Part V: **Conclusion**

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Epilogue: Virtual Jewish Spaces for the Future

JS

When I think about the two key notions of our project, "Europe as a Jewish space" and "Virtually Jewish", the first image that comes to my mind is that of several long walks with Diana Pinto, through Berlin sometime in the summer of 1998 and through Budapest in the spring of 2002. Walking has always been an important part of my research. I walked through Tel-Aviv, trying to understand how this city has been created by wave after wave of Jewish immigration, mainly from Europe, but also from the Middle East and North Africa, how elements of former – diasporic – experiences have contributed to the particular atmosphere of this first "all-Jewish city". I walked through Odessa, trying to find out more about the pre-history of Tel-Aviv and learning about the amazing variety of Jewish experiences in Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Hebrew that once had a home in that "pearl of the Black Sea". And of course, for more than 30 years now, I have been walking the streets of Berlin, trying to come to terms with its ambivalent role in Jewish history – the birthplace of Jewish enlightenment, the central place for all Jewish fantasies (from Assimilation to Zionism) of the 19th century, the theatre of a Jewish renaissance and of the fight against antisemitism – and, perversely, the site of the Wannsee conference and the deportations starting in 1941.

The Holocaust has left a deep void in many European cities. In the period of our walks, two different but clearly related developments took place in Berlin but also in Warsaw and Kraków, in Vienna and in Prague, in Budapest and elsewhere. While new forms of a place-based memorial culture have tried to document the lost presence of Jewish culture and history, re-inscribing that past in a kind of virtual enactment through memorials and publications, at the same time new cultural initiatives brought forgotten sounds and sights back (?) to the streets of those cities, "re-inventing" (as Ruth Ellen Gruber has called it)[1] Jewish culture in Europe. These different forms of virtuality have sometimes been described as artificial and superimposed, but both Gruber and Pinto have identified a creative force in them, a kind of joint Jewish and non-Jewish effort to remember the past

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1 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

and to create a new future. We know today that the optimism of these years was rather premature, to say the least, but I still think that it was grounded in reality. It was fascinating for me to see how Diana Pinto formed her thoughts about "the new European Jewish presence in those buoyant and hopeful times" while walking through the open arena that Berlin offered then.

MH

Some twenty-five years later, and as part of our conference in 2022, we – you and I, and the presenters – walked the streets of Gothenburg to learn about its Jewish history. We gathered in the chilly but sunny Swedish spring outside the ochre-colored classicist façade of Gothenburg's Museum of Art, learning that funds and art collections from Jewish philanthropists had made it a reality. We visited the Holocaust memorial at the moat and looked at the casted interior spaces of seven pairs of worn-out shoes to remind us of the trauma of the Holocaust that many Swedish Jews carry. The tour ended at the city's synagogue, where the guide pointed out Viking-inspired decoration. As we together walked the streets of Gothenburg, we were also invited to participate in Karin Brygger's art project.[2] In individually writing our thoughts on a scroll, the mold of our walk was pressed onto paper, which in turn flowed behind us and into the street as it was increasingly unrolled. Our walk took up Gothenburg's literary and literal space, thus embodying Jewish presence in the city. Looking back at it now, that walk casts itself as the very enactment of our intention for the conference and this book: it presented Europe as a vivid Jewish space and invited those of us who are not Jewish to participate in its intensive, creative process. Despite the analogue fashion of the art project, one could even say that the walk made Gothenburg's streets, and perhaps even us non-Jewish participants, "Virtually Jewish".

Similarly, the chapters written by Susanne Urban and Susanne Korbel both underline the power of artistic creativity and its sensory experiences in evolving Jewish spaces of memory beyond the "frozen", Jewish victimhood appointed to many European sites of heritage. While contemporary Jewish life in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz might not hold the richness and vividness of these medieval ShUM communities and today's Vienna is very different from the pre-Shoah Austrian capital, histories, legends, and prayers from the past are still alive, evoked in museum exhibitions, popular music, and urban art both locally and globally.

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2 Karin Brygger, "The Scrolls Project: A performance working in the intersection of writing, movement, and Jewish Studies", *Mobile Culture Studies. The Journal* 8 (2024): 123–36.

