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# Cur(at)ing History: New Genre Art Interventions and the Polish-Jewish Past

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In the past few decades, Poland has seen a growing number of attempts to reclaim its Jewish past through traditional forms such as historiographic revision, heritage preservation, and monument building. But a unique new mode of artistic, performative, often participatory “memory work” has been emerging alongside these conventional forms, growing in its prevalence and increasingly catching the public eye. This new genre of memorial intervention is characterized by its fast-moving, youthful, innovative forms and nontraditional venues and its socially appealing, dialogic, and digitally networked character as opposed to a prior generation of top-down, slow moving, ethnically segregated, mono-vocal styles. It also responds to the harsh historical realities brought to light by scholars of the Jewish-Polish past with a mandate for healing. This article maps the landscape of this new genre of commemoration projects, identifying their core features and investigating their anatomy via three case studies: Rafał Betlejewski’s *I Miss You Jew!*; Public Movement’s *Spring in Warsaw*; and Yael Bartana’s *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland*. Analyzing their temporalities, scopes, modalities and ambiances, as well as the new visions for mutual identification and affiliation that they offer Poles and Jews, we approach these performances not as representations, but rather as embodied experiences that stage and invite participation in “repertoires” of cultural memory. Different from simple reenactments, this new approach may be thought of as a *subjunctive* politics of history—a “what if” proposition that plays with reimagining and recombining a range of Jewish and Polish memories, present-day realities, and future aspirations.

**Keywords:** *Jewish heritage in Poland; new genre commemoration; performance art; Holocaust memory*

*The telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.*

Oscar Wilde<sup>1</sup>

*Politik ist die Kunst des Möglichen, Kunst ist die Politik des Unmöglichen.  
("Politics is the art of the possible, art is the politics of the impossible.")*

Olafur Eliasson<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Poland's prewar Jewish population of 3.5 million was decimated during the Second World War and further reduced by anti-Semitic incidents in the five decades that followed, so that only a few thousand remain today. Their memory had been publicly elided under Communism in a Polish national brand of Marxist historiography. A first wave of attention to the Jewish "blank spot" in Polish collective memory in the post-communist era attempted to reclaim Jewish memory through traditional forms such as historiographic revision, heritage preservation work, and monument building. But a unique new mode of artistic, performative, often participatory "memory work" has been emerging alongside these "official" forms, growing in its prevalence and increasingly catching the public eye.

After Communism fell and representations of the past were released from state efforts at censorship, there was a flood of publicly suppressed information—as well as public expressions of collective memory—regarding the thousand-year history and violent erasure of Poland's Jews. Spurred by new scholarly and journalistic writings, as well as the visits of foreign Jews (many with Polish roots), the 1990s and early 2000s saw public spaces reassigned some of their former Jewish meanings through official memorial forms like ceremonies, signage, renovation of historic sites, and monuments.<sup>3</sup> Other, more organic, grassroots forms of remembering were also growing up in response to and alongside these, in the realms of tourism and heritage brokering.<sup>4</sup> But in parallel fashion—and picking up speed in the mid-2000s—another kind of memory work was beginning to claim public attention. Social and cultural "interventions" undertaken by artists, academics, youth groups, and other culture brokers, began to create provocative spaces of dialogue and self-reflection, in staged installations or happenings in which individuals were asked to participate in active, social forms of remembering.

A shift in emotional tenor and memorial expanse can be discerned—from a 1980s generation that was the first to rediscover Poland's Jewish history and attempt to fill in "blank spots" in the historiography, make up for years of amnesia and acknowledge Poland's own role in anti-Jewish violence during and after the Second World War, to a younger generation today that is responding to a new, more intensely global social context, challenging Poles to embrace the longstanding Jewish component of Poland's history more fully into their own civic and national identity, and posing pressing questions about the continued silences and inadequacies of historical memory as it is instrumentalized in the present day. If the first wave of remembering emphasized a basic need for "recollecting" an elided narrative, diagnosing an

unacknowledged illness infecting the national body and exposing (and perhaps thereby exacerbating) a painful wound, it also set in motion a vortex of revelation and denial that has come to characterize much Polish debate about the Jewish past.

A second wave of memory work, in the form of a new genre of artistic intervention we identify here, has grown up in response to the problems unleashed by the first wave. A key characteristic of these interventions is their attention to embodied experience, and the way they *stage and invite participation in “repertoires” of historical and cultural memory*.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, they attempt to both transcend the terms of historical debate and to acknowledge the various toxins released by the way that debate has played out in Poland in the past two decades. Artists have emerged as “therapists” who attempt to treat a range of symptoms that have not responded to the prescription of textual, factual historical revelation, or more unidimensional representations of memory.<sup>6</sup> These new genre projects attempt to render abstract ideas about the past concrete and personal, and create spaces where individual experiences and emotions can be expressed and channeled into new sensory collectivities.<sup>7</sup> They may perhaps also be more accurately characterized as “memory work” than the first wave, in that more than filling gaps, they perform a “collective groping, negotiation and contestation over the proper meaning to be assigned to this memory, the proper locus of responsibility and proper forms of commemoration.”<sup>8</sup>

## Remixing History

This new genre of memorial intervention displays a radically recombinative quality, juxtaposing a variety of social, cultural, and political problems rooted in far-flung international sites. Different from simple “reenactments,” this new approach may be thought of as a “subjunctive” politics of history—a provocative “what if” proposition that plays with reimagining and recombining a range of Jewish and Polish memories, present-day realities, and future aspirations.<sup>9</sup> Projects are expressly political, commemorating not for its own sake but for the purpose of social change. They refer to—and attempt to create new—memories of the past, address present-day social ills, and imagine different futures.

Other features of this new form of memory work include:

- The ascendancy of youthful, innovative, ephemeral forms and nontraditional venues, that are socially appealing, dialogic, and digitally networked over more traditional top-down, enduring, authoritative, and mono-vocal styles.
- The creation of new opportunities—or demands—for participation, engagement, intercultural encounter, and exchange among a broad spectrum of public actors. Beyond simple artistic representations, projects entail the creation of new social space, exceeding the constraints of narrative history.
- The embrace of a lighter, or playful, approach. A radical departure for Holocaust-related material in Poland, these projects offer nonthreatening, relatively low-commitment

entryways (through familiar practices, like walking in public, being photographed, visiting a website) into an unknown, frightening domain fraught with guilt, defensiveness, desensitization, or fatigue.

- An explosion of the national boundaries of memory. Transnational flows of stakeholders and audiences (from visiting Jewish youth on state- and community-sponsored pilgrimage, to elite art transactions) collide, along with sometimes dissonant narratives and frames of memory developed in the context of their home places.
- The invitation or inducement of participants to inhabit a multiplicity of subject positions. Theatrical and embodied approaches, involving social experiences, choreographies, or performances, allow experimentation with entering into the subjectivity of others, or splicing previously separate identities together.
- The simultaneous invocation of multiple temporalities and spatialities.

These new genre memorial practices are multidimensional and ambiguous. Radically critical, they also create openings onto intimate spheres of emotion (including fear, guilt, shame, curiosity, and pleasure). They express a new sense of civic engagement or democratic agency and can simultaneously be supremely elitist. They can act as catalysts for dialogue and new social networks, and at the same time be highly polarizing.

What concerns do such projects raise, and what desires do they fulfill? To whom – and for whom – are they speaking? What do they ask participants or audience members to do, feel, or imagine? What new cultural, social, political, or emotional spaces might they open—and which may they foreclose? What opposition do they trigger? In addressing these questions, we aim to illuminate, and assess a pivotal historical moment of alchemy and emergence around Polish national identity and Holocaust memory. We discern a new phase in Polish memory culture, in an era in which the forces shaping national memory in public have become simultaneously more transnational and more local, intersecting with new forms of media to result in these provocative, new genre projects. Finally, we propose to recognize Poland—alongside the much better-known contributions of Germany—as an underappreciated site of significant Holocaust memorial innovation.<sup>10</sup>

### Three Key Projects

In this article, we offer a preliminary analysis of the motives, forms, feelings and consequences of these newly visible memorial forms by focusing on three recent, high-profile projects: Rafał Betlejewski's *I Miss You, Jew!* culminating in a July 2010 barn-burning in the village of Zawada outside Warsaw to commemorate the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom; the participatory performance *Spring in Warsaw*, a “countermarch” led by the Israeli group Public Movement in Warsaw's former wartime Jewish ghetto in April 2009, conceived in response to Israeli youth Holocaust pilgrimage season; and Israeli artist Yael Bartana's evolving *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland*.<sup>11</sup>

## Rafał Betlejewski

“On the 11th of July 2010, a day after the anniversary of the massacre in Jedwabne, a barn will burn.” This was the opening statement of a press release circulated by Rafał Betlejewski, a young Polish performance artist who has recently gained a high profile particularly for his public interventions into Jewish memory in Poland. The event—for which Betlejewski purchased and moved a rural village barn into an open field near Warsaw, and burned it down—was designed to evoke the 1941 incident in which the Polish villagers of Jedwabne had forced hundreds of their Jewish neighbors into a barn and set it on fire, killing them all. The goal of this reenacted barn burning, according to the artist, was, in the first instance, to remind Poles of the Jedwabne pogrom, question the myth of Polish innocence during the Second World War, and “wake up from the pharmacological coma applied to us [Poles] by post-war propaganda.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, however, the realistic performance was billed as an opportunity to “rebuild the Polish-Jewish community of suffering,” this time “without intermediaries, without Germans, Russians, Communists.”<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Barn Burning in Zawada, 2010.**



Photo/ Source: Soliman Lawrence.

The barn that was to burn almost 70 years after the infamous Jedwabne pogrom was part of Betlejewski’s larger artistic and commemorative project *I Miss you Jew!* which ran for a year between January 2010 and January 2011. *I Miss you Jew!* used

local networks, press releases, and a website to encourage Poles to stage impromptu memorial-performances in their own locales. Referencing the widespread problem of anti-Semitic graffiti (and reclaiming the medium for his own ends), Betlejewski called on Poles to paint his project title in urban spaces, particularly those once inhabited by Jews. The artist also photographed people across Poland, posing next to an empty chair (with a yarmulke as a prop), symbolizing an absent Jew. A key component of the project was its website, where participants were invited to post photos or short texts about Jews whom they personally remember and miss. Currently, there are over 300 such personal commemorative posts, dozens of photographs, graffiti, and other commemorative materials available on the site and discussed on its forum.

## Public Movement

*Spring in Warsaw: A Walk through the Ghetto* was an intervention into Holocaust memorial culture and space by the Israeli performance-art group Public Movement. It took place on the site of the Warsaw Ghetto and former Jewish neighborhood of Muranów, on 18 April 2009.<sup>14</sup> While because of German wartime destruction and Polish postwar urban planning policies, this residential neighborhood was almost entirely wiped clean of original traces of its former life, since the late 1940s it accrued a layer of Holocaust-related monuments, and since the late 1980s has been heavily trafficked by Jewish groups from abroad engaged in Holocaust pilgrimage. Each spring, keyed to the Israeli calendar of Holocaust commemoration (with April 19th, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, marking *Yom Ha Shoah*), thousands of Israeli and North American Jewish youth arrive in Poland, marking an emotional high point of their journeys with a walk through Warsaw's circuit of Holocaust memorial sites. Their visits have the quality of demonstrations—they are heavily guarded by Israeli security, and have little interest in or opportunity to encounter the local population.

