition held in the orthodox Synagogue Nożyki in Warsaw from March–May 2017, photograph by Natalia Romik.



2.43

pioneering work there by Emil Majuk in digitising documentation about Jewish architecture and archiving oral knowledge in south-east Poland is admirable. Unsurprisingly, he has become a close ally in efforts to preserve this scattered heritage. 'Travel Diary' was presented on the second floor of the NN Theatre. The space itself is an artistic installation, a living archive crammed with shelves, from bottom to top, full of half-completed files on Jewish memory, architecture and culture, suggesting a permanent state of incompletion, a monument to the tremendous loss. This experimental exhibition, titled 'Lublin: Memory of the Place', designed by Tomasz Pietrasiewicz is, as the catalogue notes:

2.44

2.44 The exhibition Travel Diary in the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin in May 2017, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

2.45 The synagogue in Podhajce in 2016, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

2.45

designed to look like an interior of an archive. The important elements contributing to its character are metal bookshelves with thousands of files. Several computer stands allow browsing of databases (of iconography, oral history and texts) and are also an integral part of the exhibition . . . we watch hundreds of photographs, listen to the collage-reconstruction of sounds of the town and, at the same time, we can read information about specific houses and streets from files on shelves.[86]

The mirrors used for 'Travel Diary' multiplied the existing archive, reflecting files, catalogues and documents as a gap that can never be filled. If in the Nożyki Synagogue the exhibition contrasted with its background, here it blended in, almost disappearing.

This stage of the exhibition accompanied a final summit we organised as part of the framework for the 'Shtetl Routes' tour: once again, I had the chance to meet with my fellow travellers from that tour, with whom we talked about future cooperation to strengthen the channels of cross-border communication. The conference was attended by Jewish specialists like Andrzej Trzciński, with whom we discussed details of the architectural heritage of the post-*shtetls* we had visited. This led to the launch in 2018 of a travel guidebook, *Shtetl Routes: Tours around the forgotten continent*, dedicated to the material culture of Jewish communities of 62 towns along the borders between Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, focusing also on efforts to preserve and revitalise this heritage.

Conclusion: Nomadic cycle

After my nomadic travels at the junction between archival research and fieldwork, with stopovers in towns saturated with past flavours and yet vividly full of colours, the memory of these ramblings still remains for me in the 'shade of honey'. Discussions with those now living in post-*shtetls*, across the borders between Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, or the presentation of designs in sleepy hamlets, or the flurry of emails, planning and scheduling, intense exchanges back in London – all formed a nomadic cycle, a journey without beginning or end. Often, I clutched my hand into a fist until it hurt. I disagreed with what much of what I was seeing, dissenting from this land of ruins and forgetfulness, yet also admiring the resilience of Jewish, Polish, Belarus and Ukrainian people who have braved this maelstrom of history, some of them my new-found friends and allies. Climbing over the rubble of the seventeenth-century synagogue in Podchajce in Ukraine, pieces of sandstone falling from its leaky roof, the colour of ivory, walking on old cemeteries, a green thicket creeping with wildlife, or standing in the full sun, checking a memory map with folk living nearby – where is that missing house number? After hours of recordings and many hundreds of kilometres, my travels were still far from reaching their end.

Notes

1. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba*, 70.
2. Lipis, *Symbolic Houses in Judaism*, 66.
3. Lipis, *Symbolic Houses in Judaism*, 55–6.
4. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba*, 41–2.
5. Loukomski, *Jewish Art in European Synagogues*, 29.
6. Braidotti, as quoted in Noyes, 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism', 154.

7. Noyes, 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism', 60.
8. Barnard and Wendrich, *The Archaeology of Mobility*, 3.
9. Salzman, 'Nomadism', 397–8.
10. Roke, *Mobitecture*, 10.
11. Tschumi, as quoted in Fraser, 'The cultural context of critical architecture', 318.
12. Sant'Elia, 'Manifesto of futurist architecture'.
13. Careri, *Walkscapes*, 29.
14. Careri, *Walkscapes*, 30–3.
15. Marx, quoted in McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 83.
16. Chatwin, quoted in Careri, *Walkscapes*, 34.
17. Torah Exodus 25:1–9.
18. Jewish Encyclopedia, 'Ark of the Covenant'.
19. Lipis, *Symbolic Houses in Judaism*.
20. Smith, 'Helepolis'.
21. Diod. XX.48.
22. Deleuze and Guattari, *Tysiąc Plateau*, 230.
23. Noyes, 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism', 161.
24. Noyes, 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism', 163.
25. Deleuze and Guattari, *Tysiąc Plateau*, 467.
26. Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 79.
27. Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 80.
28. Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 15.
29. Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 16.
30. Mouffe, cited in Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 'Krzysztof Wodiczko'.
31. Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles*, 96–8.
32. Sienkiewicz, 'Vehicle – Krzysztof Wodiczko'.
33. Roke, *Mobitecture*, 33.
34. Studio Orta, 'OrtaWater – M.I.U. mobile reservoir'.
35. raumlabor, 'The Knot'.
36. raumlabor, 'Das Küchenmonument'.
37. Public Works, 'Folk Float'.
38. Deller, *It Is What It Is*.
39. Majewska and Szreder, 'So far, so good'.
40. Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 3.
41. Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, 5.
42. Gell, 'Vogel's net', 24.
43. Gell, 'Vogel's net', 37.
44. Architektura Murator, 'Nomadyczne Archiwum Sztetla – podsumowanie projektu architektki Natalii Romik'.
45. Kronika. 'Natalia Romik. Jad'.
46. Ruksza and Szreder, 'RUMB'.
47. Pedersen, *Between Sites*, 157.
48. Bader, *The KNOT*.
49. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 50.
50. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 52.
51. Barnard and Wendrich, *The Archaeology of Mobility*, 5.
52. Virtual Shtetl, 'Kolonia Izaaka'.
53. Salit, *Kolonja Izaaka*.
54. Shtetl Routes, 'Training courses'.
55. Deriu *et al.*, 'Travels in architectural history', 2.
56. Deriu *et al.*, 'Travels in architectural history', 3.
57. Rendell, *Site-Writing*.
58. Nizio Design International, 'Świętokrzyski Shtetl: Revitalisation of the synagogue in Chmielnik'.
59. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 341.
60. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 342.
61. Virtual Shtetl, *Ostróg*.
62. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 348.
63. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 342.
64. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba*, 79.
65. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba*, 220.
66. Piechotka and Piechotka, *Bramy Nieba*, 222.
67. Eliektronnaja Jewriejskaja Enciklopiedija, *Ostrog*.
68. Virtual Shtetl, *Wielka Synagoga w Ostrogu (wul. Czajkowśkoho)*.
69. YouTube, 'Острог: в тіні історії | Ostroh: In the shadow of history', 48:18.
70. Myelnik, 'The certification of the building of cultural importance in Ostrog, Rivenskiy Oblast' (number 295/104), 2004.
71. Myelnik, 'The technical assessment of the heritage of regional importance of the synagogue in Ostróg' (number 157-Pv)', 2008.
72. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 98.
73. Kubiszyn, *Śladami Żydów*, 53–8.
74. Fundacja Biłgoraj XXI.
75. Nowicka, 'Miasteczko kresowe w Biłgoraju powiększy się za unijne pieniądze'.
76. Horbaczewski, 'Biłgoraj: Miasteczko takie jak dawniej'.
77. Kubiszyn, *Śladami Żydów*, 212.
78. Gminne Centrum Kultury Sportu i Turystyki w Wojsławicach, *Nomadyczne Archiwum Sztetla*.
79. https://teatrnn.pl/leksykon/artykuly/wojslawice-historia-miejscowosci/.
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81. Jewish Community of Warsaw, *Nomadyczne Archiwum Sztetla*.
82. Lublin. Miasto inspiracji, 'Shtetl Routes - Otwarcie sezonu 2017'.
83. Wikipedia, 'Nożyk Synagogue'.
84. Jewish Community of Warsaw, *Ortodoksyjna Synagoga im. Małżonków Nożyków*.
85. Shtetl Routes, 'Shtetl Routes – The 2017 season opening'.
86. The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, *Lublin*.

Chapter 3 | Walking

My nomadism shaped three different yet stylistically coherent projects: an installation that slid along (*JAD*), a cube carried around (*Hurdy-Gurdy*) and a travelling vehicle (*Nomadic Shtetl Archive*). Of the set, *Hurdy-Gurdy* was the smallest, yet it was an agile object, a mirrored 'magic box'. A walk-around performance can only cover small areas within a town, but it can be repeated – and thus multiplied. *Hurdy-Gurdy* could be taken to places where a larger vehicle like *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* had no access; we used it for example in an overgrown Jewish cemetery in Piaski and in private courtyards in Tyszowce. The *Hurdy-Gurdy* project – which in its pilot phase was referred to as the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, Part I – was enacted within the framework of the Arteria Festival in Częstochowa from 11–14 September 2014. The performance took place in the streets of its Old Town in neighbourhoods (Garncarska, Kozia, Garibaldiego and Nadrzeczna) previously inhabited by a Jewish population, and which had served as a ghetto during the Second World War.

For my performance, I adopted the figure of a Jewish busker, a job so popular in the 1920s and 1930s that it was pictured on innumerable official photographs, Jewish holiday postcards and the graphic art of the day – among others, on the drawing of *Organ Grinder in a Courtyard* by Bruno Schulz, from 1936. As a sort of memory busker, I used my voice instead of music to trigger conversations and disputes, inquiring into the veiled identities of the places we visited on the walk: passages, streets and courtyards. My body became a carrier of urban memory, a physically exhausting process due to the material weight of the box. I treated the device in front of me as not merely an inanimate object, but as *shamash*, with whom I walked and performed, clothed in black trousers and shirt.

The project aimed to discover and demonstrate the traces that Częstochowa's former Jewish inhabitants had left behind, imprinted both on the material form of its architecture and in the oral recollection of present-day occupants. As such, the *Hurdy-Gurdy* project allowed me to develop my interest in understanding the relationship between architectural and social memory, and between changing populations and functions. To emphasise these aspects, I juxtaposed a historical perspective with contemporary conditions by confronting the audience in the streets with selected archival photographs and maps found in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute.

My performance was thus assisted by the *Hurdy-Gurdy*, a small box of

3.1 Jewish Shana Tova (New Year) postcard showing an earlier hurdy-gurdy. Image from the Baumwoll Archives, from the collection of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

3.1

35 cm × 35 cm × 35 cm. It was clad from the outside with plastic mirrors, 5 mm thick, and like the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, its interior was painted black. Inside the box, another mirror (in this case a classic glass one) was installed at a 35-degree angle to create an illusion of emptiness – and from behind which I could magically pull out photographs and other items. Also in this hidden space, a sound recorder was installed to capture oral history from each district. In this sense, *Hurdy-Gurdy* had a multifaceted ontology; it was a recorder of urban memory, a performance prop, a symbol of social void and a playful object with an element of surprise. It had a double-sided door on the top side, through which I could access my props, and a trapdoor on the front through which people could see only the emptiness of a black box. Illusion was the essence of the *Hurdy-Gurdy*. Out of thin air, I could conjure photographs of a town long gone and of people no longer here.

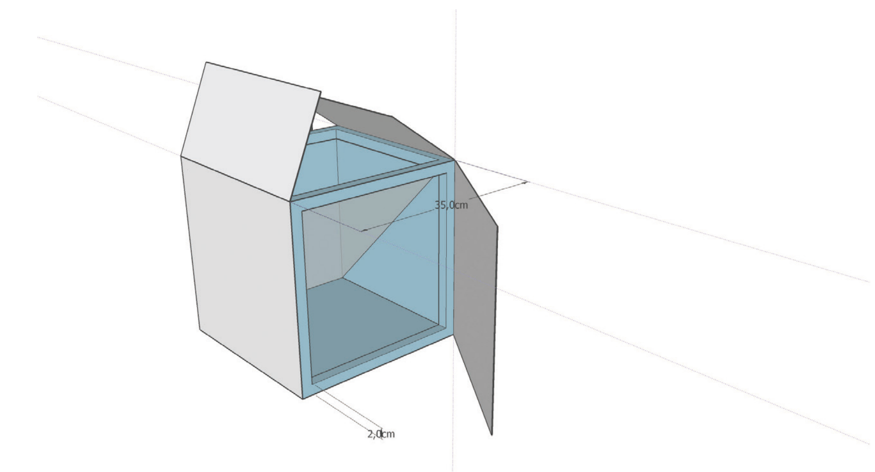
White magic of the *Hurdy-Gurdy*

In *Hurdy-Gurdy*, I was once more reiterating my interest in 'white magic'.[1] This involved mirrors and optical illusions capable of focusing attention, dispelling rationalisations and disarming people's defence mechanisms. In this way, the mirrors enabled me to 'soften' the reactions of the participating citizens and entice them into substantive exchanges. The mirrored box opened up public space, seducing spectators into discussion of troubling issues such as what it was like to live in properties formerly occupied by Jews, why the architecture was suffering so badly due to erosion, anti-Semitism and the general level of poverty.

During the interplay of archive sharing and public conversation, *Hurdy-Gurdy* tried to catch a glimpse of the aura of the visited places, of those layers of urban reality that preceded (and now underline) the current state of decay. As is pointed out about Walter Benjamin's viewpoint: 'objects possess aura when they have a distance from the viewer and can return his or her gaze. This is possible, when the objects are constituted specifically in time and space – that is to say, when they are unique and cannot be reproduced.'[2] To grasp this aura,

3.2

3.2 Drawing by Bruno Schulz titled *Grotesque: Organ Grinder in a Courtyard*, from the collection of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

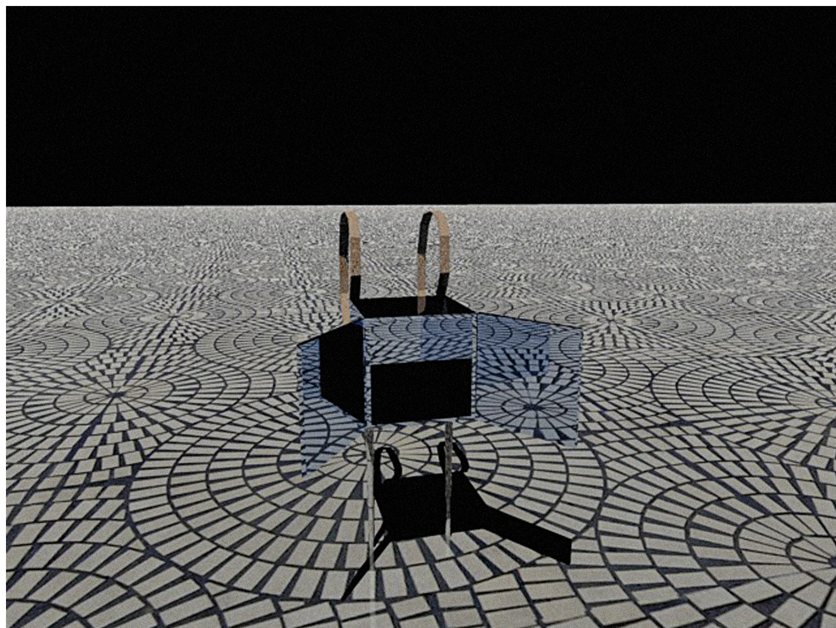


3.3 The 3D digital model of *Hurdy-Gurdy*, drawn by Maciej Czeredys and Natalia Romik.

3.3

I spent a long time learning the most basic tricks of illusion. Interestingly, the smaller a device, the more complicated its mechanisms needed to be. Thus, while *JAD* and the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* proved easy because both could just blend effortlessly into their surroundings, *Hurdy-Gurdy* demanded more careful attention. I had to sieve through books about magic mirrors and illusionary devices to find technical formulas to make it work.

I found particular inspiration in a device called 'Proteus', created by the mid-19th century illusionist, Thomas William Tobin, who was both a chemist and architect by trade. 'Proteus' is well known and is used in many magic shows even today. From the outside, it looks like a wardrobe, but inside there are two mirrors, set at a 45-degree angle to each other, creating a triangular 'safe zone' in which the magician can hide, unseen by spectators. This effect can however only be achieved if the 'Proteus' is all painted one colour



3.4

3.4 Visualisation of *Hurdy-Gurdy*, drawn by Sebastian Kucharuk.

inside and out. It means people looking from the outside see only a continuous monochromatic surface, not the presence of mirrors.[3] I used a similar trick for the inside of *Hurdy-Gurdy*, creating a safe zone to conceal archival materials which could be magicked 'out of thin air' during dialogues. People with whom I talked saw only a black interior with nothing inside, since the mirror reflected the box's black walls.

What is an illusion, and how does it differ from what we consider as real? As cautioned by Richard Gregory, author of *Eye and Brain: The psychology of seeing*, one cannot avoid this question because, in his words:

To say that all appearances of objects are illusions is no more helpful than to say that all experience is a dream. Although logically irrefutable, this drains useful meaning from 'dream' and from 'illusion' . . . We think of objects as real. But what is an object?[4]

Relativism offers only a semblance of insight into a trade of tricks, an art of higher complexity. As Gregory suggests when discussing a mirrored image, its power does not reside in the conflation of reality and image, but in something else entirely:

Seeing oneself double – with a silent touchless extra-self in a wrong place, through the looking glass – is deeply paradoxical though resulting from quite simple principles of optics. The cause is physical; but it is also due to the visual brain being unable to cope with the situation.[5]

Playing with cognitive paradoxes was my form of 'white magic'. I was trading in playful deceptions, trying to open up clogged channels of communication about the 'present absence' of Jews. The *Hurdy-Gurdy* performed its magic indeed, fuelling lively conversations with local people. The inhabitants of Częstochowa's Old Town in turn shared their everyday worries with me, while discussing their own perceptions of the past. My aim was to help recreate for them the former state of the places that they have made their home.

Walking with the *Hurdy-Gurdy*

Possibly due to the mirrored surfaces, neither the box itself nor the presence of a cameraman, Dominik Ritzsel (a visual artist who kindly accompanied me to document the performance), formed any barriers

3.5

3.5 *Hurdy-Gurdy*, photograph by Dominik Ritzsel.

with local inhabitants. *Hurdy-Gurdy* simply reflected their dwellings back to them, thereby providing me with enough time to pull out from the void of my magic box archival images and documents which provoked people's curiosity – and as it turned out, were of some sentimental value to them. Hence my urban memory box could poetically juxtapose current problems of Częstochowa with questions from its history, constituting a temporary 'community of memory'. This is a term I conceptualised after reading Gaston Bachelard.[6] It was only because we could establish this provisional sense of community that I managed to discover new traces of Częstochowa's Jewish past. Through conversations with locals, I learned of and documented a *sukkah* and the spots previously designated for *mezuzah* on some doorposts.

In this manner, the *Hurdy-Gurdy* performances yielded surprising consequences. One such case in which perambulation along the predetermined route mingled with spontaneous 'daydreaming' occurred in the back streets of Częstochowa. During the course of this walk, in response to my enquiry about some residential buildings on Garncarska Street, I was suddenly directed to Maria Opalowa who, in turn, led us into her private garden overgrown with hollyhocks,

3.6 *Hurdy-Gurdy* in Częstochowa, photograph by Dariusz Dąbrowski.

dog roses and thujas, with a sundial on one wall. Preliminary dating by Jan Jagielski, archives director for the Jewish Historical Institute, puts this sundial in the period of Nazi occupation; it was therefore most probably made in the Częstochowa ghetto. On completing this *Hurdy-Gurdy* performance, the sundial (along with other traces of Jewish material culture I had encountered) was documented and catalogued in that institute's collection.

Hurdy-Gurdy **Walking Tour – Day 1**

12 September 2014 (16:00)
warm weather, 20°C

[We are walking along Nadrzeczna Street, one of the roughest parts of Częstochowa, once inhabited by the Jewish poor.]

'Let us maybe enter through one of these gates. I have here a photograph of the building at 30 Nadrzeczna Street; we have just reached the Nadrzeczna tenements, numbered 45 and 32. Where is number 30?'

[To a group of men standing in the gate]

'Do you know the history of this street? I am looking for the houses numbered 74, 61 and 67.'

'The numbers descend that way; back in the communist times, there used to be a police station there. There is no budget for the city here; the Catholics have taken the lot. You need to ask an older person, although all of them have died by now – but there is a lady who lives in the market square who must be 100 years old by now; her name is Opad, Opak or such like.'

'That's right; this used to be the Jewish quarter.'

'Sure, sure; everything here was Jewish.'

'I want to show you some photos from the old ghetto, where you can see the houses I am looking for and trying to locate.'

[Rustling of paper while I show them the photos]

'They demolished a lot of houses here. They would evict people in the middle of the night; the houses frequently collapsed; now, people steal the reclaimed boards and rafters. Some even found gold [hidden] in doorframes . . . In some buildings, polychrome wall paintings survive, but people don't allow public access to those.'

[They continued talking about their subject of child-molesting priests]

'And gold is sometimes found in the doorframes.'

'OK, let's look for this lady and follow Garncarska Street along these façades.'

[I turn to look at my colleagues as we walk off . . .]

3.7 Discussion with an inhabitant of the former Jewish district in Częstochowa Old Town, photograph by Dominik Ritszel

[Three women are standing in front of a florist's shop]
'Excuse me, do you know the history of this district?'
'Of this place? Only Ms Opalowa does . . .'
'Oh, she is right there!'
'Hello. I have been looking around today; your neighbours suggested that you may know the houses of Garncarska Street. I am pleased to meet you, Madam. I have here some archival photographs from the Jewish Historical Institute and the Polish Academy of Sciences of Częstochowa's Jewish quarter, especially of Garncarska Street.'
'That one is this one, and this is that one.'
[The ladies compare their accounts]
'And this one is in the middle on the right side, but it does not exist anymore.'
'Oh, a magic box. Oh, Jesus.'
[I continue my conversation with Ms Opalowa]
'During the occupation, 37 people were deported from my tenement; only one small girl saved herself in the basement. She went through so much and is now in Israel. When she came over with her husband and went back into that basement, she was in despair.'
'This numbering no longer exists, Ms Opalowa. I don't know whether that house still exists.'
'I know, this is the one on the right side, and the one in the middle does not exist anymore.'
'I'm glad you recognise them, ladies.'
'This is not on that side, because 16 is Grażyna's house; don't look at the numbers, look at the photographs.'
[The women talk amongst themselves excitedly]
'But how? This must be 15 Garncarska Street.'
'Not on that side, I don't think.'
'You know what? This will be the one on this side, right here.'
'Fine. We will walk up to that place and see. You've been very kind, ladies. I'll go there momentarily and compare the street façades. You can take some photos and put the rest back into the box. They will disappear then.'
'Ohhh!'
[Ms Opalowa addresses me]
'Do you know, in my courtyard there is an old sundial; on the two occasions they were renovating the building, they wanted to dismantle it, to scrap it; it is formerly Jewish property.'
'Can I see it?'
'Yes, feel free to come along.'
[We continue talking as we walk]
'Do people remember a lot of things?'
'After all, the synagogue was a former Jewish property, the High Synagogue. They demolished everything after the war.'
[We enter her building]
'Here is our sundial!'
[This is said with a sense of pride]
'It's beautiful! And so is the fact that you made sure it remained here.'
'They would've scrapped it long ago, but I care about it; so I did not let them scrap it when they did the renovation works.'

This walking conversation with Maria Opalowa, who lives at 24 Stary Rynek Street, is an example of my 'surrendering' to urban narratives, and of how a previously

planned journey is adjusted to suit the aura and plasticity of street life. Drifting is the recurrent pattern, through which new directions and tracts of research emerge spontaneously. Time and again, I and my cameraman found ourselves in shimmering bubbles where we entered 'fairytale' private gardens, homesteads, houses, staircases, attics and alleyways, asking for help in finding specific addresses and objects.

12 September 2014 (17:37)
warm weather, 20°C
'This is 70 and 67 Garncarska Street.'
'But this address no longer exists.'
'Yes, I notice that something is not right here.'
'Can I see this photo?'
'Yes, please. I also have one of 74 Garncarska Street.'
[I sit on the stairs, as the Hurdy-Gurdy cube now feels too heavy]
'This may have been an extension, where the gallery is now.'
'Wow, this is 70 and 61 Garncarska Street. No, this is actually number 6!'
'If you are interested in it, I have here some photographs of this street from the 1930s.'
'Can I see them?'
[She shows much interest]
'This is where that synagogue stood, the so-called "new" one. Can I?'
'Do you think some people here still have some recollections of the past, about the Jews, or would they rather not?'
'My impression is that we have outright Nazis here! Kama, I am leaving my backpack here for a moment.'
'And I will take my cube and we are on our way.'
[We approach a group of men in a gateway, and tell them that we are tracing house numbers so the men direct me to a memorial plaque]
'I am looking for any recollections of ordinary houses, small factories and workshops, and mezuzah traces. Here is a photo of a synagogue.'
[This excites their interest]
'If any of you want to hold on to any photograph or a city plan, you are very welcome to do so.'
'OK, will I be on camera?'
'Yes, it's for my PhD.'
[Lively interest in what I have just said, mixed with laughter]
'In my opinion, this is the Old Market Square; number 70 has been gone for a long time.'
'Yes, of course.'
'As you enter the Old Market Square through that street to the left, turn right.'
'No, the other way; this will be on the Old Market Square.'
'This is a magical box; I open and close it, and all the materials disappear. Presto!'
[Much laughter]
'Thank you and good luck; may you succeed, and the whole truth come out.'
'Thank you.'
[We wave each other goodbye . . .]

12 September 2014, 18:49
'We could go to the old mikvah at Garibaldi Street.'
[I propose to tell her the relevant story on the way: meanwhile, a security guard speaks to me]

3.8 Garncarska Street during the Nazi occupation, photograph from the collection of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

3.8

'You had better not approach that place! It's a hard topic.'

[There are three men standing near the building, all in sportswear, and one seems to be armed]

'There is a jacuzzi at the old mikvah. Dominik, you have to shoot this! I suggest you walk along at a distance; I'll cross the street myself and have a closer look.'

Hurdy-Gurdy Walking Tour – Day 2

13 September 2014 (11:34)

'Do you know the history of this area?'

'I don't really know . . . there were some Jewish shops.'

[A voice from a distance calls out]

'Are you interested in Jewish topics?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Then I will send you to the right person.'

[I go as advised to the picture gallery across the street, but the man who supposedly has a lot of knowledge is not there]

'I am showing photographs of your area.'

'Where is this? These are really old photos.'

'You are welcome to take them as souvenirs, ladies.'

'And is this our place too?

'Yes, this comes from the Jewish Historical Institute.'

3.9 The house at 15 Garncarska Street today, photograph by Natalia Romik.

3.9

'This may be the building where that guy jumped out of a window.'

'This is number 5; when you come out of here, you will see that door right away.'

'I will take this picture and show it to Adrian. We may look at this on the Internet.'

'Not far from here, at Wilsona Street, there was a synagogue. They preserved the columns to keep things consistent.'

[I give them a short talk about the synagogue]

'Do you see that gate? It may be ours.'

'Where?'

'Here, right here!'

'Are there any polychrome wall paintings or traces of mezuzot in this area? I mean, a hollow that is chiselled into the doorpost.'

[I approach one of the doorframes to have a look]

'As you entered the house, you would see them . . . Oh, I think you have it here, exactly!'

'But what?'

[This is said with excitement in their voices]

'Ania, we have something here and we don't know about it!'

'We don't know what it is!'

3.10

3.10 Discussion with local people in Częstochowa, photograph by Dariusz Dąbrowski.

'Yes, what you have here is a trace of a mezuzah! That's awesome!'

[One more woman runs up to me as I leave the courtyard]

'People had polychrome wall paintings here; I myself painted some over and it was quite hard to cover it! I put on wallpaper. These were colourful signs. You need to go to number 2, and the first door in the hallway, Mrs Kubat.'

[I go there but Mrs Kubat is not at home]

Theory and art of walking

It is a fact that walks always take us beyond the expected. It is this measure of the unexpected, upon entering meandering streets and alleyways, or asking passers-by for the way, which has somehow always organised my research. It directs the focus of my critical thinking to a given field, be that in Częstochowa Old Town or in my visits to other places. A walk, as Francesco Careri points out, is undoubtedly how we interact

with the world: 'By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking become man's first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of situated objects.'[7]

Walks in my projects are frequently a form of an imaginary fantasy: of thoughts steeped in time, cloaked in the critical costume of a stroll. My perception of walk as a performance form is similar to that expressed by Jane Rendell:

When we walk we encounter sites in motion and in relationship to one another, suggesting that things seem different depending on from where we are coming and to where we are going . . . walking proposes a design method that enables one to imagine beyond the present condition without freezing possibility into form.[8]

The act of the walk – irrespective of whether it forms part of a performance or is fieldwork research – nearly always involves direct interaction with other people. In my walks, I always ensure to engage with the people who accompany me in a performance (cameraman, local historian, friends, acquaintances) and those I am meeting for the first time – whether those who I wish to convey specific historical material, or from whom I want to extract some information.

As pointed out by Rendell in her chapter about walking in *Art and Architecture: A place between*, this act forms private strands of relationships, both physical and conceptual, in discovering and transforming the urban tissue: 'Public concerns and private fantasies, past events and future imaginings are brought into the here and now, into a relationship that is both sequential and simultaneous.'[9] There is indeed a close affinity between walking as a metaphysical act and surrealistic journey, and wanderings that involve 'spatial stories'.[10]

The pulse of the organic and oneiric vision of a town's living tissue, 'captured' while walking, can be detected in the remarkable drawings and above all the short stories of the Jewish writer/artist, Bruno Schulz. Particularly noteworthy is his anthology, *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*, published in 1933, in which Schulz encapsulates the vision of a pre-war *shtetl*. In it, there are clear similarities to Schulz's home town of Drohobych. Flowing along with the narrator of his stories, we get the sense of 'walking suspended over' a settlement that is changing in step with the seasons. Without touching the ground, we drop into the *shtetl*'s dwellings, orchards, entryways and shops; the precise descriptions of architectural and decorative details are entangled in a young man's recollections and expressed in dream-like narratives:

On Saturday afternoons I used to go for a walk with my mother. From the dusk of the hallway, we stepped at once into the brightness of the day. The passers-by, bathed in melting gold, had their eyes half-closed against the glare, as if they were drenched with honey . . . Everyone in this golden day wore that grimace of heat – as if the sun had forced his worshippers to wear identical

masks of gold . . . The market square was empty and white-hot, swept by hot winds like a Biblical desert. The thorny acacias, growing in this emptiness, looked with their bright leaves like the trees on old tapestries.

. . . Thus, my mother and I ambled along the two sunny sides of market square, guiding our broken shadows along the houses as over a keyboard. Under our soft steps the squares of the paving stones slowly filed past – some the pale pink of human skin, some golden, some blue grey, all flat, warm and velvety in the sun, like sundials, trodden to the point of obliteration, into blessed nothingness . . . After we passed a few more houses, the street ceased to maintain any pretence of urbanity, like a man returning to his little village who, piece by piece, strips off his Sunday best, slowly changing back into a peasant as he gets closer to his home.[11]

In Schulz's view, walking offered a particularly artistic form of insight into the 1930s *shtetl*, where in addition to the architectural detail of houses that he described:

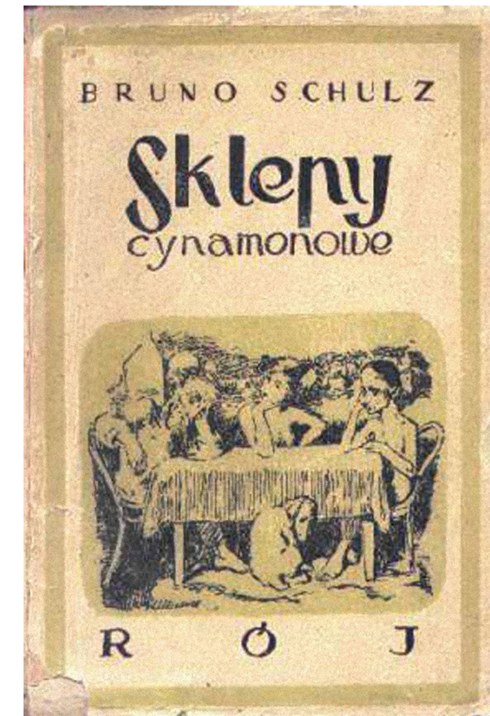
Rows of small, single-storey suburban cottages interchange with multi-storey tenements, which, seemingly built of cardboard, are an assemblage of signboards, blind office windows, vitreous-gray layers, advertisements and numbers. The street is as wide as a metropolitan boulevard, but – just as in all rural squares – its roadway has a surface of compacted clay, full of potholes, puddles and grass.[12]

In his short stories, we are also familiarised with the interior ambience of the flats and hallways that residents are living in:

the room was dark and velvety, starting from the deep blue upholstery with a golden thread pattern, but echoes of the flaming day vibrated even here, in the brass of the picture frames, the door handles and the gilt mouldings, though filtered through the dense vegetation of the garden.[13]

Drohobych is located in the Lviv region of Western Ukraine, with 76,686 inhabitants. In the nineteenth century, it was an important centre of oil production (crude oil was referred to as 'black gold'), in which Jews played an active role. The oil industry thus also influenced the town's architecture. Next to Bruno Schulz, another prominent citizen of Drohobych was Maurycy Gottlieb, one of the best Jewish artists of the later nineteenth century. Before the Second World War, when it was part of Poland, some 12,000 Jews constituted over 44 per cent of the town's population, before the onslaught:

In 1939, the city was taken over by the Soviet Union, and in July 1941 the German army invaded. In 1942, thousands of Jews were sent to the death camp at Bełżec. When Soviet troops 'liberated' the city in 1944, only 400 Jews remained alive. Today only a tiny remnant remains, and the 19th-century choral synagogue is still standing.[14]



3.11 Cover of the first edition of *Cinnamon Shops* (1934) by Bruno Schulz. Wikimedia Commons. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sklepy_cynamonowe#/media/Plik:Bruno_Schulz_-_Sklepy_cynamonowe.jpg.

