The Sound of Music: Jews and the Study of Jewish Culture in the New Europe

I. Alpine Stages

On March 24, 2005, Richard Bernstein reported in the New York Times on the first full production of the musical The Sound of Music on an Austrian stage:

"The most beautiful music is the song of the mountain." That is how the show’s most memorable phrase is literally translated from German, but it doesn’t have quite the pastoral sweep of the original: "The hills are alive with the sound of music." But never mind. The first major production in Austria of The Sound of Music, now playing in German translation at Vienna’s venerable Volksoper, is otherwise entirely recognizable. (A5)

In his account of the staging of this American musical in a Viennese musical theater, Bernstein does not wonder that the Volksoper, well-known for its tourist-friendly productions of Johann Strauss or Franz Lehár operettas, would offer foreign fare. After all, The Sound of Music may not really be that foreign. Although the American composers Rodgers and Hammerstein have provided the tunes, the musical’s plot touches on Austria’s history. The musical tells the story of the von Trapp family, its resistance to the Nazi regime, and the family’s flight across the Alps to Switzerland and safety. It offers a tale of human suffering and musical success (that of the von Trapp family’s singing fortunes), as well as of political changes and personal decision making. By the time of its first staging in Vienna, The Sound of Music had already an extensive stage history in the United States and elsewhere, and had been made into a popular motion picture as well—a film that has recently received a second career of sorts, as it is often featured as a late-night sing-along event for a younger generation, an odd rival to the Rocky Horror Show.

To Bernstein, the Volksoper’s production was remarkable primarily for its belatedness:

For decades, theatrical producers and managers evidently believed that Austrians would not like to see the period when Hitler took over turned into light, frothy American-style musical comedy. The Sound of Music was seen in Austria a bit the way another Rodgers and Hammerstein hit, The King and I is still viewed in Thailand—a frivolous, cartoonish offense to national pride. Even the highly successful 1965 movie version, starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer, never got a theatrical release in this country.

“It was about time,” Rudolph Berger, the manager of the Volksoper said when asked why he decided to stage The Sound of Music just now, “because it’s a very good play.”
In fact, the critical reception of the Volksoper’s *The Sound of Music* has been mixed at best, but the audience response has been very welcoming. Mr. Berger said one critic had charged that there was not a single memorable melody in the whole production, “in contradiction to the views of about 50 million people,” the theater manager said, no doubt thinking of songs like “Climb Every Mountain,” which is so famous that many people do not even know that it originated in this musical.

The critic of *Die Presse*, one of Austria’s serious national daily papers, called it a “boring two and a half hours.” Another paper, *Kurier*, complained that one of the show’s signature numbers, “Edelweiss,” was “an insult to Austrian musical creation.” That led some of the musical’s defenders to wonder if the old resentment against the Rodgers and Hammerstein rendition of Austria in the troubled 1930s does not still generate resentment.

“I can’t really prove it,” Mr. Berger said, “but I think some of the reviews, which were not very positive, reacted to the fact of doing it rather than to what was on stage.” (A4)

Of course, there is no need for a public to expect any “history” on stage. Previously successful runs at the Volksoper included, for example, *Tanz der Vampire* (Dance of the Vampires), a musical by Michael Kunze and Jim Steinman; the show was directed by Roman Polanski. Were the vampires’ songs more respectable, perhaps? Was Polanski more attuned to Viennese culture? And how would one define an “Austrian musical creation,” anyway? At a time in which politicians want to fold “Austrian” culture into that of a larger Europe, it resurfaces in opposition to U.S. imports and any signs of U.S. dominance.

A few weeks after *The Sound of Music* opened in Vienna, a young American journalist and writer, Sam Apple, published his first book in New York. *Schlepping through the Alps* is a memoir about his friendship with Hans Breuer, an Austrian born in Vienna in 1954 to parents active in the Communist party, and a critic of both the Austrian government and conservative Austrian bourgeois culture. Today, Breuer claims to be Austria’s last wandering shepherd, tending a flock of about 600 sheep. While guarding his sheep, Breuer studied Yiddish, perfected his knowledge of Eastern European klezmer songs, and began composing klezmer music himself. 1 Attired in a shepherd’s felt hat and with a knobby walking stick, he crosses the Alps like a latter-day, lower class von Trapp. Instead of Austrian folk songs, however, he sings Yiddish tunes, and mainly to his sheep. In his shepherd attire, Breuer has also performed at events in Austria and abroad, attended klezmer music camps, and issued recordings of his compositions.

