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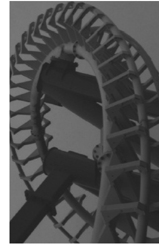

Migration and Remembrance: Sounds and Spaces of Klezmer 'Revivals'

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the cultural meanings of recent revivals in Yiddish music in the USA and central Europe. It does this with reference to Adorno's critique of lyrical celebration of the past as a means of forgetting. It examines the criticisms that recent 'Jewish' cultural revivals are kitsch forms of unreflective nostalgia and considers the complexity of meanings here. It then explores the ways in which klezmer might be an aural form of memory and suggests that revivals can represent gateways into personal and collective engagement with the past. It further argues that experimental hybrid forms of new klezmer potentially open new spaces of remembrance and expressions of Jewish identity.

KEY WORDS
Adorno/ klezmer / memory / nostalgia/ Poland

Introduction

This article addresses controversies surrounding the representations of Yiddish past and memory in cultural 'revivals'.[1] In particular it examines the transatlantic phenomenon of the revival of klezmer music and how the meanings associated with these revivals are mediated by local histories and ways of addressing the past. On an individual level, music has a significant bearing on emotional and cognitive systems since it is encoded in the perceptual memory system (the way we process objects) and music awakes us, arouses us and engenders specific emotions which have an effect on cognitive functions (Jäncke, 2008). At the social level, music is an artefact of memory and has, as DeNora says, 'a special status by virtue of its temporal and non-representational character'

(2003: 81). But how should these revivals be understood? Are they kitsch forms of superficial nostalgia or authentic reconstructions of social memories and engagement with a lost past (Saxonberg and Waligórska, 2006)? Do attempts to recollect a pre-Holocaust past signal a denial of persecution and a false nostalgic reconciliation? What is the relationship between music and nostalgia? The complexity of these questions is increased further by the development of the multiple media of archiving and transmitting memories. Kenneth Gergen (1994) calls this a 'multiphrenia' of memories, externalized in multiple media of print, film, photograph, cinema and the internet, parallel to which are 'saturated selves' as 'technologies of sociation' erode traditional face-to-face communities as a generative matrix for moral action. Recalling the past and reconstituting lost forms of sociality will never, then, be an act of repetition but of renewal through new media.

The argument is that while there are valid criticisms of aspects of the revival of Yiddish culture as 'kitsch' and commercialized, the new klezmer is complex and polyvalent. Performance might attempt to 'recreate' a lost style or alternatively play on an original modality in a way that establishes an aesthetic distance from the past, opening a space for awareness of traumatic loss. It aims to show how new or neoklezmer provides a means of developing a new aesthetics of memory through innovations in musical performance. This article examines debates about klezmer through a theoretical frame derived particularly from Adorno and Boym's critical theories of nostalgia. This analysis identifies ways in which klezmer can express loss yet sustain music as a living form that moves beyond sterile commemoration. While many existing studies of klezmer focus mainly (if not exclusively) on either the US or European aspects of its history and revival, this article views the process from both aspects within the context of a critical theory of remembrance. By understanding the new klezmer as a product of mobile performers and music flowing through multiple spaces, it aims to show how the transmission of diffuse and innovative styles of performance engage sensitively with the past.

The structure of this article is as follows. It begins with a brief history of klezmer and especially its 'migration' from Yiddish-speaking eastern Europe to the USA in the early 20th century and subsequent revival in Europe in the 1980s. It then discusses the meanings of a revival of Yiddish music in post-Holocaust Europe with reference to critical theories of nostalgia and heritage. It considers critiques of (particularly) the Kraków klezmer revival as inauthentic and commercialized. As a means of developing an alternative view, the article returns to the transatlantic context of the klezmer revival. It examines ways in which performance can embody sensitivity to understanding the distance between present performance and a traumatic past rather than attempt simply to 'recreate' a past modality of performance. The method of the inquiry is to engage critically with existing theoretical and substantive analyses of music and memory drawing on a diverse range of material including the music itself, observations elicited from performers, and commentaries in Polish media and journals.

Klezmer, Memory and Modernity

The story of klezmer[2] is intimately associated with migration in the sense of movement of people and culture across national boundaries and the consequent formation of local and transnational networks. From the early modern period, among Ashkenazi Jews, itinerant Jewish *klezmorim* (musicians) performed at *simkhes* (celebrations), especially weddings. It was inspired by secular melodies, popular dances, Jewish liturgy and the *nigunim* (wordless melodies of the Hasidim) (Eisenberg, 2004: 362). Classical klezmer is heterophonic – many instruments play the same melody but with various interpretations and tempo, which creates a chaotic and sometimes melancholic sound. Klezmer typically alternates between major and minor key, and the evocative sound of the music is achieved through the use of the first, fourth and fifth modes of the harmonic minor scale – the most distinctive being the fourth (Horowitz, 1999). The 'influence of the human voice on klezmer music is made clear by [its] quintessential instrumental ornament: the *krekhts*, which translates literally as a "sigh" or "moan"' (Sapoznik, 1999: 9).

The figure of the klezmer was ambivalent – as semi-autonomous and sometimes hereditary guilds, players were always mobile and blended tunes with other, especially gypsy, musicians. Marginality was central to the status of the klezmorim (Freedman, 2008: 74) who, not unlike Simmel's (1971) stranger, were simultaneously insiders/outsiders. They were essential to the cultural and normative life of the community especially through their performance at weddings – yet also disreputable outsiders with their own argot, *klezmerloshn,* in which many words were derived from criminal argot (Slobin, 2003: 68–9; Strom, 2002: 327–41). In Sholem Aleichem's 1888 novel *Stempenyu,* the klezmer is characterized as a figure who was both sexually threatening to the mores of the community, yet possessed insight that could resonate with the unspoken knowledge and sadness of the community – for example, in the passage where at a wedding Stempenyu plays for the bride 'a poignant sermon' about the end of her youth and the 'dark bitter life in store for her' – a meaning understood by the wives present who 'could not keep themselves from weeping out loud' (Aleichem, 2007: 22). This 'multiple diasporism' (Freedman, 2008: 80) of alterity and mobility initially intensified with migration to the USA, where the role of unruly outsider was perpetuated by figures such as Naftule Brandwein, a Ukrainian-born klezmer clarinettist (1884–1963), whose wild style incorporated influences of Greek, Turkish and gypsy music. He was also notoriously unreliable, unable to read music, and reputedly a nasty drunk, supposedly playing private shows to the contract killing gang, Murder Inc (Freedman, 2008: 80–84; Rogovoy, 2000: 59–63). He also mocked the symbols of assimilation such as Christmas tree lights and the Stars and Stripes, which he would adorn in performances (Freedman, 2008: 82). This style however contrasted with the more sober figure of his rival Dave Tarras (1897–1989) who became the most played klezmer clarinettist during the 1930s to 1950s (Strom, 2002: 161).

