

## Memory Activism Challenging the Reconciliation Paradigm

**Abstract** This chapter analyzes the practices of the Brama Grodzka group in Lublin, Poland. Brama Grodzka uses its physical location in the gateway over the road connecting the historically Jewish Quarter to Lublin's Old City as the material expression of its mission: to change Lubliners' conscious awareness of what the city's Jewish past means for Polish national identity. Brama Grodzka created a series of performative strategies that allowed participants to interact with the erasure of Lublin's Jewish community, broaching the possibility of rupture with a normalized mono-ethnic present. In their work, Brama Grodzka staff positioned the city itself as carrying the trauma of the Nazi excision of Jewish life, and the Polish suppression of its memory.

**Keywords** Brama Grodzka · Lublin · Memory · Ethnic · Nazi · Jewish Performative

The Old Town of Lublin, renovated and revived after 1989, is a strikingly beautiful example of Central European public culture. Meandering stone-paved roads leads one through charming courtyards, squares and archways, framed by churches, castles, markets, and homes dating from the seventeenth century. One of these architectural elements, the Grodzka Gate, stands out for its role in Lublin's history: it is an archway over a road that one took to cross from the Jewish Quarter to Christian Lublin. The Jewish Quarter was not, however, part of Lublin's

post-1989 restoration; until the 1990s, most traces of Jewish Lublin had vanished. Grodzka Gate remained, however, and the memory activist organization “Brama Grodzka—Teatr NN” installed itself in its rooms. In doing so, it began the process of developing a vision for bringing Lublin’s Jewish past into its present consciousness.

The city of Lublin in eastern Poland is a prime candidate for Holocaust memory work. Lublin had been central to Jewish spiritual and social life since the 1500s, when the grand Maharszala Synagogue was built in the city center to accommodate almost 3000 people. While the number of Jewish residents of Lublin fluctuated over the centuries, the city remained a home to renowned yeshivas, rabbis, teachers and cultural leaders, and figured prominently in the Jewish literary imagination of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kubiszyn 2011; Radzik 1995). Nineteenth-century urbanization encouraged an increasing number of Jewish families to move to the city from the surrounding rural areas. By 1862, Lublin proper was 45% Jewish (Kopciowski 2011).

The nineteenth century also brought a dismantling of some of the barriers to Jewish social mobility, access to professions, and freedom of residence. By the early twentieth century, Lublin was home to both orthodoxy and reform Judaism. Many Jewish Lubliners who had grown up attending public schools and speaking Polish were comfortable creating urban, secular—or at least assimilated—lives (Kopciowski 2011). However, this Jewish role in mainstream public life was resisted by non-Jewish Poles, whose politicians increasingly adopted anti-Semitic positions and tied Polishness to Catholicism during the interwar period (Blobaum 2005; Porter 2000). As William Hagen has put it, Polish anti-Semitism was “concrete and brutally face-to-face” (1996: 360).

Lublin’s interwar contradiction of Jewish and non-Jewish communities intermingling to a greater degree than in the past, on the one hand, and calls for a separation between the groups, on the other, was captured by the symbol of the Grodzka Gate. Although by the late nineteenth-century Jewish families were no longer required to live in the Jewish Quarter, this was where Jewish-owned businesses, educational and social institutions, and synagogues were mostly located, since that is where they had been originally founded. The road passing under the Gate was the only connecting avenue between the sectors. Both Christians and Jews—as well as the significant Orthodox and Uniate minorities—continually passed under the Gate’s archway to buy, sell, work, and socialize.

Grodzka Gate marked both division and the porousness of that division at the same time (Panas 2007).

In 1939 and 1940, Nazi occupation policies hardened the preexisting division. Jews were immediately divested of property, banned from shopping in non-Jewish stores and assigned to forced labor (Pohl 1993). In 1941, Nazis demarcated the Jewish Quarter as the Jewish ghetto, requiring almost all of Lublin's Jews to relocate there. Jewish individuals and families rounded up from small towns and rural areas outside of Lublin were also forced into the Lublin ghetto. Himmler ordered SS officer Odilo Globocnik to develop the concentration camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Majdanek in the vicinity of Lublin, as well as oversee all of the Lublin District; from 1941 through the end of the war, Lublin's Jews faced recurring selections and deportations to these camps (Musial 1999). The Lublin ghetto also functioned at times as a transit camp, a way station for Jews from elsewhere in Poland on the way to the camps (Marszalek 1995).