A walk or stroll appears in the oeuvre of numerous male and female artists. Adapted in accordance with a problem or narrative, the walk's dimension is often framed by visual aesthetics, as in the work of the British artist, Richard Long. Particularly noteworthy is one of his first works exploring the themes of walking and nature: *Snowball Track* (1964). Its subject combines a walk with the rolling of a snowball, which the 18-year-old artist formed on the cliffs of the Avon Gorge in Bristol. A photograph shows a snowball increasing in size as it absorbs the snow and the black trace that it leaves behind – thereby documenting a performance of a very simple kind and contributing to a new art form that broke the barriers between art and the surrounding environment: 'not only located in the landscape but was made of it'.[15] In later works, Long continued to explore the theme many times, notably in *A Line Made by Walking*, dating from 1967. This artwork brought out not only its experiential aspect but also its presence as a final, aesthetic sculpture consisting of a trail cutting through grassland. These projects have since entered the art market in a major way, making Long one of the best-selling artists.[16]

The Belgian artist Francis Alÿs' iconic project from 1997, entitled *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*, is a work that combines the act of walking with the act of disappearing. He pushed a block of ice around the streets of Mexico City for nine hours until it melted completely. At the beginning, the process was laborious and slow whereas in its final stages he could just kick the ice cube blithely along the pavement.[17] The process of reduction, and the transformations that took place in his muscular efforts, remain etched in my memory: helped by Alÿs' video recording, which preserves the artist's work and effort for posterity while also providing an important insight into Mexico City's urban tissue.

When mapping out the itinerary for my *Hurdy-Gurdy* project, framed as a performance, I drew, however, my main inspiration from Umberto Eco's book, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. In analysing literary texts, Eco uses the space of a forest as a metaphor for textual matter.

3.12

3.12 The marketplace in Drohobycz in 1915. Postcard from the collection of National Library of Poland. https://polona.pl/item/drohobycz-rynek,NjUzMDA1/0/#info:metadata.

This brought to mind an image previously devised by Jorge Luis Borges, whereby 'a wood is a garden of forking paths. Even when there are no well-trodden paths in a Wood, everyone can trace his or her own path, deciding to go to the left or to the right of a certain tree and making a choice at every tree encountered.'[18]

The question to myself was whether the experience of viewing Częstochowa from many points of observation and 'bends' in the landscape during the research phase, and then undertaking the various walking performances, could open up any new critical perspectives on its previous life as a *shtetl*. Could my perception squeeze itself through the urban thicket, all the thicker because it is overgrown with the subterranean stems of the past and inhabited by apparitions? Once you step out beyond the confines of your map and archival research, definitive categorisation becomes extremely difficult because of the arbitrary method in choosing walking routes and retracing one's steps to predetermined points on the map. As I walked through the narrow streets of Częstochowa, I assumed the position of an 'empirical reader' who thankfully, as Eco suggests, 'can read in many ways, and there is no law that tells them how to read, because they often use the text as a container for their own passions, which may come from outside the text or which the text may arouse by chance.'[19]

In my escapades as an 'empirical reader', while I was criss-crossing the narrative arteries of existent/non-existent towns, I was usually equipped with one of the *yizkor* 'memory maps'. Since they relied purely on the recollections of prewar residents of *shtetls*, they seemed to offer the ideal navigational instrument not only for moving around a town's physical spaces but also around its memory and after-images. And just as *pinkas* and *yizkor* books provide the most accurate maps when trying to understand the form of *shtetls*, so *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories* is the best guide to fictional towns, since they engage one's imagination in the work with urban memory. Not unlike how Umberto Eco approaches literary texts, I choose to employ walking as the framework for my controlled reveries: 'It is not at all forbidden to use a text for daydreaming, and we do this frequently, but daydreaming is not a public affair; it leads us to move within the narrative wood as if it were our own private garden.'[20]

3.13

3.13 Francis Alÿs, *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing* (1997). http://francisalys.com/sometimes-making-something-leads-to-nothing/.

Jewish peddlers, diasporic pilgrimages and the Wandering Jew

Wandering in the fictional woods of cultural references, I have found many traces of Jewish migrants, peddlers and pilgrims who traversed continents in search of livelihood – a fate many Jews have shared over the centuries. A walk, a trek or just wanderings, as the primeval aspects of nomadism, are reflected in many folk tales and legends. Of importance when grasping anti-Semitic prejudices is the legend of the 'Wandering Jew', which describes the figure of a Jew who insulted Christ carrying his cross to Calvary. As Richard Cohen observes: 'The Wandering Jew became associated with the growing number of Ashkenazic pedlars and hucksters who entered London in the 18th century.'[21] The legend was first introduced in an anonymous pamphlet dating back to 1602 and bearing the title *Kurze Beschreibung und Erzehlung von einen Juden mit nahmen Ahasverus*, which was widely circulated and modified in subsequent versions: *The Wandering-Jew, Telling Fortunes to English Men* (1640), *The Wandering Jew, or The Shoe-maker of Jerusalem* (1720).[22] This legend and its figure of the Jew as an eternal wanderer also appeared in many caricatures, such as that drawn by Gustave Doré for the cover of the 5 June 1852 issue of *Journal pour rire*, an image bearing such anti-Semitic attributes that it was reused with great effect decades later by the Nazi regime.[23] Apart from his hooked nose, red hair and rod in hand, the Jew depicted creates the impression of a fiery mass trailing its path relentlessly and ferociously.

In 1937, an exhibition entitled 'Der ewige Jude' ('The Wandering Jew') was organised by the Nazi Party in Munich, showing the figure of the Jew 'taking over the world' as an amalgamation of Anglo-American capitalism and Soviet communism. This is exactly the image presented by the exhibition's main poster: a sinister bulky Jewish man with money in his hand and a hammer-and-sickle-branded map tucked under his arm.[24] There was of course a real side to this racist stigmatisation. In the interwar *shtetls*, a particularly prevalent form of nomadic work had been that of the peddler. This aspect of Jewish migrations and economic mobility has since received thorough treatment in a fascinating 2015 book, *Roads Taken: The great Jewish migrations to the New World and the peddlers who forged the way*, by Hasia Diner. The work of a peddler (sometimes referred to as a *klopper*, or 'knocker') was particularly important from the perspective of the process of overcoming class barriers at the turn of the nineteenth century; it somehow emancipated those Jewish peddlers. This type of work was plied throughout the European continent, Russia, the USA and as far away as Africa. On one hand, it was associated with the sense of being a 'stranger' and often led to ostracism.[25] On the other, it created opportunities for being 'among the others' through, for example, the mastering of foreign languages, hence leading to significant cultural freedom:

Peddling provided the initial mechanism by which the Jews met their new neighbors, speakers of a multiplicity of languages. It forced them to eat at the tables of Christians and compelled them to present themselves as like their customers – worried about the weather, or proud of their children – and simultaneously as distinctive, as men who hailed from exotic places like Bohemia, Galicia, Rhodes, Romania or Morocco, who earned their living so unlike everyone else, and who would not eat the pork, squirrel, bear, or whatever other foods their hosts ate.[26]

In certain places, and at times, urban peddlers would knock on doors of houses and apartments, then cross over into their customers' spaces. The presence of these Jewish men as fixtures of everyday life, and the corollary sense that society needed to protect itself against them, provided a living backdrop to the 'stranger' theory developed by the early twentieth-century German sociologist Georg Simmel. 'In the whole history of economic activity,' wrote Simmel, 'the stranger makes his appearance everywhere as a trader and being a trader makes him a stranger . . . The trader must be a stranger.'[27]

Working as a travelling salesman was often a trade of necessity rather than choice; or sometimes it could be wish-fulfilment for those who wanted to leave their home due to political beliefs (e.g. Zionists, who located their future in Palestine, or those dreaming of a communist and internationalist world). More often than not, however, peddling simply provided a livelihood, and was one of the most modest forms of trade, available for those who had no other means of subsistence.[28] Over time, this nomadic work evolved into

3.14 Albert Fine peddling near Guelph, Ontario in 1908. Photograph from the book by Ontario Jewish Archives, *Roads Taken: The great Jewish migrations to the New World and the peddlers who forged the way*. Yale University Press, 2015.

3.14

settled employment, achieving the status of anchored existence: 'When the peddlers gave up their mobile lives, they tended to set themselves down in those small communities, opening stores and adding to the number of small-town Jews.'[29]

That aside, the loneliness and drudgery of nomadic work, such as of water carrier, peddler or organ grinder, reflected the unfavourable historical situation of Eastern European Jews in social, economic and political terms. Visual arts offer some representations of these occupational and social types, such as *The Water Carrier* (1922), an interwar painting by Józef Badower, an artist and researcher into popular culture, or the paintings by Mayer Kirshenblatt incorporated into a nostalgic ethnographic guidebook to life in the *shtetl* in Opatów – as created by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Mayer Kirshenblatt, daughter and father respectively. Mayer Kirshenblatt left Opatów in 1934 for Canada, encouraged by his daughter Barbara, a Jewish studies scholar, and he spent most of the 1970s to 1990s recreating, from memory, key moments of secular and religious life in the *shtetl* he was raised in (also known in Yiddish as 'Apt'). With skill and diligence, he reconstructed the architecture, characters and religious and secular events that took place in his youth. Apart from their richness of architectural detail, Kirshenblatt's

3.15

3.15 *The Wandering Eternal Jew* (*Le Juif Eternel*), coloured wood engraving by S. C. Dumont (1852). Wikimedia Commons. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wandering_Jew#/media/File:Nazi_Wandering_Jew_propaganda_by_David_Shankbone.jpg.

paintings preserve the archetypal image of Jews who shaped the socio-economic landscape of Opatów, reflecting the diversity of *shtetls* in Eastern Europe. For example, the water carrier depicted by Kirshenblatt in one of his paintings is a gaunt-faced man in patched rags carrying on his shoulders two buckets of water filled to the brim, to deliver to people's homes.[30] Visible in the background are two shops surrounding Opatów's market square: a greengrocer and Libenbaum's colonial goods store. In *shtetls*, water carriers sat at the very bottom of the social scale. These men began their hurried walks at dawn between the well and most households in the *shtetl*, earning a pittance in return. Various Jewish writers have recalled such circumstances:

In the corridor of every house there stood a barrel. A water carrier had his slings; he checked the barrel and, as necessary, he brought two buckets full of water from the well. He charged five groszy per bucket. The houses had no bathing amenities; people bathed in tubs; water had to be heated up on a wood or coal-fired stove before you could take a bath.[31]

In the small towns of the Lublin upland, the blocks of the main square were located in the area rising above the river valley, hence the inhabitants, usually Jews, generally used public wells. The Jewish water carrier, with his slings and creaking buckets, covered the route that ran from the public well, with its creaking winch and chain, . . . to a wooden barrel or a tin can standing in the hallway or a kitchen and back to the well, now with empty and even more vigorously creaking buckets. In Sławatycze, when the 'Dumb Davie' delivered water to the more affluent houses, his singing aroused local sleepers. This somehow formed part of the town's landscape.[32]

Another itinerant trade – typically plied within a single town – memorialised in one of Mayer Kirshenblatt's paintings, *The Bagel-Seller*, shows an old woman carrying a huge wicker basket.[33] A further nomadic trade that involved moving between towns, was that of organ grinder. In another of Mayer's paintings, *Organ-Grinder*, a smiling man stands surrounded by a group of captivated listeners: 'The organ-grinder had a parrot and a basket of fortunes . . . There wasn't much money around, so he performed near our place, around the marketplace, in the courtyard of Mandelbaum, the richest man in the town, and outside Buchiński's.'[34]

Free movement and long walks have long been an essential part of Jewish diasporic history. Nonetheless, the pilgrimages of Hasidism, the most religious and God-fearing group among Central European Jews, grew into a strong a literary image – as evoked in the novel *Austeria*, by Julian Stryjkowski, of mystical crossings of fields and small towns on the way to visit the structures built over the graves of prominent Jews who were members of *tzadikim* (charismatic leaders of Hasidic courts). Rabbi David Moshe Friedman, the Chortkov *tzadik*, explained the purpose of this back in the early twentieth century:

The more you travel to the *tzadik*, the more you gain as it is an infinite thing. When a man thus prepared travels to a *tzadik*, he may align himself spiritually with the *tzadik* in the course of that journey, and with every mile which brings him closer to the *tzadik*'s residence, he achieves more and more.[35]

The mystical Hasidic movement emerged in the eighteenth century and was a response to the orthodox Talmud-dominated structure of *shtetl* Judaism. Expressing itself in mantra-like repetitive singing (*niggunim*), dancing, ecstatic moments, as well as abuse of alcohol and tobacco, it was a medium of engagement with the sacred, then a relative novelty in Judaism. One of the early advocates of this novel branch of Judaism was a leading *tzadik*, Israel ben Eliezer, known as Baal Shem Tov, who lived in Podolia and taught that God could be worshipped not merely through prayer and the fulfilment of *mitzvot* (commandments), but also in performing everyday activities.[36] Thus, worship through innumerable simple means, including journeys to the tombs of *tzadikim*, continues to form part of the Hasidic ethos. It is worth adding that the Hasids were often criticised for the father's neglect of their families due to the long journeys they undertook to visit *tzadikim*, often extending into months.[37]

In time, however, this rebellious current surpassed its more traditional predecessor. These days, not only Hasidic pilgrimages but also the organised tours to the tombs of *tzadikim* can meet with unfavourable responses by local populations. For example, pilgrimages to the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav in Uman of the Ukrainian, Cherkasy Oblast, which Alla Marchenko has studied in detail, are criticised for the huge amount of rubbish produced and general disarray caused by the incoming Hasidic community: as Marchenko points out, the city is in effect 'turned upside down'.[38] Yet there is a wide spectrum of attitudes to Hasidic pilgrimages, depending on the number of pilgrims involved. Even though Uman might be 'turned upside down' by the arrival of so many thousands of Hasidic Jews, in places like Leżajsk, Kock or Bobowa things look different, and often their local governments can make sensible arrangements to try to deal with the pilgrims.

Walking in Jewish Częstochowa

When performing *Hurdy-Gurdy* in Częstochowa, I demonstrated that in the

3.16

3.16 Mayer Kirshenblatt, *Water-Carrier*, 2001. The Taube Family Mayer July Collection of Art, donated to POLIN Museum by the Kirshenblatt family.

course of a single walk one could track down many threads, learn the histories of old houses, recover traces of material memory (a clock, a *sukkah*, the trace of a *mezuzah*) and talk to the last witnesses who still remember pre-war *shtetls*. Present-day Częstochowa has no programme to document the old buildings in which its Jewish community once lived and worked. The condition of these buildings is catastrophic, despite the fact they witnessed the Częstochowa ghetto uprising and still possess the aura of their former functions: a Jewish-run hat factory, button factory, kosher bakery and so on.

Jews had begun settling in Częstochowa in the eighteenth century, despite strong local prejudice against them. In 1807, Częstochowa, then within the Duchy of Warsaw, only had 496 Jewish inhabitants (14.8 per cent of its population), yet by 1840 this had expanded to 2,999 Jewish residents, almost 60 per cent of the residents. In the late nineteenth century, Częstochowa industrialised extensively, with new enterprises including, among others, several printing works, a glass works and a cellulose factory.[39] This attracted numerous Jewish labourers from nearby *shtetls*:

> The Jewish community in Częstochowa was socially diversified. This diversification of the different social groups expressed itself in the places of their residence, the living conditions, the everyday dress and in the political views. The place of residence affected the perception of the world. It can be assumed that the dividing lines run along Warszawska and Krakowska streets, the thoroughfare of the day. To the west of that important artery, the Central District and part of the Old Town District (in particular: Blessed Virgin Mary Avenue, Dojazd Street – now Piłsudskiego Street, Aleksandrowska Street – now Wilsona Street and Garibaldiego Street), were inhabited by the wealthy and the middle-class sections of the Jewish community. To the east of it, the tenement houses of the Old Town, the narrow streets named Targowa, Garncarska, Nadrzeczna, Senatorska, Kozia, Gęsia, Ptasia, Drop, Mostowa and others, were, in turn, inhabited by craftsmen, retail traders and the workers of various enterprises.[40]

3.17

3.17 Mayer Kirshenblatt, *The Bagel-Seller*, 2002. The Taube Family Mayer July Collection of Art, donated to POLIN Museum by the Kirshenblatt family.

Prior to the Second World War, the Jewish community operated through many routes; in addition to the two synagogues, it managed a *mikvah*, cemetery, farm, crafts school and poultry slaughterhouse. Because the Jewish population invested so heavily in small businesses (textiles, leather and food industries, retail), it was severely affected by the 1929 Wall Street Crash and ensuing economic recession. Despite that, in 1935, as many as 2,930 retail outlets were operating in the city, many of them Jewish.[41] Twenty registered Jewish charity associations existed, including the 'Bejs Lechem' Charitable Society, the Society for the Assistance for Poor Jewish Girls and the Association of Jewish Veterans.[42] Częstochowa's political mosaic, similar to many Polish urban centres, covered the entire spectrum of Jewish views from left to right: Poale Zion Left, Histadrut Labour Zionist Movement, Poalej Syjon-Prawica in Częstochowa, Allgemeiner Jüdischer Arbeiterbund, Party of Independent Socialists in Częstochowa, Mizrachi Organisation, Agudas Izrael and so on.[43]

Two years before the Second World War, following anti-Jewish declarations by the Camp of National Unity, many Jewish shops in Częstochowa were ransacked and a synagogue was set on fire.[44] When war broke out, a typical pattern ensued. On 3 September 1939, Nazi Germany occupied Częstochowa; in April 1941 they established the ghetto, trapping over 40,000 Jews. The ghetto 'liquidation' took place on 22 September 1942.[45] At this point, about 40,000 Jews were deported to the Treblinka II death camp while 2,000 people were shot and buried in mass graves on Kawia Street.[46] In November 1942, the remaining Jews in Częstochowa were transferred to the so-called small ghetto, where they were used for forced labour in the Hasag

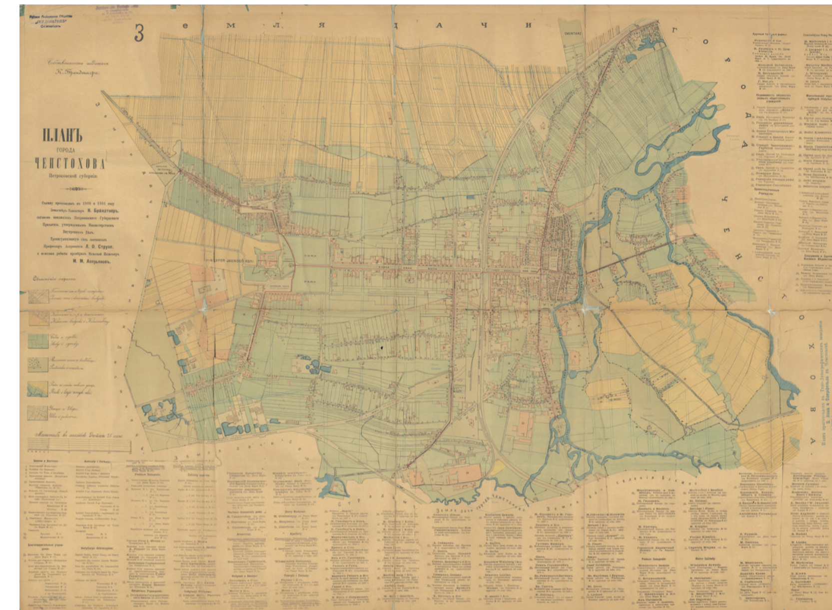
3.18

3.18 Location of Częstochowa (Poland). Drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko.

weapons factory. It was in this 'small ghetto' that an underground organisation began operations which led to an uprising there in June 1943. Adam Wolberg and Mordechaj Zylberberg (Zilberberg) were the commanders. Striking from Nadrzeczna Street, and subsequently continuing into the market square, the Nazis murdered all people remaining in the 'small ghetto', crushing the uprising.[47] When Częstochowa was liberated on 17 January 1945, only 5,200 Jews remained alive.[48] Częstochowa's Jewish Committee – which reported to the Central Committee of Polish Jews – duly began its activities, as in other centres in the People's Republic of Poland. The Jewish Social-Cultural Association, which ran clubs for young people and adults as well as Jewish schools and orphanages, was especially well organised. Following the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968, however, most of the city's remaining Jewish community emigrated, heading for Israel, the USA or Scandinavia. Only after 1989, with the fall of Polish communism, did the Częstochowa branch of the Jewish Social-Cultural Association resume its activities.[49]

Synagogue and *mikveh* in Częstochowa

The New Synagogue at 16 Wilsona Street was erected in the neoclassical style beloved of the Jewish Enlightenment, between 1899 and 1909. It was in fact the second synagogue in Częstochowa: the first, known as the Old Synagogue, stood at the intersection of Nadrzeczna and Mirowska Streets and dated back to 1765. As such, it was one of the town's largest edifices, with a columnated portico decorated with tablets of the Decalogue and the Star of David, and an ornate dome atop. But in December 1939, the Nazis chose to plunder the New Synagogue and set it on fire. Its ruins remained untouched for many years after the war. In 1955, the municipal authorities decided to build over the place by providing a concert hall for the Częstochowa Philharmonic Orchestra.[50] Completed in 1964, it was designed by Józef Tadeusz Gawłowski. A commemorative plaque on the Philharmonic Hall has an inscription in Polish, English, Hebrew and Yiddish, which reads: 'The New Synagogue which the Nazi barbarians burned down on 25 December 1939 stood on this site. That act marked the beginning of the Holocaust in Częstochowa. The State Philharmonic Hall was built on the ruins of the New Synagogue.'[51]



3.19

3.19 Plan of Częstochowa, 1902. Image from the collection of State Archive in Częstochowa.

Much more recently, Częstochowa's *mikvah* was entered onto the Polish register of historical monuments on 24 February 2005. This bath house is at 18 Garibaldiego Street, in an eclectic style with strong neo-Romanesque features. Until 1964, it served as the seat of the Częstochowa Congregation of the Jewish Community.[52] A commercial banner affixed to the former *mikvah* shows that the intention was to convert it into the Mikvah Jewish Cultural Centre, housing, among other things, the Museum of Jewish Culture, a kosher restaurant and a secondary school with English and Yiddish as the languages of instruction. Unfortunately, the project failed to receive co-financing from the regional government apparently because of some formal errors in the application.[53] A nightclub presently operates in one of the *mikvah* outbuildings.

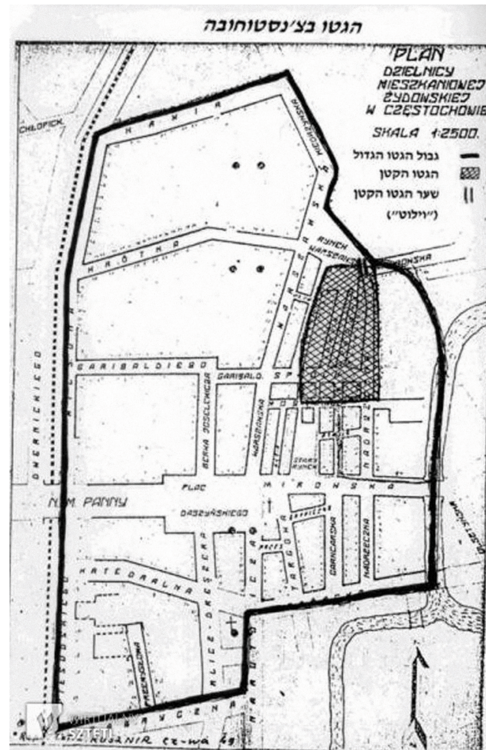
For years, Częstochowa's Old Town has been neglected in urban regeneration plans and separated from the main tourist flows, in marked comparison to the much-renovated district in the northern part of the town, which is a hub for Marian-cult pilgrimages. Local newspapers such as *Dziennik Zachodni* have often drawn attention to the discrepancy in policy, from as far back as 2011:

> The renovated town hall, the restored façades of the tenement houses around Biegański Square and along the renovated Blessed Virgin Mary Avenue, flowers along manicured lawns and in decorative flowerbeds: this is what Częstochowa's central districts look like. An unpleasant experience awaits an inattentive tourist, however, if they go too far in the area of the Old Town; they will be bitterly disappointed.[54]

This is a refrain repeated in recent years too, when noting the continuing decline of former Jewish properties in Częstochowa:

> Nothing can save the pre-war houses of the Jewish community any more. The original owners are dead or, if are alive, they are far away; here, we have our property administrators, who do not care about the condition of those houses . . . Most of the tenement houses are now in private hands or – what is worse – little is known about their owners; take the example of a

3.20 Plan of the Częstochowa ghetto. Virtual Shtetl / http://www.sztetl.org.pl / POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.



3.20

tenement at the Old Market Square; the book of lands and mortgages disclose a dozen or so names of the pre-war Jewish owners, thus the house belongs to their heirs, but after the Second World War it is very difficult to determine who these are. All the former Jewish houses in the Old Town are in what is referred to as 'temporary administration'; which means that prospective heirs may collect their property at any time. The current private owners of the tenements in the Old Town renovate their houses by themselves and within their financial means, just enough to tone down their frightening appearance. The rest of them will have to wait for better times, or they will fall apart.[55]

The final fragment of the latter article in *Dziennik Zachodni* reveals the acrid truth about debates on the regeneration of ex-Jewish property, where legal claims are being overridden by fears of an 'invasion' of Jews taking back what are now privately owned Polish homes. For years, Częstochowa has sought to organise workshops and conferences on the regeneration of its oldest area, together with the Municipal Urban Planning Studio and architectural department of the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice. In 2016, with assistance from the Association of Polish Architects, it even organised a competition for proposals to develop the Old Town district. The entry by Michał Bernasik from Cologne was selected from among 49 submissions. However, his plan limited itself to the market square, where it suggested a minimalist glass pavilion that would stand in a concrete townscape surrounded by some greenery.[56] Bernasik's plan ignored the surrounding decrepit homes and factory/warehouse spaces, rendering it useless.

3.21 The New Synagogue in Czestochowa at 16 Wilsona Street. Virtual Shtetl / www.sztetl.org.pl / POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Direct link: https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/file/67548?ref=gallery&article=83820&.

3.21

3.22

3.22 The philharmonic hall in Częstochowa built on the site of the former synagogue, 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.

Walking as a means of investigation

To my mind, a walk is as inextricably linked with the preparations for one of my performances – getting to know the neighbourhood, identifying the sights around which to anchor – as the event itself. Wandering and procrastination are the indispensable elements of the walks, even if working in a larger group. The practice of deliberate 'lingering' also opens up fresh perspectives.[57] This permits you to notice the person hanging out the laundry, the quality of the foodstuffs offered in nearby stores, whether tourist traffic reaches that place, whether the flats situated around the courtyards still have common toilets or not, what cars are parked in front of the dwellings and whether the municipality is really investing in the district. The 'lingering' that Eco writes about is an important spring of performance and its preceding fieldwork research. It helps me to gestate, to throw out roots, even for a moment. Walking is always about multiplication of the incoming stimuli, in real time, when the feet touch the ground, the materials 'come out' of the *Hurdy-Gurdy*, sunrays bounce off the mirrors and the archival research material exhibits glimpses of the past.

In a chapter of *Practice of Everyday Life*, devoted to 'Walking in the City', Michel de Certeau, not unlike Umberto Eco, compares walking to semantics and the nuances of language. He describes it as the place (space) where a city can pronounce and enunciate/articulate/enunciates.

3.23

Through the grammar of urban planning, each act of walking relates to the city in the same way as speech relates to language. Walking serves a triple function: firstly, it is a 'process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of pedestrian'; secondly, it serves as active 'spatial acting-out of the place'; and thirdly, 'it implies relations among differentiated positions'.[58] The combination of these functions shows that walking is an active stimulus which can also – contrary to spatial limitations such as when a building or a surrounding wall, or a gated housing estate is encountered – show ways to break out of the established order: 'If it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities and interdictions then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities.'[59]

In the context of the body breaking out of the established order, it is worth mentioning here the works of Bas Jan Ader, a Dutch conceptual artist who, among others, recorded himself during an actual fall from a rooftop – *Fall 1, Los Angeles 1970* – and after an unexpected bicycle accident on an Amsterdam street into the adjacent canal – *Fall 2, Amsterdam 1970*. Both of these black-and-white video performances, filled with frivolous elements, and demanding near-stuntman level nimbleness, played an important role in my *Hurdy-Gurdy* performances, not that there were any spectacular falls or sudden turns, but rather a readiness to immerse oneself into an unexpected entry into a private home or to climb onto a buttress of a synagogue. Bas Jan Ader fulfilled his image of the 'disappearing artist' in his last performance in 1975, when he sadly died in the course of his voyage across the Atlantic in a single-person boat. His body was never recovered. It makes me ask once more whether mobility, nomadism and walking are all the flipsides of space, and whether, as de Certeau pointed out, walking is the experimental process through which we are able to realise the constellation of our limits and limitations: 'To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent . . . The moving about that the city multiplies, and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place.'[60]

3.23 The building that was the former *mikvah*, 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.

Conclusion: Walking with mirrors

The liquid flow of a walk, even if I sometimes found it tiring under the heavy burden of my *shamash*, frequently solidified into new coalitions, such as finding companions who might eventually become

friends. Walks have the capacity to weave together threads of collaboration, which frequently turn out to be surprisingly enduring. Walking together is conducive to a free exchange of ideas and to physical identification of the problems people face, not in some exhibition space, but here and now, on a specific street, or in a specific synagogue or abandoned cemetery. It is probably due to this tangibility of shared experience that my walks tend to metamorphose into subsequent projects, and my fellow strollers become my collaborators with whom I develop projects, obtain grants or conduct workshops. An example of such a walk with 'a long tail' was my initial research visit to Częstochowa, organised by the Kulturoholizm Foundation in 2013.[61] That foundation, which promotes contemporary art through a local public art festival, prepared a site visit that involved walking around Częstochowa and meeting with local historians. In turn, this led to inception of a series of projects, such as that of the *Signboard* affixed temporarily to the façade of Częstochowa Town Hall in 2013 to note the historical existence of the *shtetl* there, and then the *Hurdy-Gurdy* project described in this chapter.

The emergence of these kinds of coalitions proves the power of walking in its role of solidifying liquid, conceptual forms of design into human assemblages that sustain architectural activities and, as will be discussed in the chapter on 'Embedment', sets the ground for more stable investments. Walking is the most primordial form of nomadism, a cultural and historical trope of drifting by using only the power of one's own muscles. The act of walking often brings people together; it is a very direct mode of travelling, as when walking one feels the space and faces other people who are walking there too. By walking, people move simultaneously in real towns and in fictional woods, carrying their load on their own shoulders, just as I carried around my *shamash* – the mirrored box of *Hurdy-Gurdy*. When walking, I was performing the 'white magic' of mirror images, conjuring archival materials out of thin air. This was the project in which I made my first use of mirrors to negotiate between the spectral realm of memory and the urban street, the place where I met and talked with people now living in houses previously belonging to present/absent Jews.

Notes
1. Boyd, 'Reality bending', 153.
2. Crang and Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space*, 43.
3. Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant*, 80–1.
4. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, 194.
5. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, 195.
6. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5.
7. Careri, *Walkscapes*, 20.
8. Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, 189.
9. Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, 191.
10. Rendell, *Art and Architecture*, 190.
11. Schulz, *The Street of the Crocodiles and Other Stories*, 4–5.
12. Schulz, *The Street of the Crocodiles and Other Stories*, 81.
13. Schulz, *The Street of the Crocodiles and Other Stories*, 10.
14. YIVO Encyclopedia, 'Drogobych'.
15. Wallis, *Richard Long*, 33.
16. Vogel, 'A night to buy low at Sotheby's'.
17. Alÿs, *Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*.
18. Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 6.
19. Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 8.
20. Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 10.
21. Cohen, 'The "Wandering Jew"', 151.
22. Cohen, 'The "Wandering Jew"', 148–50.
23. Cohen, 'The "Wandering Jew"', 164.
24. Holocaust Research Project, 'Der ewige Jude: The "Eternal Jew" or the "Wandering Jew"'.

25. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 9.
26. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 204.
27. Simmel, quoted in Diner, *Roads Taken*, 9.
28. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 200.
29. Diner, *Roads Taken*, 53.
30. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 29.
31. Excerpt from the memories of Dawid Ringiel from Leżajsk, quoted after Grupińska, 'Z opowieści polskich Żydów (4)'.
32. Grynberg, *Sławatycze, domu mój . . .* , 33–4.
33. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 43.
34. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 21.
35. Quoted in the main exhibition in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.
36. Bartosz, *Galicyjskim szlakiem chasydów sądecko-bobowskich*, 92.
37. Bartosz, *Galicyjskim szlakiem chasydów sądecko-bobowskich*, 94.
38. Marchenko, 'Hasidic pilgrimage in Ukraine'.
39. Virtual Shtetl, 'Częstochowa: History of the Jewish community'.
40. Szymański and Stefaniak, *Zygmunt Rolat*, 23.
41. Szymański and Stefaniak, *Zygmunt Rolat*, 23.
42. Virtual Shtetl, 'Częstochowa: History of the Jewish community'.
43. Szymański and Stefaniak, *Zygmunt Rolat*, 26.
44. Virtual Shtetl, 'Częstochowa: History of the Jewish community'.
45. Wikipedia, 'Getto w Częstochowie'.
46. Virtual Shtetl, 'Częstochowa: History of the Jewish community'.
47. Wikipedia, 'Getto w Częstochowie'.
48. Mizgalski, *Żydzi Częstochowianie*, 44.
49. TSKŻ – Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce. 'Our history'.
50. Częstochowa Jews, 'The New Synagogue'.
51. Virtual Shtetl, 'Nowa Synagoga w Częstochowie (ul. Wilsona 16)'.
52. Virtual Shtetl, 'Mykwa w Częstochowie (ul. Garibaldiego 18)'.
53. FODŻ – Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego, '"Przywróćmy Pamięć" edycja 2015–2016'.
54. Quoted in Strzelczyk, 'Stare miasto w Częstochowie'.
55. Strzelczyk, 'Częstochowskie Stare Miasto czeka na swoją szansę'.
56. Steinhagen, 'Wkrótce przebudowa Starego Rynku'.
57. Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 50.
58. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 98.
59. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 98.
60. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 103.
61. Kulturoholizm, 'Fundacja'.

Chapter 4 | Mirrors

Mirrors as a medium of illusion are embedded in my architectural and artistic practice. They encapsulate the 'white magic' of playful illusions which aim to evoke the 'present absence' of former *shtetls*. I use mirrors to add some flesh to the architectural skeletons of my *shamash*, covering them with a mirroring skin, softening their curves, providing camouflage. But it is not only about disguise, since a looking glass is never a mere instrument of illusion but also an exploratory device. Mirror-clad devices reflect their surroundings and sharpen reality by echoing its concealed layers: by looking at my installations, one catches sight of forlorn architecture and forgotten heritage.