Klezmer virtually disappeared from eastern Europe along with most other aspects of Yiddish culture, partly through migration to the USA, but principally in the Shoah which destroyed the culture in which klezmer was embedded as 90 percent of European klezmorim perished (Strom, 2002: 140). In parts of the Soviet Union (especially Ukraine), klezmer was performed as part of a Sovietized 'ethnic' music but largely estranged from any communal life (Macijewski, 2004). Slobin (2003: 72) says, 'Few European musicians who survived Stalin and Hitler were in a position to offer cultural continuity through klezmer', one being Leopold Kozlowski (nephew of Brandwein) who was the subject of Yale Strom's 1994 film *The Last Klezmer*. In the USA, while klezmer playing continued through the 1940s, by the 1960s it was out of fashion and music played at *simkhes* was more likely to be Israeli or contemporary popular tunes (Netsky, 1998).

Klezmer has since undergone a double revival – first in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s and then, since the end of Communism, Jewish culture in central Europe has been re-inserted often in absentia (without actual Jews) through concerts, workshops, memorials, and urban regeneration of former 'Jewish districts' such as those in Kazimierz (Kraków), Spandauer Vorstadt (Berlin) and Josefov (Prague). The play of presence and absence is crucial here and as Morris (2001) says, in relation to Germany, the presence of klezmer denotes an absence, an 'echo of absent spaces', which fuses nostalgia for pre-war shtetl life with traumatic melancholia of the Shoah. There has also been an increase in those identifying as 'Jewish' and (with particular reference to Hungary) Erős and Ehmann (1997) for example discuss the ways in which new generations re-discover familial Jewish pasts, as 'long-hidden memories surfaced, silence was replaced by remembering, reworking, and healing'. Beyond klezmer, 'ghostly traces of figuration remain as hints to a past, hints to a narrative, hints to a culture which no longer exists' (Coleman, 2005).

Schischa and Berenstein report (2002: 2) that klezmer music that was 'thought to have died out with the *shtetl*, has experienced a highly successful revival', although this also involved 'reclaiming a lost part of *national* identities' since the very existence of pre-war Jewish communities was often expunged from official memory. The klezmer scene varies across Europe, as does the participation of Jews as opposed to gentiles in the renaissance, which is often a result of the extent of the remnant that survived the Shoah. In Budapest where there was a significant (if often hidden) post-war community, Gantner and Kovács (2007) find flourishing and diverse Jewish subcultures, both orthodox and secular, in the former Jewish districts and beyond, which they claim is in contrast to Berlin, Kraków or Prague, which are dominated by homogenizing cultural images of Jewish life and often by non-Jewish institutions. Mars (2001) similarly finds evidence of a Hungarian 'revival' but one that is based mostly in social networks and cultural activities rather than religion. The German case is highly complex because of the combined consequences of historical memory of, and guilt about, the Holocaust, the consequences of unification, the reconstruction of Berlin and the immigration of Russian Jews since the end of Communism. No other city has

as many and as varied klezmer and Yiddish music dates as Berlin (Gruber, 2002: 202), and since 1990 US klezmers such as Giora Feidman, *Brave Old World* and *The Klezmatics* have arranged workshops, club venues and concerts, playing with German musicians though to mostly non–Jewish audiences. In Poland, mainly non-Jews have driven the renaissance, although the festivals, especially the annual Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture, attract performers and audiences from across the world. Poland – the pre-war centre of the klezmer world – will be the subject of much discussion here since its case throws into relief many of the theoretical issues to be addressed.

'Modernity' says Freedman (2008: 22) 'is frankly diasporic and resistant to entrenched cultural hierarchies', but the klezmer revival contests the assimilationist identity of the older practices of the diaspora. He sees neoklezmer as part of a larger cultural project of expanding Jewish otherness into a cultural project of alterity that contests the dominant assimilationist identity (2008: 21). In central eastern Europe, though, the meanings of the revival might be more complexly loaded with a dual attempt to re-insert Jewish culture within national narratives while opening up dialogue about the past. Indeed, such cultural revivals are controversial – often being accused of being nostalgic reconstructions of *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish culture) in countries that were sites of Nazi extermination camps. Morris (2001) regards the Jewish cultural revival as 'a place of mourning, memory, postmemory and nostalgia' that 'circulates endlessly as representation' and 'melancholic repetition'. Or again, nostalgia for pre-war Yiddish culture is viewed as a medium for the construction of a romanticized image of pre-communist life (Ziarek, 2007). While for some the term 'nostalgia' might have a negative connotation, it is also viewed as essential to the modern condition, since according to Boym (2001: xvi) 'mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility is at the very core of the modern'. On the other hand, Fred Davis argued that nostalgia is never simple and is not about the past but the present – it 'always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties even though those may not be in the forefront of the person's awareness' (Davis, 1979: 9). This theme will be developed further here.

A Nostalgic Aesthetic?

