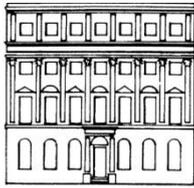


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Hanno Loewy:

*Diasporic Home or Homelessness: The Museum and the Circle of Lost and Found*

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**DIASPORIC HOME OR HOMELESSNESS:  
THE MUSEUM AND THE CIRCLE  
OF LOST AND FOUND**

HANNO LOEWY

Curatorial practice in Jewish museums has to deal with objects of ambiguous or doubtful provenance. This article is not concerned with the great scandals of looted art on which the public debate repeatedly focuses, with restitution politics, or the fairground of the Judaica market and the passion and greed of collectors. There are others to tell the stories of those known or unknown pieces of art and their journey from the homes of their former Jewish owners to the headlines of today. In this article, I would like to reflect instead upon the context of material memory, the trajectory of meanings, emotions, and affections attached to objects of everyday life—artefacts that mostly have no financial value but sometimes possess a charged, multi-layered, emotional significance. For those of us working in museums and displaying material culture in a discourse called ‘exhibition’ that engages our visitors at all levels of cognition and emotion, this ambiguous significance is a particular challenge. It is the source of the museum’s strength compared to other cultural agencies and it is its subject, because these stories and trajectories are the very issue of any critical evaluation of material culture. They are the abyss of the curators’ morale because whatever we do is an appropriation of our own narrative strategies that are only possible because of the misappropriation of these objects from their original context, that is, the life of their owners. And with regard to the specific subject of our work, this is also a story of violence. The examples that will be discussed in the following attempt to express these challenges, at least implicitly, while leaving the subject for readers to reflect upon themselves.

To begin with, the context of the museum as a social space will be addressed, in particular, cultural and social history museums of which Jewish museums tend to be articulate and emblematic representatives. The second part of this article will concentrate on a number of mini case studies, in which a few categories of objects that curators have to deal with will be developed. I will conclude by exploring some examples of curatorial practice, both in the Hohen-

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ems museum and in others that confront similar issues concerning contentious objects.

### *I The Museum as a Social Space*

The museum, and especially the cultural and social history museum, is a particular kind of social space that includes not only exhibitions and collections, but also a complex set of social rituals, such as the welcome and farewell at the counter, and of spatial hotspots, where visitors interact and communicate with each other and with the museum's staff. It includes the shop and the cafeteria, both locations of physical consumption and pleasure, of communication and business, and the creation of new memorabilia that the visitor takes out of the institution. As soon as visitors enter the exhibition space they step into a specific environment that differs from that in which other forms of contemplative art and artistic narrative, such as music or film, theatre or literature, are consumed. It finds spectators and readers (in most exhibitions except for traditional art exhibitions visitors are both) not in a state of day-dreaming or hypnosis but as alert and awake as possible. The experience of visitors is all about decision-making: they decide how they will move through space, the angle from which they will observe what is offered, and how they will comment on it, communicating with other visitors, both those in their company and complete strangers. The mode of the exhibition, either expressly articulated or merely in its material substance, thus constantly creates ambiguity that could also be termed a kind of liminality in real and virtual space. Some of these ambiguities will be explored in the article that follows.

#### *The Ambiguity of the Sacred and the Profane*

The museum makes objects that were produced to be used in the context of cult and religious practice profane by presenting them in the secular context of a historical narrative or aesthetic experience. With the secularization of monasteries and churches that started in the eighteenth century, religious artefacts and works of art that had served the narrative of Christianity in the context of worship and ritual were taken into civil custody, and were turned into either 'cul-

tural heritage' or representations of the idea of artistic genius. At the same time, this profanation of the sacred was part of the creation of a new myth, the myth of the nation. And while works of ritual art became part of cultural heritage, the same process endowed the most profane objects of everyday life with the sacred aura of national culture, which in itself represented a mythification. Beginning with institutions like the Louvre in Paris as a result of the French Revolution in 1793,<sup>1</sup> the nineteenth-century museum became a kind of secular temple of the new myth of national culture and local folklore.<sup>2</sup> This development reached the fabric of Jewish identity-making with some delay around 1900.