*Spring in Warsaw* was described by its authors as “a march, a manifestation, a new and alter-memorial ceremony, a guided tour, and an urban walk along a route in a rare site of civil pilgrimage.”<sup>15</sup> The route began at the Umschlagplatz, a monument marking the railway platform from which Jews were taken during the ghetto's liquidations to be shipped to Treblinka and other extermination camps.<sup>16</sup> Here, the curious members of the Warsaw public who had gathered to participate in the event were met by Public Movement's ten Israeli members; dressed in white—suggesting at once haunting and healing—and carrying self-made blue, black, and white striped flags, the artists led the crowd of hundreds of people, young and old, through a series of stops along Muranów's memorial circuit.<sup>17</sup>

As the group moved along, the actors performed significant moments of Jewish and ethnic Polish history. At one point the artists jumped over a fence, recalling Lech Wałęsa's mythic scaling of the fence at the Lenin Shipyard in

Gdańsk during a 1980 strike that led to the foundation of the Solidarity movement. At the site of the Miła 18 bunker, the headquarters of the wartime Jewish Combat Organization that the Nazis attacked (resulting in collective suicide involving organization leader Mordechai Anielewicz and many of his staff), the artists played guitar and sang “Janek Wiśniewski padł,” a Polish ballad about an 18-year-old worker killed in the Polish city of Gdynia during a standoff between the government militia and striking workers in 1970. At Ul. Zamenhofa #5, the former home of Ludwig Zamenhof, Polish-Jewish creator of the “universal tongue” of Esperanto, the actors fixed their home-made flags on the building’s façade and sang the popular 1967 Israeli song “Yerushalayim shel zahav” (Jerusalem of Gold) in that language. At various places along the route the artists mimed fighting, fleeing, and carrying corpses.

Participants were also guided (by following the artists’ examples, or being gently led by them by the hand) to enact a series of ambiguous choreographed gestures. Participatory actions included instances of bowing, kneeling, and fully prostrating on the street facing East in a semblance of Muslim prayer (to the tune of “Forever Young” by the pop group Alphaville), and a moment of silent kneeling, instigated by ringing a handheld Catholic church bell, in front of the memorial to German chancellor Willy Brandt’s famous *Ostpolitik*-enhancing 1970 “Kniefall” (genuflection) at the Uprising memorial.<sup>18</sup> Behind the Uprising memorial itself, the artists called through megaphones pairs of terms—capitalism/socialism; women/men; to the future/to the past; Palestine/Israel; backwards/forwards; the Poles collaborated with the Nazis/the Poles saved the Jews—and invited the crowd to choose a respective side of the plaza, demarcated by plastic tape, to stand on.

### Figure 2

#### Spring in Warsaw. Final dance in front of the Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto, 2009.



Photo/ Source: Bartosz Bobkowski/ Agencja Gazeta.

A final choreography in front of the Uprising memorial itself began with military-style marching, followed by a lyrical speech by one of Public Movement's directors, Omer Krieger.<sup>19</sup> The entire event ended with a patterned but frenzied dance that drew its poses from the frieze on the memorial's façade; its figures came alive—falling, dying, crawling and arising again, carried out to the tune of the electro-house band Justice vs. Siman's (2006) "We Are Your Friends (You Will Never Be Alone Again)."<sup>20</sup> A party for all participants took place afterwards at a local club.<sup>21</sup>

## Yael Bartana

Israeli video artist Yael Bartana has become known for her provocative *Polish Trilogy*, which narrates the beginning of a fictional Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP). The first film of the series, *Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, (2007) features the movement's charismatic leader, Sławomir Sierakowski, in real life a well-known Warsaw-based leftist activist, who delivers an impassioned speech in the Warsaw's abandoned Decennial Stadium calling for 3.3 million Jews to resettle in Poland. Sierakowski's speech, which he penned together with the prominent Polish feminist activist Kinga Dunin, poignantly articulates the core mandate of the JRMiP. Poles need their Jewish other, both to heal their "bad dreams"—pangs of conscience related to Polish complicity in past anti-Jewish violence—and to develop their own, new collective identity. In her second film, *Mur i wieża (Wall and Tower)*, (2009), Bartana imagined a Jewish response to this Polish invitation, visualizing the construction of the first of the movement's settlements in Muranów, at the center of Warsaw's former ghetto. *Zamach (Assassination)*, (2011) is an epilogue of the trilogy, which opens a new dimension. Showing the funeral of the assassinated leader, the film pictures the consolidation of the JRMiP, which is now a movement able to carry on to realize the vision of the martyred hero.

The death of the leader provides a symbolic caesura, after which the JRMiP organization begins taking shape outside of the cinematic frame. The First International Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland took place in May 2012 in Berlin under the auspices of the city's art Biennale. Bartana invited Polish and international artists, leftist activists and intellectuals to present demands that, subject to a popular vote, were to become part of the movement's official political program. Challenging the boundary between art and life, the three-day congress, staged in the intimate *jugendstil* setting of the historic, prewar Hebbel Am Ufer Theater in Berlin, established a forum that had the look and feel of a real (if somewhat dated) international political congress.<sup>22</sup> A red felt carpet covered the stage, where an enormous white round table stenciled with the JRMiP logo, surrounded by 20 chairs, formed the centerpiece of the lavish mise-en-scene. A floor-to-ceiling screen served as a backdrop onto which key proclamations during the days' discussions were projected and



the debates around them were simulcast, and a surround-sound speaker system offered a voice-of-god narration of each day's core mission.

While Congress delegates interacted at the round table and so-called active participants contributed from additional rows of seats ringing the stage, ticketed spectators could watch the proceedings from the theater's upper gallery. While there was clear attention to realist detail (a movement membership registration list; delegate name placards; red ["no"] and white ["yes"] voting cards), there were also absurdist touches: gold-wrapped chocolate gelt on each chair; paper masks printed with the face of the movement's late leader Sławomir Sierakowski, in whose memory a place at the table was left empty; and racy, politically infused entertainment at each day's close. Over three days—divided into discussions of Europe, Poland, and Israel—forty-two delegates and over a hundred active participants (who registered in response to an open call) discussed and voted on forty-three demands. These ranged from the achievable, if radical—for example, demands to open the borders of the EU or introduce Hebrew as the second official language in Poland—to the technically impossible, such as a geotectonic engineering project that would split Israel off from the continental landmass, leaving it to float as a self-governed island in the Mediterranean. The discussion explored the realm of utopia, grounded in a leftist critique of nationalism.

**Figure 3**  
**The First Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in**  
**Poland, Berlin, 2012.**



Photo/ Source: Michael Zgodzay.

## Colliding Frames of Memory

The projects by Betlejewski, Public Movement, and Bartana can be usefully distinguished by their varying *temporalities* (past, present, and future); *scopes* (on a spectrum from particularist to universalist); *modalities* (reenacting/redemptive, therapeutic, and historical corrective); and *ambiences* (spectacular/shocking, playful/cathartic, and mobilizing/empowering).<sup>23</sup> They also suggest a range of relationships between Poles and actual Jews and Jewish communities, and a point to spectrum of new possibilities for the two groups' mutual *affiliations*, as well as their identifications *vis-à-vis* other significant others, particularly the Germans. On this last theme, we identify the approaches of ventriloquism (in which Poles take the place of Jews, using the symbol of the Jew for their own self-expression and memorial purposes); partnership (in which Jews and Poles meet on almost equal terms, each contributing from their own histories, enacting togetherness, and exploring intersubjective allegiances); and solidarity (in which the Jew as a category is universalized in favor of a fusion of identities).

### *The Barn Burning*—"A Moment of Collective Hypnosis"<sup>24</sup>

Betlejewski's performance in the village of Zawada referenced a crucial, traumatic event from the Polish-Jewish *past*, the pogrom in Jedwabne. In producing the image of the burning barn, which circulated widely in the Polish media and was even broadcast live on national television, Betlejewski created a visual simulation of what has in the past decade become the iconic Polish pogrom, transporting "then" into "now." By using "total theatre" to create an illusion of "absolute reality,"<sup>25</sup> Betlejewski generated a salutary shock intended to induce Poles to incorporate the memory of Jedwabne into their collective identity, while simultaneously offering a redemptive frame that provided a symbolic closure.

While the project's prior phase, *I Miss You Jew!* had some transnational resonance (with the project's website featuring commemorative entries from both Poland and abroad), the *scope* of the Barn Burning performance was clearly intra-Polish: Poles were both the instigators and the intended audience of the controversial spectacle, which made one Polish critic conclude disparagingly that Betlejewski staged a "Polish-Polish reconciliation without Jews."<sup>26</sup>

For Betlejewski, Polish war-time violence toward Jews, epitomized by the burning barn, holds transformative potential for Polish national identity. "Jedwabne will be for Poles... the biblical eye of a needle," said the artist, "a black hole through which the Polish identity will have to pass... and become something new, something different."<sup>27</sup> But in Betlejewski's estimation, the internalization of the crime into the nation's collective memory—a prerequisite for the construction of a new Polish identity—required an act of collective expiation. The barn burning was intended to provide a vehicle.

Betlejewski framed his intervention squarely within the Christian notion of redemption, and more specifically the Catholic ritual of confession. Several months before the planned performance, the artist invited Poles to send him blank sheets of paper, which would symbolize their trespasses against Jews and anti-Semitic sentiments they might have held.<sup>28</sup> In the dramatization of the barn burning, however, it was not only the symbolic white sheets of paper but the artist himself who, donning a white costume recalling the traditional garb of a Polish peasant, was to appear to burn inside the barn. This self-sacrificing persona symbolically purged the evil from Polish society, representing through self-immolation the destruction of the perpetrators of the Jedwabne crime, and Christ himself. Betlejewski entered the barn as “a Polish anti-Semite” and “a Polish ignorant”—indeed as *all* Poles, represented by the blank papers whom he symbolically invited to “burn with [him] in that barn”<sup>29</sup> The fire was thus to be a ritual one, cleansing Poles of their sins against Jews, of anti-Semitism and ignorance. The artist embodied the old Pole who must die for the new, self-aware Pole to be born.

Apart from this “expiatory” function, the barn burning was also to become a *visual icon* of what Betlejewski called “the Polish folk Holocaust,” or the murder of Jews during the Second World War by Poles, particularly in the countryside. “While the German Holocaust, this organized and institutional one has [visual representations]—we have Auschwitz, we have all kinds of traces, monuments, gas chambers, barbed wires and different photographs and documents,” observed the artist, “we have nothing on the visual level that would picture this [other, Polish] Holocaust.”<sup>30</sup> The *modality*, or means and approach, adopted by the artist thus combined redemption and iconization. The fire was meant to serve not only as a direct remedy but also as a concrete, lingering future reminder on which the nation was being called to meditate.

Betlejewski announced his performance as one that was meant to “enable [the audience] to see the tragedy of the Jedwabne Jews directly, in real time, in close vicinity.”<sup>31</sup> The immediacy of his intervention thus relied on the ambience of *the spectacular and the shocking*. “Their annihilation took time, it had its temperature, sound, it stretched over minutes and hours,” explained the artist. “Somebody was standing around that barn, holding a rake, looking at it, guarding it. What did he feel? Through this performance I also want to penetrate into his secret.”<sup>32</sup> The spectators were therefore to be forced into dual subjectivities: to watch the barn burning from the perspective both of the perpetrators of the pogrom, and become (accusatory? redemptive? historical?) witnesses to the crime. By watching a simulation of the pogrom, Betlejewski believed the spectators would become particular kinds of intimate (moral) witnesses, who could fathom the emotions of the generic “Pole with the rake” who had both seen and participated in setting the original fire in Jedwabne. Their memory of the performance was then to become a widespread Polish “postmemory” of the Jedwabne pogrom—a postmemory that Betlejewski concluded had not been taken up by the population at large.<sup>33</sup> The film shot on the site during the event and uploaded on the project’s website was

thus to disseminate this image, making the “witnessing” experience available to a broad public.