The forced labor system in this location meant that Jewish individuals were often on the move, being marched from ghetto to workplace and back (Rezler-Wasielewska and Grudzińska 2008). Individuals periodically escaped into the countryside or small villages, and the food was frequently smuggled in. Lublin's non-Jewish residents witnessed a range of Nazi brutalities, including mass killings in nearby forests (Kopciowski 2008). On March 16, 1942, Globocnik ordered the ghetto "liquidated," meaning to forcibly assemble all residents, seize their property, shoot the sick and vulnerable, and load any Jewish person who was not actively employed in forced labor onto trains to Belzec. The SS established a smaller ghetto, called Ghetto B or Majdan-Tatarski, for forced laborers, which was liquidated in 1943. These "liquidations" required extensive coordination, so the SS recruited non-Jewish Lubliners as well as the Jewish leadership for help; even so, they were shockingly brutal, chaotic, and not at all secret (Scheffler n.d.).

The destruction of the material culture of Jewish life was central to Nazi aims in Lublin. At liquidation, the intimidation and violence against people were accompanied by fires, explosions and the physical dismantling of the main buildings comprising Jewish public life. Nazis burned down the world renowned Maharszala Synagogue—the oldest building in Poland—along with most other Jewish institutions and homes (Radzik 2007) on the night of March 16, 1942.

In the immediate postwar period, Lublin's municipal authorities did not rebuild the Jewish Quarter. The site of the Maharszala Synagogue was paved over for a highway. These decisions fit in with the general downgrading of marking or memorializing Lublin's Jewish history during the Communist Party era. A small number of Lublin Jews returned to face anti-Semitism and violence committed by non-Jewish (Polish) Lubliners (Michlic-Cohen 2000). By the 1960s, only twenty years after the Nazis destroyed the Maharszala, it was almost as if Lublin had never had a Jewish population.

The memory activist organization Brama Grodzka emerged in the 1990s when a new openness in Polish culture allowed activists to initiate innovative projects involving public history. However, the post-1989 political environment also allowed for the reconstruction of a historical narrative that reinvigorated many of the tropes of prewar nationalists. In this narrative, Polish independence and sovereignty were best supported by an ethnically Polish (defined as Polish speaking and non-Jewish, non-Ukrainian, non-Lithuanian) and religiously Catholic citizenry (Zubrzycki 2006). This nationalist narrative positioned itself in opposition to Communist era policies, which it claimed had been nothing but an extended Soviet occupation. Although the Polish Communist authorities had indeed relied on forms of nationalism for legitimacy, the post-1989 narrative refused to recognize this (Zaremba 2001; Fleming 2010).

The enthusiasm for the freedom to celebrate national pride in this way left little room for a reintegration of Poland's Jewish past. It denied any participation by Catholic Poles in the marginalization, victimization, and killing of Jews (Engelking 2011; Tokarska-Bakir 2011). But religiously infused nationalism was not the only narrative in these years, of course. As Zubrzycki (2006) demonstrates, a "civic vision of the nation" hoping to contest the institutionalization of the Catholic Church in political life also emerged. This narrative avoided ethnic identity categories. This included issues Polish-Jewish relations. In addition to these articulations of Polish identity was a withdrawal from public associational life by many people in Poland (Bernhard 1996). This was surprising to outside observers because of the widespread grassroots support for the Solidarity movement in 1980 and again in 1988–1989. In Irwin-Zarecka's terminology, the memory of Poland's Jewish past had been "neutralized" for these Lubliners (1989).