*The Ambiguity of Past and Presence*

The museum exploits the aura of the 'original', that is, the physical presence of a past time. It plays on the fact that the physical continuity of the objects it exhibits bridges the gap of chronological time. Visitors are able to touch, or at least view, the physical substance of the past, an object that was touched in the same way (at least, that is the illusion they often enjoy) by those before them. Simultaneously, however, the museum alienates the objects from their own timeframe by transferring them into a contemporary setting of mixed media installations and display cases, transforming them into relics of a vanished life and turning them into something they had never been.

*The Ambiguity of Master Narrative and Counter Narrative*

The museum presents the objects in an order that follows a narrative which the museum, that is, its team of curators, creates. As curators we tell stories, our exhibitions follow storylines, and we always send

<sup>1</sup> For the history of the Louvre with regard to the process of secularization see Gottfried Fliedl (ed.), *Die Erfindung des Museums: Anfänge der bürgerlichen Museums-idee in der Französischen Revolution* (Vienna, 1996); id., 'Die Pyramide des Louvre: Welt als Museum', in Moritz Csáky and Peter Stachel (eds.), *Die Verortung von Gedächtnis* (Vienna, 2001), 303–33, at 306–7.

<sup>2</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999), 133 ff. On the museum as a space for rituals of initiation for the citizens of the new civil society see Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals Inside Public Art Museums* (London, 1990).

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visitors on a path that we have already laid out with our ideas. We read the exhibition like a text, following a linear order. But that is not what visitors actually do. They have learned to make up their own stories, implementing their own readings, observations, and expectations into the process. They do not always follow the order prescribed by the curators, but decide on their own moves within the exhibition space, based on many different factors that curators can never control completely, such as the sheer attraction of different objects and their subjective hierarchy in the eyes of visitors, the way in which visitors move and the potential of communicating with them (whether they are part of a group, a family, a couple, or are unrelated). And what we learn from them is that this is a creative process.

### *The Ambiguity between Biography and History*

The objects that invite this contemplation on the part of visitors and inspire communication are attached to a particular biography. They are part of the way in which individuals interpret themselves, want to be seen, and want to be identified with. They are metaphors for belonging and separation. In short, they represent an attempt to construct identities, the material imprint of the self-imagination of other individuals (mostly long since passed away), examined by visitors to the museum. As exhibits, these objects are, in one way or another, taken away, taken out of context by the course of history, with or without consent, willingly or by force, transferred from being part of individual life into the realm of the collective creation of meaning. They are part of a process of dispossession that makes museums a matter of power, a contested territory.

For Jewish museums these ambiguities are especially challenging and sometimes productive. There is probably no institution that makes more sense of the term 'Jewish space'. Jewish museums represent a space that is not defined by Jewish tradition or a particular Jewish audience, but constitutes an arena of discourse about 'Jewish questions' conducted by Jews and non-Jews alike, a discourse that constitutes the 'Diaspora'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of the concept of 'Jewish space' see Diana Pinto, 'The Jewish Space in Europe', in Sandra H. Lustig and Ian Leveson (eds.), *Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry* (Oxford, 2006), 179–86.

Jewish museums came into being around 1900, reflecting the ongoing process of the transformation of Judaism from a traditional religious way of life into predominantly a question of identity that was connected with several contradictory factors, such as cultural expressions, family traditions and bonds, national reconstruction, and even utopian political dreams.<sup>4</sup> In the middle of this process of dissolving the fabric of traditional communities around the synagogues, beginning with rural communities, an urgent need emerged to find a new home for homeless objects and a site for the transformation of ritual objects into the subject of new rituals connected with the cultural temple of the museum. Unlike the kinds of national identity projects nineteenth-century cultural museums served all over Europe, the early Jewish museums in Vienna (1895), New York (1904), Prague (1906), Budapest (1909), Worms (1912), Berlin (1917), Frankfurt am Main (1922), Breslau (1927), and London (1932),<sup>5</sup> to name only a few, created a kind of discourse that aimed to save a particular tradition as a universal cultural heritage in order to make it part of the process of assimilating and integrating Jews into their new 'homelands'.<sup>6</sup> This was definitely not possible without creating a certain ambivalence between acculturation and nostalgia for a certain 'otherness', represented by the cultural artefacts.

