

Cities without Jews

In the early 1920s, the Viennese journalist Hugo Bettauer wrote a novel that at the time must have seemed little more than a satirical excursion into a science fiction–style parallel universe. Titled *Die Stadt ohne Juden* (The City without Jews), Bettauer’s brief tale describes what happens to Vienna, and to Austria as a whole, when parliament passes a law expelling all Jews from the country. The expulsion order clears Austria of its Jews in six months and includes elaborate “who is a Jew” classifications that uncannily foreshadow the Nuremberg laws decreed by the Nazi Third Reich.

Jews, of course, have been expelled from European cities and countries countless times during their more than two-thousand-year history on the continent. But Bettauer does not dwell on the hardships of the Jews forced, once again, to leave their homes. Instead, with irony and acid wit, he focuses on the predicament of the Austrian Christians left behind in their racially pure paradise. Without the Jews, Viennese culture dries up, newspapers become a yawn, coffeehouses empty out, and intellectual life comes to a juddering standstill. Political debate evaporates, and economic indicators plummet. Restaurants go downhill, vacation resorts are deserted, and men and women alike forsake elegant fashions for rough wool and sensible flannel. In short, the city—indeed, the entire country—becomes a drab, bleak, boring wasteland.

“Vienna’s going to the dogs without the Jews!” one character exclaims. “. . . Vienna’s going to the dogs, I say; and when I, a veteran anti-Semite, say that, it’s true, I tell you!”¹

In the end, the expulsion order is rescinded, and the novel concludes

with the young man believed to be the first Jew to return to Vienna being greeted by a massive cheering crowd at City Hall, Vienna's famous Rathaus: "As the trumpets blared, the Mayor of Vienna, Herr Karl Maria Laberl, stepped out on the balcony, stretched out his arms in a gesture of benediction, and pronounced an impassioned speech that began with the words: 'My beloved Jew!'"²

Bettauer's book was an immediate sensation, selling a quarter of a million copies in less than a year according to Salomea Neumark Brainin, whose English translation of the novel appeared in 1926.³ It was made into a film and inspired the Berlin-based author Artur Landsberger to write his own novel, *Berlin ohne Juden* (Berlin without Jews), in 1925. Bettauer himself, however, had little time to enjoy his fame. In March 1925 he was murdered by a proto-Nazi who was determined to save German culture from "degeneration." Bettauer received, as Brainin put it, "a fatal bullet as royalty for his novel."⁴

The Nazis came to power in Germany about a decade after *Die Stadt ohne Juden* was published and unleashed the Holocaust only a few years after that. (Artur Landsberger committed suicide when Hitler became chancellor in 1933.) Nazi Germany annexed Austria in 1938, the first step in its conquest of Europe; Hitler was welcomed by cheering crowds when he entered Vienna. By 1945 not only had almost all Austrian Jews fled the country or been deported to their deaths, but of the estimated 9 million Jews who had lived in Europe before World War II, 6 million had been murdered. Thousands of synagogues, too, had been demolished and Jewish cemeteries destroyed, not to mention Jewish homes, schools, and businesses. Torah scrolls, prayer books, ritual objects, and even the humdrum, everyday possessions of Jews had been smashed, stolen, or consigned to the flames. Bettauer's fantasy of a city—a country—without Jews had essentially become reality, not just in Austria, but in all of east central Europe and in much of the rest of the continent as well.

Today few Jews still live in the countries where the Holocaust took place. But the continuing physical absence of Jews in much of Europe is not the only way in which Bettauer's book has proved prophetic. More than half a century after the Holocaust, an apparent longing for lost Jews—or for what Jews are seen to represent—is also evident. In a trend that developed with powerful momentum in the 1980s and accrued particular force after the fall of communism in 1989–90, Europeans, like the fictional mayor of Vienna, Herr Karl Maria Laberl, have stretched open their arms to embrace a Jewish component back into the social, political, historical, and cultural mainstream.

The irony is inescapable. For decades after World War II, memory of Jewish history and heritage was often marginalized, repressed, or forgotten, not only in countries where the flames of the Holocaust had burned most fiercely, but also in countries less directly touched by the effects of the Shoah. Jews, their culture, and their history were often viewed as something distinctly apart, off-limits; even the Holocaust was regarded as an internal “Jewish thing,” detached from the general flow of national history and national memory. In eastern Europe communist ideology made the extermination of the Jews and the world that was destroyed with them a footnote to the overall suffering in World War II. In Germany the psychic trauma left by the Nazis made people close their minds to the issue. In many countries Jews themselves kept low profiles.