Adorno's (1963) aphorism that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'[3], raised the question of the possibility of aesthetic experience after the Holocaust. He also said that 'to write *lyric* poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno, 1978), suggesting that he objected not so much to representation per se but to transfiguration, whereby works of art may be received with pleasure (Vinebaum, 2001). Much of this debate, though, has centred on post-Holocaust literature and the possibilities of representing the Holocaust (e.g. Koppen, 1993), which is not the main focus here. The focus of this discussion is the relationship between cultural memory and revivals of Yiddish music. However, Adorno is relevant to this discussion too. As Rothberg (2000) argues, most of

the subsequent discussion has been about poetry rather than what was probably Adorno's central concern, the idea of 'nach Auschwitz' (after Auschwitz) as a caesura after which culture, philosophy and social theory could not be the same as before. Regarding poetry, Adorno (arguably) subsequently revised his view and said, 'It may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems' (Adorno, 1973: 362). But 'poetry' here was a synecdoche for culture as a whole (Tiedemann, 2003: xvi). So Adorno also said 'all culture after Auschwitz ... is garbage' (Adorno, 1973: 359) although this is partly rhetorical, since 'only exaggeration per se today can be the medium of truth' (Adorno, 2003: 14).

Further, the aesthetic, more than the documentary archive, engages an affective response in which the audience is oriented to the future as well as the past, since it evokes the 'tremor of the possibility of transcendence of present conditions' (Adorno, 2003: 14). The audience mimes the internal trajectories of artwork and is assimilated into the object and 'music [must] never give up the dance, if there is still a chance that their dissonant dance will continue to disconcert the audience' (Goehr, 2003). For Vinebaum (2001), the aestheticizing tendencies present in all visual representation work to combine different media (photos, narrative, testimony) to produce a permeable and multiple text that may erase any clear-cut distinction between documentary and aesthetic forms. So the aesthetic can be a medium of consciousness to reorient awareness and 'illuminate darkness and inclarity' (DeNora, 2003: 152).

To give form to crucial contradictions in real life, literature must resist the verdict of impossibility and avoid surrendering to cynicism (Rothberg, 2000). Adorno called for culture that would give suffering a voice, and 'perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will one day appear in the messianic light' (Adorno, 1974: 247). Adorno (2003) further contrasted unreflective appropriation of the past (*aufarbeiten*) with coming to terms with the past (*verarbeiten*) in terms of which one could regard the 'heritage' industry as a manifestation of unreflective 'working through', that is actually a form of collective amnesia. To construct imagined pasts in idyllic terms could involve loss of history and what Adorno regarded as 'collective narcissism that brings the past into agreement with narcissistic desires' (Adorno, 2003: 11). Thus any form of lyrical celebration of the past – such as romanticized and stereotyped portrayals of quaint shtetl (village) life – is open to the accusation of suppression of memory of Auschwitz. Since we now live in the *lieux* rather than *milieux* of memory as Nora (1989) says – the places of public commemoration rather than lived culture – representations of the past will always allude to past communal life self-reflexively. Thus 'revivals' of musical and other cultural forms will necessarily be different from the 'original' and inflected by contemporary sensibilities (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Once detached from its place in cycles of cultural life, performance becomes a self-conscious allusion to something absent. In the early 20th century, klezmer was not a positive symbol of Jewish musical culture and only became so when it had ceased to be a lived

genre (Feldman, 1994). Where music is no longer part and parcel of a way of life and has been singled out for preservation and protection, it becomes part of 'heritage', as Slobin (2003: 12–13) notes.

In an effort to develop a new aesthetic of nostalgia, Boym distinguishes its retrospective and prospective modes. Backward facing 'restorative nostalgia' seeks an always-fictional restoration of origins, which is often linked to conspiracy theories, and Manichean battles of good and evil. By contrast, 'reflective nostalgia' is self-aware and recognizes the impossibility of homecoming – acknowledging the inevitable 'ache of temporal distance and displacement' (2001: 44) – combined with projects of 'critical reconstruction' such as Berlin's post-unification architecture. This 'good' nostalgia refuses the illusory recreation of the past but rather deals in collage, and 'mosaic possibilities for confronting past and present' (2001: 191), eluding both radical modernization (that denies past); and literal reconstruction (that falsely tries to recreate it). Reflexive nostalgia has a 'utopian dimension' of unfulfilled promises of global diasporic solidarity (2001: 342). The oxymoron 'future oriented nostalgia' considerably changes the meaning of 'nostalgia', although Boym's critique of 'slick and self-conscious' commercialized reconstruction (such as the Saigon Bar in St. Petersburg that was once the bohemian hang-out of the 1970s) implies that she has some criteria for knowing the real deal as opposed to fakes. This resides in part in power to evoke complex histories – so whereas many Jewish museums are on tourist routes and, guided by local nostalgia, aim to portray the history of particular regions as tolerant towards Jews, Boym says of Berlin's New Synagogue, 'This image of fragility and beauty offered the visitor a transient epiphany and moment of silence' (2001: 204). At the same time, reflective nostalgia is, as she notes at the end of her study (2001: 354), about irony, which connotes a changed relationship between human subjects and recognition that the object of thought can be approached only reflexively.

Further, Ostrovich (2002), following Benjamin and others, writes of 'dangerous memories' that are not flows of memory but disruptive intrusions that like dreams disrupt controlling narratives. They are both personal and public, and invoke the political virtue of justice by marking catastrophic encounters that call for 'solidarity backward' with the dead and victims of injustice. Dangerous memories stand in partial contrast to nostalgia, which robs memory of its danger and smoothes the rough edges, so that these remain in the past and are 'deprived of a future'. But for Ostrovich (and similarly Davis, 1979; Boym, 2001), nostalgia can lead to engagement with history through awareness that 'something has been shattered'. Nostalgia then can become the 'refusal to let the past be simply past while resisting its incorporation into the present. There is a future content to nostalgia that can be dangerous' (Ostrovich, 2002: 256).

Revivals of Yiddish culture in Poland or elsewhere inevitably make allusion to the Holocaust and pre-Holocaust life, and implicitly raise the question of 'What would we be, what would this be, if there had not been a Holocaust?' (Kuglemass and Orla-Bukowska, 1998). Some klezmer artists perform special commemorative programmes or CDs, and for Waligórska (2007: 274) 'over the

last decades klezmer music has turned into the musical representation of the Shoah', and as such can contribute to the rescuing of both collective and personal memories (Goldfarb, 2006). These can be dangerous memories, partly because they challenge conventional modes of national narrative and commemoration (Langer, 1991; Turner, 1996; Van Alphen, 1999). On the other hand, ritualized commemoration risks a simple insertion of Holocaust narrative into familiar frames of meaning – in the passage on poetry after Auschwitz, Adorno also said 'even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter' (1963: 26).[4] Moreover, museum displays risk becoming 'heaps of now ownerless personal belongings exhibited deprived of narrative and personhood' (Baer, 2000) under the hegemony of visibility (Adorno, 1963: 182). At the same time, they risk becoming part of a 'heritage' culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2005) that loses any power to disconcert. To what extent does klezmer performance escape these fates?

