

“The Sounds of the Vanishing World”: The German Klezmer Movement as a Racial Discourse¹

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Introduction

When Joel Rubin and I were asked by the Max Kade Institute to present a paper on Jewish music in contemporary Germany, our initial reaction was: *which* Jewish music? It was Curt Sachs who originally formulated the definition that “Jewish music is the music which is made by Jews for Jews as Jews”.² In the case of contemporary Germany, it is the third item of Sachs’ definition that will provide further angles from which to look at this complex topic: are we dealing with a Jewish music as part of Jewish tradition and Jewish identity, or is this music played by Germans for Germans also played *as* Germans? In which capacity do non-Jewish performers in Germany present their Jewish music? As children and grandchildren of the perpetrators or as the victims? How does their German identity and identification or non-identification with their German heritage shape their music-making and their representation of Jewish culture and traditions? What kind of imagery is being used by them, both consciously and unconsciously, and how are these “Jewish” sounds and images received by their audiences? I have decided to concentrate in this paper on expressions of Jewish music within the public sphere. It will be shown that the vast majority of the “Jewish” music presented within this context in today’s Germany is created and disseminated by Germans for Germans — as performers, producers, distributors and reviewers.³ I argue that Jewish culture

¹ The arguments presented in this paper are drawn largely from dissertation in progress by Rita Ottens, *The Function of Yiddish Music in the Forging of German Identity after Reunification* (working title), City University, London, Department of Music.

² Introduction to the First International Congress for Jewish Music in Paris, 1957, cited in Batja Bayer, Music, in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem/New York: Keter/Macmillan, 1971-1972, vol 12: 555.

Of course, Sachs’ definition was formulated almost a half century ago, and much has changed in both scholarship about Jewish musical traditions as well as in the traditions themselves. The transformation of the field comparative musicology (*vergleichende Musikstudien*) into ethnomusicology during the 1950s, in particular, has changed our understanding of the term “Jewish music”. Ethnomusicologist Edwin Seroussi asks, for example, “where exactly are the limits between the music ‘made by Jews, for Jews, as Jews’ ... and the music ‘made by Jews, as musicians, for all listeners’” (Edwin Seroussi, Introduction, Jewish Music, in: *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie, London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., vol. 13: 24-25).

³ In contrast, the different kinds of Jewish musics that are performed and staged by Jews are largely an internal matter of the Jewish communities and have, to my knowledge, not been researched in detail. Notable exceptions to this are the Berlin community’s annual *Jüdische Kulturtage* (Jewish Culture Days) and the events presented by the community’s adult education college (*Jüdische Volkshochschule*).

My usage of the terms “Germans” and “Jews” could be seen as carrying on the Nazi ideology that Jews cannot belong to the German *Volk*. After the Shoah, however, most Jews in Germany still prefer to consider themselves as *Juden in Deutschland* (Jews in Germany) and *deutsche Staatsbürger* (German citizens) rather than Germans. Common contemporary usage also includes *jüdische Minderheit* (Jewish minority) and *jüdische Mitbürger*

events, too — even when sponsored by Jewish communities such as in Berlin — are intended primarily for a general audience and mirror non-Jewish expectations more than they present a depiction of inner-Jewish life and expressive culture.⁴ A thorough investigation of the attitudes of the Jewish community and communal organizations towards Yiddish music would be beyond the scope of this paper, and I will also only be able to briefly touch on the construction and reception of Yiddish musical culture from the perspective of the general German public. I will instead focus on tracing the development of the Yiddish music movement as it has evolved since the mid-Sixties, using exemplary visual and textual materials that I will contextualize and interpret. Parallel to this I will analyze the racial subtexts of these images and give examples of post-World War Two forms of anti-Semitism from the mid-Sixties to the present and formulate a theoretical framework as to where the roots of the present “boom” of Yiddish culture in Germany might be located.⁵

I realized that all theories and reflections on memory politics in Germany not only touch on the topic of contemporary anti-Semitism, but often can be reduced to that one question, namely “*Can Jews live in Germany today?*” And one should extend the question even further: “*Can a Jew take an active part in German life as a Jew?*”, a condition which Hannah Arendt had already postulated as a prerequisite for Jews to return to Germany in the forties.⁶ The experiences of Joel Rubin included below will deepen the insight as to what kind of role this scenario leaves for a Jewish klezmer musician and scholar in Germany, and how German concepts of Jewish ethnicity might function as future patterns for the relationship of Germans to Jews within Germany’s broader political and cultural framework.

The fall of the Berlin Wall has released bottled-up energies of enormous psycho-social pressure which evidenced themselves in outbreaks of “overt manifestations of paranoia, anxiety, and hysteria, and the intense brutality that accompanied public representations of immigrants as racial threats before and after German unification”.⁷ Discourses surrounding issues such as nation and nationalism sprung up, inseparably connected with constructions of

(Jewish fellow citizens), a prefix also applied to Turkish immigrants. *Jüdische Menschen* (Jewish humans) is another popular construction; here the fear of using the tabooed term “Jew” has led to its replacement with “human”, whereby the presumed racist noun has been defused and turned into an adjective. (See: Shulamit Volkow, Zur Definition von “deutsch” und “jüdisch”, in *Die Juden in Deutschland 1780-1918*, ed. Shulamit Volkow, Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994: 82-85; Sander L. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture*, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995: 19-26.

⁴ The majority of the Jewish community festivals have also been initiated by non-Jews. For example, the founder of Berlin’s annual *Kulturtag* was an Austrian non-Jew, who convinced the then Jewish communal leader, Heinz Galinski, in 1987 of the necessity of such an event (Raymond Wolff, personal communication, 1992).

⁵ Largely because of the case study described in this paper and numerous other, similar events, Rubin and I felt compelled to leave Germany. We have resided in the United States since July 2003, when Rubin accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at Cornell University. That is, then, the effective cut-off date for the research presented here.

⁶ “...Eines aber erscheint auch mir klar: wenn Juden in Europa bleiben sollen können, dann nicht als Deutsche oder Franzosen etc., als ob nichts geschehen sei. Mir scheint, keiner von uns kann zurückkommen (und Schreiben [und Musik?] ist doch eine Form des Zurückkommens), nur weil man nun wieder bereit scheint, Juden als Deutsche oder sonst was anzuerkennen; sondern nur, wenn wir als Juden willkommen sind.” (Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, Munich 1985: 67f., quoted in Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz: Anti-Semitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg*, Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1991: 195).

⁷ Uli Linke, *German Bodies: Race and Representation After Hitler*, New York/London: Routledge, 1999: 153.

alterity such as woman, foreigner (*Ausländer*), and Jew. This generated not only a violent pornography boom and hate crimes on foreigners and Jews,⁸ but also an unprecedented run on Jewish cultural goods. Furthermore, the political landslide snowballed processes of redefinition of Nazis and Jews as well as also new versions of German victimization, and with it revisionist interpretations of history that had already been set in motion by the end of the 1980s with the theses of the historian Ernst Nolte and the response of the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (*Historikerstreit* ; historian dispute, 1986).⁹ Not coincidentally, this occurred shortly before the time when the first Jewish culture festivals were founded (e.g. East and West Berlin, Munich). I propose that the movement centering around Yiddish music and culture, which I shall henceforth term the klezmer movement,¹⁰ has to be read as a direct product of these processes. Therefore I shall conclude my observations with a case study of anti-Semitism involving a hate pamphlet that centers around myself and my partner, ethnomusicologist and clarinetist Joel Rubin. What makes this case so important is that it contains iconic imagery and fantasies which can be traced back to the origins of anti-Judaic thinking while, at the same time, new post-unification formations of anti-Semitism appear in it. This pamphlet can serve as a demonstration piece for the particular clusters of anti-Semitic images and imagination that have materialized since the fall of the Wall and travel together with the booming “renaissance of Jewish culture” in Germany.¹¹ I shall further show that the movement’s representations of Jews and Jewish culture draw from the same sources that also determine the recurring controversies in the larger public arena of German politics, which range from the ongoing conflict over the planned Berlin *Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) to the hefty accusations and counter-accusations in the so-called *Friedman-Möllemann-Controversy*.¹² This in turn, will allow a

⁸ “2,584 violent crimes against foreign residents in Germany were recorded in 1992, of which 550 were arsons. ... During the months of September and October 1991, up to fifty such acts of attempted murder were reported every day. ... This pattern of race-based violence persists. Since 1992, arsons aimed at immigrants averaged nearly a dozen attacks each month.” (Linke, *German Bodies*: 168 include. footnotes 26 and 27).

⁹ Parallel to a perceived rise in anti-Semitism, the trope of German suffering appears to be on the increase today. See, for example, the recent conference *German Suffering/Deutsches Leid: Re(-)presentations* at Cornell University, 5-6 March, 2004 (Departments of German Studies and Comparative Literature, the Institute for German Cultural Studies, Pandaemonium Germanicum, the Society for the Humanities, the Visual Studies Program, the Humanities Initiative, the Office of the Provost, and the DAAD).

¹⁰ On the use of the term “klezmer movement”, see Joel E. Rubin, *Ambivalent Identities: The American Klezmer Movement as a Response to Rupture*, unpublished paper presented at the Society for Ethnomusicology Annual Conference, Estes Park, Colorado, 18 October, 2002.

Klezmer is a Yiddish word of Hebrew origin meaning instrumentalist. The original biblical Hebrew compound *kley-zemer* meant literally vessels of song and was a term denoting musical instruments. The Yiddish term *klezmer* (pl. *klezmorim*) referred for several centuries more specifically to the socio-professional group of ritual and celebratory instrumentalists among Yiddish-speaking Jewry in large parts of Eastern Europe, particularly in their role as wedding musicians. Since at least the 1920s, the term has been applied to the style and repertoire performed by these musicians and their descendents in North America, Israel and elsewhere. In this paper the term *klezmer* shall be used according to contemporary usage to refer to a conglomerate of instrumental and vocal genres of (mostly) Eastern European Jewish derivation which has evolved since the 1970s as a result of the rise of the American klezmer movement.

¹¹ Journalistic sources on this topic are numerous. An early article which was particularly indicative of things to come was Eva-Maria Kaes, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen. Jiddische Musik in Berlin*, in: *zitty*, No. 17, 18-31 August 1994: 44-45.

¹² The controversy centered around Jürgen Möllemann, the then Vice President of the FDP political party and Michel Friedman, the then vice president of the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland* (Central Council of the Jews in Germany) and president of the European Jewish Congress. Möllemann’s anti-Semitic attacks on Friedman were only counteracted by his FDP party colleagues after the protest in the media grew — mainly

closer look at the seemingly apolitical role of Yiddish music and culture and the drawing of parallels to the scholarly disputes concerning the anti-Semitic content of Wagner's operas which go hand in hand with the amply covered reports of Barenboim's repeated attempts to re-establish Wagner's works in Israel.¹³

The klezmer movement has developed since the mid-1980s from a few dedicated individuals in both Germanies to the involvement in united Germany of large groups of fans and practitioners in festivals, workshops, and internet activities. Under the umbrella term "klezmer",¹⁴ this movement contains many different kinds of musics, ranging from adaptations of old 78 rpm recordings to a variety of more contemporary styles including imitations of commercial soloists such as the Israeli clarinetist Giora Feidman and members of the American klezmer movement, as well as diverse interpretations of Yiddish music by Russian-Jewish immigrant musicians and singers. While the actual historical role and music of the klezmer concern but a small number of mostly professional musicians and scholars, the "klezmer" and his "wild, ecstatic, soulful" music have taken hold in the wider population as an instantiation of collective fantasy. Within the united Germany, music which is marketed and perceived as "klezmer" has become an auditory pictogram — a "sonogram" — to denote "Jew" and "Jewishness".¹⁵ On German television, for example, it is the sound of the klezmer clarinet in particular which accompanies images of Auschwitz victims as well underscoring portrayals of such different personalities as the Jewish scholars of the Frankfurt School, the psychologist Erich Fromm, the artist Chaim Soutine, the cellist Misha Maisky, and Paul Spiegel, the present leader of the German Jewish community — serving to signify them *as Jews*. This reintroduction of labeling Jews — in this case not with the Yellow Star (*Judenstern*) as during the Nazi regime,¹⁶ but with the music of the annihilated Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewry — runs parallel to the distribution of information about Yiddish music and culture, in which Jews are depicted as victims, albeit as a nomadic ("wandering") people that has kept its humour, in spite of its suffering. Surrounded by a set of iconic mannerisms such as shrugged shoulders and arms raised to the heavens, as well as

because the attacked victim Friedman defended himself. Möllemann died of an apparent suicide on 6 June, 2003. Shortly thereafter, accusations against Friedman regarding suspected drug use and pimping came to light as part of an investigation which led to his resignation from both Jewish communal leadership posts.

¹³ The Argentinian-born Israeli pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, was appointed General Music Director of the *Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin* in 1992 and, in 2000, Chief Conductor for Life of the *Staatskapelle Berlin* (<http://www.daniel-barenboim.com>). His role in recent years as a reconciler of Israelis and Palestinians, and as a Wagner apologist in Israel could be misread in the current political climate of Germany as contributing to the normalization of the relationship of Germans and Jews and therefore as relativizing the Holocaust. At the same time, it could be taken as a critique of Israel à la Möllemann — yet a critique by an Israeli must be interpreted in a different light from that by a German anti-Semite. His attempt at re-establishing Wagner's music in Israel while ignoring his anti-Semitism, and his affront to the Holocaust survivors and others in Israel who are opposed to the performance of Wagner's music *because* of his very anti-Semitism, could be misinterpreted by Germans as a confirmation that there should be a *Schlußstrich*, an end put to the discussion of the Holocaust, and that Germany should turn over a new leaf. I maintain that the rabidly anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic climate among left-wing and liberal circles, and the renewed debates about Wagner's anti-Semitism in Germany during the past decade have contributed to Barenboim's important role in post-Cold War Germany.

¹⁴ See Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, Chapter 1: "Under the klezmer umbrella".

¹⁵ Slobin transformed Mikhail Bakhtin's *chronotope* into *sonochronotope* in the context of the American klezmer movement (*Fiddler*: 73).

¹⁶ The yellow star with the black letters "Jude" on it marked the status of Jews as *Untermenschen* under the Nazis.

the usage of a picturesque language that appears (to Germans) like distorted German, their overall qualities include a resistance to “fate”, which is combated by jokes (Jewish wit) and song, and with a vivid display of emotionality (“laughing and crying”). These stereotypes and patterns have crept into the public mind in the past years via presentations of Jewish music and appear to have gone largely unnoticed by politics, academe, the church, and the media — if they have not actively employed and supported it.¹⁷ (Mis)information of the above kind is distributed mostly by non-Jews and lay people to audiences who are equally uninformed. As a result, many Jews in Germany have chosen to keep their distance from, if not to openly express their antipathy towards klezmer music itself and the wave of enthusiasm it has aroused among Germans —¹⁸ but less so against their surroundings which forcefully define and homogenize them via klezmer music contrary to their self-definitions as Jews.

Culture versus “Catastrophe”

Culture, in the words of the sociologist Detlev Claussen, was functionalized in West Germany during the Cold War era “as a kind of *Ersatz* religion ... which was supposed to bring into being a breachless taking up of seemingly unstained pre-Nazi German traditions”.¹⁹ Muffled by performances of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* (1779), concerts with the Jewish violinist Yehudi Menuhin, and occasional night club performances of Yiddish evergreens, the eliminatory anti-Semitism of the Third Reich became subject after the end of World War Two to the heaviest of taboos. Yiddish music remained within the confines of the DP-camps and the sphere of the Jewish survivors.²⁰ As the historian Frank Stern has shown, this transformation, in turn, produced a new form of

¹⁷ The German Embassy in Washington D.C. contains an entire page devoted to klezmer music in Germany! (<http://www.germany-info.org/relaunch/info/publications/infocus/JewishLife/Klezmer.htm>, downloaded on 11 June, 2004; I thank Earl Peters for this information).

See also Rita Ottens, “Ikonografie der Andersartigkeit”: Rassismus und Antisemitismus in der deutschen Populärmusik, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 4/02, July-August 2002: 54-57. [[http://www.rubin-ottens.com/roth/uploads/Beitrag_Ottens.pdf%20\(Ikonograf\)](http://www.rubin-ottens.com/roth/uploads/Beitrag_Ottens.pdf%20(Ikonograf))].

¹⁸ See, for example, “Be Silent, Klezmer, be Silent!” (“Schweig, Klezmer, schweig!”), *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 25 August 1994: 2). It is one of numerous indications in recent years that the reduction of Jews and Jewish existence to mere “klezmer” is regarded (at least among Jewish journalists) with uneasiness.

¹⁹ “Kultur wurde nach 1945 in Westdeutschland als eine Art Ersatzreligion missbraucht, die in der Ära des Kalten Krieges ein bruchloses Anknüpfen an scheinbar unbeschädigte vorkriegssozialistische deutsche Traditionen ermöglichen sollte” (Detlev Claussen, *Aspekte der Alltagsreligion: Ideologiekritik unter veränderten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen*, Hannoversche Schriften 3, ed. Detlev Claussen, Oskar Negt and Michael Werz, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 2000: 13-14).

²⁰ About Yiddish music and culture among the DPs in post-war Germany, see Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars. A World History of Yiddish Theater*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995 (orig. New York: Seth Press, 1977): 351-358.