By the late 1990s, though, the “Jewish phenomenon”—anything to do with Judaism, Jews, the Holocaust, and Israel—was increasingly recognized as part of the broad national experience, both on the personal level and as part of official policy. (Already in 1987, for example, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution recognizing “the very considerable and distinctive contribution that Jews and the tradition of Judaism have made to the historical development of Europe in the cultural and other fields.”⁵ And in January 2000 political and government leaders from forty-six countries, mainly European, gathered in Stockholm for a first-of-its-kind international forum on the Holocaust, where in effect they officially acknowledged the Holocaust as part of their countries’ national histories and embedded this recognition within the parameters of public national discourse.)

As part of this trend, Jewish culture—or what passes for Jewish culture, or what is perceived or defined as Jewish culture—has become a visible and sometimes highly visible component of the popular public domain in countries where Jews themselves now are practically invisible. From Milan to Munich, from Kraków to Cluj and well beyond, Jewish exhibitions, festivals, and workshops of all types abound, as do conferences and academic study programs on all aspects of Jewish history, culture, and tradition. Readings, lectures, seminars, talk shows, and films spotlight Jewish issues; and articles and programs on Jewish subjects are given frequent and prominent space in the print media and on prime-time television. Private volunteers and civic organizations clean up abandoned Jewish cemeteries and place plaques on empty synagogues. And new Jewish museums are being opened—often in towns where no Jews have lived for decades, often with government support,

and often in synagogues newly restored after lying forgotten since the end of World War II.

Jews and Things Jewish, meanwhile, are popular attractions, even a category of commercial merchandise. *Fiddler on the Roof*, with German or Polish or Austrian actors pinning on beards and sidecurls, is a favorite on local stages, as are many other plays and performances on a variety of Jewish themes. Yiddish song, klezmer (traditional eastern European Jewish instrumental music), and other Jewish music—performed by Jewish and non-Jewish groups alike—draw enthusiastic (and overwhelmingly non-Jewish) audiences to concert halls, churches, clubs, and outdoor arenas. Hundreds—even thousands—of new books on Jewish topics are published in local languages, and new Jewish bookstores attract a wide clientele in such cities as Munich, Vienna, Berlin, Kraków, and Rome.

Old Jewish quarters are under development as tourist attractions, where “Jewish-style” restaurants with “Jewish-sounding” names write their signs in Hebrew or Hebrew-style letters, use Jewish motifs in their decor, and name their dishes—sometimes even dishes made from pork or a nonkosher mix of meat and dairy products—after rabbis and Old Testament prophets. In April 1997, for example, the Golem restaurant in the old Jewish quarter of Prague featured “Rabbi Löw Beefsteaks,” made with ketchup, cheese, ham, and mushrooms, “Merchant Samuel Pork,” and a “Rabbi’s Pocket” filled with smoked meat and garnished with cheese. Kiosks, shops, and market stalls overflow with new Jewish kitsch; souvenir T-shirts and postcards sport imagery ranging from candlesticks and tombstones to caricatures of Franz Kafka. There are painted wooden carvings of hook-nosed, bearded Jews for sale in Poland and Golem statuettes and sidelocked Jewish puppets for sale in Prague. In the ancient ghetto of Venice, shop windows sparkle with brightly colored miniature Jews of hand-blown Murano glass. In Kraków a Ukrainian band at one “Jewish-style” café dresses up in Hasidic attire and plays Yiddish tunes for patrons sipping chicken soup and kosher vodka, while local travel agencies take visitors on “Schindler’s List” and other Jewish tours, and a “Jewish” gallery has been known to display, among other things, antique Jewish clothing—including men’s ritually fringed undergarments.