As such, Urban defines the Jewish memory of ShUM as "transnational and mobile, transgenerational, timeless"; characteristics that we often find in descriptions of virtual realities. Indeed, the memories of ShUM can be understood as an intangible virtual *and* authentic Jewish space "as they remain in people's minds and souls". They are virtual because they are based on histories of people that have been pulled out of the German context yet ground and unite Jews across the world in a common European Jewish past. They are authentic because they offer "comfort and empowerment" to Jews today. As creative outlets of these memories are replanted into museums in ShUM for both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors to experience, Jewish life in all shades can be showcased and remembered. Likewise underscoring that art that uses the vitality and strength of Jewish history in shaping Jewish spaces holds much potential for Jewish/non-Jewish relations, Korbel describes how an artist's interpretation of the Jewishness of an Austrian street name, activistly put up as a street sign without municipal allowance, became a common cause and site of gathering for Jews and non-Jews alike, both online and on the streets of Vienna. In likeness with our common stroll with the scrolls in Gothenburg in 2022, these two chapters present the vitality of Jewish history as a powerful basis for Jews and non-Jews to encounter each other *authentically* beyond the many tangible sites of destruction, often formed into memorial spaces of Jewish victimhood, that remain across Europe since the Holocaust.

But as crisis after crisis have unfolded since the beginning of the 2020s, would you say that this hopefulness inherent to the concept of virtuality has any bearing in today's Europe?

JS

Your question brings us back to the need – often mentioned by the reviewers of the contributions to this volume – to define "virtuality". Very basically, the Cambridge dictionary describes it as "the fact of existing, but not in a way that is physically real, or a thing that is imagined or considered rather than being real" – which obviously demands a definition of "reality" as well. In our context, I have earlier tried to ask questions, for example, of Tel Aviv: What is "real" here – the street that my feet are walking, or the feeling that this is a place where an immigrant from Odessa in 1924 or from Berlin in 1936 could finally walk freely? What is "real" in the sight of Berlin's Neue Synagoge – Centrum Judaicum on Oranienburger Straße today? The information (which we need to have) that this building which served as a synagogue since 1866 was demolished but not destroyed in 1938, bombed in 1943, and survived in ruins until 1988 when reconstruction

began? Or the very sensitive form of reconstruction that leaves all the signs of destruction visible and marks the wide-open space which has been left for future generations to decide? In that sense, the partial reconstruction contains virtuality in the form of hope. It is not "perfect", since, as the dictionary continues to explain, "any attempt to produce something in reality leads to imperfection". Virtuality, to quote the Merriam-Webster dictionary, has to do or is even synonymous with "essence", but only potentially; it refers to a potential existence of something. The digital revolution of recent years with its (mostly) positive aspects of worldwide connections, improved accessibility, and creative opportunities has added a new dimension to our awareness of virtuality. In concrete terms, during the pandemic synagogue services were transmitted online and made "visits" to such places virtually possible; academic lectures and conferences on Zoom or Teams reached participant numbers far beyond the usual audiences in a classroom; virtual maps helped researchers to reconstruct Jewish spaces in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East, using archival records that are now available online. This is clearly a sign of progress, and neither the pandemic nor the terror attacks, against both Jews in Europe and Israelis in Israel, have put an end to this progress, maybe on the contrary. Thousands of researchers worldwide have signed a resolution that speaks out against the boycott of Israeli academic institutions and individuals. Yes, of course, there is a huge wave of antisemitism and hate-speech "out there", but there are new opportunities to counter violence and hatred at the same time and with the same instruments.

The second opponent to "virtuality" is "authenticity". Critical commentators have stated that, for example, Klezmer music played in early 1990s Kraków by non-Jewish musicians to a non-Jewish audience very obviously lacked authenticity. But this view ignores the fact that some of the musicians have indeed Jewish roots and only re-discovered them through music; that such Klezmer festivals brought an international public to the city, including American or Israeli Jews in search of their origins, and turned the attention of the public to those Jewish institutions that still existed and were in need of support; and, finally, that those concerts (and exhibitions and publications) have served as a kind of time-bridge that will be able to preserve the contents of such cultural activities for the future (and for future Jewish communities). That is still true today, and your example of our walking experiences in Gothenburg confirms this very vividly. There is no way to go back to the past. What has been destroyed remains part of the history of these places. But we have seen signs and documents of new Jewish life in Sweden, and we see other such examples in the contributions to our volume. I don't know whether those walks have made us "Virtually Jewish". Let's say they have made both Jews and non-Jews aware of the importance of both the historical and the present and future existence of Jewish culture in Europe, and also aware of

the necessity of positive and constructive Jewish/non-Jewish relations, religious or secular.