Holocaust survivor Gita Baigelman remarked about her experiences in Cham in post-war Southern Germany, “Those years, they [the Germans] wouldn’t dare to come and mix together with Jews”, at the concerts of her husband, Henry (Chaim) Baigelman and his group, The Happy Boys, which comprised all descendents of klezmer and Yiddish theater musician families from Lodz, Poland. According to Gita, the Germans were embarrassed, afraid; “they were hiding, they were not in the open” (Interview with Henry and Gita Baigelman, conducted by Joel Rubin at their home in Forest Hills, New York, 12 November, 2000).

See also the experiences in post-war Poland related in Molly Picon’s *Molly! An Autobiography*, with Jean Bergantini Grillo, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980.

anti-Semitism: philo-Semitism, the demonstrative love of all things Jewish.²¹ In the following, I will speak of philo-Semitism as an effect of complex socio-political motives which has anti-Semitism as its necessary precondition — and *not* of philo-Semitism as the result of a simple love of Jews — at the same time maintaining that these two attitudes cannot be distinguished clearly from one another in a country with such a deep-seated history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism. Thus, it can be understood that the period immediately following *Stunde Null* did not represent — as official German politics propagate — the *end* of anti-Semitism, but the covering over of old stereotypes with new opportune images, which again did not allow for a dialogue and confrontation with the Other. As a result, anti-Semitism today is usually associated with right-wing extremism and can therefore be relegated to groups of neo-Nazis which are prone to desecrating Jewish cemeteries and attacking foreigners — a mechanism that helps remove it from the center of German society to its very margins.²²

Having grown up after World War Two some 20 kilometers from Bergen-Belsen, one of the most mysterious places I remember from my childhood was the so-called “*Konzertlager*”: obviously a gruesome place, I sensed from the lowered voices of the adults. But how could a *Konzertlager* be at all frightening, if those lucky inmates of what I imagined a summer camp of sorts were subjected to concerts and music? Later I learned that this musical locus was in reality the term for those places where Germans had turned Jews into corpses.²³

How Jewish music was used in actions of humiliation and slaughter by the Nazis is shown by the description of a round-up in the Polish town of Dubienka. Such actions typically concentrated on the “*Ostjuden*”,²⁴ the Eastern European Jews — especially religious men in traditional garb and, moreover, men whose physiognomy resembled the anti-Semitic images like the “*Eternal Jew*” (see below) and the caricatures found in *Der Stürmer* and similar Nazi publications. In the town of Dubienka, “they were forced to sing religious melodies and prayers and to lift their hands to the heavens in supplication. Then the German officers went over to them, poured petroleum and gasoline on them, and set them on fire”.²⁵ The connection between the usage of music and, especially, the sacred music of their victims by the perpetrators before burning or gassing them indicates the ritualistic-liturgical nature of a purge: through the process the Germans became “pure” again. Dominick LaCapra speaks in this context of “an unspeakable rite of passage involving quasi-sacrifice, victimization, and

²¹ See Stern, *Im Anfang*.

²² See also Jens Schneider, *Deutsch sein. Das Eigene, das Fremde und die Vergangenheit im Selbstbild des vereinten Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2001: 259.

²³ *Konzertlager* is a pun on the German *Konzentrationslager*, concentration camp.

²⁴ See: Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918-1933*, Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag Hamburg, 1986: 11-16; Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers. East European Jews in Imperial Germany*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991: 3-4, 6.

²⁵ “Man zwang sie, religiöse und Betlieder zu singen und betend die Hände gen Himmel zu heben. Dann gingen deutsche Offiziere auf sie zu, übergossen sie mit Petroleum und Benzin und zündeten sie an” (Gideon Hausner, *Die Vernichtung der Juden: Das größte Verbrechen der Geschichte*, second edition, Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1979: 55ff., cited in Harald Focke and Uwe Reimer, *Alltag der Entrechteten: Wie die Nazis mit ihren Gegnern umgingen*, “*Alltag unterm Hakenkreuz*” vol. 2, Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980: 240).

See also: Chone Shmeruk, *Mayufes: A Window on Polish-Jewish Relations*, *Polin* X, 1997: 273-286, and Bret Werb, *Majufes: A Vestige of Jewish Traditional Song in Polish Popular Entertainments*, *Polish Music Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Summer 2003 [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issue/6.1.03/Werb.html]

regeneration through violence”.²⁶ I have often asked myself how “a violent ejection of the decomposing alien element”,²⁷ like the extraction of hapless Sixtus Beckmesser from the midst of a German community, would be staged by Wagner, had he lived through the Nineties in Germany. Scenes that indicate the acting out of a *rite de passage* erupted again in the high number of arson attacks and barbaric scenes in places such as the Northern German town of Hoyerswerda where, in 1991, “neo-Nazi youths hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails at buildings housing foreign workers and asylum-seekers. A large crowd stood by and cheered — particularly when a bus convoy transporting foreigners out of the city was attacked”.²⁸

Today, after more than a decade of research on Yiddish music in Germany, I am not surprised that the German *Volksmund* had chosen a musical term as a euphemism for these death factories. I maintain that it is no coincidence that it is a Jewish musician (Feidman) who has become the main protagonist of a process which began with the staging of Jewish culture immediately after the opening of the Berlin Wall and that has by now led to the assumption of “new Jewish life in Germany”, the “blossoming of Jewish culture”, and Berlin as the “klezmer capital of the world”. According to Thomas Mann, who, after all, knew more about Germanness and music than any other intellectual of the 20th century, it was music which contained the “best” that German culture has to offer, and it was music which made Germany susceptible to the sort of political and moral regression that he, Mann, along with the entire civilized world, had been witnessing in horror and disbelief. Hans Rudolf Vietgen has pointed out that “(t)he special, possibly crucial role that ‘the most German of the arts’ [Mann] has played in German history is still not as widely acknowledged as it ought to be”.²⁹ And the historian Celia Applegate ascribes to the role of music in the spread of German national feeling in the 19th century a central importance; according to her music is “quite possibly of more importance than German literature”.³⁰

After the unification, music — “demonic territory”, as Thomas Mann termed it —³¹ has served also for a reversed transformation: here the corpses are being performed back to life with the sounds of Yiddish music. Having become a part of the official memory politics in recent years, “the Klezmer” has become the master of ceremonies. He, historically a member of a caste-like group of professional, mostly local musicians, is transformed into an itinerant

²⁶ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1998: 29.

²⁷ “Ob der Verfall unsrer Kultur durch eine gewaltsame Auswerfung des zersetzenden fremden Elementes aufgehalten werden könne, vermag ich nicht zu beurteilen, weil hierzu Kräfte gehören müßten, deren Vorhandensein mir unbekannt ist.” Richard Wagner, *Das Judentum in der Musik*, quoted in Jens Malte Fischer, *Richard Wagners “Das Judentum in der Musik”. Eine kritische Dokumentation als Beitrag zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus*. Frankfurt/Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 2000: 108.

²⁸ Frank Thaler, Germany’s Right-Wing Revival: Bashers, *The New Republic* (9 December, 1991): 14, cited in Linke, *German Bodies*: 172.

²⁹ Thomas Mann, *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of “Doktor Faustus”*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, New York: Knopf, 1961: 123, cited in Hans Rudolf Vietgen, National and Universal, in: *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002: 156.

³⁰ Celia Applegate, “What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation,” *German Studies Review* 15 (winter 1992):21-32, here 24.

³¹ Thomas Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen: Essays 1938-1945 (Essays Band 5)*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1996: 265.

hero, a new outlaw who overcomes all cultural boundaries, a glorified vagabond wandering the devastated Jewish landscape of a united Germany. The traditional anti-Semitic stereotype of the “Wandering Jew” — who has to wander because he killed Christ — is here transformed into a positive image of a politically-correct messenger of the multi-cultural society that Germans so desire and, at the same time, fear.³² Klezmer performances also stand for “new Jewish life in Germany”, but this Jewish life appears to enjoy a very ambiguous status: one of the evening programs at the 2001 *Tage der Jüdischen Kultur* (Jewish Culture Days) in Chemnitz was announced, for example, as an “enjoyable dialog with a very lively corpse”.³³

The German klezmer discourse appears on its surface to be a naive, well-meaning occupation with Jewish culture, with the emphasis being on the preservation of a “lost” tradition, a “restoration” of Jewish life in Germany. The following event illustrates how these genuine endeavors are underlined by a subtext which displays a mixture of philo- and anti-Semitic meanings. The leaflet *Ostjuden unter uns* was used to advertise a Berlin event in commemoration of the fifty-third anniversary of pogrom night, the so-called *Reichskristallnacht*, on 9 November, 1991 — a date that commemorated the beginning of Germany’s war against European Jewry and, coincidentally, the second anniversary of the fall of the Wall.

³² For the musician as a figure who transgresses boundaries (*Grenzüberschreiter*), see Ivan Puni’s *Synthetischer Musiker*, painted in 1921 in Berlin, in: *Berlin-Moskau/Moskau-Berlin 1900-1950*, Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1995: 250, and in *Ivan Puni. Synthetischer Musiker. Mit Beiträgen von Eberhard Roters, Hubertus Gäßner und Schriften zur Kunst (1915-1923) von Iwan Puni*, Berlin: Berlinische Galerie. Museumspädagogischer Dienst, 1992.

See also George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1965.

³³ Announcing the piece *Das muß ein Stück vom Himmel sein oder Die dreizehn Tode des Werner Richard Heymann*, the text reads: “Keine Museologie, sondern ein vergnüglicher Dialog mit einem sehr lebendigen Toten” (<http://www.tdjk.de/>, downloaded on 24.03.2001).



Image 1: "The community of the Auen Church in the Wilmersdorf neighborhood of Berlin in cooperation with the Evangelical Educational Works invites you to a presentation commemorating the 9th of November: Eastern Jews Among Us, with a lecture by Dr. Witalij Wilenchik, Berlin, as well as songs, stories and music of the Eastern European Jews, performed by Ilona Schlott, Leipzig, and her group".

Together with its ominous sounding title, the leaflet displays the ambivalence of German attitudes towards Jews: it was meant to advertise good will and the continuity of Jewish life in Germany, but plays on traditional anti-Semitic iconography. The imagery of "*Ostjuden unter uns*" exhibits more continuities than discontinuities with pre-war anti-Semitism and makes full use of a set of traditional stereotypes from sexual vileness and lurking slyness to a physical iconography emphasizing the "Oriental" (= barbaric) features of the Jewish male. This places it in a direct line with the pre-war image of "*Der Ewige Jude*" (Image 2, below). The graphics are reminiscent of *Der Stürmer*, and the yellow and black color schema of the flyer evokes the image of the *Judenstern*. In a way this leaflet, as well as the programming and carrying out of the actual event, gives a good idea of the old images that were ushered in by the psycho-social landslide after the fall of the Wall and entered into the public discourse — particularly since unification in October, 1990.³⁴

The introduction of the stage and the dancing woman in *Ostjuden unter uns* (which presupposes, naturally, the sound of music) stands for the nationwide staging of Jewishness which began in the late 1980s. Thus, the anti-Semitic discourse could be seen as having

³⁴ See also Klaus Theweleit, *Das Land, das Ausland heißt: Essays, Reden, Interviews zu Politik und Kunst*, Munich: dtv, 1995: 22-23.

shifted and been elevated onto the stage, and the celebration of the performance — in this picture it is the Jew who rubs his hands or applauds — could stand for the wish of Germans to be recognized and rewarded by the community of Jews for the revival and the staging of their culture and, in a broader sense, symbolize the replacement of remembrance, atonement and historical thinking with strategies of denial and constructions of the “Other”. Moreover, the man’s furtive, cunning lewdness and his rubbing hands (or at least the allusion thereto) display sexual undertones: it suggests that the dancing female might be his next prey.

Sander Gilman notes that “The image of the evil, hidden language of the Jews as Yiddish dominates the language of the Jew portrayed on the German popular stage in the late sixteenth century”, maintaining that “It was on the stage that the hidden language ... could be exposed, and the danger inherent in it mitigated”.³⁵ As part of the musical performance accompanying the program *Ostjuden unter uns*, the Yiddish language and music were now being used by a non-Jewish singer not to ridicule and to dehumanize the Eastern European Jew — as had earlier been the tradition in Germany — but purportedly to introduce the German audience to the Yiddish way of life and its music and culture, presupposing it was something that was already dead. The group of musicians from Leipzig, including the singer, clearly had never had any direct contact with Yiddish music or Yiddish speakers, although they were introduced to the audience by one of the organizers as “tradition bearers” (*Tradenten*) of Yiddish musical culture. The instrumentalists lacked the typical stylistic features, and the singer did not possess any knowledge of either the language or the traditional vocal rendition customary among Yiddish-speaking women. Although recordings and information were already readily available at that time, even to citizens of the former GDR, the group contented itself with presenting its uninformed musical performance and Jewish jokes in exaggerated pseudo-Yiddish that would have been called “*mauscheln*” before World War Two.³⁶ I attended the event in the Auen Church that night, and I found the great self-confidence displayed by the group as well as the tremendous applause from the audience disturbing. Before the musical performance there had been an unplanned for interruption at the commemoration event: one of the participants in the introductory roundtable discussion, the (Jewish?) historian Witalij Wilenchik, had complained openly about the anti-Semitic leaflet. The ensuing silence and embarrassment of the packed auditorium and the participants on stage were quickly smothered with music, Yiddish music.

By the early 1990s I had already begun to notice the tension and aggravation, and also the extreme reactions among klezmer audiences, but I could not make sense of it at that time. Noticeable to me were above all stereotypical behavioral patterns and recurring semantic structures that seemed to be indications of deep-rooted psychical disturbances which I attributed to the individual’s exposure to Jews and Jewish music.³⁷ Moreover, I began to experience that asking questions or even the slightest criticism on my part of a musical rendition of Yiddish music (as created by members of the German klezmer movement) was

³⁵ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986: 76.

³⁶ See Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Identität und Geschlecht*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1994: 195. [*Freud, Race, and Gender*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993]

³⁷ At a family gathering after my marriage, two of my uncles reacted to my husband’s presence like in trance: uttering seemingly incoherent sentences, interspersed with laughing. It was as if their stiffened bodies and their tied tongues were in great need to express something, but it could only be acted out by them in this distorted way. Both of them had been to Russia with Hitler’s *Wehrmacht*.

countered with the assumption that I was “forbidding” (*verbieten*) Germans from performing Jewish music; sometimes it has been angrily counteracted by my counterparts’ stepping into the victims’ shoes and claiming “reverse anti-Semitism”. In this context, the usage of classificatory terminology such as “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” was seen as offensive by many non-Jewish German performers. Such accusations, which have often been accompanied by the assumption that I would “own” the truth, were to form the core questions of my later research.³⁸ It was not so much a question of *what* was said, but the *uniformity* of it which aroused my interest: I would often hear essentially the same reaction — be it from a sales lady at a record store or from a university professor — almost always accompanied by a what seemed to me out-of-place aggravation and also verbal aggression towards me. It also struck me that reviews, program notes, and articles about Jewish and Yiddish music and culture also revealed equally recurring semantic patterns, icons, and attitudes. In particular the stilted artificiality of the views regarding the person of Giora Feidman and his music attracted my attention: the strong atmosphere of irrationality with which his music was received by even German intellectuals and artists, appeared to indicate their readiness to part from rational and theoretical tools when confronted with the persona and the performance of a Jewish musician.³⁹ It was my personal experiences and my observation of such stereotypical reactions which brought me to question my perceptions and to feel the need to investigate the underlying structures of such reactions.⁴⁰

I have experienced the extremes of philo- and anti-Semitism over the past fourteen years in both my professional and my private life. Being the non-Jewish, German part of a so-called mixed marriage, and in the early days after the unification involved in the field of Yiddish music as an activist, my close proximity to Jews and Jewish culture made me a projection screen for Germans’ fantasies of Jews. That my husband, Joel Rubin, was not only born Jewish, of Eastern European and German descent, but presented himself to the outside world in his capacity *as a Jew* — i.e. as a representative of a Eastern European musical tradition, a klezmer musician — enhanced not only his ambiguous societal status in Germany as a foreigner and a Jew, but also mine as a woman: I, too, became an *Ausländer*, a foreigner in Germany. This is exemplified by the reaction of a long-time friend who remarked, on my husband’s proposal to have a get-together: “Oh yes, I really do have to invite my foreign acquaintances again!”⁴¹ Sometimes people would approach me as if under hypnosis, communicating seemingly incoherent matters, and uttering uncontrolled garbled messages that seemed to come from a different person and time: stories of German grandparents who allegedly spoke Yiddish at home; one woman would call me to tell me about the braids of hair in her mother’s drawer, Jewish hair; after a concert, one person handed me a list which contained names of known Jews of the former GDR whose lives were supposedly in danger

³⁸ At one lecture, for example, the violinist of the non-Jewish trio “*Oyftref*” from Hannover asked me in a seemingly agitated tone whether I believed that I owned “the only truth”.

³⁹ About the comparable cult around Ignaz Bubis (1927-1999), the deceased leader of the Jewish community in Germany, see also Schneider, *Deutsch sein*: 255.

⁴⁰ Investigating klezmer music in the light of anti-Semitism is a topic that is at the same time a highly charged taboo in German society and a sensitive issue in my personal life. Here I draw inspiration from Ellen Koskoff’s *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), which deals with the issues of fieldwork at home and self-reflexive ethnography (see especially the introduction).