Many aspects of this phenomenon—from concerts to kitsch—are commonplace in the United States and Canada, particularly in cities where there are sizable Jewish populations. This is also the case in some cities in Great Britain and France, the countries that have the larg-

est Jewish populations in Europe outside the former Soviet Union (600,000 in France and 300,000 in Britain) and where, as in North America, Jews are and have been a visible part of the postwar social and cultural landscape and also create their own important internal markets. (This discussion does not deal with Israel, where, of course, the Jewish internal market *is* the mainstream.) Particularly in America, the size, visibility, and sense of security of the Jewish population, not to mention the long-standing general ethnic and immigrant mix, enable a casual mainstream penetration or exchange of specifically Jewish habits, traits, customs, and characteristics. They also allow for a play on stereotypes, epitomized, perhaps, by the famous ad campaign that used photographs of African Americans, American Indians, WASPs, and other representative “goyish” types to make the point that “you don’t have to be Jewish” to enjoy Levy’s rye bread.

In most European countries today, however, particularly in those where most of the Jews killed in the Holocaust were concentrated, it is not at all “normal” to be Jewish. This is the result of the Holocaust and the other legacies of a long and troubled history. But it also holds true in simple numerical terms. Despite a dramatic, if still uncertain, revival of Jewish communal life in former communist states since the waning and fall of communism and despite energetic new efforts to promote a pan-European Jewish identity,⁶ the Jewish population in most European countries is very small—and dwindling. The most pessimistic observers even predict that, as a result of demographic decline, intermarriage, emigration, and indifference, Jews may practically disappear from the continent within a few decades.⁷ There are twice as many Jews in Los Angeles as in all of Britain, and single city blocks in New York are likely to be home to more Jews than are entire European capitals. Hungary has an estimated 100,000 Jews, the biggest Jewish population in a postcommunist state outside the former Soviet Union, but only a fraction have regular contact with organized Jewry. Only about 10,000 Jews live in Austria, out of 7 million people. There are 3,500 to 6,000 Jews out of a total population of 12 million in the Czech Republic, 10,000 to 20,000 Jews out of 38 million in Poland. Of the 60 million people in Italy, only 30,000 to 35,000 are Jews.⁸ Only Germany, ironically, has seen a visible surge in Jewish population in recent years: their number has more than doubled, thanks to the arrival in the 1990s of tens of thousands of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Even with this immigration, however, Germany’s Jewish population remains minuscule—as of 1999, 80,000 Jews out of a population of 80 million.

Nonetheless, it is in countries such as these, where Jews make up only a tiny fraction of the general populace and where few members of the public may actually ever meet a living Jew, that the non-Jewish embrace of the Jewish phenomenon becomes a bear hug. Jews in these countries are of course among the participants, sponsors, and targeted public, and foreign and local Jews often play key roles in popularizing Jewish culture and bringing Jewish music, art, dance, literature, scholarship, and religious traditions to a broader public. But, for the most part, the outpouring and interest dwarf local Jewish populations and capacity. Organizers, audiences, performers, participants, and consumers are, to a great extent, Gentiles; the result is a form of Jewish culture, or at least Judaica, minus the Jews.

The motives behind this activity and interest are as varied as the manifestations themselves. Often, they are not fully clear, and the end results are not yet known. It is easy to dismiss much of the phenomenon as opportunistic “Shoah business” or a debased form of folklore, and some of it obviously *is* exploitative kitsch. Fashion, commercialism, and what can be described as post-Holocaust necrophilia also certainly play a role.

But the phenomenon is much more complex than passing fads, picking at sores, political correctness, or cynical exploitation. For one thing, it has expanded and diversified since the early 1980s, assuming new and changing forms as it has evolved. Aspects of it have become well entrenched in the most diverse of European societies. What started out in many cases as the private explorations of a limited number of intellectuals has often become institutional and also now the province of a much wider, more casual, popular awareness. In some countries aspects of the phenomenon that even a few years ago seemed startling (such as the klezmer craze or Jewish theme tourism) have simply become part of the norm. Generational changes also have had and continue to have an effect; “serious” motivations have given way in many instances to pop expression and simple cultural curiosity, and vice versa. For many, particularly younger, people, “Things Jewish” may merely be fun, even an ethnic flavor of the month in societies where “world music” and “multiculturalism” are chic political and cultural contemporary catchwords. For others, casual pop encounters have led to a much deeper academic, artistic, humanitarian, or other involvement.

