



## Part IV: **Public Spaces**



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# Jewish Spaces in Present Vienna: A Hebrew Street Sign and the Taste of Authenticity and Virtuality in the Cityscape



**Fig. 1:** Hebrew Street Sign “Tavorstraße” at Taborstraße 5 in Vienna’s Second District  
© Sebestyén Fiumei.

As I walk down *Taborstraße* in Vienna’s second district today (2024), coming from the inner city and the Danube Canal behind me, I spot a Hebrew street sign (Fig. 1). It is located at house number 5, in the immediate vicinity of *Karmeliterplatz*, surrounded by hotels in which the most famous Jewish theatres used to be a century ago. The *Nestroyhof*, one of the most notable (Jewish) theatre buildings itself, is just around the corner. And, probably most notably, *Taborstraße* leads directly to the Viennese Prater, once renowned for Jewish popular entertainment and functioning as a meeting space for Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Overall, *Leopoldstadt* was and is known as a Jewish neighborhood. Yet, the entire second district in general and *Taborstraße* in particular also represent the ambivalence of Jewish life, history,

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and culture in the metropolis of Central Europe and their spatial construction – in-between lively participation, cultural flourishing and destruction, expulsion, and annihilation. The Hebrew street sign also contributes to this spatial ambiguity. This article is about how this Hebrew street sign shapes the authenticity – defined as existing through continuous change<sup>1</sup> – of the space of *Taborstraße* between real-life conditionality and virtual creation, influenced by negotiations of Jewish history and culture that are currently becoming real in this neighborhood (again) – unfortunately not apart from antisemitism, supposedly disguised as criticism of Israel following October 7, 2023.

On the facade of house number 5 in Vienna's *Taborstraße* the Jewish artist Sebestyén Fiumei placed a Hebrew street sign in 2017. The Hebrew "Tavorstraße" plate nourishes a Jewish taste that spreads from one of the central streets throughout the district. It is an art installation that renders the name of the street in Hebrew (not Yiddish!). The artist understands the Hebrew of the sign as a nod to the backdrop of the metropolis. The sign itself is modelled according to the standard for street nomination in a public space, and is placed where street signs are intended to be hung. What the reality of the space as it appears today does not reveal is the very fact that the street sign, as it is to be seen there, was relocated on October 10, 2017, some 30 meters further towards the Danube from where Fiumei initially placed it at *Taborstraße* 18. The re-placement on house number 5 marked the end of an online debate and initiative that aimed to bring back a Hebrew street sign which was installed and soon after removed in the part of the city renowned as a (former) Jewish space.

In this article, I probe how contemporary Jewish urban spaces are designed, interpreted, and lived. The installation of the Hebrew street sign at *Taborstraße* 5/18 in Vienna's second district, *Leopoldstadt*, in 2017, serves as a case study. I regard this case as an example in which a local and a virtual community, consisting of Jews and non-Jews alike, mutually constructed or added to an urban Jewish space. How does peoples' perceptions of their cities influence contemporary Jewish spaces? What avenues of expression do current examples of space making include? How far do these expressions contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces? First, I introduce the case study. To approach this example of contemporary Jewish space making, I then provide an overview on how spatial considerations found their way into Jewish Studies and which research interests have been investigated since in the course of this Jewish spatial turn. This leads me to argue that the (Jewish) spatial turn is currently drifting towards the virtual sphere, and

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1 Francesca Piazzoni, *The Real Fake: Authenticity and the Production of Space* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), p. 4.

beyond just a metaphorical sense, since increasingly relational processes of space making occur, which emerge from or include virtual spaces.

## Virtual Activism for a Hebrew Street Sign in Vienna's *Leopoldstadt*

On October 10, 2017, Vienna's – Jewish and non-Jewish – *Leopoldstadt* community achieved their wish: The administration of the city of Vienna (re)installed a Hebrew street sign in the public space of the second district. This sign had initially been erected and quickly afterwards removed the previous summer. But how did it happen that a Hebrew street sign became a focal point for negotiating public Jewish spaces?

To situate these events more adequately, I wish to briefly touch upon the historical context: Vienna's second district, also known as *Leopoldstadt*, was and is renowned as a "Jewish quarter" far beyond the city's borders. It was the historical settlement area of the Jewish community in early modern times and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was home to many synagogues and Jewish institutions – today, it partially is again. The second district of Vienna functioned as a hub for both orthodox and "assimilated" Jews for many reasons. For instance, *Leopoldstadt* also hosted the northern railway station which was, around 1900, the first port of call for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In addition, Vienna's largest synagogue, the *Leopoldstädter Tempel* (the Leopoldstädter Synagogue), was located close to *Taborstraße* there. It added past and present – today through a void and a memory plaque – to the Jewish history and culture of the district.<sup>2</sup> The *Nestroyhof*, the next building to the synagogue, represented Jewish culture at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and does so again today, hosting the theater Hamakom "Der Ort" (the place).<sup>3</sup> It was this that earned the district the name *Mazzesinsel* and put it in the heart of modern tourist activities related to Jewish heritage and memory.<sup>4</sup>

It was there, in the *Taborstraße*, where an initially unknown person or group put up a street sign in Hebrew letters in late June 2017. The sign immediately caught the eye of passers-by, drew stares, and turned into the buzz of the district. Generally appreciated by the inhabitants of the neighborhood – Jewish and non-

2 Susanne Korbel, *Auf die Tour! Jüdinnen und Juden in Singspielhalle, Varieté und Kabarett – zwischen Habsburgermonarchie und Amerika* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2021), p. 64.