⁴¹ “*Oh ja, ich muß mal wieder meine ausländischen Bekannten einladen!*”

Until 1953, German women lost their German citizenship automatically when they married a foreign citizen. (Schneider, *Deutsch sein*: 86).

through some unnamed conspiracy. At that time, I already sensed that these people, like myself most of them from the first and second postwar generations, suffered from something like a post-traumatic guilt syndrome and that their (like my) interest in Jewish history was definitively shaped by the “leaden years” of post-war Germany.⁴²

Among the many personal experiences, one struck me as especially symptomatic of the attitudes of many Germans towards Jews: at one family gathering I learnt that one of my uncles had felt deeply insulted by my husband some years ago and did not want him to come to his house. He was still raging with anger and even went so far as speaking of getting *Satisfaktion* for not having been greeted in the proper way during a visit.⁴³ Apparently my uncle had held out his hand on that occasion and had assumed my husband’s not shaking it to have been an act of hostility. The incident becomes clearer when one knows that he had been a young soldier in the German army (*Wehrmacht*) in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ On encountering a Jew, he projected all his ambivalent feelings onto my husband and, in the course of time, construed him as the perpetrator who refused the — after all, well-meant — handshake (of reconciliation?!). My uncle had “become” the victim of a Jew. It turned out that my husband had restricted the greeting ceremony to a casual hands-off hello because he was recovering from a serious hand injury. It fits into the plot that the entire family except for us had already known about this incident. I recognized this pattern again during a televised discussion at the peak of the Friedman- Möllemann controversy in the summer of 2002. Guido Westerwelle, the leader of the Free Democratic Party, whose deputy chairman Möllemann had publicly attacked Friedman with anti-Semitic slurs, repeatedly emphasized during the discussion that it was he who was offering Friedman the possibility for a dialogue. But Friedman was allegedly refusing to move towards a compromise on the issue with Westerwelle, even though he, Westerwelle, was stretching his hands out towards Friedman, attempting to build bridges. The patronizing attitude of Westerwelle insinuates that Friedman, and not Möllemann, was the delinquent who had attacked Westerwelle using anti-Semitic stereotypes. At the beginning of the controversy, Westerwelle had attempted to cover up or belittle Möllemann’s behavior, as had the majority of the FDP leadership.⁴⁵ Both incidents indicate what Alan Dundes has termed “projective inversion”,⁴⁶ “a psychological process in which A accuses B of carrying out an action which A really wishes to carry out

⁴² After making these observations, I learned of the illness called PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). See Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages*, Munich/Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999: 19; Cathy Caruth, Introduction, *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Spring 1991; *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Trauma*, ed. Cathy Caruth, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991: 1-12.

⁴³ The choice of a term that was traditionally used in connection with the custom of a duel is no coincidence, for the agitation which accompanied the accusations denoted that it was indeed a matter of life and death.

⁴⁴ See also footnote 37.

⁴⁵ See also the appeal of Ernst Mayer of the FDP from 1951: “The Free Democratic Party ... appeals to the Jewish People whose members [sic] were the targets of particular cruelty, not to impede reconciliation by insisting on collective damnation” (“*Die Freie Demokratische Partei ... appelliert an das jüdische Volk, dessen Glieder das Ziel besonderer Grausamkeit waren, die Versöhnung nicht dadurch zu erschweren, daß es seinerseits an der Kollektivverdamnis festhält*”; cited in Y. Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung*, Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag: 159).

⁴⁶ Alan Dundes, Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics, *Modern Language Notes* 91: 1500-1533.

him or herself”.⁴⁷ Today’s anti-Semitism has taken on the face of reversal: the member belonging to the group of former victims becomes the evil perpetrator, and the self-stylization as the victim purifies even the descendants of the Nazi-generation.

The “Eternal Jew” and the “Klezmer”: Continuities and Discontinuities



Image 2: Postcard announcing the anti-Semitic exhibition *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), Munich, November 1937.

In this quintessential depiction of “the Jew” as a Nazi-construction, the “Eternal Jew” appears as a remnant of times long passed. His Asian face with its heavy eyelids, big nose and thick lips is rounded off by unkempt hair and a spiky beard. In one hand he is holding coins which he slyly treasures with his languid expression.⁴⁸ The other hand holds a whip in its tight grip, a symbol for the cruelty and lust for power with which he will finally subjugate the entire world. The knots tied into the strands of the whip might also symbolize the power of memory and the generational chain symbolized by the *tzitzit* (ritual fringes) of the orthodox Jew,⁴⁹ both of which had been turned by Nazi ideologues into dangerous tools of the Jews

⁴⁷ See also Dundes, *The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion*, in: *The Blood Libel legend. A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991: 336-376.

⁴⁸ Dundes has shown that money stands for feces. This anti-Jewish icon equates Jews with dirt-eaters and dates back as far as Martin Luther. See, for example, his tractate *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, 1543, quoted in Alan Dundes, *Sie mich auch. Das Hinter-Gründige in der deutschen Psyche*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987:107. [original edition: *Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder: A Portrait of German Culture through Folklore*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984].

⁴⁹ I thank my cousin, the Torah scribe and Rabbi Dr. Eric Ray, for his paper on the *tzitzit*.

against the Germans.

But where did anti-Semitic images like the “Eternal Jew” go after the end of World War Two, when the British Allied Forces confronted the population of the town of Bergen with the fate of the real Jews in the nearby concentration camp? The period immediately following capitulation was marked by an urge to look away instead of facing the Nazi legacy with guilt and shame. By positing the end of the war as the *Stunde Null*, the moment of absolute beginning, German society displayed a blindness to the subterranean continuities in its recent history with its Nazi past: in the mid-to late 1940s, surviving Eastern European Jews in Germany were seen as the embodiment of anti-Semitic stereotypes, and often were refused help from German authorities and regarded as unwanted aliens and criminals. At the same time, however, their songs were already being played in German night clubs: in her memoirs, the writer Hilde Spiel remarks that in the Vienna and Berlin of the late 1940s, “one hears the song with the Yiddish text “*bay mir bistu sheyn*” in the night-clubs, which for me is embarrassing because of its very tokenness”.⁵⁰ Who could have thought in the years following World War Two that Yiddish songs such as “*Bay mir bistu sheyn*” would be received today as “klezmer” and presented on large stages during state-sponsored Yiddish culture and klezmer festivals throughout Germany? It seems that a voice like Hilde Spiel, who so lucidly expressed the token function of Yiddish music shortly after the *Stunde Null*, might be accused of forbidding Germans to enjoy Yiddish music and have a hard time to get work in post-unification Germany with its own “*Stunde Null*” (i.e. 3 October, 1990) and its own way of freeing itself from the burdens of its history: the “*Tabubruch*”, the breaking of the post-war taboo against being openly anti-Semitic. I experienced a noteworthy expression of *Tabubruch* on the 9th of November during the early 1990s on a Berlin subway train when a neo-Nazi began provoking the other passengers with anti-Jewish slogans. As the only one in the full train who responded to his provocations, we came into a conversation, during which he boasted that he had a tattoo of “the Jew” on his arm. Finally, after a discussion lasting almost two hours — which had in the meantime shifted to the drafty square in front of the *Gedächtniskirche* on Berlin’s main thoroughfare, *Kurfürstendamm* — the man took off his sweater, showing his muscular upper arm: there he was, the “Eternal Jew”, engraved on the skin of a young 27 year-old German worker from the former GDR. To my questions as to why he had chosen this caricature, he became secretive and only replied because he was “happy” (“*weil ich mich freue*”) and smiled.

“When the ‘Yids’ Laugh”: Defused Jews

The Eichmann trials in Jerusalem in 1960-61 did not give rise to large public discussions in Germany,⁵¹ but it was obvious “that the damaged collective narcissism is already lurking about waiting to be repaired, and reaches out for anything that at first consciously brings the past into line with the narcissistic wishes, but also possibly shapes reality in such a way that

⁵⁰ “*Auch hier hört man in den Nachtlökalen, wie in Berlin, das mir peinliche, weil Alibi mit dem jiddischen Text ‘Bei mir bist du scheen’*” (Hilde Spiel, *Welche Welt ist meine Welt? Erinnerungen 1946-89*, Munich/Leipzig: List, 1990: 55).

⁵¹ Reinhard Kühnl, *Das Dritte Reich in der Presse der Bundesrepublik: Kritik eines Geschichtsbildes*, Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966/1992.

the particular damage will be made undone”, as Adorno wrote in the mid-Sixties.⁵² It was the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt during the years 1963-65 and the student protests against the refusal of the German government to recognize the state of Israel that seem to have been responsible for the springing up of an initial revival of Jewish stereotypes on the territory of popular music and culture. The philo-Semitic glorification of the *sabra* (native-born Israeli) by the students and intellectuals — as shown in the sudden popularity of Israeli singers such as Avi and Esther Ofarim — and the 1963 acoustic “shtetl- and Ghetto-scape” with dancing rabbis and laughing Hasidim by the German folksinger Peter Rohland were two attempts “to reach out to the ‘Other’ in order to get to the self”, as ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman has termed this process.⁵³ They can be seen as having intended to break the leaden silence of the post-war years and come to terms with the unspoken terrors of the past. The specter representing the *Zivilisationsbruch* (breach of civilization, i.e. the Holocaust) — shrouded in Yiddish music and Jewish jokes — reappears as entertainment on the German stage.⁵⁴ The recording *Wenn die Jidden lachen* by the Polish-Jewish singer Belina and the German entertainer Jens Brenke contains all of the components and ambiguities of the public post-war philo-Semitism which often took place above “a deeper layer of opinions and attitudes which presented a conglomeration of traditional and new anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic elements”.⁵⁵

⁵² “... daß der beschädigte kollektive Narzißmus darauf lauert, repariert zu werden, und nach allem greift, was zunächst im Bewußtsein die Vergangenheit in Übereinstimmung mit den narzißtischen Wünschen bringt, dann aber womöglich auch noch die Realität so modelt, daß jene Schädigung ungeschehen gemacht wird” (Quoted in Detlev Claussen, *Nach Auschwitz: Ein Essay über die Aktualität Adornos*, in: Dan Diner, *Zivilisationsbruch: Denken nach Auschwitz*, Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988: 60).

⁵³ See, for example, the Ofarims’ recordings “*Noch einen Tanz*” (1966), “*Morning of My Life*” (1967) and “*Cinderella Rockefeller*” (1968); Peter Rohland, *Un as der Rebbe singt: Jiddische Lieder*, Berlin: Pool Verlag, n.d.

Bohlman notes that Jewish music has achieved a symbolic presence, which at one and the same time recuperates the past and revitalizes the present. He writes, “the very concept of ‘Europe’ has depended on a Jewish presence and the dialectic between the self and Other” and speculates about the changes of this interaction in the so-called “New Europe”. His thesis is, “the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures in Europe is only possible in the form of symbols on the surface of society. Music, because of the complex and abstract nature of its signification, is one of the most sweeping of the new forms of symbolic interaction between Europe and its Jewish Other” (Philip V. Bohlman, *Of Hazzanim and Klezmerim. Postmodernizing European Jewry. [Sketches toward a final section of Jewish music and Modernity: The Crisis of the Other within European Culture]*. Unpublished paper given at the Divinity School, The University of Chicago, July 1992).

⁵⁴ Diner, *Zivilisationsbruch*.

⁵⁵ Belina, Jens Brenke and W. Keller, *Wenn die Jidden lachen. Life aus der Jenseits-Bar in Hannover. Jiddische Witze mit Gesang und Orchester*, Odeon EMI LP, n.d.

“... erfolgen oftmals über einer tieferen Schicht von Meinungen und Einstellungen, die ein Konglomerat von traditionellen und neuen anti-jüdischen oder anti-Semitischen Elementen darstellen” (Stern, *Im Anfang*: 330).



Image 3: *Wenn die Jidden Lachen*. LP Cover.

According to a centuries-old tradition in Germany, male Jews on the German stage were depicted as old and decrepit, as the Germanist Marc A. Weiner has shown in his analyses of Wagner's supposedly Jewish characters.⁵⁶ Following this tradition, it is again the old Jew whose image is chosen here for the imagery on the record cover, standing in a symbolic way for what Christians have termed the "Old Testament": an era of antiquity in the history of mankind — or "mankind turned sour", according to the "völkisch" ideologue Julius Langbehn —⁵⁷ in contrast to the new beginning marked by their "New Testament". This explains why the image on the cover of *Wenn die Jidden lachen* shows two elderly "people of the book", recognizable as Jews by their looks and garments. Here the gruesome "Eternal Jew" of the 1937 image — with his coins and whip — has become jovial. The conspiratory, secretive posture of "the Jews", hiding behind a book, has been defused by visible crow's feet around their eyes. Before World War Two this very position would have been adorned with appropriately sinister imagery in order to show two Jews scheming to destroy the German people. Not so these Jews of the early sixties: they seem to be having *fun*, telling each other jokes in Yiddish, as the cover title suggests. Their Talmud has been reduced to a thin leaflet which seems to assign them to their new role in Germany as jovial relics of the catastrophes of their own history, laughing away together with their German audiences.

"Klezmer" as a German Discourse

As a socio-professional group, klezmerim occupied a clearly defined and vital place within the traditional Eastern European Jewish communal hierarchy. Their music was characterized by a special repertoire for Jewish life-cycle celebrations and holidays which was based on

⁵⁶ Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Texts and Contexts Series), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

⁵⁷ "ein Stück Menschheit, das sauer geworden ist" (Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher: Von einem Deutschen*, Leipzig 1909, 206, 351, cited by Peter Berghoff, "Der Jude" als Todesmetapher, in: *Die Konstruktion der Nation gegen die Juden*, ed. Peter Alter, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, Peter Berghoff, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1999: 169.

archaic structures and performed in a particularly intense, emotional manner.⁵⁸ The melodies, repertoire and style of the European klezmerim had been changing (and slowly disappearing) with the social changes in Eastern Europe and the waves of immigration beginning in the late 19th century. The destruction of traditional Jewish life during the wave of pogroms, the Russian revolution and ensuing Civil War, World War One, and the early Stalinist period, had left little of the klezmerim and their musical world. The German army wiped out most of the remaining klezmerim in the Soviet Union, most of whom were elderly musicians by the time of the invasion in June 1941. As documented by the musical folklorist Moshe Beregovski and others, their children and grandchildren had largely turned to classical music since the opening of the Russian conservatories during the last quarter of the 19th century, as well as to entertainment music with the rise of salon and jazz orchestras in the decades preceding World War Two.⁵⁹

Despite these gradual, albeit traumatic, changes, it has been generally assumed in Germany that klezmer music was destroyed by the Germans and, therefore *must* have existed, even flourished in Germany before the Nazi regime — a seemingly logical conclusion.⁶⁰ Here cultural and socio-political differences between German and the Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews are not taken into account. An example for the homogenization of these two distinct Jewish cultures and historical revisionism is the film *Die Comedian Harmonists* (1998). In it, director Josef Vilsmayer conflates the two cultures, reinventing klezmer music as a part of the “Golden Twenties” in Berlin — despite the fact that the music of the klezmerim would have been heard only in areas such as Berlin’s Scheunenviertel where poor, largely orthodox immigrants from Russia and Poland were living in crowded quarters.⁶¹ The film’s wedding scene with klezmer-like music emphasizes the stereotypes of the music of the Jews as being wild and exotic. Moreover, with four cemetery scenes during which the two Jewish members of the Comedian Harmonists hold monologs at their ancestors’ graves, the film reaffirms the notion of Jews as returning ghosts, inhabitants of another world. This intimacy with the dead is ostentatiously underscored by the whispering “klezmer” clarinet of Feidman, thereby creating an aesthetic appeal to German audiences that is derived from the trivialization of the music and, simultaneously, evocations of death. Both parameters determine the status of the real existent Jew in Germany today, for a Jewish presence is only tolerated if it allows itself to be fitted into this framework of stereotypes.⁶²

Sounds and icons of Eastern European klezmer music and traditions had already surfaced in the 1970s, emanating from the first American Klezmer bands which had formed on the West

⁵⁸ Among Hasidim today, the term klezmerim continues to be used for the musicians who perform this function within the traditional orthodox Jewish context (Yaacov Mazor and Edwin Seroussi, Towards a Hasidic Lexicon of Music, *Orbis Musicae* 10, 1990-1991:127-128). See also Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, *Klezmer-Musik*, Kassel/Munich: Bärenreiter/dtv, 1999; Joel Rubin, *Rumenishe shtiklekh: Klezmer music among the Hasidim in contemporary Israel*, *Judaism* (Issue no. 185, vol. 47, no. 1, Winter 1998):12-23.

⁵⁹ In Poland, klezmerim were still active in hasidic courts and traditional communities up until 1939, but there, too, descendants of klezmer families such as the pianist Wladislaw Szpilman had already left traditional Jewish life and turned to classical and popular music.

⁶⁰ Joel Rubin has observed a similar tendency in the myths formulated by participants in the American klezmer movement (*Ambivalent Identities*).

⁶¹ See, for example, Joseph Roth’s description in *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1985: 51-52.