Thoughtful reevaluations of history, culture, and identity are at play, as are sincere attempts to make up for the past. But Holocaust commemoration *per se* is only part of the equation. In many ways (at least

in its initial stages) the phenomenon has reflected a “third generation” syndrome: the desire to discover and seize hold of knowledge withheld, denied, or ignored by older generations, be they parents, grandparents, or ruling elites. Memory—memory of Jews—is employed as a vehicle for self-discovery and self-exploration. The recovery of Jewish history and culture as well as Holocaust memory is used, consciously or not, as a means of rethinking and redefining personal identity and national histories. This process may entail what some Germans label “memory work,” a meticulous, sometimes ritualized approach to bringing to light that which the wartime generation sought to bury. Or it may be what eastern Europeans dubbed “filling in the blank spaces” created by communist ideology. It may be an intellectual or emotional attraction to Jews and to their lost world as metaphorical symbols—symbols of survival, of self-irony, and of identity maintained in exile; symbols of the Holocaust; symbols of what was suppressed under communism; symbols of democratic ideals; even simply symbols of the “good old days.” Or it may be a much less complicated attraction to local legend and lore.

Clearly, various degrees of philo-Semitism—an idealization of Jews, sometimes linked to guilt or uneasiness about the Holocaust, sometimes linked to a fascination with what is perceived as an almost familiar exotica—play a role. Nostalgia, too, is involved, though it is likely to be expressed as a pseudonostalgia for stereotypes—be it the stage-set shtetl world of *Fiddler on the Roof* or a romanticized vision of the coffeehouse Jewish intellectual—rather than nostalgia for the highly nuanced and often highly contentious Jewish world that actually once existed or, for that matter, nostalgia for the complex, problematic, and far too often ugly relations between Jews and non-Jewish society.

The conflicting motivations can lead to a troubling ambivalence. The history and memory that are resurrected and tenderly restored to place are often distorted to suit specific local and personal needs. Sincere attempts to study or reintegrate what has been lost, destroyed, or forgotten coexist with superficiality, slogans, lip service, and show. State-, city-, or church-sponsored promotion of Jewish culture or celebrations of Jewish heritage—whether by the opening of a Jewish museum, the restoration of a synagogue, or the organizing of a Jewish cultural festival—can serve as institutional forms of cultural apology, consciously articulated mea culpas aimed at acknowledging, however tardily (and with however much self-serving political calculation), a part of history once deemed lost, if not indeed irrelevant. In addition, some

governments, including several communist regimes in the 1980s, have not hesitated to play the Jewish card to win sympathy or support from Western nations and from what some perceive as an internationally powerful Jewish lobby or, more simply, to look good in the eyes of the world. Jews, too, are often viewed as symbols of all persecuted peoples: honoring lost Jews and their annihilated world can become a means of demonstrating democratic principles and multicultural ideals, regardless of how other contemporary minorities are treated, be they Turks, Roma, North Africans, or whatever.⁹

“Feeling,” too, bears an influence on the reconstruction of what is perceived as fact. Nostalgia, stereotypes, and commemoration can become shorthand tools in the creation of what often, to rework a concept expressed by Umberto Eco in a 1975 essay on aspects of popular culture in America, become “absolute fake” environments, “where the boundaries of game and illusion are blurred” and where “absolute unreality is offered as a real presence.”¹⁰ Indeed, many who so tightly embrace Jewish memory and Jewish culture, who profess themselves interested in “bringing back to life” what was destroyed in the Holocaust, have manifested little apparent interest in the local living Jewish present.

The Paris-based historian Diana Pinto uses the term “Jewish space” to describe the place occupied by the Jewish phenomenon within mainstream European society today.¹¹ Jewish space, she has written, entails not so much the physical presence of Jews but the ways in which European countries now integrate Jewish history and memory, and the Holocaust, into an understanding of their national history, regardless of the current size, visibility, or activity of the local Jewish population.¹² “There is a Jewish space in Europe that will exist even in the absence of Jews,” Pinto said at a 1995 conference in Prague on planning for the future of European Jewry. “The ‘Jewish thing’ is becoming universal.”