Betlejewski’s realist reenactment of the traumatic events of Jedwabne was a repetition in a double sense: it not only echoed past violence, but evolved into a site of contemporary violence. Two protesters tried to prevent the performance, climbing up one of the barn’s internal roof beams. They were aggressively removed by a group of local men who entered the barn and demanded that the performance proceed. In his documentary, Betlejewski frames this incident as “a crystallization of the same positions that might have been manifested also 70 years ago,” and hence as an integral part of reenactment, and indeed the effect he wished to achieve.<sup>34</sup> For the two young protesters, however, the performance was an unethical “barbaric act,” which irresponsibly exposed the spectators to “something they never wanted to see.”<sup>35</sup>

The barn burning was staged in meticulous detail. Brought to the spot from another village, the structure itself was carefully reconstructed, with its asbestos cement roof replaced with a more authentic looking (and flammable) thatched roof. This attention to realistic detail, however, contrasted with the manner in which the performance was to be publicly consumed. The artist arranged for a village orchestra to play during the barn-burning, and the local farm wives’ association was asked to prepare hot snacks for the spectators. Because of protestation by a local official, this part of the plan was not realized, but the (now) controversial performance nonetheless took place in an atmosphere that the artist described as cheerful:

People came with blankets, with prams, with children, with snacks and alcohol in order to see the show, this burning barn. It is not an ordinary thing after all.... They were saying afterwards that they had never had anything like that in Zawada, that it was great that the TV came and that they finally showed Zawada. So they were delighted.... Actually, they would have loved it to have some stands there with beads, beer and *bigos*. I was actually encouraging them to do it. To my mind, it would have been perfect then.<sup>36</sup>

For Betlejewski, “a village fair” would be the best context for the performance because it represents “the most authentic and natural form of popular expression” for local people.<sup>37</sup> Pogroms, he adds, also had “something of a licentious, macabre and unrestrained folk festivity.” Further, placing a representation of a violent crime in a context of a joyful village fair was to provide a *Verfremdungseffekt*, augmenting the cognitive shock of the onlookers. This dissonance, he concluded, was “supposed to hurt.”<sup>38</sup> In designing his shocking tableaux of fire and festivity, however, the artist said he did not inform local officials about the real purpose of the barn burning, letting them believe the barn merely served as a film-set location.<sup>39</sup> The inhabitants of Zawada were therefore employed unknowingly as the main characters in a performance in which their very participation was the object of scrutiny for another,

external and passive audience, who was intended as the main consumer of the spectacle.

The aestheticization of the barn burning, though meant as an alienating device to intensify the sense of horror, also raised anxieties among critics about viewers drawing simple pleasure from this visual spectacle. The theatrical quality and high production value of the televised event, which foregrounded the figure of the artist himself, also provoked criticism by some observers that Betlejewski's work does not represent art but "advertising," and that it served only the self-promotion of the performer, whose training in commercial design also prompted the opinion that Betlejewski is a derivative late-comer to terrain that "real" artists had readied.<sup>40</sup> And while many, like philosopher and prominent Warsaw Jewish community member Stanisław Krajewski, recognized the potential of Betlejewski's performance, believing that the simplicity and immediacy of the visual image it left behind resonated in a particularly powerful way, others believed that "repeating a violent act is also a form of aggression"<sup>41</sup> and bemoaned the fact that Betlejewski "intruded upon the territory of somebody else's memory."<sup>42</sup>

In the barn-burning performance, Betlejewski indeed put himself in the position of a *ventriloquist* who not only spoke in the name of the Jews but also symbolically occupied their position.<sup>43</sup> It is the figure of the generic Pole, which the artist himself claimed to embody, that was placed at the center of the barn-burning spectacle. Before he set the barn on fire from the inside, seemingly perishing in the flames, Betlejewski delivered a speech that made it clear who was to be the victim of the barn burning *anno domini* 2010:

I was brought up by a Polish family, by the Catholic Church, by a Polish school, Polish literature, Polish art, Polish poetry, Polish television, and, finally, by the Polish language. I was shaped by Polish consciousness and I am an example of a total Polish ignorant... With this symbolic act, I would like to complete my own metamorphosis. This metamorphosis consists in the fact that in the year 2000 I had no idea about anything, and that person I was then I would like to symbolically burn in the barn today.<sup>44</sup>

Betlejewski, who announced that *I Miss You Jew!* was originally inspired by Jan T. Gross's 2000 publication of *Neighbors*, wanted to achieve more than just condemning ignorance about the Jedwabne crime. He entered the barn *in place of the Jews* and declared the desire to *shed the identity of the perpetrator*. "I want to show that I, an ethnic Pole, am able, through this symbolic act, to change the place that history gave me, that is, outside the barn, with the torch and the rake" he says in the Burning Barn documentary, "I would like to change this place and come into the barn."<sup>45</sup>

In one interview, Betlejewski proposes that Poles and Jews should "give up their positions and move to the other side."<sup>46</sup> This experiment with entering the subjectivity of the other—arguably a core element of empathy (and an approach also pursued by Public Movement in their action)—becomes highly ambivalent in the symbolic

space of the barn. If, as Betlejewski suggests, many Poles are still ignorant about the Jedwabne crime, what do they learn about anti-Jewish violence and how to come to terms with it by performatively stepping into Jewish shoes? How does this momentary, symbolic reversal of roles contribute to the creation of a collective memory of Jedwabne among Poles?

Jews, while symbolically invoked in *I Miss You, Jew!*, are also problematically displaced in behaviors like putting on a costume yarmulke, acts we might describe as what Marianne Hirsch has called “appropriative identification.”<sup>47</sup> Concentrating on the *Polish* exclamation of loss, the project neither specifies *which Jews* are being addressed, nor does it devote much space to a *Jewish response* to this longing. Do Poles desire the return of the country’s prewar Jewish population—or perhaps only religious ones with *peyes*? Would they be equally pleased by an influx of Moroccan or Ethiopian or Russian Jewish emigres? For Betlejewski, Jews seem to belong exclusively to a narrowly imagined past. Further, while Poles might remember or feel nostalgia for Jews, they do not encounter them in their diversity, complexity, or individuality in his performances. Even their role as victims is effaced, displaced by a generic Pole.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Spring in Warsaw: “A Picnic Underpinned with Unease”*<sup>49</sup>**

*Spring in Warsaw* casts a critical eye on public manifestations of memory *in the present day*, and seeks to intervene in their concrete, spatial, embodied forms and practices. The project’s driving concerns were the meaning and symbolic ownership of the present-day neighborhood (and wartime Jewish ghetto) of Muranów, and “questioning the intouchability [*sic*] of the Israeli and Jewish Youth Delegations to Poland” that traverse this terrain, “exploring the political and aesthetic meanings residing in their rituals.”<sup>50</sup>

If Betlejewski’s projects comprised a largely intra-Polish conversation, Public Movement showed that the discussion of Holocaust memory increasingly is—and how it might usefully be—an international, intercultural dialogue, interweaving the histories, concerns, and sensibilities of both Poles and Jews.<sup>51</sup> For Warsaw residents, spring signals both the neighborhood’s annual resignification by way of the Polish state’s official Holocaust commemoration and the arrival of these Jewish groups. The latter phenomenon amounts to the giving over of ownership of this already-overdetermined part of the city’s public space to uniform-clad, Israeli-flag-waving corps of young Jews, whose style of travel has been the subject of sustained critique.<sup>52</sup> *Spring in Warsaw*—the brainchild of Israeli and Polish artists and cultural elites in conversation—was an attempt to “speak back” at the dominant forms of commemoration, and to expand the memorial terrain to include a broader range of local (Polish), Jewish (i.e., Middle Eastern), and universal concerns. In turn, the

project's title, *Spring in Warsaw*, subtly suggested a reversal of the globally dominant Holocaust memorial gaze, typically directed critically at Poland by foreign Jews (and others), opening the field of view to include the Polish experience of these Jewish rememberers. The word "spring" also evoked an air of possibility and the regeneration of life in a quarter of the city burdened by ghosts.

While still somewhat "particularist" in its scope—speaking to issues of Jewish and Polish history and culture in a specific city and site—the event gestured more and less subtly to broader, further-flung issues through its inclusion, for example, of the postures of Muslim prayer, and the mention of "checkpoints." Yet there was an ambiguity to many of the scripted movements (scrambling, chasing, and grabbing) which blurred not only the line between menace and play—suggesting that historical events and their participants can have many meanings—but intimated the repetition of similar forms of violence in many times/places. The impression was that everything is happening today, in a constant repetition of past violence in new forms and sites. *Spring in Warsaw* thus engaged a Polish public in experiencing and physically inhabiting "noncanonical" texts and gestures overlaid on a landscape of highly potent preexisting symbols and practices. The event thus intermingled references to a web of genealogically (but not directly) related political and emotional issues within a single commemorative frame.

Three intertwining modalities were discernible in the group's work. First was their collaborative, inclusive, ecumenical, participatory approach, based on an ethic of "consultation and collaboration with scholars, experts, and ongoing group debates and discussions."<sup>53</sup> This openness refers not only to the Israeli group's relationship with the event's Polish co-planners but also to the range of concerns (Jewish and Polish, European and Middle Eastern, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) that was invoked, suggesting shared—or at least parallel—rather than competitive suffering. Second was their focus on *the body* as an instrument of politics, treating its postures and movements through space as a trigger for accessing and liberating memory and forging solidarity at the most intimate, physical level. As stated in their manifesto, their work "explores the political and aesthetic possibilities residing in a group of people acting together."<sup>54</sup> The artists' therapeutic conduct vis-à-vis participants' bodies (their nurturing gestures, their white outfits) further suggested their recognition of history and memory as capable both of collectively wounding and healing. Third was their playful approach to the use of symbols, gestures, language, and music, their generosity of spirit, and the lightness and "breathing space" they infused into an otherwise psychologically freighted space.<sup>55</sup>

A keyword that arose in our discussions with organizers of and participants in "*Spring in Warsaw*" was *odczarowanie*, best rendered in English as "dispelling."<sup>56</sup> The notion of *odczarowanie* has been publicly debated in relation to Betlejewski's work, as the artist himself claimed explicitly that part of his motivation was to "*odczarować*" or "disenchant" the word "Jew" (in Polish "*Żyd*"), breaking it of its

negative, psychologically complex overtones and according it the relative neutrality evoked by other national designations.<sup>57</sup> But if Betlejewski concluded that his project was a success in that it he now personally feels able to use “Jew” as a normal word, the notion of *odczarowanie* seems more broadly applicable to the freeing, cleansing, spell-breaking *ambience* that *Spring in Warsaw* participants we spoke to reported experiencing.<sup>58</sup>

A number of participants in the action spoke of the way Muranów—and its Polish inhabitants—were burdened with or haunted by the onerous residue of the quarter’s tragic history, and how the artistic event lightened their load.<sup>59</sup> Zuzanna Sikorska, a member of Nowy Teatr, Public Movements’ key Polish partner organization, spoke of a sense many Poles had of being trapped in a particular, cramped, repetitive relation to the Holocaust past, and the need Varsovians, in particular, felt to “throw off the responsibility, the weight” of the past, encoded in prescribed and presumed emotions and forms of behavior. In the twenty-minute video documentary produced for the project, the faces of individual participants seem to suggest a kind of “flow” or deep engagement, communion, or even reverence as they performed some of the movements.<sup>60</sup> Sikorska described feeling a sense of “relief” through her participation.

But if *odczarowanie* was indeed both a desire and to some extent an outcome of this action, of what loads, specifically, were Varsovians unburdened? On one level, the event was a call to free participants of the shackles of their very bodies, to unlearn the unthinking postures of being Polish in public, to be broken free from the collective hex of both habit and *habitus*. Sikorska expressed the need to make Warsaw’s Holocaust heritage *visible* anew—she attended high school in Muranów, and noted that despite (because of?) walking there each day, she couldn’t “see” the memorials that surrounded her. But vision is not the only physical function that has been diminished. She compared the conventions of Polish collective behavior and carriage in Muranów to those in the Catholic Church. She described that just as Poles immediately bow their heads when the priest holds up the host (instead of looking at it and meditating on it as prescribed), when they enter Muranów, they unthinkingly give in to their body’s presumptions, and any power the site may have to create new knowledge is lost. The space of the (former) ghetto is so stigmatized, so freighted with symbolic meaning, that people’s very sinews are bent by the weight of it.