Klezmer and the Sounds of Memory

The 'remarkable revival' of klezmer in the USA during the 1970s and 1980s (Freedman, 2008: 17) both sought to recreate old sounds and techniques while taking an ironic distance from them. A new group of musicians rediscovered klezmer – and formed bands such as the *Klezmorim*, the *Klezmer Conservatory Band*, *Kapelye*, *Brave Old World*, *The Klezmatics* and the *New Klezmer Trio*. According to some participants in this revival, they had become 'alienated from American-Jewish culture and music' which they regarded as overly schmaltzy (London, 1998). Some of this group were associated with John Zorn's label 'Tzadik' and the Radical Jewish Culture movement, which is still a strong focus of identification. Seeing Brandwein in some ways as a bridge to 'disreputable' klezmer, the new musicians challenged dominant modes of aesthetic assimilation. This has not necessarily dissipated in the years since then. Dave Licht, the former *Klezmatics* drummer (who still sometimes tours with them), says, 'Once anyone is part of the Radical Jewish Culture, they will *always* be on board !!'.[5] Radical Jewish Culture was linked to radical politics and for Alicia Svigals (a founder of the *Klezmatics* and of the all-women band *Mikveh*) is a way of being Jewish consonant with 'feminist gay-positive values' (Svigals 2002). This hybridized playing with the traditional form is a kind of 'postklezmer' (Freedman, 2008: 22) that expands Jewish culture and derives its meaning precisely through distance from the original – although the new wave players also study early recordings and scores to reproduce earlier techniques. Svigals looks to Jewish culture, and particularly Yiddishism, as a source of identity while discarding religious observance (Svigals, 2002), although this is not a contrast shared by all the new klezmer performers, such as Joel Rubin, as we will see below.

Vital (2001: 430) refers to 1930s Yiddish communities in the USA as a 'Diaspora of the Diaspora' who were still culturally linked in many ways to Europe. The US revival, performed in the main by grandchildren of these

migrants, created a kind of reflexive diaspora of the diaspora in which the styles of a now-vanished Yiddish diaspora were re-enacted. Since there were virtually no klezmorim in eastern Europe in the 1980s, the music has been subject to a double migration – from Europe to the USA with mass migration during the 1900s to 1930s, and then 'back' from the USA to Europe in the 1980s and 1990s as American klezmer musicians began to play and sometimes live in central European cities. In this migratory process klezmer music was influenced by various musical styles, such as jazz, soul, rock and classical, which it in turn influenced. For example, *Brave Old World*'s member Stuart Brotman's early experience was playing at Los Angeles weddings in the 1960s followed by playing with rock bands *Canned Heat* and *Kaleidoscope,* and then from 1988 he began playing klezmer in Berlin (Rogovoy, 2000: 108–9). *The Klezmatics* also reflect the diverse origins of contemporary klezmer. David Licht began playing in rock groups and his driving drum style gave the group a distinctive sound. Again, the violinist Alicia Svigals has played with Robert Plant and Jimmy Page (both formerly of *Led Zeppelin* fame).[6] This renaissance was a self-conscious effort to develop new music that was rooted in the European Yiddish tradition, although the boundaries of klezmer are now unclear and some bands such as *Di Naye Kapelye* prefer the label 'Jewish music'.

Through the internet, the moorings of musical performance, reception and reproduction are loosened from particular places, which facilitates transnational transmission. This seems ironically overlooked in Ruth Gruber's influential and wide ranging study of new European Jewish cultural life, *Virtually Jewish* (2002). Despite her play-on-words title, Gruber writes only about the relationship between music and place, not about the global culture of Jewish music and the links between the US and European klezmer scenes. In some ways the contemporary scene goes beyond the confines of place to a more 'virtual' space as new modes of exploration and identification with Jewishness are opened up. Much Yiddish culture is accessible on the internet (for example through the KlezmerShack at http://www.klezmershack.com/ and Jewishmusic at http://www.jewishmusic-jmd.co.uk/), and many bands work globally, playing across Europe and the USA. In these ways the past is re-imagined through multiple media and in many locations. Indeed Lubet (2003: 298) suggests that the internet is the 'most natural instrument of Jewish community' since 'Jewish life has been virtual for a very long time in ways both awful and elegant. There is the diaspora – *golus,* Israel without a place. But there is also Torah, Written and Oral: Israel as conversation with God … [and] the Passover Haggadah, whose declaration that "in every generation, every man must think of himself as having gone forth from Egypt" defies both time and space'.

Steven Saxonberg (personal communication – see note 7) points out that *Brave Old World*'s members are transnationally located – Alan Bern lived in Berlin for many years, while Stu Brotman lives in Los Angeles, Michael Alpert lives in New York, Kurt Bjorling lives in Chicago, and Chrstian Dawid (who often replaces Bjorling for the European tours) lives in Berlin. Bern has done a lot to promote klezmer in Germany by holding annual workshops in Weimar,

while Giora Feidman (based in New York) has also held many workshops in Germany and invited Germans to Israel for the Safed workshops at the Safed klezmer festival. *Di Naye Kapelye* has both Americans and Hungarians in the band, and *Sukke* has musicians from the UK, the Netherlands and Germany playing songs to texts written by a Canadian![7] Again, *The Bridge Ensemble* is composed of a German cellist, Mathis Mayr, American clarinettist Adam Mazurek and Ukrainian accordionist Alexander Schamigov (see *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 July 2002) so there is a complex linkage between performance and spaces of memory.