As you say, the digital world has brought about a new relationship between "virtuality" and "authenticity". If we don't treat authenticity as a fetish but instead allow (with the help of all that the digital sphere offers) a more open and, in cases, even playful approach, new such spaces may appear. Here is the synagogue that fulfills its function as it has done for centuries. Next to it is a church, or a mosque, with its own internal function. Is it not interesting, for us, what happens between them, ideally in the form of a Christian-Jewish or Muslim-Jewish dialogue? Here is an archive that allows us to research the former places of settlement of a Jewish community somewhere in Galicia or Bukovina. Is it not interesting for us to see how their lives related to that of their neighbors? And to learn what they took along when they emigrated to Sweden or Germany?

And, to continue our discussion, what are possible theoretical approaches that could help us to understand this relationship? In what ways can Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura" of works of art, something unique to the original (authentic) product that gets lost in the process of technical reproduction, be helpful, and does it still hold?

MH

Yes, let's dig deeper into the meaning(s) of "authenticity" and see how it might finetune our definition of virtuality – as an imperfect, open, playful and co-constructive dialogue – of Jewish spaces. As you have already pointed out, the re-invention of Jewish traditions and customs in today's Europe can, perhaps cynically or with a lack of hope in the future of Jewish Europe, be regarded as a non-Jewish colonial engulfment of remnants from a butchered minority's culture. From this point of view, cultural expressions such as language, music, clothes, and food developed and used by the pre-1939 European Jewry are regarded as original, grounded in and inherent to historically local – and expelled or murdered – Jewish populations, which in turn prompts a polarized view of the reincarnations arising at the end of the 20th century as copies or fakes of a lost past. The "aura", which Benjamin defined as the aesthetic (and somewhat metaphysical, ethereal, or divine) authority of an original work of art,[3] cannot be reproduced, leaving Jewish-styled restaurants, klezmer performances, and, in Ger-

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3 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, [1935] 2008).

many, liberal theological centers as nothing more than a non-Jewish enactment "of a specific kind of Jews" that fails to take into account "traces of a past, that are repugnant and must be repudiated, and yet, in light of past atrocities, must be tolerated".[4] Based on such curated, commodified, instrumental, and pliable characteristics, Jewish spaces, which are developed in, by, and for national discourses in Europe, are anything but authentic.[5]

This approach to authenticity is closely connected to Benjamin's essentialist reading of aura as an intrinsic, objective, and quantifiable value attached to an entity as it is molded into art. In trying to explain the appeal of certain places, tourism studies and urban studies have followed suit, emphasizing authenticity as the opposite to a generic and standardized landscape. They see authenticity as akin to people-centered processes that are related to an historically continued custom, an unaltered materiality, or an uninterrupted lifestyle.[6] And contrary to the skepticism outlined above, a positive view on the authenticity of Jewish spaces can be approached from this positivist point of view. In her chapter, Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach explains the digital documentation of tombstones in cemeteries of Jewish communities murdered in the Holocaust as "an attempt to create a substitute for authenticity in virtual space". It is about the preservation of a space that according to Halakha, and despite not being in active use, never stops being Jewish – bodies and Torah scrolls buried in a Jewish cemetery can never be moved – but nonetheless might be broken down by erosion, vandalism, or indeed the loss of memory. While this digital process is not akin to a continued, ethno-religious use of the on-site cemetery, impossible as it is with its owners and users long gone and without any new local Jewish inhabitants to take over, it ensures the survival of a once rich Jewish life in Europe. Nevertheless, Abraham-Diefenbach is cautious about "the loss of physical authenticity" – the historically attached, emotional experience that arises when standing in front of a tombstone – that a turn to Jewish spaces in the digital realm might lead to. While the authentic outlines of a historical site's physicality, the remnant that remains closest to the site's original function, can be digitally saved, its digital representation

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4 Hannah Tzuberi, "'Reforesting' Jews: The German state and the construction of 'New German Judaism'", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27/3 (2020): 223–4.