That maybe I should look up, I should raise my damn head, and only afterwards bow... [Rather than] feel immediately guilty for the all the evil in this world, maybe, damn it, I should *read* these names [written on the plaques] and *think*. Maybe I can even *laugh* there; maybe I can eat ice cream while strolling with my child, and maybe I don’t have to scold my child for laughing.<sup>61</sup>

Habit, she seems to suggest, can block the flow of life, voiding both the claims of the past (the names) and the demands of the future (the laughing child). As Polish



visual culture scholar and project consultant Iwona Kurz suggested, a modicum of comfort is necessary for the creation of knowledge. "A certain type of gravity gags you," she said. "If you are so serious that you cannot speak through your tightened throat and clenched teeth, you cannot ask anything, you cannot wonder about any thing."<sup>62</sup>

And yet if habit can be a burden, Public Movement acknowledged that it can also be a comfort whose ritual value may be respected, if recuperated to new ends. One of the project's co-curators, Marianna Dobkowska, spoke of how moved her mother—who accompanied her the day of the event—felt when the church bell was rung during the event, and the crowd was led to kneel in silence (Zofia Wa licka also noted this among other "moving moments," during which some participants wept.<sup>64</sup>) Dobkowska said that many Poles feel guilty about the past, but have never been given an invitation to participate, to contribute to the work of Jewish memory in ways meaningful to them in a domain that seems rightfully Jewish. The habits of Polishness, and specifically Polish Catholicism, may seem alien, awkward, even besmirched through Jewish eyes trained on Holocaust commemoration. Their inclusion in the event's choreography was a gesture of "permission" on the part of Jews for Catholics to remember the Holocaust within their own sacred idiom. Moreover, by the end of the event, everyone had partaken in someone else's body language (Jews shared in the Catholic modes, and both groups undertook the Muslim postures), offering an intimate approach to empathy from multiple perspectives.<sup>66</sup> This is a different kind of "stepping into another's shoes" than the problematic, unidirectional one manifested in Rafał Betlejewski's projects.

A final burden is that of the simple proximity to Holocaust death sites that Poles have inherited, and the tarnishing effect that this history has had on perceptions of Poland's very ground and, by extension, those who live on it. Warsaw social psychologist Michał Bilewicz noted the legitimizing quality of Public Movement's visit for both ethnic Poles and local Jews. In stark distinction to the standard refrain of foreign Jewish groups who perceive contemporary liveliness in Poland as morally repugnant and evidence of indifference (as Poland's very terrain symbolizes the Holocaust, let alone particular Holocaust and ruined Jewish sites), Bilewicz understood Public Movement's message to be saying, "we perceive you [Poles]... your existence here as legitimate. It's not like 'oh guys, you live on this cemetery.'"

The idea of *odczarowanie* raises clear questions about the ethics of memory and the conditions appropriate to fulfilling a desire to be "freed" of the burdensome past. As *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist Paweł Gołinski put it, "we [Poles] still need to carry this burden for awhile... the ghosts haven't left Muranów yet... they haven't [really even] emerged... they haven't even begun to haunt the inhabitants... let them haunt [them] a bit before we try any kind of exorcism." The event, though, was far from uniformly relieving, its lightness not carefree; while it may have been in some way embracing and soothing, the unusually broad and unexpected mix of themes it invoked still pushed the boundaries of comfort, expectation, and discourse.<sup>68</sup>

particular, it forced participants to inhabit constantly changing subject positions in relation to actions gentle and violent: as witnesses and actors, collectivities and partners and individuals, observing and executing gestures familiar and alien, acting in unison and in difference.

Iwona Kurz noted the way Spring in Warsaw served as a “reminde[r] that conflict is real.” The game that involved taking positions on polarized topics—in essence voting with one’s feet—was a particularly “active” aspect of the event, in which participants themselves became performers, forced to display publicly deep differences that divide the largely ethnically homogeneous Polish society. Yet participants also used it as an opportunity to enact resistance to schematic binaries, and to practice creativity. Rather than simply submitting to the terms laid out by Public Movement, Sikorska noted that while some participants “took sides, a couple of times they even tore the plastic tape to show that there’s no division, that they are in between. There was even a couple who started to kiss from across the two sides.” “Despite the giggling and confusion,” another critic observed, “the questions remained, lingering in the air.”<sup>69</sup>

Some differences were challenging for participants to integrate, highlighting the clash of memorial frames—progressive Polish and progressive Israeli Jewish—brought to bear in this activist action. Issues that are part and parcel of Israeli national memory discourse and related problems with present-day “otherness,” persecution, and exclusion seemed somewhat occult when imported into the East European context, where the struggle to construct a basic acknowledgement of Holocaust crimes and incorporate their legacy into national memory is itself still perceived as the task for progressive cultural elites. While part of Public Movement’s message may have been that one could be simultaneously a victim and a victimizer, Go linski said the group’s invocations of Palestinian issues or Islamophobia in their action presumed that criticism of Israel was a central part of local popular political discourse. “They’re treating us as if we were French or Spaniards,” he said, referring to the very different atmosphere in Western European countries with large Muslim populations. Go linski also expressed particular discomfort with the group’s critical approach toward the Holocaust memory more generally. He described wanting to tell the crowd “don’t look” at parts of the performance, suggesting that Poles are simply not ready to jump ahead to criticizing Jewish/Israeli politics before they’ve done their own national memory work. “It’s very easy to go a step too far,” he said, stressing that in the Polish context these foreign, and much more radically critical, debates could easily validate anti-Semitism. What may be appropriate and clear in its intentions in the Israeli context is simply too volatile in Poland, risking appropriation by regressive forces.

Kurz suggested that it was “precisely the elements of conflict [and] anxiety [that] were the most important critical components” of the event, and further, that “the therapeutic narration of memory serves to treat wounds and lead to their healing” in ways that “usually shapes them into signs that are legible and socially safe.”<sup>70</sup>

part of what made Spring in Warsaw powerful—as the event's final speech suggests—was its caring, curative tenor: its recognition that history has hurt us all, in myriad ways. The final speech, like the rest of the event, was overloaded with a thicket of potent historical references. But sewing together the dense, sometimes troubling allusions to abjection was a sense of abundance, a weightless, lyrical tenor saturated with humanity, vibrancy, eros, and joy: “Human flesh is revealed: hungry arms, skirted legs, bare breasts, torn cloths. It is springtime; white faces blush in Warsaw,” Krieger intoned, a beatific smile on his face. His words were aspirational as he told the crowds, “This is the time to make new friends, to make love, to raise high hopes,” in a seeming attempt to infuse the meaning of spring in Warsaw with nature’s persistence against history, when “green buds rise from hills of rubble.” The text was explicitly universal, calling out to “humanity,” to “Poles, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Europeans, Africans, Asians, Americans, Australians, Israelis and Palestinians,” stressing that “our stories are different, but all of our lives are sacred.” It asked the audience to “remember the Jewish fighters of the ghetto, fighting in Warsaw not for Judaism but for life... not for a state but for human dignity, for survival.” (Even the invocation of Adam Mickiewicz’s nostalgic call from exile, “Oh, Lithuania!” suggested not the nation-state but a bucolic, multicultural ideal and a belated recognition of its loss.) And yet there remained a specificity, however multivalent, of the burdens of this memory. “We live in their houses,” he said, referring perhaps to Jewish houses, or Palestinian; he referenced “checkpoints,” suggesting both postwar Europe and present-day Israel. The speech ended with the question, “What is to be done?”

The implicit answer to that question seemed to recommend that relief isn’t necessarily pacifying and that people need not only to be unsettled, but also enabled, because change demands creation along with deconstruction. We need new subject positions, new ground to stand on, in order to act differently. In their approach to identification and affiliation, Spring in Warsaw thus treads a middle path among the three projects we discuss, one of intersubjectivity and partnership. If Jews and Poles share space in Warsaw, with Jewish Holocaust tourists pouring in, “bus after bus, to the Umschlagplatz,” Zuzanna Sikorska described how local Poles are “basically indifferent to it.” And the ignorance goes both ways. “It’s really amazing how every one just fluidly sidesteps each other,” she marveled. A key intervention, then, was to bring these two sets of rememberers, and their different memories, into conversation.

But what were the terms of the conversation? Kurz suggests that Spring in Warsaw highlighted Muranów as “a place of pain for both national memories and their shared acknowledgement.” The language of the event was, indeed, one of invitation and collaboration. Public Movement co-leader Dana Yahlomi stressed at the beginning of her speech at the Umschlagplatz that the participants were not meant to be a passive audience to the performing artists; rather, she said, “It’s about making a work together.”<sup>72</sup> If Betlejwski’s villagers were in a sense unwitting

participants in a culturally alien art project that foisted a burning barn into their backyard, Public Movement was invitational, extending a hand and making a space.

Joanna Warsza, the event's main Polish co-curator and local resident, spoke of her own desire to bring more pluralism in the space, to take it back from foreign Jewish stage it has become, and return it to the "real Warsaw." Yet she noted that "each side"—the locals and foreign Jews—"needed the other" to speak effectively to the issues of memory in the space; <sup>75</sup> thus, she and the Israeli artists were the "authentic" voices necessary to seed the conversation.

But if the attempt to fuse together ethnic Polish and Jewish traumas was conceived in a collaboration between Israeli and Polish elites, if a Polish–Jewish dialogue seemed essential for an authentic discussion of Holocaust memory, it was the Jews who were the event's public hosts and facilitators. And despite the mix of issues and messages embedded in the event, Poles were its main audience. Minimal outreach was done in Warsaw's Jewish community, with only tepid response. The event functioned somewhat more as a performance for unsuspecting—and by some accounts rather surprised—official Israeli groups whose paths they occasionally crossed.<sup>76</sup> But it was mostly Polish people who participated, including some locals who became accidental audience members, "peeking from behind their curtains and watching the event surreptitiously, probably noticing that it was slightly different than [the marches] they were used<sup>76</sup> to."

It is worth pondering, then, the kind of catalyzing, permission-giving role Jews may play in working through the morally fraught landscape in which Holocaust memory practices take shape. Zuzanna Sikorska suggested that "if it hadn't been an Israeli group leading the march but rather a Polish one that had taken up the theme, it would have had maybe only a tenth of the power." The necessity of a Jewish voice, "that it was their issue as much as ours," made the event seem right to her. She stressed that it was important that it was an Israeli group because they validated certain behavior when they said, "Friends, we're doing it, you can [too]. It doesn't offend us." Katarzyna Wiegla, another co-organizer of the project, put it more starkly: "No one in Poland would dare to do that<sup>75</sup>." Further, for Poles, the mere experience of being confronted with a different kind of Jew, one who cares about Polish issues, who isn't here to blame, who isn't looking for an apology or performing their superior victimhood, is significant. Zuzanna Sikorska said that for her personally, seeing the Israelis singing in Polish was one of the strongest moments of the event.

Indeed, perhaps Jews are being cast even as healers or confes<sup>76</sup> sors. visiting, white-clad Jewish aides invited a traumatized, ossified Polish public to engage in a collective cure that the artists would administer. The Poles were offered an opportunity to let down their guard, divest themselves of their habituated gaits and inculcated relations to place, past, and otherness. The Jews had the power to dispell, and it was their guidance and gentle touch that healed. They extended their hands to

the unsure audience, they urged them to follow, to step closer, to bow, to kneel. They held people's babies. The hope seemed to be that the Polish participants would walk away from the ritual renewed, refreshed, reborn.