“The Austrian hills were alive with the sounds of bleating sheep and Yiddish music,” Apple says, describing his experience of accompanying the shepherd in the role of the wandering Jew.

and for at least a few minutes I felt at peace. I pictured a Hasidic Jew spinning atop a green hill, arms spread, like Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*. I couldn’t understand most of the songs, but I got the important words: the *mamas* and the *tatis*, the *oy veys*, the *chosens* (grooms) and the *kalahs* (brides). I liked thinking about those medieval Jewish traders walking the same hills speaking the same words. Yiddish had long ago disappeared from this part of the world, but it was there for a day, and I was part of it. (101)

Apple, the Jewish visitor from New York, looks for an experience that would tell him more about his European roots, a Jewish past that would bring something lost to life. The irony of Breuer’s singing for sheep instead of Jews has not been

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1 The question of whether the language of klezmer can be easily identified with the study of Yiddish is, however, discussed by Bohlman, “Historisierung als Ideologie” 243.
lost to him. Apple recalls an image of "sheep as European Jews being led to the slaughter" (90), a phrase that echoes Hannah Arendt's controversial use of the same image in an early version of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to argue that Rabbi Leo Baeck led the Jews like sheep to the slaughter.²

Breuer is not a rabbi, nor does he make any claims in regard to any "Austrian musical creations." He did not even hear Yiddish being spoken at home. Breuer's father does have a Jewish background, but neither father nor son related to Jewish culture until Breuer discovered both klezmer music and the sheep. As a communist, Breuer's father had rejected religion, and he did not dwell on his family's Jewish past. Neither of his parents hail from Eastern Europe, where Yiddish had once flourished; they were and are Viennese citizens. Yiddish, as well as klezmer music, had been alien to both.

But while Breuer did not hear Yiddish language or music at home, he claims to have felt "at home" the moment he heard Yiddish, particularly Yiddish songs, and that these in turn have provided him with a home in the Alps. There were also other, peculiar moments of reference, as Apple relates:

After singing for a bit, Hans announced he had a story he wanted to share. Several days before I met him for the first time in New York, Hans had been in Canada for the annual KlezKanada klezmer festival. During a break from the festival, Hans spent an afternoon touring a Jewish neighborhood in Montreal. As he strolled the residential streets, three separate elderly women stopped to talk to him. The conversations were insignificant. But something about these old women, Hans said, was "heymish." *Heymish* is a Yiddish word for "deeply familiar" or "homey." Hans had never had a feeling quite like it. And what struck Hans most of all about these women were their hands. Unlike the coarse, thick hands of the Austrians, they were delicate and bony, the hands of intellectuals. They were, in Hans's eyes, typically Jewish, *heymish* hands that reminded him of the hands of his father.

(27)

The heritage of sound and the heritage of hands: Breuer's anecdote brings together a musical and a corporeal physiognomy. Moreover, Apple's and Breuer's paths seem here to cross. If the production of *The Sound of Music* provided a presence of the "foreign" staged as *heymish*, Breuer seems to find the *heymish* in exile, and with a people defined by exile.³ For Breuer, Canada or America in general do not provide any threats to Austrian culture, but rather the evidence of a lost European culture and a tradition that was broken. The Old Europe seems to have moved to the New World, and klezmer becomes the sign of that Europe's "authenticity" (see Bohlman, "Historisierung als Ideologie" 241). More than a singer of songs, Breuer becomes an emissary of sorts, finding a home by bringing klezmer home.

II. Vienna, Berlin, Cracow

Breuer may be Austria's last wandering shepherd, but in regard to his love for Yiddish songs, he is not alone. Rather, it is his isolation, his lonely existence in

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² Hannah Arendt's statement appeared in the serialized version of her book in *The New Yorker* and was then deleted from the book version of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. An extensive discussion of her statement can be found in Aschheim.

³ The relationship of exile and home in regard to the new conceptions of Jewish culture, including klezmer, is discussed in Schlöp, "Jüdische Kultur" 319-37.
the Alps that is unusual. Jewish music, and klezmer music in particular, is usually performed in and for groups. It is a kind of folk music that celebrates community rather than compositions by and for individual artists, or an audience of sheep. Moreover, it seems to have integrative qualitites. Thus, on July 24, 2003, the German weekly Die Zeit published an article on Jewish culture in Germany entitled in Yiddish "Der ausserwählte Folk" (The Chosen People). The article concerned itself with klezmer music, here described as the exuberant music of Eastern European Jews:

Another accordion—that would just be too much. Three can be heard already, in addition to five clarinets, and there are two violins as well. This crowd has more than a dozen players, and they jam quite loudly while drinking apple juice and beer, and once in a while, a violin or a trombone is heard, a player jumps into the middle of this group and produces a solo of his own. Another accordion, one deems, would result in a contrapuntal effect; another base fiddle would destroy the musical framework. But then, a base comes weaving into the room, and curiously enough, it works: the music continues. For each additional player added, the others do not even have to interrupt the piece.4