3 See Theater Hamakom, "Der Ort", accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.hamakom.at>.

4 Ruth Beckermann, *Die Mazzesinsel: Juden in der Leopoldstadt 1918–1938* (Wien: Mandelbaum, 1992).

Jewish alike – discussions about the street sign and the Jewish past and present circulated through the district and were soon featured in local newspapers. Due to the increasing attention it received, it soon emerged that this street sign had not been approved by the *Magistratisches Bezirksamt* (district authority). Despite Austrian authorities usually trying (or, at least, to pretend) to care for Jewish cultural sites and memory initiatives, the city administration “fulfilled their administrative duty” (this might remind the reader of a different historical debate in Austria post-Holocaust history) and removed the street sign on July 17, 2017.<sup>5</sup> The absence was noticed by local residents, and local newspapers began to report on it.

Soon, the removal of the Hebrew street sign just a few weeks after its installation at *Taborstraße* 18 caused protest. The neighborhood formed a group that – in order to facilitate coordination, achieve outreach, and establish a network beyond the district and across the city of Vienna – chose to rely on a virtual presence.<sup>6</sup> Together with people participating online, this pop-up community created an online platform using social media (Facebook and Instagram) and promoted their wish to have “the Yiddish[!] street sign” back. Operating as the Facebook groups “Das Taborstraße-Schild auf Jiddisch soll zurück”<sup>7</sup> and “Taborstraße Straßenschild/רחוב תבארשטראסע שלט צוריק”,<sup>8</sup> they articulated a strong affiliation with the sign because it reminded the locals of lived historic Jewish spaces, such as the Jewish entertainment mile that had crucially determined Jewish and non-Jewish everyday life in the neighborhood at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> In the course of the online campaign, the community learned that the Hungarian street artist Sebestyén Fiumei (alias Shabi Fiumei)<sup>10</sup> was the

5 See “Rätsel um hebräisches Straßenschild im Zweiten”, July 18, 2017, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.heute.at/s/ratsel-um-hebraisches-strassenschild-im-zweiten-49467599>.

6 See the Facebook group “Taborstraßenschild”, accessed November 10, 2023, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMqecCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment\\_id=1073665409841122](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMqecCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment_id=1073665409841122).

7 See “Das Taborstraße-Schild auf Jiddisch soll zurück”, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067922265410>.

8 See “Taborstraße Straßenschild/רחוב תבארשטראסע שלט צוריק”, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/Taborshtrase->.

9 Private correspondence with Sebestyén Fiumei (June 19, 2023).

10 The street artist Sebestyén Fiumei is well-known for urban art installations that relate Jewish history to cities’ present appearances. For instance, Fiumei also made the sign “Mazzesinsel” in Yiddish letters at Schwedenbrücke in Vienna and Yiddish street signs at Rue de Rosiers in Paris. Recently, Fiumei developed a street sign for Grenadierstraße in Berlin. See his various social media accounts: on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/shabi.fiumei/>; on Twitter, [https://twitter.com/shabi\\_fiumei](https://twitter.com/shabi_fiumei).

mastermind behind the original installation and had initially placed the sign within view of his apartment window: “Since the house on Tabor Street has been standing there for years without a street sign for some reason, I thought I’d do it myself, add something to it, a little work of art so to speak”.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 2:** Flyer, “Invitation to the revival of the street sign”.

Following a few brief newspaper articles and some weeks of activism on the Internet, the virtual community finally gained attention from the sphere of communal politics. After contacting both the local community and the artist, politicians Andrea Standl and Adi Hasch, both members of the Green Party, initiated the re-erection of the street sign and called for an event that would bring it back to the *Taborstraße* neighborhood. Supported by Ursula Lichtenegger (Green Party), who operated as head of the *Bezirksvorsteherung Leopoldstadt* (district administration) at that time, the reinstallation was framed as the opening of an art installation by Fiumei in an “*Enthüllungszeremonie*” (unveiling ceremony) on October 10, 2017 (Fig. 2). The official event was widely attended, and members of both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Vienna participated. For instance, the president of the Viennese Jewish Congregation Oskar Deutsch, vice presidents Chanan Babacsayv and Dezoni Dawaraschwili, and Chief Rabbi Arie Folger, as well as certain politi-

<sup>11</sup> Facebook, “Taborstraßenschild”.

cians, all contributed to the official unveiling. Local newspapers reported on the event, and the reinstallation was a great success.<sup>12</sup> The artist presented the sign to the district administration and to Deutsch, as the official representative of the Jewish community. Deutsch was quoted to have wished for such a street sign on every street in the second district.<sup>13</sup> Pleased, honored, and inspired by the commitment of the local community, Fiumei stated: “Sometimes it only takes one person to get a piece of art removed, but dozens of others to get it put back up. I think this case was a good example of that. Nevertheless, I was very happy about the support of the local Jewish communities of the 2nd district”.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it is important to note that the street sign was placed at *Taborstraße* 5 instead of on the facade of *Taborstraße* 18, the former Hotel National (famous for hosting a vaudeville stage at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), where it was initially installed. *Taborstraße* 18 belongs to the hospital of the Brothers of Mercy. When Fiumei claimed that he wished to re-place it on the original building, he was informed that renovations were soon to be made and that he should come back to it “when the building [was] ready for it”.<sup>15</sup> Asked for his reasons as to why he wanted to put up a street sign, the artist replied that he considered it to be a nice gesture when, for instance, “a place name is placed not only in the official language of the country, but also in a language that concerns many inhabitants of the place with their culture” – hinting at the well-known examples of various Chinatowns. Yet, as he admitted, “in Austria, on the other hand, such a thing is not always so welcome [. . .] By putting up a street sign, I also wanted to counteract the fact that, ironically, the most Jewish quarter in Vienna is named after an antisemite”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the second district owes its name to emperor Leopold I, and his role in the expulsion of the Jewish population from the city in 1669/70.<sup>17</sup> In the debates about either renaming or contextualizing historically problematic streets, squares, etc., Fiumei considers himself as “not necessarily taking the position of the renaming proponents”: “I am more in favor of counterbalancing”, he explains, “I believe that we can learn more about history and society