One example of the migration 'home' of klezmer music is the Kraków Festival of Jewish culture, held annually in Kazimierz (the historical Jewish quarter of Kraków), and founded by Janusz Makuch and Krzysztof Gierat in 1988. Discovering a formerly hidden world of Jewish history caused them to reassess their understanding of their personal and national narratives (Radłowska, 2008; Waligórska, 2005).[8] The festival has become a staple event drawing thousands of people to concerts, performances, exhibitions and workshops, and Makuch searches for artists from round the world to perform and brings over US players such as Michael Alpert, Frank London, Benzion Miller and David Krakauer, creating translocal networks of performance and memory. One local commentator describes klezmer as having become 'trendy' – and increasingly a 'multicultural' blend of 'almost anything' including (as well as klezmer) reggae, funk, bluegrass and jazz that 'makes a homage' (*hołdować*) to tradition while connecting with modern musical forms (Handzlik, 2007). Makuch (who no longer lives in Kazimierz because there are too many tourists!) nonetheless insists on its importance as a venue – Kazimierz, he says, still 'lies in the shadow of Auschwitz' but also lives in a triangle between Kazimierz, New York and Jerusalem (Radłowska, 2008). Similarly Szykierska (2002) suggests that the festival and workshops unite three sites – Kraków, where Jews used to live, New York where klezmer is now created, and Jerusalem where they pray.

The Kazimierz music scene could be seen as an example of aesthetic echoes of absent spaces. But this migration of postklezmer US culture does not necessarily 'play' in the same way when local bands are, as Slobin puts it, 'riffing on an American product' while evoking an old Jewish world (2003: 130). The European revival is the focus of controversies about authenticity and engagement with the past. Writing more about Germany than Poland, Morris sees it as a 'simulacrum of a displaced and fetishized Jewishness', an 'absolute fake … marked, perhaps, by a nostalgic desire for Jewish sound' (Morris, 2001). Several other writers argue similarly. For Gruber the fact that often neither the musicians nor the audiences are 'Jewish' is significant and risks commercial 'falsification', a 'nostalgic never-never land' (2002: 91) of 'codified kitsch' (2002: 185) in which Jews become symbols of an idealized past (2002: 235). Likewise, Mark Slobin (2003) is enthusiastic about neoklezmer in New York and says that part of klezmer's 'distinctive core has to do with reconstruction, the day to day work of memory' (Slobin, 2003: 61). But when

commenting on the east European/Kraków scene, he writes of 'commercialized remembrance' that avoids 'both a local sound and an American klezmer approach' while only 'gesturing toward Jewishness' and meeting the needs of tourists (Slobin, 2003: 82–3).

These critiques are not without force. One can take weekend packages to Kraków, stay at a 'Jewish inn' and take a 'kosher-style breakfast' followed by the 'Schindler's List' tour (which rarely visits the actual site of the ghetto over the river at Podgórze), then take the hour's bus journey for a guided tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau and end the day with a 'kosher-style' dinner and klezmer concert – though a pork dish named after a famous Rabbi is probably on the menu. Moreover, such tourist sites reduce the painful complexity of Polish-Jewish relations to a promise of a fictional stereotyped exoticized Other – a 'culture that is not lived, that draws heavily from the museum' (Bodemann, 1996: 57). Yale Strom expresses these concerns, though also a more hopeful possibility of dialogue:

> The robust revival of klezmer in the USA has crossed over into Europe. As a klezmer researcher and musician, the revival of klezmer in Poland today is very encouraging, but I do have some concerns as the central issues of this revival are not specifically limited to playing klezmer: First, most of these Polish musicians – especially those who are not Jewish – know very little about the history of klezmer vis-a-vis its relationship to the development of shtetl culture … Klezmer music comes from the joys and pains of the Jews and Jewish functional life. Without an understanding of Jewish-Polish relations during the nearly 1000 years of Jews' living in Poland, Polish klezmer revivalists cannot go beyond the 'notes on the page'. Second, most klezmer musicians in Poland today know little to nothing of the Yiddish language. Yiddish was the lingua franca of the klezmer musicians before the Holocaust and knowing even a little Yiddish allows the musician (to say nothing of the Yiddish vocalist) to get beyond not just correct pronunciation but to have more of an insight into the daily lives of the Jews. Lastly, Polish klezmer revivalists (bale-kulturniks – Yiddish for returnees to culture, and masters of culture) are in a unique position to spur dialogue about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust … Within such a social and historical exploration, this current revival and love for klezmer music in Poland today could be a catalyst towards greater Jewish-Polish understanding.[9]

Similarly, Macijewski (2004) argues that the klezmer renewal is not 'real' because face-to-face transmission of ways of playing has been lost and the new players read from notes.

An illustration of the fraught engagement with the past is the dispute over the klezmer band *Kroke* (the Yiddish name for Kraków), which throws into relief many of the issues underlying the controversy. Three graduates of the Kraków Music Academy, Tomasz Kukurba, Jerzy Bawół and Tomasz Lato, founded *Kroke* in 1992. Their music is based on Balkan klezmer, but also jazz, improvisation, avant-garde. It is produced in Kraków under the symbol of the 'disappearing world' – an allusion to Kraków's past. Like many new klezmer bands, their use of the genre is eclectic and their use of metronomic time and the predominant base sound are probably not typical of klezmer as it was played

one hundred years ago. Like many in the new klezmer movement they claim to have innovated by mixing original with contemporary styles. Although since 1999 they have avoided describing their music as 'klezmer', Bawół says, 'We, here in Poland, have never heard about "Klezmer Music". For us this name is very new, but we have heard of Klezmers – musicians. So, going from this point it is more important to be a Klezmer than to play the Klezmer."[10]

However, the 'territory of music serves as a hegemonic battleground' (Ottens and Rubin, 2002: 27), and for some critics of the klezmer revival, *Kroke* epitomizes tendencies of commercialization and lack of authenticity. Joel Rubin has pioneered improvization and ornamentation of klezmer clarinet music, and founded several revival groups, notably *Brave Old World* (of which he is no longer a member), and has performed across the USA and Europe (Rogovoy, 2000: 108–9). Ottens and Rubin (2002) claim that some revival groups deploy stereotyped imagery, for example of Jews who have 'kept their humour despite the suffering', iconic mannerisms such as shrugged shoulders and emotionality in performance and images of the *mauscheln* (dishonest, money-grabbing) Jew. When non-Jews play klezmer, the victim is merged with the perpetrator in a Girardian scapegoat bond since adopting characteristics of the scapegoat/victim, they claim, expunges the guilt of the perpetrator.[11] Citing Adorno, they argue that artistic creation is turned into nostalgia that brings the past into line with a narcissistic desire for a Jewish presence that conforms to a framework of stereotypes. For example Ottens and Rubin (2002: 30) describe *Kroke's* performance of 'Reb Dovidls Nign' (which can be found on their 1997 album *Eden*) as 'an exaggerated vocal rendition in pseudo or invented Hasidic style'. Moreover, *Kroke* are accused of deploying anti-Semitic imagery on the cover of the *Eden* CD, which:

> contains a depiction of the ten sefirot[12] in a circle surrounded by a ring of fire. But what looks on the surface to be yet another contemporary depiction of this kabbalistic symbol, has undergone an alteration: a skeletal hand with spidery fingers has reached from the outer void through the fiery circle towards the tree. It is clutched around the second lowest sefirah, yesod, the foundation. (Ottens and Rubin, 2002: 30)

This, they claim bears a strong resemblance to the anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish greed for power which is symbolized by the tight grip of their hands around the globe.[13]

There is an important issue here – that in the process of re-enacting Yiddish culture, stereotyped cultural resources might be invoked. But there are other interpretations of *Eden*. The *sefirot* are often compared to the parts of the body and the image of the hand could symbolize the giving of *vesod*, knowledge. Moreover, a clue to the meaning of the CD is in the title 'Eden', which was the mythical site of the tree of life in which the hand suggests both the giving of knowledge but also a metaphor of the Fall. This in turn could be an allusion to the history of Polish-Jewish relations (perhaps suggesting an age of innocence prior to the Holocaust) and guilt following the destruction of pre-war Jewish

life in Poland. The track 'Secrets of the Tree of Life' is dominated by a mournful base evoking loss, which, albeit at the risk of cliché, could be an aesthetic representation disrupting received narratives.

Rather than looking for unitary meanings, the revival of Yiddish culture should be viewed as polyvalent. Some klezmer played in Kazimierz may be open to Adorno's strictures on jazz – that it is formulaic and commercial, especially in its use of improvisation around standard themes. But a more nuanced evaluation of this cultural phenomenon is also possible. Waligórska (2005: 369) notes that participants of the revival 'have to face the history, national myths and stereotypes concerning Polish-Jewish relations'. Some of the Polish musicians she interviewed displayed uneasiness about Polish identity while the festivals open gateways to knowledge of Jewish history and religion. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (19 June 2007) reports that participants in these festivals enter an enriched educative process which is now a 'living culture' and not a museum. This is particularly relevant since the 'Jewish' populations of former communist Europe have been growing rapidly as increasing numbers of people rediscover Jewish ancestry or indeed become Jews by choice (Graham, 2004 a theme that is also explored by Barbara Kessel (2000).) Erica Lehrer (2007) sees in Kazimierz a space in which new modes of Jewish identity can be explored offering cultural education and experiments with 'vicarious identity' – not *as* Jews but *with* Jewishness, opening potentials for future reconciliation between Jews and Poles (2007: 95–100). One example of this process is Makuch himself, who began studying Jewish life in Poland around 1983 when he formed the Jewish Social and Cultural Society and has since worked to 'convince the world that the force for life is winning' (Radłowska, 2008). Moreover, the festival did not begin in a vacuum but in a context of wider re-assessment of Polish-Jewish relations as Kozik (2007) finds – for example Monika Krajewska's (1983) *Time of Stones*, a photo-album of Jewish historic monuments in Poland, Gierat's 1986 festival of Jewish films and Jan Blonski's (1987) essay in *Tygodnik Powszechny,* 'Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto', which sparked controversy by accusing the Poles of indifference toward the extermination of the Jews.

By pulling together the theoretical and substantive transatlantic threads, it can be said that klezmer performance offers at least three modes of engagement with the past. First, the notion of the 'authentic' performance is continually re-interpreted. It was noted above that pre-Holocaust klezmer was 'hybrid music' and the origins of klezmer itself were in the adaptation of Hasidic ecstatic emotion through music, dancing and singing into popular dance tunes and songs that were seen as frivolous by traditional rabbis (Rogovoy, 2000: 48). Musicians exchanged popular tunes with local cultures – Romanian, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, gypsy, Magyar, etc. – and used to play with and for non-Jews and vice versa. What is now 'traditional' – such as polka-mazurkas and waltzes – was often regarded with disdain 100 years ago (London, 1998). Klezmer was a flux of improvisation and incorporates a global repertoire of light classical works and dances mixed with black music and swing in the USA. With migration to the USA from the late 19th century, klezmer that had previously been passed

down orally became commercially marketed popular music. Its influences were diverse. The swing era ushered in a fusion of Yiddish and American popular music (Rogovoy, 2000: 72). Dave Tarras incorporated jazz and swing to create easy listening 'Yiddish melodies in swing' for radio and gramophone. The cover of his album *Yiddish American Klezmer Music 1925–1956* shows his band (*The Musiker Brothers*) dressed in velvet dinner jackets and bow ties – the typical attire of 1940s swing bands. To the first-hand world of live performances was added that of 78rpm recordings which in turn affected the nature of the music – pieces were written or arranged to last three minutes which became the standard length for concert performances as well (Bern, 2007).

According to Alan Bern of *Brave Old World*, in the klezmer revival in 1970s New York, the 78rpm recording became the initial model and pieces were written 'by mixing instrumental and vocal repertoire, humorous repartee and in some cases light theatricality. It may seem surprising that repertoires drawn from Yiddish theater, popular, folk, and even para-liturgical music were presented without much concern for their contextualization' (Bern, 2007). Charlie Berg of *The Klezmer Conservatory Band* says 'for a few decades an American klez style flourished. You could hear the influences of the Greek and Balkan and Eastern European melodies left behind, but this Americanishe version was also influenced by music from America – especially jazz' (Berg, 1997). The revival movement then attempted to go 'back to roots' to rediscover 'authentic' klezmer and Joel Rubin, for example, aims to re-create the sound and arrangements of the past. Bob Cohen of *Di Naye Kapelye* says because of the diversity of contemporary klezmer, 'we prefer to tell folks we play Jewish music. Old Jewish music. Music that would appeal to my grandfather's aesthetic sense. We see no need to invent tradition' (Cohen, 2006). But for many contemporary klezmorim, the style continues the practice of innovating and fusing with other genres – as with the links between *Brave Old World* and 1960s rock that were noted above.

