

## Postmemory: Fragments / Crypt

Ben Spatz with

Lxo Cohen, Lindsey Dodd, Nazlihan Eda Erçin, Paula Kolar, and Agnieszka Mendel

This photo essay gathers evidence of the video works *Postmemory: Fragments* and *Postmemory: Crypt*, which ran from June 27 to August 4, 2022, at Holocaust Centre North at the University of Huddersfield in northern England.

Included here are photographs from the video works and their installation, as well as the complete exhibition program. In this accompanying statement, I (Spatz) position this work within the Judaica project, an extended investigation of contemporary Jewish identity that I have led over the past decade, and in relation to the four themes suggested by the editors of this special issue: ethics, knowledge, affect, and power.<sup>1</sup>



Still from *Postmemory: Fragments* (single-channel video, 2022). I confront a combination of Jewish ritual objects (“Judaica”), contemporary sculptures, and canvases left in the space by a community painting class.

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## I. Ethics: A Laboratory of Fragments

The notion of fragments carries a long history in Jewish mystical thought, perhaps best known through the popularized notion of *tikkun* or repair. Yet, as the editor of the journal *Protocols* observes in reference to Israel/Palestine: “Contemporary Jewish power relations clearly complicate any simplistic allusions to repair as an unambiguous ‘Jewish value’” (Ratskoff 2019). Perhaps this is why I prefer to stay with the notion of fragments themselves: the shards, sparks, filaments, or crumbs of life that are said to have fallen to earth after some original vessels of light were shattered. If *tikkun* is the act of repair, understood here as the gathering of broken fragments, then I am thinking here less of what the repaired world might eventually look like and more of what the practice of gathering involves.<sup>2</sup> What are the fragments of the past and present that we encounter when we see the world through the lens of a catastrophic shattering? How do we encounter these fragments and what can we do with them?

My mother creates fragments. Through a unique process of pouring and breaking plaster, she produces objects that appear to have been generated by destruction, like the crumbled bits of buildings after a bombing or an earthquake. Upon these rough objects, she paints breathtaking images: forests, skies, swimming pools, always broken where the surface meets the edge (Spatz-Rabinowitz 2022). Like her, I search for ways to make fragments luminous, but my approach has developed through experimental theatre rather than painting. More than twenty years ago, I first encountered Tim Etchells’s description, in *Certain Fragments*, of the fragmentary as a starting point for creative process: “They had this unspoken agreement that no one would bring anything too completed to the process—a few scraps or fragments of text, an idea or two for action, a costume, an idea about space, a sketched-out piece of music—everything unfinished, distinctly incomplete—so there’d be more spaces for other things to fill in . . . more dots to join” (Etchells 1999, 51).

Since encountering the work of post-Grotowskian practitioners in 2003, I have been working with song fragments: bits and pieces of songs, hints of melody, simple rhythms, qualities and timbres of the voice. Song fragments became the most stable feature of my artistic practice, at once malleable and unbreakable, constantly shifting their meaning yet undeniably evocative and somatically resonant across bodies. The Judaica project began in 2012, when I started to work with Jewish songs. Following Grotowski’s formulation of the theatre as laboratory, while increasingly in conversation with the methodological and archival questions posed by “practice-based research” and similar developments, I gradually developed an audiovisual approach to embodied research that short circuits the living practice of songwork to new forms of video publication. In this essay, I focus on a single pair of video works from the Judaica project.

*Postmemory: Fragments* and *Postmemory: Crypt* are two single-channel video works, each just over forty-five minutes long. The audiovisual material used in each video comes from a single session. Those two sessions were recorded just four days apart, during a week in September 2017 when I visited a number of ruined and partially restored synagogues in the rural Świętokrzyskie region of Poland with my two research partners, Nazlıhan Eda Erçin and Agnieszka Mendel. It was Agnieszka’s idea to visit these sites. I had been focusing on more urban and culturally active locations in Poland, such as the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, and the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław. Yet this initially minor addition to our itinerary generated some of the most resonant audiovisual material out of six months of lab sessions. In 2021, I began to explore the possibility of collaborating with Holocaust Centre North, a regionally oriented

archive located in my own university, and for the first time directly faced the question of holocaust memory in relation to the Judaica project.

I had previously produced a thirty-minute video article focused in part on our lab team's preparation for the journey to Poland (Spatz et al. 2018). Eda had also produced an eighteen-minute video essay using the recordings from our visit to a different synagogue, in Działoszyce (Erçin, Mendel, and Spatz 2021).<sup>3</sup> After speaking with historian Lindsey Dodd, who agreed to contribute to the exhibition, I decided to work with approximately four hours of video that had been recorded at two other synagogues: in Szydłów on September 8 and in Pińczów on September 12. When I sat down to edit this material, I intended to produce a single twelve-minute video essay, combining video material from both sites with annotated texts in the style of “illuminated” video I had been developing (Spatz 2021). But I found that I could not do this. Perhaps not only because of the material itself, but also because I was now thinking of it explicitly in terms of holocaust memory, it now felt impossible to cut and montage the sessions as I had done in some earlier videos. As I watched the material, I was surprised by the degree of narrative complexity that appeared, even without any editing. During the lab sessions, we had not attempted to generate narrative. Indeed, we had spoken very little to each other, relying on the lab's methodological division of labor to structure our practice.<sup>4</sup>

As I wrote in the exhibition program: “In these practice sessions, we lay our songs and our bodies against the particularities of each site. We did not plan what would happen or draw explicit distinctions between memory and imagination, tradition and innovation, the proper and the improper. We worked with care, supporting each other in our practices. As each of us takes the role of performer in turn, we perceive different aspects of the place and respond in different ways.” The lab method itself was designed to prioritize an ethics of embodiment. Yet I realized, watching these videos, that this ethics of embodiment was also revealing an ethics of emplacement. Just as the songs and song fragments, drawn from many different sources, circulated through our bodies, energizing and vibrating them, producing shifting cultural meanings in a kind of alchemy, so our bodies circulated through these unique sites, interacting with them and revealing their layerings in a kind of embodied research on and with each place.<sup>5</sup>

I noticed, for example, how all three of us carefully removed our shoes, as well as jackets and other items, when we transitioned from the “director” and videographer roles into that of the practitioner/performer. This is a common practice in theatre pedagogy and ensemble-based performer training, but its effects are intensified and transformed when bare feet come in contact with the cold stone or hardwood floors of such overdetermined sites as these synagogues. Bare feet are blasphemy in a place of worship; yet these places are no longer active, and we did not arrive to them as religious pilgrims. Bare feet, from a post-Grotowskian perspective, are above all a way of restoring contact with place and ecology. Once released from the bondage of shoes, the feet become sensitive instruments, feeling into the textures of each place as much as the hands, eyes, or ears might do. We remove our shoes and other extra garments in order to become porous or even vulnerable to the space, so that we can more fully hear and feel its invitations.

The ethics of this lab, as I understand it, is an ethics of fragments. We do not work with hard, mathematical particles or with technoscientific substances but with fragments of livingness: songs, bodies, identities, places, all of them mutually constituted with each other, none of them existing alone. For me, practice-based research asks how an ethics of embodiment—like that which I associate with the intercorporeal relations of shared embodied practice—can be carried through into various forms of mediation, toward the institutional and the social. This text is composed of

fragments, as are the video works it discusses. While I have written it alone, I follow scientific laboratory protocols in attributing authorship to all those who have made vital contributions to the lab process at various stages. As of this writing, Eda and Agnieszka have not met Lindsey, Paula, or Lxo in person, yet in this document we are all mixed together through a mediated synthesis of videographic and textual materials.



Still from *Postmemory: Fragments* (single-channel video, 2022). Without my realizing at the time, Agnieszka's videographic choice juxtaposes my face against that of Moses in Kazimierz Gustaw Zemła's sculpture *Decalogue*.