In the early 1990s the sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann described the specific manifestation of this phenomenon in Germany as the emergence of a “Judaizing terrain” made up of “converts to Judaism, of members of joint Jewish-German or Israeli-German associations, and of many ‘professional almost-Jews’ outside or even inside the apparatuses of the Jewish organizations and [Jewish communities].” Jewish culture, he wrote, “is being manufactured, Jewish history reconstructed, by these Judaizing milieux—by German experts of Jewish culture and religion [who] enact Jewish culture from within German biographies and from within German history; this has an important bearing on the type of Jewish culture that is actually being produced: a culture that is not

lived, that draws heavily from the museum, and that is still no less genuine for that.”¹³

I think of this “universalization” of the Jewish phenomenon and its integration into mainstream European consciousness, this emergence of a “Judaizing terrain” and “Judaizing milieux” in all their widely varied, conscious and unconscious, manifestations, as a “filling” of the Jewish space.¹⁴ This is a process that in turn encompasses the creation of a “virtual Jewishness,” a “virtual Jewish world,” peopled by “virtual Jews” who perform—or, as Bodemann put it, enact—Jewish culture from an outsider perspective, alongside or often in the absence of local Jewish populations. In doing so, they may take over cultural and other activities that would ordinarily be carried out by Jews. In other cases, they create their own realities that perpetuate an image of Jewish presence. Some go so far as to wear Stars of David around their necks, assume Jewish-sounding names, attend synagogue, send their children to Jewish schools, and follow kosher dietary laws, in addition to championing Jewish causes. Sometimes non-Jews consciously underscore the irony of their outsider status: local non-Jewish klezmer groups in Austria and the Netherlands punningly call themselves by the Yiddish name *Gojim* (Gentiles). Another, in Bremen, Germany, takes the pun a step further, calling itself the *Klezgoyim*.

Like any broad notion, the idea of a virtual Jewish world embraces several realms. There is a public political dimension and a dimension that is strictly personal. There is a physical dimension, exemplified by activities such as the restoration of synagogues, the documentation of Jewish monuments, and the redevelopment of old Jewish quarters. Another dimension is that of performance, which by definition embodies the use of virtualities: the created worlds presented onstage and in film or in museum displays, for example. Shifting definitions of “Jewish culture” and the manufacture, merchandising, and display of what can be called “Jewish cultural products”—books, music, art, souvenirs, and the like—constitute still other dimensions, as does the iconizing of the concept “Jew” or “Jewish identity” as a model, metaphor, symbol, or tool.

What is the scope of the “virtual Jewish” phenomenon? It is hard to quantify, but a few examples may help.

- In 1992 in Berlin—home to about nine thousand Jews at the time—an exhibition described as “the world’s largest and most expensive ever” was mounted at the Martin Gropius Bau museum.¹⁵ Spon-

sored by the city and costing more than \$6 million to mount, the exhibition spilled far outside the walls of the museum to include a wealth of related performances, conferences, poetry readings, film series, specialized exhibits, and concerts—even a double compact disc (CD). Some 350,000 people saw the exhibition, called “Jüdische Lebenswelten” (Patterns of Jewish Life), and 115,000 attended the related events. Some sixty thousand copies of the catalog, which was nearly 800 pages long and included more than 740 illustrations, were sold.¹⁶

- The European Association of Jewish Studies (EAJS), founded in 1981 as an international voluntary association, began organizing annual international Jewish studies conferences in the early 1990s. In 1995 it established a permanent secretariat. Its first *Directory of Jewish Studies in Europe*, published in 1998, listed nearly three hundred institutions and university departments in twenty-two European countries (outside the former Soviet Union) where Jewish studies courses or classes were taught. It also listed nearly one thousand Europe-based scholars who taught (or in some cases carried out research in) various areas of Jewish studies.¹⁷ Similarly, scholars, archivists, museum directors, and researchers from more than forty institutions all over Germany attended the 1997 annual meeting in Cologne of Germany’s Association of Jewish Collections, and in Prague in March 2000 some forty representatives of Jewish museums in a dozen countries attended the annual meeting of the Association of European Jewish Museums.
- In Italy a January 1998 special program on state-run television featuring a cabaret act combining Yiddish music, Jewish jokes, and a discussion of Jewish traditions drew an audience share of one million viewers. On the day of the broadcast, the staid Milan daily *Corriere della Sera* splashed its entertainment section with the headline “Songs, Theater, and TV: It’s Yiddish-mania” and ran a glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms with the article.
- In Kraków, Poland, a city with a Jewish population of about two hundred souls, the Center for Jewish Culture, operated and staffed by non-Jews, opened in November 1993. By August 1996 it had already programmed more than 625 events, including lectures, concerts, exhibits, and seminars. In 1995–96 alone, more than five hundred “serious titles” on Jewish history, literature, and culture were published in Poland, and Poland claimed the “world record” for the

translation of works from Yiddish: more Yiddish books were translated in Poland than in the United States or Israel.¹⁸