Spring in Warsaw inhabited a risky space of "multidirectional memory," in which the interconnections among a historically, culturally, globally intertwined network of wounds and injustices beg to be both highlighted and distinguished. Its creators identified and plunged into a roiling crossroads of overlapping issues, full of obstructions and unspeakable injuries, with an inevitable mixture of results. But the specificity accorded the immediately relevant parties (Poles and Jews) and the focused attention to place and personal experience that was built into the event gave it a sense of intimate significance and inspiration for at least some of its participants. The abundance of symbols deployed Spring in Warsaw and their multivalence, meant that everyone could understand it in their own way, and find a space for themselves in it.<sup>78</sup> For Sikorska, the issue of the Israeli youth tours was "their [Public Movement's] thing." For her, it was about what Varsovians needed in the space of Muranów. And the event indeed seemed to have made possible real moments of spiritual engagement and release. His reservations notwithstanding, Go linski described how, among the crowd of choreographically moving bodies, he unexpectedly accessed an internal well of "undigested" family issues related to Holocaust history. The event provided him with a "space for some private feelings," and a possibility for "deep emotional engagement," which "reignited a stalled process of mourning."<sup>79</sup>

Spring in Warsaw's Israeli Jewish facilitators attempted to expand the "discussion" of the Holocaust in Poland, illustrating the ways that both Jewish and Polish bodies and public spaces are embedded with powerful, politicized, publicly enshrined forms of Holocaust memory, and suggesting that it is possible to criticize and perhaps change these—a stance that Polish artists and activists would have a hard time inhabiting, for fear of offending the victims. The artists performed the essential need for partnerships in opening respectful spaces to breathe and to move and to discuss each side's own contemporary struggles and "blocked" psyches. In doing so, they spoke to the need Varsovians—and other Poles and Jews—have for sites and modes of "memory work" that enable the revitalization of energies and the generation of hope to tackle the difficult tasks of facing history and building better futures.

This terrain is, of course, fraught with danger. Any invocation of Warsaw's spring charms in this place will inevitably echo Czes aw Mi osz's damning description of Varsovians riding a carousel on "a beautiful Warsaw Sunday" while the last Jews were being burned alive in the ghetto. The wounds of the Holocaust generation and the moral challenges flowing from them will—and should—be in eternal tension with the desires of young people to change the world. "It's necessary to breathe," Pawe Go linski said of his experience with the Spring in Warsaw event. "But one has to breathe in a responsible way."

## *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP): Writing New Pages into History*<sup>81</sup>

While Yael Bartana's "fictional" political organization, the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, invokes the past to address current socio-political issues, the project is predominantly *future-oriented*. And just as time frames collapse in her *Polish Trilogy*, rendering a simultaneity of painful past, haunted present, and visionary future, the *scope* of Bartana's unorthodox project, conceived in collaboration with a circle of Polish intellectuals, likewise explodes the boundaries of Polish, or even Polish-Jewish memory, bringing to bear a wide range of contemporary issues relating to multicultural politics in Europe and the Middle East. The idea of the Jewish return to Poland serves here as a catalyst to "overcome history," imagine political change, and trigger new processes of group identification in a globalized world shaped by mass migrations.<sup>82</sup>

Referring to Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *The Old New Land* (1902), which envisioned a Jewish state in the land of Israel (and became a foundational Zionist text), Bartana places her work in the category of fiction that can "help imagine a different world" and "provoke history."<sup>83</sup> Dreaming of a Jewish return to Poland, Bartana's JRMiP is more precisely an experiment in "reversing history," in an attempt to undo one of the consequences of the Holocaust, Zionism, and anti-Semitism: Jewish absence in Poland. The "what if" modality of her project, however, generates more than a vision of alternative history, in which Jews who were murdered, emigrated, or were expelled from Poland are replaced by a new, massive immigration wave. It is also an exercise in political imagination, intended to inspire a new model of a postnational European society whose *raison d'être* is the equal embrace of different ethnic groups and an embrace of refugees and other marginalized and persecuted people.

But along with the universal dimension of her message, Bartana addresses a very specific historical predicament. She intends the vision of the Jewish return to Poland to "overcome a trauma" that Poles and Jews share: a sense of guilt toward a wronged minority.<sup>84</sup> While the rhetoric of healing is shared by Bartana, Betlejewski, and Public Movement, the Israeli filmmaker uses different means to administer the cure. Where Betlejewski employs an *ambience* of metaphysical awe and redemption, and Public Movement is exploratory, inviting, indeed at times tender in its choreography (the group's white outfits suggesting both a negation of nationalism and a healing of its wounds), Bartana's approach is bracing and invigorating. Blending existing national symbols (the Star of David and the Polish eagle) with graphically powerful references to past political movements (allusions to Communism, Zionism, even Nazism can be seen in JRMiP's red flags and kerchiefs, kibbutz training camp, and barbed wire and watchtowers), Bartana frames these with Leni Riefenstahl-esque filmic references. In doing so, she both mocks the language of political propaganda

and suggests its potency, playing (if edgily) with the idea that politically progressive art can no longer just unsettle and question but must also inspire and construct.<sup>85</sup> Bartana reclaims the *ambience* of pathos, allegory, and the dramatic, deploying them for a work that “affects other people by allowing them to fantasize something else departing from this project.” In this way she puts in motion what she calls “a mechanism that produces possibilities.”<sup>86</sup>

Bartana employs a *modality* of empowerment and mobilization. Yet the Berlin Congress, which provided the first, real platform for political action under the banner of JRMiP, was characterized by a constant tension between the authentic concerns of the delegates and the event’s status of a performance art piece. Inscribing a liminal space between art and reality, participants were invited to alternate between genuine involvement and their project-specific performative personae. The combination of a necessary suspension of disbelief on the part of the participants and actual limits to their agency (the delegates could not, for example, elect the leadership of the movement) contributed to the ambiguity of their position. The precariousness of the Congress’s status manifested itself in the constantly shifting mood of the debate, which vacillated along a continuum ranging from the earnest to the absurd, the genuine and the artificial.

Bartana, who was first invited to Poland by the Warsaw-based Foksal Gallery, conceived her JRMiP project not only as a collaborative enterprise of Polish, Israeli, and German artists, but also as a platform where Poles, Jews, and others could engage with each other in a spirit of interethnic *symbiosis*. The manifesto of the JRMiP speaks of the organic need for the other in today’s ethnically homogeneous Poland.

With one religion, we cannot listen.  
 With one colour, we cannot see.  
 With one culture, we cannot feel.  
 Without you, we cannot even remember.

The specific Polish invitation of Jews back to Poland is, therefore, more than a declaration of longing by one ethnic group for another. Rather, it implies that otherness—both present-day and recollected—is a prerequisite for a normally functioning national body. Only by living together with Jews can Poles regain their full sensory perception and recall their history correctly. But if the JRMiP envisions a symbiosis of two interdependent groups, it also redefines the category of “Jew.” Proclaiming the movement’s mission as that of fostering solidarity among underprivileged people everywhere, the “Jew” thus becomes a generic symbol of displacement:

We direct our appeal not just to Jews. We accept into our ranks all those for whom there is no place in their homelands—the expelled and the persecuted. There will be no discrimination in our movement. We will not dig into your life stories, or check your residence cards or refugee status. We shall be strong in our weakness.<sup>87</sup>

Bartana declares her intention to open up the term “Jew” so it can signify a supra-national collective identity, paralleling the term “European.”<sup>88</sup> Unlike Public Movement, which offered a vehicle for Jews and non-Jews to interact as partners, the JRMiP provides a way of not only being *with* the other, but *being* the other. Summoning Poles (and others) to join the JRMiP and march under its banner alongside Jews, Bartana abolishes the boundaries between them, giving primary salience to a different category: the weak, the persecuted, the displaced. The returning Jew, embodied in the *Polish Trilogy* by the ghost of Rivka, who emerges from the grave to haunt the Polish conscience, is the voice of disinherited people everywhere (“I am the return of all the expelled and dispossessed... in Sudan, Kosovo, Eritrea or Afghanistan”).<sup>89</sup> The once-Jewish Rivka is both an irritant (potentially returning to claim her belongings, appropriated by Poles) and a universal victim *with whom Poles can also identify*.

Polish art critic Dorota Jarecka noted that Bartana, in “blending terms previously considered separate,” forges a “new, post-Shoah Polish language” that Poles are in desperate need of, in order to adequately narrate the difficult Polish-Jewish past and navigate Polish-Jewish relations today. If Betlejewski identifies with historically existing Jews, whose specific experience of victimization he obscures in his pursuit of Catholic Polish redemption as such, Jarecka argues that Bartana’s language, “in which the Jew is the compatriot, the other is me, and I am the other,” is, conversely, usefully antiessentialist, a prerequisite for speaking about Polish-Jewish relations and integrating them into the Polish historical narrative.<sup>90</sup>

If Bartana challenged the boundaries of the terms “Jew” and “Pole” in the *Polish Trilogy*, she framed the JRMiP in terms vastly exceeding the Polish-Jewish question. Designing the JRMiP’s first Congress in Berlin in May 2012, she opened the debates onto issues relevant to Israelis, Palestinians, Germans, and Europeans—including the plights of Vietnamese immigrants and African asylum seekers. “The more specific the questions become,” she said, “the harder it is to stay in the narrow framework of Jews and Poles.”<sup>91</sup> Allowing the widest range of implications, however, revealed fundamental tensions in Bartana’s universalist vision, which were clearly visible at the Congress. Each of the Congress’s three days—devoted to the EU, Poland, and Israel, respectively—had its own territorial and political focus. Despite some shared concerns, the discussions within each of the three groups of delegates had different internal logics, some of which were difficult to reconcile.

As the boundaries of the JRMiP’s preoccupations blew open, Poland’s fundamental role in the movement became problematic. The fact that the congress took place in Berlin (and not Warsaw) meant that not only did Poles make up a minority of participants and spectators but also that what had been the movement’s core rallying cry—the Jewish return to Poland—was overshadowed by other, mostly Israeli, concerns, which also meant that fundamental, real-life issues the Jewish return would entail were left unaddressed. An intervention by a group of Polish participants who interrupted the English-language debates to request a translator highlighted the symbolically marginal



role to which “Poland” was relegated in practical terms. But the greatest challenge to the position of Poland and Poles during the Congress related to the scope and tenor of the discussion, which included radical proposals for solving the Middle East conflict by dismantling Israel as a Jewish state. Demands to convert Israel into “a state for the stateless” or a island floating in the Mediterranean and to grant the “right of return” to Palestinians—all accepted by popular vote, and thus linked to the original Polish “invitation” of Jews to return—made some Polish participants uncomfortable. If the Polish call for Jewish return entails a demand to dismantle, abolish, or otherwise transform the Jewish state, what are the moral implications of such an invitation? Can such a demand be voiced by Poles at all? If Bartana’s project enacted a critique of her own country Israel, by means of a Germany-based Congress debating Jewish return to Poland, what are the ethical consequences for Poles and Germans seeking to participate in a project of Jewish/non-Jewish solidarity?