Still from *Postmemory: Fragments* (single-channel video, 2022). Outside the synagogue, Eda breathes and stretches near a sculpture that I later interpret as Baba Yaga, a figure from slavic folklore.

## 2. Knowledge: Audiovisual Becoming

I am continually amazed by how much remains to be discovered in this video material that was recorded over five years ago. It is not only that I notice elements of the synagogues themselves that I had not noticed originally or had forgotten. More surprisingly, our interactions with these places appear narratively rich in ways that belie the improvisational nature of the sessions. To give one example: The synagogue in Szydłów has a warm feeling, contrasting starkly with the cold stone floors at Pińczów. The floor is wood, and sunlight was streaming in on the day we visited. The main room contains an exhibition of “Judaica” in the proper sense (jewish ritual objects), but also a number of contemporary sculptures and, on the day we visited, numerous canvases that had been left behind by a community painting class, which seemed to have used the space without regard for its history. There is a moment, early on, when Agnieszka as videographer has framed the image so that my face is juxtaposed against that of a massive statue of Moses carrying the Ten Commandments. When I first saw this, I felt embarrassed. The statue is kitschy enough on its own—a totalizing patriarchal icon, exactly the opposite of the fragmentary approach to jewishness I have been seeking—let alone in comical juxtaposition with my own appearance. But I returned to this moment later, after encountering another moment from the same session, in which the videographer (now I was in that role) creates a parallel framing, this time with Eda’s face juxtaposed against a very different statue outdoors. The outdoor statue shows a woman’s face, wrapped in a shawl—perhaps an older woman, an archetypal peasant, or even a kind of Baba Yaga figure.<sup>6</sup> Now I see the two juxtapositions in a different light, alongside one another. The two statues offer a dynamic opposition: male and female, indoor and outdoor, historical and contemporary, heroic and mundane. What does their juxtaposition with our bodies—a composition generated uniquely by careful but entirely improvised dynamic relations between performer, videographer, and location—reveal about our presence in those places and the archetypes that haunt our every movement?

This diachronic juxtaposition within the Szydłów video is particularly striking to me because it cannot have been planned. As far as I remember, I was barely aware of the Moses statue, let alone the way in which Agnieszka had framed my face against it in the camera lens. There is no way that I could have been referencing that compositional choice when I decided to frame Eda’s face against the outdoor statue in a symmetrical way. Other compositional synchronicities are more consciously intended. For example, when Agnieszka begins to sing the song “Es Brennt” (It’s burning) by Mordkhaï Gebirtig—a song that she introduced to the project from her own research, which describes the burning of a jewish shtetl in a pogrom—I turn away from her, in my role as videographer, and walk across the room with the camera to record a black and white photograph of the synagogue, after its destruction and before being partly restored. This is a cinematic moment, one produced by the videographer in response to the performer’s choice of song, creating an explicit historical link.

Intended or not, such narrative fragments emerge from the dynamic interaction of our bodies, the songs, and these two places. Any other team of people, any other selection of songs and song fragments, and any other site or location would generate very different videographic data. Nathalie Fari refers to this phenomenon as the “narrative agency” of the camera (2023), its capacity not only to capture but to produce meaning through the juxtaposition of elements that come together within the frame and through the microphone. All of the Judaica lab videos have something of this quality, because of the experimental structure of the lab method, but the synagogue material is particularly rich because of the density of the sites at which our embodied songwork takes place. The Szydłów synagogue collapses time and history into the present by setting objects with radically different

provenance and function next to one another. The Pińczów synagogue is less cluttered, more sombre, but no less complex in its layered accumulation of multiple histories. A poetic documentary of these places, perhaps with a documentary-style voiceover, would be interesting in its own right. But there is something about the presence of our bodies, conducting our somatic experiments and offering our embodied songwork, that opens the spaces up in unanticipated ways, generating meaningful juxtapositions that verge on the magical.

Gil Z. Hochberg writes of the “archival imagination”:

Archival imagination involves imagined archives: imagining existing archives differently as well as creating new archival effects and affects. It is archival in that it is citational, mimetic, intertextual, and often mobilized by archival fever: it cites, recites, and revisits archives new and old, creating new archival sites and undoing others. It is often playful and mischievous, but it never takes the archive lightly. It is drawn to footage, documents, and photographs of the past, but it mixes and remixes toward potential futures. Archival imagination returns to the archival drive to preserve, collect, store, and document, but also to the equally powerful drive to destroy, displace, manipulate, and radically alter. (Hochberg 2021, 16)

Perhaps the titles I have given these two videos suggest two different modes by which I have attempted to grasp and grapple with the past through these sites, which themselves are material archives crying out for reimagining. On the one hand, the archive is a crypt, a place of death and secrets, heavy with memory and a sense of loss. On the other hand, the archive is a set of fragments, seeds, or crumbs, available for citation, editing, and reinterpretation as Hochberg describes. But I would not want to suggest a simple division of the archive or the historical site into these two modes alone. I rather see the encrypted and the fragmentary as starting points for a host of strategies to unearth, reinvent, reconstruct, rework, reencrypt, and reencode the past. In video, this reworking iteratively comments upon itself: Upon repeated viewing, Baba Yaga seems to comment upon Moses; the presence of amateur paintings alongside shattered masonry comments on the layering of time; and the coldness of Pińczów comments on Szydłów’s light.

Holocaust Centre North (HCN) is an archive as well as an exhibition centre. Its central feature is a small museum exhibition that follows the familiar timeline of the European, Jewish Holocaust, from the rise of Hitler to the freeing of the camps. At HCN there is a particular focus on what happened next, as the primary purpose of the centre is to commemorate the experiences of a number of Jews who resettled in the region around Leeds. Within the exhibition is a small auditorium, which has since its opening continuously displayed an eleven-minute, four-channel video on permanent loop. It is in this auditorium that I presented the *Postmemory* videos, with all the implications of that emplacement, both in terms of its position relative to the main exhibition and its unique multi-screen setup. But before I consider the politics of Holocaust memory in more detail, another word is needed about the production of videographic knowledge.

Since the 2017 Judaica project lab, I have been exploring the textual annotation of video material—what I call “illuminated” video—as a way to draw out its layers of meaning.<sup>7</sup> Here I faced a different challenge: Whether and how to edit these videos across multiple screens? What kind of additional knowledge might this generate, beyond what was already there? The strategy I chose balanced my desire to experiment with the constraints of technological feasibility. I created a three-channel video installation, using three large screens that are positioned next to each other in the auditorium—

effectively a single screen with triple the standard aspect ratio, except that the two outer screens are also angled inwards, adding an aspect of spatial immersion. (A fourth screen, which I did not use, sits opposite those three in the space.) I also decided that I would follow a simple rule when transforming the single-channel videos into a three-channel installation: The single-channel video would always be displayed on at least one of the three screens. In that way, nothing from the single-channel version would be lost. The other two screens would display either the same video, a cropped version of it, or nothing at all. This ruled out certain kinds of complexity—for example, I would not be taking the three channels out of sync. The video playing on each of the screens is always the same, although in some cases the doubled or tripled image is cropped.