The memory activism of Brama Grodzka was, thus, not simply a recovery of Jewish artifacts or the placement of plaques on missing

buildings. Brama Grodzka hoped to address the newly formed attachments of Polish Lubliners to the post-1989 nationalist historical narrative, as well as those who had become uninterested in the public sphere. The organization wanted to open up the possibility for a new version of the past in which Jewish life could be integrated. In doing so, however, the organization developed assumptions about what comprised an accurate interpretation of Lublin's history; what outcomes constituted a successful renegotiation of Polish identity; and how best to represent the pain—that is, the trauma—of the past. Given the complex history of Jewish Lublin, this last question was particularly complex. Which aspect of historic Jewish suffering captures Lublin's losses? Is the answer to this the same as the answer to the question of honoring Jewish sacrifice and pain? Should the losses of Lublin's non-Jewish, Catholic population be acknowledged also, and if so, how to represent Christian anti-Semitism in Lublin's history? If many of the Jews killed in the ghetto and nearby camps were brought in from elsewhere, are those deaths part of Lublin's history?

As will be detailed below, Brama Grodzka eventually addressed these issues through what might be called the modes of rupture and mourning. Its goals were neither recovery of a lost past nor reconciliation between Poles and Jews. Brama Grodzka activists sought to intervene in the apparently seamless dominant narrative of who a Polish person living in Lublin is and how she has come to be. Their practices provoked, first, an acknowledgment that the identity of "Lubliner" in the postcommunist period relied on the denial of Lublin's Jewish past or at least apathy to it. This assumption differs from the stance that Lublin is "missing" a Jewish element to its history and that this element needs to be recovered so that it can stand side-by-side with Catholic Polishness in the Lublin story, or that Catholic Lubliners should undertake reconciliation with past patterns of dehumanization. Second, Brama Grodzka used a representation of past trauma that required present day audiences to "witness" the past in an embodied practice, and then create space for grieving their losses.

Brama Grodzka did not address a Jewish past or a Jewish voice directly. It constructed a Polish identity that incorporated a series of moves: Polishness is partly comprised of a shared past with Jews, who were then violently excised not only from Lublin as a space, but from that Polishness. Moreover, this excision has itself been suppressed; speaking of it was taboo. In the words of activist Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, "How can one think of the history of the city without thinking of the

history of Jews? Our history is partially a Jewish history. To deny it is a lie” (Pietrasiewicz 2002). A prewar multicultural, multi-religious political community—albeit one threaded with conflict and ethnic hatred—had been replaced by first Nazi occupation, then Soviet domination, and since 1989 a triumphalist democratic pluralism that is nevertheless mono-ethnic. While Jewish absence is also an element of their events, Brama Grodzka created—they would say “retrieved”—a fractured Lublin and made explicit the implications for Polishness as an identity, which they read as constituting a violent loss. For Pietrasiewicz, Lublin’s Jewish past “has been taken from people’s minds.”

A challenge in using a concept of trauma in memory scholarship is that it often imprecisely distinguishes between direct experience of violence, recall of that violence, witnessing of that violence, and a person or social group facing an upheaval in self-understanding as a result of any of these. Critical trauma theory addresses this imprecision by calling attention to how the label, “traumatic,” functions in social relations. Perhaps most helpful in interpreting the work of Brama Grodzka is Peggy Phelan’s integration of critical trauma theory, identity, and performance (1993, 1997). Phelan argues that there is a quality of public performance that distinguishes it from other types of expression when it comes to identity. In her words, “something substantial can be made from the outline left after the body has disappeared” (1993: 3). What she means by this is that memory of a loss can be incorporated and marked in a theater performance because a performance disappears materially as soon as it is completed, while its meaning for us persists (1997). Performance itself enacts loss. As will be shown below, Brama Grodzka’s memory activism was, in part, the creation of an outline of Jewish Lublin while resisting the temptation to fill it with an idealized reconciliatory impulse.