5 The characteristics are borrowed from Taylor Dotson, who argues for their inauthentic quality in relation to virtual spaces: Taylor Dotson, "Authentic virtual others? The promise of post-modern technologies", *AI & Society* 29 (2014): 11–21.

6 See, for example: Ali A. Alraouf, "Regenerating urban traditions in Bahrain. Learning from Bab-Al-Bahrain: The authentic fake", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 8/1–2 (2010): 50–68; Mustapha El Moussaoui, "Spatial transformation – The importance of a bottom-up approach in creating authentic public spaces", *Architecture* 4/1 (2023): 14–23.

is virtual – mobile, transnational, flawed as a memorial space yet also open for further, future functions – and might not elicit the same bodily and affective response.

Libby Langsner digs deeper into the potential for authentic affectivity that digitized Jewish spaces carry. She posits that VR (virtual reality) representations of heritage sites can spark a renewed interest for the European Jewish pasts of American Jews. Yes, Langsner continues, walking through a virtually restored synagogue might not do more than offer a nostalgic experience of the past, but this can also be seen as an end in itself, since nostalgia is crucial for Jewish identity processes and might "shape a new reality where Europe and the United States do not seem to be separated by an ocean". Similarly, Abraham-Diefenbach believes that digital representations of Jewish spaces might support dialogue between dispersed communities and in this way enhance the relevance of the European Jewish past for today's world Jewry. Here, authenticity is not used as a benchmark for material or cultural longevity but, as Andreas Wesener argues, a constructivist concept that has less to do with historic roots and everything to do with the realization of self.[7] For Jews in the United States, Israel, or elsewhere, and as demonstrated in Kyra Schulman's chapter, digital interfaces of European heritage sites can function as spaces of reconnection to European Jewish history and thus (re)establish Europe as a geographical container (or "third pillar", as Pinto described it at the end of the 1990s)[8] of today's Jewish identity. While this definition brushes close to John Urry's life-long investigation into the modern tourist's desire to visually consume their destination, transforming space into an object rather than a subject,[9] coming full circle with the critical, colonial lens described above, it also opens up the concept of "authenticity" for a relational, rather than an essential, approach. This fits neatly into the therapeutic understanding of the AM (Authentic Movement) Model, which believes that bodily movements in the presence of a silent witness can release and communicate a person's premediated – authentic – emotions. Yael Barkai demonstrates that students of this model highly appreciate its intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics: while the self-awareness it generates is regarded as the model's most meaningful activity, the trust, affirmation, openness, and attentiveness of being a

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7 Andreas Wesener, "'This place feels authentic': Exploring experiences of authenticity of place in relation to the urban built environment in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham", *Journal of Urban Design* 21/1 (2016): 67–83.

8 Diana Pinto, *The Third Pillar? Towards a European Jewish Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 1999).

9 See, for example: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990); John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995).

witness also gain high scores.[10] In other words, authenticity – of self, including in and through an absolute or abstract space – is not the result of a predefined list of static values but produced through human interaction. Echoing your earlier discussion, the authenticity of a still-standing synagogue, ruins from a Jewish cemetery, a museum that highlights Jewish history, or a digital interface commemorating Europe's murdered Jews should be linked to the ability of each space to facilitate the development of (Jewish or non-Jewish) understanding or expression of self *through* the presence of a living, breathing Other. This way, the process of virtuality holds potential for (Jewish or non-Jewish) self to be authentic (singular and relational) while physically or metaphysically experiencing the Jewish past and present in a Jewish Space.[11] The question is: is this potential realized in the digital world?