Cropping became an exploration and interpretation of knowledge embedded in the video. Once again, choices that were in a sense random became, by magic or synchronicity, unexpectedly revelatory. For example, I might crop the video on one or two of the screens in order to highlight a specific part of the image. But the camera moves and the crop does not; moments later, that same cropping choice would reveal an element of the image that I had never noticed, in many cases almost seem to speak, as if proclaiming the significance of this background element. In the Szydłów video, I would most often crop the image to show the performer's face. That same crop, a moment later, might highlight an object in the space, or focus in on a gesture of the hand, or bring attention to the play of shadows. The crops speak to each other, like commentators, interpreting the underlying video. In the Pińczów video, I found myself drawn to more schematic and geometrical crops. Rather than cropping from all four sides of the screen, to focus a box around a particular part of the image, I would crop the images to change the relations between the three screens. For example, by removing the left half of the leftmost screen and the right half of the central screen, I could create a “flipped” version of the fullscreen image, which still played on the rightmost screen. The flipped image is not simply reversed; rather, the right half is pulled over to the left side. This kind of flipping was surprisingly interesting, often seeming to change the relation between performer and place. Sometimes, when the camera would pan up to show the extraordinary painting on the walls and ceilings, I would have the same full image play across all three screens, in a mosaic, producing the sense of a much larger space—fabulating an imaginary, grander synagogue than the one that exists.

I felt, in this process, as if it were not even just the video recordings but the places themselves that were guiding me in the videographic editing process, or which I was still continuing to research, despite having visited them each for only a few hours, several years ago. With each cut and crop, I was learning something about the place, listening to its voice through the videographic trace. The two spaces called for me to edit them differently. Szydłów, with its chaotic jumble of objects, asked me to crop the image so that a viewer could direct attention to what might otherwise go unnoticed. Pińczów, with its juxtaposition of tomb-like solidity and achingly beautiful colour, demanded that I work with its images so as to bring out its hidden geometries. The two spaces feel different at the editing desk, just as they sound different.

Video editing is *editing* because the first round of work, writing a draft or substantial notes, has already been done. One sits down to edit video not like staring at an empty page, but with the videographic “page” already full, indeed teeming with meanings far beyond those that can be fully planned or anticipated. With audiovisual material—particularly when it has been produced through an experimental method and when technique is linked robustly to the identities of the performers and the places of enactment—numerous potential narratives are always already present, bubbling up from the video material. Each moment is dense on its own and may be connected to a thousand

others. Video editing is the final (or finalizing) moment in a knowledge generation process that begins when the camera is turned on, if not long before.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (single-channel video, 2022). Agnieszka, in the role of director or “primary external partner,” gently tells Eda that her session in the role of performer / practitioner has finished.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (single-channel video, 2022). Agnieszka sings and moves in response to the partially restored wall paintings. Every now and then, I offer a few suggestions or invitations in the role of director.

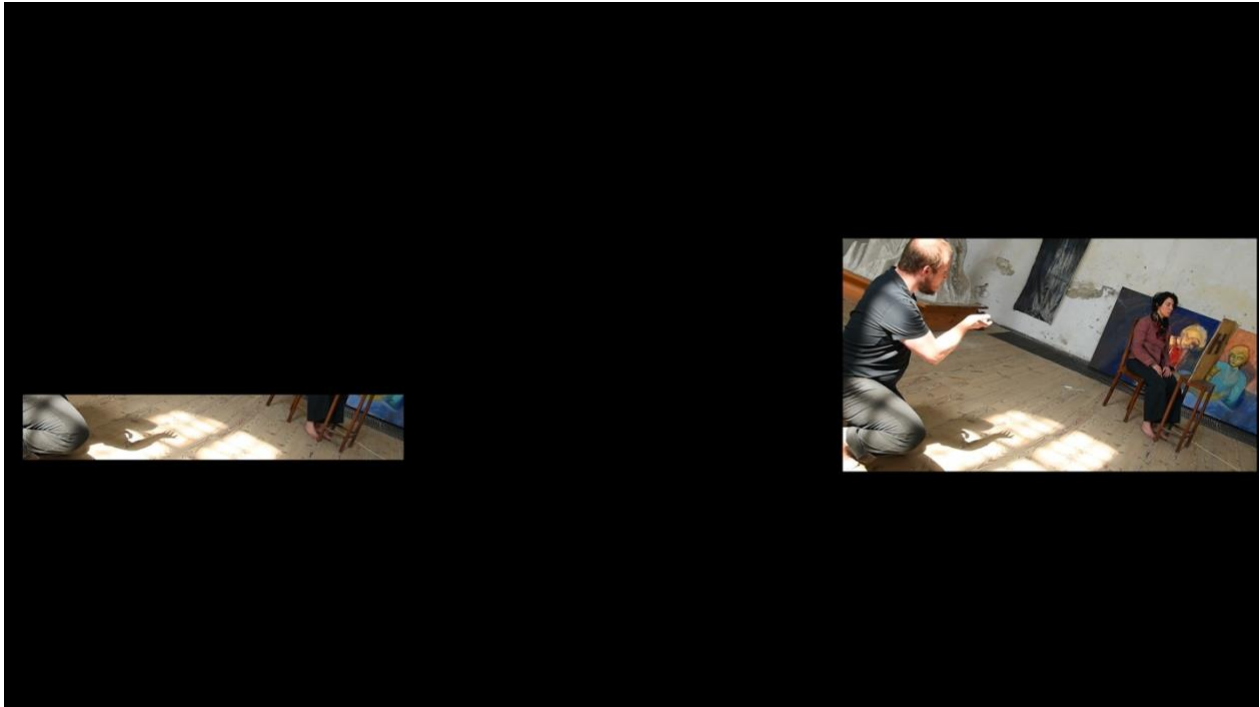


### 3. Affect: Postmemory and Historiography

I asked historian Lindsey Dodd to work with me on the *Postmemory* project because her research pushes the boundaries of historiographical methodology. After watching Eda's video essay from the Działoszyce lab session, Lindsey expressed interest in the lab method's affective dimension, the ways in which our songwork activates these historically loaded sites in nonverbal, embodied, resonant ways. Lindsey worked from the raw songwork videos to produce written distillations of her affective responses to them, which came out looking more like poetry than prose.<sup>8</sup> These not-quite poems also teemed with meaning, shaping their own set of narratives through Lindsey's feeling, knowledge, and interests. She explains her process and position in the short essays "Postmemory: A Dialogue of Concept, Song and History" and "Towards an Affective Historiography," written for the exhibition program.

In *Postmemory: Fragments*, when it is Eda's turn in the role of performer, she speaks to the camera and explains that she will go upstairs to the office area instead of staying in the main hall, where Agnieszka and I had been singing. She says: "We are now going to the space which was an addition to the synagogue, for women only. It's just an office right now, but the windows are still there." Orthodox Jewish religious spaces are more or less strictly segregated by gender. This may involve separate seating areas on the same level, with or without a partition between them. But in several of the synagogues we encountered in Poland, the women's area was entirely separate, often located above the central men's area, placing women in a spectatorial position, observing the action of religious service without participating. (The same architecture is visible in Eda's video essay: Erçin, Mendel, and Spatz 2021.) The camera follows Eda as she goes upstairs, finds an alcove of interior windows overlooking the main hall, and opens its panels, so that we find ourselves looking with her over the main space, through the small opening. As she does this, the background noise of a vacuum cleaner suddenly disappears, the sudden silence giving additional emphasis to Eda's words. She says: "It's totally like different worlds. There's not even a connection, just kind of a cold breeze. So. In fact, I don't feel good being here. So I think I'm going to leave soon."

Eda makes a few more observations about the upstairs space. Then she goes downstairs and leaves the synagogue, walking out into the field of grass behind the building. There are many ways to read this exit, but the critical feminist perspective embodied by her investigation of the spectatorial position of the women's area is clear. Knowing that Eda's relationship with secular Islam in some ways mirrors mine with secular Judaism, I can guess that the binary gender architecture of this space resonates with others she has encountered, perhaps closer to home. By commenting upon and then exiting from the synagogue, Eda enacts a politicization of the ethics and affects of the lab method, revealing how it was already implicitly political. For the three of us to enter and sing in that space, with our multiple genders, diverse religious backgrounds, and bare feet, was always a political act, even while it was an ethical and affective investigation of place and memory. The lab method itself, in its short-circuiting of embodied practice and videographic output, links ethics to politics, knowledge to power. These links are especially palpable in our encounters with sites like these synagogues, where multiple layers of past and present fuse in a series of improvised videographic moments.