Verging between visibility and invisibility, the mirrored bodies of my vehicles in motion – *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy* – serve as material shells for ghostly visages of Jewish communities, as architectural forms containing urban archives. In this sense, my practice confirms what Derrida wrote in *Spectres of Marx*, namely that mirrored architecture, when set at specific angles in sites charged with spectral presence creates a 'ghost effect':

> The production of the ghost, the constitution of the ghost effect is not simply a spiritualisation or even an autonomization of spirit, idea or thought, as happens par excellence in Hegelian idealism . . . Namely, a body! In the flesh (Leib)! For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-spectre of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh, in a space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearing of an apparition. For there to be ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever.[1]

When facing the 'present absence' of former *shtetls*, the mirrors of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy* are ghostly. These mirror-clad archives, as a liquid state of conceptual design, thus flow through the spectral towns of former *shtetls*, revealed a glowing contrast between what used to be there and what is there now. This opposition predetermines how architectural and political constellations form and present themselves. Nomadic mirrors as an epistemological medium support their operators in catching the dialectic image of 'present absence', remixing the past with contemporaneity. With every motion and reflection, the mirror-clad façades blend into towns and landscapes, probing them. Mirrors let fleeting reflections free, without storing them for too long. But they also add layer after

4.1 The façade of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* when entering Kransobród, photograph by Natalia Romik.

4.1

layer to the ghostly body of archive, to the skin of which they are. Is this the 'ghost effect' that Derrida talks about, a reverse side of contemporaneity? The moment is placed beyond temporal flow by congealing 'past present, actual present: "now", future present', as Derrida wrote about these paradoxical moments of time-beyond-time.[2]

By remixing past with future, presence with absence, by evoking the white magic of public memory, my mirrored vehicles serve as time machines. They transported my collective of fellow travellers, activists and members of the public between the layers of time. Whenever I placed a memory map on the doors of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, its reflection in the façade meant it was juxtaposed with that town square today. Such layering does not reiterate the past but remixes it with the present. I personally felt as if torn between the interwar universe of thriving Jewish communities, seeing their echoes in an empty Jewish orphanage, or in a Star of David shaped from clinker bricks, and a glimpse of the future. This involved thinking about preservation and repurposing that would breathe new life into ex-synagogues or houses of Jewish cobblers, while resonating with the fading melodies of communities gone. Surrounding myself in a skin of mirrors helped me move between these layers and travel transversally across three states of urban matter – past, present and future.

The former *shtetls*, tainted with the erosion of (post-)Jewish architecture, are thus haunted by spectres; they offer a *mise-en-scène* for ghosts to re-enter this world. Together with my devices and crews, we were not only transitory travellers stopping for a moment en route from one place to somewhere else. Sometimes we stayed, like in Wojsławice, where the SENNA Collective was working on renovating the synagogue, as will be described in the 'Embedment' chapter. But ours was not intended as a nostalgic trip. We reflected not only the spectres of the past, but also the topsy-turvy reality of late capitalism in Poland's peripheral regions. Boasts about attracting the 'creative classes' ring hollow in such places, where synagogues instead become storage depots for construction materials, or watering holes for local entrepreneurs. We slipped in-between the cracks between lost property deeds and new property structures, in towns whose backbones never really mended, especially after the shock therapy of Polish neoliberal transformations since the 1990s. As the *Communist Manifesto* proclaimed in 1848 about the new era of steel and railroads:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[3]

I wish this prophecy could be fulfilled in Poland, which as yet is not able to put its own ghosts to rest because when spectres are disturbed, each new transition returns to a past seemingly long gone yet which in fact still haunts the present. Jonathan Hill argues that the iconic phrase 'All that is solid melts into air' has not lost its pull, because it still 'encapsulates the force of a capitalist society that, in expanding cycles of destruction, production and consumption, undermines all that is assumed to be solid, such as the home. But in undermining the safety of the home, a capitalist society feeds desire for a home that is ever-more safe.'[4] Possibly this is the reason why people in Poland are so obsessed with the sanctity of their own private homes and of their churches, communal homes of their Christian God. They are too shell-shocked to think about anything exceeding their own small private kingdoms. They do not have any energy left to care even for their own communal architecture, not to mention that of the communities of former Jewish neighbours – unless, that is, they can claim those buildings as their own property, at which point they become homely again.

Pointing with *JAD*

JAD, a nomadic platform for urban protest, was an experimental intervention into the problems of (post-)Jewish properties in Poland. *JAD* is a Polish derivative of the Hebrew word, *yad*, which means 'hand'. In Judaic tradition, *yad* denotes a liturgical tool, a small pointer ending with miniature hand that is used for reading the Torah. The pointer can never touch the pages of a holy script, yet it serves to decipher the entangled patterns of Hebrew letters.

4.2

4.2 *Jad*, fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, MPOLIN-M128, the collection of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Yad, as a liturgical tool, has fascinated me for many years: 'a pen without ink', a pointer, a helper in reading the Torah. As a dyslexic person, I also found it extremely supportive in my first attempts at reading Hebrew script.

The tradition of craftsmanship in carving silver *yads* is very rich, with some examples found in Germany in the early sixteenth century.[5] They came in various sizes and designs, one of the most exquisite ones originating in the synagogue in Pohrebyszcz, sculpted with the motif of a heart, and made by a goldsmith named Baruch in 1735.[6] Another interesting example is that of the extended *yads* presented at an exhibition in Szydłów's synagogue, exceeding 30 cm in length.[7] *Yad*, as an artificial hand with an unfolded pointing finger, is hence an expressive sculptural composition. There are legends about *yads*, which in ancient times due to their sharpness were even used as weapons in defending synagogues against invaders. Furthermore, according to Sephardic Jews the five fingers on the hand protect one from evil, and for this reason an image of a hand was frequently painted on dwelling walls.[8]

For my performance piece, *JAD* thus became a nomadic machine shaped as a big hand with pointing finger, clad in mirrors. It was deployed in various places of architectural erosion in Silesian Metropolis – Będzin, Bytom and Sosnowiec – between June and October 2012. In these towns, I selected locations that before the Second World War were closely related to the Jewish community (houses, hospitals, synagogues) but which are currently neglected or in the process of privatisation. *JAD* was pushed to those spots and then activated as a vehicle of 'urban emergency', calling the public's attention through its form, sounds, light effects and artificial smoke. The performance deliberately and provocatively targeted examples of poor urban management that boil down to irreversible (or untaken) post-communist decisions about derelict and forgotten (post-)Jewish architecture.

I used *JAD* as an instrument to read the concealed palimpsests of these former Polish *shtetls*, traversed together with a group of fellow activists. We scanned the landscapes to spot urban conflict, at which juncture we deployed *JAD* to create temporary zones of alternative experience in

4.3

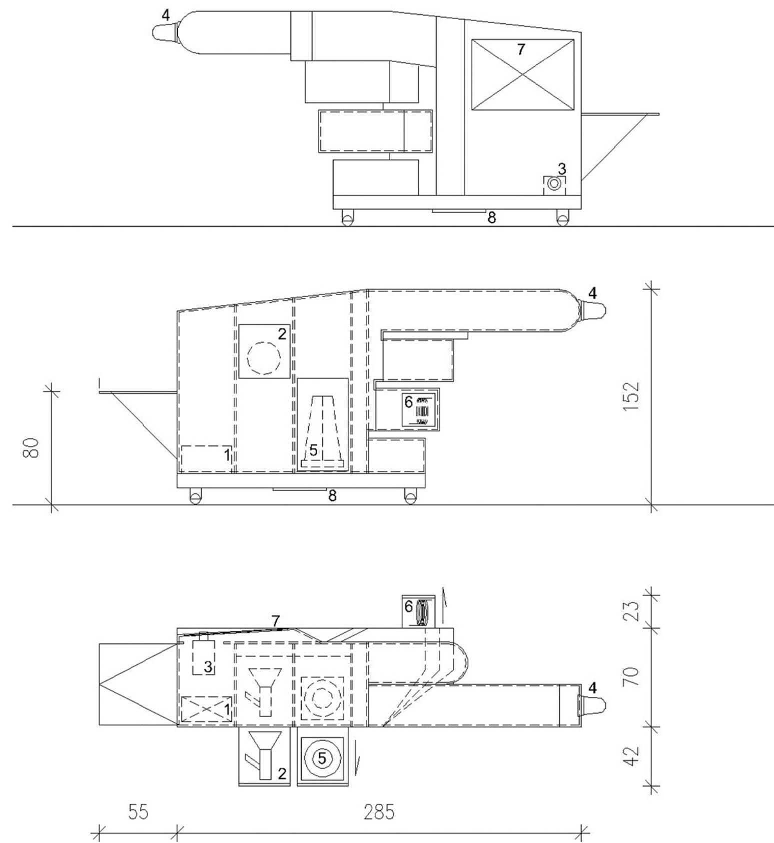
4.3 The opening of our exhibition in the Contemporary Art Centre Kronika in Bytom from October–November 2012, photograph from the collection of the Contemporary Art Centre Kronika in Bytom.

which we re-enacted erased architectural memory. This involved exploring disused synagogues and vacant lots emptied after the demolition of Jewish buildings; we visited private flats, Jewish orphanages, ritual bathhouses, praying rooms, religious schools, cemeteries, youth headquarters and political organisations. Most of these places are now extremely degraded or used for purposes unrelated to Jewish heritage. The sole exception was the headquarters of the Brama Cukermana Foundation in Będzin, an NGO located in the former private prayer house and devoted to maintaining Jewish heritage.[9]

The mirrors, which armoured *JAD*, optically magnified these instances of urban erosion, creating an illusion of disappearing. *JAD* blended in like a chameleon, concealing itself, playfully deconstructing itself. A huge human hand could have otherwise looked out of proportion, yet when covered in mirrors, *JAD* presented itself as a prop in a surrealist urban spectacle, like a situationist game. This 'camouflage' de-escalated the tension otherwise associated with the performance, calming heated debates about anti-Semitism, poverty and social neglect.

JAD was constructed in cooperation with Krystian Banik, a lecturer in stage design at the Academy of Fine Art in Katowice, and Sebastian Kucharuk, an architect. It was made of plywood (8 mm thick), which at first was cut into smaller parts and later assembled into the shape of a hand. Eventually, the device was clad with mirrors made from 3 mm high impact polystyrene (HIPS) plastic panels and set upon a mobile platform, held on four rubber wheels (with brakes). The vehicle had no engine, and so needed to be moved around manually by our collective of urban activists.

On one side of *JAD* there was a drawer, covered by a flap, which served as storage for my toolkit as urban activist. On top of the pointing finger was a battery-powered beacon light, and, on the other side, a triangular frame. This frame looked like a street sign, and inside it we placed graphic icons – designed by Piotr Jakoweńko – that represented the need for action, along with a slot for a short explanatory text printed onto triangular plastic sheets. In the later stages, whenever *JAD* was exhibited, this frame became a didactic part of the installation. Additionally, the battery powered a 'fog generator' which we used to create atmospheric scenery for our performances, in which, veiled by drifting mist, we declaimed texts about the history of Jews



4.4

4.4 The design for *JAD*, drawn by Sebastian Kucharuk and Natalia Romik.

in Silesia. In the storage drawer I could hide my field notes, chalk, maps, bullhorn and portable bollards. Wherever I could not enter with my *JAD* – like over rail tracks, in narrow alleys or ultra-bumpy pavements – I used colourful smoke bombs to create a stir.

JAD had a double function of an activist instrument and an exhibitable installation. It was first exhibited in the Contemporary Art Centre Kronika in Bytom from 13 September to 30 November 2012, this gallery being one of the co-producers of *JAD*, in conjunction with a show named 'Project Metropolis'. The overall exhibition was curated by Stach Ruksza and was financed by a small grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage that I had secured. For my archival research for *JAD*, I was helped by Jan Jagielski of the Jewish Historical Institute. The sites of performance were chosen, and the device deployed, with Piotr and Karolina Jakoweńko from the Brama Cukermana Foundation, who enthusiastically drove me and *JAD* to different Silesian towns. When I exhibited it in Kronika, I invited the public to contribute, and they eagerly responded by adding their own tips about neglected Jewish buildings and places of forgotten heritage. At the opening, I announced that a form of urban action would take place. The morning after, we duly took the device outside, formed a pageant of urban activists and ventured with *JAD* into the urban voids left by Silesian Jews.

Sites of urban memory

We visited several locations with *JAD*:[10]

1. Block of flats, previously a Jewish elderly care home, at 4 Smolenia Street in Bytom. Before the Second World War this building had been a care home. On its front façade, just above the entrance, a Star of David is embellished, patterned out of clinker bricks, a trace of a happier past hovering above a devastated courtyard. In the basement, there are remains of a *mikvah*, the basin of which is quite well preserved, clad with white and blue tiles.[11] When I spoke with locals, they mistakenly believed that the building had once been a hospital. Only a few knew its real function,

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4.5 *JAD* in front of the house of Rutka Laskier in Będzin, photograph by Natalia Romik.

4.6 The triangular inserts on the side of *JAD* into which are fixed site-specific information, drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko.

but they were not at all sentimental about the Star of David or any other elements of the façade.

2. House on sale, previously a private prayer house, at 31 Korfantego Street in Bytom.

3. Vacant building, previously a Jewish orphanage, at 17 Sienkiewicza Street in Będzin. Up to 1939 an orphanage was located here, a charitable donation by Josef Rappaport. At that time, Będzin was 69 per cent inhabited by Jews. During the war, the Nazis created a gathering point for Jews here, before transporting them to death camps. After 1945, the building was used as a children's hospital before that institution moved to the adjacent town of Czeladź. This six-storey ruined building is currently owned by the municipality of Będzin, unused and neglected. When during our performance we talked with people living in the area, they wanted it to be restored to its previous function, whether an orphanage or children's hospital. As one lady said: 'These days, the hospitals in Będzin are overcrowded, while this building only scares visitors.'

4. Cukerman's prayer house at 24 Kołłątaja Alley in Będzin. The prayer house was initiated in the early twentieth century by Nachim Cukerman, and then, after the Second World War, used as a private flat. After being abandoned, the wall paintings were renovated and currently it serves as an office for the Foundation Brama Cukermana.

5. Ruins of the house of Rutka Laskier at 4 Moniuszki Street in Będzin. Before the war, the family of Rutka Laskier lived here. As a Jewish girl compared often to Anne Frank, she was only 10 years old when she was resettled to Będzin ghetto, where she wrote a heart-breaking memoir before being transported and killed in Auschwitz.[12] Her tragic story was later depicted in a 2009 BBC documentary.[13] At the back of this house a *sukkah*, a temporary hut constructed for the Sukkot festival, once stood. This three-storey house is currently a ruin, overgrown with weeds and bushes growing in its fissures. We were struck by sadness on seeing this neglect of one of the few remaining pre-war buildings in Będzin, with its bricked-in windows and rundown yard at the back. For decades, the municipality was unable to determine the legal status and ownership of the building. Only in 2014 did municipal lawyers manage to identify and contact the family of Rafał Kuryło, whose grandmother bought the house in 1949. As Kuryło admitted, his family 'knew nothing about the building'.[14] In 2015, Będzin County's Office for Architecture decided that the building should be demolished: accordingly, the second floor and the attic were dismantled.[15] At one point, the new owners expressed a vague plan to adapt part of the building into a museum about Rutka Laskier: 'If possible, we will exhibit figures of the Laskier family in the windows, erect a memory plate, and even, but I say it with caution, establish a small museum devoted to their memory.'[16] Instead, the building was demolished almost entirely, with only its street façade remaining. During demolition, Karolina Jakoweńko from the Brama Cukermana Foundation spotted the traces of inscriptions in Hebrew, further proof that a prayer room used to be located there. Photographic documentation was given to the municipal official responsible for heritage, yet this didn't prevent the building being lost.

4.7 Location of Bytom, Będzin, Sosnowiec (Poland), drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko.

6. Empty cubic structure for a *sukkah* at 9 Sączewskiego Street in Będzin. As another example of interwar Jewish remains, the original wooden shed of the *sukkah* is preserved in the backyard.

7. Marketplace, previously the site of the Grand Synagogue, at 16 Deckerta Street in Sosnowiec. This market thrives on the vacant lot of a neo-Baroque synagogue erected in 1894 by Jewish merchants. On 9 September 1939 the Nazis demolished the building and reused the remaining materials. When we arrived with *JAD*, we encountered a busy bazaar. Its design is untypical, as one enters the marketplace through a postmodernist gate, styled a bit like the ex-synagogue's doorway, but also as an assemblage of pastels, curves and arcs typical of Polish urban aesthetics in the 1990s.

8. Residential building, previously a Jewish butcher's, at 8 Kierocińska Street in Sosnowiec. According to the oral testimonies of Jews, and tax registers, this butcher's shop was established in 1928 and used until November 1939.

4.8 A courtyard in Bytom at 6 Smolenia Street, photograph by Natalia Romik.

9. Ruins of a synagogue in Bożnicza Street in Modrzejów, Sosnowiec. The synagogue was erected in the 1890s near an older wooden synagogue and *kirkut*, following the revival of the local Jewish community board in the Modrzejów district of what was then a *shtetl*.

10. Health centre, previously a Jewish hospital, at 9 Odrodzenia Street in Sosnowiec. This former Jewish hospital had been built in 1912, founded by Abraham Pelerman, before being closed by the Nazis in August 1943.

11. Empty building, previously a Jewish orphanage, at 7 Odrodzenia Street in Sosnowiec. The orphanage was erected in 1920 after a public collection initiated by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor of Judaic Faith. The Nazis closed it in 1942, shifting all the children to the ghetto. Currently, the building stands empty, located close to a medical centre.

12. Residential building, previously a *cheder*, at 5 Racławicka Street in Sosnowiec. In this building from 1920–39 was one of many religious schools (*cheders*) in Sosnowiec, constructed by the Jewish inhabitants of the Pogoń district through collective effort.

'Your City is a Battleground'

To aid my performance, the collective of activists took responsibility for deploying, steering, and moving *JAD* around. We used speakers to amplify the discussions, exhibited boards with information about ex-Jewish architecture, and used our activist props (smoke bombs, bullhorns, rotating lights) to attract attention. We utilised *JAD* as an experimental platform for

4.9 A vacant building, previously a Jewish orphanage, at 17 Sienkiewicza Street in Będzin, photograph by Piotr Jakoweńko.

4.10 Cukerman's prayer house at 24 Kołłątaja Alley in Będzin, photograph by Dominik Tomczyk.

4.11 Karolina Jakoweńko in front of Cukerman's prayer house, photograph from the collection of The Cukerman's Gate Foundation.

the communal production of urban space, trying to reclaim what Henri Lefebvre once described as the 'right to the city'[17] – here understood as the right to communal memory, demanded in the name of people who are no longer there.

The exterior surface of *JAD*, glittering like the scales of an ancient creature, attracted many people, producing smiles in some but also striking sombre tones with others. *JAD* absorbed surrounding buildings while always pointing with its finger at our destinations. This gesture, accompanied by the bulky frame of the giant hand, grounded our explorations. People joining our group, and with whom we talked, were also reflected in these mirrors. *JAD* stored these images in its mirrors, recording them as a memory of the participants. After its first installation

4.12 Interior of Cukerman's prayer house showing the renovation of wall paintings, photograph from the collection of The Cukerman's Gate Foundation.

4.13 Ruins of the house of Rutka Laskier at 4 Moniuszki Street in Będzin. Photograph by Krzysztof Bielawski / Virtual Shtetl / www.sztetl.org.pl/ / POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

4.14 *Sukkah* at 9 Sączewskiego Street in Będzin, photograph by Roman Łuszczki, from the collection of The Cukerman's Gate Foundation.

4.15 The Pepco shop, where previously stood the Grand Synagogue at 16 Deckerta Street in Sosnowiec, photograph by Piotr Jakoweńko.

4.15

4.16 Fellow travellers of *JAD*, photograph by Natalia Romik.

4.16

4.17 The empty building, previously a Jewish orphanage, at 7 Odrodzenia Street in Sosnowiec. Photograph by Adam Marczewski / Virtual Shtetl / www.sztetl.org.pl/ / POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

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4.18 My walk with *JAD*, photograph from the collection of the Contemporary Art Centre Kronika in Bytom.

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4.19 *JAD*, 'Projekt Metropolis' exhibition, curator: Stanisław Ruksza, Silesian Museum in Katowice—Contemporary Art Centre Kronika in Bytom—Imago Mundi Foundation, 2015. Photograph by Marcin Wysocki.

in 2012 at the CCA Kronika in Bytom, it was deployed in the Modern Art Museum in Warsaw, where it was included in a 2014 exhibition titled 'Your City is a Battlefield' – before becoming part of the 'Project Metropolis' show in the Silesian Museum in Katowice and Bytom in 2015. The Warsaw version of Your City is a Battleground, from 12 October–9 November 2014, curated by Stach Ruksza, was part of a wider festival called Warsaw under Construction. For this exhibition, *JAD* was brought into a symbolic field of struggle, meaning that it stood side-by-side with artists who are addressing problems of the contemporary metropolis, and of people's rights to the city, space and memory, including well-known figures like Krzysztof Wodiczko, Barbara Kruger and Artur Żmijewski. It was an honour to be exhibited in such company, strengthening my conviction that the *JAD* project could have real impact in revitalising cultural memory and combating gaps in the discourse about Jewish heritage. *JAD* was presented as the centrepiece of the Warsaw exhibition, surrounded by props, graphics and a TV set with a video documenting its urban interventions. The curatorial text for the exhibition declared:

Artists have become some of the many decision makers with regard to the visible shape of the city. Oftentimes their works were an example of the critical reflection; they initiated debates, thus becoming a litmus test of social tensions, saturated in the new content. An important part of the Polish transformation is a thread omitted in many historical summaries – its social cost: decreased quality of life for the considerable part of the citizens for whom there was not enough 'safety net' in the Polish 'shock therapy'. The art show consists of the most important, although sometimes forgotten works created after 1989, devoted to the image of the city's social transformations. Artists featured in the exhibition represent various generations, artistic approaches, and circles; they use different media and constitute a wide cross-section of the Polish art scene.[18]

Next, 'Project Metropolis' in the Silesian Museum from 27 February–3 May 2015 was another important milestone as it summarised the travels of *JAD* in the very region that I had traversed only a couple of years prior. Those involved in 'Project Metropolis' had been early allies in organising my travels through their support for artists' residencies in Upper

Silesia. The exhibition presented the results of these residency cycles, showcasing dozens of works that emphasised their strong connection with local communities. In its first iteration, the exhibition was presented in a cultural centre established in a former coalmine in Katowice, with *JAD* placed at the very entrance to this building, in a spacious industrial hall, full of light flowing through its glass façades. Sitting in the spotlight, *JAD* quickly harnessed the attention of visitors. The exhibition received positive reviews, with one of them, published in the popular e-journal, *Political Critique*, focusing directly on *JAD*:

Project Metropolis boldly walks on a shaky ground – taking a position in disputes regarding which type of Silesian history should be told in this underground museum. It creates unofficial, entirely new, and diverse narration, assembled from myriads of micro-histories. The first one is unearthed at the very entrance, with the – previously nomadic, currently stabilised – installation *JAD* of Natalia Romik, a magnified hand, made from steel, with a pointing finger, set on wheels. *JAD* travelled through Silesia, pointing towards places of (post-)Jewish memory – forsaken by God and Men alike. The artist, referring to a liturgical instrument, used for reading the Torah, created a visually attractive, yet pragmatically utilisable vehicle, which can be used also after the exhibition commences, by urban activists.[19]

JAD was later shown during the Congress of Culture in 2016 in the Palace of Science and Culture in Warsaw, in the exhibition 'Nothing about You Without Us', curated by Szymon Żydek. This exhibition was conceived to represent the generation of Polish artists born in 1980s, with its aim being, in the curator's words: 'To represent two tendencies visible in the artistic practice of this generation: the ambivalence of political engagement and the attempts to make art beyond the conventions of artistic autonomy.'[20] *JAD*, which was here presented on red carpets in the huge space, in a Socialist Realist style, seemed to suffocate inside the exhibition room, surrounded by pompous columns, as if it lacked the space to breath freely. Even though the Congress of Culture was important, I had the feeling that the *JAD* project really belongs to a public space – to a backyard near the house of Rutka Laskier, or a pavement in front of the building with a Star of David on its façade in Bytom, or to its cradle in the CCA Kronika in Bytom.

Mirrors in motion

These mirrors in motion, in their nomadic form – whether it means pushing *JAD*, carrying *Hurdy-Gurdy* or driving the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* – move transversally through ghostly urban landscapes, providing shelter and sanctuary, protecting me against my own angsts about unfriendly anti-Semitic crowds and angry ghosts. All my projects use mirrors to evoke an aura – of the place, of performance, of public intervention – to pull people inside the archive, attracting them also through external image by having their own images reflected in the mirror-clad façades. The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was never empty; it has always been heavily visited. In the case

of *JAD* or *Hurdy-Gurdy*, the mirrors served as an attractor, with people, on seeing their own reflections, changing their direction to stop, partake and discuss.

What is the relationship between the aura evoked by the looking glass of my projects and the indigenous aura of the former *shtetl* towns? A key question is whether this aura was already there. Or perhaps I was just projecting my own expectations onto these towns, amplifying my own preconceived notions through my psychic, artistic and optical devices? It is hard to resolve this question, considering the elusive nature of aura itself. As Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift suggest, when commenting on the notion of 'aura' in Walter Benjamin's philosophy of urbanity:

This leads to something of a paradox in terms of Benjamin's theory of aura and urbanism. His own statements indicate that he saw cities as auratic, as sublime. However, he also argued that auratic objects were usually received in a state of concentration, whereas the built environment tends to be experienced in a state of distraction.[21]

In my design experiments, mirrors focus public attention by scattering and reassembling layers of time/space, in a simultaneous process and not something that happens consecutively (e.g. we disassemble first and then reassemble after). Mirrors do both at the same time. We can see a memory map reflected in the image of a town square today, while talking about the 'present absence' of communities seemingly gone, yet still forming the urban reality in former *shtetls*. This is the reason why I try to insist upon using the temporal phenomenology of mirrors, only partially anchored in the here-and-now, to reveal the multi-layered nature of what we conceive to be real. I found confirmation of my intuitions in Benjamin's idea of 'aura'. He conceived it as a physical quality of things, 'encroaching' on a subject by casting 'shadows' and multiplying itself through mirror images.[22]

Displacement and expansion of aura is essential to my projects. Both cast shadows on reality, encroach on their surroundings by projecting their mirror image or reflecting the sunbeams. These shadows are not only aesthetic, but also of a social nature; they congeal relations by carrying over fragments of conversations and passions between people, who are attracted to nomadic projects at different stages, linking us together. Whenever reflected by mirror devices, I become entangled in the same web of connections, remixed with the communities and towns I have visited. According to Benjamin, objects 'possess aura when they have a distance from the viewer and can return his or her gaze'. Hence, they must be 'unique' and 'cannot be reproduced'.[23] For Benjamin, aura is therefore not only a natural phenomenon, pertaining for example to mountains, but is embedded in artworks through their claim of uniqueness and irreproducibility. Art, just like religious icons or relics, is hence firmly rooted in social rituals. Or in Benjamin's own words:

It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.[24]

As a nomadic artist/architect who takes her projects from one place to another, and who sets her designs-as-traps in town squares, I cannot fully share Benjamin's insistence on discrete singularity. Instead, I aim intuitively not to create projects that seek to invoke aura in places which are 'white cube' galleries, or other sanctified environments, devoted to the celebration of art by a group of initiated devotees. On the contrary, I take my nomadic vehicles into mundane public places, attracting people who are not accustomed to art, so as to convince them to enter into the collective time travels of our performances.

Mirrors offer the key to this paradox, evoking aura due to a sense of cultural importance and mythological roots, being both popular and uncanny. They fascinate, with the mystery of one's own image for instance reflected in myths like that of Narcissus, or the diabolical mirrors of medieval legends. The process of making mirrors, of polishing and perfecting a surface until it casts an ideal reflection, is highly significant. In my fascination with mirrors, I have had many occasions to take a closer look, zoom in, observing how *JAD*'s plastic mirrors twisted when exposed to heat, frame from various perspectives and contexts. I do echo Benjamin's feeling that 'aura overpowers us', in that it starts to live a life of its own.[25] In truth, I started to experiment with plastic mirrors long before I used them for my research into *shtetls*, admiring their powers of camouflage and ability to attract attention, to reflect and twist the environment, through earlier artistic projects such as *Predator* (2009) and *Dreamcatcher* (2014).

My first-ever mirror project was *Predator*, during which I performed wearing a costume made from hundreds of tiny mirrors. *Predator* was a mercurial figure creeping towards living beings and inanimate objects, or lurking on urban frontiers. It first appeared in Warsaw in September 2009, on the wild riverbanks of the 'less cultured' part of the city, where it stalked the boundaries between nature and civilisation. It had been commissioned for the Disappear by the River festival organised by the Bęc Zmiana Foundation.[26] My next mirror project, titled *Dreamcatcher*, was commissioned by the Roskilde Festival in Denmark and sat enclosed inside a tent, as excellently analysed by Signe Brink Pedersen in her doctoral thesis 'Between sites: Relocating critical curatorial practice'.[27] As she and I wrote as a joint entry in the catalogue:

Dreamcatcher fuses into the urban tissue, disappearing from the field of vision. Behind the mirrors an urban sauna is hidden, the steaming interiors of which will stir up public imagination. The architectural structure (aluminium, HIPS mirrors and wood) serves multiple purposes: it is a site of practical and theoretical poetry, of collective dreaming, meditative exchanges and heated debates. The space is hospitable and open to everybody.[28]

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4.20 *Predator*, a performance by Natalia Romik, photograph by Jacek Kołodziejski.

Dreamcatcher was built with colleagues in the SENNA Collective as a place to debate urban policies and negotiate new urban investments. In Copenhagen our tent was installed in a parking lot where a cultural complex was going to be constructed, designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA. This served as my open-air laboratory where I could test the qualities of construction materials, such as the HIPS mirrors, which were exposed to the cold from the outside while also being heated up by the humid air of a sauna inside.

During my project performances, I have been frequently asked about my motivations for, and the consequences of, the continual use of mirrors for visual effect. The mirror-clad façades of my *shamash* thus play with urban space without dominating it through an architectural ego. This expresses my own dissent with star-architecture made from aluminium and

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4.21 The *Dreamcatcher* installation in Copenhagen, photograph by Natalia Romik.

concrete that dominates public space as a streak of narcissist self-affirmation. Mirrors play an important part in such subversion, because installations now blend in, disappearing alongside the ego of architect. Such designs are not intended to accumulate the capital of powerful insiders but distribute those moneys amongst the people gathered. Following the way of mirrors, architectural form dematerialises itself without losing its material solidity by playing with human perception. Here I agree with Hill when he emphasises that dematerialisation is a matter of aesthetic play rather than of a crudely defined lack of physicality: 'Whether architecture is immaterial is dependent on perception, which involves creative interpretation, fictions rather than facts.'[29] On the other hand, this is not a mere trick, but a real difference in the public status of such projects as they activate the same faculties of audiences stifled by monumental ego-architecture. To quote Hill: 'The experience of immaterial architecture is based on contradictory sensations, and is appropriate to an active and creative engagement with architecture.'[30]

Mirror is indeed a looking glass: it is a relational instrument that gains its qualities in concatenation with other elements such as architectural context, Jewish archives and political constellations. Sites become emptied of meaning, but only on the surface, as they remain political in their form, defusing architectural ego and creating space for senses to emerge – and thus for ghosts to reappear, remixing the past, present and future. It becomes an articulation of immaterial architecture, something which is performative, because it only functions in and through performance, and – when used – only by reflecting objects, people, histories and actions.

Parallax view

My mirrors are thus paradoxical agents, invisible in themselves, yet rendering the status of installations concealed and surroundings reflected, as a kind of parallax view. In this way they do not really engage in the process of translation, which would involve what Slavoj Žižek criticises as Kant's 'transcendental illusion' of language devoid of human particularities. Žižek talks of a fallacy that is based on 'the illusion of being able to use the same language for phenomena which are mutually untranslatable and can be grasped only in a kind of parallax view, constantly shifting perspective between two points between which

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4.22 The *Dreamcatcher*, photograph by Natalia Romik.

4.23 *Virtual Economic Zone*, installation in Gdańsk, photograph by Maciej Czeredys.

no synthesis or mediations is possible'.[31] However, mirrors do not translate. Instead they sustain a parallax view towards coexisting realities, bringing them closer in a process of montage that juxtaposes them as dialectic images.[32] This does not erase any difference in the illusion of unfettered, rational communication. Nor does it allow memory to be forgotten. Mirrors, when used skilfully, can disrupt echo chambers, waking up people from their ideological slumbers in which they tend to reiterate communal fallacies, enabling some to deny the Holocaust or to whitewash Polish anti-Semitism.

In this context it is important to emphasise the relational status of mirrors, which never work on themselves. They must be constantly polished, while also being pointed at special angles and in certain directions. This juxtaposition works through points and counterpoints in this thesis, and just like any complex compositions, it requires at least two dimensions to work together. A market square and a memory map are hence like two sides of a Möbius strip, seemingly different, yet at the same time sharing the 'mathematical property of being unorientable'.[33] Today, there are no Jews in the former *shtetls*. We will never get to know what a particular town, a synagogue, a workshop, a market would have looked like if they were still there. Poles live there today in a parallax town, on another side of the reality strip – yet in a perverse Möbius-like manner, it is the same town. No mirror is suited to overcome this paradox, as it only provides a parallax view on either side of a Möbius strip. This opposition can never

be resolved, but it can be socially negotiated, solidifying into a blueprint for action such as renovating a neglected synagogue. And a mirror is an instrument calibrated to grasp this dialectic. Parallax: 'the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by change in observational position that provides a new line of sigh'.[34]

Sabine Melchior-Bonnet in her treatise, *The Mirror: A history*, refers to the Platonic tradition in which mirrors always played the role of mediators in a system of analogies and hierarchies.[35] They were never a lifeless passive object, but instead a zone of transfer in which a viewer 'disguises himself', linking with phantasmal realm. As she notes: 'The fiction of the mirror refuses the rigid distinction between real and imaginary and allows a more subtle dialectic of the subject.'[36] Hence a mirror image is not a mere illusion, but instead a cognitive tool for recognising a multilayered reality – or, in my case, to explore a spectrum of shadows cast by an older and a more recent past.