Most say no. Discussions on authenticity in relation to, for example, a virtual reality (VR) and a virtual influencer (VI) reveal them as constructs shaped by the consumer's socially predetermined perception of a referent entity.[12] As such, today's cyberworlds, such as massive multiplayer online simulations (OASIS), are creatively informed by colonial and imperial hegemonies, inhibiting ethnic minorities from using their own cultural expressions to represent themselves.[13] While it seems that people with an identity that aligns to the white, Western world have a better chance of using digital platforms to express themselves, that expression is in itself not necessarily authentic. As noted above, authenticity is produced in the presence of an Other and Taylor Dotson argues that "it is through constraint that Reality becomes cognitively present".[14] Virtual simulations that adhere to a majority's cultural perceptions are not likely to impose such an authentic interaction on its users. In the wake of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, Krista Susman carries a hope that digital interfaces can act as merely a skin between self and Other as they engage in dialogue, but she also determines that the digital social room's removal of sensations, embodiment, and concreteness in-

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10 Yael Barkai, "On the Authentic Movement Model: A space for creation – a place to be", *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 44/1 (2022): 4–20.

11 Victoria Grace Walden discusses this without mentioning authenticity: Victoria Grace Walden, "What is 'virtual Holocaust memory'?", *Memory Studies* 15/4 (2022): 621–33.

12 Bernadett Koles et al., "The authentic virtual influencer: Authenticity manifestations in the metaverse", *Journal of Business Research* 170 (2024): 114325; Rambabu Lavuri and Umair Akram, "Role of virtual reality authentic experience on affective responses: Moderating role virtual reality attachment", *Journal of Ecotourism* (2023): 1–19.

13 Jennifer Williams, "The erasure of virtual blackness: An ideation about authentic black hairstyles in speculative digital environments", *Journal of Future Studies* 24/2 (2019): 37–46.

14 Dotson, "Authentic virtual others", p. 17.

hibits the human touch needed to encounter each other "as *whole persons*".[15] Digital landscapes need to force their users "to confront the burdens and inconveniences of reality" in order to offer authentic encounters with another individual, ethnicity, or culture.[16] Clearly, the living, breathing Other is not easily transferable into digital form, and if it is, it can still be stereotyped, reduced, controlled, dodged, ignored, and excluded. On the other hand, Urban, Korbel, Abraham-Diefenbach, and Schulman all emphasize that it is the relationship between digital social interfaces and the tangibility of real space – museums, streets, cemeteries, and venues – that anchors the memory (or "virtuality") of Jewish pasts in Europe and produces curiosity-driven, and sometimes awkward, interactions between Jews and non-Jews.

The concepts of virtuality and authenticity both focus on encounters with human beings and cultures to go beyond mere nods to the other's existence. Both underline the importance of deep engagement with that which is different to the self, and the notion of authenticity in particular emphasizes the need to acknowledge this otherness with respect and empathy in order for it (and the self) to stay true to itself. These processes are based on a hopeful and creative understanding of human interaction. They do not shy away from burdens of the past, such as the Holocaust, or present challenges, such as today's increasing antisemitism, but believe that they can be overcome only as Jews and non-Jews truly meet each other, in whatever shape, form, or platform. Based on the other contributions to this book, do you think that such positive manifestations of Jewish/non-Jewish encounters exist in relation to Europe's Jewish past and present, especially after the crises of the last few years? Is there space for burdens and inconveniences to be shared among Jews and non-Jews in trust, openness, playfulness, and imperfection? Or are we presently seeing a Jewish world shrinking away from such virtual processes and authentic expressions?

JS

This has provided us with some very relevant background, and it clearly helps us to place our discussion about Jewish virtual spaces and Jewish/non-Jewish encounters in the wider context of those new developments in communication. I

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15 Krista Susman, "Between the tiles: The psychology of the virtual room. Appropriating and subverting the digital sphere for authentic and meaningful encounter", *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* 20/4 (2021): 331.