There was much enthusiasm for Bartana’s work in Poland on the part of the cultural and artistic elite, culminating in her invitation by the Polish Ministry of Culture to represent Poland at the Venice Biennale in 2011. But Bartana’s *Polish Trilogy* also raised a controversy in both Poland and Israel. The artist’s implicit critique of Zionism was met not only with ostracism on the part of the Israeli Minister of Culture who, as reported by *Haaretz*, “tried to avoid visiting the Polish pavilion” at the 2011 Biennale in Venice.<sup>92</sup> Her work also provoked critique by Polish-Jewish leaders who felt she overlooked the presence and concerns of Poland’s existing Jewish community; they charged that her project was “patronizing,” “outright anti-Israeli,” and even “cynical” in using a “Jewish cause” to promote a certain political agenda.<sup>93</sup> Prominent Polish-Jewish community member and political commentator Konstanty Gebert echoed the accusation that Bartana overlooked actual Polish Jewish life, saying, “I refuse to be a symbol.” But he also voiced a countervailing dismay: that the artist dared to dabble in the realm of the real. What began as a “brilliant provocation... started, heaven forbid, to treat itself seriously.”<sup>94</sup> As another critic put it, entering the realm of political action, Bartana’s idea, “lost its metaphorical shield.”<sup>95</sup> Miriam Gonczarska, secretary of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, expressed concern that the voicing of political demands in Bartana’s project could have adverse effects on Poland’s existing Jewish community:

She didn’t take into consideration that this project has a powerful political meaning, and that it could be seen as an attack on Polishness in [right-wing] radical circles... who constantly fear “invasion,” and suddenly they hear that the Polish parliament is going to be dissolved, and Poles are going to be taxed in order to bring 3 million foreigners here—and Jews, no less.<sup>96</sup>

This reading—however marginal—of the JRMiP as a Jewish plot against Poland could, Gonczarska fears, even lead to “physical attacks” against local Jews. “It might be art,” she concludes, “but it is radical enough to lead to a situation in which somebody is going to pay for it... I personally think it poses a serious threat.”<sup>97</sup>

This question of the project's ontological status—as art or politics—is both central and moot. And yet the frequent labeling of Bartana's work by art critics and some lay observers as simple “irony” misreads key aspects of both its intent and effects.<sup>98</sup> Along with Bartana's emphasis on the importance of having Polish collaborators who are speaking “out of [their] own truth,” and the resonance that the yearning for Jewish return to Poland has, for example, with sentiments expressed by participants in Betlejewski's “*I Miss You, Jew!*” project, the idea of the *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* has led many people to respond from their own places of sincerity.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, this is what Bartana seems to have had in mind, envisioning that perhaps “one person out of this whole thing will rise and say ‘OK, now let's start the real process.’” She described how she screened *Mary Koszmary* for Holocaust survivors and Jews forced to flee Poland, and

they were so moved by the thought that Poles would actually invite them to return to Poland, in Polish. They approached Slawomir [the film's co-producer and main character] with emotion, surrounded him, and started speaking old Polish to him.... There is something very real for the people to which this project speaks on a personal level, and I believe that is its strength: as far-fetched and provocative as it is, something in it aspires to be sincere.<sup>100</sup>

But if the movement was conceived as a catalyst of possibility, its symbolic and elite nature has perhaps inevitably had ambivalent effects on the populations in whose name it speaks, and among whom it awakens a range of emotions and aspirations.<sup>101</sup> As a Canadian Jewish art critic noted, despite the provocation, the project leaves us “stranded, with hardly any place to go.”<sup>102</sup> While we ourselves have been inspired by the possibilities for thought generated by the JRMiP, its very genre—its embroilment in the world of high, conceptual art—may make it self-limiting for a broad public looking for a community of action. An overheard incident took place during one of the Congress's intermissions, when a woman speaking German with a Polish accent approached Yael tentatively, and asked us to translate that she had never heard of the “movement” before, and was encountering it here at the Biennale for the first time. With emotion in her voice, she said she saw the flags hanging outside and the T-shirts with the JRMiP logo (the Polish eagle fused with the Star of David), and was very moved by its power. She asked eagerly how she could get involved. “I'm sorry,” Bartana replied—perhaps out of busyness, distraction, or lack of comprehension of what the woman wanted—“It's not real.”

## Conclusion

The character of these recent public expressions of Jewish memory in Poland may be understood—in part—as an effect of the rise of what Levy and Sznajder call “cosmopolitan memory” of the Holocaust, as the “container of the Nation-State... in

the process of being slowly cracked.”<sup>103</sup> Certainly the presence of the German Nazi camps that remain lacerations on Polish soil, and the international Jewish (and other) tourism that helps keep these wounds fresh, point to inexorably global vectors in Polish Holocaust memory. Moreover, similar kinds of creative, politicized cultural intervention in the domains of cultural politics and heritage can be seen elsewhere in both the region and the world: from Belarussian protests and Bosnian street theater to the Palestine Biennale, grassroots activists disillusioned by the state are engaging in creative alternatives to traditional political processes.<sup>104</sup> Yet the explosion of artistic interventions related to the Jewish past here speak not only to a particular admixture of history, trauma, and globally intersected space, but to an attempt to translate and domesticate memory for incorporation by a specific local audience, resulting in a uniquely “Polish” cultural product.

Germany has been the touchstone and lauded as a world leader in Holocaust *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since the 1980s, with major contributions to education, historiography, and new “counter-monumental” forms.<sup>105</sup> Further, in Germany, Holocaust memory is woven into the very fabric of the state, with moral authority ceded to the local and world Jewish community. One word from a museum visitor can shut down an avant-garde project.<sup>106</sup> In Poland, not only is there no such consensus, but the intelligentsia and moral arbiters simply cannot keep up with the enormous proliferation of projects. After the long period of silence around the Holocaust, that memory is resurging in the Polish public realm with such impetus that it has overflowed the capacity of the state’s official frameworks of commemoration. The projects we discuss, and their boundary-pushing range of forms, speak to a “Wild West” quality of Holocaust memory as a Polish field of endeavor: grassroots, pioneering, widely democratic, speculative, and risky. Finally, while in Germany there is a settled quality to Holocaust memory—a sense that it is a closed chapter—in Poland, this memory is visceral, intense, and raw, an “open wound” that is both painful and extremely productive.<sup>107</sup> While there is enormous unevenness in memory projects of this genre, the domain itself thus represents a site of great critical and creative possibility.

When asked why he began dealing with Jewish themes in his theater, prominent Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski, answered “I’m Polish—that’s enough for this theme to be permanently close to me.”<sup>108</sup> Public Movement, for their part, defines the artist’s role as “spokesperson, diplomat and traveling agent.”<sup>109</sup> Yet key questions in this democratizing, cosmopolitan field linger: Who speaks? For whom? Whose voices are heard, and whose silenced? If critical cultural studies literature has celebrated the fracturing of essentialist notions of culture and self, and valorized fluid identities, are all voices, frameworks, and points of view equal? And despite groundbreaking international and intercultural collaborations, which audiences do these new forms of memory work address and engage, and how broad—and how relevant—a public is reached by them?

The strategies these new commemorative projects use to engage with the Jewish past in Poland differ, as do the opportunities for Jewish/non-Jewish dialogue or reconciliation that they permit. And overtly similar gestures may have very different implications; Bartana's proposal of the label "Jew" as a future universal symbol feels bracingly visionary, while Betlejewski's evacuation of Jedwabne's historically specific Jews for the catharsis of present-day Poles smacks of objectionable appropriation. Further, while bringing Poles and Jews to work through their mutual memorial entanglements together in a present-day frame may be a step forward from Polish attempts to create pageants that remember the Jews, the attempt to superimpose Polish and Jewish frames of memory may breed not only empathy, but also incomprehension, indifference or estrangement. The social impact of these interventions might also seem limited. The projects described do not do sustained-community work, they do not seek to understand or help Polish Jews with their very real, day-to-day existential travails, nor do they educate Poles about Jewish culture or their own history.<sup>10</sup> And despite what political aspirations these ventures may have, they are art—postmodern, cosmopolitan, conceptual art—with all the exclusions of status, economics, and aesthetics that designation implies.

Nonetheless, this new genre of memory work offers innovative modes of probing, questioning, and critiquing official forms of commemorating Poland's Jewish past. Its creators attempt to ignite a process of remembering beyond a backward-looking, blank-spot-filling reinsertion of Poland's lost Jewish other. Crucial as such historical work is, taken alone, it risks framing Jews as essentially distant, different, and separate—and perhaps even "past." These new commemorations work not with restorative imagination, but creative reconfiguration; they allow Jewishness to change. They seek pathways to introduce reworked notions of Jewishness into Polish landscapes—landscapes that are material, psychological, somatic—to aid Poles in identifying and embracing (Jewish) alterity as part of their collective identity, even as they offer Jews new relationships with Poland. Staging time and space as interpenetrating or even collapsed, they bring deeper understandings and insights about both then and now, here and there. Applying a playful approach (and an aura of safe experimentation due to their status as art), they circumvent deeply ingrained and habituated sociologically and historically produced responses to one of Poland's key memorial burdens. Most importantly, these performative projects open spaces for introspection and healing unavailable within entrenched national commemorative ceremonies. There is a need for intimate public spaces for shared vulnerability, where people can explore their own dark places, their desires, and their aspirations going forward. The issue is how to heal responsibly, in the fullness of time, while allowing pain and guilt to also serve their purposes.

## Notes

1. "The Decay of Lying," in *Intentions*, 1891.

2. This is the title of a six-month educational-political experiment realized by the artist in 2012 together with the Institut für Raumexperimente (Institute for Spatial Experiments) and the Berlin University of the Arts. The fellowship aimed to create a critical exchange between political and artistic practitioners based on their shared sense of social commitment.

3. Sławomir Kaprański, "Battlefields of Memory: Landscape and Identity in Polish-Jewish Relations," *History and Memory* 13, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2001): 35–58; Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011); Monika Murzyn-Kupisz and Jacek Purchla, eds., *Reclaiming Memory: Urban Regeneration in the Historic Jewish Quarters of Central European Cities* (Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2009).

4. Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Erica Lehrer, "Can There Be a Conciliatory Heritage?" *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, nos. 4/5 (2010): 269–88; Steven Saxonberg and Magdalena Waligórska, "Klezmer in Kraków: Kitsch, or Catharsis for Poles?," *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 433–51.

5. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor describes how performance—understood broadly as expressive behavior, "transmits memories, makes political claims, and manifests a group's sense of identity" through a "repertoire," or nontextual mechanism of knowledge transfer. (Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2003], xvii). It is important to take an interdisciplinary approach to these artistic actions so as not to reduce them to texts, as their performative (and in some cases participatory) nature is part and parcel of their political aims. That said, given their ephemeral nature, and the fact that one may at times find out about them only post facto, they can be challenging objects of study. In spring/summer 2011 and 2012 we interviewed artists, curators, scholars, participants, and members of the local Jewish community in relation to the three projects. We also analyzed video and photo documentation of the performances by Rafał Betlejewski and Public Movement and participated as delegates in the Berlin Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (11–13 May 2012). For a discussion of the theoretical generativity of scholars attending to, as well as participating in, arts-based memory work, see Karen Till, "Artistic and Activist Memory Work: Approaching Place-Based Practice," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 99–113.

6. See, e.g., Mirosław Balka's installation "Wege zur Behandlung von Schmerzen," 2011. See Joanna Zielińska, "Mirosław Balka: 'Wege zur Behandlung von Schmerzen,'" *Dwutygodnik*, <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artkul/2634-miroslaw-balka--wege-zur-behandlung-von-schmerzen.html> (accessed 20 July 2012).

7. For a discussion of the significance of the sensory in Polish national mythology, see Genevieve Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology," *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011): 21–57.

8. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, "Cultural Trauma as a Way to Historical Justice? Memory of Holocaust in the Post-communist Poland" (paper presented at the conference "Historical Justice and Memory," Melbourne, Australia, 11–13 February 2011).

9. Chiara De Cesari uses the term "preemptive representation" to describe "the performance of an institution that does not yet exist" but may sow "the seeds of new institutional [and social] arrangements" in relation to the aesthetics of recent Palestinian art Biennals. "Creative Heritage: Palestinian Heritage NGOs and Defiant Arts of Government," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 4 (2010): 632–33.

10. James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2. (Winter 1992): 267–96; Stiftung Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas, *Materialien zum Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005); Brinda Sommer, *Gesellschaftliches Erinnern an den Nationalsozialismus: Stolperstein wider das Vergessen* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2007); Bernhard Schneider and Daniel Libeskind, *Jewish Museum Berlin: Between the Lines* (Munich: Prestel, 1999).