Thomas Gross, the author of this essay, concludes that "[o]ne cannot accuse the people at this "Klezmer-Stammtisch" of lacking a sense of fundamental democracy, or a joy in playing" (35). Among the disembodied instruments—some accordions, clarinets, violins, trombones, bases—the journalist finds players that would appreciate a sense of political democracy. This music, brought forth by a chaotic mix of instruments, a doubling and tripling of keys, and carried by improvisation, may be the sign of a new Germany, and Berlin, the old and new German capital at the country's new Eastern border, has become a capital of klezmer music as well. While Poland moved westwards in a territorial shift after WWII, Berlin, now located a mere half an hour by car from this Polish border, found its place not so much in a Central Europe of the past, but in a new Eastern Europe, one that would celebrate its former, now vanished, sufrides in the courtyards of a post-industrial German metropolis.

This description of a thriving musical scene evokes haunting images from the past. The reader envisions a resurrected Jewish population, one which does not mourn the dead, but celebrates its presence. The music seems to evoke the memory of an idyllic, life-affirming past, one that none of the people performing it had experienced. But these musicians are neither threatening Jews nor members of a world conspiracy; rather, they are simply members of a chaotic, but stable and fundamentally democratic organization. We can rest assured: these are merely Jews at play.

A couple of paragraphs further into the article, however, the reader has to realize that her assumptions have been wrong. These are not Berlin's Jews celebrating their chosenness, but young Germans who have become the new "Der ausserwählte Folk." Both they and their fans have names such as Carsten Schelp or Heiko Lehmann, and they are reviving tunes that have been unknown to Berlin's Gentile population, at least until fairly recently (see Ottens and Rubin, "Einleitung"). Now, the tunes are embraced with gusto by the musicians and their audience alike. Played not on alpine peaks but in urban pubs or courtyards, klezmer seems to transcend the demands of fashion. Those young Germans, per-

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4 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are mine.
forming in Berlin's Hackesche Höfe or its former Scheunenviertel—a section of town that was populated by poor Eastern European immigrants before the war—are not just playing music. They are playing Jews, and to the apparent satisfaction of actors and listeners alike, many of them tourists who are encountering this phenomenon for the first time. Indeed, while klezmer music had previously been alien to any German-Jewish experience, it has come to identify Jewish culture—and much more so than the aspirations of assimilating German Jews.

Furthermore, although the klezmer scene in Berlin I have just described may be distinctive, it is ultimately not very different from the music played today on the outskirts of the Polish city Cracow. With the exception of performers such as Breuer, klezmer has become a new urban phenomenon. Just like Montreal, Cracow has an annual Jewish culture festival that is largely carried by klezmer music. Reporting from Kazimierz, the formerly Jewish part of town, Anne Seth describes this move as “Folklore Instead of History” (“Folklore”). An eight-hour klezmer concert marking the end of one of these festivals attracted 13,000 people. Similarly, Philip Bohlman describes Eastern Europe as “ever more a site of return” (“Remembrance”; cf. Kugelmass), a place where tourists and refugees gather for their own kind of pilgrimage: “Return has become the modern surrogate for place in Europe at the end of the twentieth century, with the music of return becoming a sound-mix of place for European modernity” (669).

By contrast, the Jewish community in Cracow lists only about 140 members, and their average age is 74 (Seth). Nearly all of the kosher-style—but not kosher—restaurants and shops in Kazimierz are run by non-Jews. Seth cites the Polish-Jewish writer Henryk Halkowski: “If you would like to see Judaism without Jews, just come to Cracow,” and Jürgen Hensel, a non-Jew and German who represents the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, is skeptical that Jews could be reintegrated into Polish life (Seth). The virtual Jewish life in Cracow reminds him rather of the absence of a real Jewish life that would be part of Polish culture once again.

What contributed to this revival of Yiddish music? How did klezmer come to have such an important role in the construction of a new Austrian, German, or Polish identity, and how did it move from the culture of the shetlts to the Alps, as well as the urban centers of Europe? Much of Yiddish European culture was lost with its representatives during WWII, and survivors of the war often shunned Yiddish in favor of Hebrew or the secular languages of their residences (Lilienfeld 7, 153).

Aaron Eckstaedt, a musicologist and klezmer musician, attempts to answer this question for Germany, a country in which klezmer has reached an astonishing level of popularity. In his study Klaus mit der Fiedel, Heike mit dem Bass . . . , he tells the history of its reception there. He describes the popularity of Jewish songs in the former German Democratic Republic and West Germany, as well as the rise of klezmer music—particularly after the Fall of the Wall in 1989 and German reunification (see also Ottens and Rubin, Jüdische Musik?).