The dualistic 'mediation of the mirror' was observed and analysed by the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, who described how six-month-old children start to recognise their own mirror image, in what is now called the 'mirror stage'. A child who differentiates between his/her own body and their surroundings 'playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates'.[37] On a wider scale, this relationship can be seen as a pattern for a distinction between the internal life of an individual organism (*Interwelt*) and an external reality (*Umwelt*).[38]

Whenever a regular mirror reflects a living or lifeless object, it somehow returns to its point of departure – that is, reflections are directly similar to the things being reflected. It is a different matter altogether, however, if a mirror is distorted, coloured or clouded. The 'black mirror', the fascinating story of which is narrated by Arnaud Maillet in *The Claude Glass*, is an example of asymmetrical reflection, whereby the mirror purposefully distorts an image, making itself visible as a medium. In the words of Maillet:

> This asymmetry, obtained by the reduction that the black mirror brings about, makes it possible to maintain the irreducible divergence or breach between the two tendencies, between two images. . . . if this number two becomes the primary element of the proliferation of doubles as a form of becoming, the mirror reflection does no more than present a double that has little to do with any becoming. And to think a becoming of the mirror is pointless, since the mirror by itself is only an object.[39]

Art of mirrors

Many contemporary artworks utilise mirrors, whether by mirroring surfaces or mirroring images. Polished surfaces in pieces by Jeff Koons or Anish Kapoor, when sold at auctions or global art fairs, turn into luxurious elements of interior design, the epitome of glamour. Gerhard Richter frequently builds his works by using monochromatic sheets

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4.24 Anish Kapoor, *Sky Mirror* in Kensington Gardens, London, photograph by Natalia Romik.

of mirroring glass in different colours, the surfaces of which reflect the external world. Richter emphasises the depth that such a technique gives, locating his objects somewhere between paintings and looking glasses, since it 'doesn't show the picture behind it but repeats what is in front of it. And in the case of the coloured mirrors, the result was a kind of cross between a monochrome painting and a mirror, a "neither/nor" – which is what I like about it.'[40]

It is an interesting thought, even taking into consideration the context in which these objects are presented in the sanitised 'high art' space of an art gallery. The art of mirrors does not however need a gallery to work its magic, with for instance their spectacular aspect being used by Anish Kapoor in several of his large-scale public sculptures. His open-air exhibition, 'Turning the World Upside Down', organised by the Serpentine Gallery in London from 28 September 2010–13 March 2011, was both an aesthetic spectacle and a logistically challenging undertaking. Kapoor's large sculptures stood out from their environment, attracting large audiences with their wittily perceptive plays. They could not be defined as 'modest', since it was a rather grandiose gesture to use such a popular park for a solo exhibition by one living artist. This tension between artistic ego and the playfulness of mirrors can be traced in other realisations by Kapoor, for example his use of an oval red mirror in the centre of a pond to face up to and reflect passing clouds (*Sky Mirror, Red*), or the person-sized stainless-steel band titled *C-curve* at the Serpentine Gallery in 2010 which mirrored its environment upside-down. Due to such tricks, Kapoor's exhibition had the folksy atmosphere of a 'House of Mirrors' in which a bewildered public in a bygone age could play with their distorted self-images, although this was mixed in his case with overt references to the sober aesthetics of high-end minimalism. Even though I admired the precision of concept and perfection of execution, I am troubled by the contest between Kapoor's artistic ego and the settings, which were not considered as a partner in this dialogue, but rather as mere backdrops for the display of the power of art (and of the art market). Kapoor, in an interview with the curator Nicolas Baume, chose to underline perfection, emphasising his debt to other heroes of contemporary and modern art such Constantin Brancusi and Jeff Koons:

> The interesting thing about a polished surface to me is that when it is really perfect enough something happens – it literally ceases to be physical; it levitates; it does something else, especially on concave surfaces. Brancusi made a number of polished objects . . . Jeff Koons has also used polished convex surfaces. But what happens with concave surfaces is, in my view, completely beguiling. They cease to be physical and it is that ceasing to be physical that I'm after.[41]

Indeed, one cannot deny Kapoor's mastery of materials, with steel that is bent, twisted, shaped to create a desired effect. But for me personally, crafting reflections is less important than the playfulness of mirrors themselves. I do not want to work with clouded, colourful or shaped mirrors, because in this way one simply exploits mirror as an aesthetic medium. Instead, my view is that a plain mirror is interesting enough as it offers a parallax view, it can be used to juxtapose historical dimensions, and it can give a spectral body to an archive. By overworking or aestheticising the mirror, one turns it into an art form that focuses attention on itself (mirror for art's sake), whereas in my projects I try to consider it more instrumentally, as essential part of more complex device of the nomadic archive (i.e. pulled, carried, pushed). Paradoxically, the mirror as an art form seems doomed to make a separation between reflection, reflected object and reflective medium. In such art everything must be sanitised, neatly organised. I prefer these aspects to be chaotically coagulated, as otherwise mirrors lose their aura and are not able to conjure spectres anymore. As observed by Saint Augustine, there is a difference between 'seeing a mirror' and 'seeing through a mirror'.[42]

The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, to work its magic, must hence remain a looking glass rather than a mirrored object to be looked at. A plain mirror does not mean a perfect mirror, though. The mirrors in the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* were made from affordable HIPS plastic, their smoothness only temporary, as after being exposed to the elements, to high and low temperatures, sun and rain, they bulged and twisted 'naturally' when the glue holding them oxygenated. It was a surprising irregularity, as if the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* had taken on a life on its own, neither controlled nor intended by those who made it. At the beginning, I was a bit anxious when seeing these deformations, with this nomadic vehicle looking as if it had swollen up after a hot and sunny day. But in the cold, evening breeze, the mirror panels went back to their form, as slim reflections of the world around.

It was an unexpected side-effect of using HIPS mirrors. I had chosen this material because of its affordability, and also due to its lightness and safety, since it could not cut people. When transported over long distances, regular glass tends to break and become dangerous for people or vehicles. To use stainless steel would have been not only far more expensive, but also much heavier and bulkier, making the archive more difficult to push or carry around. My nomadic devices need to be easily deployable, without much effort, since my energy is better spent on communication rather than display. Whenever I needed perfection,

for structural reasons, like the illusionary trick played inside *Hurdy-Gurdy* with its angled mirror creating an illusion of a black box, I did use actual glass. But even in such instances, I paid a price: what I gained in perfection I lost in lightness and operability, with the box becoming too heavy for me to use for longer than a couple of hours.

Otherwise HIPS, despite its whimsical nature, served me well. As a polymer of polystyrene and butadiene rubber, HIPS has lower stability in higher temperatures but is extremely light (density of 1.06 g/cm³). Due to its plasticity, it is widely used in design, especially for interiors (such as rehearsal spaces for ballet), as long as it is not exposed to hikes in temperatures. I tend to include it as external cladding; sometimes it proves to be more resilient, sometimes more fragile. It is easy to cut into sheets, it will not break, but it is also easily scratched and damaged. Yet since it is relatively cheap, I can simply refurbish my *shamash* with new skins after a period of extensive use. Another advantage of HIPS is that one can form it in a regular workshop, without specialist tools or extensive training, and then simply stick it onto a plywood foundation. I usually order large sheets of HIPS (2 m × 1 m), cut them into the required form, and use special mirror glue. Initially one sticks them together for just a moment, to let the glue connect and oxygenate; only during the second stage does one glue them for real, pressing together with the plywood and leaving them to rest for 24 hours. This second phase especially requires care and attention, as using too much or not enough glue can result in considerable deformations.

My explorations of the material texture of mirrors are just a miniscule appendix to a long historical struggle to attain the perfect mirror image. When thousands of years ago, Egyptian craftsmen managed first to create mirrors, they made them not from glass but metal, because – as Bonnet says – the first challenge 'to overcome was the opaque quality of glass . . . Composed of sand containing iron oxide, early glass gave off a blue-green hue that diminished its transparency.'[43] For this reason, the ancient Egyptians made mirrors by 'mixing an alloy of copper and tin. Bronze was also used, but in very thin sheets to minimize rusting.'[44] Only later did technological development make it possible to use glass, with already in ancient Rome this technique being mastered to create looking glasses:

> Ancient techniques, used by the Romans, consisted in applying hot lead to a layer of glass, but the glass layer that served as a support had to be fairly thin and regular to resist the heat. After the ball of glass was blown, melted lead was poured into a concave bowl and was then removed. The mirror was never larger than what could be cut from the glass ball, and the curvature gave it a bulging shape that can be found in Flemish paintings and German engravings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[45]

It was not until the Early Modern era that European craftsman could devise methods to make larger, flat, reflective surfaces: 'Flat mirrors were by necessity quite small, for not until the 17th century, when the "table casting" technique was developed, were large glass surfaces produced with a satisfactory result.'[46]

Searching for the most perfect reflection, one needed to improve the clarity of the glass, with competing schools – their secrets, patents and technologies – struggling to achieve the competitive edge. The echoes of those challenges resonate till today:

> The Venetians still challenge the Lorraines over who was the first to perfect glass making. In fact, from the second half of the 15th century, glassmakers from Murano knew how to make a glass so pure, white, and fine that they called it 'crystalline' because of its similarities to rock crystal, whose transparency and shine it resembled. The glassworks of Bohemia were also famous in the 16th century.[47]

The mirror as a faithful representation of reality has a cultural and mythological motive. The fascination and anxiety caused by mirrors is poetically expressed in the myth of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, rejecting Echo, the nymph, who repeated words about her love till she withered away, leaving only her voice, which echoed over and over again. This myth is a beautiful story of craving and allure. Narcissus was the son of Liriope and Cepheus, and when he was just a child a prophet, Teiresias, augured that the boy would live as long as he did not see his own reflection. When he turned sixteen, he saw his own visage reflected on the surface of a pool, immediately falling in love with it, dropping to his knees, wanting to be close to the object of his desire, transforming himself into a yellow and white conspicuous flower with tepals surmounted by a trumpet-shaped corona.

> How many futile kisses did he waste
> *on the deceptive pool! How often had*
> *he clasped the neck he saw but could not grasp*
> *within the water, where his arms plunged deep!*
> *He knows not what he sees, but what he sees*
> *invites him. Even as the pool deceives*
> *his eyes, it tempts them with delights.*
> *But why, o foolish boy, do you persist?*
> *Why try to grip an image? He does not exist –*
> *the one you love and long for. If you turn away, he'll*
> *fade; the face that you discern is but a shadow, your reflected form.*
> *That shape has nothing of its own: it comes with*
> *you, with you it stays; it will retreat when you*
> have gone – if you can ever leave![48]

Both the paintings by Caravaggio (*Narciso*, 1597–9) and by John William Waterhouse (*Echo and Narcissus*, 1903) depict this mysterious and delightful moment of gazing at one's own image, even when one's life is put at risk. Caravaggio masterfully captured this interplay between gaze and reflection, which is

4.25

4.25 *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in Józefów Biłgorajski, photograph by Aga Szreder.

repeated in the act of contemplating a painting, an observer observed, the image in the image. We cannot see anything else in his painting, just Narcissus bent over the dark pool, enthralled by his own reflection, on the verge of falling in. Ancient people did indeed believe that staring at one's own reflection could result in calamity or death. Melchior-Bonner notes:

In antiquity mirrors were considered to be magical instruments, used in charms and auguries. Vases with water or polished objects gave signs and hinted at things . . . It was not until later in the classical period in Greece that the reflected image lost its magical aspect and acquired its status as mere replica or semblance.[49]

Within Jewish religious law, Halakha, the mirror is mentioned in the context of mourning rituals, when its regular function is reversed: so as not to reflect the image of a dead person, one is required to cover

4.26 Caravaggio, *Narciso* (1597–9). Wikimedia Commons, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcyz_(obraz_Caravaggia)#/media/File:Narcissus-Caravaggio_(1594-96).jpg.

4.26

all mirrors in the deceased's household.[50] Chabad-Lubavitsch, an Orthodox group established in 1775 by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, explains it similarly:

> These demons cannot be seen by the naked eye. But when looking in a mirror, you may catch a glimpse of their reflection in the background. And so we cover the mirrors in a house of mourning because we don't want to be alarmed by seeing these demonic visitors.[51]

Similar customs of covering mirrors, or framing paintings with a black band, also became popular for mourning culture in Germany, Belgium and Victorian Britain. In some parts of China, after the death of a family member, mirrors are covered or rehung with their fronts facing the wall, or else turned upside down.[52]

The motif of the mirror is abundant in Western painting. For example, Rene Magritte's 1937 painting, *Not to be Reproduced*, offers an excellent expression of awe and fascination also caused by mirrors in modernity. It depicts Edward James, a patron of the painter, standing with his back to the viewer in front of a mirror in which, however, instead of the expected mirror image of his face, one sees a replicated image of his back. The viewer therefore cannot see who actually stands there, a painterly rupture of mimetic expectations, and a clever deconstruction of image. Yet as Sabine Melchior-Bonnet suggests, this painting is also about secrecy, respect and privacy, since Magritte, by refusing to show the face of his friend and patron, conceals his identity from 'the inquisition of an all-seeing society that assigns and enforces rigid identities'.[53]

When studying Magritte's painting, I am prompted to reflect upon the identity and image of people with whom I interacted through my projects. I had adopted a clear ethical guideline by safeguarding entirely the anonymity of those I spoke with, unless explicitly waived, as in the case of my friends, co-workers and fellow activist-artists. My focus instead was more on the interplay between mirrored devices, the spectral archive of *shtetls* blinking at the verge of presence/absence and the Polish people now living there. Hence, I did not want to focus my camera lens on particular people, turning them to show their faces. I respected their right to privacy, to be able to turn their backs, like in Magritte's painting, with the mirrored surface becoming our shared haven. I was not conducting sociological investigations, but rather interventions through architectural design, exchanging ideas and information with people of different backgrounds and personal histories, not inquiring about them and not being judgemental. Some of them might have been victims, others perpetrators, and while many of them now live in (post-)Jewish properties, they too are scarred by the neoliberal transformations since the 1990s. Following Magritte's example, I allowed people to remain anonymous, otherwise the mirroring surfaces of my projects could have been a source of anxiety.

I say this because throughout the ages, mirrors have provoked anxiety, especially

4.27 Rene Magritte, *La reproduction interdite* (*Not to be Reproduced*) (1937). Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Not_to_Be_Reproduced.

4.27

when they mysteriously twist reality as in the case of the convex mirror. The latter were believed to be, as Arnaud Maillet describes, the 'Devil's dark and illusory trap', potentially even causing blindness.[54] In modern times, convex mirrors however achieved the status of desirable elements within bourgeoisie interiors. The exhibition 'Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites in London's National Gallery from 2 October 2017–2 April 2018', traced the motives for introducing convex mirrors into the paintings of mid-Victorian Britain.[55] The curators, Alison Smith and Susan Foister, found many compelling examples, such as the dark and unfinished painting of Ford Maddox Brown titled *Take Your Son, Sir!* (1851), William Holman Hunt's *Il Dolce far Niente* (1859–75), or Henry Treffry Dunn's watercolour of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Bedroom at Tudor House, 16 Cheyne Walk* (1872).[56]

In a chapter devoted to magnetism and hypnotism, Maillet describes how the use of mirrors as instruments in hypnosis stirred a particularly deep angst because they revealed the 'true self' of people, who therefore lost control over their public image. He quotes Leon de Laborde's treatise on oriental magic from 1833: 'I was afraid – afraid with a fear not of what I would see but of the effect it would produce on me, of the responses that would be forced from me before this curious and Mocking public.'[57] This trickier side of mirrors, their capacity to deceive senses, did not escape Walter Benjamin's attention in his (unfinished) *Arcades Project*: 'Let two mirrors reflect each other; then Satan plays his favorite trick and opens here in his way . . . the perspective of infinity . . . Paris has a passion for mirror-like perspective. Architecturally a fata morgana perspective.'[58]

Benjamin interprets mirrors in the context of nineteenth-century Paris, during the self-declared *belle époque*, as a spatial device created by the bourgeoisie to project its own power – a subconscious expression of belief in unruptured accumulation of capital, with the illusion of equality concealing stark social contrasts. The mirrors he saw were everywhere, defining the glamorous aesthetics of cafés, arcades, shops and salons.[59] Architecturally, mirrors sustained the self-centred and self-satisfied bourgeoisie ego, as Benjamin notes when quoting S. F. Lahrs from the time: 'Egoistic – that is what one becomes in Paris, where you can hardly take a step without catching sight of your dearly beloved self. Mirror after mirror! In cafes, and restaurants, in shops and stores, in haircutting salons and literally salons . . . every inch a mirror!'[60]

A mirror as an instrument of narcissistic vanity was thus now being industrially reproduced by modern society to portray the bourgeoisie as a class of self-indulgent individuals. Jean Baudrillard returned to this notion in his analysis of nineteenth-century consumption patterns:

> The mirror is an opulent object which affords the opportunity to exercise his privilege – to reproduce his own image and revel in his possession . . . the mirror is a symbolic object which not only reflects the characteristic of the individual but also echoes in its expansion the historical expansion of individual consciousness . . . Bourgeois consumption, Versailles from Napoleon to Art Nouveau.[61]

Baudrillard suggests that mirrors have a unique ability to store and 'memorise' images, events and epochs past. It is well known that mirrors in many historical periods – because of their price and scarcity – served mainly the upper classes as props for their vanity. The most famous example of this is of course the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, created by architects Charles Le Brun and Jules Hardouin-Mansart in 1684 as an overt display of the wealth and power of Louis XIV. This architectural precedent was then copied by French aristocrats as an exclusive and fashionable mode of interior design, like in the *cabinet de miroirs* commissioned by the Duchess de La Valliere in the same era.[62] By the nineteenth century, through industrial production, mirrors became popular as decorative elements in French bourgeois homes, and thus as symbols of conspicuous consumption and tokens of social distinction.

Conclusion: Spectral reflections

In his *Arcades* text, Walter Benjamin also asked another important question: 'Where were these mirrors manufactured?'[63] However, as a designer who walks with mirrors to uncover the present absence of Jewish communities, I would prefer to ask: What do those mirrors reflect? As explained above, the mirror image is not a mere semblance of reality, but can become, when set at proper angle, a reflection of spectral urbanity. After testing and experimenting with the design potential of mirrors in my projects, I started to use them as my favoured material to clad my *shamash*, precisely because they could pulsate, blind, distort, disappear, confuse and yet also sharpen and provide insight into the otherwise invisible realm of memory in the former *shtetls*. Hence, they proved their merit as the most suitable cladding for the creation of liquid archives.

Notes

1. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 157.
2. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 19.
3. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 16.
4. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 73.
5. Borzymińska and Żebrowski, *Polski słownik judaistyczny*, Vol. 1, 809.
6. Rejduch-Samkowa and Samek, *Dawna sztuka żydowska w Polsce*, 138.
7. Dylewski *et al.*, *Judaica*, 291.
8. Unterman, *Encyklopedia tradycji i legend żydowskich*, 121.
9. Brama Cukermana Foundation, *Foundation*.
10. Kronika. 'Natalia Romik. Jad'.
11. Virtual Shtetl, *Żydowski dom starców w Bytomiu (ul. Smolenia)*.
12. Virtual Shtetl, *Dom Rutki Laskier w Będzinie (ul. Moniuszki 4)*.
13. BBC, *The Secret Diary of the Holocaust*.
14. Warchala, 'Wyburzają dom Rutki Laskier w Będzinie'.
15. Virtual Shtetl, *Dom Rutki Laskier w Będzinie (ul. Moniuszki 4)*.
16. Warchala, 'Wyburzają dom Rutki Laskier w Będzinie'.
17. Lefebvre, 'The right to the city'.
18. Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 'Your City is a Battleground as a part of 6th Warsaw Under Construction Festival'.
19. Gawkowski, 'Nowy wspaniały Śląsk'.
20. Bęc Zmiana, *Nic o was bez nas / Warszawa, 7–9.10.*
21. Crang and Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space*, 46.
22. Benjamin, 'Unpacking my library', 216.
23. Crang and Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space*, 43.
24. Benjamin, 'Unpacking my library', 217.
25. Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space*, 110.
26. Bęc Zmiana, *Natalia Romik: Predator – Rozproszenie*.
27. Pedersen, *Between Sites*, 157–60, 164.
28. Dome of Visions, *Making the City – Temporary Encounters*.

29. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 72.
30. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 73.
31. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 4.
32. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 4.
33. Wikipedia, 'Möbius strip'.
34. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 17.
35. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 188.
36. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 182.
37. Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the *I*', 94.
38. Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the *I*', 97.
39. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 187.
40. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 188.
41. Anish Kapoor, 'Anish Kapoor. In conversation with Nicholas Baume'.
42. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 204.
43. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 13.
44. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 10.
45. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 14.
46. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 37.
47. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 18.
48. Mandelbaum, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, 94.
49. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 102, 188.
50. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 503.
51. Moss, 'Why are the mirrors covered in a house of mourning?'.
52. Dickey, 'Behind the draped mirror'.
53. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 273.
54. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 49.
55. The National Gallery, *Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites* .
56. Thiele, '[A Review of] "Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites"'.
57. Maillet, *The Claude Glass*, 63.
58. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 538.
59. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 567.
60. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 539.
61. Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 21.
62. Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*, 26.
63. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 538.

Chapter 5 | Archives

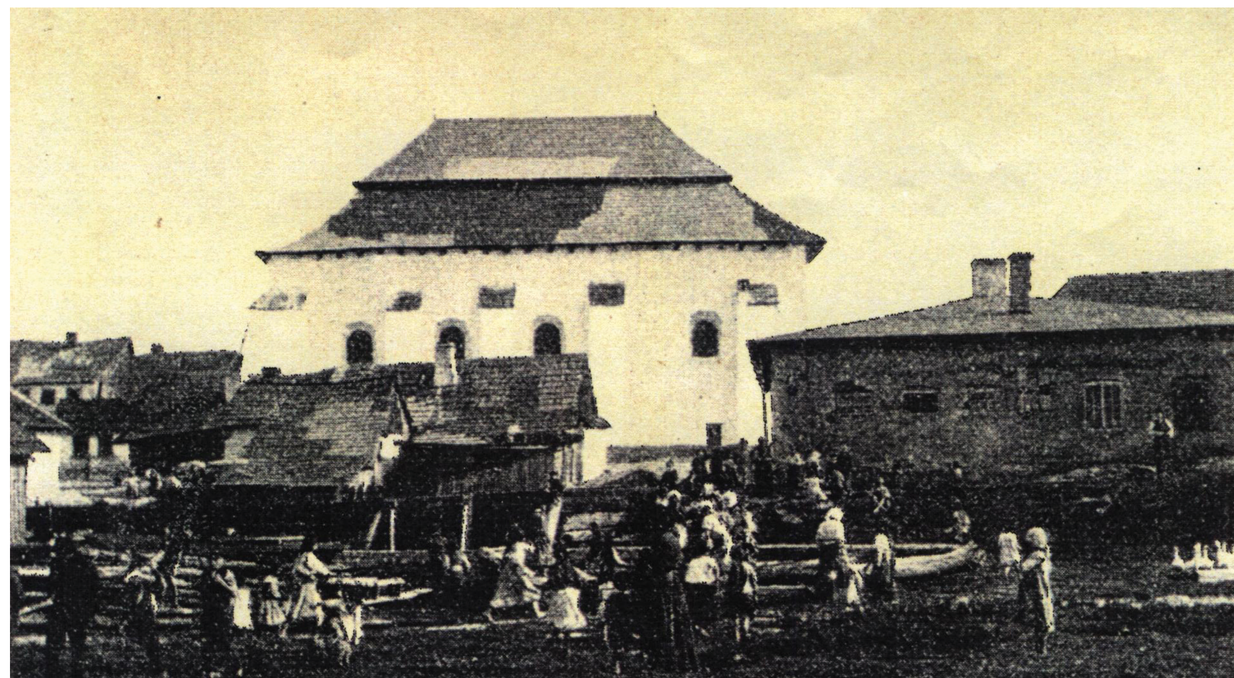
This chapter discusses the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy* as iterations of my impulse to create archives. While designing my *shamash*, I thought about different ways of not only organising archival materials, but also liquifying the ossified knowledge, activating files, memory maps and old photographs, which normally rest forgotten on dusty shelves in municipal libraries or slumber in wooden drawers. The aim of my instruments is to reinsert this knowledge back into the flows of social memory. Nomadism, walking, mirrors and other magic tricks are thus deployed to activate archives within the context of present absence in former *shtetls*, with all the challenges and risks involved.

One of my first attempts to revive archival knowledge was a video installation called *Synagogues Co(n)version*: this was first displayed in the Nizio Gallery in 2007; then in the gallery of the Old Brewery in Poznań during the 'Twelve Days of Judaism' exhibition in 2009; and in 2014 at the Bartlett School of Architecture during an exhibition of doctoral research projects. The video installation, which I created together with Dorota Grobelna and Arek Dybel, documents the current state of ex-synagogues in Poland in juxtaposition to their previous religious functions. It consists of six films and sound recordings of former synagogues in Inowłódz, Wodzisław, Poznań, Piotrków Trybunalski, Opole and Szydłowiec, which are currently used respectively as a shop, ruin, swimming pool, reading room, television station and bar. Formally, each is given around 15 minutes of documentary footage captured in a single frame by a static camera.

The slow rhythm of moving bodies, or the wind roaming through the ruins of a synagogue in Wodzisław, the only unused building we filmed, portrays these ex-synagogues in the process of becoming something else. Viewers can observe the architectural details and assess the conditions of these buildings, with the slow rhythm suggesting the invisible passage of time. Our films are juxtaposed with images of the pre-war synagogues in archival photos, with the dramatic montage exposing the transformation from religious to thoroughly utilitarian functions.

My archival haven

I travelled with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* on the *shtetl* routes, not only moving physically through landscapes dotted with (post-)Jewish small towns, but also making imaginary excursions into the forgotten continent of Polin – brimming once with



5.1

5.1 The synagogue in Wodzisław before 1939. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

Jewish life, now accessible only by browsing through archives, books, old maps or faded photos. To explore this archipelago, I built a patrol boat from files, documents, bits and pieces found on archival shelves. It was as nomadic as any other project in my arsenal. I found a safe haven in the Jewish Historical Institute where I would often anchor my memory-machine. I started to frequent that establishment in 2007, during my research for the *Synagogues Co(n)version* project, and then again from 2008 when working on the Shtetl Museum in Chmielnik. Luckily, I befriended the keeper of this archive, Jan Jagielski, director of the Department for Documentation of the Jewish Heritage.

In their archive are rows of shelves, all filled with files put into categories – such as synagogues, memorials, cemeteries – and indexed alphabetically by town. I could search through them, scaling ladders to reach the upper shelves, bringing down the files, placing them on a large old oak table, discussing them with Jan Jagielski. When talking about the stories they contain, I got an impression that the archive is mirrored in his brain, since his grasp of the material is so precise. Eventually, I also started to contribute to his archive by adding my own found materials, documents and images. Whenever I found traces such as that left by a missing *mezuzah* on a doorframe of the old house in Częstochowa, I photographed

5.2 Still image taken from the movie *Synagogues Co(n)version* showing the ruins of the synagogue in Wodzisław in 2007. Created by Natalia Romik, Dorota Grobelna and Arkadiusz Dybel.

5.2

them and took my images to Jagielski, who added them into his collection. And thus, our cooperation evolved.

Thousands upon thousands of files, filling the room from floor to ceiling, visible even from the other side of the four-lane avenue in front of the Jewish Historical Institute. It sits within an interwar building designed by Edward Zachariasz Eber in 1928. Before the Second World War, the Main Judaic Library and the Institute for Jewish Studies were located here, in close vicinity to the Grand Synagogue on Tłomackie Street. In 1940, however, the records were all relocated within the administrative borders of the Jewish ghetto. The synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis on 16 May 1943, on orders from SS Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop, to celebrate the thwarting of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. The institute was set on fire and heavily damaged; one can still spot traces left by licking flames on the floor tiles. Considering this terrible history, it is not surprising that the building and its returned archive carry the ghostly aura that I found in post-*shtetls*. Thus, the institute forms the perfect operational base

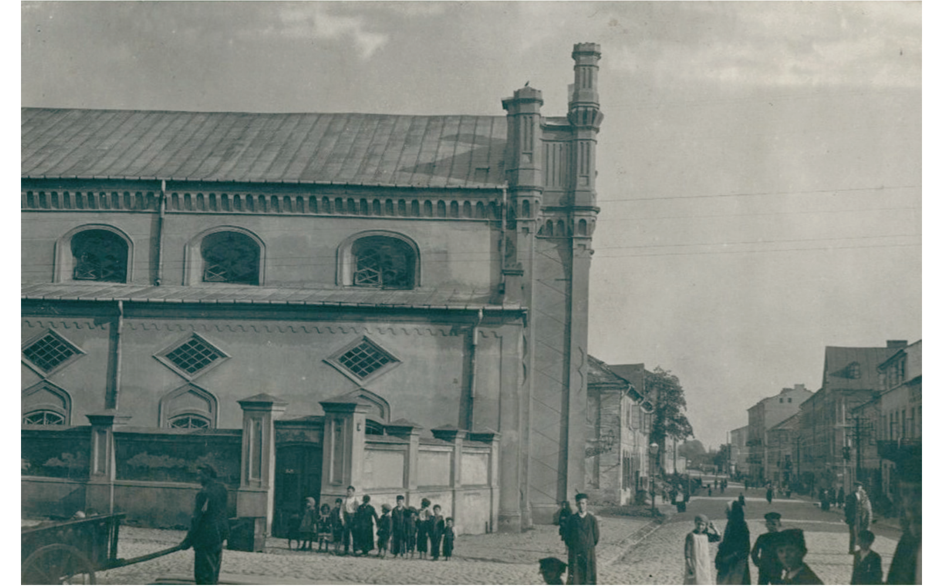
5.3 The synagogue in Inowłódz before 1939. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

5.3

5.4 Still image taken from the movie *Synagogues Co(n)version* showing the synagogue in Inowłódz refurbished as a grocery store in 2007. Created by Natalia Romik, Dorota Grobelna and Arkadiusz Dybel.

5.4

5.5 The synagogue in Piotrków Trybunalski before 1939. Collections of photographs and survey drawings, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.



5.5

5.6 Still image from the movie *Synagogues Co(n)version* showing the synagogue in Piotrków Trybunalski refurbished as a library in 2007. Created by Natalia Romik, Dorota Grobelna and Arkadiusz Dybel.

5.6

5.7

5.7 The boxes and milk cans in which Oneg Shabbat concealed its archives. Wikimedia Commons, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emanuel_Ringelblum#/media/File:Boxes_and_milk_cans_used_by_Oneg_Shabbat.jpg.

for my imaginary walks through the lost continent.

One of the most inspiring moments in its tragic history was an undercover archival unit called Oneg Shabbat (The Joy of the Shabbat), established in 1940 by a group of historians led by Emanuel Ringelblum. This 'conspirational archive', known today as the Ringelblum Archive, belonged to the dispersed Jewish resistance movement, documenting the life and destruction of Jewish communities during the war by collating reports, documents, photographs, statistics and by preserving pre-war heritage. Ringelblum wrote about this archival unit:

Oneg Shabbat tried to create a comprehensive picture of the life of Jews during the war. The aim was to reflect faithfully all that the masses had experienced, what they thought and what they had suffered. We tried to ensure that the same event – for instance the story of a given Jewish community – was recorded by an adult and a young person, by a devout . . . and by a lay Jew . . . A comprehensive picture was the objective of our activities.[1]

The archive needed to remain secret, and so in summer 1942 it was hidden in the basement of a building at 68 Nowolipki Street; two other parts, sealed in milk cans, were also buried there in 1943. The main archive was rediscovered in 1946, and a second was unearthed in December 1950, yet the third has never been found. The bulk of documents, despite the unfavourable storage conditions, survived intact. After the Second World War, the Central Jewish Historical Committee was established to preserve the memory of Polish Jews and popularise the Ringelblum Archive.[2] Today, the archive is listed in the 'Memory of the World Programme', accompanied by a programme of workshops, lectures and research activities. The entire archive was also published in 32 volumes by the Jewish Historical Institute. Conducting my own archival research, sitting on the second floor of the institute, I often reminded myself of Oneg Shabbat and the Ringelblum Archive, thinking about the solemn gravity of this place, which for me was always so supportive and hospitable. It is important to note that I received all archival materials from the Jewish Historical Institute without ever any charge, for the sake of artistic and academic research.

Interview conducted with Jan Jagielski in Warsaw, 19 February 2018

During the early 1990s, Jan Jagielski created the largest – indeed only – department dedicated to preserving traces of Jewish material culture in Poland. Previously an amateur collector, he began to work professionally in this field in 1981, since when he has been actively involved with the Committee for Protecting Jewish Cemeteries and Heritage in Warsaw and has enjoyed links with the Association for Heritage Protection.

When did you begin to work with the archive as a medium?
As a student of geology who was studying in the 1960s, I was able to travel around Jewish cemeteries and small towns. I did it because I was interested and had many close Jewish friends in my class. All of them left the country after 1968. So I started to look around, travel, made field research and slowly gathered an archive. You know how it is with archives . . . something here, something there. Whenever I travelled through Poland, I took a small notebook, barely 60 pages long, in which I noted the route that I took, how to get there, asking local people about information, writing that down, taking photos and sticking them inside.

You have crossed through different disciplines, working for example in the Institute for Chemistry, and had wide constellations of friends. When did this eventually evolve into a full-blown fascination with the archive?
I began with the stories of particular people, back in the 1960s. During the period of martial law imposed in the 1980s, a group of enthusiasts gathered together, including Monika and Staszek Krajewski, and Konstanty Gebert, and together we established the Flying University for Jewish Studies, an informal educational collective. I specialised in material culture. When, after 1968, many Jews were expelled from Poland, one had to preserve what was left. After my studies, I worked in the Institute for Applied Chemistry, yet also conducted my own private research at every occasion of work-related trips. For example, when I went to Wieliczka, I also visited the Jewish cemetery or noted that a car garage was now occupying the former synagogue. Step by

step, not very regularly, I collected the archival materials. And after a while people started to approach me, asking for information.

When did you start to professionalise your fascination with (post-)Jewish architecture by cooperating with the Jewish Historical Institute?
After martial law in the 1980s, the institute lacked members, and I knew them. Somehow, as the youngest one of them all, I was put in charge of the archive. The Jewish Historical Institute, during the period of socialism, was something that needed to be filled. Many older people worked here, but they had no opportunities to travel around and talk with people. They were busy with documenting the Holocaust, yet through desktop research. Whereas I believed that the archive should consist of small towns, real cemeteries and so on.