Still from *Postmemory: Fragments* (three-channel video, 2022). Cropping the image unexpectedly highlights certain details, such as the shadow produced on the floor by a gesture.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (three-channel video, 2022). Cropping and repeating the image reconfigures the space.

#### 4. Power: A Cryptojudaic Prelude

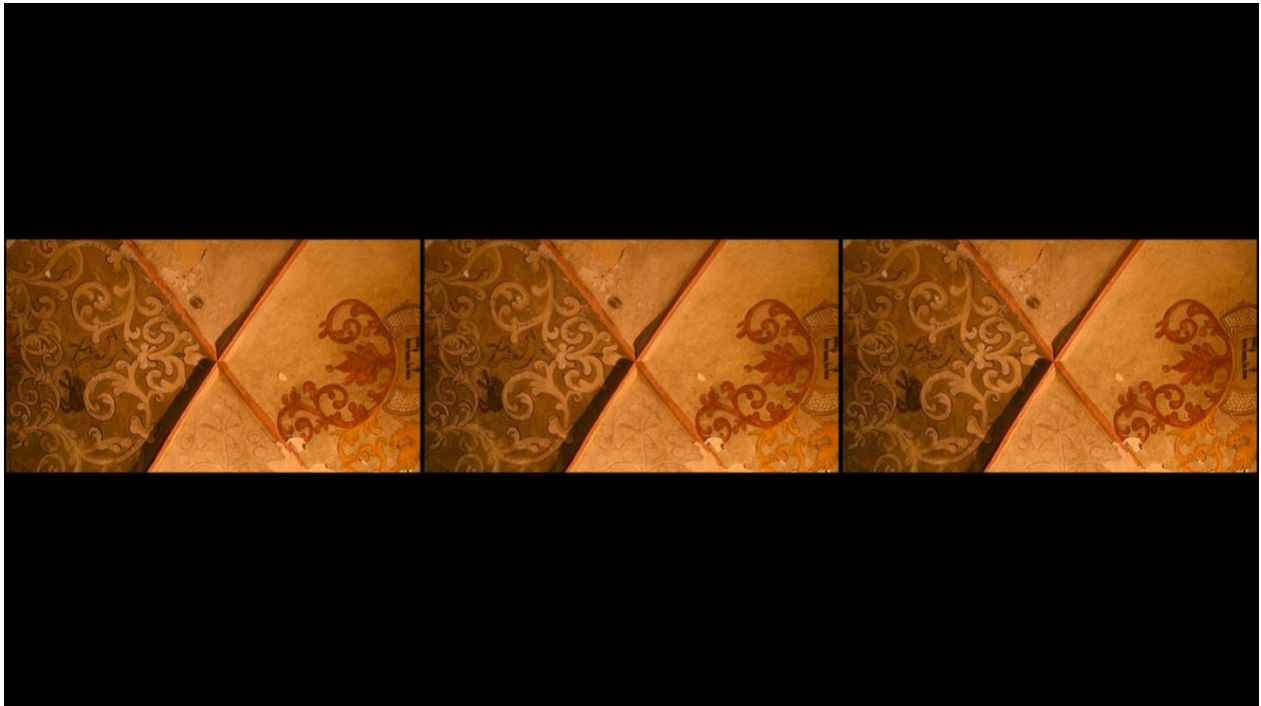
My perspective on the politics of jewishness continues to evolve. Holocaust memory is a deeply vexed and contested site at which to attempt to resituate jewishness within a broader context of antiracist and decolonial thought and practice, as is suggested by Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory (Hirsch 2012; Hirsch and Miller 2011), as well as Michael Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory (Rothberg 2009) and the ethics of implication (Rothberg 2019). Both the memory of the european holocaust and the general concept of antisemitism are increasingly weaponized today, following what Santiago Slabodsky (2014) calls the "re-racialization" of jewishness as white in the second half of the twentieth century, as often used to bolster white supremacy and colonialism as to work for peace and justice. As a result, any consideration of holocaust postmemory, if it aims to be in dialogue with critical race and decolonial black and indigenous praxis, must radically rethink the meaning of the holocaust itself.

As I wrote in the exhibition program: "Today it is impossible for me to speak of Holocaust memory without invoking the prior genocides of european colonialism and slavery; ongoing indigenous erasure and antiblack violence, from the united states to the mediterranean sea; the twisting of history to justify further catastrophe in israel/palestine; and the present and future of a climate catastrophe caused by extractive capitalism. With the current rise of nationalism and fascism across the world, we must ask ourselves what it means to say: 'never again.'" Following Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's foregrounding of diasporic jewishness (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002; Boyarin 2023) and Slabodsky's crucial but cautious evocation of a potentially decolonial judaism, I find myself drawn now to reimagine the concept of the *cryptojudaic*. The term "Crypto-Judaism" is usually applied to the spanish and portuguese jews, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who converted to christianity under duress and in many cases continued to practise judaism secretly (Boyarin 2009). But, as Agata Bielik-Robson suggests, the cryptographic of those historical cryptojews could be applied more broadly, in particular to that generation of "philosophical Marranos" who developed radical critical theories and counterphilosophies before and despite the racial whitening of jewishness following the end of World War II and the founding of the state of Israel (Bielik-Robson 2014, 20).<sup>9</sup>

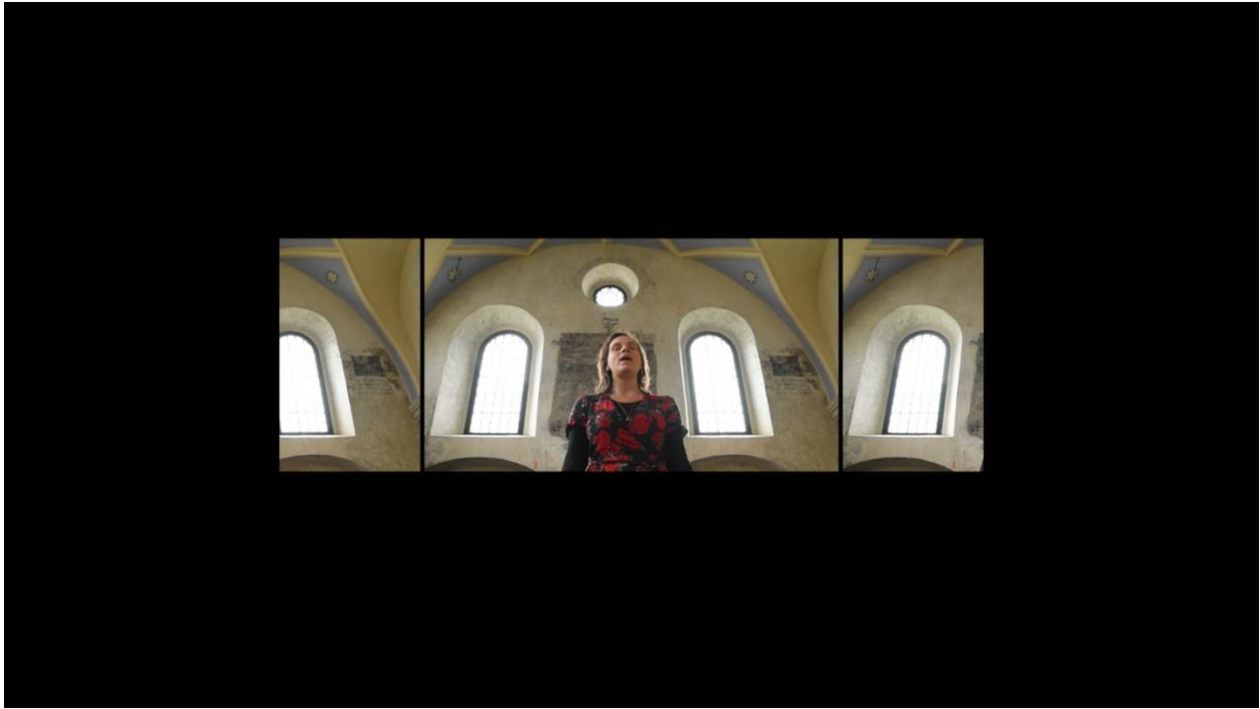
The Judaica project was always intentionally diasporic, locating the ethical and political foundations of jewish radical praxis in diasporic experience and attempting to provincialize the zionist narrative that would define jewish diaspora in relation to a colonial "return" to Palestine. The project's orientation was subsequently transformed by my encounter with Slabodsky's idea of decolonial judaism. In this context, I offer the *Postmemory* videos as fragmentary instances of contemporary cryptojudaica: attempts to dislocate and disentangle the radical and transformative potentiality of jewish identification from a dominating whiteness. If the colonial zionist narrative, inextricable from euro-american hegemony, is the sole unencrypted version of state or official judaism, then where might we discover all the many hidden and encrypted counter-judaisms at work beyond its reach? What codes and techniques might be hidden in the crypt-like stone of the Pińczów synagogue, waiting to be decrypted or reencrypted for other purposes? For each israeli delegation of schoolchildren that visits such synagogues, absorbing their holocaust postmemories into a triumphalist narrative that ends with the founding of the israeli state, are there not countless others—jewish and not—who might find and enact very different meanings at these sites?