While klezmer music had been played in the sixties, its popularity increased dramatically in the eighties, and reached a highpoint in the nineties (Eckstaedt 9). Eckstaedt cites two major musical influences. First, the music group Zupfgeigenhansel took up klezmer as part of the folklore movement in the seventies, and
other groups like Hai and Topsy Frankl or especially the group’s name hints at the German folklore movement of the earlier twentieth century—also sparked Breuer’s interest in Jewish music. In the wake of the screening of the American TV series Holocaust in 1979, the interest in a lost Jewish culture intensified in Germany, and klezmer concerts increased in popularity. Many current German music groups not only want to introduce their audiences to klezmer, but also want to do so in an archival way by reconstructing tunes and concertos of the past. Klezmer has become a symbol for an “authentic” culture, and, for many, it demands to be played in an “authentic” way.

The second important musical influence was the Jewish Argentine artist Giora Feidman, who played an important role in the formation of different German klezmer groups. In the eighties, he began to tour Germany and offer courses in klezmer music. However, he did not insist on any “authentic” sound, but on the expression of the player’s emotions, and thus provided an alternative school or conception of klezmer for musicians. Other American music groups invited to Germany contributed to these two general “schools” and offerings.

By the early nineties, a klezmer scene had firmly established itself in Germany, particularly in Berlin. And while Berlin now offers a larger Jewish community than Cracow—the influx of Russian Jews after 1989 increased its membership to more than 10,000—sightseeing tours through the Jewish section of Berlin, as well as many Jewish-style restaurants and souvenir shops, have been firmly in Gentile hands and so complement the klezmer phenomenon. Do the descendants of the Holocaust’s perpetrators identify with its victims, as Henryk Broder writes (362)? Eckstaedt’s interviews with German klezmer musicians offer varied answers for their interest in Jewish music. Some view it as therapeutic: like Breuer, they play to find themselves and their own “home.” They feel liberated by jazz-like improvisation or by a folklore not praised by a past National-Socialist regime. They are also interested in the alternative, the exotic, the foreign. Klezmer music had never before been part of German-Jewish culture; now it helps shape the image of the Eastern Jews and perhaps newly orientalized Jew (Bohlman, “Historisierung” 246). For Germans who would like to appropriate Jewish culture, this Jew must be made a stranger once again. This reception may not differ all too much from the earliest definitions of “Jewish” music that emerged in the late nineteenth century within the framework of a debate on anti-Semitism (most prominently, the writings of Richard Wagner), or with the Romanticization of the Eastern Jews by early twentieth-century German Jews and non-Jews alike. 5

In a contemporary Germany (or Austria) struggling to come to terms with its past identities, klezmer has become a pharmakon of choice. Broder writes of attempts to “heal” history by connecting to a pre-Holocaust past (Bohlman, “Die Entdeckung 99). Jewish culture discovered via klezmer music is concrete and mythical at once. For a few—Eckstaedt, for instance—the discovery of klezmer music provided a first encounter with Judaism and even opened a path to conversion. But beyond this path of self-discovery, klezmer seems to have offered a more general pedagogical lesson. Thus, Wolfgang Martin Ströh describes how

research into klezmer music can lead to a better understanding of Jews and so lead beyond a Betroffenheit (concern) to a new understanding of the past, at one point suggesting quite seriously that school teachers study a tango version of a tune that was sung in the concentration camp in order better to understand Jewish culture (232). It is as if klezmer's musical celebration of life will undo the death images of the Holocaust and provide a glimpse of a lost culture by transforming victims into dancers. Klezmer is music played for and by survivors.

III. The Siren Song of Jewish Culture

"One cannot imagine the folk music scene of the New Europe without klezmer," Bohlman writes ("Die Entdeckung" 98). In her study on "virtual Jews" in the New Europe, Ruth Ellen Gruber defines klezmer as a symbol for the reinvention of Jewish culture—a "Klezmer in the wilderness" that would serve to redefine Jewish identity (see, especially, Chapter 10). But the general availability of klezmer shows that more is at stake here than a search for the identity of post-war Jews in a world in which Jewish identity has become very fluid and very hard to grasp.