How do you assess the situation of Jewish heritage under socialism?
Their view was simple: 'It is not ours, Jews are not here, let it fall into ruin.' But I need to admit that the situation did differ from town to town. Sometimes the matzevahs were used to pave roads, and the synagogues were reused. Some people thought that it was not decent, that Jews might come from abroad and start to look for their traces. They have not stopped others but have not assisted them either. But remember that Poland's economic situation after the Second World War was dire, and all the funds were invested into the reconstruction of larger cities. And the Ministry for Religious Affairs adopted a very liberal policy when it came to Jewish heritage, saying that 'if they need those materials, let them do it'.

But one could counteract these things, as did the Nissenbaum Family Foundation, the first NGO established in socialist Poland in 1981, to protect the Jewish cemetery in Bródno, Warsaw.
Yes, this is a good example. One could also act under the umbrella of the Association for Heritage Protection by, in the smaller towns, documenting traces of the Second World War as imprinted on synagogues, mikvahs, etc. We collected photographs and descriptions, informing the authorities in larger cities. Lublin was an example of good practice, especially the work of Dr Trzciński.

Do you feel now that you are an archivist?
To be frank, still to this day I have not learnt how one should properly archive stuff. I developed my own methods, from fieldwork through to notation. It was not the best one but proved to be fruitful. In the Flying University, we were not archivists, but rather a group of tourists and ramblers who visited Jewish memorials. We responded to their decay by making notes, creating archives, making this knowledge public. That was the process. Easy.

Have you conducted a lot of archival research, or are you a fieldwork person?
I am rather of the field. The material culture that requires protection is always in the field.

Don't you think that the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute should be located also in the small towns, as a kind of archival shadow?
Yeah, that's precisely what I think, but how to get there? (Laughing)

What is our remedy?
There is none. Too many bad things happen at once. Too many responsibilities are shouldered by bottom-up initiatives and groups of enthusiasts, by wonderful people like Dr Trzciński, Brama Grodzka, or other people from around Lublin. You know them all. But we lack infrastructure. And now everything is being made by amateurs.

Do you think from time to time about Oneg Shabbat, who met here, in these rooms, every Saturday?
Yes, sometimes I do.

I share with Jan Jagielski his belief in archives as a liquid form that flows through communities, fuses with material culture, with its fieldwork dealing with very concrete, touchable monuments, or places in decay. Such an archive cannot be contained in a room. It should be dispersed by following the 'lines of flight' that are transversal to national boundaries, class relations, and the distinctions between metropolises and peripheries. Maybe this is an idealistic vision, but in his case, it has worked out. As he said: 'Easy.' The work started with a group of enthusiasts, then built up – after a few years – the most comprehensive database of Jewish material culture in Poland. I believe, as he does, this archive is now flowing back to where it sprang from, revitalising and nourishing, informing practices and policies, even if it can never be enough considering the scale of destruction.

Archive as a liquid form

There are some other notable archives about pre-war *shtetls*. In the 1970s and 1980s, Monika Krajewska and Staszek Krajewski documented devastated ex-Jewish cemeteries against the backdrop of post-war apartment blocks, publishing the results of their meticulous investigations as a moving testimony in *Times of Stones*.[3] Another significant contribution is the work of the researcher Ellen Gruber who, in numerous trips around Central/Eastern Europe, documented the erosion of *shtetls* and condition of post-Jewish architecture, spreading knowledge about this problem. Under her editorship, *Jewish Heritage Travel: A guide to Eastern Europe* was published in 1992 by National Geographic.[4] Gruber has also created a thriving Jewish Heritage Europe website, which declares:

JHE's primary goals are to promote the identification, description, study, protection, preservation and appropriate use of Jewish monuments and heritage sites in situ and to foster an exchange of news,

information, and expertise regarding these places and this process among a growing network of individuals, institutions and organizations.[5]

Another key archive is the internet portal, Virtual Shtetl, a comprehensive database with information about 1,900 towns. It is maintained by POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and has been frequented by over 1,200,000 individual visitors annually.[6]

Help also comes from organisations dedicated to preserving the Jewish material heritage of post-*shtetls*, with many of whom I have cooperated. One such is the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland, whose key mission is to oversee educational and cultural heritage tourism programmes.[7] Another worth a mention is the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe, a philanthropic foundation which supports projects across Europe that conserve and showcase Jewish cultural heritage, some being featured in the 'Jewish Heritage Tourism in The Digital Age' conference in Venice in 2017.[8] Also active in Poland is the Forum for Dialogue (Forum Dialogu), which facilitates Polish–Jewish dialogue among young people and is particularly devoted to spreading knowledge about the former Jewish material heritage.[9] And a special place is held by the Nissenbaum Family Foundation (Fundacja Rodziny Nissembaumów), established in 1983 as one of the first non-governmental organisations in communist Poland: it is dedicated to preserving ex-Jewish cemeteries in Poland, focusing its activities on the one in Bródno, Warsaw.[10]

Thus, the situation in Poland today retains the potential to be put into motion, to flow back and forth, just as I have done with the magic box of *Hurdy-Gurdy*, weaponising the initiative with *JAD* or blending in urbanistically with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. Poles now living in houses previously belonging to their Jewish neighbours suffer from a memory gap that can be filled by a liquid archive. Statistics and data would be alien to these new inhabitants: they need something more concrete that mediates between historical destruction and their own surroundings, the buildings in which they dwell, the courtyards where they hang out, and the passages through which they walk. Such situated knowledge prompts reaction and starts a dialogue that enables the archive to return to life.

When I talked about the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* and *JAD* at a seminar at the University of Haifa's Department of Jewish History, students pointed out that a nomadic archive, focused upon the site and prompting face-to-face dialogue, offers the best interventionist tool in conflict zones as it transverses the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' on which nation-states thrive. To wage wars, countries often manipulate history, amplify divisions and falsify truths. During this meeting at Haifa Technion, discussing my archival projects amid the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, I realised that my nomadic projects are modes of 'relational architecture'. They are not merely physical forms but also relation-prompters that can triangulate between architecture, present communities and communities gone. The liquid designs are flows of communication, as my *shamash* serve also as

interfaces which weave networks of communication with my associates and visitors.

The communication of *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, for instance, works not only in situ, but also precedes the action and is sustained afterwards, extending the communication time-wise with people from the places that I have visited, as a self-expanding and flowing archive. This can be compared to 'relational aesthetics', a term proposed by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the early 2000s to discuss artworks which frame human relationships as their medium.[11] However, I never instrumentally utilise my interlocutors as mere materials for my social sculptures. Instead, I consider my liquid archive as a device for co-producing the relational space of post-*shtetls* – in dialogue both with spectres and the living.

Democratisation of memory

My attempts to activate *shtetl* archives also acknowledge the metropolitan concentration of archival infrastructure in Poland's larger cities. Someone living in Kock can find more information about their neighbourhood by browsing archives in Warsaw rather than their own town. It widens the divide because it means that most people simply do not have access to the expertise accumulated in specialised institutions that include: the Institute of Polish Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Instytut Sztuki Polskiej), the Central Archives of Historical Records (Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych), the National Heritage Board of Poland (Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa), all in Warsaw; the Archives of the Regional Offices for Historical Heritage (Archiwum Konserwatora Zabytków) in Lublin, Chełm and Zamość; the Institute of History of Architecture and Historical Heritage in Kraków Polytechnic (Archiwum Instytutu Historii Architektury i Konserwacji Zabytków Politechniki Krakowskiej); and several other places outside of Poland like the Center for Urban History of East-Central Europe in Lviv and Art Dvir Centre in Buczacz, Ukraine. Very few of these archives are located outside of large cities, and while physical limitations of access can be partially overcome through online archives, those too are bound by social barriers: for example, they are still only sporadically included in the educational curriculum for primary schools. What is needed for these archives to be activated more widely are dedicated programmes and sustained institutional support that can increase interest and participation in Poland.

Obviously, I am not suggesting that my interventions alone can bridge this major structural gap. As Jan Jagielski pointed out, enthusiasts can only do as much as a single person is able to do, and they cannot compensate for a basic lack of finance or infrastructure. Yet during my travels, I have thrived upon existing configurations with local cultural centres, associations and festivals, and have enhanced their knowledge through the flow of my liquid archive. And this flow has sometimes solidified into more concrete projects to sustain such mediations on a more regular basis, as in the case of the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice, discussed in the next chapter.

My understanding of the relational character of a liquid archive is informed

by Michel Foucault's analysis of public function in 'The historical a priori and the archive'. Foucault proposes that the archive should not be understood as a room or an institution, but rather as a paradigm that constitutes a body of knowledge: 'The analysis of the archive, then, involves a privileged region: at once close to us, and different from our present existence, it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us.'[12] According to Foucault, the archive delineates our discursive practices, disrupts an illusionary continuity between past and present, and this rapture creates a chasm that can never be filled, yet needs to be addressed nonetheless.[13] This idea for opening up and decentralising the archive also inspired Jacques Derrida's 1995 book, *Archive Fever*, in which he writes:

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation. There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without an outside.[14]

A nomadic, liquid archive is thus a double protest – against forgetting, and for the democratization of memory. It cannot be understood as relativistic valorisation of different perspectives about historical facts, which only results in the whitewashing of tragic events; instead, it is a dialogic engagement with the responsibility to remember. Presenting archives, sticking maps and images onto the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, reading aloud memoirs of Holocaust survivors with groups of local kids, organising evening screenings of films about *shtetls*, intervening with *JAD* in front of derelict buildings: all these activities are conceived as modes of democratising archives.

Sue Breakell, in 'Perspectives: Negotiating the archive', emphasises the point that for Derrida, the archive is not a closed, complete form, but is characterised by its essential 'incompleteness'.[15] Archives are never finished: any idea that history is fixed tells more about the political temperature in a given country than it does about historical reality itself. The element of 'incompleteness' is amplified in my mobile archives by the use of mirrors and by the relational character of my interventions. This liquid archive – as in the case of Jan Jagielski – was all in the field, growing by being activated, like a snowball that expands by rolling.

Relationality does not however imply a lack of ordering. On the contrary, I took great efforts to carefully design the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* so that it elegantly presented its knowledge to the public without losing its flexibility and could respond to an objective lack of information while prompting a relational dialogue. The design task was to reign in chaos while not succumbing to the creation of rigid order, which is frequently dictated by anxiety and a fear of the unknown and unexpected. The liquid archive cannot be spineless: it must

have a backbone, for to open real dialogue one must take a position. As Foucault notes:

But the archive is also that which determines that all this things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents, but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; that which determines that they do not withdraw at the same place in time but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale.[16]

To grow a backbone within the liquid form is thus the challenge of an archive designer. In the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, I placed my bets on modularity. The archive was built in small sections: temporary exhibitions that changed from town to town, plus a permanent exhibit featuring more detailed knowledge about Jewish heritage. Information about a post-*shtetl* was presented outside, on the archive's doors, whereas inside, visitors could gain a better understanding of Jewish architecture and become acquainted with *pinkas* and *pizkor* books, memory maps, architectural blueprints, archival photos and so on. There was a lightbox with a diagram of the workings of a typical synagogue, showing where the place for women is, what a *bimah* is, and so on – a graphic prop especially attractive to youngsters. There was even a small library containing books about Jewish studies and literature, in case anyone wanted to spend more time there.

I considered the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in a similar manner to Foucault, as an open discursive space from which new readings flow unremittingly, the reverse of a rigid space that tries to determine one canonical reading. In remaining in permanent development, never fully completed, it was again in tune with Foucault's vision:

The archive cannot be described in its totality . . . It emerges in fragments, regions and levels . . . The description of the archive deploys its possibilities . . . on the basis of the very discourses that have just ceased to be ours; its threshold of existence is established by the discontinuity that separates us from what we can no longer say, and from that which falls outside our discursive practise; it begins with the outside of our own language (langage); its locus is the gap between our own discursive practice.[17]

Openness proved its merits for archival practice, with change being activated many times, whenever my archived knowledge was confronted with reality. I thus altered according to stories by local residents, who frequently knew more accurately about architectural details, dates of photographs, or names of the persons depicted. The most literal example of this was an archival image of a building in a town called Piaski, which turned out to be entirely different to the town of Piaski we visited with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. I informed

5.8

5.8 Discussion with inhabitants in Józefów Biłgorajski, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

Jan Jagielski about this mistake, and he duly corrected the Institute of Jewish History's archive. This duality of archive – as an institution in Warsaw and nomadic outlet – thus enhanced the relationality of its contents.

Practicing counter-memory

If controlled by the state, archives can become weapons in struggles over history and memory, reproducing authoritarian politics. The same tendency resurfaces in mobile exhibits touring between smaller towns and in major exhibitions in museums. Poland's current right-wing government is heavily invested in rewriting Polish history, for example by commissioning exhibitions about 'accursed soldiers', guerrillas who struggled against the nascent communist regime between 1944 and 1947. They are being portrayed as national heroes, despite the fact that many of them were involved in atrocities against ethnic minorities, including Jews, and engaged in outright collaboration with the Nazis. These exhibitions are commissioned by government agencies like the Institute of National Remembrance – theoretically devoted to objective historical research, but now directly involved in the culture wars by promoting nationalistic interpretations of Polish history. I refer to 'accursed soldiers' purposefully, as even in the towns visited during my travels, people still remember the atrocities and killings committed by these brutal commandos against Jewish neighbours, a tragic history currently being distorted as a heroic tale of anti-communism.

Nomadic Shtetl Archive

[Standing in front of the Nomadic Shtetl Archive in the middle of the market square, we drink a mineral water with an elderly man in his late 80s]

Has the memory of the shtetl been preserved?

Yes, very sad, how the Nazis murdered people, with the help of 'ours', so to say.

[He talks to his friend, standing nearby]

Do you remember this fellow [name redacted], *a real motherfucker. Sorry . . .*

Yes, I remember.

A woman called out: 'Mr [name redacted], *please give us water!' And this thug only beat her with a stick, just beat them all horribly. This market was burned down in 1939, but before there had been more Jews here than non-Jews.*

[There had been 1,500 Jews in a population of 2,000 people]

Here was the so-called cheder.

Have you ever been inside?

5.9 The public programme in the evening session at Józefów Biłgorajski, photograph by Natalia Romik.

5.9

No, I have not. Here was the mikvah. In 1942 they murdered the Jews. In 1943 nobody was left. As a kid it was my duty to feed the rabbits. I remember the moment when nine German aircraft came to bomb the town. Germans surrounded everything and caught us all – I was just 10 years old. I ran quickly, the airplanes were not modern, but they shot at us. I ran one way, Horodelski, my friend, the other way. To let these rabbits free, or not? But as one of the soldiers caught up with me, he kicked me so hard that I fell. They herded us at the cemetery, near the church.

Had you befriended any Jewish colleagues?

Yes, many of them. I treated them normally, so to say. They spoke Polish, after all. I will tell you about [name redacted], *a real criminal, who after the war all life carried a baldachin over the priest at processions, for this reason I became an unbeliever. I am not able to believe anymore. I buried those people, with my own hands, for three long days. What could I have done? They gathered us and ordered to bury, so I buried. Germans took people to the woods, and killed them there, at Biłgorajska Street. Seeing all this,* [name redacted] *shouted: 'Here, this one is a Jew as well!' I said to him: 'Are you insane, what are you doing? Please let him go, he is a Jew, but my friend as well. He is a friend of your daughters, first just a year older, second a bit younger . . .' And later, I had to bury my Jewish friend as well. And this*

motherfucker was serving at a mass, an artist and a sculptor. He has a house just there: on one wall Jesus Christ, 'In thee I trust.' Do you want to see it?

Yes, we can go there.

Ten years ago, I went there, and saw a monument, a nice one: 'For saving life in 1943'. God damn it! And now on the church a plaque: 'For accursed soldiers.' Mere bandits they were! Fuck them!

[He spits]

The chores of any archivist are burdensome, especially if one works against an officially celebrated 'memory industry', engaging in what Hal Foster calls a practice of counter-memory.[18] In this sense, the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy* are machines of counter-memory, devices to counter the shameless whitewashing of Polish history, and to permeate the social space with historical truth. Counter-memory touches upon events both recent and long gone. My archive consists of documents evidencing capitalist privatisation from the 1990s, yet also testimonies regarding wicked operations by 'accursed soldiers', or other pogroms, as recounted in seminal books like *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (*Neighbours: The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland*) by Jan Tomasz Gross or *Miasta śmierci* (*Deadly Towns*) by Mirosław Tryczyk, sadly now negated or even directly censored by current Polish historical narratives.[19]

Yet the process of acquiring materials, and consequently of displaying them, remains a physical, bodily activity. Just as Walter Benjamin suggested in 'Unpacking my library: A talk about book collecting', the collector is always bound to his/her collection, which is never a finalised enclosed entity, but a continuous process. It is not about possessing, but about collecting and displaying a collection.[20] I understand these subtle tremors of the collector's heart, especially when dealing with knowledge. Each time I went to the Jewish Historical Institute, I felt a thrill of curiosity, unearthing a piece of the unexpected and forgotten, building passages to lost images or memory maps. Every morning, setting up the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in a new town, there was a similar jolt of excitement whenever I posted my modest exhibits, always on the lookout for new information.

A question remains, especially when considering archives as sites of alienated expertise, of how to popularise them by reapplying their aura within everyday life in (post-)Jewish small towns? How can one move beyond interventionism? I talked about this with Emil Majuk from the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin, and we agreed that the only way forward is through small steps, and that the only learning that matters is acquired by doing. After the success of the 'Shtetl Routes' tour, his foundation began to organise them on a regular basis. After the visit of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* to Wojsławice, we started work on a project to rebuild the local synagogue as a cultural centre devoted to the memory of *shtetls*.

Yet how can one move forward considering the scale of the challenge? I raised this point frequently at occasions like the conference on Jewish Heritage Tourism in the Digital Age held in October 2017 in Venice.[21] Despite the diversity of methods and areas of expertise, involving academics, activists, tourist guides, museum directors and curators who are active across Europe, all shared similar concerns about how to preserve and reanimate Jewish material heritage in their region. One remedy was suggested by Jonathan Webber, a British social anthropologist specialising in European Judaism, who proposed establishing academic departments to educate future cadres about Jewish material heritage. While I support his idea, I also think that such studies need to be practice-led and practice-oriented as a hands-on curriculum in archival knowledge, juxtaposing existing and spectral cities, because archives need to be constructed in the field. The gaseous forms of archival discourses should be liquified, like in the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, therefore overflowing the walls of conference halls and universities and solidifying into new social institutions that can sustain their presence on the ground.

5.10

5.10 Issachar Ber Ryback, *The Synagogue in Dubrouna* (1917). Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Issachar_Ber_Ryback#.

Referencing archives

The project titled Enthusiasts Archive, created by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska in 2002, remains an exemplary example within contemporary art. They revived the (frequently unkept) archives of amateur film clubs that emerged during Poland's communist era but then declined in the 1990s. Cummings and Lewandowska searched through this material, made a selection of the most representative movies, digitised them and published them in the public domain under a Creative Commons licence. After 15 years the archive was given to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw to secure public access to this collection. By framing the act of collecting and publishing as a conceptual artistic intervention, they contributed to discussions about the artistic status of an archive and the authorial status of archivists.[22] In an interview with Anthony Spira, they referenced Jacques Derrida by underlining the 'exteriority of collection . . . [which] is not about accumulation but instead about how to relive the sources from the central structure into the peripheries'.[23]

A contrasting example, involving bottling up an archive, is the amazing collection of Issachar Ryback (1935–97) now in the custody of the Museums of Bat Yam (MoBY) in a remote district of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. In itself, MoBY is a complex of three spaces: the David Ben Ari Museum

5.11

5.11 Tue Greenfort, *The Worldly House* (2012). As presented during Documenta 13 in Kassel, photograph by Natalia Romik.

of Contemporary Art, Ryback House, and Sholem Asch's Home. Its collection of Ryback's paintings and drawings, although one of the most extensive in the world, is unfortunately not displayed regularly due to a lack of resources. Through the courtesy of MoBY's director, I was able to look at Ryback's paintings inspired by the architecture and daily life in the former *shtetls*, probably of his home town of Kropyvnytskyi. The museum also possesses a comprehensive collection of manuscripts by Shalom Asch, a famous Yiddish writer and author of a 1904 cycle titled *Shtetl*.[24] Both archives are neglected traces of Israel's past, which denies its own origins in small Jewish towns by preferring instead to project its power as a modern nation-state, symbolised by Tel Aviv's Bauhaus-designed White City, as far away from the smelly market squares of *shtetls* as one can imagine. And yet, in Tel Aviv's peripheries, in archives, other memories rest in deep slumber, neither forgotten nor cherished, but stubbornly refusing to fade into non-existence.

Archives have become a common motif in contemporary visual art, both as an object of reflection and a medium of artistic expression. One example that inspired my research was an installation by an architect-artist Tue Greenfort, whose *The Worldly House* was presented during Documenta 13 in Kassel, held in 2012. Greenfort's archive was inspired by Donna Haraway, thereby tackling issues of the anthropocene, evolution, hybridisation and human–animal relations. It resembled a research lab for an evolutionary biologist, being full of books, sketches, computer screens and video projectors, set in the wooden hut of a gardener and located by the pond in the middle of Kassel's Baroque park. The proximity between nature – the installation's scenery resembled wetlands, although with an ambience of artificiality – and technology created an uncanny version of a future archive that reverse-engineers our presence as somebody else's past. It offers a temporal loop that evacuates linearity of time and meditates upon '*multispecies co-evolution* that will examine and perhaps help reshape links among living creatures, both human and non-human'.[25]

Another challenging example of opening up an archive is the interdisciplinary exhibition 'Frank Stella and Synagogues of Historic Poland', organised in 2016 by the POLIN Museum in Warsaw.[26] It offered a thought-provoking montage of Stella's oeuvre of post-painterly abstraction directly inspired by traditional synagogue architecture, using the

5.12

5.12 The cover of the Kosów *yizkor* book, from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, photograph by Natalia Romik.

archival photos, documents and drawings of old wooden synagogues collected by the Polish architects Kazimierz and Maria Piechotka. The exhibition not only dissolved disciplinary boundaries between architectural history and painting, but also linked together the compositional principles of traditional Jewish architecture with formal innovations in abstract painting. Since the early 1970s, Stella has named his series of paintings after *shtetls* (e.g. *Brzozdowce I*, *Nowe Miasto IV*). His abstract forms do not conceal, but instead express a fascination with architectural details of synagogues, especially their roofs. They include three-dimensional assemblages of painterly and sculptural elements, and as Stella notes: 'I don't think it's any accident that they could pass for architectural plans.'[27] Inspired by archival sources, pre-war photographs and synagogue drawings, he has created probably the most visual representation of *shtetl* memory to date.

Pinkas and *yizkor*

Pinkas record books and later *yizkor* memorial books are not only sources of architectural knowledge, but also offer a way to understand the specific sociocultural constellation of *shtetls*. With contents like memory maps, they are fascinating subjects for interdisciplinary research about vernacular cartography, local history and anthropology of memory. There are many institutions specialising in *pinkas* and *yizkor* research, such as the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, New York Public Library, Project Jewish Gen, The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, the Yiddish Book Centre, plus many departments of Jewish studies in Poland, Israel, Britain, the USA and other countries worldwide.[28] I do not however think that these academic studies suffice in terms of dealing with *pinkas* and *yizkor* books, as they need to be reactivated in their places of origin so that they can inform Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian communities; they should be taught there in primary schools, available in local libraries, discussed in cultural centres, and become an integral part of local heritage. Even

though all surviving *pinkas* and *yizkor* books are now available in digital format at the New York Public Library, they are prone to the same set of limitations as other online databases. Things are even more complicated in the case of *pinkas* and *yizkor* books because they are mostly in Yiddish and Hebrew, so their revival in local situations in countries like Poland would have to involve specialist knowledge and language translation.

In Jewish communities the creation of memorial books as a medium of remembrance was perfected in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when in Germany the first '*memorbuecher*' ('memory books') were written to carry a collective voice across the generations, preserving painful memories of pogroms for Jews who had managed to survive. In Poland, such memory books were written even before the First World War, commemorating the victims of pogroms in towns like Proskurowo or Felszyn, a collection of which was published in 1919 in the United States.[29]

Every title used by a *yizkor* memorial book is structured in the same manner: it consists of a town's name and then a subtitle indicating its purpose. Most often this subtitle is *yizkor-buch*, but it can be *sefer zikaron* (another term for memorial book), or they are sometimes called *pinkas* (chronicle) or *sefer* (tome).[30] On the front page the motif of burning candles is often used to illustrate a name in Yiddish or Hebrew – for example in the memorial books of Tłumacz, Ostrołęka, Kosów or Partysow, which visually commemorate a decimated *shtetl*. Images of fire and flames, which symbolise the Holocaust, are often used in nostalgic drawings that illustrate the first pages of some *yizkor* books, as in that from Dynów (written relatively late, in 1979). Here, a collage of *shtetl* houses is accompanied with burning candles and hands that make a sign, 'Remember: Dynów'.

Written mostly in Yiddish and Hebrew, there are some 540 *yizkor* memorial books in total – which does not mean that they only cover 540 towns, as some books also describe neighbouring areas around a larger town. For instance, the *yizkor* book about Płońsk also describes another *shtetl*, Nowe Miasto. Around 70 of these memorial books are about *shtetls* from the region around Lublin, 60 from the Białystok area, 59 from Warsaw, 57 from Wołyń, and 47 from Kielce.[31] They differ in size, ranging between 200–1,000 pages, and the longest one is a four-volume tome from the Słonim *shtetl*.[32] *Yizkor* books have been objects of keen academic study for some time now, with pioneering research dating back to the 1980s.[33]

Each book is usually divided into three parts. The first part describes everyday life in a pre-war *shtetl*, narrating anecdotes and stories about holidays, market days, family/social relations, important figures – such as Rabbi Dr I. M. Biderman in the Kolbuszowa *pinkas*[34] – or the operations of political parties and other associations.[35] Because these post-war books frequently revisited memories from the 1920s and 1930s, they tend to emphasise – as characteristic for this period – the tensions between Hasidic populations and the newly established Zionist movement, Bundist trade unionists or members of the illegal Polish Communist Party. The chasm between people's memories and such a disruptive past inclines narrators to romanticise their childhood or youth, creating a rosy image, as Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz points out: 'These books are not only invaluable documents, but also contribute to *shtetl* mythology, they idealise the past, creating a myth of "golden age", beautifying the writer's own experience, especially of adolescence.'[36]

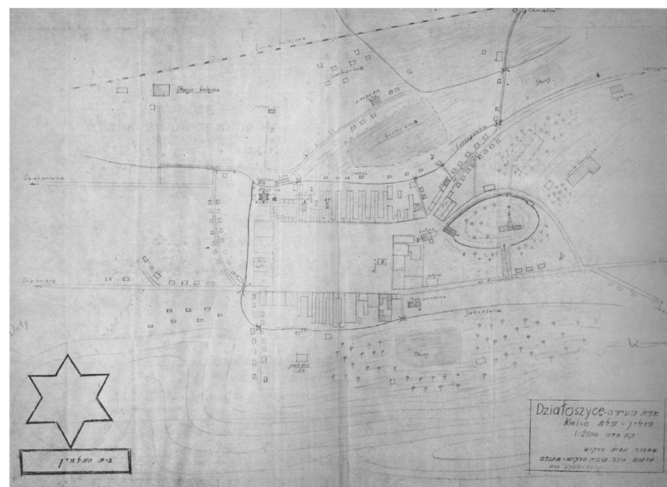
The second part of the *yizkor* books – usually the most extensive – is devoted to the Holocaust. They describe horrific stories about terror, ghettos, mass killings and transportation to death camps. Often the stories and photos of people who did not survive are featured, commemorated and honoured by the survivors.

The third part, usually the shortest, is dedicated to the post-war life of survivors whether still in their Polish communities, or after emigration, documenting their various gatherings and summits. *Yizkor* books preserve collective memories through many different mediums, including written testimonies, drawings, paintings, photographs and memory maps, providing a multifaceted perspective on these ex-Jewish towns.

When in 2008 I was conducting preliminary research for the Museum of the Shtetl, I was gifted the Chmielnik *yizkor* book by a local historian, Piotr Krawczyk. I was fascinated not just by the vivid inter-war photographs of Chmielnik, but especially by a map of the town, hand-drawn by a survivor, shown from a bird's-eye view. This drawing was an entangled knot of lines and emotions, full of humour, based on embodied first-hand knowledge of a person who had lived in this *shtetl*. This map inspired all my designs for that museum, prompting me to inquire more into the mechanisms of the collective memory of *shtetls*.

Cartography is therefore a substantial element of *yizkor* memorial books. The maps, usually hand-drawn as top-down aerial views, often feature on the very first pages. Because these maps were created by amateurs, their graphic style varies, depending on skill and talent. The authors are usually anonymous, named only occasionally in the captions, such as: 'The plan sketched from memory by Mr Israel Ringel of Rawa Ruska, 1973'; 'The symbolic map drawn according to descriptions by survivors from Dynów, 1978'; or 'Schematic plan of Stolin, 1952'.[37] The cartography depicted in *yizkor* books is a powerful example of what Roger Downs calls 'cognitive mapping', in which the typical spatial abstraction of maps is saturated with the emotions and imagination embedded in individual and collective memory. He defines cognitive mapping as 'the mental process through which people come to grips with and comprehend the world around them. And a cognitive map is a person's organized representation of part of the spatial environment.'[38]

According to Downs, the power of cognitive mapping is the ability to 'collect, organize, store, recall'. As a mental process activating different layers of cognition, it does not depend so much on direct sensory evidence as on remembrance and emotion.[39] It means the maps in *yizkor* books are visual representations of the



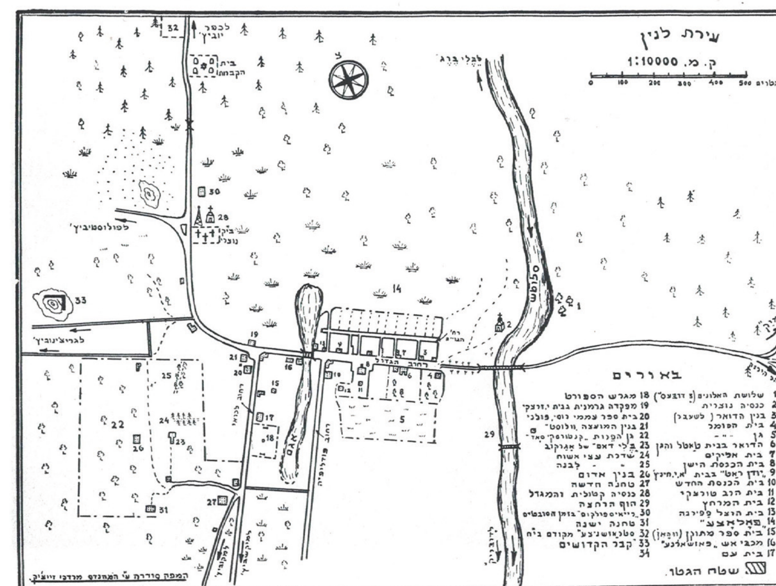
5.13

5.13 Memory map from the Działoszyce *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

entangled experiences of Holocaust survivors who on one hand are recollecting lively pre-war *shtetls* and on the other dealing with trauma and loss. For this reason, maps drawn even decades after the Second World War brim with details, with their lines and styles varying from very personal – sometimes lavish, sometimes very intimate – to extremely dry, drawn with a mathematical precision. As a researcher of *yizkor* books, the historian Jakub Kuna notes:

The mental maps tend to depict things closer or more important to their creators as larger (than their physical proportions otherwise indicate), they are drawn in detail. The things with lesser significance, or the ones which were not memorised clearly, are depicted as smaller, generalised, or are ignored.[40]

Despite differences in geography, landscape, precision, icons, keys and modes of depiction, there are many similarities shared by memory maps. Nearly all use a key – yet in some cases, like the map of Działoszyce in southern Poland, instead the names of different buildings or elements are written directly onto the map. Almost every map is oriented around the market square, the urban and symbolic centre of the town, from which the streets and avenues fork off. The majority of maps include religious buildings of Jewish and Christian faith, such as synagogue, *mikvah*, church and respective cemeteries. They also depict other important public buildings like schools, town halls, fire stations and less frequently cinemas or hospitals. Usually, individual houses of the *shtetl* are drawn in, along with wells, allotments, gardens (as in the book for Zinkov), shops and workshops, with their functions indicated. Some maps show the borders of a ghetto from the 1940s, or the camps erected for forced labourers like in those for Otwock, Mława and Zamość.[41] The memory maps often include natural elements such as parks, rivers, lakes, ponds, fields and woods. Larger landscape features, such as hills or mountains, tend to be included in those maps of more organic character. Beautiful examples of this style are the 'memory maps' of Augustów in Poland or Lenin in Belarus. The map of Tłumacz in Ukraine consists of an organic tangle of roads that cross through thickets and patches of greenery, reminding one of the roots of a gigantic tree. This map is accompanied by a regular map of the region, also personalised, thus providing an insight into the social geography of the place through the eyes of a former inhabitant.



5.14

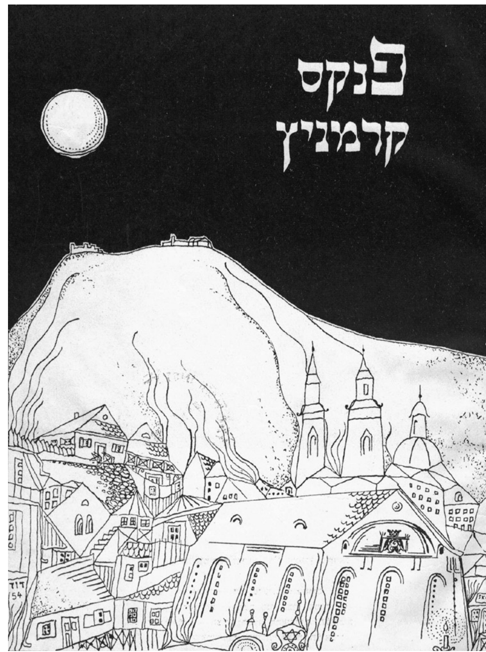
5.14 Memory map from the Lenin *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

A similar combination of 'personal' and 'professional' maps is used for Krzemieniec, also in Ukraine, combined with nostalgic drawings of the nocturnal landscape of the town in its picturesque valley, plus an aerial photo and a sketch of the area, including the surrounding villages of Syczówka and Grabówek. This memory map depicts Krzemieniec also as a thick tangle of roads, passing near a confectionary and synagogue, and then crossing near the cemeteries. The map is labelled in Polish, and the names seem to flow into the bloodstream of the streets. I used a copy of this last map, sourced from the Jewish Historical Institute, to guide me during a three-hour walk in Krzemieniec during the 'Shtetl Routes' tour. I began near the Lyceum, towering over the centre of the town, and headed to the Museum of Juliusz Słowacki, in the direction of the Jewish cemetery, not far from the centre. The roads drawn in the memory map have not changed in the slightest. Indeed, I could use it to walk from point to point, and whenever I went astray, attracted by a curious element on the map or by an architectural detail, I simply asked someone to point the way, thereby navigating in between the memory-scape and the town's present urban-scape.