The essence of the cryptojudaic is that it points backward and forward at the same time. The concept derives from and is grounded in a particular moment in european jewish history, when forced conversion to christianity produced a mode of judaism that is not merely diasporic but also

encrypted. But the crypto of cryptojudaica also resonates with that of encryption and cryptography. In this way, I draw cautiously on the visionary example of afrofuturism as a strategy to rework technology through an alternative ontology, activating at the level of form what is too often politically contained as mere content. This is not to suggest an equivalence between jewish and black diasporas but rather to acknowledge the ways in which radical black and indigenous thought must be centred and made indispensable to any future jewishness.<sup>10</sup> If cryptojudaica can learn from afrofuturism how to radicalize diaspora, then perhaps other lineages, those that have been even more deeply absorbed into the hegemonic monoculture, might learn from jewishness how to disentangle themselves, step by step. What other counterworlds and leverage points are waiting to be activated? What else has been boxed and contained within the category of “cultures,” when really, with Cadena and Blaser (2018), we should have been saying “worlds” all along? Watching and listening to the video recordings that became *Postmemory*, I search for them: the seeds of another world.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (three-channel video, 2022). Repeating the image reconfigures the space, here as if the painted ceiling were much larger than it is.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (three-channel video, 2022). Cropping and repeating the image reconfigures the space, here as if the synagogue were larger and had even more windows.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (three-channel video, 2022). Cropping the image highlights particular details. I had not paid much attention to the clasped hands until they were repeated separately from the rest of the photograph.



Still from *Postmemory: Crypt* (three-channel video, 2022). Cropping the image highlights particular details.

## Notes

1. Since 2017, I lowercase “jewish” to avoid the dual implications of orthodoxy and nationalism (see Spatz 2019). Since 2020, I also lowercase other religious, national, racial, and linguistic terms. In this article, I lowercase “holocaust” in deference to other genocides. Audiovisual materials from the Judaica project can be accessed via the Urban Research Theater (2022) website, although the two works discussed here are not currently available online.
2. For a beautiful reading of jewish diaspora itself as a positive image of generative scattering, rather than one that would need to be recuperated into a sovereign nation-state, see the recent Boyarin (2023).
3. Both of these videos were on display in the *Postmemory* exhibition, looping on television screens with headsets, in the main reception area, where they were intended to serve as an introduction to the new works screening inside.
4. All of our 2017 lab sessions made use of the audiovisual embodied research method Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video. In this method, a specific set of relations based on the conventional roles of performer, director, and videographer are “configured” through an iterative process of lab design, producing audiovisual material from within the experimental practice. This method is described and contextualized in detail in Spatz (2020).
5. My thinking about place and emplacement has been influenced by critical indigenous theories of place, as in Tuck and McKenzie (2014). I will examine the implications of those influences more fully in a different context.
6. The Moses statue, *Decalogue*, was created by by Kazimierz Gustaw Zemła. I do not know who created the outdoor sculptures, including the racist caricature of the jewish man with which *Postmemory: Fragments* begins.
7. For a set of examples, see *Journal of Embodied Research* 4 (2), a special issue of illuminated videos. And see Spatz (2021) for a discussion of illuminated video in relation to contemporary queer and trans media production.

8. Lindsey's poetic texts refer to the Szydlów and Pińczów video selections in the Songwork Catalogue, a set of more than three hundred short video clips published on the Urban Research Theater (2022) website, rather than to the edited video works discussed here.
9. Bielik-Robson (2014) does not suggest a racial or decolonial dimension. Following Slabodsky (2014), I believe it is crucial to understand that the radical thought of these Jews was related to their racial positioning and marginalization. Since writing this essay, I have launched a new project on Instagram to explore the concept of cryptojudaism through videographic form: <https://www.instagram.com/cryptojudaica/>.
10. Some of the sources I have been thinking with include Bey (2020), King (2019), McKittrick (2021), and Robinson (2020). My ideas about the complex and asymmetrical relations between figural Jewishness, whiteness, blackness, and indigeneity are more fully developed in my forthcoming book, *Race and the Forms of Knowledge: Technique, Identity, and Place in Artistic Research* (Northwestern University Press).

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Postmemory in the North



# Postmemory in the North

## VIDEO EXHIBITION

27 June – 4 August | Monday – Thursday | 10am-5pm

Holocaust Centre North  
University of Huddersfield

### video works by **Ben Spatz**

with **Nazlıhan Eda Erçin & Agnieszka Mendel**

accompanying texts by **Lindsey Dodd**

programme design by Paula Kolar

#### works presented in the Toni Schiff Auditorium:

**Postmemory: Fragments** (46:10)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin & Agnieszka Mendel

**Postmemory: Crypt** (47:22)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin & Agnieszka Mendel

#### also on display:

**Diaspora: An Illuminated Video** (30:48)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, Agnieszka Mendel & Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz

**Działoszyce: Song, Border, Body** (17:38)

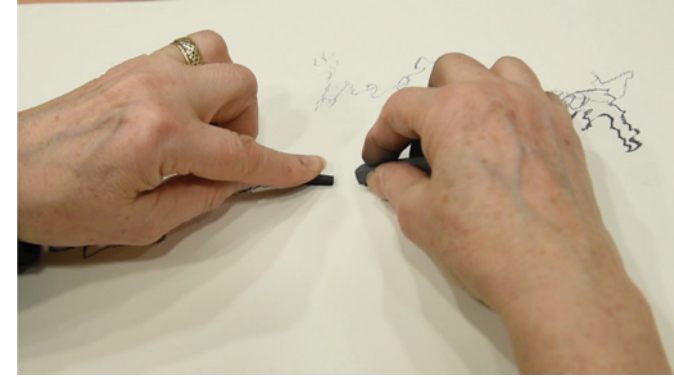
Nazlıhan Eda Erçin with Agnieszka Mendel & Ben Spatz

### guest talk by **Nafhesa Ali**

**Wednesday 29 June @ 17:30**

'There were bodies everywhere': childhood memories of Partition, gendered sexualities and (inter)generational ageing in the UK.