With the klezmer musicians—as well as with Berlin's kosher-style restaurants, theme-oriented city tours and much, much more—we encounter a peculiar paradox. Jewish culture, we must suppose, can exist without Jews, and, once the question of "authenticity" is suspended, we may suggest the same for the study of Jewish culture as well—by denying it the need for Jewish agency if not for a Jewish subject. Indeed, if one looks at the many Jewish Studies departments that have sprung up, and received funding, at various German universities in recent years, a phenomenon has taken hold that is not unlike that of the klezmer musicians. In Germany, the study of Jewish literature and culture is largely conducted by non-Jewish scholars. Scholarly degrees are, in turn, obtained by non-Jewish students, who travel to Israel or the United States to learn Hebrew, to further their studies, or to visit archives. Many of these Jewish Studies departments and institutes flourish in towns such as Duisburg and Trier that until very recently had no post-war Jewish communities at all. And even where both scholarly institutions and Jewish communities exist, the relationship between them is tenuous, to say the least. In Germany, one could argue, the study of Jewish literature and culture has become during the past twenty years a popular field for the exploration of German identity through the study of the Other. (More recently, one can perhaps observe a similar trajectory regarding German programs in Islamic Studies.)

But even more is at stake here than the study of one's own identity or the acquisition of another. Jewish Studies has shifted from a field that should be able to give answers as to who one is—that is, defining a person's Jewish identity through historical reflection—to a study of subject matter, one that could then be made available to all (and even be made available for the purpose of a renewed, or virtual, identification).

Germany once had, of course, a different tradition of Jewish scholarship. For generations, Jews had regarded their very "chosenness," their special relation-

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6 See Schlör, "What Am I Doing Here?"
ship to God, and the truth of the biblical text as a warrant against historical interpretation. But in the early nineteenth century, the new emphasis on the importance of historical thought entered Jewish thought as well. Young men such as Eduard Gans or Heinrich Heine began to meet in 1819 to discuss their own Jewish identity and reflect on a Jewish past. These gatherings could be seen as emergency sessions of a sort. In Prussia, a de facto Jewish emancipation had been in place since 1812, but a mere seven years later anti-Semitic Hep Hep riots raged in Southern Germany and in many university towns. Gans and other young Jews—most of them law students enrolled at universities—were eager first of all to discuss the philosophical, educational, and political issues that were of concern for Jews. But during these meetings, Jewish studies as Jewish historiography was also born and named the “Science of Judaism,” or Wissenschaft des Judentums (see Wissenschaft des Judentums, ed. Carlebach). Immanuel Wolf, a founding member of the group, describes this new “Science of Judaism” as follows:

It is self-evident that the word “Judaism” is here being taken in its comprehensive sense—as the essence of all the circumstances, characteristics, and achievements of the Jews in relation to religion, philosophy, history, law, literature in general, civil life and all the affairs of man—and not in the more limited sense in which it only means the religion of the Jews. (145)

Wolf’s claim did more than widen the field of inquiry. He insisted on studying Judaism over time, but also as a “characteristic and independent whole” (143). Wolf did not stake out a special claim for German Jews. He wanted Jews to declare themselves as a people and not just as believers in a different religion, and to assert a nationhood of sorts. This nationhood would be able to cross state boundaries and survive ongoing discussions about religious practices. As Reform Judaism began to emerge, this “Science of Judaism”—clearly a product of the Enlightenment—even permitted secularization. The orthodox Jew was the student of the Torah; the modern Jew was the student of Judaism.

Scholars such as Leopold Zunz and Isaac Marcus Jost continued to elaborate on this claim, and the Society’s journal, the Zeitschrift, offered a lively discussion of it, although it was published only in 1822. The group soon disbanded. Most of its members converted to Protestantism, some out of conviction, most of them for pragmatic reasons, as they wanted to enter careers in law or in other academic fields that were barred to Jews. When the Science of Judaism was finally institutionalized as the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in the second half of the nineteenth century, history finally began to enter rabbinical thought as well. Moreover, the school produced a curriculum of sorts. Religious texts were not only studied and argued about, but also dated. Scholars wrote about German rabbinical scholars or German Jewish communities, but the news about communities in Bavaria was reported alongside reflections on former communities in Spain or the meaning of Aramaic words. Abraham Geiger, who taught at the new institution, followed the tripartite distinction of philological, historical, and philosophical aspects of Jewish studies. By the time Heinrich Graetz penned his History of the Jews, which was published in eleven volumes between 1853 and 1876, history reigned not only as an instrument of analysis, but also as its sine qua non. Graetz’s history was the first comprehensive, multi-volume history of the Jews ever to be written (those by Simon Dubnow and Salo Baron...
would follow in due course). “Judaism can be understood only through its history,” Graetz wrote, and the importance of historical study thus began to surpass that of religion.

At that point, a separation between the Jewish academy, on the one hand, and the German university, on the other, had become obvious. Hebrew had been taught at German universities for centuries, but as a discipline within a Christian universe. In the early modern universities, Hebrew studies were taught by and for Christian theologians, and especially by converted Jews, as part of an effort to examine the roots of Christianity and to discover a Hebraica veritas. The place for the study of Jews as pre-Christians was in the theological faculty or Divinity School; the place for more detailed linguistic studies was in the institutes of Oriental Studies.