Special mention should also be given to the colourful map of the post-*shtetl* of Bychawa in Poland, as drawn in 1969, which enticed genuine interest amongst the current inhabitants of the town when shown in 2016 as part of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. Local people said their curiosity was due to the map's unusual palette and its emphasis on foliage surrounding the *shtetl*. Indeed, meadows, fields and woods sprawl through almost the entire map, as if they covered the urban tissue, with this green landscape cut only by the blue ribbon of a river. In the centre of the map, red squares indicated the synagogue and Jewish cultural centre. We used this map to guide us on a tour with a local historian, in this case Jakub Kuna, a ritual repeated in each town visited.[42]

The map of Wiśniowiec Nowy in Ukraine is different example of an organic map, being monochromatic, in an ochre shade, and very detailed. One even sees the passages between houses, the doors and twisted roofs of buildings, the synagogue and the surrounding scenery of hills and forests. On first glance, it is sketched in a fairy-tale style, yet on closer look, one realises that amongst the details the author

5.15 First-page illustration from the Krzemieniec *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.



5.15

has included the barbed wire surrounding the ghetto, the ghetto gate and mass graves (*kvarot ha-ahim*).

The picturesque map of Zinkov in Ukraine is also drawn in an organic way. The centre of the town is depicted as if on flat ground, in the usual cartographic manner, but strangely enough, the surrounding natural elements, like the fields and meadows, are sketched in three dimensions, creating an impression of overflowing, liquid form. In actuality, Zinkov is not so weirdly shaped, and hence this is a typical example of distortions intrinsic to cognitive mapping. The map key is also quite unusual, as it lists otherwise unnoticed elements of the town such as: 1–Modern lanterns lux; 25–Stalls for bread and fruit; 29–Butcher's corner; and 35–Court of law. There are also graves of famous rabbis and the cemetery, and buildings are described using the names of their owners, for example, the house of Josil Sejs. However, it is important to note that most of the *yizkor* memory maps are far more geometric, sketched as lines in the dry manner of typical cartography, as in those for Baranów, Brody, Ostrołęka or Gostynin.

For me, the memory maps offer an invaluable source of inspiration, whether as navigational tools, as performance props for the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, or informing the architectural design of the Shtetl Museum in Chmielnik. From my encounters with *pinkas* and *yizkor* books, I am convinced they should be studied and discussed in schools and cultural centres in every former *shtetl* in Eastern Europe, especially considering the current wave of anti-Semitism and general xenophobia engulfing those countries. According to research by Anna Stefaniak and Michał Bilewicz, educational processes and public discussions that unpick the idea of Jews as the 'other' is one of the most effective countermeasures against anti-Semitism in towns that after the Second World War – for the first time in their history – became almost entirely mono-ethnic:

> Emphasizing the individualised and local history is the only, effective measure of educating about the Holocaust. People, who know and are interested in local history held much less distorted image of the impact of their own ethnic group on the history of a region . . . and are more tolerant to other ethnic groups.[43]

5.16 Aerial view of Krzemieniec as shown in the Krzemieniec *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

5.16

The same authors also mention interesting practices such as their programme, 'The School of Dialogue', a curriculum of workshops, lectures and classes to undermine the stereotypes jeopardising the Polish–Jewish relationship. They invited me to talk about my architecture–art practice during one of their seminars in 2015. Stefaniak and Bilewicz stress that:

> The School of Dialogue attempts to convey the knowledge about the history of Polish Jews strongly embedded in local context, so that the pupils cease to perceive Jews as 'Others', appreciating their contribution to the history of their region, as the common dwellers of the same town or even former neighbours of their grandparents.[44]

Yizkor memory maps are used as important educational tools in many projects by the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, one of my partners in the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. They not only collect these maps as archives, but also try to disseminate them in small towns in south-east Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. One of their programmes brings in older people who survived and thus remember the war, asking them to draw memory maps of former *shtetls* that have not been mapped yet.[45] The Centre for Education and Animation in the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre also conducts regular educational workshops for children and adolescents, coordinated by Joanna Zętar, during which the participants look at memory maps as an entry point to deeper discussions about Polish–Jewish identity. Furthermore, the memory maps are undergoing exhaustive investigation within the framework of the 'Shtetl Routes' project to document (post-)Jewish towns across the region, including making 3-D digital models of the towns based upon data from the maps to be viewed in online virtual tours.[46] Already there are 15 of these digital mock-ups, as a start-up phase for hopefully a larger future project – the aims of which, involving the use of GIS systems and cartographic symbols, have been analysed by Jakub Kuna.[47]

I have begun to develop an idea for a new research project, not yet realised, as another imaginary exercise dealing with the cartography of memory. I intend to select around 15 small towns in Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania, and by using the techniques of digital spinning, create decorative tapestries – measuring roughly 2 m × 1.5 m – based on images of memory maps sourced from *yizkor* books

5.17 Memory map from the Krzemieniec *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

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5.18 Map of Krzemieniec drawn in the Krzemieniec *Yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

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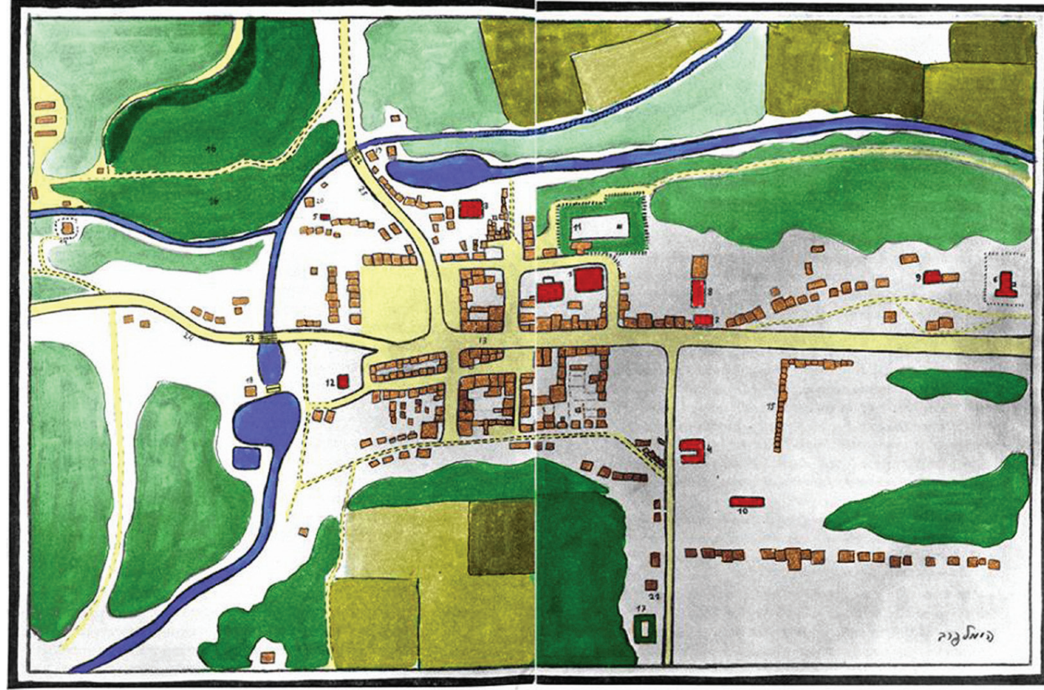

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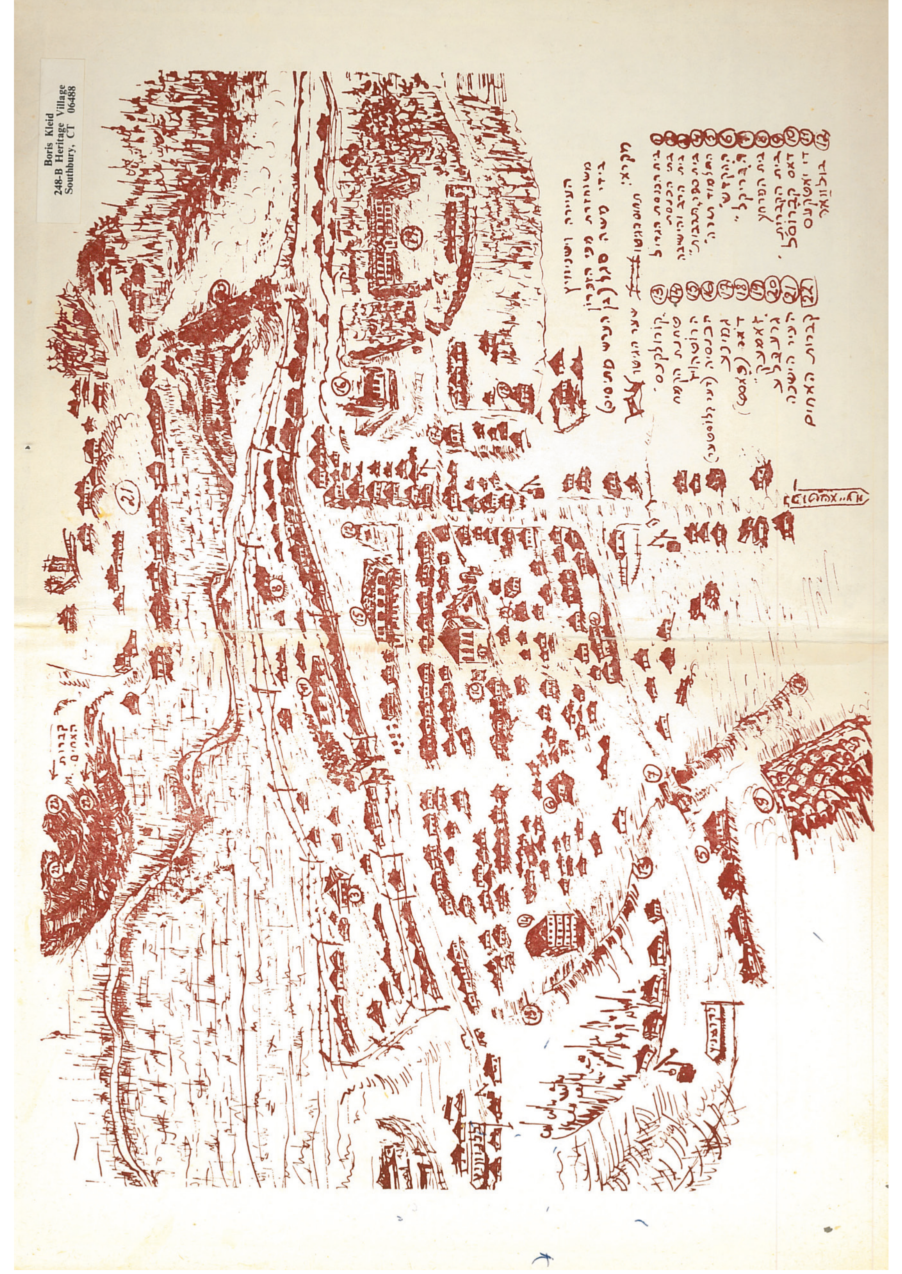
5.19 Memory map of Bychawa in the Bychawa *yizkor* book published by Ya'akov Adini in 1969, colourised image from Virtual Bychawa, courtesy of Jakub Kuna. The map notes these key features: 1–Synagogue; 2–Beit Midrash (Talmudic school for men); 3–Beit Ha'am (Jewish cultural centre); 4–Town hall; 5–Mikvah (ritual bath house); 6–Elementary school; 7–Post office; 8–Jewish community building; 9–Religious Court for Jewish community; 10–Fire station; 11–Old kirkut; 12–Catholic church; 13–Main street; 14–Park; 15–Market; 16–Meadows; 17–New kirkut; 18/19/20/21–Mills; 22/23–Bridges; 24–Road to Lublin; 25–Local road to pastures



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5.20 Memory map of Wiśniowiec from the Wiśniowiec *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

5.21

5.21 Memory map of Zińków from the Zińków *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

for each town. I will then donate these tapestries to municipalities to be placed in representative spaces in town halls or cultural centres. Such a practical form of commemoration, unassuming and yet critically penetrating the public sphere, aims to contribute to the discussion already prompted by Jan Tomasz Gross in his book, *Neighbours*, which to this day sparks controversy. Gross has been condemned by the right-wing press and politicians as an arch enemy of the Polish people.[48] In a 2018 interview, when asked about appropriate and respectable ways of commemorating Jewish neighbours in former *shtetls*, Gross said, using words that I agree with fully:

'I think that this is the main challenge for our generation. We must confront this enormous monstrosity, in which so many people participated. There is no other way, but to face it directly, with clear awareness of what transpired, and respond. Instead of erecting yet another monument to Lech Kaczyński [Polish president who died in an air crash in 2010], one should start building monuments to Jews murdered in small towns. Let's start to organise public memory days in the anniversary of ghetto liquidation . . . one knows the dates more or less – half of the victims usually died in one day. A bell should ring, a priest should tell a word or two. It would be enough.'[49]

When discussing my performances and research projects with Jan Gross, he emphasised the importance of activating archives and facilitating discussions in these post-*shtetls*, as the metropolitan zones feel that they are already saturated with this knowledge anyway, given they have well-functioning museums and well-intentioned NGOs. Struggles for cultural memory are always waged out in the field.

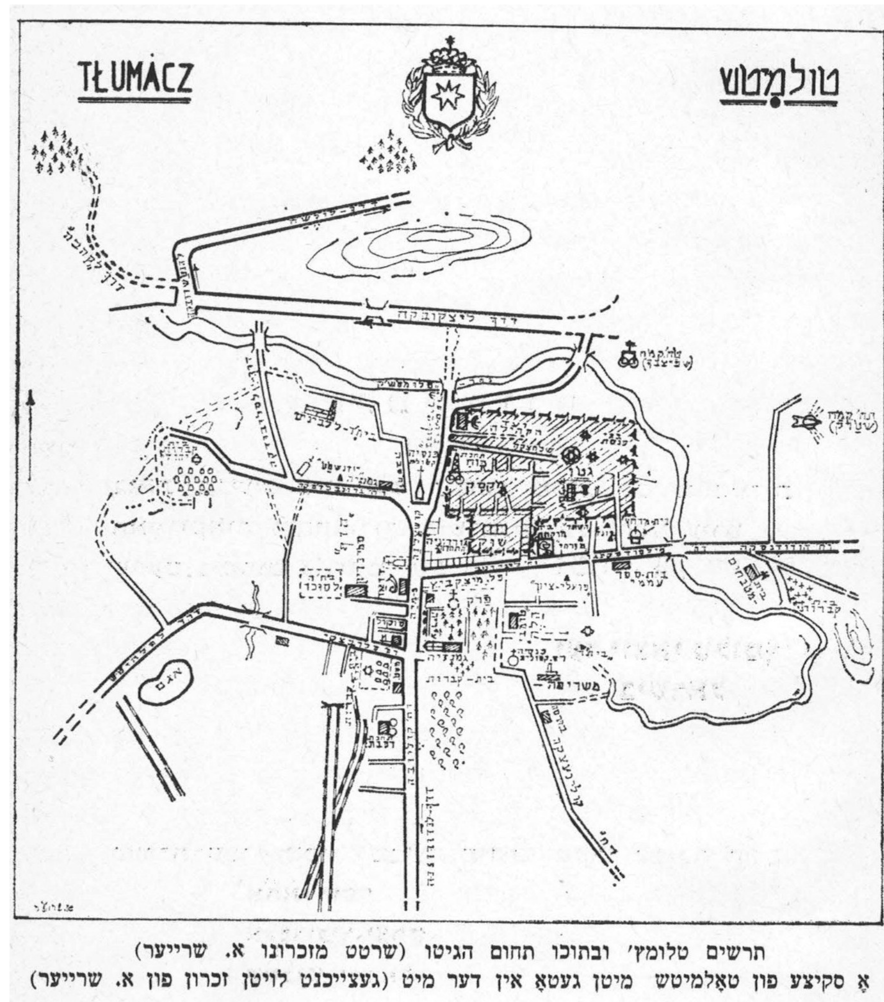
Conclusion: On magic encyclopaedias

The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy*, like Walter Benjamin's library, are all to be conceived of as 'magic encyclopaedias', transmitters of aura that link together times and sites, past and present.[50] In constructing these *shamash* I used every conceptual means at my disposal – walking, nomadism, relational designs, deceptions of white magic, optical illusions, parallax view – to create transgressive archives that could be deployed in the field of social memory. When I designed *Hurdy-Gurdy* as a magic box, I did so to conjure up archival materials. The mirror-clad façades of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* evoked the ghostly present absence of *shtetls* wherever we were stationed, usually safely contained in the official archives. For *JAD*, playful deceptions served as a camouflage to animate archival knowledge about sites of urban forgetting. Hence, I imagine my *shamash* as instruments through which I can draw new routes onto old memory maps, as pathways to be walked in the company of others. In the following chapter I will discuss how these liquid flows of archival knowledge might solidify into new social assemblages of people, institutions and buildings.

Notes

1. Ringelblum, quoted in Markowska, ed., *The Ringelblum Archive*, 78.
2. Jewish Historical Institute, Ringelblum Archive.

5.22 Memory map of Tłumacz from the Tłumacz *yizkor* book, image from the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.



5.22

3. Krajewska, *Zeit der Steine*.
4. Gruber, *Jewish Heritage Travel*.
5. Jewish Heritage Europe, 'About'.
6. Wikipedia, 'Virtual Shtetl'.
7. Taube Philanthropies, 'Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland'.
8. YouTube, 'Jewish heritage tourism in the digital age'.
9. Forum Dialogu, 'O nas'.
10. Fundacja Rodziny Nissenbaumów, 'O fundacji'.
11. Miessen, *Koszmar partycypacji*, 64.
12. Foucault, 'The historical a priori and the archive', 30.
13. Foucault, 'The historical a priori and the archive', 30.
14. Derrida and Prenowitz, 'Archive fever', 11–14.
15. Breakell, 'Perspectives'.
16. Foucault, 'The historical a priori and the archive', 28–9.
17. Foucault, 'The historical a priori and the archive', 29.
18. Foster, 'An archival impulse', 4.
19. Gross, *Neighbors*; Tryczyk, *Miasta śmierci*.
20. Benjamin, 'Unpacking my library', 61.
21. Jewish Heritage Europe, 'Jewish heritage tourism in the digital age, Oct. 23–25, 2017'.
22. Cummings, 'Enthusiasts archive'.
23. Cummings and Lewandowska, 'From enthusiasm to the Creative Commons. Interview with Anthony Spira', 149.
24. The MoBY – Museums of Bat Yam. 'Collection'.
25. Greenfort, 'The Worldly House'.
26. POLIN Museum, 'Frank Stella and synagogues of historic Poland'.
27. Goldman-Ida, *Alois Breyer, El Lissitzky, Frank Stella – Wooden Synagogues*, 142.
28. New York Public Library, 'Yizkor books'.
29. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 11.
30. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 12.
31. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 15.
32. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 19.
33. Horowitz, *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry*; Kugelmass and Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden*; Tahan, *Memorial Volumes to Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*.
34. New York Public Library, 'Kolbuszowa'.
35. Więch, 'Księgi pamięci jako źródło historyczne', 62.
36. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, 'Stara ojczyzna – w nowej ojczyźnie', 57.
37. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 45.
38. Downs and Stea, *Maps in Minds*, 61.
39. Downs and Stea, *Maps in Minds*, 6.
40. Wirtualna Bychawa 1938, 'The Jewish Bychawa'.
41. Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.*, eds, *Tam był kiedyś mój dom . . . Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, 45.
42. Wirtualna Bychawa 1938, 'The Jewish Bychawa'.
43. Bilewicz *et al.*, 'Stracone szanse?', 156.
44. Bilewicz *et al.*, 'Stracone szanse?', 156.
45. The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, 'Mapy Pamięci'.
46. Shtetl Routes, 'Modele 3D'.
47. Kuna, 'Cartographic visualization of Jewish heritage in cross-border tourist project *Shtetl Routes* (Poland, Belarus, Ukraine)'.
48. Steiner, 'Poland's willing executioners'.
49. Sierakowski, 'J. T. Gross o polskim udziale w Zagładzie'.
50. Benjamin, 'Unpacking my library', 62.

Chapter 6 | Embedment

In this chapter I will focus on the transition between the liquid flows of my nomadic interventions and more stabilised design processes. As I will argue, these are not contradictory stances; instead, they are two states of the same matter, changing between liquid and solid form (both aided by the gaseous form of my research as a cloud of references, ideas, texts and discussions). These three forms are embedded, and so the question is about how they embed themselves within the context. Do they flow through it? Do they settle down? And do they solidify or transmute into an aura, spectre or mirror image?

Transversal nomadism, moving in-between towns, did not merely provide transitory, temporary flashes of memory, momentary glimpses into a spectral landscape of former Jewish towns. As discussed in the 'Walking' chapter, my vehicles/devices were embedded in alliances and friendships with individual people – archivists, enthusiasts, historians – and various collectives, NGOs and official institutions which anchored my experiments in the everyday life and struggles of Poland's post-*shtetls*. The pack of my fellow travellers grew exponentially with every project, installation, site, as a shifting assemblage and indeed constellation of people and institutions. My liquified archives seeded new ideas, which sometimes, when planted in fertile soil, blossomed and solidified into fully fledged architectural realisations: design proposals, buildings, exhibitions and such like.

Travelling and walking around towns and epochs unfolded their potential not only in transit, but also during periods of rest, of being on site, and returning to places once visited, resettling the energies released by nomadism. Obviously not every site became a new gravitational centre, yet some did, or at least showed a potential to become solid. To permanently rearrange a space is much harder than to intervene in it on a temporary basis. One needs to deal with the politics of that place, which might be hostile to such initiatives. But it is not only a matter of politics. One needs to secure substantial investment, work with different stakeholders, and engage with the materials and processes of construction. To start the discussion, I will look at one example of this kind of intervention in Częstochowa – *Signboard* – which was initially conceived as settled, but which was forced into temporariness by reluctant politicians. I will then examine two examples of embedded architectural designs that emerged from my nomadic projects for the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* and *JAD*: the successful renovation of the Pre-Burial

6.1

6.1 Installation of *Signboard* in Częstochowa, photograph by Natalia Romik.

House in Gliwice as the Museum for Upper Silesian Jews, and an unrealised scheme to repurpose the synagogue in Wojsławice.

Signboard

My first attempt to leave permanent traces of Jewish memory in the public space of a former *shtetl* was *Signboard*, involving the placing of a commemorative plaque on a town hall or other building of public importance in Częstochowa. I had approached many municipalities in post-*shtetls*, but to no avail, and then finally in 2013 received a positive response from Częstochowa as part of ART.eria, a local festival for public art. My installation was made possible by support from the Kulturoholizm Foundation, organiser of that festival, a friendship with which lasts until today. I therefore started to visit Częstochowa and, paradoxically, while my efforts to install a permanent trace of Jewish presence did not succeed, I was able to return there for a performance of *Hurdy-Gurdy* in 2014, as mentioned in the 'Walking' chapter.

Signboard was conceived as the result of multiple site visits, intensive archival research, walks and talks with historians, and discussions with Marta Frej and Tomek Kosiński, curators from the Kulturoholizm Foundation. Together we managed to convince the municipality to place the *Signboard* installation on the entrance wall of Częstochowa Town Hall. It consisted of a red-and-white placard with a simple slogan reading 'Shtetl – a former Polish-Jewish Town', made to look exactly like the official signs typically seen on important public buildings. I viewed *Signboard* as an experiment with the temporary alteration of cultural perception and social memory. The sign would intervene in Częstochowa's urban landscape, bringing back older times when the town hall served as a public building for both Polish and Jewish citizens.

My installation thus deliberately subverted the design and semantics of official signboards on governmental institutions, unveiling instead the Jewish heritage of this post-*shtetl*. In 1840, there were as many as 3,000 Jews living there, around 60 per cent of Częstochowa's inhabitants. Today, Częstochowa is a post-industrial town that suffered badly after the decline of local industry from the 1990s and has since become an important pilgrimage destination for Marian devotees. Hence, despite the town's financial problems, under the influence of Catholic Church the municipality has renovated spaces for Christian pilgrimage. At the same time, the former Jewish architecture of Częstochowa

remains totally underinvested in. There are barely any reminders of Jewish presence in neighbourhoods like the Old Town of Częstochowa, currently inhabited mostly by poorer citizens who have been relegated to these districts through deliberate government policies.[1]

The target audience for *Signboard* were the municipal bureaucrats and visitors to the town hall. I had hoped it would be more permanent, but in the event it was only exhibited for 10 days. The reactions of onlookers were recorded on video by the artist-filmmaker, Dominik Ritzsel. These responses were mixed: frequently puzzled, some positive and others negative. There were even some open protests. *Signboard* also became a prop used for other stunts and performances, like the one by TLEN – an independent feminist theatre troupe from Częstochowa, which staged there a fake wedding of two female spouses. Their performance, *Wedding Ceremony*, was preceded by a ceremonial procession from the nearby sanctuary, after which the couple kissed and exchanged rings. In what is now called the 'capital of Polish Catholicism', and in a country that vehemently bans marriages of same-sex couples, TLEN's performance was interpreted by conservative politicians and the press as tasteless provocation.

Signboard utilised the tactic of semantic hijacking (*détournement*) as popularised originally by the Situationists, and then by street artists and ad-busters.[2] By using language as a means of intervening in urban space, I was also referring to the tradition of activist art collectives like REPOhistory or Gran Fury, who frequently use signs or slogans to express minority narratives otherwise repressed by hegemonic ideologies.[3] My aim was to revive memory about the extinct Jewish community, a victim of double-erasure from the material and spiritual landscape of Częstochowa. The simple aesthetics of *Signboard* (red letters on white background, on a placard 390 mm wide and 420 mm high) was inspired by a classic intervention by feminist artist Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)*, produced in 1989 in support of the Women's March on Washington, a pro-choice demonstration against the attempts to undermine abortion rights in the USA.[4] To my great delight, one of my installations, *JAD*, was exhibited side-by-side with some of Kruger's work during a Polish exhibition, Your City is a Battleground, organised by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2014. Unfortunately, in Częstochowa, we curators only acquired permission for a short time, yet even that proved controversial enough. *Signboard* was not allowed to stay there any longer, thus balancing between nomadism and embedment: an installation intended to be permanent but forced into transitoriness.

The permanence of plaques is always questionable, though. Monuments, placards and street names are all subject to political and historical change, transforming alongside political regimes that support or deny them. Currently, Poland's conservative government is embarked on a wide-ranging campaign to purge towns of what they define as reminders of a totalitarian communist regime, yet in fact they are cleansing public space of all signs relating

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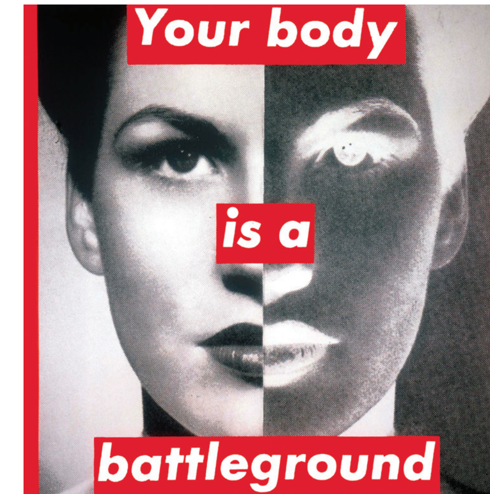
6.2 The performance by TLEN, an independent feminist theatre group from Częstochowa, in front of *Signboard*, photograph by Natalia Romik.



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6.3 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)*, 1989, photographic silkscreen on vinyl. Courtesy the artist, The Broad Art Foundation and Sprüth Magers.

6.4 Location of Gliwice (Poland), drawn by Piotr Jakoweńko.

to any leftist history. Streets previously named in honour of the Polish anti-fascist contingent in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, or celebrating the memory of Józef Lewartowski, a socialist resistance leader in the Warsaw ghetto, are being erased in accordance with a right-wing vision of history. On 14 March 2018, an example of this barbarity was dismantling a plaque celebrating the birthplace of Rosa Luxemburg in Zamość. In response to international protest, the municipality issued a statement claiming that the action had been demanded by the Institute of National Remembrance using authority granted by the 2016 Decommunization Act.[5] Not only was the memory of the notable socialist thinker and activist being attacked, but also another memory of the Jewish community was jeopardised, as Rosa Luxemburg was both a Jew and a communist. An international committee of artists and socialists emerged in response, commissioning a new plaque – an initiative that might however only get traction once the right-wing wave recedes in Poland. Before this happens, Polish artists and intellectuals need to pursue more temporary and subversive tactics, as I did in Częstochowa. I intend to continue with the activity of trying to place *Signboard* on the façades of town halls and other governmental buildings in former *shtetls* throughout Poland – including Nasielsk, Nowe Miasto and Płońsk – by negotiating with local politicians for the right to memorialise the Jewish communities that used to live there.

The Pre-Burial House in Gliwice

My work in Gliwice is less explicitly related to the legacy of *shtetls*, as the town (in German, *Gleiwitz*) is located in the industrial region of Upper Silesia in south-west Poland, a very different context to that country's south-eastern region. Nonetheless, our renovation of the Pre-Burial House employed a similar design methodology to approach the 'present

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6.5 Postcard with a view of the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice, 1903. From the Archive of the Museum in Gliwice.

absence' of Jewish communities. It offers an example of a fully fledged realisation, the seeds of which were planted in the series of nomadic interventions that I conducted with *JAD*. This transformation of fluid form into a solidified form is part of a process of resilience – of Jewish architecture and memory – which relies on architectural imagination, nomadic protests against forgetting and municipal investment to preserve Jewish heritage. The link is constituted with an assemblage of people, notably the SENNA Collective and the Brama Cukermana Foundation, whose combined forces at first propelled the *JAD* vehicle, and in later stages – due to friendships established and inspirations shared – managed to find powerful allies such as the Museum of Gliwice, who mobilised their own networks to create the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in the previously derelict Pre-Burial House in Gliwice, opening in December 2018. It is interesting to note that while *JAD* had never deployed in Gliwice, since the latter is not a post-*shtetl*, a few years later in 2022, it was brought to the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance – where it is now temporarily parked, awaiting new deployments.

Since its completion, the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance has operated as a well-visited cultural centre that is very positively welcomed by both the local populace and tourists alike. It was even nominated for the prestigious European Museum of the Year in 2020/21. The SENNA Collective was commissioned to develop the museum's functional arrangement and its exhibition space, and to discuss both of these aspects it is also necessary to describe the former use of the building within the historical context of Upper Silesian Jews, the Haskalah movement, and funeral rites in Judaism. The conceptual framework for our design tries to reveal this continuity of architectural memory, and hence features like the central installation, *The Cloud*, merge commemorative aspects with new functions relating to hosting public events and displaying historical information. In this way, the design negotiates between remembrance of the Jewish community and the needs of new inhabitants and users.

The ceremonial hall, more than 10 metres in height, is dominated by a damp and solemn chill. A cloudless cemetery and slimy ivy are forcing their way in through the boarded-up door from the outside. This makes me think instantly of a typical shtetl – a desert of wooden landscape that is

the reverse of what I see. In the middle of the hall right under the vault, which at the time I did not notice, it seems to me that just a moment ago there drifted a massive cloud of dust mixed with bird manure. The space seems to be intact . . . In places lie dead pigeons. It is cold, and I smell the odour of the intestines decomposing on the dirty, seemingly black and white floor. I look up . . . [6]

Those were my first impressions on visiting the derelict Pre-Burial House in Gliwice in March 2013, still carrying traces of decades of neglect. The building had been constructed in the early twentieth century, commissioned by the vibrant community of Silesian Jews.

A pre-burial house, sometimes called a 'pre-funeral house' or 'house of mourning', is known in Hebrew as *beit tahara*, referring to the ritual washing of bodies in preparation for burial. Typically, a Jewish pre-burial house is located in the vicinity of a Jewish cemetery and is entirely devoted to funeral ceremonies. The building is usually only a one-storey construction, divided into different parts: staff residence, a mortuary, the chamber for washing bodies and waiting rooms for relatives of the deceased taking part in the funeral. More affluent Jewish communities commissioned bigger facilities in which waiting rooms were more spacious and could be used for ceremonial prayers. The *tahara* chambers contained a special bed to wash the deceased, equipped with special turning systems.[7]

During the Middle Ages, Upper Silesia (including Gliwice) was ruled by a Polish dynasty of dukes. In later times it belonged to the Czech crown and then the Austrian House of Habsburg. By the mid-eighteenth century, most of Upper Silesia was incorporated into the Kingdom of Prussia, gradually becoming one of Central Europe's most important industrial centres. After the Second World War, Gliwice became part of the Polish People's Republic. Today, it is the seventeenth-biggest town in Poland, with 182,500 citizens. Although the situation in Gliwice differs significantly from the post-*shtetls* in south-east Poland, similar problems arose in the aftermath of the Second World War, when a large part of its population moved to West Germany. This adds another layer of forgetting in that, in Gliwice, one cannot find any old people who remember the persecution of Jewish neighbours, as the former residents of what was then Gleiwitz, if alive, are today in places like Munich, Hamburg or Stuttgart.

The project called 'Dom Światów' ('House of the Worlds') was initiated in Gliwice in 2013. This initial working title for the museum's design aimed to symbolise the complex dynamics of remembrance and contemporariness (material and spiritual, mortal and eternal, present and past). In the event, the Pre-Burial House is more precisely named now as the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance. It is organised as a department of Gliwice Museum, a multi-departmental museum financed by the municipality.[8] Gliwice Museum had been contacted first by the activists from the Brama Cukermana Foundation, who – having heard about planned construction works to be undertaken in the derelict Pre-Burial House – approached them to suggest that it become a Jewish memorial.