- According to Rachel Salamander, founder of the *Literaturhandlung* Jewish bookstores in Munich, Berlin, and Vienna, as of 1997 about 1,200 new titles on Jewish topics or by Jewish authors were being published in German each year. Salamander, the daughter of Jewish displaced persons who settled in Germany after World War II, founded the first *Literaturhandlung* in Munich in 1982. It both responded to and helped catalyze interest in Jewish subjects among society at large. In its first fifteen years of operation, it expanded its inventory to include some 7,000 titles grouped in some forty subjects. *Literaturhandlung* also hosts readings, lectures, and other public events and annually publishes a successful mail order catalog. A similar catalog, divided into fifty categories, was published in 1997 by Rome's Menorah Jewish book shop and also posted on an Internet web site. Menorah initially made an effort to stock Italian university dissertations on Jewish themes on its shelves, but by the late 1990s, according to its owners, it had to abandon the practice because of the volume.

It is important to note that all these activities (and more) exist side by side with widespread ignorance and apathy and sometimes overt anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. Numerous surveys and public opinion polls in various countries, east and west, have demonstrated this, and also that young people, in particular, are often quite ignorant of recent history or of anything to do with Judaism.¹⁹ A series of studies carried out by the American Jewish Committee in 1998 and 1999 demonstrated that nearly a decade after the fall of communism, little was taught in state-run high schools in former communist countries about the Jewish phenomenon, and what was taught sometimes included anti-Semitic distortions.²⁰

Ignorance combined with the visibility of Jews and Jewish concerns in the media, on theater stages, in bookstores, and the like, also produce mistaken impressions about the status of Jews in Europe today. "Considering the number of publications [and] exhibits and the large focus on Jewish topics in the media," the German journalist Katharina Ochse told a 1993 conference on emerging Jewish culture in Germany since 1989, "one could get the impression that the country had a few hundred thousand Jews and a blossoming German Jewish culture."²¹ According to surveys cited but not identified by the Polish author Agata

Tuszyńska, “[One] in 4 Poles is convinced that from 350,000 to 3.5 million Jews are living in Poland. One in 10 believes that there are significantly more, perhaps 4 million, perhaps as many as 7 million.”²² Various surveys carried out in the 1980s and 1990s in Italy showed that Italians consistently overestimated the number of Jews in the country by hundreds of thousands or even millions.²³ Indeed, in summer 1998 a senior staff member at a local history museum in the northeastern Italian town of Gorizia, on the border with Slovenia, told me that she guessed there must be about 500,000 Jews in Italy—some fifteen times the actual number. (“I know there are only a small number of Jews in Italy,” she told me, “and 500,000 seems small in a country with 60 million people.”)

This woman may have gotten the impression that there were so many Jews from the attention paid to the Jewish phenomenon in Gorizia alone, not to mention in the national media. The town has a Jewish history stretching back to the Middle Ages. Though the Jewish community never amounted to more than three hundred fifty people, Jews played an important role in local development, and the community produced several prominent figures, including Carlo Michelstaedter, an early-twentieth-century poet and philosopher. Today Gorizia has only a handful of Jewish residents, but its large eighteenth-century synagogue is the epicenter of activity organized by a local club called the Association of Friends of Israel, which had about sixty members in 1998. It sponsored public meetings, exhibits, lectures, seminars, publications, guided tours to the onetime Gorizia ghetto, and other initiatives “aimed at the recovery of the history of Gorizian Jews and the diffusion of information about the state of Israel.” The synagogue, abandoned after World War II, was fully restored by municipal and regional authorities and reconsecrated in 1984 at a gala ceremony led by the mayor, a man who later became president of a local institute for middle European Jewish studies. Throughout the 1990s the Association of Friends of Israel maintained its offices in the synagogue building and also managed the museum installed in a ground floor hall beneath the sanctuary. Until 1998 this museum comprised little more than an amateur display of ritual objects and historic memorabilia, but in 1998 the municipality sponsored a total overhaul that added didactic text panels on Jewish history and traditions, installations, multimedia presentations, and a special room dedicated to Michelstaedter. (The young architect who designed the new exhibition installation had little knowledge of Judaism, however: the minyan, or quorum for a Jewish service, she informed me, was fifteen, not ten, men.) This upgrade formed part