11. In Polish the project titles were, respectively, "Tęsknie za Tobą, Żydzie!," "Wiosna w Warszawie," and "Ruch Odrodzenia Żydowskiego w Polsce."

12. Betlejewski in Piotr Pacewicz, "Płonie stodoła," *Gazeta Wyborcza: Duży Format*, May 22, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7899683,Plonie\\_stodola.html?as=1&startsz=x](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7899683,Plonie_stodola.html?as=1&startsz=x) (accessed 18 July 2012).

13. Ibid.

14. The project was created by then Public Movement leaders Dana Yahlomi and Omer Krieger in collaboration with Polish curator Joanna Warsza and related Warsaw arts and cultural institutions including Nowy Teatr (New Theater) and the Center for Contemporary Art (CSW) Zamek Ujazdowski. Its sponsors included the CCA Warsaw, Artists-in-Residence, the Israeli Embassy, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Beit Warsaw (Progressive Jewish Congregation), Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw, and Chłodna 25.

15. See the text accompanying video documentation of the event at <http://vimeo.com/8564716>.

16. The group moved in the countervailing direction to the official trajectory of the annual Polish ceremony marking the "Route Commemorating the Martyrdom and the Struggle of the Jews 1940-1943," which takes place the following day, on April 19. This commemoration is organized by the TSKŻ, the Jewish Veterans' Association, and the Warsaw Jewish Theatre, and the mayor and other local and regional officials take part. Participants traditionally leave a trail of daffodils or other yellow flowers along the memorial route. *Spring in Warsaw* followed a circuit more consonant with the traditional Israeli trajectory, asserting a heroic narrative that begins with death (Umschlagplatz) and ends with "heroic" resistance (Ghetto Uprising memorial).

17. Participant and journalistic estimates ranged from 200 to 1,300 participants; the video documentation of the event suggests the higher end of the spectrum. Agnieszka Sabor "Wiosna w Warszawie," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 21 April 2009, [http://tygodnik.onet.pl/0,25680,wiosna\\_wwarszawie,komentarz.html](http://tygodnik.onet.pl/0,25680,wiosna_wwarszawie,komentarz.html) (accessed 24 July 2012)—reports 250 participants; Agnieszka Kowalska, "Tańczyli pod pomnikiem Bohaterów Getta," *Gazeta.pl*, 20 April 2009—reports 1,000 participants; Katarzyna Kazimierowska, "Zostań moim przyjacielem. Public Movement w Warszawie," *Kultura Liberalna*, 20 April 2009 (accessed 24 July 2012)—reports around 1,000 participants; Daniel Miller, "Performing Politics for Germany," *Frieze blog*, [http://blog.frieze.com/performing\\_politics\\_for\\_germany/](http://blog.frieze.com/performing_politics_for_germany/)—reports 1,300 participants.

18. It seems worth noting the intense memorial palimpsest in this moment: kneeling at a monument to a dignitary who kneeled at a nearby monument. Brandt said of his own genuflection, "Under the weight of recent history, I did what people do when words fail them." Manfred Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich: Beck Publishers, 1999) 544.

19. The speech can be listened to in full at the end of the project's video documentation: <http://vimeo.com/8564716>.

20. Aside from the openness implied by the song's title, the tune itself has previously been the anthem of Le Madame, a hip, gay-friendly club in Warsaw's old town that had been closed for "political reasons" in 2006, in what amounted to a generation-defining event for the young left wing. Thanks to Michał Bilewicz for this observation.

21. The party took place at Chłodna 25, an artsy cafe-club (and co-sponsor of the event) situated at the intersection where a bridge connected the two halves of the Warsaw ghetto.

22. For a brief history of the theater, built by architect Oskar Kaufmann, a German Jew who later immigrated to Palestine, see [http://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/archiv\\_hebbel\\_theater/seiten/haus\\_geschichte\\_engl.html](http://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/archiv_hebbel_theater/seiten/haus_geschichte_engl.html)

23. By "modality," we mean the tools, mechanisms, frames, symbols, goals, means, treatment via which (and motivations for which) the artists attempted to enact their works. By "ambience," we are referring to the atmosphere, the effects, the experience of spectators and participants, the impact (to the extent we were able to access these).

24. Rafał Betlejewski, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674>.

25. Ibid.

26. Michał Bilewicz, "Co spalił Rafał Betlejewski?," *Cwieszni*, no. 1/2, 2010, 172. On the positive side, prominent Jewish community member Stanisław Krajewski praised Betlejewski for taking personal responsibility for internalized Polish anti-Semitism, noting that Betlejewski was in essence saying "It's my problem." Interview with the authors, 23 July 2011.

27. Rafał Betlejewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 January 2011.
28. Betlejewski's original plan called for Poles to write their latent anti-Semitic thoughts and other sins against Jews on the papers they would send. But this process was not successful, so he changed his request to blank paper.
29. Rafał Betlejewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 January 2011.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Betlejewski in Piotr Pacewicz, "Płonie stodoła," *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Duży Format, 22 May 2010, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7899683,Plonie\\_stodola.html?as=1&startsz=x](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7899683,Plonie_stodola.html?as=1&startsz=x). (accessed 18 July 2012).
32. *Ibid.*
33. Prior to the barn burning, Betlejewski commissioned a national opinion poll which revealed that 41 percent of the respondents never heard of the pogrom in Jedwabne and the percentage of such people in the group aged 15–24 was as high as 61 percent. At the same time, nearly two-thirds of the respondents stated that Betlejewski should not burn the barn in Zawada. See <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674> (accessed 28 July 2012). Other statistics, reported by Antoni Sulek, support Betlejewski's conclusion. See Joanna Beata Michlic, "Remembering to Remember, Remembering to Benefit, Remembering to Forget: The Variety of Memories of Jews and the Holocaust in Postcommunist Poland," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 3 January 2012, <http://jcpa.org/article/remembering-to-remember-remembering-to-benefit-remembering-to-forget-the-variety-of-memories-of-jews-and-the-holocaust-in-postcommunist-poland/> (accessed 30 July 2012).
34. Betlejewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 January 2011.
35. The entry of "Jestem Łajką" on Betlejewski's "I Miss You Jew!" website, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674> (accessed 20 July 2012).
36. Betlejewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 January 2011.
37. *I Miss You Jew!*, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674> (accessed 19 July 2012).
38. Betlejewski in Piotr Pacewicz, "Splonie stodoła. Żydzi podzieleni," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 June 2010, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8119419,Splonie\\_sodola\\_Zydzi\\_podzieleni.htm](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8119419,Splonie_sodola_Zydzi_podzieleni.htm) (accessed 17 August 2012).
39. Interview with Magdalena Waligórska, 20 January 2011.
40. Agnieszka Kowalska, "Artysta czy copywriter?" *Gazeta Wyborcza Warszawa*, 24 March 2010, 8; Dorota Jarecka, "Kit" Wysokie Obcasy, 3 April 2010, <http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/2029020,56480,7705763.html> (accessed 17 August 2012).
41. Jacek Plewicki, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 23 January 2011.
42. Stanisław Krajewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 23 July 2011; the entry of Jacek Plewicki (Jestem Łajką), one of the protesters against the barn burning, on Betlejewski's *I Miss You Jew!* website, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674> (accessed 20 July 2012).
43. Speaking for/as Jews, and thereby with a voice of moral authority, is an increasingly common strategy in political and artistic actions in Poland. During riots in Warsaw in 2010 sparked by the erection of a cross in front of the presidential palace after the deadly airplane crash in Smolensk, a flash mob of people showed up wearing T-shirts reading "Jestem Żydem" (I am a Jew). A Polish student gathered her friends to make T-shirts with the same slogan, and ride their bikes through the town of Jedwabne, site of the infamous pogrom and focus of the subsequent national debate (Małgorzata Pakier, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 24 July 2012). In November 2009, to protest a march of right-wing extremists in Warsaw, Polish artist Paweł Althamer, together with a group of friends and family, donned "*pasiaki*," or the striped garb of Nazi camp inmates, complete with yellow Stars of David. See: Rafał Żwirak, Marcin Kaliński "Marsz Duchów" *Krytyka Polityczna*, nos. 24/25, 8/9.
44. The Burning Barn documentary, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674> (accessed 21 July 2012).
45. *Ibid.*
46. *I Miss You Jew!* website, accessed 20 July 2012, <http://www.tesknie.com/index.php?id=674>.

47. Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 8.

48. While it is worth noting that Betlejewski is one of the few artists to actually address "Jewish memory work" to inhabitants of the Polish provinces (as opposed to ignoring them, toeing the longstanding divide in which the intellectual and the aesthetic are urban domains as against a primitive village realm), his approach, at least with the barn-burning, may have equally reinforced the split by mocking or manipulating them.

49. This was Iwona Kurz's characterization of the event.

50. Text accompanying video documentation of the event: <http://vimeo.com/8564716>.

51. Their broader work explores mostly non-Holocaust and non-Jewish issues. Their current program is called "Re-branding European Muslims": <http://code-r.at/rebrandingeuropeanmuslims/?public>.

52. Much of the publicly vocalized critique in Poland has come from within the Polish Jewish community. Polish Jews have taken to calling the Holocaust pilgrimage season "Żydobranie," a play on "grzybobranie," or the term for mushroom collecting. For detailed critical descriptions of Jewish and Israeli youth pilgrimages to Poland, see Jackie Feldman, *Above the Death Pits, Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008); Erica Lehrer, "Relocating Auschwitz: Affective Relations in the Jewish-German-Polish Troika," in *Germany, Poland and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past*, ed. Kristin Kopp and Joanna Nizynska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 213–38; Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), chapter 5, "Performing Memory: Tourism, Pilgrimage, and the Ritual Appropriation of the Past"; Rona Shermay, "From Auschwitz to Jerusalem: Reenacting Jewish History on the March of the Living," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 19, *Polish-Jewish Relations in North America*, ed. Mieczysław B. Biskupski and Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), 307–26.

53. "Rebranding European Muslims," <http://code-r.at/rebrandingeuropeanmuslims/?public>. Like Yael Bartana's *Trilogy, Spring in Warsaw* grew out of conversations seeded by Warsaw's Adam Mickiewicz Institute leading up to and during the "Polish Year in Israel" in 2008–2009. The event was developed during a three-month residency in Warsaw, which combined research seminars on Polish visual culture and dialogue with Polish artists, scholars, and others. See the website of the Polish Year in Israel: <http://www.poland-israel.org/en/?lang=en>.

54. "Rebranding European Muslims."

55. One journalist called the atmosphere at the event "imprezowa" or "like a party." Katarzyna Kazimierowska, "Zostań moim przyjacielem. Public Movement w Warszawie," *Kultura Liberalna*, 20 April 2009, <http://kulturaliberalna.pl/2009/04/20/zostan-moim-przyjacielem-public-movement-warszawie/> (accessed 24 July 2012).

56. The term "oczyszczenie" or "cleansing" was also occasionally used, and Joanna Warsza, a Polish co-curator of the event, spoke of her desire that the event would deal with the need she perceived for "odzyskanie" or repossession/reclamation of the space of Muranów.

57. See Jerzy Bralczyk and Agnieszka Kowalska, "Odczarujemy słowo 'Żyd,'" *Gazeta Wyborcza Warszawa*, 23 March 2010, 2; Paula Sawicka, "Odczarować słowo Żyd," *Gazeta Wyborcza Warszawa*, 25 March 2010, 2.

58. Rafał Betlejewski, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 January 2011. Indeed, Betlejewski's use of the term "odczarowanie" in interviews published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in 2009 may have influenced the descriptions of "*Spring in Warsaw*" subsequently offered to us by during interviews in July 2011.