How do memories of the past impact on ageing experiences in the present and on (inter)generational relationships? Trauma, memories from the place of birth and passing on transnational (inter)generational gendered identities will be explored in this talk, in relation to older South Asian migrant women (between sixty and eighty years old) who settled in the UK and have lived here for the majority of their adult lives.



stills from "Diaspora" and "Działoszyce"

## Artist Statement

I grew up with the weight of Holocaust postmemory, both implicit and explicit. In 2012, when I began to investigate the politics of jewish\* identity through artistic research, I did not intend to deal with the Holocaust directly. But, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett once asked: Isn't every jewish cultural project in europe necessarily a project of Holocaust memory?

Today it is impossible for me to speak of Holocaust memory without invoking the prior genocides of european colonialism and slavery; ongoing indigenous erasure and antiblack violence, from the united states to the mediterranean sea; the twisting of history to justify further catastrophe in israel/palestine; and the present and future of a climate catastrophe caused by extractive capitalism. With the current rise of nationalism and fascism across the world, we must ask ourselves what it means to say: "never again."

The videos presented in this exhibition follow the encounters of the 2017 Judaica project lab team with ruined and partially restored synagogues in the rural *świętokrzyskie* region of poland, where we undertook a kind of *research on place* as well as memory. In these unique places, we encountered the relics of genocide alongside museum exhibitions, archival traces, and objects ranging from the mundane and the kitschy to the downright racist.

In these practice sessions, we lay our songs and our bodies against the particularities of each site. We did not plan what would happen or draw explicit distinctions between memory and imagination, tradition and invention, the proper and the improper. We worked with care, supporting each other in our practices. As each of us takes the role of performer in turn, we perceive different aspects of the place and respond in different ways. Two new video works, *Postmemory: Fragments* and *Postmemory: Crypt*, have been created for this exhibition.

The songs we sing in these videos come from a variety of sources. Some were selected for the Judaica project, as part of its methodology. Others arise from our individual histories of personal and artistic research. Through the process of video editing, I cast about again in the ruins for a different way of becoming present and a different way of grappling with history.

This work is done in solidarity with decolonial movements and explorations throughout the world, as a search for jewishness beyond the nation-state and even beyond diaspora.



\* Since 2017, I lowercase "jewish" to avoid the implications of orthodoxy and nationalism. Since 2020, I lowercase all religious, national, and racial identity terms; sometimes also the names of places.

## Video Works

### **Postmemory: Fragments** (46:10)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin and Agnieszka Mendel (2022)

*Postmemory: Fragments* was recorded on 8 September 2017 at the ruined and partially restored synagogue in Szydłów, Poland, which is now a community centre. The main room hosts an exhibition of jewish cultural and ritual objects, as well as sculptures by Kazimierz Gustaw Zemła, including a four-meter tall statue of Moses called *Decalogue*. When we visited, the room was filled with canvasses that had been left by a community painting class.

The word "fragments" refers to the juxtaposition of dissimilar things, the fragmented space of memory and contemporary community this place has become. The idea of the fragment has been part of my artistic practice for decades, perhaps since I encountered Tim Etchells' book on artistic fragments more than two decades ago. In the Judaica project we worked with "song fragments," or what we also called "crumbs of song." Fragments are a key image in jewish mysticism, following the kabbalistic story of the breaking of unity into shards or sparks.

### **Postmemory: Crypt** (47:22)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin and Agnieszka Mendel (2022)

*Postmemory: Crypt* was recorded on 12 September 2017 at the ruined and partially restored synagogue in Pińczów, one of the oldest in Poland. The main hall contains an exhibition about the Jews of Pińczów. Since 2005 this synagogue houses two stained glass windows created by the artist Jacek Nowak, while a project to restore the wall paintings and other architectural elements was carried out by the World Monuments Fund.

The word "crypt" refers to the physical structure and somatic texture of this synagogue, its coldness and its abandoned inner chamber. Of course, it also refers to the contemporary status of such synagogues as places of death, memorials to genocide. More recently, I have been thinking about another meaning of crypt, the cryptic or cryptographic, as in the identities of "crypto-jews": those who are jewish but, for whatever reason, find themselves "passing" as members of christianity, or what we would now call whiteness.

### **Diaspora: An Illuminated Video** (30:48)

Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, Agnieszka Mendel & Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz

*Diaspora* was recorded on 3 August 2017 in the Patrick Stewart Building, University of Huddersfield. It was published in the journal *Global Performance Studies* 2.1 (2018).

### **Działoszyce: Song, Border, Body** (17:38)

Nazlıhan Eda Erçin with Agnieszka Mendel and Ben Spatz

*Działoszyce* was recorded on 8 September 2017 at the ruined synagogue in Działoszyce, Poland. It premiered online in the 1st International Ecoperformance Festival, São Paulo, Brazil (2021). This video work was composed and annotated by Nazlıhan Eda Erçin.

**Ben Spatz** is a nonbinary scholar-practitioner working at the intersections of artistic research and critical theories of embodiment and identity. They are a leader in the development of new audiovisual and embodied research methods, publishing across scholarly writing, video essays, and video art. Ben is Reader in Media and Performance at University of Huddersfield; founding editor of the videographic *Journal of Embodied Research* and the Advanced Methods book series; and author of *What a Body Can Do* (2015), *Blue Sky Body* (2020), and *Making a Laboratory* (2020).

**Nazlıhan Eda Erçin** is a performer/researcher with a background in sociology and ethnography. She holds a practice-based PhD in drama from the University of Exeter, specializing in the performance of gender, ethnicity and language. She is currently teaching in Communication Studies at Louisiana State University and managing the HopKins Black Box Performance Laboratory. Her work has been published in *Performance Research* and *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*.

**Agnieszka Mendel** is a vocalist, actress, and coach of voice and stage presence. She graduated from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology and the Gardzienice Theater Practices Academy. For 15 years, she was closely associated with the European Center for Theater Practices Gardzienice, where she created leading acting and vocal roles in performances by Włodzimierz Staniewski. As part of her own artistic activity, she composes, writes texts and performs concerts. She is the leader of several music groups, including Tara Gayan and Yaron Trio.

**Lindsey Dodd** is Reader in Modern European History at the University of Huddersfield and has published widely on children's lives in France during the Second World War, memory, and oral history. Among other things, she teaches on the university's MA in Holocaust & Genocide Studies. She is author of *French Children Under the Allied Bombs, 1940-1945: An Oral History* (2016) and *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France* (forthcoming). She is collaborating with Ben Spatz on the 'Postmemory in the North' project for the School of Arts & Humanities Cultures of Place festival.

**Nafhesa Ali** is an interdisciplinary sociologist with expertise in the everyday lives of racialized and minority communities. She is currently a Research Associate for the Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability (TIES) Leverhulme-funded project in the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) at the University of Manchester. Nafhesa has a PhD in Sociology, completed in 2015 from the University of Huddersfield. Her publications include two edited books, *Storying Relationships* (2021) and *A Match Made in Heaven: British Muslim Women Write About Love and Desire* (2020) and journal publications in *Sexualities*, *Ethnicities*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Cultural Geographies*.

In *The Generation of Postmemory* (Columbia University Press, 2012), Marianne Hirsch explains her concept as follows:

'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. (p5)

Postmemory describes a kind of personal (rather than collective) remembering performed by the generations which come after. It may manifest as forms of memory, as behaviours, or it may be held in objects, images, places and so on. It is, in its stricter sense, a feeling of knowing a past as though the memory of it is one's own. Postmemory may be characterized as familial, transmitted down family lines, and this is, perhaps, its most evident form. But Hirsch also writes of 'affiliative structures of memory beyond the familial' and of 'connective memory work' (p21). Thus, postmemory may also encompass communities of care and alliance which feel and remember with and for others. Such communities support and bolster important reparative work. But there are reasons to tread carefully. Hirsch asks:

What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness? (p2)

This question is a burning one for descendants of the second or even third generations. Yet for those people who are not directly descended from Holocaust victims and survivors, the issue of owing something to this suffering is also relevant. But is owing quite the right word here? Is it indeed a feeling of duty or something else? A desire? A responsibility? A need? A wish? A whim? A penance? A fantasy? A hope? I do not want or seek other people's suffering, nor do I pretend to feel it. I am mindful of Hirsch's point about appropriation, and gaps and chasms. I am distant. Why do I seek to care, though? While Hirsch's generation has been directly shaped by their parents' experiences, are not all of us who come after 'shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events' (p5), especially when our work brings us into contact with wide-ranging traumatic residues and echoes? And although these traumatic fragments may 'defy narrative reconstruction,' they exist affectively nonetheless.