Brama Grodzka originated as an arm of the local government’s arts programming office in 1990, a time when city governments in Poland were newly elected, open to new ideas, yet with few resources as the subsidies offered by the previous regime were abruptly cut off. It became first a theater, then expanded its activities beyond theater in 1998 (Pietrasiewicz 2002, 2008). It benefitted from increased tourism to the city, especially after the completion of the restoration of the Old Town. Publicity materials presented its programs as focused on a “restoration of Memory of the presently nonexistent Jewish Lublin.” The capitalization of the word, “memory,” (in Polish, *pamięć*) denoted the intention to privilege this concept, invest it with specific meaning, and set it

apart from other terms in the organization's materials. Brama Grodzka used a specific understanding of "Memory" which incorporated physical, embodied, performative practices; aspects of material urban culture specific to Lublin; and a commitment to creating a means by which non-Jewish citizens could enter and exit a remembering experience, that is, a pathway.

The restoration of the Grodzka Gate itself was the foundational event for the Brama Grodzka organization. The reassertion of the Gate's importance to Lublin (which had faded) was the first and most prominent action taken by the organization. The term "Brama Grodzka" means "The Grodzka Gate," the fourteenth-century archway over the main street connecting the former Jewish quarter with the rest of Lublin. Grodzka Gate is not simply an architectural feature but an extension of a supporting building that housed a small museum, staff offices, and performance space in 2000; next door was a café and theater. Prior to 1990, the archway building had been in a state of neglect and disrepair. The decision of the group to locate permanently in the Grodzka Gate was intentional and required the solicitation of resources to upgrade the facilities and restore the historical integrity of the building. As presented by Brama Grodzka in an early brochure (available from the author), the restoration became "an element of the revitalization and rescue of the materially degraded Old Town of Lublin."

The group used its location in the archway to materialize its identity as a space that, prior to 1939, was neither Jewish nor Christian and at the same time both Jewish and Christian. As discussed above, before the war, when a Lubliner passed under the archway she moved into the transitional zone between the two sections; the imperative to freeze into a single identity was suspended, albeit temporarily. This is not to say that one's identity was transcended or left behind. Instead, the period of passing through, marked by the architectural assertion of the archway, rendered what had passed for a taken-for-granted, naturalized division into something else: a Polishness *constructed* to be not Jewish, or a Jewishness constructed as non-Polish. Thus, the archway was not only a border between the two sections of the city; it enunciated the quality of having a border, inherent to identity itself.

The complex interplay of intimacy, interdependence, and suspicion between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles is well illustrated by Brama Grodzka's oral history project focused on non-Jewish Poles (Kubiszyn 2000). Told from a child's point of view, they incorporate wonder and

empathy. Speakers are Catholic Poles recalling the Jewish Quarter of Lublin of sixty-five years ago:

In these little workshops you could buy and sell everything. Tailors would almost re sew your shirt sleeve while it was still on your arm. Shoemakers could fix any shoe. To really fix your shoes you went to the shoemaker on Kalinowszczyzna Street. For him, no shoe existed that he could not repair. He patched, he resoled. If someone would not be able to leave his shoe, the shoemaker resoled it on the spot; if there was a hole in the shoe, he patched it. (Kubiszyn 2000)

I cannot forget the sodas. There, aside from fruit, in the afternoons were the most common items; I remember *świętojanski* rolls, candies, ice cream, cakes, every single one with a different taste, like the Mikado or the Stefan with a sugar glaze. The cakes cost on average 10 groszy. Whenever we came back from a walk, we went to the soda shop; each of us could choose our own cake; the counter girl then wrapped them up and tied them with a string, and at the end tied up a kind of little peg, so that it would be easier to carry the package between your fingers. (Kubiszyn 2000)

The details regarding the reputation of the shoemaker, the cost of the sweets, and the ease of carrying the packages seem to be adult concerns filtered through what a child heard at home. The focus on some details and not others, such as the tastes of the cakes, seems directly apprehended by a child. The *świętojanski* rolls mark a Catholic holiday, and it is not clear if the adult speaker has misremembered or if the Jewish shop baked these breads. Both excerpts capture differentiation, in the sense of strangeness and excitement in entering the Jewish Quarter. Yet they simultaneously communicate a resistance to differentiation, in terms of a focus on the qualities of pride on one's work, humor, need, and pleasure—shared elements of humankind. Other excerpts include stereotypes of Jewish merchants coexisting in the same narrative with an identification with those merchants. The oral histories mirror the contradictions of the Gate itself: connection and separation coexisting in one space.