59. Recent interest in Muranów as a Jewishly haunted space in need of exorcism is evident in the new novel by Igor Ostachowicz, *Noc Żywych Żydów (Night of the Living Jews)*, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2012), and the play *Muranooo* (with the extra "o" suggesting the haunted sound "ooo") by Sylwia Chutnik, which premiered at Foyer Dużej Sceny in Warsaw on 12 May 2012.

60. A journalist observing the event also described the crowd as "surrendering to the magic of participation." Kazimierowska, "Zostań moim przyjacielem."



61. Interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 July 2011.

62. Interview with the authors, Warsaw, 21 July 2011.

63. Interview with the authors, Warsaw, 20 July 2011.

64. Interview with the authors, Berlin, 14 May 2012.

65. The importance of revising and expanding the body's deep repertoires seems like a crucial intervention into embodied cultural scripts in light of Czaplinski's chilling suggestion, cited in Jan Gross's *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 109–10, that the citizens of Jedwabne who perpetrated the infamous pogrom “knew how to act” because of a particular, anti-Semitic Catholic habitus that facilitated their (reversed) reenactment of the suffering of Christ on the town's Jews.

66. Not only does the person “trying on” a foreign bodily posture gain new intersubjective understanding, but seeing another inhabit one's “own” cultural postures can be moving or feel conciliatory, if done respectfully. Steve Weintraub, an American Jew who teaches Chasidic dance at Krakow's annual Jewish Culture Festival, spoke of his joy at seeing non-Jewish Poles enact these characteristically Jewish gestures and postures. “Their movement, their carriage... they were walking in our shoes.” Interview with Stephanie Rowden, July 2008, <http://www.conversationmaps.org/odpowiedz/listenup.html?slider2=10> (accessed 24 July 2012).

67. Interview with the authors, Warsaw, 24 July 2011. The term “exorcism” is problematic in this context, as it suggests that the Jews or Holocaust memory haunting Poles are equivalent to an evil spirit, a characterization not in keeping with the event's stated intentions or the other uses of the term “*odczarowanie*” in related discussions.

68. Henrietta Riegel discusses the power of humor as a gentle subversion in which one can simultaneously engage in an act and critique or problematize. “Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference,” in *Theorizing Museums*, eds. S. Macdonald and G. Fyfe (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 98.

69. Kazimierowska, “Zostań moim przyjacielem.”

70. Iwona Kurz, “Spacer po ‘błędym mieście’: Polska wycieczka pod izraelskim przewodem,” unpublished manuscript, 2010, 8 (cited with permission). And indeed, alongside the inviting, embracing, collaborative sensibility that some audience members gleaned from the event, others felt disturbed or provoked. Two participants we spoke to (Michał Bilewicz and Małgorzata Pakier) felt disturbed by the “totalitarian” aesthetic of the event, with the artists “all dressed the same... like this column of soldiers.”

71. Kurz, “Spacer po ‘błędym mieście,’” 6.

72. <http://vimeo.com/8564716>.

73. Seeing these “foreign” flags, the Israeli youth seemed to wonder who else was commemorating them. Kazimierowska, “Zostań moim przyjacielem.”

74. Iwona Kurz, interview with the authors, Warsaw, 21 July 2011. The obligatory Warsaw police escorts, who also often accompany the official Israeli groups, agreed to be in plain clothes and hang back, and afterward approached Zuzanna Sikorska and said they thought the action was nice, different, and positive.

75. Stanisław Krajewski, prominent Jewish community member, had a somewhat different perspective, noting that no Pole would dare to play with *Catholic* symbols, but the Israelis felt free to.

76. On the Jew as “absolver” (albeit with a focus on the necessarily absent one) see Karen Underhill, “Next Year in Drohobych: On the Uses of Jewish Absence,” *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 3 (2011): 581–596.

77. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

78. Of course multivalence is both a strength and a weakness. For a discussion about the slipperiness of an arts-based approach to Jewish history in Poland, see Helena Chmielewska-Szlaifer, “The Plastic Palm and Memories in the Making: Conceptual Art Work on Warsaw's Jerusalem Avenue,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 23 (2010): 201–11.

79. Interview with authors, Warsaw, 24 July 2011.

80. "That same hot wind / Blew open the skirts of the girls / And the crowds were laughing / On that beautiful Warsaw Sunday." "Campo dei Fiori," Warsaw, 1943. From *Selected Poems, 1931-2004*, trans. Miłosz and Robert Hass (New York: Ecco Press, 2006).

81. JRMiP website, accessed 20 August 2012, [http://www.jrmip.org/?page\\_id=2](http://www.jrmip.org/?page_id=2).

82. Yael Bartana in *Interview Magazine Germany*, 11 May 2012, <http://blog.interview.de/Interview-Yael-Bartana> (accessed 21 July 2012).

83. Yael Bartana in Dorota Jarecka, "Śmierć lidera" *Wysokie Obcasy*, 11 April 2011, 16–17. Similar "imaginary" Jewish homelands have been proposed by Israeli artists Amit Epstein ("Bundesland Israel," 2008) and Ronen Eidelman ("Medinat Weimar," 2008).

84. Yael Bartana in Dorota Jarecka, "Śmierć lidera," 17.

85. While she talks of wanting to "undermine" and "dislocate" the Zionist ethos, e.g., she also wants "to see what it produces in Poland," acknowledging that "there is something thrilling in this vigor of the pioneer, the vanguard of the Jewish movement." "Till Imagination Takes Us Back—A Conversation with Yael Bartana," *Ma'arav*, 29 April 2012, <http://www.maarav.org.il/english/2012/04/till-imagination-takes-us-back—a-conversation-with-yael-bartana/>. (accessed 20 July 2012).

86. "Till Imagination Takes Us Back."

87. The Manifesto of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, [http://www.jrmip.org/?page\\_id=5](http://www.jrmip.org/?page_id=5) (accessed 17 August 2012).

88. Yael Bartana in Dorota Jarecka, "Śmierć lidera," 16.

89. Yael Bartana, "Duch Powrotu," *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 26: "Duchy" (no pagination).

90. Dorota Jarecka, "Język polski po Zagładzie," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 January 2008, 14.

91. "Till Imagination Takes Us Back."

92. Amalia Rosenblum, "A Pioneer in Poland," *Haaretz*, 16 June 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/a-pioneer-in-poland-1.367991> (accessed 18 July 2012).

93. Piotr Paziński, "O Ruchu Odrodzenia Żydowskiego," *Forum Żydów Polskich*, <http://www.fzp.net.pl/opinie/pazinski-o-ruchu-odrodzenia-zydowskiego> (accessed 18 July 2012). Indeed, even if Bartana's invitation to "Jews" is meant to signify a return of "otherness" to Poland in general, she leaves Poland's actual pockets of difference untapped. As Joanna Warsza reported, "Ngo Van Tuong, a Vietnamese journalist who has lived in Warsaw for years, answered Bartana's call by saying "Can't you see? We've already returned!" *Krytyka Polityczna*, nos. 24/25, 112.

94. For Gebert, "the success of the film was in challenging things that we have in our heads. But even treating half-seriously the idea of returning to Poland is a failure, because it gives us answers and not questions." Gebert's statement reads as a critical response to the ideology of art of which Artur Żmijewski, Polish artist and curator of the Berlin Biennale where Bartana's congress took place, is a proponent. Żmijewski speaks of the Biennale's efforts to support artists who are working at "finding answers, not asking questions." *Forget Fear* (Köln: Walther König, 2012), 10.

95. "The Power of Imagination. 1st International Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement" *Culture.pl*, [http://www.culture.pl/web/english/events-calendar-full-page/-/eo\\_event\\_asset\\_publisher/L6vx/content/the-power-of-imagination---1st-international-congress-of-the-jewish-renaissance-movement](http://www.culture.pl/web/english/events-calendar-full-page/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/L6vx/content/the-power-of-imagination---1st-international-congress-of-the-jewish-renaissance-movement) (accessed 19 July 2012).

96. Interview with the authors, Kraków, 18 July 2012.

97. *Ibid.*

98. Carol Zemel, "The End(s) of Irony" *Forward.com*, 15 July 2011, <http://forward.com/articles/139457/the-ends-of-irony/> (accessed 16 August 2012). Robin Cembalest called it "satire" in "Here and There: Notes toward a Theory of post-Diasporist Art," *Tablet.com*, <http://www.tablet-online.info/jewish-arts-and-culture/759/here-and-there> (accessed 16 August 2012). Public Movement also made a point of stressing their lack of parody in "Nie jesteście parodystami," Dorota Jarecka, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 April 2009.

99. "Till Imagination Takes Us Back." Sierakowski, speaking to a student group, also echoed the sentiments of his character in the film, telling them "We are the realization of the dream of Adolf Hitler... One religion. One race. It's really toxic for a society, that homogeneity." Justyna Gmitrzuk, Lena Mechik, and Denver Nicks, "Where Everyone Was Invited: Art in the Streets and the Humanization of Warsaw,"

<http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/65-where-everyone-was-invited-art-in-the-streets-and-the-humanization-of-warsaw> (accessed 21 July 2012).

100. "Till Imagination Takes Us Back."

101. Bartana noted that the idea of Jewish return to Poland intrigues her "more on a symbolic level than as an actual act." "Till imagination takes us back."

102. Zemel, "The End(s) of Irony."

103. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 88.

104. In 2011, in Belarus, where avant-garde theater has become a medium for voicing critique toward the Lukashenko regime, activists used absurdist-tinged, performative tactics also in street protests (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/world/europe/15belarus.html?ref=europe>). In Bosnia, activists have been addressing the public through "street performances, puppetry, fake media campaigns, and creative use of commercial billboards," in an attempt to "open new spaces for political engagement" and "keep a vision of a different world alive." Larisa Kurtović, "Activism in the Times of Impasse," *Anthropology News*, May 2012, 28. (On Palestine, see note 8). Street theater and public actions are also a longer-standing Polish form, drawing on popular sensibilities and the need for creative tools to criticize the socio-political status quo. In the 1980s, during the declining but turbulent years of the Polish People's Republic, a dadaist political art movement called the Orange Alternative (Pomarańczowa Alternatywa) emerged (beginning in Wrocław). Their response to the absurdity and repression of the political system was more absurdity, in the form of mass public "happenings" that used the trappings of the system's official forms (ceremonies, anniversaries, pompous slogans) to mock them and highlight their shortcomings. See Katarzyna Jagodzińska, "The Alternative in the City Space: Contemporary References," In *Happening Against Communism by the Orange Alternative*, eds. Barbara Górska and Benjamin Koschalka (Kraków: International Cultural Centre, 2011).

105. Young. "The Counter-Monument."

106. Polish artist Artur Żmijewski's "Berek/Tag" (1999), which depicts a group of nude people playing tag inside a gas chamber, was removed from a 2011 exhibition at the Martin-Gropius-Bau museum in Berlin due to a letter of protest by Hermann Simon, director of the city's Centrum Judaicum.

107. See Erica Lehrer, "Relocating Auschwitz: Affective Relations in the Jewish-German-Polish Troika," *Germany, Poland and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past*, ed. Kristin Kopp and Joanna Nizynska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 213–38, 230.

108. Krzysztof Warlikowski interviewed by Piotr Gruszczyński, "Reimagining the Jewish Legacy in Post-communist Poland: Dialogues," *Polish Theatre Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2010): 93–94.

109. "Rebranding European Muslims."

110. There are a growing number of projects—some quite longstanding, like Brama Grodzka in Lublin, or Pogranicze in Sejny—that do committed, grassroots work, in cities and in the countryside, to educate local people about Poland's Jews and multiethnic history. Similarly, some projects—like the partnership of cultural anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and artist Artur Żmijewski—illustrate a way to be based on in-depth research, produce artistic products (the film *Polak w Szafie/A Pole in the Closet*, 2007), and contribute to real-world outcomes (the permanent covering of an anti-Semitic painting in the Sandomierz cathedral).

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