Rather than keep klezmer preserved artificially as it might have been in the 1920s, the new wave adapts and creates new living genres. *The Klezmatics,* for example, perform self-consciously transgressive music that is pan-cultural, radical music, a fusion of traditional themes with contemporary styles and issues. Their rendition of the Bundist labour anthem 'Ale Brider' (We're All Brothers) changes the last verse from 'we are all sisters/ Like Rachel, Ruth and Esther'[14] to 'We're all gay, like Jonathan and King David'. Their performances are a celebration of sexual diversity (called 'Queer Yiddishism') combined with evoking memories of the shtetl, and their audiences include a wide generational mix. Despite transgressive play with classical style, their music effects a combination of traditional mystical tunes, such as 'Romanian Fantasy' on the one hand, and the raucous 'Man in a Hat' on the other, both on their 1995 album 'Jews with Horns'. *The Klezmatics* first album in 1988, *Shvaygn=Toyt* (Silence=Death), made explicit reference to the connection between the AIDS epidemic and the Holocaust, and used Passover themes of exodus and freedom to find common ground with black themes of liberation. Furthermore, the new klezmer can effect a self-conscious amalgamation of archive and aesthetic memory. *Brave Old*

World's 2005 CD *Songs of the Łódz Ghetto*, for example, combines songs written or sung by residents of the ghetto and collected by musicologist Gila Flam (1992) with new compositions and arrangements. The refrain of their own lament 'Berlin 1990' links the cycle, making it clear that this is a story told from the present by contemporary musicians and not survivors themselves. The performances maintain a continual movement between past and present on several levels – for example, playing the traditional lyrics of Yiddish songs combined with Ghetto versions. In the traditional version of 'Ver klapt du azoy?' ('Who's knocking there?'), the response 'Yankele Bulantshik/... Ikh bin dokh dayn koknantshik' ('It's Yankele Bulantshik/... I'm your lover') becomes 'Es klapt di geto hinger' ('hunger striking the ghetto'). In the Ghetto version, the tempo slows and the vocalization is soft, while a single clarinet plays faintly in the background evoking impending tragedy. The genre then has the capacity for multiple adaptations and fusions, and the ability to disconcert.

A second mode of engagement with the past is through 'suppressed music', which is played *as if* it had evolved and interacted with other forms over the past 60 years. Ben Goldberg, of the *New Klezmer Trio*, says, 'If klezmer music had been simultaneously evolving since the 1920s then we certainly wouldn't be here today trying to sound like Naftule Brandwein' (Rogovoy, 2000: 153). There is an important way of establishing a relationship with the past and in particular with the consequences of the Holocaust that destroyed Yiddish culture. The question 'How might the music have developed?' is a theme among many contemporary klezmer or Yiddish music performers. Wolf Krakowski, for example, fuses Yiddish song and American roots music that shares kinship with rock-orientated efforts of other klezmer renaissance groups (Rogovoy, 2000: 201).[15] Krakowski is a native Yiddish speaker who was born in the Saalfelden Farmach displaced persons camp in Austria after the Second World War. His work fuses traditional and contemporary styles but retains frequent allusions to the Holocaust. For example, take his rendition of 'Everything Goes up in Smoke' (by Benzion Witler): 'Everything goes up in smoke / I think you rack your brains for nothing / What is it worth? / What do you get out of it? / ... / When everything goes up in smoke?'[16] Krakowski regards music as a form of remembrance. He says, 'I sing through them and those that were silenced sing through me ... It is as if all the people who I left behind somehow "transmigrated" over here, and their stilled voices, cloaked in the raiment of R&B blues, country-rock and reggae, act as a bridge from the Old World to the New, through me'.[17] *The Bester Quartet* (formerly the *Cracow Klezmer Band*) similarly blends klezmer techniques with multiple styles that draw upon modern genres, especially jazz (Handzlik, 2007).

Third, the medium of aesthetic representation relates to the question of nostalgia and forms of commemoration. The critique of (some aspects) of the klezmer revival is made from the standpoint of a search for 'authenticity' against 'nostalgia'. However, it was noted at the beginning of this discussion that nostalgia is never simple and always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties. It can become a means of critical engagement with the past that is informed by contemporary concerns – as

Svigals (2002) says, it is possible to play 'authentic Jewish folk music [without] reifying a particular slice of Jewish musical history'. Further, it is possible to transform aesthetic kitsch into avant-garde through forms of musical self-reflection and ironic allusion. Nostalgia can take a reflexive turn (Boym's prospective nostalgia) and kitsch can become avant-garde – as, for example, when John Coltrane played Richard Rodgers', 'My Favorite Things' where the simplicity of the lyrical song is given a new interpretation by trilling the notes and the original chord progression is significantly altered (Coltrane, 2008). American klezmer groups have done similar things with iconic Jewish songs, such as David Krakauer's deconstruction of 'Hava Nagila' in his 'Living with the H Tune' (Krakauer, 1995). Musical forms, then, can become means of both enacting remembrance and facilitating innovation, rather then melancholically dwelling in the museum. Again, Krakowski's music is a good example of this. He takes the traditional Yiddish folk song 'Shabes, Shabes', in which the traditional version is a slow lament with the violin predominant, punctuated with slight downward sliding notes. In Krakowski's rendition, though the song is given backing by soul singing against a scratchy electronic violin and reggae drumbeat, nonetheless the rhythm and sense of joy of the original arrangement is retained. No piece of music is ever played again in the 'same' way, and with the passage of time performers will necessarily adopt a reflexive attitude to earlier forms. If 'nostalgia is memory with the pain removed' (Davis, 1979: 37), the klezmer revival bands move beyond nostalgia and evoke dangerous memories disruptive of flowing lyrical narratives. Works such as those of Krakowski, *Brave Old World*, *The Bester Quartet*, *The Klezmatics*, *New Klezmer Trio* and *Kroke* manage to recover the past but also transmute it into a means of engaging with the present in a process that Davis described as bracketing naive modality and critically altering its meaning (Davis, 1979: 92). Similarly, the slow piano lament and discordant passages of David Krakauer's 1999 version of 'Gas-nign', that convey a sense of mournful loss, contrast with the heterophonic and more up tempo renditions from the 1920s, such as Max Weissman's.[18] In sophisticated art as Davis (1979: 93) says, 'sometimes a playful "as-if"ness is interposed between the naive symbol and its reference by bracketing', a situation which I would add allows the tremor of recognition (as Adorno might have put it) that the past is represented critically and refuses enjoyment of unreflective nostalgia.