In this context, one of Brama Grodzka's first performative strategies was the "Streetlight Project," which took place on the anniversary of the 1942 liquidation of the Jewish ghetto. The destruction of not only the people, but the buildings of the Jewish Quarter (of which the ghetto was a smaller part) transformed Lublin from Catholic-Jewish to "purely" Catholic. Grodzka Gate led to an area of the city—never rebuilt



and paved over—that was devoid of any specific historical character, that is, empty. In 2000, it was comprised of a parking lot, a multilane highway, some small businesses and a restored (non-Jewish) castle with a vast, empty lawn. This decision by the city reflected the overall reluctance by the Polish government to address the issue of Poland’s Jewish past, allotting scarce funds to Catholic and other non-Jewish projects. Yet gradually young people, in particular, began to realize that these “empty” places were somehow Jewish, according to Pietrasiewicz (Pietrasiewicz 2002).

Brama Grodzka chose not to pursue commemoration of either the Jewish Quarter or the Jewish ghetto, but instead developed a strategy to counter the post-1945 acceptance of Lublin as purely Catholic and unmarked by Jewish death. After negotiating with the Lublin utility company, they launched the “Streetlight Project,” in which each of the streetlights in the former Jewish Quarter was turned off for one hour on the evening of the anniversary of the ghetto liquidation (March 16). The lights in the rest of Lublin remained on as usual. The purpose of the extinguished lights was publicized throughout the city the month prior to the event in local newspaper and radio media. City residents were invited to stand on Lublin’s Old Town streets—on either side of the Grodzka Gate—with lit candles during the hour. The organization hoped to create an experience in which citizens were present with both the darkness and the light; one portion of Poland’s past had been extinguished while another had been rebuilt and renewed.

In interviews with the Brama Grodzka staff, it became clear that the act of extinguishing the lights had layered meanings in reference to the historical memory of Jewish Lublin: a light extinguished is a stark visual reference to a life extinguished; the multiple “deaths” of all of the streetlights reenacted the liquidation of the ghetto; the subsequent palpable darkness in part of the city emphasized the significance of the loss for Christian Lublin as well as for Jews; the streetlights themselves are everyday elements of urban life, repurposed temporarily to signify light that is extinguished; and the history of the ghetto was reinscribed in the city itself not as an erasure, but as a plunge into darkness—a loss that people are invited to grieve. All city residents were treated as potential spectators and each could choose the extent of his or her individual participation, including participation that was private and undocumented.

A more ambitious event, “The Presence of Absence,” manifested publicly the loss of Lublin’s Jewish community. In 2001, Brama Grodzka

organized a community project in which city residents—mostly high school students—each mailed a letter to an individual who had lived in the Jewish Quarter, using the individuals' prewar addresses. Each participant listed his or her own return address on the envelope. Since the physical homes at the addresses listed had been destroyed during the Nazi occupation, the Lublin post office processed each letter as "undeliverable," its standard procedure when a residence cannot be located. Stamped or handwritten on each letter by the post office was the phrase "addressee no longer exists" or "addressee does not exist," usually over the original address. Thus, returned to each letter writer was a material artifact of both a presence and an absence. Layered over an original text acknowledging an individual's historical existence was another text authoritatively negating the continued relevance of that historical existence. Both realities co-existed; each could be physically observed through the letter gaps of the writing and stamping.

Taken together, the hundreds of letters comprise a twofold expression of the "presence of absence." First, each letter writer individualized and concretized a general and abstract historical phenomenon, the murder of Lublin's Jewish families, by addressing a distinct letter. A letter with an address is a familiar and conventional mode of connection that presumes not only a recipient, but a communication, an intention, a specific place. A letter arrives not only in the hands of a reader, but at the reader's home. The address on each letter repopulated the current area of the former Jewish Quarter with not only people but the physical places where people lived. When all of the letters were brought together (at a gathering), they invoked the notion of a community living a collective life in materialized buildings that had been a substantial part of Lublin.