of an overall municipal development plan for historical tourism in Gorizia, and it placed the Jewish museum and synagogue squarely within the official framework of the town's cultural sites. Antonella Gallarotti, president of the Association of Friends of Israel, a plump, smiling woman who wears a gold cross around her neck, oversaw the changes made in the museum presentation and exhibits. "The Jewish community gave a lot to Gorizia, to its cultural, social, and political fabric; to the life of the city on all levels," she told me. "And this has disappeared. Few survived to come back. So it seemed right to us to memorialize them, at least to keep their history alive for future generations to know what the Jewish community gave Gorizia and how unjust was their fate." As of September 1997, according to information Gallarotti provided me, twenty-four exhibitions had been mounted at the synagogue and four books and ten pamphlets had been published. Lectures, book presentations, and panel discussions were "too numerous to cite" individually.

A Question of Timing

In one form or another and to one degree or another, the reintegration of a Jewish component is a pan-European phenomenon, part of an unprecedented and widespread confrontation with history in which the past "has again become [a] battlefield of interpretation."²⁴ It can be seen in countries whose people were the perpetrators as well as the victims and bystanders of World War II and the Holocaust, in countries on both sides of Europe's north-south axis, in countries that straddle the onetime Iron Curtain that divided the Soviet bloc from Western democracy, and in countries where anti-Semitism is still alive, openly voiced, and sometimes, quite literally, kicking. Symptoms of the phenomenon—that is, the concrete ways in which it is manifested—are much the same across the continent, regardless of differing motivations and differing political history. Still, geography, postwar politics, and historical legacy obviously have had an inescapable impact, both on the attitudes of individuals and on public policy. The history and societal role of Jews, the impact of the Holocaust, and the course of postwar development were different in Poland from what they were in Italy, different in the Czech Republic from what they were in Austria, different in the postwar eastern and western parts of today's united Germany.²⁵

"Blank spaces" regarding Jewish heritage and history, as well as re-

garding the Holocaust, were the result of much more than World War II annihilation. They were created and bolstered after the war by willful public amnesia, deliberate political agendas, or apathetic neglect—or a combination of all three. Indeed, the postwar years were a time both to rebuild and to forget. Across the war-ravaged continent, where entire cities had been reduced to rubble and where millions of people, not just Jews, had been made homeless, Jews and non-Jews alike scrambled to put the war, its horrors, and its effects behind them. Few Jewish survivors wanted to remain in the parts of Europe that had become a vast Jewish graveyard. Those who did remain tended to keep a low profile as they regrouped and recovered, or sought anonymity in total assimilation. Many, if not most, Jews remaining in communist-dominated countries chose (or were compelled) to conceal or deny their Jewish identity. Some wanted simply to slam the door on the tragic past. Some wanted to build a “safer” neutral identity for their children in countries where religion in general was repressed, Jewish topics were officially taboo, and grassroots as well as official anti-Semitism often lingered. Some, at least initially, embraced communism with enthusiasm, attracted by its internationalist promise of ethnic equality.²⁶

Among non-Jews, the memory of prewar Jewish presence and history, along with the shameful or guilty memory of anti-Semitic persecution and of the Holocaust itself, was often repressed and even effaced. Among society at large, there was little desire to explore the meaning and specific horrors of the Final Solution or to make the painful effort of self-examination that that process would entail. On the one hand, the wound was too raw and too potentially disturbing; on the other, the fate of the Jews seemed incidental when compared in immediate terms to the fate of entire countries or to that of individual families and friends. In the view of many, the Holocaust had concerned “others,” not themselves, and those “others” were now gone. People, too, were simply numb.

It took changing conditions and several postwar catalysts to enable the development of the non-Jewish embrace of the Jewish phenomenon. One of these was distance, first marked most vividly by the coming-of-age of the student generation of the 1960s and then marked by degrees as living memory became history. A generational attempt to confront both the wartime legacy and its prewar antecedents formed part of a broader general revival of interest in lost traditions and veiled history that also, for example, produced folk music, genealogy, and “alternative” lifestyle movements as well as Vietnam-era antiestablishment protests and political groupings.