Fifty years later, the same objects, so far as they still existed, seemed to be homeless in a much more radical way than the first founders of Jewish Museums (whether in Vienna, Vilnius, or New York) ever anticipated. With the unprecedented violence towards and extermination of European Jewry in the Shoah it was almost forgotten that

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the creation of Jewish museums around 1900 and later, see Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek and Wiebke Krohn, *Das erste Jüdische Museum* (Vienna, 2005); Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek (ed.), *Was übrig blieb: Das Museum jüdischer Altertümer in Frankfurt, 1922–1938* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988); ead., 'Eine Sammlung in Wien', in ead. (ed.), *Möcht' ich ein Österreicher sein: Judaica aus der Sammlung Eisenberger* (Vienna, 2000); Dirk Rupnow, *Täter – Gedächtnis – Opfer: Das 'Jüdische Zentralmuseum' in Prag 1942–1945* (Vienna, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Jens Hoppe, *Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur in Museen: Zur nichtjüdischen Museologie des Jüdischen in Deutschland* (Münster, 2002), 261 ff.

<sup>6</sup> This is emphasized for Vienna's Jewish Museum by Klaus Hödl, 'Jüdische Identität und Museum: Das Wiener jüdische Museum im 19. Jahrhundert', *transversal: Zeitschrift des Centrums für Jüdische Studien*, 3/1 (2002), special issue: *Sammeln und Präsentieren: Konzeptionen des Jüdischen*, 47–67.

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the traditional world we now seek to remember by contemplating its material heritage had already begun to change and dissolve long before. The Nazis did not only carry out exterminations; they also had their own ideas about preservation. They even created their own memory of the destruction of Jewish life in museums that celebrated the dispossession of Jewish material culture and its meaning as a triumph of the new 'chosen people' (the Germans), turning their obsession with Jews (that went far beyond anti-Semitism) into an obsession with collecting any trace of Jewish 'spiritual power'. The Nazis themselves thus created a highly ambiguous resource for any strategy of reappropriating this material culture after 1945.<sup>7</sup>

After the Shoah even the most minuscule trace of physical existence became precious and 'sacred' in the realms of another teleological perspective on history. Zionism, like other ideologies that dreamed of a historical turning point, aimed to put an end to diasporic Jewish history as we know it. From this perspective, the fragments of Jewish material life that survived the Shoah became relics of martyrdom, as a sacrifice of life meant the absolute end of the old Jewish world and the creation of a new one.

But the question once so rigidly answered by the most secular Zionist utopians only became more apparent: would Judaism as a religion be a matter of the past and the 'Sherit Hapleitah', the survivors in displaced persons camps, be magically transformed into the 'First of the First', the human resource on which the revival of a Jewish Nation in Israel would draw? Or would the 'Jewish state' take Judaism back to its own pagan roots by stepping behind the diasporic tradition of the prophets and resurrecting the old religion of the Temple? Or would the Jewish Diaspora finally re-emerge on the surface, with the museum as a kind of transitional field of preservation, experiment, and open discourse?

### *II Object, Trajectory, and Emotion: Case Studies*

The four case studies that will be discussed here illustrate the variety of ambiguous trajectories that curators come across in their work. All

<sup>7</sup> Dirk Rupnow, *Vernichten und Erinnern: Spuren nationalsozialistischer Gedächtnispolitik* (Göttingen, 2005). For the impact of this 'heritage' see also id., *Aporien des Gedenkens: Reflexionen über 'Holocaust' und Erinnerung* (Freiburg, 2006).

but the first are taken from curatorial practice in Hohenems, a little town on the Austrian–Swiss border, south of Lake Constance. For three centuries, beginning in 1617, a Jewish community lived there. Hohenems was once an imperial county and not part of Austria, making it the oldest continuously existing Jewish community inside Austria’s present-day borders. In the nineteenth century, about 600 Jews lived there, forming the centre of a network of Jewish marriage and business migration between southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. From there the incentive came to form Jewish communities in St Gallen, Innsbruck, and Merano. And for thirty years, from 1849 to 1878, the Jews in Hohenems formed their own political community, with their own mayor, in a market town with a growing textile industry, owned by Jewish entrepreneurs, and two main streets, Jews Lane and Christians Lane (probably the only street with that name in Europe).