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12 There was also a minor scandal because a politician of the right-wing Freedom party participated and tried to claim the installation as being supported by them (*Taborstraße*, 2017).

13 *Die Taborstraße auf jiddisch*, Wiener Bezirksblatt, October 19, 2017.

14 Private correspondence.

15 Ibid.

16 Fiumei here hints at the vandalism of the bilingual place-name sign of Oberwart, where the Hungarian name *Felsőőr* was scratched through, and the dispute about bilingual place-name signs in Carinthia.

17 On the *zweite Wiener Gesera*, see Barbara Staudinger, *Gantze Dörffler voll Juden. Juden in Niederösterreich 1496–1670* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2005).



through this”, and he anticipates his art as a step towards such critical counterbalancing of spaces.<sup>18</sup>

To conceptualize the interplay between local engagement and the online community, I want to point to another debate on the creation of, naming of, and artistic intervention in public spaces in Vienna: that concerning the antisemitic mayor Karl Lueger and his (still remaining) representation in the contemporary cityscape. Until 2012, a part of Vienna’s prominent *Ringstraße* in the very center of the city (the part where the university is located) was named after Lueger (*Luegerring*, today *Universitätsring*). And still today, a monument – though artistically conceptualized – secures the antisemite’s presence in the cityscape. Politicians and academics, but above all the general public – still present in the virtual sphere yet operating primarily on other media back then – have campaigned for the street to be renamed and for the monument to be removed and/or replaced. The former happened in 2012, and the latter is still only happening in the form of a palimpsest-like inscription. As Dirk Rupnow states, this debate on a potential removal and replacement of this monument indicates that “in other countries, streets are renamed and statues removed while Austria remains steadfast”.<sup>19</sup> While a detailed discussion of the context and the problems with the *Luegerring* and the *Lueger Denkmal* is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be pointed out that the online documentation of the whole initiative<sup>20</sup> and the discussions that emerged around the controversial monument indicate yet another dynamic not evident in the case of the Hebrew street sign: in the case of the monument, which has not been removed but only contextualized, a local, unknown group eventually sprayed the word “shame” upon it in order to bring its problematic nature back into the public discourse. While the support by the online community helped the Hebrew street sign to be replaced, the dynamics surrounding the Lueger monument discussion highlighted other means of action – namely action in the physical space that then promotes a virtual community to join in.<sup>21</sup>

Since its reinstallation, the Hebrew street sign has become a trademark of Vienna’s second district, portrayed in many tourist pictures, and widely seen as a representation of the neighborhood’s rich Jewish history. For example, Twitter’s ap-

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<sup>18</sup> Private correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> Dirk Rupnow, “Lueger ohne Ende – Zu einer schrägen Debatte”, in *ErinnerungsORTE weiter denken. In memoriam Heidemarie Uhl*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, Monika Sommer, Richard Hufschmied, and Karin Liebhart (Vienna: Böhlau, 2023), p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.luegerplatz.com>, accessed November 10, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Martina Teig, “Künstlerische Erinnerungskultur-Projekte im öffentlichen Raum der Stadt Wien”, in *ErinnerungsORTE weiter denken. In memoriam Heidemarie Uhl*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, Monika Sommer, Richard Hufschmied, and Karin Liebhart (Vienna: Böhlau, 2023), pp. 72–3.

plication programming interface (Twitter API)<sup>22</sup> data can be used to track how often the street sign, or an image of it, is used as a reference to the second district, its Jewish history, and the current urban atmosphere that surrounds it. Drawing on the data that Twitter users choose to share publicly highlights an increase in references to Jewish history and culture in the second district related to the placement, movement, and finally re-placement of the Hebrew street sign.<sup>23</sup> What is more, the virtual presence initiated another discussion on the Internet concerning the topography of Tabor streets across the globe. The virtual community learned that there is a Tabor street sign to be found, at least, in Jerusalem, and in Brooklyn, New York.<sup>24</sup> Another example of the attention the sign has gained is a video used for urban communication design in which a group of students at the Technical University Vienna placed the Hebrew street sign, then in an abstract and digitalized visualization, at the heart of a video clip on typography in Vienna.<sup>25</sup>

Fiumei also received reactions from both the Jewish and non-Jewish residents and of the various diverse Viennese Austrians. The artist recalled that some “native Austrians” were annoyed by the street sign: “They thought it was foreign because it is not in German. But this is wrong, and this is also what this project wants to demonstrate. Jewish history is not foreign, certainly not in the second district. It belongs to this district; it belongs to Vienna. It is also absurd to believe that the German language is threatened by Yiddish or Hebrew”.<sup>26</sup> Despite these backward positions, the artist was happy to see the support and appreciation for the street sign, especially by the heterogeneous Jewish communities that were present: “And it was not only the Ashkenazi Jews who thought the project was important; through my former partner, who is from the Caucasian Jewish community of Vienna, I learned to my surprise and delight that the project was also much discussed and appreciated by Caucasian, Bukharian, and Georgian Jewish