At the same time, the post office stamp across the addressee's residence transformed each letter into a material expression of the present-day impulse to negate the Jewish community's historical presence in Lublin. Throughout the city, a number of buildings that played significant roles in Jewish life are marked with plaques, and most residents were aware that Jews had once lived in Lublin. However, cultural anti-Semitism, a sense of unease with the historical facts of the Polish role in the annihilation of the Jews, and the long-term taboo on discussing Jewish Lublin, limited the possibilities that a shared understanding of the actual depth of the Jewish presence could emerge. Taken collectively, the letters with post office stamps asserting the addressee's "non-existence" were a re-narration of this resistance to the acknowledgment of Jewish Lublin.

The final instance of memory activism to be detailed here was “One World—Two Temples.” Staff researched Jewish families who had once lived in Lublin but escaped death, either by leaving Poland before 1942, hiding with Christians or passing as non-Jewish. The organization invited family members or their descendants to Lublin for a ceremony honoring Jewish Lublin. Also invited were family members and descendants of Christians who had harbored Jews during World War II. Other invitees included Catholic clergy, Jewish community activists, and regular residents of Lublin. Prior to the date, the event was publicized in radio and local newspaper outlets.

The program involved 1500 active participants and an uncounted number of spectators (Boniecki 2001; Jozefczuk and Praczyk 2000). On the evening of the ceremony, Brama Grodzka staff organized participants into two parallel corridors of people, facing each other, beginning at the former “site” of the main synagogue in the Jewish section (the railing of a highway). Participants formed a double line through the (unmarked) former Jewish section, under the Grodzka Gate archway and ended at one of the oldest Catholic churches in Lublin, which was undergoing the beginnings of restoration and whose foundations only were visible. Each alternating individual represented Jewish Lublin, either because he or she was Jewish or because his or her family had played a role in Lublin’s Jewish history.

Each person read from a text he or she had prepared that expressed Lublin’s personal significance to the reader. Readers alternated between those at the beginning of the line near the synagogue and those at the church, with readings gradually moving toward the midpoint. Microphones and speakers allowed the readings to be heard by participants and by residents of Lublin who were spectators. The first individual at the synagogue site held a container with soil from the site. The soil was passed from person to person as individuals read their texts. The second container of soil from the Catholic Church’s restoration site was passed from the first individual at the Catholic Church. The soils were mixed together at the Grodzka Gate, the symbolic midway point between both places of worship; portions of the mixed soil were returned to the original sites in containers intended to grow vines.

“One World—Two Temples” illustrates the combination of scripted and unscripted elements in memory activism. The project was logistically ambitious and required coordination between invited participants, city officials, religious authorities, the media, and technicians. At the same

time, participants needed to come to their memory pathway voluntarily, and the readings were dictated only by the desires of each reader. Activists did not develop an articulated “lesson” that spectators should have come away with; spectators chose their own level of involvement, including joining the line if they wished. Residents of Lublin who may not have intended any level of participation could spontaneously and/or temporarily venture into the proceedings at various points (although not at all points—the scheduled speeches created more rigid roles of “speaker/listener”).

The project sought to alter the experience of Lublin for visitors and residents. For one evening, individuals committed to recovering Lublin’s Jewish identity occupied a large portion of the city’s public space. In addition to honoring the importance of the newly renovated church, the event recreated and honored the space of a nonmaterialized synagogue. Both church and synagogue were equally weighted components of the logistics of the event, even though one of these was purely imagined. Participants behaved as if a synagogue was present, and in doing so, reinscribed that section of Lublin with its existence. The Grodzka Gate was also reinscribed as a site where variously identified individuals, with variously strong or loose attachments to those identities, could safely interact. This is not to say that it became a site of ambiguity or indeterminacy. Rather, the event reinforced Brama Grodzka’s appropriation of the archway as a space that ruptures the image and lived reality of Lublin as purely Polish and purely Catholic. In “One World—Two Temples,” the equivalence of Catholicism with Polishness is disrupted and Catholicism must make way for an acknowledgment of a Poland containing a constitutive Jewish self.