Conclusion

Playing klezmer at sites of mass murder is open to allegations of debasement unless it incorporates in its form the tremor of loss and dissonance, which retains the potential to disconcert, disrupt and evoke dangerous memory. Aesthetic forms of recollection of traumatic loss are freed from the documentary medium of the museum to explore affective engagement with the past as both personal and public narrative. As Gergen (1994) notes, there is never an act of repetition as such

but always a renewal. Yet aesthetic representation that makes allusion to an absence inevitably becomes entangled in disputes over authenticity. Following to some extent Adorno's critique of the collective narcissism of nostalgia as a failure to engage with the past, critics of the new klezmer music in eastern Europe attempt to save it from debasement into kitsch. Much existing literature, though, is too preoccupied with place – the appropriateness, for example, of playing klezmer in Kraków – while in an era of global music we need to look at transnational movements and influences and in particular the double migration of Yiddish cultural revival in the USA and eastern Europe. Klezmer bands that play in New York also play in Kraków and Berlin, and vice versa. There are elements of kitsch in the culture of revival but this discussion has suggested that the new klezmer creates polyvalent spaces/sounds of memory and a dissonant dance that might disconcert the audience. Similarly, there has been (at times acrimonious) debate over the authentic way of playing klezmer. But repetition and formulaic performance is inimical to klezmer where composition, innovation and performance are integral and not separated as they are in classical music.

Existing analysis has been developed here with reference to Adorno's critique of superficial engagement with the past. This discussion highlights some limitations in Adorno's analysis. As Witkin (2000) argues, Adorno tended to minimize differences among a range of things and types to which one is opposed – a practice that is itself authoritarian. Adorno's hostility towards jazz is well known but jazz was internally differentiated (classical, mainstream, modern and hybrid, each with internal stylistic differences) and remained distinct from later popular music and popular culture. Similarly, there are many forms of aesthetic expression within klezmer. This discussion has indicated that neoklezmer can embody forms of critical remembrance while sustaining the music as living form. Rothberg (2000: 22) suggests that Adorno's return from exile confronted the traumatic absence of Jews in Germany and his writings laid the groundwork for a traumatic realism that relied on the viewer's knowledge of the Holocaust (Rothberg, 2000: 27). In other words, it presupposed a process of coming to terms with the past rather than attempting to offer a representation of it. Perhaps the cultural festivals and revivals could be interpreted similarly. In these terms contemporary klezmer is not so much representing the past as portraying what was lost – breaching the distance between now and 'before'. The dissonant dance will continue to disconcert the audience. If so, this may be useful in the battle against collective amnesia today.

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Notes

1 Some object to the term 'revival' because klezmer did not completely disappear and the new wave does not simply reproduce the original. Newer versions of earlier cultural styles will indeed display different sensibility and rediscovery is always reinvention too. However, 'revival' seems a reasonable way to describe the relearning of Yiddish language and culture that had experienced a catastrophic rupture and had become almost extinct by the 1970s (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).
2 Derived from Yiddish *kley* (vessel) and *zmer* (melody), klezmer appeared as secular music among Ashkenazi Jews around the 15th century, although using the term to denote a musical genre appeared only in the mid-20th century. See Rogovoy (2000), Slobin (2003) and Strom (2002) for histories of klezmer.
3 'Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch" (Adorno, 1963: 26). So he actually says, 'to write a poem' is barbaric.
4 'Noch das äußerste Bewußtsein vom Verhängnis droht zum Geschwätz zu entarten.'
5 Dave Licht, personal communication, 14 September 2008.
6 I am very grateful to Steven Saxonberg for suggesting these examples.
7 Steve Saxonberg, personal communication, 8 August 2007. See also *Brave Old World*'s website at http://www.braveoldworld.com/english/bios.php, consulted 4 September 2009.
8 Makuch (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 June 2008) describes himself as a 'shabbos goy' – traditionally a non-Jew who performs services for Jews such as lighting fires on the Sabbath (shabbos). Gruber largely overlooks this kind of irony in the performance of the 'revivals'.
9 Yale Strom, personal communication, 16 September 2008.
10 Jerzy Bawół, 4 September 2008. Personal communication.
11 Their critique is directed largely at the German new klezmer in which they include *Kroke* on the grounds that their label, Oriente Musik, is German.
12 In the mystical tradition of 'Kabbalah' the ten sefirot are creative forces that intervene between the infinite, unknowable God (Ein Sof) and our created world.
13 The image can be viewed at http://www.kroke.krakow.pl/html_en/eden_en.html (consulted 4 September 2009).
14 'Un mir zaynen ale shvester, oy, oy, ale shvester,/ azoy vi Rakhl, Ruth un Ester oy, oy oy.'
15 Rogovoy (2000: 201) describes Krakowski's music as a 'kind of electric shtetl-rock', a term with which Krakowski disagrees – 'As there are no shtetlekh to rock how can I be rocking the shtetl? I cannot rock the past can I?' (Krakowski, personal communication, 7 October 2008).
16 'Alts geyt avek mitn roykh / Umzist denk ikh dreystu dayn moykh / Far vos dayn loyen / Vos bekamstu derfar? / … / Az alst geyt avek mitn roykh?'
17 For Wolf Krakowski's *Goyrl: Destiny* reviewed by Mordechai Kamel, see http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/2002.kamel.goyrl.html (consulted 4 September 2009).
18 Both of these can be found in the downloadable tracks that accompany *Fiddler on the Move* (Slobin, 2003).

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