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<sup>22</sup> The Twitter API provides programmatic access to data which has been publicly shared on the site, such as images, hashtags, and written posts about the Hebrew street sign in Vienna. The API helps to “analyze, learn from, and interact with Tweets, Direct Messages, and users”. It can be used, for example, to investigate an increase or decrease of mentions, references, comments, and other tweets related to the street sign: see <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-api>. For more on the advantages and limitations of such an analysis, see Irving Dongo et al., “Web Scraping versus Twitter API: A Comparison for a Credibility Analysis”, *iiWAS '20: Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Information Integration and Web-based Applications & Services* (2020): 263–73.

<sup>23</sup> Data collection and analysis based on my open access Twitter API account: API20172023KorbeltSusanne.

<sup>24</sup> Facebook, “Taborstraßenschild”.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlbtwoDxHPo>.

<sup>26</sup> Private correspondence.

women in Misrachi Jewish hair salons, for example. And, of course, the recladding was supported by many non-Jewish residents of the neighborhood”.<sup>27</sup>

## Digital Culture, the Spatial Turn, and a Virtual Sphere in Jewish Studies

In the past decades, Judaism and Jewish culture have been increasingly negotiated, lived, and constructed on the Internet. It is not only that cultural and religious institutions and heritage sites offer activities, participation, and information via online channels.<sup>28</sup> Using the case of a virtual pop-up community, Nathan Abrams, Sally Baker, and B. J. Brown demonstrate that people – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – gather on the Internet and form religious and denominational communities, exchange views about religious practice, discuss exegesis, make music together, read historic and contemporary texts, negotiate cultural installations, and add much more to Jewish cultures and life.<sup>29</sup> Peter Margolis highlights that the Internet functions as an amplifier of the lived world and offers many possibilities for cultural and religious actions to be added to Jewish life.<sup>30</sup> Since the 1980s, the Internet has thus become a space for encounters, both literally and metaphorically, and also provides the necessary infrastructure to create Jewish spaces in the physical world.

Since notions of spatiality have vividly resonated with postmodern mores in the field of Jewish studies, I wish to introduce some of its premises to learn about the entanglement of digital culture and spatial design. Dating back to the 1990s, research has increasingly become interested in the composition, construction, constitution, and making of Jewish places and Jewish spaces, leading to the current heyday of a Jewish spatial turn. Throughout the more than three decades

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<sup>27</sup> Private correspondence.

<sup>28</sup> Ranging everything from the Western Wall to local congregations around the world to music festivals to literature and to archives, museums, libraries, special collections, etc., the online offerings for participation in Jewish religion and culture have grown immeasurably with the rise of the Internet: see Heidi A. Campbell and Drake Fulton, “Bounded Religious Communities’ Management of the Challenge of New Media: Baha’i Negotiation with the Internet”, in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 185–90.

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Abrams, Sally Baker, and B. J. Brown, “Grassroots Religion: Facebook and Offline Post-Denominational Judaism”, in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Margolis, “Virtuality. A Theory of Digital Judaism(s)”, *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 43/2 (2023): 189–92.

since, investigations of Jewish spatiality have developed in multifarious directions, including religious sites, urban Jewish landscapes, (critical) mappings of memorized Jewish spaces, and interest in (historic) spaces of encounters and spheres of everyday life. Researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, such as religious studies, urban histories, and cultural studies, have expressed interest in heterogeneous Jewish spaces.<sup>31</sup> Alongside these varied research interests, a vast number of definitions and approaches to Jewish places and Jewish spaces have developed. Hitherto, they have been discussed broadly, sometimes even controversially or contradictorily.<sup>32</sup> For instance, Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov investigated Jewish spaces through the lens of their constitutions in written text.<sup>33</sup> Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman understood spaces as containers for place making – a process that endows spaces with meaning<sup>34</sup> – while Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke regarded Jewish places as everything that has a physical position in a geographical landscape and a defined Jewish affiliation.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the increasing influence of the Internet, the virtual world, and digital culture – for negotiations of Judaism, Jewish history and culture – and the omnipresence of the metaphor of “digital space”, spatial considerations have so far received little attention in the so-called spatial turn.<sup>36</sup> For example, Martina Löw and Gunter Weidenhaus emphasized that spatial references in the context of the scissors of the Internet often decouple debates about reciprocal spatial design into the sheer metaphorical level. Yet, the increasing presence of the virtual aspects or the way virtual negotiations might condense in physical spaces have received less at-

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31 Julia Brauch and Anna Lipphardt, “Gelebte Räume – Neue Perspektiven auf jüdische Topographien”, in *Jewish Spaces: Die Kategorie Raum im Kontext kultureller Identitäten*, hrsg. v. Petra Ernst und Gerald Lamprecht (Bozen, Innsbruck, Vienna: Studienverlag, 2010), pp. 19–22; Barbara E. Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 2–3.

32 Susanne Korbelt, Lukas Nievoll, and Thomas Stoppacher, “Introduction: Rethinking Jewish and non-Jewish Relations”, *Jewish Culture and History* 21/1 (2020): 2.