I am shaped by the knowledge I have; not in the same way as Marianne Hirsch, say, or as Ben Spatz, or as anyone with their own connection to this past. But I am not untouched by it, and it affects what I am capable of knowing, thinking and feeling. This is not a question of appro-

priation as a facile kind of empathy; it's a question of alongside-ness which recognizes separation; of sympathy and an ethics of care. Hirsch comments on engaging 'in patterns of affiliation beyond the familial, forming alternate attachments across lines of difference' (16): with this, Postmemory in the North takes this concept into different contextual realms, to see where new attachments may form and grow.

Likening postmemory to a Post-it note, Hirsch writes:

Post-its, of course, often hold afterthoughts that can easily become unglued and disconnected from their source. If a Post-it falls off, the post-concept must persist on its own, and in that precarious position it can also acquire its own independent qualities. (p5)

A concept has its own life: it can evolve and develop. Postmemory will stretch and grow as we use it. If, as Hirsch suggests, postmemory is 'a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience' (p6), then such elasticity is inherent: we are dealing with multiple combinations – assemblages, perhaps – of generationality, memory, trauma, knowledge, experience and embodiment. The image/metaphors which my own engagement with the synagogue songworks have generated are, perhaps, some of postmemory's lines of flight, sparking their way to other constellations of experience. And indeed, postmemory should move away from dominant forms of Holocaust memory which, as Hirsch rightly states, may engender the occlusion of 'other, more proximate histories of violence' (p20). We can thus extend postmemory to the intergenerational remembering of suffering during and after the Partition of India and Pakistan, as one example. The way painful memories surface and manifest, inhabit and cling, reshape and mutate in the everyday lives of diasporic populations is a context with relevance in the United Kingdom and in the Huddersfield region specifically.

Marianne Hirsch issued a call to historians to broaden our repertoire: my recent work on affective historiography – writing histories through feeling – has been doing just that. Traditionally, historians are positivists: they demand evidence. But where is the evidence for that which, as Hirsch writes, 'exceed[s] comprehension' or 'def[ies] narrative reconstruction'? (p5) Nonrepresentational and affective methodologies 'can shift the frames of intelligibility so as to allow new experiences to emerge, experiences that have heretofore remained unspoken, or even unthought' (p18). For an historian, what evidence can derive from this songwork? Hirsch states that working with the ideas of postmemory, and broadening our historiographical repertoire may open a space

for the consideration of affect, embodiment, privacy, and intimacy as concerns of history, and [...] shift our attention to the minute events of daily life. (p16)

My engagement as an historian with the synagogue songwork videos at Szydlów and Pińczów synagogues has been an experiment in affective historiography, and an attempt to broaden the repertoire of historical concern in ways which are productive and therefore valuable, as well as interesting and thought-provoking.

## Towards an affective historiography

By Lindsey Dodd

How might these songwork videos – artistic, abstract, and distant in time, place and person – be of use to an historian? History is grounded in evidence. It tells stories of what was, not of what is, and it bases them on fact. In its traditional form, history seeks to represent faithfully the events of the past in the present, as fully and accurately as extant sources allow. But there are more ways of approaching our understanding of the past. Recently, I have turned towards thinking affectively: what can we know though feeling? How can becoming better attuned to the felt realm help us think or know differently? What could I learn from Ben Spatz, Nazlıhan Eda Erçin and Agnieszka Mendel singing, moving, feeling their way around two synagogues in Poland in 2017? How could it enrich my thinking? My engagement with these videos developed as a process of layering, moving from the sensory and affective, to dialogue and consolidation, to tentative interpretation and budding lines of flight away from this context.

In early 2022 I watched a series of extracts from the songworks made by Ben Spatz, Nazlıhan Eda Erçin and Agnieszka Mendel at Szydłów and Pińczów synagogues. These songworks are extracts from longer recordings which have since been re-edited for the Postmemory in the North exhibition. As I watched, I scribbled notes in pencil on folded sheets of paper, rendering sounds and images into words. These were my words, carried along by my knowledge and practice as an historian and scholar of affective methodologies. I noted freely, messily, what I experienced visually, auditorily and affectively as I watched. I was both a filter and a tool. Difficult though it was, I tried to write what I saw and heard directly. I tried to detach evaluation and interpretation from experience. I tried not to think but instead just to do. Each video became an unwitting poem: a distillation of my experience. Resonant intensities emerged around bodies, buildings, voice and gaze, shadows, and around me, an outsider. I added a second layer more consciously: with the songworks in mind but drawing on my distillations, I pulled my recent writing on affect and history, and ideas from others, into dialogue with them. This consolidated a sense of connection and of purpose: an affective kind of historiographical writing began to seem possible. Finally, with Marianne Hirsch's book *The Generation of Postmemory* to hand, I focused on the most striking, stickiest images that the songwork videos had imprinted on me, and the ideas with most intensity. I wondered what they might be made to mean as metaphors in relation to postmemory.

These usable image/metaphors can tell a story of a questing: a postmemorial exploration of knowledge, identity and possibility. The singers are tentative, probing with their bodies and voices the spaces and objects in which memory might be lodged; which memory, and indeed whose, is another matter. What is certain is that new memorial layers now dwell in these crumbling, beautiful buildings, and that other rememberers distant in time, place and person are being pulled into an assemblage which they had not anticipated.

The songs flow like a liquid into the voids of these synagogues, under the flaking paintwork, into the cracks and through the cobwebs. They re-place memories here. Probably, though, this is not about memory. Not quite, anyway. Postmemories not quite memories; they are a kind of knowledge. So by finding, placing, re-placing and generating memories at Szydłów

and Pińczów, and in Huddersfield too, what is being found, placed, re-placed and generated is a kind of knowledge. Affective knowledge is knowledge known (or present, available, experienced) because it is felt. This knowledge is embodied by the searchers – the singers – but it is generable by other searchers – me and you, who may or may not sing – further down the affiliative line, who may encounter it through these films. This knowledge is illusive and allusive. It is generated in between the singer, the watcher and the place; between my time, their time, the time before and all the times in between. It is subjective and relational, contingent on the people involved. Each of the image/metaphors which I have derived from this layering process contains something of hope and intention, of failure and false starts, and of quite optimistic transformations.



**Probably, though, this is not about memory.  
Not quite, anyway. Postmemories not quite  
memories; they are a kind of knowledge.**



Their songs haunt, lament the body of the  
place, its paint the colour of flesh and blood,  
Of life.

Of flesh.

The place is a body, peeling and flaking;

The body hurts.

Words I cannot read, signs and symbols,

Signs and symbols peel from the ceiling,

The ceiling peels and flakes.

Peeling, flaking

Of memory and knowledge.

The body hurts.

By Lindsey Dodd, from the songwork *Dust and clay, Pińczów synagoga*



### The peeling and flaking of memory and knowledge

From these images, a feeling arose which suggested the process of the natural, but painful, erosion of knowledge and memory over time. This is a starting point for re-placing knowledge and memory into the synagogues through the songwork. As the experiential and phenomenological knowledge and memory of situated experience recedes – as it flakes and peels, revealing, perhaps, something underneath, as it disintegrates into the atmosphere, becomes dust – this loss hurts. The place where it was held is pained; it does not disintegrate quietly or go with good grace. Layers are underneath: something new, something other, and that is fine. It is how things are. But the dead layers are gone, and that hurts.