⁶² See also Saul Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod: Der Widerschein des Nazismus*, Munich: dtv, 1986: 26.

and East Coasts.⁶³ It is important to understand that the primary “texts” of the revival did not stem from Eastern Europe, but were rather based on the mediated mass culture of the immigrant generation, in particular the commercial Yiddish-language and klezmer recordings made in New York from approximately 1905-1940 — a period which coincided with the young musicians’ grandparents’ (and, for some, parents’) rebirth as Americans. Since the beginning, the revival generation has been reading these icons of their own cultural memory as founding texts to their secular Jewish identity as Americans of Eastern European Jewish descent within a globalized world. Today, evenings with klezmer and Yiddish music and showings of Yiddish films from the Thirties have become a medium of identity building within segments of secular Jewry in the United States, creating sites of memory which were still closed to them not long ago, due to the silence of their parents and grandparents about their cultural heritage.⁶⁴ Beginning outside of Jewish communal structures in the counterculture of the 1970s, the klezmer movement has become since the late 1980s increasingly centrist in its position, serving as an important unifying factor in American Jewish communal life and in the creation of a new American Jewish identity.⁶⁵

Contrary to the functioning of the American klezmer movement within the Jewish communities in the US, the film *Die Comedian Harmonists* illustrates how klezmer in Germany is used to revise history in many ways, from personal family memory to national history — not to forget the history of klezmer music and Jewish history itself.⁶⁶ In particular, a mighty need to reconnect to an allegedly blossoming “Jewish” culture in the Twenties becomes visible, as if the Holocaust were just an accident of history. Is it therefore surprising when popular mythology insists that Berlin’s *Kurfürstendamm* was teeming with klezmer melodies in the Twenties and that the music Jews were playing in the concentration camps was klezmer music?⁶⁷ This stance alleviates the fact that at the beginning of this glorified decade stood the assassination of the Jewish communists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in 1919, followed by the Kapp Putsch of 1920, the assassination of the Jewish Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau in 1922, and the pogroms in the Scheunenviertel in 1923 — where today concerts of klezmer music regularly take place “*am historischen Ort*”, in their “historical setting”.⁶⁸ Sonja Margolina has written of a “naive and romantic cultural

⁶³ See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Sounds of Sensibility*, *Judaism*, Issue no. 185, vol. 47, no. 1, winter 1998: 49-78; Rubin, *Ambivalent Identities*; Slobin, *Fiddler*; Mark Slobin, ed., *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002.

⁶⁴ See Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire*, in: *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, cited in Slobin, *Fiddler*.

On the shift in orientation among American Jewry from “the *shtetl*” to “the Lower East Side” as the “area of first settlement”, see Hasia Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000: 27.

⁶⁵ See Rubin, *Ambivalent Identities*.

⁶⁶ See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies, Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 1982.

⁶⁷ See Klaas Rusticus, *Ich komme spät nach Hause: Giora Feidmans Klezmer*, television documentary, Mainz: ZDF/arte, 1996.

⁶⁸ On the events in Berlin of the 1920s see Sebastian Haffner, *Geschichte eines Deutschen: Die Erinnerungen 1914-1933*, Stuttgart/München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000: 53ff; Joseph Roth, *Das Spinnennetz*, Cologne: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1988; Sonja Margolina, *Das Ende der Lügen: Rußland und die Juden im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Siedler Verlag 1992: 120.

dream: to undo the ‘final solution’ and to help the Jewish culture of the Twenties to come into a new flowering. Although one can sympathize with this dream, it presents a dangerous abyss”, as it creates new lies and distortions.⁶⁹ It fits the climate that many of the German klezmer protagonists proclaim their motivations as a kind of *Wiedergutmachung*, of making reparations: the majority of the singers’ and musicians’ motivations appear to focus on the preservation and continuation of pre-war Eastern European Yiddish traditions; some claim to innovate within the tradition or to even see themselves as “klezmer avant-garde”. Interesting is the unmistakable wish of many of the groups to inscribe themselves into Jewish culture and even history and to make a *contribution* to Jewish music and culture.⁷⁰ This is exemplarily shown by the cover to the group Massel-Tov’s CD *Vos iz vikhtik?* (What is important?, 2001) on which photographs of the group’s members are interspersed with portraits of historical and contemporary (presumably) Jewish personalities as wide-ranging as Freud, Anne Frank, Frida Kahlo, Fred Astaire (!) and Gene Simmons of the group Kiss.⁷¹

On the Scheunenviertel, see Eike Geisel, *Im Scheunenviertel: Bilder, Texte und Dokumente*, Berlin: Severin und Siedler/Quadrige, 1981.

On events in the contemporary “*Scheunenviertel*”, of particular interest are the presentations of the *Hackesches Hof-Theater*, which are also programmed by non-Jews. The Jewish participation in the several times weekly and, at times, daily programs with Yiddish music consists mainly of two singers from the former Soviet Union, Inna Slavskaja and Mark Aizikovitch, as well as occasionally of visiting performers from abroad. Of the two, only Slavskaja had already been performing Yiddish material in the former Soviet Union. The programs of the *Hof-Theater* reflect more or less the ideas of the surrounding German society about Jewish music, and the performances of both singers reflect the expectations of their audiences: both Slavskaja and Aizikovitch market their material as “klezmer”, although it is strictly vocal.

69 “[Ein] naiver und romantischer Kulturtraum: die ‘Endlösung’ rückgängig machen zu können und der jüdischen Kultur der zwanziger Jahre zu einer neuen Blüte verhelfen zu können. Dieser Traum ist ebenso sympathisch wie bodenlos und gefährlich” (Margolina, *Das Ende*: 123; 120).

70 See Rita Ottens, Der Klezmer als ideologischer Arbeiter. *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 3/98 (Mai-Juni), S. 26-29 (<http://www.rubin-ottens.com/rott/uploads/klezmer.pdf>).

On the subject of the German “contribution” (*Beitrag*) to Jewish culture, see also the revisionist history of Yiddish music in Germany by the musician Heiko Lehmann (*Klezmer in Germany/Germans and Klezmer: Reparation or Contribution*; <http://www.sukke.de/lecture.html>, last consulted on 6 June, 2004).

71 The cover is based on the painting “*Der auch...? Oz Almogs bunter Index Judaeorum — Chronik einer kulturellen Obsession*” (Him too? Oz Almog’s Colorful Index Judaeorum — Chronicle of a Cultural Obsession) by the Israeli(?) artist Oz Almog. According to the band’s liner notes, this consists of “400 oil portraits of famous or infamous Jews, who turn the preconception of the typical Jewish face on its end. With the voyeuristic gaze of an observer, Oz stresses speculatively “Difference” with his installation. After observing Almog’s portraits, racist clichés lose their validity. We, the group Massel-Tov, consciously place ourselves in line with the portrayed personalities. In so doing, we are emphasizing Almog’s statement of how futile the attempt is to confine perceptions to the framework of preconceived notions” (“400 Ölporträts berühmter und/oder berüchtigter Jüdinnen und Juden, die das Vorurteil vom typisch jüdischen Gesicht ins Gegenteil verkehren. Mit dem voyeuristischen Blick des Betrachters spekulierend betont der Künstler Oz Almog mit seiner Installation die Verschiedenheit. Rassistische Klischees verlieren nach der Betrachtung von Almogs Portraits ihre Gültigkeit. Wir stellen uns als Gruppe Massel-Tov bewußt in eine Reihe mit den porträtierten Persönlichkeiten. Dadurch möchten wir Almogs Aussage unterstreichen, wie vergeblich das Bemühen ist, die Erkenntnis in das Raster vorgefasster Bestimmungen zu sperren”).



Image 4: CD Cover by the German klezmer group Massel-Tov (Munich)

“Come as a good doctor ...”:⁷² The Jew as the Healer of Germany

The merging of victim and perpetrator as an integral part of the German discourse was already acted out in Bitburg on 5 May, 1985: the ceremony at which German politicians and U.S. President Ronald Reagan honored not only the victims of the Second World War, but also the SS-officers, expressed at that time what has meanwhile become a general attitude within German society: to blur the differences between victim and perpetrator and turn them into one. In the musical-ideological terms of the klezmer movement, this reads: “we are all klezmers” and, as it has been said about Giora Feidman, “When Feidman plays, all the differences fall silent”.⁷³ The Argentinian-born Feidman has, since his first appearances in the original German production of Joshua Sobol’s theatre piece “Ghetto” (Berlin 1984), become the embodiment of “the Jew” and “Jewish music” in Germany and attracts large audiences with his concerts and other appearances. His German persona generates a further continuation of both philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic stereotypes that were already sketched out in the cover of *Wenn die Jidden lachen*.

⁷² In August 1945, an open letter by the German author W. von Molo, addressed to the exiled Thomas Mann had appeared in the *Hessische Post*. It contained the urgent plea to return to Germany and, as Mann remembers in his notes on the genesis of his *Doktor Faustus*, “take my residence again among the people for whom my existence for a long time had been so offensive, and who had not the least remembrance of the treatment that I had to experience from its rulers”. Repeating von Molo’s plea, Mann concluded: “‘Come as a good doctor...’ To me, it sounded particularly wrong”. (“*Das Office of War Information hatte einen an mich gerichteten Offenen Brief des deutschen Schriftstellers W. von Molo mitgeteilt, ein Dokument, erschienen zu Anfang des Monats in dem Blatte ‘Hessische Post’ und dem Inhalt nach eine dringende Aufforderung, nach Deutschland zurückzukehren und meinen Wohnsitz wieder unter dem Volk zu nehmen, dem meine Existenz längst so anstößig gewesen war, und das gegen die Behandlung, die ich von seinen Machthabern erfahren, nicht das geringste zu erinnern gehabt hatte. ‘Kommen Sie als ein guter Arzt ...’ Es lautete mir recht falsch...*”) (Thomas Mann, *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus: Roman eines Romans*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998: 91).

⁷³ “*Wenn Feidman spielt, schweigen die Unterschiede*” (W. Weigel, in: Giora Feidman et al., *Feidman: The Magic of Music*, Heidelberg: Umschau Buchverlag, 1999).

If we read “the Klezmer” as a post-war representation of “the Jew” which has — in the persona of Feidman and the German “klezmerim” of the Yiddish music movement — been transformed from that of “the Eternal Jew” of the National Socialist era, we can begin to understand how criticism and analysis of the German klezmer scene could cause extreme reactions. Although already well known in Israel and the United States, Feidman’s prominent role in Germany stems from an entirely different source: “The unanimous repulsion of the one who causes sickness has led to a covering over of this feeling by unanimous adoration for the one who cures this very sickness”, as René Girard describes the mythological process.⁷⁴ Feidman has become the product of a powerful conversion that has turned the victim into an omnipotent healing agent, the holy founding father of the unified Germany, as can be seen in his various official activities, such as playing at the groundbreaking ceremony for Berlin’s Holocaust memorial and his affinity to Bayreuth and the works of Wagner — the performance of whose music is still banned in Israel.⁷⁵ Whether ostentatiously performing Wagner’s “Pilgrims’ Choir” from *Tannhäuser* between the prisoner bunk beds of Birkenau in a German public television documentary, or recording a CD with the triumphant title *Feidman in Bayreuth*,⁷⁶ Feidman becomes even more closely linked to German nationalistic symbolism via Bayreuth as the locus of Wagner’s philosophy and creations and the town where his daughter-in-law Winifred and Hitler are still to this day honorary citizens. Wagner’s great-granddaughter Nike Wagner has spoken of the “siren call of an invitation to Bayreuth” in a similar case and called this “symbolically celebrating Hitler“ (*Hitler mitfeiern*) by refusing to recognize the consequences of such a commitment.⁷⁷ Feidman was also invited to the German *Bundestag* to take part in the official commemoration marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two in May 1995, where he performed a Jewish prayer and Schubert’s *Ave Maria* for the Members of Parliament — thus symbolically merging the two sides together. Here, as on numerous other occasions, the merging of victims and perpetrators has been performed by Feidman, but contrary to the Bitburg events, it appears to have gone unnoticed and remained largely uncriticized from either the Jewish or the German side.⁷⁸

Although Feidman is a Jew, his public persona, his endowment by the German public with

⁷⁴ “Die einmütige Abscheu vor demjenigen, der krank macht, wird folglich überlagert von der einmütigen Verehrung für denjenigen, der eben diese Krankheit heilt” (René Girard, *Der Sündenbock*, Zürich/Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 1988: 68).

⁷⁵ See the debate unleashed by Barenboim’s controversial decision to perform a work by Wagner during a guest appearance in Israel in May 2001. Like Feidman, Barenboim, plays the role in Germany of public Jew and reconciler (*Versöhner*). Feidman was awarded the *Bundesverdienstkreuz*, a German national award, on 27 March, 2001 for his work in the arena of German-Jewish reconciliation.

⁷⁶ See Jens Uwe Scheffler, *Wenn Du singst, wie kannst du hassen? Giora Feidman in Deutschland*, television documentary, ARD and ARTE, 1995, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation from Auschwitz on 27 January, 1945); *Feidman in Bayreuth: Lilith. Neun Gesänge der Dunklen Liebe — nach biblischen Szenen des Alten Testaments*, Dortmund: Pläne 1997 (CD 88806).

⁷⁷ Nike Wagner, *Wagner Theater*, Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1998: 432-33.

⁷⁸ Feidman publicly proclaimed in 1995, fifty years after the end of World War Two that German children, traumatized by their knowledge of the Shoah, should listen to klezmer as played by children in Israel (cited in Jörn Rohwer, *Klezmer wohnt uns inne: Giora Feidman, Klarinettist*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 24 November 1995; In another television documentary, he makes the claim that Jews have written their best music in the concentration camps which, in turn, leads the interviewer — apparently assuming that all music in the camps was klezmer music — to the logical question: “Were the concentration camps beneficial to klezmer music?” (Rusticus, *Ich komme spät nach Hause*).

attributes such as *Gefühl* (feeling) and *Seele* (soul) commonly associated with Germanness, as well as his participation in official symbolic acts and the “initiation rites” of Bayreuth have transformed him into a “German”, whose “Jewishness” however still corresponds to the expected stereotypes. Over the years, his music has been declared deep, spontaneous, emotional, and deeply rooted in Jewish traditions yet, at the same time, innovative by the media.⁷⁹ He is depicted as a man of the people, an anti-intellectual — that, together with his slogan “Everybody who can sing is a klezmer”, makes him part of the life-giving inner organism of the unified Germany. Accompanied by a set of mimetic and verbal mannerisms that his German audiences of all ages can easily identify as “Jewish”, Feidman has codified Jewish music and indirectly contributed to the homogenization of Jews and Jewishness. As a result, for example, it is expected from practically every klezmer clarinetist to make use of the long, drawn-out screeching sounds which are his trademark. Grown to be expected and often copied is also his stage presentation, which included his entrance from the dark at the back of the audience and dancing through the aisles with his instrument. One cannot help noticing the parallels of this manner of presentation with the image of the reappearance from the darkness of the “other world”, the realm of death. His performances are characterized by witticisms, pseudo-hasidic or kabbalistic messages, and a body language that ranges from expressions of ecstasy to gestures of sanctification and divine communication.⁸⁰ Within the German context, Feidman’s representation of klezmer releases different images and touches on a different set of emotions and stereotypes than do his Israeli or US appearances — emotions and stereotypes which are firmly rooted in European history. Whereas Feidman in Germany is celebrated as a descendant of traditional klezmerim who has elevated the music of the Jewish “folk” to true art music, he is generally regarded critically by members of the American klezmer movement as well as by the older generation of American-Jewish wedding musicians.⁸¹

It was this opinion of the American musicians, woven into my own critical analysis of Feidman’s music and presentation, that made me experience the consequences of having questioned the power of an ancient god, for I came to be known as “the one who dared to criticize Feidman”. My statements appear to have been seen as a sacrilege and were treated as endangering the entirety of post-war German society and its efforts to create a new national narrative. I began to understand the powerful energies that are at work when questioning alone can jeopardize the now supreme hero — who was once the victim of

⁷⁹ The trope of deep-rootedness and innovation has also been commonly employed by participants in and journalists of the American klezmer movement.

⁸⁰ In an interview from 1991 about the International Klezmer Festival in Safed, Ethnomusicologist Yaacov Mazor stated that Feidman “doesn’t represent klezmer tradition. He represents himself and his own ideology” (quoted in Pamela Kidron, Performances rich in style, poor in soul. At the Third Annual Klezmer Festival in Safed, *Jerusalem Post*, July 1991). Even placing a quote such as this would be difficult in the mainstream media of Germany because of a cultural-political situation in which the ultimate fear of being branded an anti-Semite squelches all criticism.

⁸¹ The notion of klezmer music as “folk” music — which Feidman shares with his German audience — is itself a misconception, since the klezmer tradition was at its core known for professionalism and urbanity. In the early 1970s, Feidman began to perform a similar repertoire to that of the later American revivalists based on early recordings of the clarinetists Naftule Brandwein (1884-1963) and Dave Tarras (1895-1989), which he labelled “Jewish Soul Music”. Although he has made New York his home since the mid-1970s, Feidman has had and continues to have little or no contact or interaction with the American klezmer movement. As such, his music, while not representing an entirely separate phenomenon, appears to stem from largely different motivations and continues to be received differently within the American Jewish communities.

collective murder — and his community of disciples. Behind the glorified healer Feidman stand the marginalized, exorcized, and murdered stranger, posthumously sanctified, or, as Girard has written, “Behind the healing Gods are always the victims...”⁸²

“Ich kann dich ja nicht leiden, vergiß das nicht so leicht!”⁸³: The New German Narrative and Its New Enemies (The Experiences of Joel E. Rubin)

I arrived in Berlin on the weekend of Gorbachev’s fated visit to East Berlin in October 1989 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic. Before that, I had spent several months in the divided city, always a stone’s throw from the Wall. I noticed immediately that my music was received differently in Germany than it had been in the US. There, our performances had taken place mostly within the confines of Jewish communal institutions, either at public events of Jewish museums and community centers, or at private affairs. Non-Jewish contexts consisted mostly of appearances at university campuses or at folk or world music festivals, and press coverage was minimal.⁸⁴ In Germany, I was performing for an audience of almost exclusively non-Jews and my concerts with the accordionist Alan Bern and, later, my group, Brave Old World, were announced and reviewed extensively in both the mainstream and Jewish press. It was during that first trip in 1988 that I had my first encounters with the (at that time still tiny) local, non-Jewish Berlin klezmer scene.⁸⁵ As people were attentive, serious, engagingly curious, and seeking my friendship, my initial experiences led me to believe that I had come to an environment in which Germany was coming to terms with its Nazi past — at the time it appeared to represent a much more open and honest way than, in my experience, America was coming to terms with *its* past vis a vis the annihilation of Native Americans or the enslavement of African Americans.