33 Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov, “Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space”, *Jewish Social Studies* 11/3 (2005): 2.

34 Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (eds.), *Making Place: Space and Embodiment in the City* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

35 Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke, “Exploring Jewish Spaces. An Approach”, in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Burlington, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 1–26.

36 Heidi A. Campbell, “Introduction. Studying Jewish Engagement with Digital Media and Culture”, in *Digital Judaism. Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 5–7.

tention.<sup>37</sup> Besides approaches inspired by digital humanities, fewer works have been interested in Jewish spaces and virtuality.<sup>38</sup> According to the historians Miriam Rürup and Simone Lässig, questions regarding relational spaces – spaces as products of social interactions and sociability – are still underrepresented and, in particular, ignored in terms of the virtual world.<sup>39</sup>

When Rürup and Lässig edited the anthology *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, they were among the first to open the spatial turn in Jewish studies toward the digital sphere. In their reflections on what the Jewish spatial turn has achieved hitherto, they included, for instance, Ruth Ellen Gruber's article on reflections on her concept of "virtually Jewish" – a punning reference to the Internet that rather mediates the multifarious understandings of space making and its negotiations, in, beyond, and in-between physical, imagined, virtual, and/or memorized spaces. It is important to note though that with the widely discussed concept "virtually Jewish", Gruber has not the virtual world in mind but suggests that "in post-Holocaust places already now devoid or nearly devoid of living Jews, non-Jewish interest in Jewishness has had this effect", namely, to produce a "virtually Jewish world".<sup>40</sup> Works such as those by Barbara Mann indicate that the virtual sphere also starts to add to physical Jewish spaces, and other approaches have demonstrated that in the virtual sphere Jewish spaces might evolve, as, for example, Joachim Schlör examines with the democratic preservation initiated by a particular Facebook group using social media as an archival

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37 Martina Löw and Günther Weidenhaus, "Borders that relate: Conceptualizing boundaries in relational space", *Current Sociology* (2017): 553–70.

38 In particular, research on the Holocaust has resonated with digital humanities approaches and digital as well as critical mapping. See, for example, Anne Kelly Knowls, *Holocaustgeographies*, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://holocaustgeographies.org/>. On deep mapping in Jewish migration history from the Middle East and North African region, see Piera Rosetto, "Mind the Map: Charting unexplored Territories of invisible migrations from North Africa and Middle East to Italy", *Jewish Culture and History* 23/2 (2022): 172–95.

39 Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup, "Introduction: What Made a Space 'Jewish'? Reconsidering a Category of Modern German History", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017). What is more, Lässig and Rürup highlighted that historical research in Jewish studies has ignored questions concerning spaces. Among the first historical studies of Jewish spaces was a special issue of *East Central Europe* (2015): see therein Erika Zsívós, "Introduction: Historic Jewish Spaces in Central and Eastern European Cities", *East Central Europe* 42 (2015): 139–62.

40 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Real Imaginary Spaces and Places: Virtual, Actual, and Otherwise", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017), p. 300.

space.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the dynamic between real-life spaces and those created on or through the Internet resonated in Maja Hultman's and Joachim Schlör's call for a 2022 conference on "Jewish spaces in past and present Europe", during which they aimed to discuss contemporary Jewish spaces as both "virtual and real-life spaces".<sup>42</sup> So, will "new Jewish spaces" be continuously initiated in the virtual sphere?<sup>43</sup> And how does the virtual contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces today?

## The case of Vienna and Hebrew Street Signs in Other European Cities

As in Vienna, Hebrew (and Yiddish) street signs are becoming increasingly common in European cities. Especially in the post-socialist countries, such street signs belong to the phenomenon Gruber described as "virtual Jewishness". The story behind the Viennese street sign is rather different; debates surrounding it demonstrate the wide range "virtual Jewishness" takes, beyond Eastern Europe and post-socialist countries, and also adds to the renewal of Jewish rituals.<sup>44</sup> Before I aim at contextualizing what I consider to be practices of space making, I wish to introduce Fiumei's aim and thoughts regarding the Viennese Hebrew street sign and this particular kind of art installation.

Impressed by the multi-layered processes of spatiality that unfolded alongside the Viennese Hebrew street sign, I was eager to talk about them with the artist. In correspondence with him, I learned that Fiumei specializes in working with languages and shares an interest in urban spaces, especially in what he called "socio-history/ies" of certain neighborhoods. He shared with me that one of the places where he lives is the second district of Vienna (which he actually prefers not to refer to as *Leopoldstadt*):

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41 Joachim Schlör, "German-Jewish Family Archives in the (Virtual) Diaspora. Questions of Storage, Ownership and Belonging", *Tsafon – Revue d'études juives du Nord* 11 (2023): 145–7.

42 The call can be accessed via the website of the *European Association for Jewish Studies*, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.eurojewishstudies.org/conference-grant-programme-reports/report-a-jewish-europe-virtual-and-real-life-spaces-in-the-21st-century/>.

43 Diana Pinto, "The Jewish Challenges in the New Europe", in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York: Berghahn, 2002), p. 250.