By the early twentieth century, the study of Jewish history had found its occasional echo in history departments as well. The field of medieval history may serve as an example. Harry Bresslau, a Jewish scholar who was able to obtain only an extraordinary professorship in Berlin in 1877, was called to a chair at the University of Strassburg in 1890. There, he founded the Historical Commission for Jews in Germany (Historische Kommission für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland), a commission which he headed from 1885 to 1902 (Peters, forthcoming). Under its auspices, the Berlin scholar Julius Aronius began to work on a register of royal and imperial documents concerning German Jewry from the Middle Ages to 1273, a work that seemed to establish the necessity of using non-Jewish sources for the periodization of German-Jewish history. Aronius’s work, published in 1902, was followed by the Germanica Judaica, “an alphabetical catalogue intended to identify all places in the German Empire in which Jewish settlements existed, from the earliest times to the Treaties of Vienna, and to describe them on the basis of a scientific investigation based on sources” (Brann ix). The research on this project ceased only in 1934.

If much of the scholarly research in Jewish studies was still done at the Berlin Hochschule or other Jewish Lehranstalten in Frankfurt or elsewhere, there was also an increased attention to Jewish scholarship at the universities, which enrolled ever larger numbers of Jewish students. Bildung, which had served as a promise for true emancipation since the Enlightenment, turned many Jews into Bildungsbürger par excellence. But while the universities had opened their gates for Jewish students, they were still barring Jewish graduates from teaching positions. Most of them were unable to obtain professorships until the early twentieth century, unless, of course, they chose to convert. German universities were defined as Christian institutions, populated by officers of a Christian state. Jewish scholars like Bresslau had to move to Strassburg to obtain a regular professorship. Only after WWI were Jews in Germany able to obtain university positions in larger numbers, which increased until 1933. In that year, Germany’s Jewish population was about 0.8% of its total population, but the percentage of Jews in academic positions was nearly 6% of the total; moreover, 4.5% of the students enrolled in German universities were Jewish.

Graetz, “Judaism Can Be Understood” 219. See also Graetz, The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays.
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Only very few of these newly minted Jewish professors were interested in the study of Jewish literature or history, and Jewish students entering the state institutions of higher learning were mostly attracted to subjects like medicine or law, subjects that offered economic security as well as social acculturation. The bifurcation of German universities and Jewish academies continued to exist.

After 1945, hardly any Jewish scholars returned to teach at German universities, which also made no effort to call emigrants back into their fold. Instead, most of the faculty members who taught during the Third Reich continued to teach or were reappointed. This resulted not in further anti-Semitism in higher education but in a general silence concerning Jewish affairs, punctuated by occasional philo-Semitic statements.

Jewish communities within Germany had in turn more pressing problems than the establishment of university disciplines. Moreover, most of the Jews who settled in Germany after the war hailed from Eastern Europe; they remained in Germany after the dissolution of the DP camps, or were more recent refugees. Hardly any of them had a connection to, or even a knowledge of, German-Jewish history, or the traditions of a Berlin Hochschule or a Frankfurt Lehrhaus. There were no rabbinical seminaries, and the options for a Jewish education in post-war Germany were sparse. Rabbis in Germany hailed from abroad, and often they were able to speak neither German nor any of the other secular languages represented by the members of their own communities. If post-war Jews instilled a wish for learning in their children, it was not simply related to social betterment. It was viewed as an instrument for future emigration. Parents encouraged their children to live abroad, and a German university diploma became a passport for doing so.

Jews who lived outside Germany, as well as historians at German universities, began to view German Jewry as a thing of the past. In fact, it was not until 1979 that the German Jewish Central Council proceeded to found a new Hochschule für jüdische Studien—in Heidelberg of all places, a university town that housed an institution that had embraced Nazi policies very early during the Third Reich (see Remy). The Hochschule’s goal was to continue a tradition of higher Jewish learning, as commenced by the Jewish academies before WWII, and to train teachers of Jewish religion. Three years ago, the council decided to train rabbis there as well. Other, independent rabbinical institutions were founded at the same time in Potsdam, Munich, and Frankfurt. Earlier, the Jewish community had offered stipends to members who wanted to become teachers of religion or rabbis and train in London. Now, the Jewish community offers stipends to students who want to remain in Germany and study in Heidelberg.