16 Dotson, "Authentic virtual others", p. 19.

have learned at least two things that are indeed important for our project. The key notion is human interaction, both directly – people sitting in a coffeehouse or a university classroom and talking to each other, working together for the restauration and documentation of a cemetery, creating cultural heritage projects, and fostering dialogue – and through the intermission of a journey, a place, a sight, a document, or even a technological tool. And, secondly, all those new and (well, partly) exciting technical facilities that create virtuality are useless when they lose contact to what the historian in me still wants to call reality. And here I think that our field of Jewish Studies and Jewish/non-Jewish relations is faced with new challenges. Particularly, the so-called "social" media have shown their huge and seemingly uncontrollable potential to spread ugliness and hatred. Hate preachers of all kinds, including Islamist and right-wing populists, have discovered TikTok and similar platforms to reach out to younger generations; even "Queers for Palestine" or "Feminists for Palestine" celebrate Hamas as freedom fighters and ignore – or even deny – the massacres of October 7, not just on the streets of our cities but also through all those channels that have once been hailed as new fora for an open alley of free communication. So-called "pro-Palestinian" activists (who, often enough, have no basic knowledge of or deep interest in Palestine) desecrate a memorial in Berlin that is dedicated to the only public protest against the deportation of Jews in Nazi Germany, claiming that "Jews are committing genocide".[17] Freedom of speech has become a kind of license to shout down anyone with a different opinion and most of all those among us who defend Israel's right to exist and to defend herself. All this has also led to a split within the diverse Jewish communities in most European countries where some intellectuals (understandably, to a degree) fear that measures taken against antisemitism might lead to a problematic reduction of the freedom of speech, while – in my observation – a large majority has indeed begun to shrink away from public exposure and seek comfort in the Jewish house alone. And that is a huge difference to the optimistic outlook in Diana Pinto's and Ruth Ellen Gruber's work written in the 1990s and early 2000s.

But of course, I know that such a complaint is futile when it is not accompanied by some kind of positive counteractivity. And yes, I do think that the examples gathered in this book stand for "positive manifestations of Jewish/non-Jewish encounters" and will still be valid once some kind of settlement – "solution" seems too far away a word – for the conflict in the Middle East will have been found and the wave of right-wing populism has calmed down. There are three

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17 "NS-Denkmal in der Rosenstraße beschmiert", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, August 28, 2024, https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/berliner-denkmal-antisemitisch-beschmiert/.

larger areas of activity that we could identify – heritage, digital practices, and public spaces. The area that obviously offers the most in common ground is the heritage sector – which is, at first glance, not such an optimistic statement. Projects in this sector are, by force, oriented towards the past. But the contributions in this book show how useful initiatives, supported by digital approaches, can develop a more future-oriented potential.

In the field of digital practices, we see an interesting development, where projects that look into the past find ways to explore not just memory spaces, but also the contemporary public space as an area for research and for dialogue. In her contribution, Schulman discusses how a digital project, the construction of a Holocaust memorial map of the Polish city of Łomża, based on the memoirs of a survivor, served as a tool for Polish-Jewish reconciliation. The detailed field report describes the difficult processes of negotiation between two groups of researchers and the local population and works out how and why this digital approach has been successful: "What was the virtual terrain able to offer us that the physical terrain could not?". The joint work on the map, on the inter-relation between past and present and between the physical and the virtual representations, has created a platform for dialogue. Alla Marchenko contributes to a new area of research that brings together questions of ethno-religious belonging, practices and effects of social media representation, and their impacts on society. She asks how new and digital forms of "being publicly Jewish", represented by four female personalities on different social media platforms, contribute to the changes of the status and the perception of Judaism and Jewish culture in contemporary Poland and Ukraine. She identifies two distinct expressions, on the one hand a secular, community-oriented popular Jewishness, characterized by family stories, professional achievements, and broad community engagement, on the other hand a religious, individual-oriented popular Jewishness that serves as a means of exploring "orthodox" Judaism – in each case made accessible by individuals with their particular personalities. Dekel Peretz takes this (at least partly) inner-Jewish dialogue one step further and discusses two forms of interfaith digitization established during the COVID-19 pandemic: mediatized interfaith encounters broadcast on social media channels, and interfaith dialogues conducted in ephemeral virtual spaces on online communication platforms. While Muslim-Jewish dialogue in digital virtual rooms during the pandemic has created new spaces for overcoming isolation and fostering solidarity and tools for alleviating double marginalization, power asymmetries, patriarchal structures, and a joint response to Christian hegemony and ideas of a German "Leitkultur", this dialogue has obviously become much more difficult after October 7, 2023, and its aftermath.