44 Daniel Belasco (ed.), *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Taborstrasse is the main artery of the so-called Mazzesinsel, there is no other street in Vienna that is so closely and intensely connected with the Jewish past, but also with the Jewish present. I was intrigued by the coincidence that the word Tabor also happens to resonate with the religious Jewish residents of the neighborhood. The term Tabor is a wartime loanword that entered the German vocabulary during the Hussite period. Originally, Tabor was the name given by the Taborites, the radical and militant wing of the Hussites, to a place in the open air where they gathered, a camp. The exaltation of Jesus on an unnamed “Mount of Transfiguration” recounted in Mt 17:1–12 EU was placed by the Taborites (as were other Christian groups) on Mount Tabor. Mount Tabor (in Hebrew: Har Tavor) and its surroundings play a central role also in the Tanakh in the Book of Judges, chapter 4 “Deborah Battle”.<sup>45</sup>

The collaborative construction of a Jewish space in mutual exchange between a virtual community, local activists, and regional politicians in Vienna’s second district ultimately enabled an art intervention in the public space in Vienna that soon had an impact beyond the city’s borders. Following the Vienna Hebrew street sign in 2017, Sebestyén Fiumei designed similar signs for installation in Paris and Berlin. As had been the case in Vienna, his signs evoked a range of reactions from the local communities and politicians. All three projects place a Hebrew or Yiddish street sign in surroundings strongly associated with Jewish culture, whether historically or at present. “I think there are quite a few monuments and other objects that remind us of the terrible things that happened in Jewish history, but sometimes I miss things that would remind us of the actual life and stories and people between these tragedies”.<sup>46</sup> A crucial part of his art activism is the moment of surprise, as Fiumei told me: “I did all three installations in public spaces without prior permission, this is part of my artistic practice, I want to keep the element of surprise, similar to street art in general, just maybe overcome the vandalism”.<sup>47</sup>

In Paris, Fiumei created a Yiddish street sign that reads “Pletzl”, which is a reference to the Jewish quarter of the fourth arrondissement in Paris. Comparable to Vienna’s *Taborstraße*, Paris’s *Rue de Rosiers* holds a specific place in the representation of historic, memorized, and present Jewish culture. The street is known for serving as a space of Jewish and non-Jewish encounters, past and present, as well as being a hub for heterogenous Jewish communities, including Hasidic and orthodox Jews and liberal groups of diverse migration backgrounds from Eastern Europe as well as from the North African regions.<sup>48</sup> Fiumei placed

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<sup>45</sup> Private correspondence.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Jeanne Brody, “La rue des Rosiers ou la mémoire réappropriée”, *Espace populations sociétés* 14/2–3 (1996): 357.

the sign at the heart of *Rue des Rosiers* in 2019<sup>49</sup> “In the Parisian Jewish neighborhood of Pletzl, my project was immediately understood and liked, even the mayor of the arrondissement posted a picture of it on his Instagram profile. It now acts as one of the attractions of the neighborhood, you can even buy fridge magnets of it in the local Judaica stores”.<sup>50</sup>

Following the Paris 2019 project, Fiumei began work on a Yiddish street sign for Berlin’s *Grenadierstraße* in the centre of the former *Scheunenviertel* (barn quarter), the port of call for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Russian Pale of Settlement in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similar to Vienna’s *Leopoldstadt* and Paris’s Pletzl, in the *Scheunenviertel* a rich Jewish culture was represented, being a sphere where orthodox Jews, new immigrants to the city, and those climbing the social ladder mingled, and where the most prominent spots of Jewish religious and cultural life were found.<sup>51</sup> In a newspaper interview, Fiumei stressed that despite Berlin’s abundance of memory culture, one is astonished to find almost no hint of the Jewish history of this street and quarter.<sup>52</sup> With this project, Fiumei aimed to do what he called “memory culture from below”. As was the case with the two other installations, he again consciously evaded bureaucracy when he placed his art at today’s *Almstadtstraße*, which was called *Grenadierstraße* in earlier days.<sup>53</sup> Yet, “[i]n Berlin it was removed by the authorities, but the neighborhood assured me that they would be interested in installing it”. However, due to regulations for artworks in public spaces in Germany that forbid artworks to be placed only temporarily in public spaces, Fiumei is still trying to bring his sign back to the streets. So far, the street sign has been kept in storage by the city administration.

With the installation of the street signs by Fiumei in the three cities (Fig. 3), two aspects of negotiation of contemporary Jewish spaces became evident. On the one hand, discourses around visible Hebrew font and Yiddish culture in urban space overlap; and this is also where the installation of Hebrew street signs inter-

49 Une plaque en yiddish dans la rue des Rosiers”, *Times of Israel*, December 17, 2019, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://fr.timesofisrael.com/une-plaque-en-yiddish-dans-la-rue-des-rosiers/>.

50 Private correspondence.

51 Anne-Christin Saß, “Reconstructing Jewishness, Deconstructing the Past: Reading Berlin’s Scheunenviertel over the Course of the Twentieth Century”, in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

52 Masha Malburg, “Erinnerungskultur von unten”, *ND Journalismus von Links*, July 26, 2021, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1154885.jiddisches-strassenschild-erinnerungskultur-von-unten.html>.

53 See גרענאדירשטראסע, *Yiddish Berlin*, September 9, 2021, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://yiddish.berlin/wp/de/2021/09/>.