During the ensuing years, Ottens and I, now married, witnessed the first

⁸² “Hinter den heilenden Göttern stehen immer die Opfer ...”. (Girard, *Der Sündenbock*: 73).

⁸³ “I really can’t stand you, don’t forget that so easily!” Siegfried to Mime, in Richard Wagner, *Siegfried. Zweiter Tag aus dem Bühnenfestspiel Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Libretto, introduced and published by Wilhelm Zentner, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1973: 17.

⁸⁴ The American klezmer movement has progressed in waves and has at times, however, received much media attention, such as the first appearances by the group The Klezmorim at Carnegie Hall in February 1983. The later media attention generated by violinist Itzhak Perlman and his traveling klezmer show, “In the Fiddler’s House”, in the mid- to late 1990s has tended to eclipse those earlier successes in popular memory. See, for example: Richard F. Shepard, “Klezmer Music Makes Leap to Carnegie Hall”, *New York Times*, 20 February, 1983: C1, C21; Seth Rogovoy, The Klezmer Revival: Old World Meets New, *The Berkshire Eagle*, 31 July, 1997; Don Heckman, Perlman Leads Bowl’s Lively Klezmer Parade, *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June, 1998.

⁸⁵ There was only one nominally klezmer band active in West Berlin at that time, paralleled by a few groups in still-separate East Berlin, which were mostly performing Yiddish songs.

events with Yiddish music and culture after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which revealed an almost uncanny atmosphere by evoking the image of the Jew for the first time to both West *and* East German audiences. The first of such events was a concert by Giora Feidman at the *Haus der jungen Talente* (House of Young Talent) in East Berlin shortly thereafter. Feidman presented the musical results of his workshop with both East and West German musicians and singers. Oversized slide projections of Jewish symbols and hasidic Jews appeared on the wall behind the stage of the packed hall like specters while Feidman was playing his clarinet. I remember sensing at that time that this staging of Jewishness was a kind of para-liturgical event that had little to do with music. The atmosphere was one of religious concentration during a church service that this spectacle seemed to evoke in the audience and the participating musicians. Another such event was the 1992 theater production, *Golem*, by the Italian Moni Ovadia, a Sephardic Jew from Bulgaria. During this piece — which consisted of a questionable concoction of stereotypes of Eastern European Jews, and trivialized klezmer copied from American revival records, all glued together in a pseudo-expressionist plot — Ottens and I were sitting in the packed Hebbel Theater amidst an enraptured audience including some of the leading cultural representatives of Berlin. The people clearly took Ovadia's *Golem* for "art"; they saw in it the rebirth of the legendary pre-war Jewish/Yiddish theater. Next to us sat the head of the music division of the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of the World's Cultures), closely connected to the German Goethe Institute. During the intermission he ran behind the stage in order to invite the on-stage "klezmer" group to Berlin.⁸⁶

One of the first disturbing impressions I remember as a performer was of a female guest at a non-Jewish wedding in a banquet hall, tugging on my partner's nose as she begged us to continue playing.⁸⁷ More blatantly, perhaps, and this brings us to the central themes of this paper, was when a local newspaper did a feature article on an upcoming performance with a non-Jewish singer with whom my partner and I had been playing. Since both of us were already well-known international performers and teachers at the time we began to appear locally in Berlin in the late 1980s, our understanding of the concerts and the article about them was that we were

⁸⁶ See also the description of another performance of Moni Ovadia in Slobin, *Fiddler*: 87-88. On Ovadia's staging of Jewishness and klezmer, see also his CD "*Oylem Goylem*" (1999), Warner Fonit 3984 26906-2, as well as the book Moni Ovadia, *Un tetto sospeso tra cielo e terra*, Milan: Ricordi (BMG), 2003.

About another performance of a Yiddish play at Berlin's Hebbel Theater, this time a new adaptation of Sh. An-ski's "The Dybbuk" sponsored by the Goethe Institute, see Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, *Jüdische Musiktraditionen*, Kassel: Gustav Bosse-Verlag, 2001: 91-94.

⁸⁷ Regarding the significance of the Jewish nose, see Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1991.

the featured artists who were collaborating with a local singer. The photograph which had been taken of the three of us, however, was cropped by the newspaper to show only the non-Jewish singer, and the article had been correspondingly written to feature him with the implication that he had somehow acquired authenticity by being accompanied by two live Jews.⁸⁸

In spite of these seemingly isolated incidents, I experienced the curiosity on the part of non-Jewish Germans about Jewish culture and music as much stronger in those days than now, in 2003. Since the mid-Nineties in particular I have had recurring experiences of my work as a Jewish musician and scholar not only being *used* by Germans, but presented as *their own* — while my name has been discredited or erased. Some of these cases were as dramatic as my (and Ottens') work on the treatment and the screenplay for the documentary *A Tickle in the Heart*,⁸⁹ a film that bases on my research with the last generation of klezmer musicians in America; others were rather more marginal like the local Berlin klezmer musicians who came for just one lesson when they wanted to teach a klezmer workshop or make a recording. The case of *A Tickle in the Heart* is particularly emblematic of the process of transforming Jewish intellectual property into a German one: it includes all stages from the humble approach by the German filmmaker to the “knowing” Jew, who has spent his entire adult life studying a Jewish musical tradition; to the ensuing appropriation of *his* material and the turning of him into a marginal figure in his own story — a non-entity even — while the German director claims the research for himself and is filmed after the premiere in front of the Great Synagogue in Berlin, proudly smiling.⁹⁰ I owe it to my experiences with this film that I began to realize that my role as a Jewish artist and scholar in Germany would be to provide the raw material for German culture,⁹¹ whereby my own work would be available to be

⁸⁸ See also Rita Ottens, *Der Klezmer als ideologischer Arbeiter: Jiddische Musik in Deutschland*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, May 1998: 26-29, which refers to the case of the German-Jewish singer, Jalda Rebling, whose image was edited out of a television documentary about Germans who play Yiddish music. What makes this case remarkable is the fact that the film concentrated — as the title indicates — on *Germans* playing Jewish music. Rebling was the only Jewish member of an otherwise all-German theater troupe, and it was only she who simply “disappeared” from the filmed stage sequence, whereas the other members were amply featured. See *Scholem Alejchem — Friede sei mit Euch: Junge Deutsche machen jiddische Musik*, television documentary, Munich: Bayerischer Rundfunk, 1996.

⁸⁹ Dir. Stefan Schwietert, Germany, Switzerland, USA, 1996.

⁹⁰ Although the filmmaker Schwietert carries a Swiss passport, he was born in Germany to German and Dutch parents — thus also having German citizenship. Because of this, in conjunction with the fact that he studied filmmaking in Germany, lives in Berlin and speaks High German without an accent, I am considering him to be German for the purposes of my argument.

⁹¹ See also the case of the German novelist and Nobel prize-winner Gunther Grass who allegedly plagiarized portions written by the Jewish writer Edgar Hilsenrath, cited in: Sander L. Gilman, *Jüdischer Selbsthaß. Antisemitismus und die verborgene Sprache der Juden*, Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993: 23-24.

“slaughtered and disemboweled” (*ausschlachten*). At the same time I would be denied the objectivity of a scholar because of my hidden motivation to “conquer German market segments”, as the professor of music pedagogy, Wolfgang Martin Stroh, claims on the web site of the University of Oldenburg.⁹²

Especially after the publication of our book *Klezmer-Musik* in 1999, Ottens and I encountered vehement anger and verbal aggression. We attribute these outbreaks to our depiction of klezmer music as being rooted in traditional Jewish religion and culture —up to the present day — and not simply as an empty shell that can be filled with random terminology and charged with new meanings stemming from a specific post-war German world view. It was the anger of the revisionists who, as Cynthia Ozick has said, “put nothing in the place of something”,⁹³ a technique of fantasy that works as much for the denial of the Holocaust as for the real presence of Jews in Germany and, last but not least, for Jewish cultural traditions such as klezmer music. I also maintain that my being a Jew who analyzes his own cultural tradition and thereby takes a close look at the people who appropriate and instrumentalize these traditions for their nation-building processes, was regarded as a threat,

⁹² “Bei der Beurteilung der aktuellen Entwicklung sind Rubin/Ottens voreingenommen, da sie als Produzenten und Musiker nicht nur an ihrer persönlichen ‘Message’, sondern auch an der [sic] Eroberungen deutscher Marktanteile interessiert sind” (<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/~stroh/klezmer/schule/Kap0/kap0.htm>, last consulted on 6 June, 2004).

Such classical anti-Semitic tropes such as Jews being non-objective, power- and money-hungry — here in connection with Germany as an economic territory to be conquered, suggesting that we are invading outside forces — shed light on the current turn of attitudes in Germany. It is telling that Stroh’s web site now contains a review of our book *Jüdische Musiktraditionen* which ends with the invitation to the interested readers that “we can didactically cannibalise this collection of materials and, with it, enrich my own materials, ‘Play Klezmer, play!’” (“*Wir können diese Materialsammlung didaktisch ausschachten und damit meine Materialien ‘Spiel Klezmer, spiel!’ ... bereichern*”; <http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/~stroh/klezmer/politbildung/index.html>, last consulted on 6 June, 2004). The linguistic usage of a verb like *ausschlachten* in this conjunction points at a strong negative aggression against the Jewish (and the female) body and, at the same time, to incorporate its products in order to receive strength from the dead, cannibalised body.

See also Martin Luther, *Tischreden* (1911:289): “When we read that Judas hanged himself, that his belly burst into pieces and his intestines fell out, we can take this as an example for the fate of all enemies of Christ. The Jews should have recognized themselves in Judas like in a mirror and would have seen how they will be annihilated in the same way. In this is hidden an allegory or a mystery, because the belly means the entire Kingdom of the Jews which will be wiped out, so that nothing will be left. When we read that the intestines fell out, it shows the descendants of the Jews, their entire race, which will rot and die.” (“*Wenn wir lesen, daß sich Judas selbst erhängte, daß sein Bauch in Stücke zerbarst und seine Gedärme herausfielen, können wir dies als ein Beispiel dafür nehmen, wie es allen Feinden Christi ergehen wird. Die Juden hätten sich ein Spiegelbild von Judas machen sollen und darin erkennen können, wie sie auf die gleiche Weise vernichtet werden sollen. Hierin ist eine Allegorie oder ein Geheimnis verborgen, denn der Bauch bedeutet das ganze Königreich der Juden, das verschwinden und vernichtet werden wird, so daß nichts übrigbleiben wird. Wenn wir lesen, daß die Gedärme herausfielen, zeigt dies die Nachkommenschaft der Juden, ihr ganzes Geschlecht, das verderben und zugrunde gehen wird.*”, quoted in Dundes, *Sie mich auch*: 107-08).

⁹³ Quoted in: Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996:85.

especially as I lived among them, i.e. I had the German equivalent of a Green Card, spoke fluent German and claimed my share in participating in social and cultural life. Today, in hindsight, it makes sense that a German cultural official from *Amerika Haus* admonished me in 1992 for wearing a *kippah* (traditional Jewish headcovering) at a concert with religious Jewish music that I had organized, an action that I had not fully understood at the time. For me now, in 2003, it has become reality what Jürgen Habermas warned about in 1986: the “Benjaminian legacy” has been brushed aside, and the air that he deemed necessary for “our Jewish fellow citizens” to be able to live in Germany, has become too thin.⁹⁴

Musical Exorcism: The Group Kroke and the Jews

One of the most extraordinary cases of how the territory of music serves as a hegemonic battleground between Germans and Jews is the case of the Polish group Kroke. I had become interested in the group a few years ago precisely because of its demonstratively “Jewish” presentation which was displayed in the booklets and iconography of its first two CDs. For the purposes of my argument, the nationality of the group in question is of secondary importance here because all their albums have been produced and marketed by a German company based in Berlin. Moreover, the psycho-social situation of Polish society in the early 1990s could be compared to Germany in the mid-1960s when the first recordings with Yiddish music appeared and found a wide echo of reactions.⁹⁵

The three non-Jewish musicians from Cracow who gave themselves the Yiddish name for their home town, began as local group playing music from the Balkans. The first visits to Cracow by Rubin and his former group Brave Old World in 1991 are distinctly reflected musically in Kroke’s original demo tape and their first CD, *Trio: Klezmer Acoustic Music*,⁹⁶ both in terms of style and repertoire. Yet already this fact had been chosen by the group to be hidden: there is no mention of Jewish sources or acknowledgment of Jews; instead the booklet text of *Trio: Klezmer Acoustic Music* and its iconography already reveal a striking transformation into “Jewishness”. The group makes the claim of being “strongly linked to Kazimierz”, the city’s former Jewish quarter. In the 1990s Kazimierz was in the process of becoming a tourist attraction through the presence of an annual Jewish culture festival and, especially, the making of the film *Schindler’s List*, which was shot on location there. The “strong link” to this area — which has been almost devoid of Jews and Jewish life since the

⁹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, On the Public Use of History: The Official Self-Understanding of the Federal Republic Is Breaking up, in: *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993: 165. (Originally published as Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch der Geschichte in: *Die Zeit*, 7 November, 1986).

Rubin is alluding here to Walter Benjamin’s historical-philosophical thesis that the total and programmatic negation of historical correlations must lead to the situation that, in our world, “even the dead won’t be safe from their enemy, when [if] he is victorious” (... *auch die Toten werden vor dem Feind, wenn er siegt, nicht sicher sein*; Walter Benjamin, Über den Begriff der Geschichte, in: *Abhandlungen. Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I.2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977: 695).

⁹⁵ See the example of *Wenn die Jidden lachen* above.

⁹⁶ Berlin: Oriente, 1996 [RIEN CD04].

end of World War Two — allows Kroke to maintain that “in 1992 (...) — after a break of 50 years — [they] tried to rediscover and revive the traditions and culture of *their ancestors*, through music” (booklet text; my emphasis).



Image 5: Photo from Kroke CD booklet *Trio: Klezmer Acoustic Music*

The black and white photo from the CD booklet shows the three musicians dressed in the typical black hat and pants, and white shirts of modern yeshiva students, posing in front of the medieval synagogue at the end of Ulica Szeroka (the former main square of Jewish Kazimierz). The group’s veiled claim of being Jewish is strikingly contrasted by the photo, which is a revealing study of discomfort as mirrored in the members’ body language. The posing in black suits and hats is evocative of the style of the orthodox Jews who visit the former Jewish center to pray at the grave of Rabbi Moses Isserles, one of the most important 16th century religious scholars. The iron Stars of David, woven into a fence behind them, serve not only as a background, but as a kind of legitimation, or even as a “fourth member” for whom violinist Tomasz Kukurba (right) and accordionist Jerzy Bawol (center) have explicitly made space. It seems that the mimetic task of transforming oneself into a Jew presents a burden, even a threat, as seen in the protective posture of the accordionist with his folded arms and sunglasses. Yet, at the same time, the expression of contentment, even triumph shows that this state of mimesis is highly desirable. This, together with an aura of self-satisfaction and pride, I have noticed as a common feature of many German klezmer groups when they present themselves in the guise of Jews.⁹⁷ Not long after this, the violinist and accordionist of the group claimed to have discovered having been Jewish all along. Furthermore, the accordionist began to allege having been “definitely influenced by his grandfather, who was an acclaimed [yet unnamed] Klezmer musician”, according to the web site of the group’s record company Oriente.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For example, see web site of the German Duo Chalil (<http://www.chalil.de/>).

There are similarities in this process to that which the late political scientist Michael Rogin has termed “Jewface”, based on his analysis of blackface which represents “white modes of representing blacks that take the form of appropriative identification” (Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1996: 18). On Jewface, see pp. 64, 225.

⁹⁸ <http://www.oriente.de/>; downloaded April 2000.



Image 6: Cover of Kroke CD *Eden*⁹⁹

The cover to the group's second CD, *Eden* bears the names Kroke and Eden in both Latin and Hebrew letters and contains a depiction of the ten *sefirot* in a circle surrounded by a ring of fire.¹⁰⁰ But what looks on the surface to be yet another contemporary depiction of this kabbalistic symbol, has undergone an alteration: a skeletal hand with spidery fingers has reached from the outer void through the fiery circle towards the tree. It is clutched around the second lowest *sefirah*, *yesod*, the foundation. The hand bears a strong resemblance to the anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish greed for power which is symbolized by the tight grip of their hands around the globe.¹⁰¹ The booklet text contains citations from the early kabbalistic text, *Sefer Yetsira* (Book of Formation), and the *Tosefta Sanhedrin* (early rabbinic additions to the religious laws codified in the *Mishna*). In the booklet, Kroke further claims that its music "should be understood and felt as the quintessence of ancient Jewish culture, and at the same time as living proof for its unbroken existence", and that it contains "musical quotations from the 3500 years old liturgy of the Prophet Samuel and the Korahitic Psalmists, from sephardic and chassidic sources as well as East European Jewish music". The musicians' claim goes so far as to declare their music as "a kind of addressing God".