In each of the initiatives presented above, non-Jewish Lubliners were invited to take up positions as mourners, in Phelan’s sense of marking a space of loss. Brama Grodzka carefully avoided engaging with any historical instances of Catholic, Polish victimization by the Nazi regime. Alternatively, it also avoided the temptation to organize its events around the life story of a single Jewish family, a process that many memory activists elsewhere engage in because it appears to create empathic identification with Jews (for a critique, see Trezise 2013). For Brama Grodzka, the only trauma that could possibly be approached ethically, by non-Jews, was the city’s. Lubliners physically witnessed the absence of the Maharszala, stood in its vacated space, in its “outline,” as Phelan would say. They held envelopes in their hands literally inscribed with precise

evidence of the annihilation of Jewish homes. They blinked in the dark, temporarily disoriented, when the streetlights momentarily reproduced the darkness of a vacated Jewish space.

The embodied, performative elements of Brama Grodzka's strategies demonstrate the creativity possible in the 2000–2002 period in post-communist Poland. However, these strategies—which were designed to contrast with solemn, silent, spatially fixed commemoration events—can break loose from their moorings and lose their sense of purpose. At the end of the “Two Temples” ceremony, participants and residents mixed together in a carnivalesque atmosphere; since the event took place on Lublin's city streets, there were no clear boundaries demarcating the participants from spectators, or indicating the spatial or temporal limits of the event. For some Jews I spoke with, the element of merriment marking the end of the event was inappropriate.

A carnivalesque engagement with a space marked by Jewish death may enable a response that is itself a refusal to engage with the brutal extremes, the more so since Judaism (like most religions) argues for a very specific set of behaviors on the ground of the dead. In other words, did Brama Grodzka produce the conditions for a dismissal of real mourning and real rapprochement, in exchange for a surface-level mourning that at least enacts a partial acknowledgment of pain? As Ruth Gruber (2002) has expertly observed, non-Jewish “virtual,” vicarious encounters with Jewishness in Central Europe is a common experience. The reality may be that trauma does not always remain tied to its moorings; affect and emotion are unpredictable players in memory performance.

In the mid-2000s, Brama Grodzka increased its profile as a cultural actor in Poland. It drew more attention and funding. The local government supported programming that targeted teachers in the school system. In 2011, its director won a prestigious cultural prize (“Nagroda” 2011); in 2014, the organization won a European-wide competition for its activities in creating a “vibrant memorial city.” As documented in its website and in media coverage (<http://teatrnn.pl>), Brama Grodzka expanded to become an established voice in Polish memory activism. Its growth speaks to its consistent commitment to intentional, carefully designed programs. But its institutionalization into Poland's cultural scene also speaks to the movement of Jewish memory issues into the cultural mainstream. In 2014, the central government unveiled Poland's Museum of the History of Polish Jews (after years of controversy and

budget shortfalls), centrally located in Warsaw and generously funded—an acknowledgment of the emergence of the Jewish experience as a crucial dimension of Polish history.

The case of Brama Grodzka suggests that since, as Peggy Phelan writes, “Performance’s only life is in the present,” performative strategies for memory work generate a different kinds of mourning: the creation of new identities that address loss not only as a wound, but as an invitation (1993: 146). In contrast to memorialization, historical recovery or dialogue, Brama Grodzka detached Polishness from its definition by narratives that placed a mono-ethnic and monocultural Polish essence at the center. This rupture created space for a new, more capacious understanding of “Polishness” represented as capable of including a history of “other,” non-idealized, intertwined experiences. It also created a pathway into engagement with history and public life for those who had no real attachment to any historical narrative.

Neither a resolution nor reconciliation, this Polishness included experiences of hostility as well as interdependence, compassion, and familiarity. Kaja Silverman (1983) offers us the concept of “rapprochement” to describe the acceptance of a tension that can never be resolved. In rapprochement, any goal of reconciliation is suspended. The uneasy co-existence of good and evil, compassion and indifference, is what we must live with.

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