**Fig. 3:** Collage of Fiumei's projects in Vienna, Paris, and Berlin by the author.

vene with Human Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's note that "[t]he cult of the past calls for illusion rather than for authenticity".<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, today's Jewish space making in Europe is intrinsically linked to memory. What is particularly compelling about the Vienna art installation is that the sign is usually referred to as a Yiddish street sign and not a Hebrew one; however, a reader of the languages will immediately notice that it is not a Yiddish transliteration of the German street name. Also, one of the online debates, reflected in comments on the Facebook group, revolved around the fact that the supposed Yiddish transliteration of the street name would be incorrect.<sup>55</sup> And yet, the artist's point was precisely not to transliterate a given name but to add an explicit biblical reference to Mount Tabor: "It was a conscious decision not to simply transliterate the word Tabor into Yiddish (טאבאר), but to use the spelling of the biblical mountain (תבור). I found it a happy coincidence that the name of the street also has an indirect Jewish reference. I wanted to create an association with Mount Tabor. I wanted to point to that association, to reinforce it".<sup>56</sup> The Hebrew street signs are thus apt examples of what Diana Pinto proposes as a description of contemporary Jewish spaces in Europe: "The new Jewish Spaces instead were to be based on a Jewish understanding of the Jewish past [and present, if I may add] and its interaction with the

<sup>54</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 195.

<sup>55</sup> For example, user Michael Krebs (September 15, 2021) stated "Meiner Meinung nach ist das kein Jiddisch, auf Jiddisch würde es wohl גרענאדירשטראסע (Taborgasse) lauten". See Facebook, "Taborstraßenschild": [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMcfqCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment\\_id=1073665409841122](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMcfqCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment_id=1073665409841122), accessed June 24, 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Private correspondence.

wider European context. Jews as authors and co-authors, no longer as subjects of non-Jewish investigation, would ideally help define the perimeters of such Jewish Spaces where non-Jews, as equals, could also bring in their contributions, queries, and understandings”.<sup>57</sup>

## Authenticity and Reality of Virtual Jewish Spaces – Jewish Space Making Today

But how does the street sign initiative fit among and contribute to virtual Viennese Jewish spaces? Vienna, alongside other cities, is obviously the subject of a broad discourse on the Internet today. Hashtag *#JewishVienna*,<sup>58</sup> for example, collects a wide variety of contributions related to research institutions. In particular, the *Vienna Wiesenthal Institute* and the *Jewish Museum*, memorial initiatives, such as *Politics of Remembrance* (POREM) or a project on an apartment building at the *Servitengasse* and its expelled Jewish residents, and private groups that exchange information about former relatives who once lived in Vienna but had to flee or were murdered. Hashtag *#JewishVienna* might also be attributed to posts and contributions by individuals on social media and thus adds to the portrayal of the Jewish spatial perception of the city. Despite such loose affiliations which can be easily added to link interests, I am interested in a more specific form of exchange, influence, and transgression between the virtual and physical space with this case study: namely, how a mutual back and forth between online and physical spaces fosters sociability. In the case of the *Taborstraße* street sign, a real-life and a virtual community together generated an impact on a public space through Facebook and other social media activities that raised the public's awareness and put pressure on the city administration. First, the installation of the street sign can be described as a relational spatial practice that allows for a discussion of how an abstract spatial conception by an informal, non-group-based, non-governmental initiative operating on the Internet took shape in a physical location. Triggered by the removal of the sign, a community popped up using (primarily) Facebook to initially form and then operate, before transgressing their action into the physical space; an art project re-created the Hebrew street sign

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57 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", p. 23, in this current volume.

58 Vienna Wiesenthal Institute, <https://www.vwi.ac.at>; POREM Politics of Remembrance, <https://porem.univie.ac.at>; Servitengasse Verein, <https://www.servitengasse1938.at/index.php?id=2>; Jewish Museum Vienna, <https://www.jmw.at>. All accessed June 24, 2023.

*Taborstraße*, which was then re-installed on October 10, 2017. Finally, as the sign was once more placed in the streets of Vienna, it again impacted discussion and cultural negotiations on the Internet and soon led to artistic installations emerging in other cities that were meant to provoke public reactions to a visible, allegedly officialized lived Jewish culture as amalgamated in city administrations' naming of streets.

So, how does the virtual contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces today? By investigating the tensions between reality, authenticity, and virtuality (as this edited volume also does), researchers gain a deeper understanding of how virtual spaces are changing the way we experience and interact with the world around us, both physically and digitally. The urban studies scholar Maria Francesca Piazzoni notes that "authenticity is, above all, about an unresolved tension between permanence and change".<sup>59</sup> Acknowledging the ambiguities that come with the word "authentic", Piazzoni succeeds in describing space making as a continuous process, that is, increasingly influenced by communication and activities bridging physical and virtual spheres. The Hebrew street sign in Vienna is a case in point.

The debate around the removal and reinstallation of the Hebrew street sign in Vienna was a beginning rather than an end of a hybrid way of constructing Jewish urban spaces. Since then, an even more vivid exchange between virtual and physical activities has shaped the perception of the city's Jewish spaces, so to speak. In terms of the discussion of Yiddish culture in the public sphere created in a historic (but also contemporary) Jewish space by (also) non-Jews, Vienna's *Taborstraße* street sign would perfectly fit into examples of "virtual Jewishness". As I aimed to demonstrate with my examination of the intermingling of pop-up virtual and real-life communities, the space-making practice emerging around the *Taborstraße* street sign is an example of a collaboration between a virtual and a local community in which Jews and non-Jews strongly interacted. This dialogue added new layers to the historic Jewish quarter of Vienna and to how people interact in, come into contact with, and perceive the *Leopoldstadt*.