What struck me at first was above all the phantasmagoric claim to musically include Judaism over the entire era of its existence including its religious-mystic dimension, especially after having come to know the musicians' milieu and background from several visits to Cracow

See the discussion on musical genealogy and the importance of heritage in Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*, Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995: 68-72.

⁹⁹ Berlin: Oriente, 1997 [RIEN CD 09].

¹⁰⁰ The ten *sefirot* is a kabbalistic concept accounting for "the various stages through which the hidden, unknowable, unattainable, and infinite God (En-Sof) is transformed into the manifest, knowable, biblical God associated with the Creation and the finite world" (Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*: 34).

¹⁰¹ That my argument can also be applied to the situation in Poland, is shown by the following example: The commemorative coins produced for the 1992 Cracow Festival of Jewish Culture, at that time under the musical direction of Joel Rubin, depict two skeletal hands which are held together, protecting(?) the old synagogue of the former Jewish quarter Kazimierz, then and now the main venue of the festival.

and Poland. Kroke's instrumentalization of the Jewish past as seen in the fragmented use of religious and mystical symbols and snippets of philosophy also creates a void between the imagery and the actual music: not only did Kroke's music by this point not contain the seeds of klezmer or the essence of Judaism as advertised in the promo texts, but their attempts to aestheticize hasidic *nigunim* (religious melodies of spiritual elevation) — in addition to their overall presentation — caused in me sensations of ambivalence and even anger on hearing some of the pieces. Following the historian Saul Friedländer, one could interpret this rendition as exorcism, which he defines as “a defense reaction against reality ... a form of standing up against reality which, at the same time, is also an evasion, a neutralization of the past, a blurring — be it conscious or not — of what is unbearable about this past”.¹⁰² Here I mean, in particular, track 3, “Reb Dovidls Nign”, as well as track 7, “Jazz Tashlikh”. “Reb Dovidls Nign” is an exaggerated vocal rendition in pseudo or invented hasidic style of a tune often associated with the *mayufes*, a self-deprecating and “comical” dance Jews were often forced to dance and sing with specifically “Jewish” mimicry and gestures in Poland for the *pritsim*, the feared non-Jewish landowning aristocracy.¹⁰³

I was aware that my reactions could be perceived as endangering the scholar's presumed aspiration to “objectivity”. As the ethnomusicologist Judith R. Cohen has written, recent tendencies in ethnomusicology, folklore and ethnology have been to avoid value judgments and to describe distortions of traditions by outsiders — whether inadvertent or not — from the viewpoint of their being a “hybrid new expressive culture”, in this case as a *Weiterentwicklung jüdischer Musik* (further development of Jewish music).¹⁰⁴ Thus, my only alternatives appeared to be to suppress my own doubts or to lapse into silence. Here I draw inspiration from Cohen's insights developed during her research on the (mis)representation of Sephardic music and culture in contemporary Spain — a phenomenon that bears striking resemblance to the klezmer movement in Germany. Cohen asks in her conclusion whether it is “ever justifiable to perform aspects of a culture not one's own, particularly aspects concerned with ritual and ceremony” and, further: “How justified, if at all, is it to make changes in the traditions represented, indeed, to what degree is accuracy possible?”¹⁰⁵ Friedländer speaks of “the criterion of uneasiness” (*Kriterium des Unbehagens*) and defines it in his discussion on the new Nazism as “a discrepancy between the explicit moralistic and ideological position of the author ... and the aesthetic effect of his ... work”. In his investigation, Friedländer restricts the “criterion of uneasiness” to filmic and literary works, but his observations can clearly also provide a theoretical framework for the study of musical

¹⁰² “... Abwehrreaktionen gegen die Realität ... eine Form, der Realität sich zu stellen, die zugleich ein Ausweichen vor ihr ist, um die Neutralisierung der Vergangenheit, um die Verschleierung — ob nun bewußt oder nicht — dessen, was an dieser Vergangenheit unerträglich bleibt” (Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod*: 86).

¹⁰³ *Mayufes* is derived from the Ashkenazic pronunciation of the Hebrew ode to Shabbat, “Ma Yafit”. As comedy contains within it the overcoming of fear and claims of superiority, in some cases the landowners themselves would don fake *peyes* (sidelocks) and *gartlen* (the sashes worn by hasidic men) in order to imitate orthodox Jews and make fun of and humiliate them (Moyshe Beregovski, *Yidishe klezmer, zeyer shafn un shteyger*, *Sovetish* 12, Moscow: Farlag Der Emes, 1941: 432; see also Shmeruk, *Mayufes* and Werb, *A Vestige*. For a depiction of *mayufes* in the German context, see the scene in Roman Polanski's film “The Pianist” (2002), in which Jewish ghetto inhabitants are forced by Nazi officers to dance at an increasingly faster tempo, all the while being ridiculed.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Cohen, *Constructing a Spanish Jewish Festival: Music and the Appropriation of Tradition*, *World of Music*, 4 (3), 1999: 104.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen, *Constructing*: 105.

A Case Study of New Left-Wing anti-Semitism

In our book *Klezmer-Musik*, Rubin and I briefly mentioned Kroke — without naming them — as a “non-Jewish Cracow klezmer band which even used kabbalistic symbolism on its CD cover to support its claim of creating ‘a sound which has thus far been unheard in Jewish music’”.¹⁰⁷ In apparent reaction to this statement, the owners of Oriente formulated and distributed shortly thereafter a pamphlet entitled *The Controversy between Kroke and Rita Ottens: To Journalists, Concert Promoters and Cultural Politicians* to an unknown number of recipients.¹⁰⁸ In it, I was accused of being the leader of a conspiracy against the “Jewish group from Cracow”. The subtitle of the pamphlet was *Non-Aryan Certificate for Polish Klezmer Musicians?* It was I as the German part of the writing team, and not the Jewish co-author of the book (Rubin), who was accused of “robbing” the group of “its right to continue to develop its [i.e. Jewish] cultural traditions”.¹⁰⁹ As the pamphlet would have it, I had actively instigated organizers of Jewish festivals to *not* hire the group.

Perhaps most revealing in the case of the Oriente pamphlet is the deluded depiction of a force capable of pulling strings to determine who *performs* at Jewish festivals, as if all the festivals were somehow interconnected by an invisible web (= conspiracy). The overestimation of my power — in a different context a misogynist topos (and possibly an accusation to the German woman married to a Jew) —¹¹⁰ turns into an anti-Jewish one, as it is (when it comes down to the actual accusations) directed to the “non-existent” Jew, Rubin. “The one who has contact

¹⁰⁶ “Es kommt in den meisten Fällen aus einer Diskrepanz zwischen der erklärten moralischen und ideologischen Position des Autors ... und der ästhetischen Wirkung seines filmischen oder literarischen Werkes ...” (Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod*: 28).

¹⁰⁷ “... eine ebenfalls nichtjüdische Krakauer Klezmer-Band wirbt gar mit kabbalistischer Symbolik auf dem Cover für ihren Anspruch, ‘etwas Neues und in der jüdischen Musik Einzigartiges zu schaffen’” (Ottens and Rubin, *Klezmer-Musik*: 10; the internal quote was from the booklet text to the CD “Eden”).

It should be noted that the journalist Ruth Ellen Gruber spoke already in her 1996 published brochure, *Filling the Jewish Space in Europe* (International Perspectives 35, New York: American Jewish Committee) of the “non-Jewish group Kroke”; in her book *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 2002), she retained this terminology.

¹⁰⁸ See appendix for complete text in German and English.

As mentioned above, culture is one of the most-used terms in contemporary Germany, and there is also a “culture of controversy”, indicating a widespread, almost traditional and “civilized” way to carry out disputes among various layers of German society. This so-called *Streitkultur* is proudly used in the context of the great public discourses such as the controversy of 1998 between Ignaz Bubis and the author Martin Walser, and the other debates that have erupted around the past, Jews and the “New Germany”. In the case of Oriente and Kroke, too, not only has the term “controversy” been employed, to disguise the true purpose of the pamphlet, but the pamphlet’s headline suggests a one-to-one debate between equal partners. Thus the denunciatory character of the action could be shrouded in a politically correct term, disguised as an exchange of opinions and viewpoints. Since Rubin and I only found out about the existence of the pamphlet five months after its appearance — and then only by accident — this could hardly have been the case.

¹⁰⁹ On the fluidity of Jewish musical identities in contemporary Europe, see also Cohen, *Constructing*. Jon Stratton also writes eloquently of such constructions in *Coming Out Jewish: Constructing ambivalent identities*, London/New York: Routledge, 2000.

¹¹⁰ Some sixty years ago this would have been a criminal offense under the Nürnberg racial laws.

with Jews, is himself a Jew”, as Hannah Arendt has written.¹¹¹ She is speaking in this context of the “guilt by association” which is a sign of totalitarian ideologies such as anti-Semitism, “because it immediately eliminates [the possibility of] a jurisdiction on an orderly basis”.¹¹² It is above all the clumsy omission of Rubin’s name in the textual passages in question that lays bare the post-war anti-Semitic content of the pamphlet — a pre-1945 text would have not been that discreet.¹¹³ Instead, *I* have become the token scapegoat in effigy of Rubin, a sign that the mighty post-war taboo of directly attacking a Jew is partly still in function.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the terms “police”, “conviction” (*Verurteilung*), and the “usurpation” or “seizing hold” of Jewish symbols (*Bemächtigung*) express in this context a sense of powerlessness on the part of the authors and the fear of the subconscious that craves punishment for its transgression.¹¹⁵ As I have demonstrated with the story of the handshake above, guilt often transforms the perpetrator into the victim. This type of reversal is virulent especially among the postwar generations in Germany, the generations which cannot be *blamed* for the crimes of Nazi Germany, but which do carry a historical responsibility for them.¹¹⁶ With their self-stylization as victims of anti-Semitism, Kroke and Oriente reveal their strong guilt feelings and even open fear of reprisal that is displayed when they speak of a “klezmer police” which would determine who is allowed to play the “correct” Jewish music, and ask if they should be required to show a “reverse Aryan certificate” to the

¹¹¹ “... wer mit Juden umgeht, ist selbst ein Jude.” (Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totalitärer Herrschaft. Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft*, 8th edition, Munich/Zurich: Piper, 2001: 696.

¹¹² “Die Vorteile, die das Prinzip des ‘guilt by association’ jeder willkürlichen Gewaltherrschaft bietet, schon weil es eine geordnete Rechtsprechung sofort vernichtet, sind bekannt genug ...” (Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*: 696).

¹¹³ A similar pattern can be observed in the TV-film “*Armer Nanosh*” (1989), an episode of the popular series “*Tatort*” (Scene of the Crime), in which a German Gypsy, not a Jew, serves as the projection screen for the authors Martin Walser and Asta Scheib’s anti-Semitic (and anti-Gypsy) stereotypes. This was written years before Walser published his anti-Semitic hate pamphlet disguised as a novel, titled *Tod eines Kritikers* (Death of a Critic), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002.

¹¹⁴ During the time of the editing of this essay, a number of physical attacks against Jews took place in Berlin. On 12 May, 2003, the Israeli paper *Ha’aretz* reported that “Police in Berlin said Monday that they were looking into allegations that a man was assaulted on a public bus by other passengers who objected to his wearing a Jewish Star of David emblem on a neck chain. A group of youths kicked and spat upon the 56-year-old victim before fleeing the bus in the incident Sunday evening, police said. Jewish leaders in Berlin have condemned what they see as an alarming trend toward violence against Jews in public on the streets of Berlin. In March, an American Orthodox Jew was assaulted by a group of four youths on Berlin’s busy Kurfuerstendamm boulevard as scores of stunned passersby looked on. A year earlier two Orthodox Jews were attacked and beaten on Kurfuerstendamm, the major retail thoroughfare in the heart of former West Berlin” (<http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=29>). Although a number of these attacks have been attributed to Arab youths, they nevertheless seem to be indicative of a change in political and social climate.

¹¹⁵ In the book, we actually used the relatively neutral term “*werben*” (advertise); the revealing expression “*Bemächtigung*” is an interpretation on the part of Oriente and a powerful expression of the psychical forces involved.

¹¹⁶ An illustration of the psychic mechanism at work here is the entry by Joseph Goebbels in his diary from 4 April, 1945:

“This would suit the Jews really well that, after they have committed the most gruesome crimes against humankind, humankind would now be forbidden to even think about it” (“*Das würde den Juden so in den Kram passen, daß, nachdem sie die schauderhaftesten Verbrechen gegen die Menschheit begangen haben, nun der Menschheit verboten werden sollte, darüber überhaupt nachzudenken*”), quoted in Stern, *Im Anfang*: 36.

audience in order to be allowed to continue to play klezmer music.¹¹⁷

In the pamphlet, Rubin's musical work, too, is depicted in terms of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes as coming from an orthodox, reactionary, uncreative Jew who can only function in the reproduction, but not the creation of music. The term "copying", which appears in numerous German reviews and newspaper articles on klezmer music, seems to have become a hidden semantic icon for the klezmer version of the Wagnerian-to-Hitlerian concept relating to the lack of Jewish creative faculties.¹¹⁸ It is usually relegated to those Jewish musicians who do not meet the expectations of the German audiences in one way or another. Seen through German eyes, Rubin's music lacks wildness, ecstasy, or it is not fused with jazz, tango, or other contemporary forms (= "innovation"). "Copying" melodies from historical recordings and trying to imitate their sound is seen as a sterile, uninspired occupation that produces dead music. This attitude discredits a profound artistic dialogue with a master of the past, and for that matter, with the past itself.¹¹⁹ It furthermore disregards the fact that several generations of American Jews have been disconnected through immigration, assimilation, wars, and the Holocaust from the "world of their fathers" (and mothers). It was through this very process of copying that young Jews in America were able to reoccupy the culture of their ancestors and make it part of their lives and their communities. Furthermore, by using the term "traditionalist", the image of the fanatic Old Testamentarian Jew is evoked in the pamphlet, as it often is in the anti-Semitic context.¹²⁰ What appears "museum-like" (*museal*) to the German post-war generation, is in reality the "archetypical modern Jewish dramaturgy [which] is a dramaturgy of return", as the literary critic David Roskies described the prevailing trend in secular Judaism; a taken-up dialogue — sometimes not even severed — with the traditions of the ancestors, as thin as the thread might appear to be. Progressive innovation and conservative authority are not seen as polarities in Judaism, but complement each other. But when, as in the case of Germany, there is no past to turn back to, the refusal to be "modern" can easily become a threat: audiences and the media will regard this as negative cultural criticism or even as a reactionary attitude which does not allow for the reconciliation of Jews and Germans and, last but not least, for

¹¹⁷ How little Oriente and Kroke really knew about Rubin's musical work is illustrated by the fact that the Joel Rubin Jewish Music Ensemble, with which he has been working since 1994, consists of predominantly non-Jewish members. It seems to reveal a determination to pronounce him guilty (of [reverse] anti-Semitism) in spite of the facts.

¹¹⁸ In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler maintained that "what sham culture the Jew today possesses is the property of other peoples and for the most part it is ruined in his hands." (Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943: 302-3, quoted in Gilman, *Smart Jews*: 48-49).

¹¹⁹ See, for example, George Steiner, *Unreal Presences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989; Clifford Geertz, "Epilogue", in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986: 380, cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Sounds of Sensibility*: 56).

¹²⁰ In one broadcast, Rubin was referred to as an "orthodox Philistine" (Cologne: WDR, 1998). See also the website of Stroh cited above; Fischer, *Richard Wagners "Das Judentum in der Musik"*: 40; Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*: 156-157 about Clemens von Brentano and C.W.F. Grattenauer's pamphlet *Wider die Juden* ("Against the Jews").

Additional stereotypical terminology that I have observed over the years ranges from metaphors referring to blood ("bloodless"), cold ("coldness"), knowledge ("academic", "intellectual"), and death ("museum-like"); all refer to 19th century perceptions of Jewish creativity and mainly Wagner's texts. Their positive counterparts are: passion, feeling, soul, heart, expression of deep emotions — in Arendt's words the "privilege of the paria" (... weil sie das Privileg des Paria sind – Menschlichkeit, Güte, Vorurteilslosigkeit.) (*Elemente und Ursprünge*: 166), which are seen today as the primary characteristics of Jewish music — above all the music of Feidman as described above.

“normalcy”. The dualism “avant-gardist/innovator” versus “reactionary/traditionalist/nostalgic/museum-like” can be read in almost every article and review and heard in every conversation about Jewish music in Germany, especially relating to “the Klezmer”. It seems that after the fall of the Wall, the Christian notions of the “old” and “obsolete” Jewish people and of the Jewish origin of the Christian faith as being something that has to be overcome, has been superseded by a new meaning.¹²¹ German “normalcy” is now being defined in opposition to “the Jew” as the embodiment of the *Holocaust*, which also has to be overcome. This transformation has led to questions such as who, “in the times of Rostock and Hoyerswerda, and forty-eight years after Auschwitz, could possess the courage to bring the sounds of klezmer music in its original form into the cultural centers”?¹²² — the implication being that this approach to klezmer music by Jewish musicians is seen as reactionary from the German perspective.