After many months of negotiations, Gliwice Museum complied and then commissioned a design concept for the project from the SENNA Collective.

Visiting the building, the immediate encounter with such historical gravity directed our design processes, experiencing predominantly a feeling of incompleteness. SENNA's project thus sought to explore specific questions about how to convert ex-Jewish property for new functions. Our design attempts to excavate the layers of the building to juxtapose those with the spectral presence of the Jewish communities. Although concerned about historical emptiness, we, the members of SENNA, recognised intuitively that we could not simply fill the vacuum left by the building's former inhabitants. Instead, we needed to negotiate between honouring the dead and serving the living through architectural means.

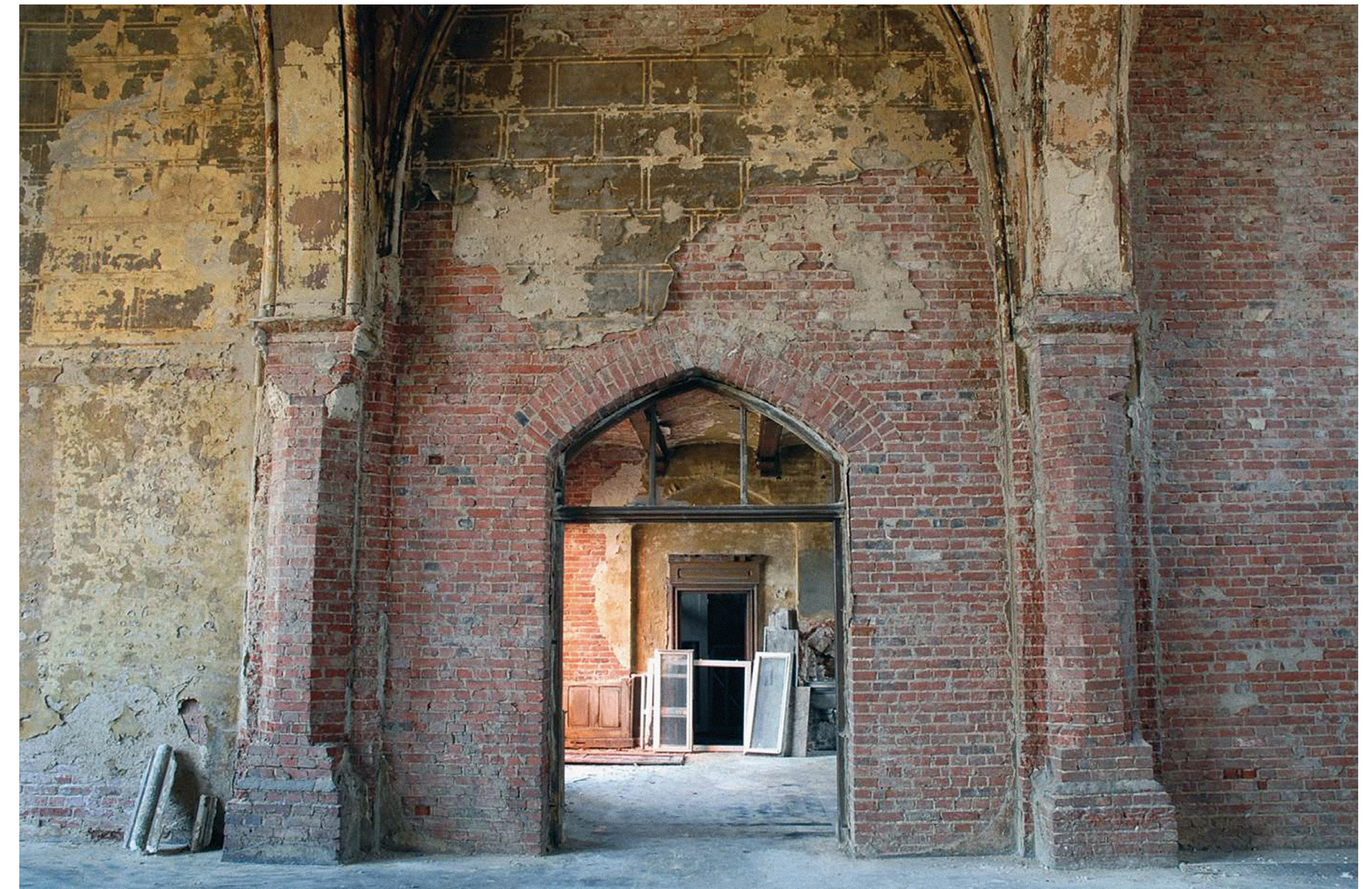
Gap in historical memory

The 'House of the Worlds' project wished to remedy the gap in historical discourse by the spatial commemoration of Upper Silesian Jews – a group whose history is still to some extent taboo within the Polish narrative. Upper Silesian Jews are not usually recognised as they are seen as part of the region's German legacy, not its supposedly inherent 'Polish' character. At the same time, memories of Jewish presence have sunk into post-Holocaust oblivion, not least due to the rhetoric of Polish martyrdom during the Second World War and a lack of access to historical archives. As noted by Peter Chmiel, one of the scholars of Upper Silesian Jewry:

The development of a Jewish settlement in the former eastern lands of Germany played rather a secondary role in historical research after World War II. It resulted both from the specific nature of that issue after the tragic experiences of the years 1939–45 and the initial lack of public interest, as well as from the condition and accessibility of the sources, which – in most cases – were kept beyond the 'Iron Curtain' which divided Europe.[9]

However, since the 1980s there has been an expansion in the historiography of Upper Silesian Jews. Universities and museums have organised academic conferences, and individual scholars have produced essays, monographs and edited books. Good examples include: *Jews in Silesia*, edited by Marcin Wodziński and Janusz Spyra and published in 2001; *Juden in Oberschlesien* (*Jews in Upper Silesia*) by Peter Maser and Adelheid Weiser, published in 1992; the fourteenth volume of *Zeszyty Rybnickie* (*Rybnik Notebooks*) on *Żydzi na Górnym Śląsku w XIX I XX wieku* (*Jews in Upper Silesia in the 19th and 20th Century*), published in 2012; and the post-conference monograph on *Żydzi Gliwiccy* (*Jews of Gliwice*) published by Gliwice Museum in 2012. Furthermore, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw has developed a good digital database of information about the legacy of Silesian Jews as part of its Virtual Shtetl portal.[10]

With that in mind, the new museum in Gliwice's Pre-Burial House focuses on Jews who once lived in Upper Silesia, which it defines as a region located in today's



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6.6 The Pre-Burial House in Gliwice in 2006, photograph by Szymon Janiczek from the Archive of the Museum in Gliwice.

Poland and Czech Republic. Geographically, the region includes the river basin of the Odra and the headwaters of the River Vistula, while politically it sat within the nineteenth-century borders of the Prussian administrative district of Opole. After careful consideration, it was decided that the museum would not cover the history of Jews from Lower Silesia or Austrian Silesia, based on consultation with a group of Polish historians, among them Marcin Wodziński, Dariusz Waleriański, Bożena Kubit, Przemysław Nadolski, Aleksandra Namysło and Eleonora Bergman.

Objectives of the design

Gliwice Museum's aim to establish a new branch devoted solely to the history of Upper Silesian Jews has contributed to the revival of memory about this forgotten community. Our design as the SENNA Collective attempts simultaneously to break the vicious cycle of misuse and neglect – after the Second World War the

building was used as a private dwelling – and to revive architectural memory and open up these spaces for contemporary cultural needs of citizens who are ethnically and socially distinct from the original Jewish users. The design process was inspired by Rabbi Dr Wilhelm Münz's speech in 1903 at the opening ceremony for Gliwice's new Jewish cemetery and Pre-Burial House: 'The cemetery, therefore, is not only a place of tears, but a place of life, where we pass from the worldly life to eternity and dedicate the cemetery not to death but to eternity and immortality.'[11] This quotation inspired the SENNA Collective to use the paradoxical juxtapositions of 'tears and life', 'death and immortality' and 'physical and spectral' as our guiding design principle. Our scheme is conceived to support both the commemorative and public functions of a layered building that is simultaneously a former religious facility, a memorial to an exterminated community, a museum of that community's history and a public education centre.

Decoding the past

To appropriately implement the building's new functions, SENNA devoted its initial activities to unearthing the spatial, temporal and social dimensions involved. The Pre-Burial House, designed in North German Gothic style, opened on 15 November 1903 in what was then called Gleiwitz, alongside the Jewish cemetery. The architect was Max Fleischer, a renowned Vienna-based architect. Fleischer had designed the New Town Hall in Vienna, an extension to Tobitschau Castle and many synagogues in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as the Neudeggergasse Synagogue in Vienna and those in Budweis and Krems. He also designed pre-burial houses, like the one in Mikulov, now in the Czech Republic.[12] He was an active member of the Jewish community, reputed for his charitable engagements. In his book, *Bauwerke jüdischer Friedhöfe in Deutschland* (*Jewish Cemetery Construction in Germany*), Ulrich Knufinke defines Fleischer's architectural style as 'church-style Gothic' (*Kirchenstil Gotik*), to denote the extent to which his designs echoed the general trend of German architecture during this period.[13]

Gliwice's Pre-Burial House, which faces onto the street, was inseparable from the adjacent Jewish cemetery; together they form a cohesive architectural complex. The cemetery is located at the rear, with less than 20 metres between the Pre-Burial House and the first graves. As reported by the *Oberschlesische Wanderer* on 17 November 1903: 'The direct reason for building the cemetery was a great increase of the Jewish population in the city.'[14] In accordance with the guidelines for Jewish burial places, the building was divided into one section devoted to worship and another as a mortuary for 20 bodies, with a movable table for the purpose of washing them – as well as a caretaker's dwelling. Jewish standards also required that the building featured two washbasins for the ritual washing of hands.[15]

In her discussion of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House, Magdalena Żmudzińska-Nowak points out that its architectural principles were already codified – as indeed were

the requirements for private mansions, public buildings and religious structures – in special nineteenth-century guidebooks known in Germany as *Baukunde des Architekten*. One of the chapters of the *Baukunde des Architekten* was hence devoted to Jewish architecture, albeit also considering the specific religious laws of Judaism. It stipulated that the main part of any pre-burial house had to be given to a 'Ceremony Room', whose plan was usually longitudinal in an east–west direction. The two longer sides of a pre-burial house needed to have the maximum possible number of windows on the entrance side and large doors on its rear façade to enable participants to carry coffins towards the cemetery. There had to be a separate entrance leading to a mortuary equipped with a stove for heating and a table for cleaning the bodies.[16]

The design of pre-burial houses needed to be so strictly codified because of the significance of burial rites in Judaism (*kvura*), which, although conducted according to religious laws, are interpreted differently by various Jewish communities. In Jewish tradition, a funeral should take place less than 24 hours after death. Traditionally, the ritual preparation of the body (*tahara*) was performed in the house of the deceased, with the body then taken to the grave for burial. This only changed in the nineteenth century, and so the very construction of pre-burial houses was part of the process of integration of Jews into German society. According to a major book, *History of Silesia*, by the early twentieth century German Jews – which is how Jews in Gleiwitz would have thought of themselves – had become to a large extent assimilated, a process now described as 'German–Jewish symbiosis'.[17] They felt citizens of Germany, distinguished from other Germans only by their faith. Anna Rosner claims that, in contrast to most other Jews in Eastern Europe, German Jews were highly secularised and lived in liberal environments. They identified with German science, art and cultural heritage, and hence perceived themselves not as 'Jews born in Germany' but as 'Germans of Jewish descent'.[18]

Much of this was the result of the way that the Haskalah, or 'Jewish Enlightenment', took shape in Germany. The Haskalah had an impact not only on Jewish customs and religious rituals, but also on the design of religious architecture, primarily absorbing its influences from the interiors of surrounding non-Jewish buildings. Gliwice's Pre-Burial House offers a clear example of cultural and architectural adaptation in the wake of the Haskalah – whose purpose, above all, was to adapt Enlightenment ideals and enable integration with the non-Jewish community.[19] As a result, the building's aesthetic character, built of clinker brick in the so-called Prussian Gothic style, is similar to that of a number of buildings built in the town around the same time, such as the Technical Secondary School of Metallurgy and the Post Office.[20]

In its original state, Gliwice's Pre-Burial House must have looked stunning. Between the spans of its cross-ribbed vaulted ceiling, fragments of paintings depicting a starry sky have survived. The windows were made from multi-coloured stained glass featuring Stars of David. A press

6.7 Watercolour painting of the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice by Max Fleischer in 1901. Photograph from the book by Bożena Kubit, *Żydzi Gliwiccy*, Museum in Gliwice, 2005.

release in the *Oberschlesiche Wanderer* of 17 November 1903 mentions neither the paintings nor the windows, suggesting that these features were finished slightly later, after Fleischer's death. Indeed, the ceiling paintings only partially followed his original design, with the decorators using geometric motifs instead of figural depictions of religious subjects. Fleischer had outlined his idea for the interiors in a 1904 lecture, in which he stated: 'Stained glass will be framed in lead, and coloured glass will depict suitable biblical scenes. There will be similarly themed paintings on the walls.'[21] Unfortunately, Fleischer did not live to see these ideas followed through, as he died in 1905 in Vienna. Nevertheless, his plans confirm his reformist tendencies, as well as the degree to which he was influenced by contemporary German architecture: synagogues traditionally tended to be austere in terms of depiction of religious scenes, and stained glass was only found in Christian churches.

The Cloud

SENNA proposed that the former Prayer Room in Gliwice's Pre-Burial House be filled with an ephemeral installation titled *The Cloud*, referring to Jewish rites of passage but also providing an adjustable lighting system for that space. Designed to occupy the dome in this main room, the form and substance of *The Cloud* creatively

6.8 The Pre-Burial House in Gliwice in 2011, photograph from the Archive of the Museum in Gliwice.

pick up on the surviving cross-ribbed ceiling vaults and their painted motif of a starry night. SENNA decided to embrace the allegory of clouds despite the fact that in conventional Judaism this metaphor plays only a minor role – perhaps more so in Hasidism and Jewish mysticism.

As an allegory, however, a cloud is aesthetically consistent with our plans for the former Prayer Room, underscoring the depth of visual perspective and heightening the sense of infinity. Even more important is the conceptual and programmatic purpose of *The Cloud*. In line with the aims of the initial 'House of the Worlds' project, we decided that the Prayer Room needed to merge its commemorative and public functions. Consequently, in addition to an exhibition about funeral rites in Judaism, this space also serves as a concert hall and

lecture theatre, thereby hosting events not only about Jewish history but also the issue of multicultural tolerance.

SENNA's process that led to devising *The Cloud* was also an intuitive response to the deterioration of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House when we first encountered it in spring 2013. Yet I also immediately recognised the enormous potential of its central dome, still visible despite the general state of neglect. Used as a residential building from 1945 until the 1990s, it then became vacant and underwent slow but noticeable decay. Before our renovations began, the dome was inhabited by pigeons. This meant the walls and floors were covered in pigeon waste, gradually obliterating the room's decorative surfaces. As pointed out in the expert report written in 2014 for Gliwice Museum by an engineer, Rudolf Schnurpfeil, pigeon dung was one of the key factors responsible for the destruction of the original polychromatic paint colours.

On opening in 1905, the Pre-Burial House had been stylishly decorated and solidly built, including being equipped with a central heating system that ran under the floors – possibly one of the first installed anywhere in Upper Silesia. The building's floors were covered in ceramic tiles. The entrance hall was equipped with a ritual washbasin carved from marble (which luckily survived years of neglect and has now been renovated). In the South Wing was the mortuary, and in the North Wing the spacious caretaker's flat: the central nave was devoted to the richly decorated Prayer Room. When we first visited, the grey dust on the floor, the bodies of dead pigeons and the mouldy smell contrasted starkly with hints of a spectacular blue vaulted ceiling spangled with golden stars. Hence the Prayer Room, even when covered in debris, retained a strong aura of a ruined yet monumental neo-Gothic sacral micro-universe. If anything, the spectacular keystones in its ceiling gave an impression of functionality. This is probably where chandeliers used to be suspended as the room's original source of light. The dome creates an impression that one is entering a protracted daydream and is certainly one of the building's most architecturally exciting elements. Any modifications to this main space risked losing its ungraspable infinity and unsettling character, its particular allure of feeling almost unreal. As Michael Webb, an English architect and founder-member of the Archigram group, once observed: 'The point about a nostalgic place is that by changing it, you destroy it.'[22]

I reacted to this particular quality of the dome by imagining the figure of clouds. As my first bodily perception of the existing Prayer Room, it seemed that the perpetually changing character of clouds would be able to unsettle the permanency of our exhibition about funeral rites in Judaism that was to be featured in that same space. The fluctuating character of clouds could infuse the display with a new dynamic – a lofty composition informed by the implicit qualities of the dome, a lingering ruin with its own laws of (meta)physics. The motif of a cloud is also a good metonymy for the transition between solid, liquid and gaseous forms, and of spectral architecture, in tune with my overarching research aim.

6.9 The main praying space in Gliwice's Pre-Burial House in 2006, photograph by Szymon Janiczek, from the Archive of the Museum in Gliwice.

6.9

The design principles of *The Cloud* are also a variation on the painterly themes and techniques of an 'illusion of immateriality' and of 'infinite abundance' known already to late-Renaissance painters such as Antonio Correggio, creator of the famous fresco of *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1526–30) in Parma Cathedral. As the French philosopher Hubert Damisch suggests, Correggio's works are among the first examples of 'illusionistic' and 'architectural' spatial clouds in the history of decorated domes.[23] It was Correggio who pioneered the application of illusionistic representations in this manner, with 'silhouettes and clouds coming out from the frescoes'. This motif was replicated and perfected in later church cupolas, especially during the Baroque era. Damisch also writes: 'Correggio's art is in no sense real. Nor, however, does it depend in any way upon the perspective mechanisms of illusion.'[24] Damisch instead refers to Correggio's frescoes as a groundbreaking 'fleeting spectacle' in which the elements expressly gain architectural characteristics and expand into infinity: 'The cloud is not just an instrument adopted by a style; it is the very material of a construction.'[25] Similar motifs of cloudy skies were subsequently used to decorate several synagogues in Eastern Europe, including those in Oszmiana (Belarus) and Niebylec (Poland).

Even more specifically, my design for *The Cloud* was also inspired by a

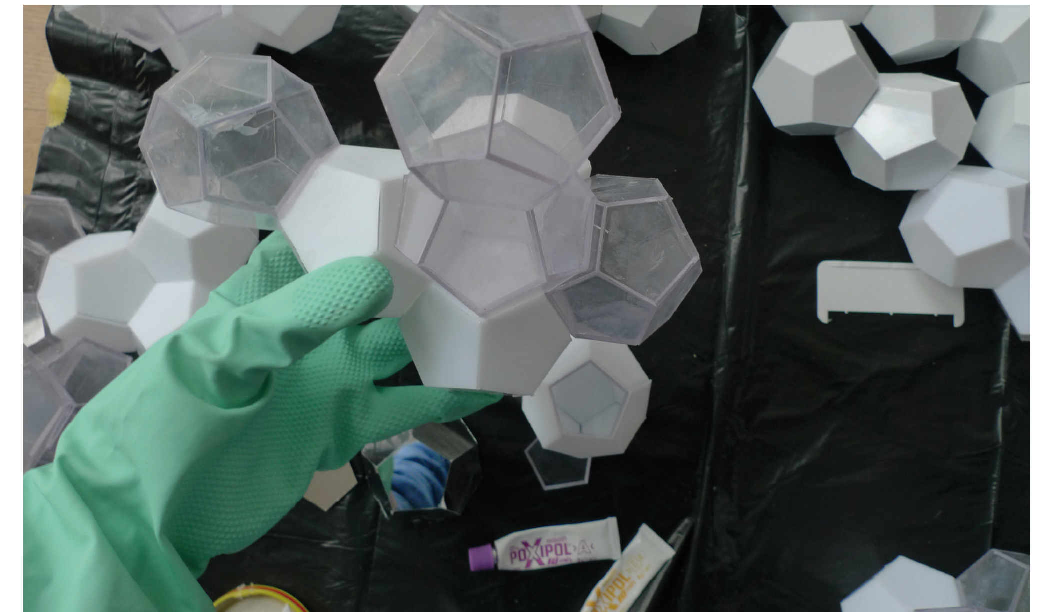
philosophical treatise, *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds*, written by the English meteorologist and polymath, Luke Howard. In his text, Howard proposes a classification of clouds based on their diffuse temporal sequences. Following this premise, *The Cloud* is based on the amalgamation of different cloud types blended into a single sequence, thereby mimicking all the clouds about which Howard so elegantly wrote:

> The Cirrocumulus is formed from a Cirrus, or from a number of small separate Cirri, by the fibres collapsing as it were, and passing into small roundish masses in which the texture of the Cirrus is no longer discernible; although they still retain somewhat of the same relative arrangement.[26]

This passage served as an inspiration to think about my design, as the intention of *The Cloud* is to suggest an ephemeral, transitory, forever-changing configuration of clouds. Copying the natural frictions between clouds, *The Cloud* integrates a multitude of pentagonal cubes that together create an organic composition. It is being constructed from about 1,000 of these small cubes. At first, I wanted them to be made from polyurethane in three grades of transparency (white, semi-transparent, transparent), yet that material is not very resilient and is prone to ageing. Now, after my experiments with the optical magic of mirrors, I am employing these for *The Cloud*, as mirrors will be far more suitable for negotiating the spectral presence haunting Gliwice's Pre-Burial House. To achieve an effect of lightness, *The Cloud* will gradually become darker in its upper parts and have light sources inserted within it. In this way, it will offer an additional source of artificial light to augment the stained-glass windows in the revived Prayer Room. The only thing to be seen from the outside will be its luminous surface of geometric shapes forming a single organic cloud.

The structure and mimetic figure of *The Cloud* in the Jewish Pre-Burial House in Gliwice will thus offer a visual representation of the gaseous form of design as it transforms into a minimalist exhibition about funeral rites and mourning rituals within Jewish culture. Its small, illuminated boxes will include textual and graphic representations of a number of themes: the moment of death, the role of family and relatives, the funeral service, the funeral meal, the burial ceremony (from washing and dressing the body to burial itself), the rules and symbols of the gravestones (*matzevah*), the psalms on the anniversary of deaths and Silesian sepulchral art. The two existing keystones in the starry vaulted ceiling of the Prayer Room will provide the fastenings for the hanging cloud. In view of the artistic programmes to be conducted in the space, *The Cloud*, suspended on steel cables, will be able to be either drawn up or lowered by winches installed in the attic space above.

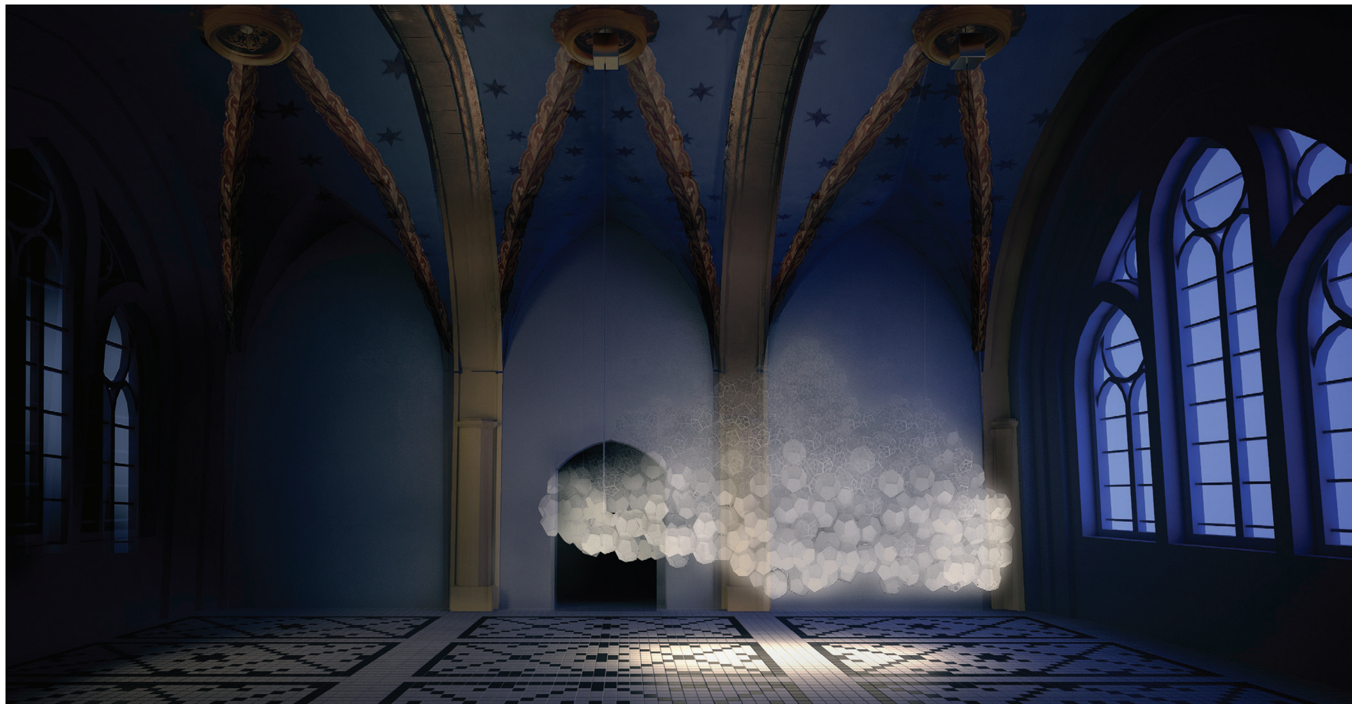
Through its design, *The Cloud* is likewise intended to resonate discreetly with the cemetery outside. In contrast to many cemeteries in post-*shtetls*, this one is still functioning because the members of Silesia's Jewish community are buried there. As such, the cemetery is not an



6.10 Proposed model for *The Cloud* (2013), photograph by Natalia Romik.

overgrown thicket, but a 'regular' one. In line with the spatial redesign of Gliwice's Pre-Burial House, the cemetery is to be used to augment and systematise what is happening inside the building. Since the cemetery is still in use, nobody is permitted to visit it on the Jewish Sabbath (which runs from Friday after sundown until sundown on Saturday). At the same time, the museum is open on Saturdays because most people visit on the weekend. To negotiate between respect for Jewish religious principles and the needs of museum visitors, our aim is to enable them to unobtrusively experience the cemetery while there. Therefore, on the outside of the building there is going to be a metal installation with an adjustable mirror which on sunny days casts focused light onto the gravestones. One further element to permeate between the two worlds is a pentagonal glazed opening in the door facing onto the cemetery outside.

The northern wing of the Gliwice Pre-Burial House contains the main historical exhibition, open since 2018, and which is organised both chronologically and along specific themes. To communicate a large amount of material within a relatively small space, the exhibition design uses translucent materials, glazed panels and sand-blasted mirrors, the composition of which create an illusion of infinity. The mirrors, as in my nomadic projects, negotiate between the spectral realm of the past and the present, with a pinch of playful illusion. Artefacts and documents look as if they are levitating, giving the impression



6.11

6.11 Visualisation of *The Cloud* (2013), drawn by the SENNA Collective and Łukasz Boniewsk.

6.12

6.12 Visualisation of *The Cloud* (2013), drawn by the SENNA Collective and Łukasz Boniewsk.

of being suspended in an endless space. Here the design inspiration was the oeuvre of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, who since the early 1960s has explored subtle illusionary techniques to create an impression of infinity.[27]

The exhibition's themes are: the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Upper Silesia; economic activities of Upper Silesian Jews; families of Upper Silesian Jews; architectural styles of synagogues; social and educational activities of Upper Silesian Jews, including cultural and political organisations; increasing anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany; the Holocaust; and the post-war fate of Upper Silesian Jews, concluding with reference to Jews living in the region today. In some moments of the narrative, mirrored panels serve as metaphors. For example, to illustrate the tragic events of Kristallnacht in November 1938, we use cracked mirrors – representing broken shop windows – to show documents and films. When one passes into the space dedicated to the Holocaust, the mirrors are crushed. In charge of the content for this thematic exhibition was a team of outstanding historians from Poland and Germany, curated in cooperation with Bożena Kubit.

An interactive space, which we call the 'Treasury of Knowledge', is located in the hall leading into the main Prayer Room. It contains information about the material legacies of Jewish architecture in Upper Silesia, therefore collecting information about and providing an insight into the architectural traces of Jewish history in Silesia (including synagogues, *mikvahs*, pre-burial houses, cemeteries). The Treasury's interactive panel has a polyurethane finish that changes colour when touched, providing additional sensations to visitors. Another element of the museum which has already been constructed is a multicultural educational centre in the southern wing, with kitchen and library. Paradoxically, it means that the former mortuary currently brims with social activities – workshops for kids, lectures about Judaism, movie presentations, public discussions. The programme encompasses not only the themes of Judaism and the history of Upper Silesian Jews but links them with contemporary discussions about open and tolerant society.

Even while the museum was being built, it provoked some controversy. Voices were raised, not in public, but in private proceedings of the museum's expert committee by its more conservative members, claiming that the proposed design was too radically contemporary and hence overshadowed the building's original qualities. In response, we in the SENNA Collective emphasised that our design does not intend to overwrite the space, but

6.13 View of the space between Gliwice's Pre-Burial House and the Jewish cemetery, photograph by Karolina Jakoweńko, image courtesy of the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance, Museum in Gliwice.

6.13

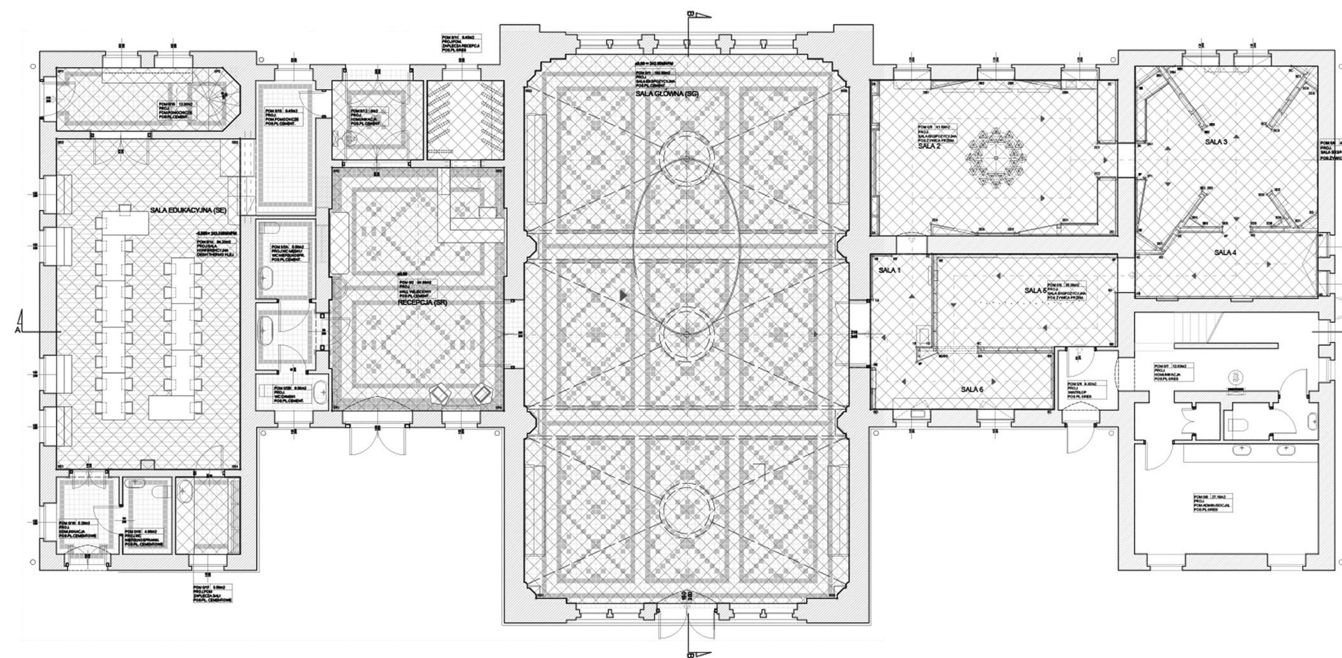
instead give a new metaphorical expression to the emptiness inherent in Gliwice's Pre-Burial House. The abovementioned nomination for the European Museum of the Year Award proved our position to be right. Such places must be used, otherwise they eventually become underfinanced and obsolete, devolving back into a state of – maybe romantic – ruin. We think about the project, and of specific elements like *The Cloud*, as a space of commemoration and of life, trying thereby to follow the anticipatory spirit evoked a century ago by Rabbi Münz.

Ostjuden

While researching for the exhibition and redesigning Gliwice's Pre-Burial House, I began to understand more the fundamental differences between Jewish culture in *shtetls* in south-east Poland and that of assimilated Jews in Upper Silesia's industrial towns. Even though the architectural conundrum of 'present absence' might now be similar, their historical background differs, complicated additionally by the historical transformation of Upper Silesia in the 1920s and 1930s. After the First World War, Upper Silesia was divided between Germany and Poland, and because of regulations controlling the migration of Jews to Germany, the Jewish community there remained relatively wealthy and assimilated.