This Viennese example differs from conventional phenomena of space making in so far as the Vienna example did not (only) remain at the level of "virtually" or invention but rather enhanced a mutual and dynamic ongoing exchange between real-life and virtual spaces. The pop-up community-initiated neighborhood activism was in answer to a political debate, first on the Internet and then in the physical space, which then resonated back and forth among a larger global online community. Through their online presence, the group was also able to launch a global search for similar installations and created a huge *Taborstraße*

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<sup>59</sup> Piazzoni, *The Real Fake*, p. 4.

street sign network. This connected diverse peoples who started to exchange, think, and thus re-create the atmosphere of their district and personal and family memories related to it, to Vienna, or even more generally. They discussed findings and space making in Europe and around the globe. For example, Klezmer festivals are increasingly being set up in Krakow's Kazimierz or in Vilnius and other Eastern European cities,<sup>60</sup> "virtually" and/or as virtual initiatives, and evoke sociability and Jewish/non-Jewish relations, for instance among festival visitors. Additionally, touristic sociability around virtually and virtual created spaces is more and more paradigmatic for today's Europe as it witnesses the heyday of "Holocaust tourism".<sup>61</sup> But the installation of a street sign in Vienna might be added to what Gruber describes as a dynamic transition from "virtually Jewish"<sup>62</sup> – which, as mentioned before, describes the invention of European Jewish spaces by non-Jews – to the virtual; a phenomenon we are, according to Gruber, currently intensively witnessing.

## Conclusion: Spaces Meet Digital Formats – Spatial Theory as a Hybrid Undertaking

The Viennese initiative is but one example of a change in Jewish space making – one that also/may include the virtual sphere and online communities. In this article, I investigated Jewish space making as a dialectic and mutual dynamic between real-life spaces and the virtual space. The discussion concerning the *Taborstraße* street sign and the opening event for its reinstallations illuminated a scenario of virtual space making in which Jews and non-Jews alike participated. I suggest considering such examples as new hybrid undertakings in space making and including the virtual sphere (not in Gruber's sense of virtual Jewishness) as an increasingly meaningful component of contemporary space making. Case studies such as the *Taborstraßenschild* initiative and its impact on the making of Jewish space in other European cities reveal new hybrid relational formats of Jewish spatiality in modern Europe, despite the long-standing ban of virtual spaces in the spatial turn. This late inclusion of virtual spaces was not least due to the strict rejection of their inclusion in relational concepts by the concept's founder, Martina Löw, who argued that the

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<sup>60</sup> Magdalene Waligorska, *Klezmer's afterlife: An ethnography of the Jewish music revival in Poland and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99/4 (2009): 498–500.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid; Gruber, "Real Imaginary Spaces and Places", pp. 298–310.

Internet is the implication of a spatial metaphor – Löw and Weidenhaus define it as diametrically opposed to spaces. “In short, the Internet is overall not a space, but rather a communication system that embeds spatial metaphors”.<sup>63</sup> Regarding consideration of Jewish spatiality, there has been a significant presence in cyberspace for the past decades, and channels of virtual communication have changed a lot since. It has thus become increasingly apparent that there are transitional scenarios of physical space making. Virtual spatial constellations are anchored in physical places and also anchor themselves in and through social relationships, which then, in turn, affect and impact the negotiation in virtual spaces (on the Internet in general, in distinct social media in particular). This becomes apparent when one moves through the streets of Vienna’s second district – virtually or physically – and witnesses how people arrange to meet at the Hebrew letter *Taborstraße* sign or come into contact and exchange ideas through the initiative, even globally via the city borders dialogue, which then catalyzes concrete meetings in Vienna. We are thus also seeing, in Diana Pinto’s sense, new Jewish spaces as hybrid Jewish spaces<sup>64</sup> – and hybridity in an additional sense as it was described in the postcolonial turn.<sup>65</sup> Yet, as I have argued here, space making is always a relational undertaking. The reality of the space constructed through and around the Hebrew *Taborstraße* sign is currently challenged by antisemitism following the events of October 7, 2023. In the course of 2024, slogans such as “victory to Palestine” or “death to Zionism” have been placed around or just below the street sign, thus also adding to the contemporary space of the *Leopoldstadt*.<sup>66</sup> In addition, not only visual assaults against the Jewish taste of the neighborhood, affiliating it with Zionism and convoluted in a harsh critique on Israeli politics, but also physical attacks are overshadowing the space: in March 2024, a Jewish neighbor was physically attacked for wearing a kippa in the vicinity of the *Taborstraße* sign.<sup>67</sup> This current turn of antisemitism in lived spatial practice thus casts a dark shadow over this seemingly positive example of a Jewish/non-Jewish space-making process in Vienna’s *Leopoldstadt*.

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<sup>63</sup> Löw and Weidenhaus, “Borders that relate”, p. 556.

<sup>64</sup> Pinto, “The Jewish Challenges”, pp. 242–50.

<sup>65</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Agnes Preusser, “Antisemitische Schmierereien in Wien: Fernab des Akzeptablen”, *Kurier*, May 2, 2024, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/antisemitische-schmierereien-in-wien-fernab-des-akzeptablen/402880784>; Anna Strobl, “Antisemitische Schmierereien an mehreren Hausfassaden in Wien”, *Kurier*, May 2, 2024, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/antisemitische-schmierereien-an-hausfassaden-in-der-leopoldstadt/402880457>.

<sup>67</sup> Parlament Österreich, “Antisemitismus-Ausstellung ‘Tacheles reden’ mit zehn neuen Videos”, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/news/Antisemitismus-Ausstellung-Tacheles-reden-mit-zehn-neuen-Videos/>.

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