The (female) passive tense of the Jew, Rubin, who “allows himself” to be marketed, depicts him as a female man, i.e. circumcized Jew. By juxtapositioning the male-female duality, the castration complex is being introduced into the discourse, “the deepest, subconscious root of anti-Semitism”, according to Freud.¹²³ This passive, inferior position in conjunction with the effeminateness of the Jew make his production of “nostalgia” to be the work of evil fabricated to threaten the manly “avant-gardists” of the group Kroke, which is (actively) thrusting forward into the future. This, together with the surrounding text which depicts Kroke as the “uncircumcized Jews”, stands for the “clean” Jews, as they are devoid of the most intrinsic sign of (male) Jewishness: the circumcized penis. To enhance this fiction, they are portrayed as resistance fighters “against the conservative-Catholic circles”. The implication here is of resistance fighters against the Nazis, which is reflected in their choice of the term *Widerstand*. Furthermore, their (male) creativeness is seen in an even more unselfish, idealistic way, possibly not determined by commercial interests.

In this case, the production of “nostalgia” — a term that seems to be reserved for unwelcome traditions and memory in the realm of world music ideology — is assigned to the Jew. In this context it could also be interpreted that the text is advocating that the Jewish people, “the people of memory par excellence”, as Jacques Le Goff states, should be exorcized of their memory.¹²⁴ This is all the more remarkable as the Nazis included in their plans for the total destruction of the Jews the elimination of the Jews from memory altogether, “at least in the

¹²¹ Steinsaltz, *Talmud für Jedermann*. trans. M. Seidler. Zürich/Basel. Verlag Morascha, 1995.

¹²² “wer denn in den Zeiten von Rostock und Hoyerswerda, auch 48 Jahre nach Auschwitz den Mut aufbringen soll, Klezmerklänge in ihrer ursprünglichen Form in die Kulturhäuser zu tragen[?]” (Harald Fricke, *Wanderer zwischen den Welten. Internationale Volksmusik als Bindeglied zwischen den Kulturen*, in: *WeltMusikSommer '93. Das offizielle Programm zum Weltmusiksommer 1993*, Berlin, 1993).

Rostock and Hoyerswerda are two of the towns in Germany where notorious hate attacks against foreigners have been carried out, in August 1992 and September 1991, respectively.

¹²³ “Der Kastrationskomplex ist die tiefste unbewußte Wurzel des Antisemitismus...” (Sigmund Freud, *Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben (“Der kleine Hans”)*, in: Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe Band VIII, Zwei Kinderneurosen*. ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000: 36 (footnote 2).

See also Gilman, *Freud*: 69-71; 129-32.

¹²⁴ “Le peuple juif est par excellence le peuple de la mémoire” (Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard 1986), quoted in: Harald Weinrich, *Lethé: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens*, München: C.H. Beck, 1997: 230-31.

form of self-representation”, as LaCapra has written.¹²⁵ By transforming the history of a Jew, Jewish history, and therefore history in general, into mere “nostalgia”, a process of weakening is being initiated in which the Jewish part of the Jew is being distanced from the validity of his own memory and therefore identity. This reversal works, again, by disguising the “narrative fetishism” on the side of the non-Jewish German movement as “innovation and avantgarde”. By narrative fetishism, Eric Santner means “the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place...”.¹²⁶ In this case, the Jew as the living site of mourning and the one who is connected to the dead, becomes again the target of fantasy, a “strategy of undoing” that evades and replaces the process of mourning by turning the artistic creation of the Jew into nostalgia. In other words: Jewish memory is rendered questionable, worthless, whereas the “condition of intactness”, in the words of Santner, is subject to the self-relegation of the ones who seek to control the new narrative. It is the authors of the pamphlet who declare the Jew an outsider to his own traditions, a mere exploiter, while at the same time they emphasize the claim of their group Kroke to “innovate” and further develop these very traditions (which they, as can be heard from their music, do not even *know*). But unhindered by their lack of knowledge and despite the presence of facts which are known to them, they seem to be determined to erect the construction of a negative image of the Jew as a cultural transgressor, a construction that is necessary in order to reinvent themselves, the non-Jewish descendants of Poles and Germans, as “whole”, unblemished by traits of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

The ethnomusicologist Ellen Koskoff defines the “true spirituality” of Lubavitcher hasidic culture as one that “is irrevocably linked to the past” and sees it as exactly “this interaction with the past that allows their spirituality to grow in present times ... Thus, today’s Lubavitcher performers must create the past anew each time a performance takes place in the present.”¹²⁷ How does Kroke’s music “as the quintessence of ancient Jewish culture, and at the same time as living proof for its unbroken existence” conform with this attitude?¹²⁸ With this set of contradictions, denial, and misrepresentation, a group like Kroke can *only* grow and flourish in an atmosphere that is ignorant of Jewish traditions and lacking the very Hasidim that they claim to represent. The reintroduction of racial criteria into what some people call the “Jewish Renaissance in Europe” reveals the political-ideological content of the klezmer movement and reduces it to questions such as “do two Jewish grandmothers of three Polish musicians make the group a Jewish group playing Jewish music?”¹²⁹ The

¹²⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians’ Debate*, in: *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, ed. Saul Friedlander, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992:125.

¹²⁶ Eric L. Santner, *History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma*, in: *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, ed. Saul Friedlander, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992: 144.

¹²⁷ Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*: 105-107.

¹²⁸ Kroke, *Eden*. Berlin: Oriente, 1997 [RIEN CD 09].

¹²⁹ Rita Ottens, *Dürfen Deutsche Klezmer-Musik spielen?* (Are Germans allowed to play Klezmer music?) Unpublished paper, Bremen 2000.

Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman write in their introduction to *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000): “As ‘Jewish music,’ klezmer has special meaning for Germans, and in the 1990s it has become the music that symbolizes race and racism in the public sphere of post-Holocaust Germany more than any other” (41).

allegedly racist intention into which our sociological categorization of Kroke as a non-Jewish group has been transformed disguises the actual core of the problem: it is the wish to silence the differences between Jews and Germans (and Poles) and to reverse their roles — so as to fade out the Holocaust and furthermore, aim directly at the core of *halakha*, Jewish religious law, and therefore at the heart of Judaism,¹³⁰ seeking to weaken and redefine it according to criteria championed by the Nazis themselves. It sheds light on the massive formations of denial that are still determining the lives of the first and second post-war generations of Germans and Poles — as well as on the psychological deformations of the Jews who live among them.

A further facet of the Kroke case is an economic one: in the years following the fall of the Wall, I tried to interest the owners of the record store Canzone (who later founded Oriente) in the music of Brave Old World and the Epstein Brothers, at that time two leading groups of the American klezmer revival and traditional American-Jewish wedding music, respectively. They were neither interested in the music of those particular groups nor in the genre klezmer at all. It was only after Rubin's and my first anthology with klezmer music was published in 1991 and our Jewish Music Series for Schott Wergo became established that it became clear there was a large interest in this music on the part of the German public.¹³¹ After that, Oriente began to put out its own CDs with klezmer music, including those by Kroke. Throughout these years we had been frequent visitors of Canzone and been on friendly personal and professional terms with the owners. During our last visit to Canzone in November 1999, a few weeks after the publication of our book, we noticed that our records — which had normally been displayed prominently — had been reduced to a small number. Upon inquiring as to the reason, we were told their business had suffered “a 20 percent loss of income in the recent past”. Shortly thereafter, Canzone filed for bankruptcy. The pamphlet must have been sent out just before our visit.

¹³⁰ See Steinsaltz, *Talmud*.

¹³¹ Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, *Yikhes: Frühe Klezmer-Aufnahmen von 1907-1939 aus der Sammlung von Prof. Martin Schwartz*, Munich: Trikont Verlag, 1991; Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin, *Jüdische Lebenswelten/Patterns of Jewish Life: Highlights from the Concert Series “Traditional and Popular Jewish Music” Berlin 1992*, Mainz: Schott Wergo, 1993. Also in 1991, the Klezmatics' second CD, *Rhythm + Jews* (Berlin: Piranha), and the CD *Brave Old World: Klezmer Music* (Chicago: Flying Fish Records/Hamburg: Fenn Music Service) were released, both of which contributed significantly to the profile of klezmer music in Germany.



Image 7: CD cover Kroke, *The Sounds of the Vanishing World*, 1999

In their CD *The Sounds of the Vanishing World*, released by Oriente in 1999, Kroke appears to be now cleansed of all things Jewish. The title however indicates — together with the imagery of the CD cover and the classification of the music as “World Music/Jewish Music/Poland” — that it *is* the Jews who are meant with the term “vanishing world”.¹³² Yet the cover shows an *African* tribe, having erected a camp during their apparent flight. The camp is situated at a lake; behind the people lies the desert. Scorched black earth and black smoke that rises towards the sky can not only be seen on the cover, but also on the booklet and on the compact disc itself. The alternatives left to this dispersed bunch of refugees are hopeless: should they return to the world of death, symbolized also by the pair of dark woman’s eyes, which — framed by smoke clouds — look down from the sky? The image of the eyes belongs to a set of psychologically stereotyped characterizations of Jews as the suffering and chosen (knowing) people, and in this case it symbolizes the Jewish victims of Auschwitz. Facing them is a single boat that seems to hint at a possibility for flight over the water, perhaps alluding to the anti-Zionist threat of “driving the Jews of Israel into the sea” which is common in the Arab lands.

Behind the superficially harmless term “vanishing”, a post-war term which has been used to describe the silent removal of the Jews from their surroundings — socially murdered long before they were physically eliminated — one can assume the knowledge and bad conscience of the former neighbors, onlookers and active participants. Frank Stern suggests that the term “vanishing” (*verschwinden*) “can moreover also be a reflection of the ideological indoctrination of the population of the Jew as the Other, the stranger, who has to disappear from Germany”.¹³³ He furthermore thinks that the “abstractness, the nebulousness, the not asking about the vanishing, are conditions of a disposition which shape the reactions to the

¹³² After this writing, Kroke’s CD *Ten Pieces to Save the World* (Oriente, 2003) and the collaborative CD with British violinist Nigel Kennedy, *East Meets East* (EMI, 2003) were released. *Ten Pieces* at least does not mention either “Jewish” or “klezmer” in the filing instructions on the back of the CD cover.

¹³³ “Diese Formulierung kann darüberhinaus auch ein Reflex auf die ideologische Indoktrinierung der Bevölkerung vom Juden als dem Anderen, dem Fremden sein, der aus Deutschland zu verschwinden habe” (Stern, *Im Anfang*: 209-210).

reappearance in changed social processes”.¹³⁴ In this respect the visual icon of “vanishing”, used by a contemporary “klezmer” group within the context of the structures of the German klezmer movement, may clarify my case study and analysis.

“What are we Germans to do?”: The Case of Kroke and the World Music Establishment

After our discovery of the Oriente-Kroke pamphlet, Rubin and I found out that at least three publicly-subsidized German national public radio stations had transmitted interviews with members of Kroke and/or their record label, in which they repeated similar accusations as in the pamphlet. As in the case of the pamphlet, we were not informed of the existence or content of the radio broadcasts, nor were we ever asked for our side of the story by any of the journalists involved. After a lecture of mine on the German klezmer movement in Bremen in April 2000,¹³⁵ one attending journalist lamented openly: “What are we Germans to do? We do not have our own music any more! The Nazis robbed us of our songs. We have nothing. Where are we to turn to find our own music again?”¹³⁶ It turned out that it was exactly *the* journalist who had been (at least partly) responsible for the authorship of the pamphlet and who also had done some of the radio shows. This lamentation, although it expresses the problematic and burdensome relationship of the German post-war generation with its own cultural traditions,¹³⁷ also characterizes the apolitical post-war attitude which seeks flight in the cultural riches of the German past. Here, too, the readiness of the journalist in question to formulate a text of such consequences as well as the lack of any sense of democratic or political awareness, as well as the failure of professional ethics is striking, especially as it involved not only private individuals but also the media — one of which was the prize-winning Berlin station Radio *Multikulti*. The assured tone of the entire pamphlet (and the broadcasts) suggests the anticipated consent of the many addressees. Furthermore, the behavior of the accuser towards the accused, living in the same city and having known one another for more than a decade, emphasizes the denunciatory character of the paper. It also sheds light onto questions dealing with human behavior under dictatorships which Hannah Arendt has described: “The next decisive step in the preparation of living corpses is the assassination of the ethical person.”¹³⁸ But what is perhaps more disturbing is the fact that an obvious economic problem — possibly combined with the wish to outdo a competitor — was so rapidly and easily fitted into anti-Semitic stereotypes which must have been ready at hand like the prefabricated tattoo stencils of *Stürmer*-Jews of the young German Nazis.

¹³⁴ “... daß die Abstraktheit, die Nebelhaftigkeit, das Nicht-Hinterfragen des Verschwindens Bedingungen einer Disposition sind, die die Reaktionen auf das Wiederauftauchen in veränderten sozialen Prozessen prägt” (Stern, *Im Anfang*: 210).

¹³⁵ Ottens, *Dürfen*.

¹³⁶ The journalist, Winfried Dulisch, was a former left-wing singer-songwriter of the Sixties.

¹³⁷ See also the monologue in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s film *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, 1976/77: “You [Hitler] are to blame that we can [sic; no] longer look at a field of grain without thinking of you. You made old Germany kitschy with your simplifying works and peasant pictures”. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Hitler: A Film from Germany*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1982: 242.

¹³⁸ “Der nächste entscheidende Schritt in der Präparierung lebender Leichname ist die Ermordung der moralischen Person”. (Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*: 929).

Conclusion: Klezmer as the Soundtrack of German “normalcy”

Through the constellation of Oriente’s position in the World Music scene, in conjunction with the collaboration of journalists such as Winfried Dulisch — not coincidentally a member of the committee of the “*Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik*” (German Record Critics’ Prize) — and German National Public Radio stations such as Radio *Multikulti*, WDR and Radio Bremen, Kroke was awarded the *Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik* in 2000 for *Sounds of the Vanishing World*.¹³⁹ They have positioned themselves as one of the most visible groups representing “Jewish” musical traditions on the European World Music circuit, collaborating regularly with British renegade violinist Nigel Kennedy, and their CD *Ten Pieces to Save the World* reached the number two position on the European World Music Charts in June 2003.¹⁴⁰ My abstract proposing a scholarly analysis of the Kroke pamphlet examined here was rejected by the guest editor of the Anglo-American journal *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* for a special issue devoted to Jewish popular culture in Poland, the argument being I would “trash” the group. Interestingly, his argument runs parallel to the reactions in Germany regarding critical analysis of the klezmer movement: while the tenor in Germany was I would “forbid” Germans to play klezmer music,¹⁴¹ the American editor interpreted my experience and my analysis of it as a “condemnation of whole cultural trends” which he deemed “useless”.¹⁴² It seems to me that reactions like these are bred in an atmosphere of amnesia, fear, and revisionism.¹⁴³ In such an atmosphere, the utmost intellectual effort seems to amount to the coining of journalistically encoded catchphrases such as the “virtual Jewish presence in Europe”,¹⁴⁴ a strategy that helps defuse the dangerous realities of the actual re-racialisation and marginalization of Jews taking place in Germany (and Poland).

Friedländer maintains the assumption that “a new discourse about Nazism is unfolding today on the imaginary level, in the realm of icons and emotions”.¹⁴⁵ The German klezmer movement can be interpreted as such a new discourse by investigating, for example, the transformation of the “icons of alterity” that have traditionally been used to characterize Jews, such as the Yiddish language, the Eastern European Jewish body, and the music of the

¹³⁹ http://www.kroke.krakow.pl/plyty_e.htm, last consulted on 6 June, 2004.

This prize is roughly equivalent to an American Grammy.

¹⁴⁰ Here it should be noted that the World Music Charts Europe are compiled for the European Broadcasting Union by two journalists from Radio *Multikulti*, thus further cementing the World Music constellation. The choices are not based on record sales, but rather “Once a month radio-Worldmusic-specialists from twentythree European countries select their individual top ten favourites out of current Worldmusic releases from their playlists and mail them to Berlin. The nominations are processed in a data-base and the top ten is then published as the WORLD MUSIC CHARTS EUROPE” (<http://www.wmce.de/about.html>, last consulted on 6 June, 2004).

¹⁴¹ Both, Möllemann and Walser spoke of “being forbidden” to speak out, when confronted with the anti-Semitism implicit in their attitudes. As criticism is not actually forbidden in democratic Germany, this attitude could be interpreted as a “staged breaking of taboos” and, at the same time, as their self-stylisation as victims.

¹⁴² Michael Steinlauf, personal communication via e-mail, 1 November, 2000.

¹⁴³ It has been a common feature of my research that informants are afraid to speak out; if they do, they usually wish to remain anonymous. This was especially so while Rubin and I were interviewing people in Poland about the background of Kroke.

¹⁴⁴ The term is derived from Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*.

In Germany, the equivalent of this is the term “Jewish Disneyland”.

¹⁴⁵ “... von der Annahme auszugehen, daß ein neuer Diskurs über den Nazismus sich heute genau auf der imaginären Ebene, im Bereich der Bilder und der Gefühle entfaltet” (Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod*: 23).

Jews.¹⁴⁶ As Rubin's account of the Feidman concert at the *Haus der Jungen Talente* in 1990 shows, the Jew had to be made visible again almost immediately after the opening of the Wall. This process began to involve the staging of Jewish culture in a "pragmatic deployment of fictions in order to shape the societal reality according to the myth" of "normalcy" and a "renaissance of Jewish culture in Germany".¹⁴⁷ The "artificially enhanced visibility" of the Jew is needed for the constitution of the German community and Germanness in contrast to the Jewish Other,¹⁴⁸ and repeated ritual performances of klezmer and Yiddish music serve as a generator for the distribution of cultural stereotypes of Jews and Jewishness into German society and its institutions. I maintain that the ideology of the German klezmer movement contains many new components which endow the Jew with positive, e.g. healing and saving qualities, but also carries forth residual structures and stereotypes of the old anti-Semitism. Both, the pre-World War Two wandering Ahasverus, the Eternal Jew, who threatens Germany with his greed for gold coins and lust for power, and the multicultural Jewish klezmer musician from New York, who connects Germany again to the international world, are the two sides of this ideological coin. I have shown that this newer, more positive image of the far-away Jew (invited to Germany and returning to his home abroad) is contrasted with the Jew living in Germany as a Jew (uninvited, staying, and claiming a place in German society) as a target of stereotypes that have been part of German popular culture for centuries.