The same is true for the topics of our final contributions. Marcela Menachem Zoufalá discusses, in a very personal and ethnographic approach, several seem-

ingly disparate but deeply interconnected events – the news of the massacre that reached her while she was in Tel-Aviv, preparing for a conference by the Association for Israel Studies to be held on October 8–10 at Ben Gurion University; the emerging "battle of narratives" about Israel and Palestine, Jews and Muslims, and its impact on academic debates and publications; and, finally, the conference of the European Association for Israel Studies in Prague 2024 which, for security reasons, "vanished from the digital sphere" nearly completely. In a remarkable act of resilience, the organizers responded with the creation of a new submission category, "Israel and Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Diaspora", and a keynote lecture with the programmatic title "On the Potential of Listening to Each Other: An Exploration of The New Momentum in Israel and Beyond". Finally, Karin Brygger and you return to the two main concepts that have been the central inspiration for this whole book, Pinto's discussion of a Jewish space in Europe and Gruber's idea of virtuality: The virtuality of a Jewish space is marked by an active Jewish/non-Jewish relation that is defined by adaptiveness, inclusion, creativity and life – or in Gruber's words, vividness and intensity – and focused on societal needs for a pluralistic and democratic Europe here and now. This programmatic approach, which indeed sums up the key intention of us as editors, is tested in a case study of three Swedish Jewish spaces, the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and a private organization, Jewish Culture in Sweden. The responses of all three institutions to the events of October 7, 2023, the fear of rising antisemitism, and the ensuing public debates show in great detail that Jewish spaces in Europe are fragile, unstable and dependent on forces beyond individual, communal, or institutional control. They must indeed be continuously practiced and steadfastly protected in order to secure and to develop the integral place of Jewish history and culture in Europe.

MH

Throughout this book, virtual Jewish spaces in Europe have received many faces. Are these different aspects all examples of real and authentic Jewish/non-Jewish relations? No. Our contributors highlight the presence of Jewish history and its potential for Jewish/non-Jewish encounters in spaces of heritage, the digital, and the public as closely linked to socio-political developments, fragile in the face of increasing antisemitism, as well as natural and memory developments linked to the very passing of time. Jewish history sometimes emerges as a thorny landscape carefully, and perhaps even fearfully, navigated by Jews and non-Jews as they try to relate to each other. Awkward or uncomfortable, even antagonistic, encounters

have been demonstrated in some of the chapters. The pandemic and October 7, two among many crises that have affected Europe since the turn of the 21st century, seem to have dented people's ability to tolerate and appreciate the Jewish (and Muslim) Other. But several studies in this book also make abundantly clear that the virtual presence of Jewishness, in people's memory and on digital interfaces, made tangible through exhibitions and interfaith dialogues, holds immense potential for supporting experiences, activities, and events that anchor the European Jewish past and contemporary Jewish culture as a vital arena for identity processes and self-expressions. Our contributors have given examples of these creative and relational processes. While many of Europe's Jews are scarred by the antisemitic eruption that followed Hamas's terror attack on Israel, some limiting their public and online presence as a consequence,[18] art, music, digital tools and interfaces, academic conferences, public events, museums, streets, and city walks continue to invite Jews and non-Jews to share burdens, experience the world together, and co-construct a more inclusive society.

Still, the question of Europe as a safe home vividly resonates in the European Jewish consciousness since October 7. Europe's societies still battle how to approach the presence and role of Jewish history and culture in respectful, empathetic, open, uncomfortable (to national majorities), and relational ways. But in excavating the many meanings of virtuality, authenticity, and reality in relation to Europe's Jewish spaces, contributions to this book have collectively searched for and found a remnant of Gruber's and Pinto's original hope. The question mark that followed "Jewish Europe" in our original conference title should indeed be turned into an exclamation mark, if only for the sake of reminding us of the never-ending work that needs to be done to safekeep its existence.

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18 See, for example, reports from the UK and Sweden: Jonathan Boyd, *Antisemitism in the aftermath of October 7: What do the data tell us, and what more do we still need to know?* (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2024); Christer Mattsson, Robin Andersson Malmros, and Morten Sager (eds.), *Antisemitism i Sverige efter den 7 oktober: Upplevelser och konsekvenser* (Göteborg: Segerstedtinstitutet, 2024).

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