In West Germany this coming-of-age led to a painful—often brutal—confrontation with family and national skeletons that was exemplified by the radical “’68 generation” directly asking the question “What did you do in the war, Daddy?”²⁷ Interest in Jews per se resulted in part from this fixation: The question What did you do in the war? became Whom did you do it to? and what did you destroy? This confrontation and how to deal with it, a sometimes clumsy balancing act of guilt, memory, atonement, and denial, has yet to be resolved. In West Germany it developed into a manifold, if far from flawless, process known as *Vergangenheitsverarbeitung*, “working through the past” (or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, “coming to terms with [or mastering] the past”), a process of making moral, material, and psychological amends for the Nazis, on both the institutional and individual levels, that encompasses everything from official commemorations and acts of reparation on the part of the state to the activities of religious and other groups that try to foster German-Jewish dialogue to a personal fascination with Jewish culture and traditions.

Another catalyst was the opening of the Christian world—particularly the Vatican—to Jews and Judaism, which also was initiated in the 1960s and gained momentum as the postwar student generations came of age. The landmark *Nostra Aetate* declaration issued in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council repudiated the notion that the “perfidious” Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. Its call for “mutual respect and understanding” between Catholics and Jews formally initiated an interfaith interaction that has by now become so routine that in some countries it is often taken for granted. Pope John Paul II, who saw the effects of the Holocaust and of communist anti-Semitism firsthand in his native Poland, made improving relations with the Jewish world one of the cornerstones of his mission after he was elected to the papacy in 1978. In numerous declarations and with highly publicized and highly significant acts, such as visits to Auschwitz in 1979 and to the great synagogue in Rome in 1986, the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel in 1993, and the release in 1998 of an official (if controversial) Vatican document repenting for Catholic failings during the Holocaust, John Paul demonstrated a vivid appreciation of Jewish heritage, history, and values to the Catholic world and to the world at large. Jews, as he put it most famously, were Christianity’s “older brothers”; they and their culture thus were worthy of respect, honor, and even love. His mission was crowned by an emotional visit to the Holy Land in March 2000.²⁸

The role of Israel on the world stage and shifting attitudes toward

the Jewish state in light of developments such as the Eichmann trial in 1961, the Six-Day War in 1967, the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon and the Intifada in the 1980s, the Gulf War in 1991, and the ups and downs of the peace process also have focused attention on Jews and Things Jewish in general and have influenced European attitudes toward them, both on the governmental and personal planes. In much of Europe, as part of an anti-American, anti-imperialist political ideology that grew out of protests against the Vietnam war, many countercultural young leftists embraced a militant form of pacifism and sought to identify with all peoples and classes they saw as victims, including the Palestinians. Members of the influential left-wing intellectual community also frequently assumed a sharply pro-Arab, “anti-Zionist” position against Israel, America’s close ally.

It took the waning and collapse of communism to make confrontation with history and the historical legacy the norm, in the East as well as the West. The growing interest in the Jewish phenomenon paralleled other trends across Europe when the end of the Cold War opened up idealistic new visions of an undivided continent and sparked general attempts to redefine, reexamine, reevaluate, and “fill in the blanks of” the past. Needless to say, these trends have had a dark side, too, with a growth not just of national pride and national curiosity but also of nationalism and of public, sometimes violent manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

Jews themselves have not been immune to these changes. Parallel to the development of a non-Jewish embrace of Things Jewish in Europe has been an internal Jewish rediscovery of roots and heritage, particularly since the fall of communism. Indeed, the embrace of Jewish culture by mainstream society goes on side by side (and at times hand in hand) with efforts by Jews in various countries to recover or redefine personal Jewish identities and to revive or enrich Jewish communities, Jewish life, and internal Jewish culture. In this parallel process, the mainstream embrace may serve to nurture emerging new Jewish communities and stimulate debate and internal development—but it may, too, overwhelm or even alienate them.

There is, in fact, a very fine and dangerous line between appreciating Jews and their culture and mythologizing them. While welcoming the new openness, some Jews are acutely uncomfortable with the new role forced on them and their culture and history. They feel used and exploited. In the early 1990s Michael Alpert, of the American klezmer group Brave Old World, expressed this vividly. He wrote a song in Yid-