The topics of Wagner's racial anti-Semitism appear here in a twisted form: in this case it is not the outsider who seeks to excel in *German* music (like the hapless Sixtus Beckmesser in *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*); instead the accusations are directed against the Jew in Germany who investigates his *own* culture, his own history, and the memory of his people. "Remembering and working through: Are those not definitions of the Un-German itself?" asks Theweleit in his analysis of post-war Germany after the fall of the Wall.¹⁴⁹

The German Klezmer movement is a microcosm of German society and contains all of the same structures as the great discourses taking place within society at large. Yet, disguised as a merely popular cultural and not a political issue, the klezmer discourse is looked down upon as a side issue, while the great public controversies, such as the debates surrounding the author Martin Walser and the Möllemann-Friedman dispute, occupy the political analysts.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Weiner, *Richard Wagner*, Introduction.

On the Jewish body, see Gilman's *Freud, Identität und Geschlecht*, *The Jew's Body*, and *Jewish Self-Hatred*.

¹⁴⁷ "Der Mythos ist eine Politik des Als-Ob, die ganz pragmatisch und zynisch Fiktionen einsetzt, um die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit dem Mythos anzupassen", Kurt Lenk, Politische Mythen im Nationalsozialismus, in: Manfred Sicking and Alexander Lohe (eds.), *Die Bedrohung der Demokratie von rechts: Wiederkehr der Vergangenheit?* Cologne: Bund Verlag 1993: 54-66, quoted in Dieter Borchmeyer, Renaissance und Instrumentalisierung des Mythos: Richard Wagner und die Folgen, in: *Richard Wagner im Dritten Reich*, ed. Saul Friedländer and Jörn Rüsen, Munich: C.H. Beck: 81.

For a similar analysis of images of Sephardic Jews in contemporary Spain, see Cohen, *Constructing*.

¹⁴⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1969:166.

¹⁴⁹ "Erinnern & Durcharbeiten: Sind das nicht Definitionen des Undeutschen selber?" (Theweleit, *Das Land*: 100.

¹⁵⁰ Another nationwide controversy erupted around the publication of Walser's novel *Tod eines Kritikers*. Throughout the book, which one German critic called a "document of hate", there are reflections about the reasons to carry out the ultimate *Tabubruch*, in this case to murder a character with distinct "Jewish" and

That the the Kroke pamphlet examined here has not turned into a public controversy — although it, too, represents a form of *Tabubruch* — also has its reasons in the idealized position of music in German culture, and in the increasingly ideologically-charged role of Yiddish music as an icon for normalcy and new Jewish life in the united Germany. Furthermore, even if it *had* made it to the public limelight, it would have immediately been ghettoized and seen as belonging to the sphere of anti-Semitism and Jewish culture and history, instead of as part of German history.

Like the public controversies and affairs, the development of the klezmer movement owes its present status to the new constellations that the Fall of the Iron Curtain and German unification brought about. As the anthropologist Uli Linke has observed:

Contemporary Germans invest bodies and physicalities with meanings that derive significance from historical memory: of Nazi atrocities, the Holocaust, and the Judeocide. These events are implanted in social memory through a repertoire of images and symbols, which, by nature of the violence of representation, sustain and even reproduce the culture of the past. Such mimetic evocations, while often tangibly inscribed on bodies, remain below the level of conscious acknowledgment because they exist in disguised or highly aestheticized form.¹⁵¹

Most scholars of German studies, anti-Semitism studies and Jewish studies concentrate their analyses of Jewish culture and Jewish life on contemporary German literature, film and television. The field of music, however — although hardly invisible with Yiddish musical performances and festivals taking place in practically every German town — has been almost completely excluded.¹⁵² But it is here, in the realm of music and popular culture, where the racial dimension is tested out by adherents of the German anti-establishment and alternative forms of living and thinking and, finally, “Jewish” ethnicity and status are defined. It is music that is used to tame the demons of the past and to celebrate the new beginnings of a united country which had long been divided as a result of the two wars it waged against the world and a genocide which marked the *Zivilisationsbruch*. A fetish figure, “the Klezmer” — as a musician connected to the subconsciousness and the realm of the unspeakable — is to mediate the new historical situation of Germany and its future as a rehabilitated member of the world’s nations, helping it to come to terms with dualisms: those of past and future, Self and Other, and victim and perpetrator. Translated into the vocabulary of the German klezmer movement, the dualisms include tradition and innovation, and purism and hybridization.

The processes Rubin has observed among the American klezmer movement are diametrically opposed to the ones of the German movement:¹⁵³ in Germany, the Yiddish sounds and images undoubtedly struck a nerve as they opened up the possibility for interaction, but it was not the interaction with the past of their grandparents and parents. Via Yiddish music, Germany’s post-war generations could get in contact with the feared and desired Other, “the Jew” who, in the Sixties and Seventies, had almost no public presence in either of the German states. Contrary to the American movement, in which exploration is an act of

sexually perverse features. The Jewish character is based on Germany’s most well-known and disputed literature critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, not coincidentally a Jewish survivor of the Warsaw ghetto.

¹⁵¹ Linke, *German Bodies*: 1.

¹⁵² As an example of the trend towards incorporating music into the discourse, see Applegate and Potter, *Music and German National Identity*.

¹⁵³ Rubin, *Ambivalent*. In the American movement, Jews use klezmer music to define themselves as a distinct ethnic group (or groups) within a multicultural society. See also Stratton, *Coming out Jewish*.

celebration of generations past, here the music of the Eastern European Jews had to be retrospectively rendered usable for the own rejected German history and sometimes even be used to purify the tainted image of the parents and grandparents by turning them into alleged “half-Jews” and “resistance fighters”. In this sense, the Yiddish movement is the *only* discourse that allows a broad German audience active access to the most tabooed part of its own immediate historical past, the Holocaust. But as a result of the missing dialogue with its own history and cultural traditions, the movement becomes a kind of acoustic occupation with Jews and the Holocaust without the need for having direct contact with Jews and their specific Jewish experience. Through this process, *Jewish* history and culture are transformed into *German* experience. At the same time, klezmer music in Germany is supported and celebrated, like the carefully nursed physical Jewish presence, as a sign that Auschwitz has been overcome, as a proof for “reconciliation and normalcy”.

That this discussion is almost entirely one *by Germans about Jews*, is also the key difference that distinguishes the German from the American klezmer movements *as Jewish movements* — although there are numerous overlappings and the music made by Germans and Jews often *sounds* at least superficially and, perhaps, surprisingly the same. Jewish musical traditions, rooted in religion and history, have — even in their popular-commercial forms such as the Yiddish Theater and Yiddish-language cinema during the decades of immigration, as well as the contemporary American klezmer movement — been able to transcend death and therefore connect with the generations of the past *and*, at the same time, reach into the future. The German discussions around innovation and the preservation of Jewish music are fruitless, as they are undertaken from the specific German standpoint: they ignore the fact that the continuous musical reinterpretation of the Jews is a reflection of the reinterpretation of the Torah, which has been undertaken over the course of several millennia and, therefore — even in its seemingly most banal secular expressions — is still connected to Jewish religious philosophy and practice. Without this connection to the past and an audience that identifies with this music in the present, the German movement lapses into a kitschy *Heimatgeschichte* that is performed for lack of its own *Heimat*.

In the klezmer movement, a new place for Jews is being negotiated by Germans for Germans *as* Germans in the united nation-state. Here, German organizers, record companies, journalists and cultural activists play a major part in the management and distribution of cultural images of Jews.¹⁵⁴ Klezmer evokes “the Jew” and, yet, simultaneously relegates the living Jews in Germany to a status at society’s margins, for “in a society of the living ... the dead can only be embodied by persons whose integration into the social body is incomplete”, as Carlo Ginzburg has written.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Gilman has advocated for the “necessity for Jews in today’s Germany to face the fact that they are not taken into consideration as living

¹⁵⁴ The ethnomusicologist Anca Giurchescu has written:

It should be stressed that it is not the insiders of a given culture, but rather the outsiders, who define and use concepts such as folklore, tradition, authentic, representative and national. Defining folklore is in essence a question of selection made by a decision-making group in accordance with the ideology and political interests of that group. It designates aspects of culture which may suit the group’s aims and principles. (The Power of Dance and its Social and Political Uses, in: *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33, 2001: 116).

¹⁵⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *Hexensabbat: Entzifferung einer nächtlichen Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993: 302.

humans who are contributing to modern society”.¹⁵⁶ While the real existent Jews are ritually performed into non-being —¹⁵⁷ into a “vanishing people”, as my case study of the group Kroke illustrated — the precious shards of his cultural heritage are being cemented into the foundation of the new German “normalcy” and the new Germanness.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ “... die Notwendigkeit für Juden im heutigen Deutschland, sich mit der Tatsache auseinanderzusetzen, daß sie als lebende, ihren Beitrag zur modernen Gesellschaft leistende Menschen nicht wahrgenommen werden” (Gilman, *Jüdischer Selbsthaß*:22).

¹⁵⁷ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990:140, cited in: Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*: 22.

¹⁵⁸ On music, memory and forgetting, see Philip V. Bohlman, *The Remembrance of Things Past: Music, Race and the End of History in Modern Europe*, in Bohlman and Radano, *Music and the Racial Imagination*: 644-676.

Appendix:

Zur Kontroverse zwischen Kroke und Rita Ottens

An Journalisten, Veranstalter und Kulturpolitiker

Berlin, im November 1997 [sic; it was 1999]

NICHT-ARIER-NACHWEIS FÜR POLNISCHE KLEZMER-MUSIKER?

Zuerst glaubten das Krakauer Klezmer-Trio KROKE und ihr CD-Label ORIENTE an einen Zufall. Der englische Musikjournalist Simon Broughton machte in einer Rezension der KROKE-CD "Eden" für die Musikzeitschrift "folk roots" im April 1998 den drei Musikern das Kompliment, dass man offensichtlich kein Jude sein muss, um eine gute Klezmer-Platte zu produzieren ("... as well as ample proof that you don't need to be Jewish to make a good Klezmer album."). Wir glaubten immer noch an Zufälle, als im weiteren Verlauf des Jahres Absagen bzw. Nicht-Einladungen der drei Musiker zu jüdischen Kulturfestivals damit begründet wurden, dass man nur jüdische Musiker einladen würde. Es ging hier ausdrücklich nicht um künstlerische Kriterien.

Wir haben uns zu Anfang geweigert zu glauben, dass es sich um eine gezielte Kampagne gegen eine jüdische Musikgruppe handelt, die sich seit ihrer Gründung 1992 in Krakau aktiv und oft gegen den Widerstand konservativ-katholischer Kreise für eine Wiederbelebung und Weiterentwicklung jüdischen Kulturlebens in Polen eingesetzt hat. Wir haben auch bewusst keine Namen von Verantwortlichen ins Spiel gebracht.

Die drei KROKE-Musiker Tomasz Kukurba, Jerzy Bawol und Tomasz Lato äußerten allerdings in einem — von WDR und Radio Bremen im Sommer 1999 gesendeten — Interview die Vermutung, dass eine "Klezmer-Polizei" darüber wacht, wer die "richtige" jüdische Musik spielt, nicht ahnend, dass die damals noch anonymen "Polizisten" sich alsbald selber outen würden. Inzwischen ist nämlich das Buch "Klezmer-Musik" von Joel Rubin und Rita Ottens im — ansonsten als musikphilologisch vertrauenswürdig geltenden — Bärenreiter Verlag erschienen. Bereits im Vorwort (S. 10) verurteilt das Autorenteam jene Nichtjuden, die sich der jüdischen Kultur und ihrer Symbole bemächtigen, und verweist als Beispiel auf eine Krakauer Klezmerband:

"... und eine ebenfalls nichtjüdische Krakauer Klezmer-Band wirbt gar mit kabbalistischer Symbolik auf dem Cover für ihren Anspruch, 'etwas Neues und in der jüdischen Musik Einzigartiges zu schaffen-'" Es gibt nur eine Krakauer Klezmergruppe, die auf einem ihrer CD-Cover Symbole der Kabbala verwendet und im Booklet den Anspruch erhebt, etwas Neues und in der jüdischen Musik Einzigartiges zu schaffen, und es kann kein Zweifel darüber bestehen, wer hier gemeint ist. Wir wissen, dass zumindest Rita Ottens wider ihr besseres Wissen die Mär von der nichtjüdischen Klezmerband aus Krakau verbreitet. Die Gründe für diese gezielte Diffamierung kennen wir nicht. Es ist jedoch kein Geheimnis, dass Rita Ottens und Joel Rubin seit geraumer Zeit versuchen, sich vor allem in Osteuropa als musikhistorische Standortbestimmer und einzig legitimierte Hüter jüdischer kultureller Traditionen zu etablieren — nicht zuletzt durch das Verfassen einschlägiger Veröffentlichungen (s.o.). Dabei sind Klezmer-Avantgardisten wie KROKE, die sich nicht

als orthodoxe Nostalgieproduzenten vermarkten lassen, offensichtlich lästige Störenfriede.

Makabres Fazit: ein Berliner Weltmusiklabel sieht sich vor die Frage gestellt, ob es dem geneigten Publikum Nicht-Arier-Nachweise für eine jüdische Musikgruppe aus Krakau präsentieren soll, der selbsternannte Kulturpäpste das Recht absprechen, ihre kulturellen Traditionen weiterzuentwickeln.

Gigi Backes • Reiner Jordan • Till Schumann (ORIENTE Musik)

p.s. Um Missverständnissen vorzubeugen: der oben erwähnte Rezensent Simon Broughton hat sich, von uns auf seinen Irrtum hingewiesen, inzwischen korrigiert. Nachzulesen im 1. Band des soeben erschienen (sic) ROUGH GUIDE WORLD MUSIC, S. 222

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The Controversy between Kroke and Rita Ottens

To Journalists, Concert Promoters and Cultural Politicians

Berlin, November 1997 [sic, was 1999]

NON-ARYAN CERTIFICATE FOR POLISH KLEZMER MUSICIANS?

At first the Crakow-based klezmer trio Kroke and their CD label Oriente believed it to be a coincidence. The English music journalist Simon Broughton, in a review of the Kroke CD “Eden” for the music magazine “Folk Roots” in April 1998, paid the three musicians the compliment that the recording provides “ample proof that you don’t need to be Jewish to make a good Klezmer album”. We still believed in coincidence when, during the course of the same year, the reason given for rejections and non-invitations of the three musicians to Jewish cultural festivals was that only Jewish musicians were to be invited. This had to do explicitly with non-artistic criteria.

In the beginning we refused to believe that it had to do with a campaign directed against a Jewish music group which has worked actively (and often against the resistance of conservative-Catholic circles) since its founding in 1992 in Crakow on the behalf of a revitalization and further development of Jewish cultural life in Poland. We have also consciously not brought any names of (possible) responsible parties into the picture.

The three Kroke musicians, Tomasz Kukurba, Jerzy Bawol and Tomasz Lato, first aired their suspicions publicly in an interview broadcast in summer 1999 by WDR (West German Radio) and Radio Bremen that a “klezmer police” is determining who plays the “correct” Jewish music — not knowing that the then still-anonymous “police” would soon come out of the closet. But in the meantime, the book “Klezmer-Musik” by Joel Rubin and Rita Ottens has been published by Baerenreiter Verlag, which otherwise enjoys a reputation as a trustworthy music publisher. Already in their foreword (p. 10) the team of authors condemns those non-Jews who seize Jewish culture and its symbols and use as an example a Crakow klezmer band:

“... and a similarly non-Jewish Crakow klezmer band even advertises with kabbalistic symbolism on the (CD) cover for its claim ‘to create something new and unique within Jewish music’”. There is only one Crakow klezmer group which uses kabbalistic symbols on one of its covers and raises the claim in its booklet to create something new and unique within Jewish music, and there cannot be any doubt who is meant here. We know that at least Rita Ottens has been spreading — against her better knowledge — the fable of the non-Jewish klezmer band from Crakow. The reasons for this well-aimed defamation are unknown to us. It is, however, no secret that Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin have been attempting for some time to establish themselves above all in Eastern Europe as the musical and historical definers and only legitimate guardians of Jewish cultural traditions — last but not least through the writing of publications of the above-mentioned sort. Klezmer avant-gardists such as Kroke, who do not allow themselves to be marketed as orthodox nostalgia producers, are apparently regarded as annoying trouble-makers in this process.

The macabre result: a Berlin World Music label is confronted with the question as to whether it is supposed to present its well-meaning audience with a non-Aryan certificate for a Jewish

music group from Crakow which is robbed by self-proclaimed cultural experts of its right to continue to develop its cultural traditions.

Gigi Backes • Reiner Jordan • Till Schumann (Oriente Musik)

p.s. In order to prevent any misunderstandings: the above-mentioned reviewer, Simon Broughton, has corrected himself after we had pointed out his error. See volume one of the just-published "Rough Guide World Music", p. 222.