By Lindsey Dodd, from songworks *Warming my bones, Reading a painting through a song & I need "your" song, Szydłów synagoga*



### As two in gaze and voice

This image/metaphor suggests the impossibility of identity, as in being the same. It rejects empathy as facile, and embraces the necessary side-by-sideness of an alliance which does not pretend to share in experience. This experience can be powerfully connective; it is the precondition of affiliative postmemory. It is about sympathetic companionship and a plea never to usurp experience or to make unfounded assumptions about that which one cannot know; to recognise that one walks alongside and not in the shoes of someone who has experienced suffering or antecedental suffering.

They are parallel, together,  
but they gaze differently at the world  
I am lost by her experience.  
Together, in tune,  
but regarding the world differently  
As two in gaze and voice.



They try to fill the doorway – the room is empty beyond, and grey.  
 They are watched. Another voice joins.  
 They feel the edges of this space. Try to fit into it –  
 A stopper or a gateway?  
 Why this doorway? A gap, a door, their fingers feel all sides of the  
 doorframe.  
 They support themselves in this frame. It holds them:  
 Their balance, their pressure, their effort.



By Lindsey Dodd, from the songwork Dust and clay, Piłchów synagogue

Do members of postmemorial generations act as stoppers or as gateways? Do they prevent something flowing, something from being seen, something coming to light? Or do they open up ways of seeing and viewing? They probably do both. Two points arise: one is the control and ownership that postmemorial generations have, and the way in which they gain and enact that control and ownership; the other is how that control and ownership affects them, is embodied by them, and is a question of balance, pressure and effort. They might wish to caress the antecedental past because it is something precious. There is also a sense that their antecedental past supports them, holds them up, but not without an effort on their part.

### A stopper or a gateway

By Lindsey Dodd, from the songwork In contact with stone cold, Piłchów synagogue



### The light seems brighter when she leaves

This is both uplifting and melancholy. Is there a need, at some point in life, to shed some of the burden – of worrying? Of feeling sad? Of feeling guilty? Or of questing and searching? – in order to gain clarity, or lightness: a brighter light, and a lighter load? Perhaps this means handing over something to someone else, whether another generation, or an outsider. This act is neither to ignore, bury or silence, or even to retreat, but to shed something in order to shed light, to see better, by letting in some of the light.

She ceases, pants, holds the wall, confused removes her shoes.  
 Layers of light –

She undoes her top and leaves.

The light seems brighter when she leaves –

Light floods in.

As she sheds her layers, her shoes, this place is illuminated.

They crawl into light.  
 The shadow of the window, the bars are written in light and dark on  
 the swirling, knotty grain of the floor.  
 Within a shadow frame  
 – their shadow sharp in bright light –  
 They touch shadow and light, fingers feeling textures  
 Light fills and –  
 This ceiling is devoid of decoration.  
 Window panes, shadows of a grid, a cage.  
 They become enlivened and sing – their shadow is encased in light;  
 Walking loudly, in a frenzy, calling to the ceiling, sinking under its  
 weight, rubbing at their cheeks, their strike their cheeks.



By Lindsey Dodd, from the songworks Trans/space, Szydlów synagoga & Floors and windows, Pińczów Synagoga

**Within a shadow frame** Postmemorial generations and their members may live within shadow frames created not just by the past, but by their present questing. What casts the shadow frame? What is cast by it? Is it the person or the past? Or the interpretive weight of retelling the past, or of trying to make sense? Shadow frames create borders of light and dark, and someone may be trapped inside – although the frame is a shadow: intangible, unreal, an illusion of light. It may disappear or mutate. Shadow frames may act as barriers inside which people feel they should or must operate. The presence of individuals may also throw a shadow frame across the past, casting both light and dark in their shape. Shadow frames may cast their somatic effects into lives as well, as disquiet, a burdensome weight or self-attack.

By Lindsey Dodd, from the songwork Follow the voice, Pińczów synagoga



### She sings and makes voices, metamorphosis

Here we encounter a rapid, inexplicable, varied form of vocalized expression, that was embedded and embodied in place and face, but which was not a song. This was an experience of becoming: bits of everything were in everything else, and everything was tending towards something else. It was multiplicitous; it was full; transformations were happening as the singer moved on unseen lines, near-simultaneously and always holding what came before, from status to status, pulled or drawn where an affective flow led her. This forced a recognition of the sheer impossibility of interpretive fixity: a tendency towards movement rather than stasis. The singer was becoming the life of this place, tending towards it in its multiple forms, times and objects. In becoming, the life of this place entered her too. Here is a moment of inter-affectivity in a visceral, embodied form. It evokes the becoming-tendency of research and researcher, and the becoming-tendency of affective practices. To do affective research, we must tend elsewhere, and embrace openly happenstance, flow and unknowability.

A cry of horror – animal – bird call – a door squeaks open – an animal – a baby – a song, a singer, opera, scales – off – just off – clicking – horses' hooves – a dog barks – a Christian church – shift elsewhere – from grimace to horror – grimace to horror – a gargyle – stuck – voice creaks – the beauty of this ceiling – sound leaps up – sounds make scales, make tunes – metamorphosis – animals, laugh, monkey, squawk.

She sings. She makes voices. Metamorphosis. All life was here.



By Lindsey Dodd, from the songworks *Dust and clay*, Pińczów synagoga, and *Echo and Distance*, Szydlów synagoga

**A questing is happening here** A postmemorial generation might struggle to fill the empty spaces left by missing people and missing parts of culture, but also the spaces and gaps in knowledge. Groping fingers touch the walls of what is known, trying to discern shapes and consolidate what is there, and feel into the dents and divots. What groping fingers cannot touch, sound strives to fill. The voice enters all spaces, into the nooks and crannies and even the fingerprint swirls of the groping fingers themselves. Filling these spaces, mostly, must fail; sound ceases, it bounces back. Knowledge cannot stretch that far. But it is the act of searching, seeking, feeling gingerly and tenderly, touching and sensing texture, that matters. Doing the work of feeling, of running hands over stone and of probing the walls with song, takes them somewhere and creates, for them, a knowledge that differentiates what was from what is (existence), what was from what could be (permission), and what was from what might be (possibility). Questing is a leap into possibility and potential, and its achievements are always inconclusive.

It is a struggle to fill this space, a puzzle.  
 Not filling, then, but questing, seeking.  
*Tâtonner.*  
 In a doorway, on a threshold.  
 The space fills with voice,  
 Voice and arms reach up, reach down,  
 reach around.  
 Voice and arms quest:  
 A questing is happening here.

Black absorbs her song.  
 She speaks of light, she touches the painting  
 – an eye? –  
 Looking out from within the darkness, dark is differentiated by light,  
 by her touch, her voice  
 – What looks out?  
 This darkness is differentiated.

By Lindsey Dodd, from the songwork *Light is born*, Szydlów synagoga



**Darkness is differentiated**

In contradiction, perhaps, to shedding something which may act as a constraint, here there is a sense that by engaging, doing, singing, feeling, searching and questing into something that appears very dark that the darkness can be differentiated. It is not brighter, but it is differentiated. What appears to be wholly black, wholly lost and wholly depleting may be found to have something else to offer. But it is only through effort – affective effort – that the darkness of a damaged or damaging past can be differentiated, and made, productively, generatively, creatively, into something else.

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**The performance of return (the actual visits to the destroyed villages) is not a display of nostalgia or an act of mourning. Rather, it is framed and takes place in a temporality of becoming.**

– Gil Z. Hochberg, *Becoming Palestine*

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