While the Jewish Central Council’s decision to found a Hochschule reflected its wish to account for the present Jewish population of Germany and plan for a future of Jewish learning, it also curiously parallels attempts by a new generation of German professors and administrators to establish Jewish Studies departments or chairs at their own universities. The older field of Judaistik, evolving from Oriental Studies departments, was revitalized in places such as the Free University in Berlin and in Cologne. Judaistik centers on the study of Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinical tradition. It combines philology with his-
torical work and the consideration of the religious tradition. Most programs of Judaistik concentrate on the study of ancient and medieval Jewry, and Judaistik’s representatives find their way only very slowly to the study of Jewish life in modern times.

In the 1980s, *Jüdische Studien* (Jewish studies) established itself as a field in German universities. As a largely historical field not necessarily wed to the study of Hebrew, other Jewish languages such as Yiddish or Ladino, or ancient texts, *Jüdische Studien* concentrates on Jewish culture, including the study of acculturated or assimilated Jews. Novels by Stefan Zweig or the work of Sigmund Freud could thus be studied in *Jüdische Studien*, but would have no place in the departments of Judaistik.

Most programs of *Jüdische Studien*—such as the Center for European Jewish Studies in Potsdam—are administrated by historians with a more general training in German history, and they concentrate on Jewish life, history, and literature since the emancipation period (the eighteenth century). Needless to say, a rivalry quickly developed between the departments of Judaistik and *Jüdische Studien*. For representatives of Judaistik, *Jüdische Studien* is not serious scholarship because it ignores the core of Jewish language and learning. For representatives of *Jüdische Studien*, Judaistik has lost touch with modern Jewry and contemporary political issues.

But while the silence of previous years has been broken, the research done in all of these departments still bears the tone of memorialization, of dealing with a lost past. The *new Germania Judaica* consists of the publications detailing tombstone inscriptions or providing the statistics for, and guides to, pre-WWII Jewish populations in various villages, towns, or city quarters. Often, it seems simply to document what has been lost. As such, it has become (especially in the eighties) a *Trauerarbeit*, a work of mourning for a part of German history that was and was not the researcher’s own.

One could even claim a sort of continuity in the relationship between the silence regarding Jewish matters in the immediate post-war years and the new *Germania Judaica*: both insist on the absence of Jews. More uncannily, the terms of the Nazi persecution have proven to have longevity as well. Even today, Jewish studies institutes in Duisburg and in Potsdam are sponsoring biographical studies of persons who, although they did not view themselves ethnically or culturally as Jews (and may even have been Christians or without religion entirely), are considered appropriate subjects for research if they had a parent or grandparent who was born a Jew. It is as if racial terms still continue to define Jewish subjects, and racial descriptions like *Halbjude* (partial Jew) abound. However, social and intellectual histories increasingly have been added to this research, and studies abroad in Israel and the United States have further internationalized research and approaches.

**IV. Jews and Jewish Culture in the New Europe**

In her study of post-1989 Europe, written with enthusiasm soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Diana Pinto sketches an image of voluntary Jews populating
Jewish communities in Germany and elsewhere, and of a new German-Jewish relationship:

Unlike Israel, which is its own vast Jewish-Jewish space, or America where Jewish space is filled by Jews themselves, in what can be called a sociological and cultural triumph, Jews in Europe are only one part of this new space. This is particularly true in Germany where in the Jewish study programs at the universities, inside museums, in the realm of publishing, as well as in every other Jewish manifestation (except for religion), non-Jews constitute the majority of the “users” and even implementers of this space. (“Jewish Challenges” 290-31)

For Pinto, who has served as an advisor to the European Council, the Jews are the ultimate Europeans and “represent” the European culture of the future. Just as Pinto advises the European Jewish community to open up to more religious diversity and criticizes the dominance of orthodoxy and Zionist views within official Jewish institutions and media, she also places her hopes in this new—and unprecedented—Jewish space:

One of the results of the European sea change and above all the Holocaust’s “coming home” to Europe’s historical consciousness has been a major interest in Jewish themes in the non-Jewish world. This interest has grown exponentially in recent years. The result has been a plethora of publications on Jewish themes, novels and films written by non-Jews with Jewish characters in them (the most notable being, of course, Roberto Benigni’s La vita e bella), memoirs and histories, Jewish traditions ranging from the Torah to cuisine, Jewish jokes, Jewish museums, memorials, exhibits. Every corner of Europe is busy exhibiting the slightest Jewish traces in its past, whether they go back to more than two millennia as in Italy or to a “mere” two centuries as in Sweden. This interest in Jewish “things” which has no historical precedent in European history constitutes the greatest challenge of all for a European Jewish identity. (“Third Pillar” 16)

Instead of virtual Jews, Pinto describes a “virtual space” that would lead to new interactions, new symbioses, new identities. For Bohmler, klezmer has come to stand for the particular role that Jews play in this newly emerging society and newly constructed geographical space:

The political message and the cultural imperative of postmodern Europe is that it is in transit. There is little doubt about what it is in transition from; there is little consensus about what it is in transition to. The omnipresence of klezmer is a metonym for Europe’s millennial transit, for it arises from and depends on the axis of Europe’s current transition postmodernism. The public traces of klezmer are notable for the ways they adhere to billboards, to the pages of free newspapers cluttering subway stops, and, above all, to the pedestrian passageways that wind their ways through construction zones. These are the Passagen—the Benjaminian arcades (Benjamin 1982)—of a re-unified Europe, as it recovers its past to rebuild its future. (“Introduction” 41)

Pinto agrees on the special symbolic role of klezmer, but is less concerned with any development in flux than with the identities to be constructed. Jews are not only the new Europeans par excellence, they have a lesson to teach as well:

The cutting edge is to make Europeans understand the degree to which their own culture was influenced by the Jewish presence, not just to stress its own separate dignity. Klezmer music may have become a code word for a separate Jewish ethnicity (even though that music was in full symbiosis with the folk music of Eastern Europe). However, the real challenge today is to reflect on the Jewish component of many a Jewish contribution to universal culture, be it in the musical or literary worlds or in the great modernist avantgarde of the turn of the century. (“Third Pillar” 15)

Thus, Judaism is both real (as an actual tradition) and virtual (as a new postmodern space). And what Pinto views here as a triumph and the construction of a post-modern Jewish space can also be seen as a proliferation of Jewish spaces that seem mutually exclusive. Jewish Studies at the universities are still suffering
from a phantom wound—it is a traumatic field no less. But the Hochschule, too, has come to fulfill a task that was perhaps not expected by its founders.

The small Hochschule in Heidelberg aims to serve primarily Jewish students. Most of those enrolled in its courses have cross-listed from other institutions, however, and do not regard themselves as Jewish at all. Full-time students at the Hochschule can be largely divided into two groups. One consists of recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who are supported by community fellowships. Most of them have grown up without religion, without previous knowledge of Judaism, or were—according to Jewish law—not even Jews. The other group consists of students who have recently converted to Judaism or are thinking of conversion. Thus, the Hochschule not only offers courses in Jewish studies, but fulfills an integratory task for the community itself. It may have wanted to produce scholars of Jewish Studies, but it is primarily producing Jews.

The university programs in Berlin or Hamburg or Cologne in turn do not for the most part attract German Jewish students or Jewish faculty. Recently, there were plans to close the Judaistik program at the University of Frankfurt, a city that boasts a long Jewish tradition and currently holds Germany’s second largest Jewish community. The plan was to move the program to Marburg, a university that was once Martin Heidegger’s home, located in a small town with hardly any Jewish population. For the Hessian Secretary of Arts and Science, Udo Cortes, the shift from Frankfurt to Marburg was simply a move “to save” one of the “small disciplines.” But for the task of Judaistik or Jüdische Studien, Jews are hardly needed, as both fields have undergone their own “klezmerization” of sorts. For faculty and students, moreover, the subject matter is foreign or a thing of the past. The Jewish identity that the Hochschule wants to achieve and the Jewish identity that the universities study hardly match.

Beyond the institutions of higher learning, moreover, Germany’s Jews and Jewish studies scholars occupy parallel worlds. As the Jewish population in Germany increases, however, the discipline of Jewish Studies will have to change as well. This is not just due to the larger numbers of immigrants, who are no longer only clustering in Germany’s major cities, but also in smaller towns and even villages. And it is not even due to the fact that these new Östjuden (Eastern Jews) differ fundamentally from their former, mostly orthodox, counterparts, as they are mostly non-religious. It is due to one single fact: most of these immigrants and their families did not experience the Holocaust, and this in turn facilitates their life in Germany. While they receive social aid, few have demands for reparation. They feel little anger or guilt towards their German surroundings. Germany, once again, has become for many a country that represents Bildung, as well as an economic wonderland. The children of these immigrants, who are neither survivors nor heirs of a German-Jewish past, may change the study of Jewish literature and culture in Germany again—and by doing so perhaps provide some of that new “space” that Pinto has been dreaming of.⁸

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⁸ Udo Cortes, Letter to David Ruderman, Director of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies,
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University of Pennsylvania, 13 July 2005. I would like to thank David Ruderman for making this letter available to me.

9 My longer survey of the past, present, and future of the field of German-Jewish Studies is a general appeared as 'Reflecting on the Past, Envisioning the Future: Perspectives for German-Jewish Studies.' GHI Bulletin 35 (2004): 11-32.