At the same time, in the inter-war period many Jews – escaping the biting poverty of *shtetls* elsewhere – moved to the Polish part of Upper Silesia. Local Jews, westernised and assimilated, who considered themselves to be German followers of Judaism, called the newcomers '*Ostjuden*' ('Jews from the East'). The latter were regarded as ultra-traditional, backward and uncivilised by assimilated Jews in Upper Silesia. These two communities never really integrated as the cultural and religious differences proved too strong. Simon Eichel from Chorzów wrote in his memoirs:

> In our town and other towns of Upper Silesia, one hardly met any Jew with a longer beard. In Sosnowiec, almost every Jew had one. I did not like Sosnowiec . . . I patronised Jews living there, including my cousins. I did not find them equal, I thought that they were on a lower level of education and knowledge . . . In comparison with my more religious cousins from Sosnowiec, I was considered as a religious ignorant, almost a goy.[28]



6.14

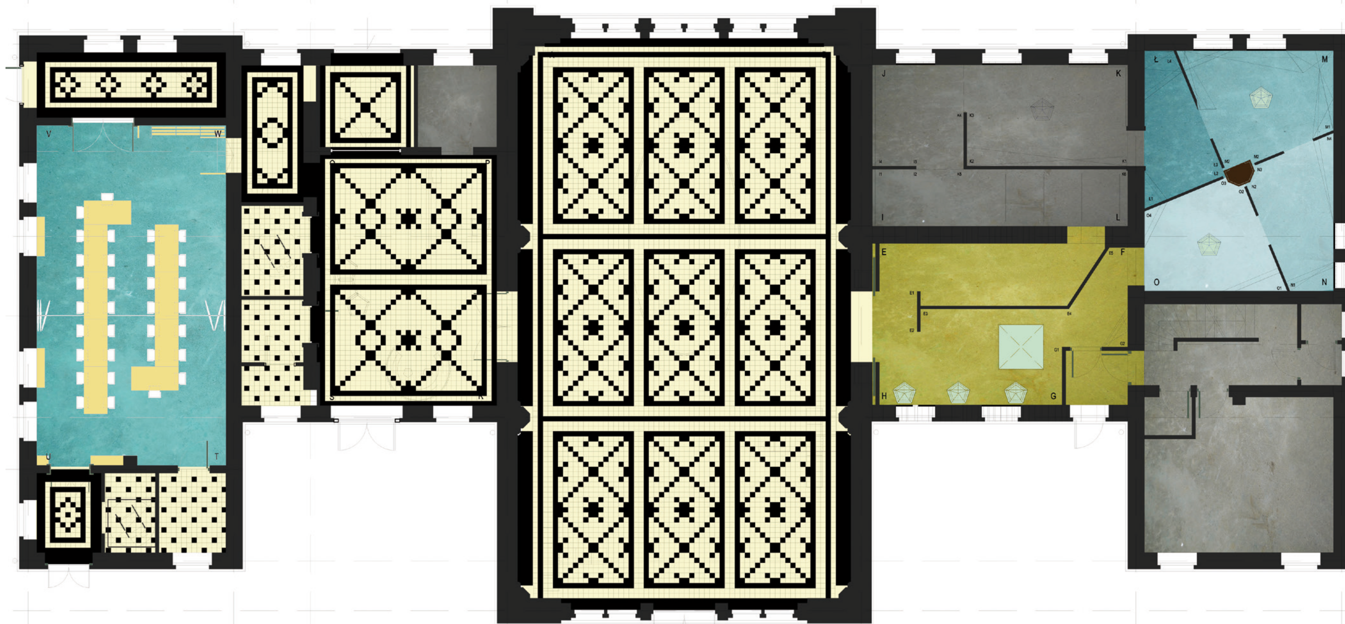
6.14 Concepts for the design of floor details in the Pre-Burial House (2013), drawn by the SENNA Collective.

Even after 1933, once Adolf Hitler had come to power, assimilated Jews in Germany chose not to migrate to the Polish part of Upper Silesia; instead tried to go to Western Europe, USA or South America.

I try to address this historical distinction between the Jewish multitudes in *shtetls* and Jewish patricians in Germany in the exhibition's design and content, by including newspapers published in Yiddish and German or by emphasising the specificity of the architectural styles popular in Silesian synagogues with those in south-east Poland. Yet, despite these differences, the challenges and methods of commemorating absent communities by reimbuing their architectural monuments with new life is similar in both regions – as will now be described in regard to the synagogue in Wojsławice.

Wojsławice synagogue

Another past endeavour was that of revitalising the synagogue in Wojsławice, a former *shtetl* near Lublin – a directly connected project as our example for Gliwice's Pre-Burial House inspired the local community in Wojsławice to also attempt to



6.15

6.15 Design drawings for the Pre-Burial House (2013), drawn by the SENNA Collective.

6.16

6.16 Lobby in the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance (2017). Drawn by the SENNA Collective. Photograph by Iza Grauman, image courtesy of the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance, Museum in Gliwice.

6.17

6.17 Education Room in the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance (2017). Drawn by the SENNA Collective. Photograph by Karolina Jakoweńko, image courtesy of the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance, Museum in Gliwice.

renovate their synagogue. Unfortunately, in contrast to Gliwice, this grassroots impulse has been stifled by bureaucratic obstacles and so our designs remained unrealised. Instead, the synagogue was renewed by another company following the breakdown of negotiations between the SENNA Collective and the municipality. Thus, the synagogue has been repurposed, just not as we had imagined.

In the case of Wojsławice, the gaseous cloud of inspiration – mediated through documents, walks and presentations – informed our vision for how to honour the spectres of the past by filling the space with new life. The idea to revitalise this synagogue as a cultural centre was seeded during a visit to Wojsławice by the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in autumn 2016, and flourished due to a coalition established between the SENNA Collective, Grodzka Gate Centre in Lublin, Panorama of Cultures Association in Wojsławice and the municipality (the latter proving to be the weakest link in this chain). After the travels of the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* had concluded, I was invited, together with SENNA, to prepare a scheme to transform the derelict synagogue into a cultural centre and museum about the history of local Jews. The synagogue like others had been devastated during the Second World War by the Nazis, who used it for storage, and it kept the same function after the war, with some of the façades redesigned.[29] In the late 1980s the building was partially renovated as a library and municipal office.[30] To prepare for this

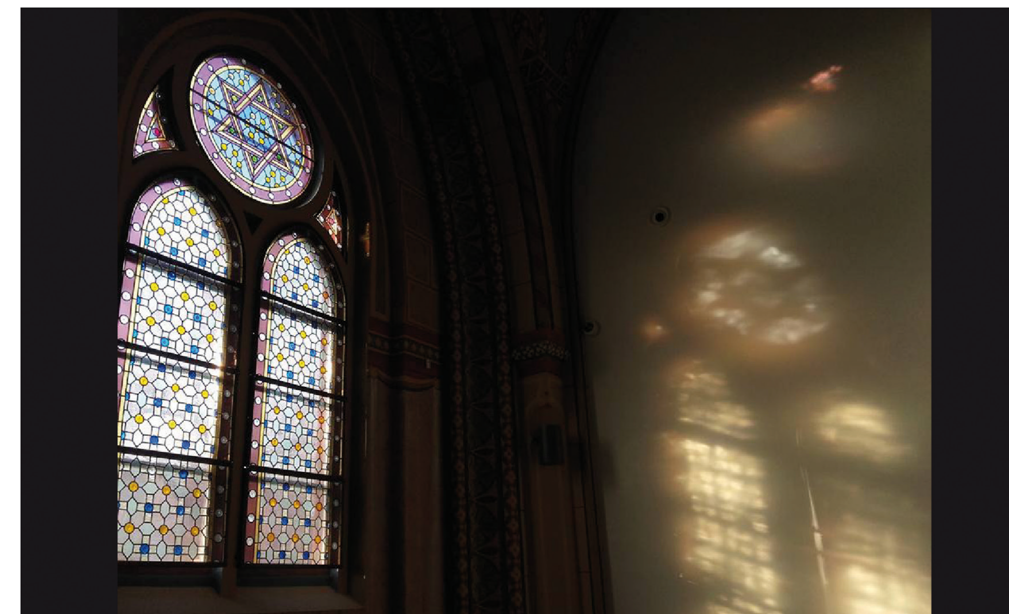
6.18

6.18 Prayer Hall of the Pre-Burial House after renovation in 2017, photograph by Natalia Romik.

latest redevelopment, SENNA was commissioned to produce sketches and concept for a design to support an application for European regional development funds. A grant of 4,000,000 złotys (c. £800,000) was duly awarded in December 2017 to finance the synagogue's renewal and install the exhibition. By 2018, the technical details of the construction process were being negotiated between the SENNA Collective, municipality and regional government.[31] However, it was at this stage that the talks broke down, and another company was brought in instead.

The impetus for our (now only partially realised) exhibition was inspired by the *Yizkor* book for Wojsławice, created by Jewish exiles from the town living in the USA and Israel in the 1970s.[32] As such, the exhibition was conceived as focusing upon

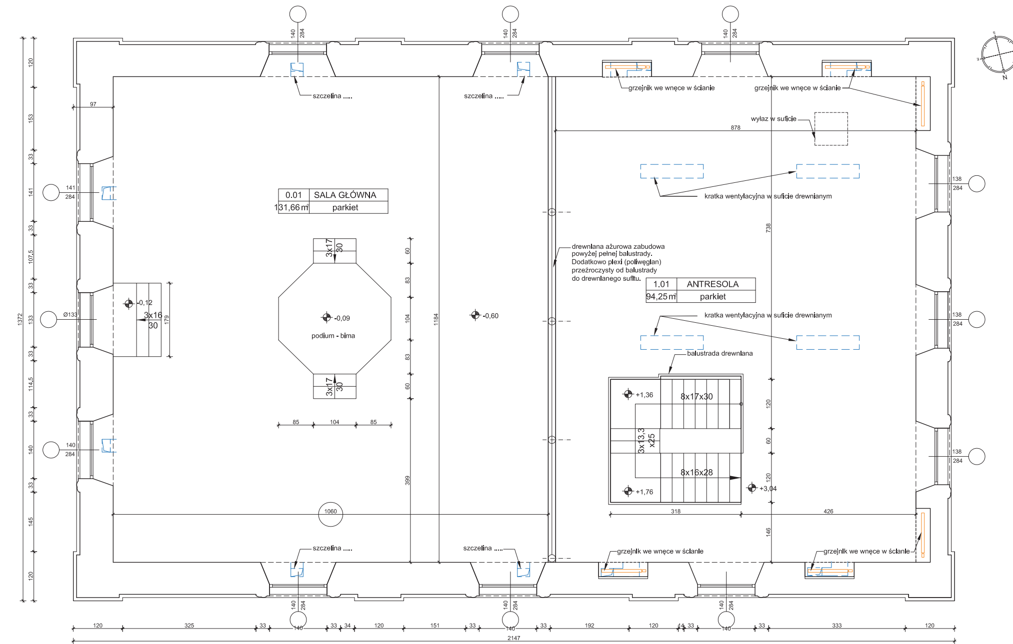
6.19 Renovated stained-glass windows in the Prayer Hall in 2016, photograph by Natalia Romik.



6.19

the town's multicultural legacy, from the moment when Jews first arrived until the Holocaust. It was intended to tell the story about Jewish society, but especially of everyday life, the sorrows and joys of which were shared with Polish and Ukrainian neighbours – as typical in *shtetls* – such as poverty, fires, struggles for basic medical care and so on. The memories taken from *Yizkor Wojsławice* helped us to make these tales more personal and closer to the lives of visitors.[33] We aimed to use those testimonies to disenchant the mythology of the 'Golden 20s/30s', instead speaking about rising tensions and anti-Semitism. Our exhibition also wished to underline the tradition of craft trades and discuss architectural heritage: Wojsławice is unique for a small post-*shtetl* in that there is a sixteenth-century Roman Catholic church, an eighteenth-century Orthodox Christian church and a synagogue built in the nineteenth century.[34] We wanted to celebrate the local architectural style of arcaded timber houses, including the House of Fawka the Shoemaker, where the offices of Panorama Kultur are now located. These arcades were used to provide protection against the elements, but also served as displays for the merchandise in shops.[35]

SENNA had intended the exhibition to be minimalistic, underlying the synagogue's rectilinear interior. Before the Second World War, the synagogue had been, in the recollection of Rabbi Irving Raab: 'beautiful and full of colour, ornamented with hand-crafted decorations'.[36]



6.20

6.20 Drawing for the refurbishment of the synagogue in Wojsławice (2017), drawn by the SENNA Collective.

Currently, only the niche for the Torah Ark remains, with the building long stripped of anything valuable. In our scheme, the main space was to hold an exhibition about Jews in Wojsławice, while the women's gallery was to be refurbished as a small cinema/seminar room. We also planned to recreate the absent *bimah*, similar to our version in Chmielnik, but here made from mirrors with delicately shaded surfaces.

This unrealised project in Wojsławice has nonetheless fed into my more recent research into post-*shtetls*. Two design projects continue to coagulate three states of design: liquid, gaseous and solid. The first is the Museum of the Jews in Płońsk, again prepared with SENNA, which opened in 2024.[37] The museum commemorates the Jewish heritage of that small Mazovian town, notably the early life of Ben Gurion, as it is located in the house where he was born and raised. A second project is commissioned by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and is dedicated to the former shtetl of Opatów, inspired by the paintings of Mayer Kirshenblatt that I referred to in my 'Walking' chapter. Kirshenblatt was born in Opatów in 1916, before emigrating to Canada and then from the 1990s producing his remarkable series of around 300 paintings about his childhood recollections. Today in Opatów, there are still preserved examples of (dilapidated) wooden houses, waiting for buyers, and this has inspired me and the SENNA Collective, along with my co-curator Justyna Koszarska-Szulc, to try to recall this once important Jewish centre.

6.21

6.21 The synagogue in Wojsławice in 2016, photograph by Monika Tarajko.

To counter the local lack of knowledge about *shtetls*, our exhibition will cover many topics: property restitution, infrastructural changes, the post-war fate of Jewish traces – the cemetery is currently a public park, the former *mikvah* now a sweets factory – trades performed by Jews before World War Two and the Holocaust.

Conclusion: Liquifying the solid

This chapter has argued for an intrinsic connection between nomadic, liquid forms of design, as described in previous chapters, and solid architectural investments like Gliwice's Pre-Burial House and the intended refurbishment of the Wojsławice synagogue. Although these projects are partly separated by the historical and cultural differences between *shtetls* in south-east Poland and the industrialised region of Upper Silesia, I found that I encountered similar challenges in expressing the 'present absence' of (post-)Jewish architecture. Eventually,

one of those projects came to fruition, while the other was curbed and realised differently.

Furthermore, the methodology for their creation is similar, shifting from conceptual forms to more solid, bricks-and-mortar proposals. However, I consider the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice as another state of the archival flow, as initially liquefied by *JAD*. The scheme for Wojsławice synagogue hoped to solidify and stabilise the nomadic constellation set in motion by the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*. Without *JAD* or the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, neither of these architectural projects would have been possible or even thinkable. I do not even consider buildings as the final stage in the development, but instead part of a design cycle that will prompt newer movements and liquid designs in the future (with or without me involved). The dynamic of this constellation is propelled through a human network or assemblage: one that emerges during my nomadic travels, and which is crucial for recomposing social memory in post-*shtetls*. This then raises the point about the risks and challenges of my projects, an aspect that will now be discussed in the concluding section.

Notes

1. Municipality of Częstochowa, *Miejski Program Rewitalizacji dla Częstochowy*.
2. Wikipedia, 'Détournement'.
3. Gregory Sholette, 'REPOhistory'.
4. Caldwell, 'The history of "Your Body Is a Battleground"'.
5. Stempel, 'Afera w sprawie demontażu tablicy Róży Luksemburg'.
6. Author, field notes.
7. Borzymińska and Żebrowski, *Polski słownik judaistyczny*, Vol. 1, 340.
8. Muzeum w Gliwicach.
9. Chmiel, 'Contemporary German research on the history of Upper-Silesian Jews', 423.
10. Virtual Shtetl.
11. *Oberschlesische Wanderer*, 'Die Einweihung des neuen jüdischen Friedhofes'.
12. Architektenlexikon, 'Max Fleischer'.
13. Knufinke, *Bauwerke jüdischer Friedhöfe in Deutschland*, 186.
14. *Oberschlesische Wanderer*, 'Die Einweihung des neuen jüdischen Friedhofes'.
15. Żmudzińska-Nowak, 'Dom Przedpogrzebowy na Nowym Cmentarzu Żydowskim', 170.
16. Żmudzińska-Nowak, 'Dom Przedpogrzebowy na Nowym Cmentarzu Żydowskim', 170–1.
17. Czapliński *et al.*, *Historia Śląska*, 256.
18. Rosner, 'Utracona tożsamość?', 153.
19. Coenen-Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism*.
20. Żmudzińska-Nowak, 'Dom Przedpogrzebowy na Nowym Cmentarzu Żydowskim', 167.
21. Fleischer, 'Friedhof in Gleiwitz und Synagoge in Wien'.
22. Quoted in Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, 145.
23. Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud*.
24. Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud*, 18.
25. Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud*, 16.
26. Howard, *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds*, 8.
27. Yayoi Kusama.
28. After Namysło, 'Kim jestem – Polakiem, Niemcem, Żydem?'.
29. Virtual Shtetl, 'Nowa Synagoga (ul. Rynek 20a)'.
30. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 118.
31. Wojsławice Commune Office, '4 miliony dotacji'.
32. New York Public Library, 'Wojsławice'.
33. Shtetl Routes, 'Mendel Szafer, Moje sześćdziesiąt lat życia w Wojsławicach 1879–1939'.
34. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 115.
35. Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 120.
36. Quoted in Majuk, ed., *Szlakami sztetli*, 118.
37. https://dompamieciplonsk.pl/en/the-exhibition-glance-and-recall/.

Conclusion

I was finishing the final pages of my PhD thesis on the 50th anniversary of the anti-Semitic events of March 1968, when 13,000 Jews were expelled from Poland. Unfortunately, yet again history was repeating itself – as Karl Marx said, as farce – because in February 2018 the international reputation of Poland was badly damaged when its parliament passed a new law to penalise 'ungrounded accusations of the Polish Nation for the crimes committed by Nazi Germany . . . or any other crimes against humanity'.[1] Responsibility to enforce this law was handed to the Institute of National Remembrance, and specifically its Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation – which is infamous for waging a widespread campaign against any public commemorations of Polish socialism, as well as instigating the cult of the 'accursed soldiers', members of the Nationalistic wartime underground, some of whom were openly fascist and responsible for anti-Semitic violence. The new law was widely criticised as stifling public debate, violating the freedom of research, and being intended for the falsification of Polish history. Back then, Dariusz Stola, the Director of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, declared in an open letter:

> Passing a law that may exert a negative influence on historical research, that is on searching for the truth about the past, is not a good solution. We feel that the proposed legal measure poses a major risk of such damaging impact. It is highly likely that it will trigger an atmosphere of intimidation and discourage scholars, especially those of the younger generation, from tackling difficult subjects related to crimes committed in the 20th century on the Polish soil. These concerns are confirmed by vicious attacks on a number of Holocaust historians that we have witnessed with indignation over the past several years. Moreover, many people may perceive the proposed amendment as an attempt to stifle the debate on crimes committed by Poles, as political interference in historical disputes, and, ultimately, as a confirmation of anti-Polish prejudice . . . We are not responsible for a past on which we had no influence. However, we are responsible for what we do about that past today. Above all, we owe the truth to the victims of past crimes, and the truth is fueled by an open and factual discussion.[2]

I still regard this law, even if now superficially diluted, as an unmitigated conservative backlash against efforts

to uncover the truth about issues like wartime Polish anti-Semitism and to get Poles to accept and shoulder responsibility for past crimes or omissions. As I have argued throughout this book, it is not only a matter of human decency but also necessary for Poland to become a more mature society: this will not be an easy task yet is imperative for unclogging the way towards reconciliation. My ventures into the 'vanished Atlantis' of former *shtetls* are thus not merely sightseeing tours. My instruments are not mere optical toys or fun gadgets. Nomadic travels through post-*shtetls* are there to create paths of memory and reconciliation, and I regard my projects as *shamash* to assist in reclaiming Jewish social and architectural memory, helping Poland to move forward and grow in the future.

In my struggles, I have thankfully found many allies and associates who help me in my efforts, including of course my mirror-clad instruments, my *shamash*. To describe my projects as helpers is not a mere anthropomorphic figure of speech but a theoretical attempt to underline their importance in my research. At first, I only grasped this intimate relation intuitively, but then came to understand its full importance when they became my fellow-travellers and faithful companions, with their own agency. *Hurdy-Gurdy* was too heavy to walk with for long, yet was so supportive in establishing meaningful relationships with audiences. The *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* was a helper with which one had to tread carefully, respecting its needs when selecting our sites of performance. The pointing finger of *JAD*, almost accusatory, instigated a more confrontational approach to sites of urban decay and forgetting, while also helping to unlock new forms of dialogue.

All these projects were crucial in disentangling the 'present absence' in the Jewish communities that had once lived in *shtetls*. Mirrors helped me to adopt a parallax view, traversing between spectral landscapes and towns of the living. They supported my inquiries into three states of design – liquid, solid and gaseous – and facilitated my explorations of the multilayered nature of former *shtetls*. I negotiated with spectres, juxtaposed administrative reality with historical vistas, and combined architectural drawings with memory maps. *The Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD* and *Hurdy-Gurdy*, once liquefied and set in motion, hold the dormant potential to be re-applied in the field, as instruments for further inquiries, reflecting and melting into other sites of architectural erosion. They might also solidify into real buildings, as described in my 'Embedment' chapter, and my hope now is very much to develop this methodology further. The potential is confirmed by vigorous feedback I received in the media, with my interventions being generally positively reviewed by national daily papers, architectural magazines, radio programmes, and publications by Jewish communities and foundations.[3] For me, however, the gaseous constellation of references and discourses would be formless if not grounded in the alliances and friendships I have established. The SENNA Collective, Brama Cukermana Foundation, Grodzka Gate from Lublin, Panorama of Cultures Association and the Pre-Burial House in Gliwice constitute a functioning support structure that has the capacity to facilitate future research into post-*shtetls*.

I often wonder if the Jewish legacy of Eastern European *shtetls* might be turned into sanitised aesthetic projects or even touristic products – a sort of 'Jewish Disneyland', as Sandra Lustig forewarns.[4] The artistic conventions are already there, as are the cultural stereotypes, ripe for taking. One can already find plenty of art 'about the Holocaust', visit theme-parks based on *Fiddler on the Roof*, the stories of Isaac Singer and paintings of Marc Chagall, like one private museum called Yankel's Shtetl located in the middle of Israel, or in the housing scheme called The Settlement on the Route of Borderland Cultures in Biłgoraj in Ukraine, described in my 'Nomadism' chapter. While I am troubled by such trivial utterances of memory, I still ask myself whether such distorted memory is not better than outright denial? But as I have tried to prove with my projects, we are not fated to an alternative between forgetting and disrespect: instead we can imagine and develop architectural forms and designs that negotiate between our obligation to remember and the need to live.

When I began my nomadic travels, I was anxious that my projects would be trivialised by this connection to light-headed or folksy references to Jewish legacy in Poland. Conversely, my aims of liquefying the archive, putting memory back into post-*shtetls* and engaging in public interaction with people living there, cannot be completed if approached through the seriousness of official policies or commemorations – the necessity for which I do not belittle. But when one stops with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in a market square, one needs some magic tricks, a couple of cards up one's sleeves, conjured out of thin air. One has to think out of the box, especially considering that those people tasked with urban redevelopment are usually busy elsewhere, engrossed in metropolitan processes of investment. As I argue in this book, the social void of former *shtetls* is matched by a gap in architectural discourse. I do not accuse anyone in Poland of bad will; instead, this neglect is common to urban redevelopment in most countries worldwide, which prioritises areas with higher densities of economic and social capital. This kind of neglect is only amplified by the wilful ignorance to the problems facing (post-)Jewish towns, a yawning gap only widened by historical amnesia and consistently enabled by the governmental policies which have dominated Poland since 2015.

The design research encapsulated in this book bridges from theory to practice, and from actual terrains in Eastern Europe to spectral communities of lost Jewish towns – the results of which only reinforce my initial objective of an interdisciplinary fusion between architectural practice and Jewish studies. As an application of open, fluid, experimental design research, the originality of this study comes from its embrace of the potential of design research to bring fresh insights to such intractable social issues as presented by post-*shtetls*. This emphasis on creative intuition has been strengthened by feedback I have received during numerous

public presentations of my research into mobile archives and nomadic interventions among former *shtetls*. Both the lay public members and academic specialists frequently underlined the importance of connecting historical reflection, interventionism approaches and design as an innovative technique to address problems of urban erosion and the slow yet steady decay of Jewish heritage. One of my future aims is to further this flow of interdisciplinary inspiration with other activists and institutions that can also apply this blend of knowledge and action in the field – dealing with the conflicts for memory on an everyday basis.

Might, therefore, my methods have applications beyond the context of former *shtetls* in Eastern Europe? One obvious place might be Israel, yet in January 2017 when I went there looking for 'mirror reflections' of *shtetls* – and while I met with inspiring figures like Scott Ury, Marcos Silber and Naama Meishar – my impression of venues like the Museum of the Jewish People (Beit Hatfutsot) in Tel Aviv, formerly the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, was that it seemed out of date, containing only a few traces about the old *shtetls* in the melting pot of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Perhaps it has now been improved, but to me then I had the feeling that the official political line of the state of Israel – now so dominantly constituted along Zionist principles – wants to deny its earlier roots in the poor villages of Eastern Europe.[5] The 'present absence' of *shtetls* is also overwritten there by the 'present absence' of Arabs who have been expelled from Israel, an exodus that began with *al-Nakbah* in 1948. I have thought long about this parallel when walking with Naama Meishar in Jaffa Park in 2018, trying to find traces left after the expulsion of Arab communities.[6] It reminds me of my own nomadic travels in Eastern Europe and of the interventions I had designed to facilitate my explorations. It is a problem that haunts me.

So, instead of travelling so far abroad, recently I have been following another imaginary route, closer to home, which led me from my nomadic travels among *shtetls* to the sites of Jewish hideouts that were built and used by Jews during the Second World War. It all started during the visit by the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* to Bychawa in 2016, when a local person showed me an old document – as already mentioned in the chapter on 'Nomadism' – the diary of a young Jewish student from the Bet Yaakow religious school 'left' in the attic of a house where a Polish family now lives. The document was given to the Grodzka Gate collection, as the family did not want to talk more about the back-history of this item. During that evening, I began to wonder if there were still hiding places in *shtetls* where Jews hid during the war? Despite the fact that the Polish historical narrative places great emphasis on heroic resistance during the Second World War – including the role of the Righteous Among the Nations, who saved Jews, whereas the behaviour of *szmalcowniks* and 'silent witnesses' during the Holocaust is almost completely ignored, the physical and the spatial aspects of Jewish hiding places is underexplored.[7] This is how the idea emerged for my research project

on 'Hideouts: Architecture of Survival'. Funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, I was able to conduct intensive site research from 2019–21, which then concluded in 2022 with exhibitions in two contemporary art galleries in Poland: the Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw and the Trafostacja Center for Contemporary Art in Szczecin.

My exhibition focused on how to recapture the hiding places of Jews during the Holocaust. They used tree hollows, wardrobes, urban sewers, caves or empty graves to create temporary shelters. In the exhibition rooms of the Zachęta National Art Gallery, my mirror-casts of nine hiding places in Poland and present-day Ukraine were exhibited. The installation was conceived as a tribute to the daily toil of those in hiding and those who provided hiding places, their creativity, solidarity and will to live, so often overlooked in the tradition of heroic commemorations that celebrate heroes and leaders. My exhibition reflected on fundamental problems of architecture and social coexistence, such as the relationship between form and function, and the design and use of space. The hiding places were created ad hoc, out of the need of the moment, in places originally unsuitable for living. They are a testament to the architectural creativity of users who had to secure the basic needs for sustaining life – sometimes for many years – with minimal resources, without being able to radically alter the space available to them. Attics, cellars, caves, trees or even tombs were given a completely new function, the condition of which was to maintain a semblance of their previous form: to provide effective protection, the attic had to look like an ordinary attic and the tree like an ordinary tree. And at the same time, this exhibition is a celebration of my interdisciplinary research method that combines architectural design, artistic interventions, archival research and humanities/social science techniques. Thus, in Hideouts: Architecture of Survival, as an extension of my *shtetl* project, I am continuing my research into the 'present absence' of Jewish architecture, and the architectural traces of hiding – thereby further developing my interests in aesthetical forensics, distributed archives, modes of representing otherwise concealed architecture, and how to commemorate the heroism of their makers. The architectural-artistic explorations signalled and discussed in this book, such as the disruptive use of mirrors, are now used to investigate and mediate the architecture of survival.

The methodology that I used for this exhibition, and more generally my understanding of the relationship between exhibition design and cultures of commemoration, is embedded in the nomadic experiments I have described above. My thinking about material traces of the Jewish past, and ways of evoking its 'present absence', is infused with the atmosphere of former *shtetls*. On my excursions I have learned about the importance of the urban spaces and architecture, getting to understand their paradoxical status – shaped by both their current, contemporary use and their historical embedment.

Even though I felt publicly exposed and somehow vulnerable, when parking with *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* in the midst of a former shtetl, walking with *Hurdy-Gurdy*

C.1 and C.2 The opening of the exhibition 'Natalia Romik. Hideouts: Architecture of Survival' at Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw, 31 March 2022–17 July 2022, photograph by Jakub Celej, from the Archive of Zachęta.

C.1

C.2

or directing *Yad*, I was never alone. I was accompanied by my *shamash* and surrounded by people who also believe in this quest to revive Jewish memory. Thus, I learned about the importance of coalitions, and that reclaiming memory is always a collective endeavour. For this reason, the opening line of every speech I give for the Hideouts exhibition is that 'the artist never works alone' – as I strongly believe that only through work by multitudes can the cultures of commemoration be revived with any hope of success.

The coalitions initiated with the SENNA Collective and other NGOs in the process of traversing former *shtetls* continue to this day to bear fruit, such as the very new museum dedicated to the history of Jewish inhabitants of the former *shtetl* of Płońsk, just 60 kilometres north from Warsaw, which opened in 2023,[8] or the temporary exhibition '(post)JEWISH . . . Shtetl Opatów Through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt'[9] which went on view at Warsaw's POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in May 2024. Through my nomadic projects, I have learned how important is the reality 'on the ground', as this is where the daily work of reclaiming and preserving memory unfolds. In these exhibitions and museums, I try to remain faithful to the urban, material detail, trying to take history lessons from the architecture of the former *shtetls* – albeit mainly its remnants – as the medium of memory which informs the development of discourse. Architecture is my material witness, to whom I listen.

According to Susan Schuppli, a member of the Forensic Architecture collective, it is precisely the material object that is the most important – albeit often overlooked – witness to the past:

> Material witnesses operate as double agents: harboring direct evidence of events as well as providing circumstantial evidence of the interlocutory methods and epistemic frameworks whereby such matter comes to be consequential. Material witness is, in effect, a Möbius-like concept that continually twists between divulging 'evidence of the event' and exposing the 'event of evidence'.[10]

Furthermore, these architectural pieces provide not only direct evidence of past events but also shape current urban reality. Their presence cannot be easily eradicated and denied. As material heritage – broken *matzevot*, abandoned synagogues or reused *mikveh* – they can be mobilised as active protagonists around whom new narratives can be built, based not on denial but responsibility and reconciliation.

For this reason, the '(post)JEWISH' exhibition was designed using recycled wood from the former Polish-Jewish school in the town of Opatów, currently decommissioned, preserving elements which would otherwise end up in a dump. This wood was redeployed to frame the paintings of Mayer Kirshenblatt, described in the 'Walking' chapter, to create a material context for his painterly visions of Opatów, where he depicted its vibrant past as a Jewish *shtetl*. As with the other projects, we established coalitions with local activists, conducted site visits, talked with amateur collectors of local Judaica, identified and translated archival documents, and planned public

performances and programmes both in the POLIN Museum as well as 'in the field' in Opatów.

Similarly, when designing a permanent exhibition in the Memorial House of the Municipal Cultural Center in Płońsk, which is devoted to the 500-year history of the Jews of the former *shtetl* of Płońsk, we emphasised the importance of local cooperation. We actively intervened in the public space of the city. This collection of objects proved to be a huge success, with many anonymous donors gifting us with priceless items such as Talmud books. Although the exhibition was initially intended to emphasise one of the most famous figures from Płońsk – David Ben-Gurion, one of the founders and inaugural prime minister of Israel – we decided to focus on the town's general socio-economic history. As with the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, the astonishing books of remembrance, *pinkas*, as described in the 'Archives' chapter, were a core element of the exhibition, giving a voice to the town itself. Thus, just like my *Nomadic Shtetl Archive* or the Upper Silesian Jews House of Remembrance in Gliwice's Pre-Burial House, these initiatives open up the available archives, put their contents on public display, contribute to the public negotiation of troubled memory, and in doing so engage in architectural/artistic protests against the forgetting of Jewish heritage.

Notes

1. Kośmiński, 'Ustawa o IPN wchodzi w życie'.
2. Stola, 'Statement of POLIN Museum concerning a proposed amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance'.
3. Ciałowicz, *Kolbojnik*, 2016; Gostkiewicz, 'Niewidzialna pożydowska architektura'; Ostrowska, 'Natalia Romik: architektura nie czeka na zmiany, ona się po prostu rujnuje'.
4. Quoted in Murzyn-Kupisz and Purchla, eds, *Przywracanie pamięci*, 81.
5. Brossat and Klingberg, *Revolutionary Yiddishland*, 20.
6. Meishar, 'In search of meta-landscape architecture'.
7. Romik, 'Hiding Places'.
8. https://dompamieciplonsk.pl/en/strona-glowna-english.
9. https://www.polin.pl/en/postjewish-shtetl-opatow-through-eyes-mayer-kirshenblatt
10. Schuppli. *Material Witness*, 3.

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DESIGN RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE

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Architecture of Memory explores architectural disappearance, urban remembrance and functional change amid social upheaval. Using archival, architectural and artistic methods, Natalia Romik investigates the spectral architecture of former *shtetls* – predominantly Jewish towns in Central and Eastern Europe before the Second World War. After the war, these towns were repopulated by people of other nationalities, who reused former Jewish properties. Today, traces of the Jewish populations have nearly vanished from urban reality and public discourse. Romik's work seeks to discover new ways to develop abandoned *shtetl* architecture, focusing on Jewish heritage sites like synagogue ruins and ritual baths.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that merges architectural design, contemporary art and Jewish studies, Romik's experimental research addresses the complex social issues of former *shtetls* by combining theoretical discussions with artistic performances and architectural interventions. The book documents projects ranging from subtle, mirror-clad interventions – such as the *Nomadic Shtetl Archive*, *JAD*, and *Hurdy-Gurdy* – to practical renovations that transform derelict synagogues and Jewish pre-burial houses into historical museums and cultural centres. These efforts confront the 'present absence' of these towns by merging theoretical discourse with archival research, artistic performances and architectural interventions, aimed at investigating the lost Jewish communities' spectral architecture.

Natalia Romik is an architecture practitioner, designer, author, public historian and artist. She was awarded a PhD from The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL and holds a scholarship with the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, Gerda Henkel Foundation. Her work combines academic research with methods of contemporary art and architecture to explore the (post-) Jewish architecture of memory.

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