From the end of the eighteenth century Jewish families from Hohenems migrated all over western Europe, to the USA and Turkey, and later to South America, Australia, and Palestine. After full legislative emancipation in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland in the 1860s, most of Hohenems’s Jewish families left for St Gallen, Zurich, Trieste, Merano, Vienna, Munich, Frankfurt, London, Florence, Rome, or Brussels. By 1938 there were just fifteen Jews left in the town. Long before the destruction of the community and the deportation of the last eight members still living in Hohenems in 1940, the Jews of Hohenems had created what is today still called, with some irony, the ‘Hohenems Diaspora’. In the 1970s gentiles in Hohenems, now a local community without Jews, started to entertain the idea of giving the memory of the once thriving Jewish community a home. There were, of course, very different motives for this initiative. From those who wanted to show the world that everything was better in Hohenems to those who had enough evidence for disillusionment, grounded in the obvious existence of anti-Semitism among the locals, from gentiles who longed for reconciliation to the descendants of Jewish families who wanted to reconnect with their past, a multilayered coalition brought a museum into being in 1991. Now this institution serves as a custodian or trustee of diverse and contradictory memories, stories, and artefacts that relate to Hohenems but clearly do not ‘belong’ there, constructed and contested narratives and artefacts that the museum does not possess but takes care of.

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a) Our first case study concerns not museums but everyday life, not only property and restitution, real estate, art, and bank accounts, but the little artefacts that we often do not pay attention to at all—a heritage also present in many regular ‘German families’. These stories are about how we create meaning, belonging, and identities. A friend who worked as a psychodrama therapist once described vividly how he made people re-enact their relationships with their family members, relatives, friends, and others by reflecting on objects in their immediate environment, and making these objects ‘speak’. A client of his was suffering from a serious inability to concentrate on her work. While she was exploring these problems another anxiety that occupied her came to the fore: she felt the danger that she might convey these paralysing feelings of being blocked and stunned to her daughter. While focusing on her environment during the psychodrama process, a little box on her desk appeared in her story. She related that she kept a gold ring in the box, one that she had received as gift from her mother and a strong symbol of family tradition. While working on that story, the client realized that she should know more about this ring. In the end—and the story is so emblematic that recounting it becomes almost kitschy—she knew more about her family and guessed much more that she did not know and that her therapist was unable to help her with. Only research in the archives allowed her to discover more. She found out that the ring was a present to her mother from her father, who had been abroad around 1942, working in the German Ghetto Administration somewhere in the Baltic provinces. The gold ring was a symbol of the new well-being of the couple—both from lower-class families—and of their own family that they had started just before the war. For my friend’s client, the gold ring at first appeared to be merely a kind of memento of her mother, something that she would naturally pass on to her own daughter at some point.

What would happen if she decided to interrupt this material trajectory of complicity? She could sell the ring on the market to get rid of the physical memory and to transform it into the universal and innocent currency of money, something that would help her to let the memory vanish into the realm of pure ideas, into something without any physical substance, not something to be passed on as a symbolic gift. Or she could ‘return’ the ring by handing it over to an agency of material restitution (for example, the Claims Conference or the

Stiftung Zurückgeben), knowing that those who would profit from this gesture would probably not be the original owners or their heirs, but members of some sort of Jewish collective body, whose definition depended on its political agenda. Or thirdly, she could make the story itself part of a public act of compensation and give it to an institution like a museum, leaving it to them, that is, to 'us', to deal with. Or she could decide to pass it on to her daughter after all, now with the full weight of the fragments of historical knowledge she had acquired, creating a different kind of complicity that left the decision of how to make use of that knowledge to her children. I never heard how the story of the ring ended, whatever the 'end' of this story could be, and how its owner finally decided to settle her relationship with it.

There are, no doubt, literally thousands of objects like this around. In the files of any Ghetto or Camp Administration hundreds of official requests for rings, watches, necklaces, or whatever can be found, mostly from German policemen, soldiers, and civil servants, explicitly asking for Jewish property, to name only one of the careers of such items. Some of these objects found their way into museums, others remained in the everyday use of their subsequent owners, however they might have come into their possession.

b) The second case study is even more complex, because it is not about loot but about lost and rediscovered identities, a trajectory of objects that makes them a kind of Marrano, Jews who hide their heritage and pass as 'non-Jews'. In 2006 I met an old woman in Brussels, whose grandmother had been the last owner of one of the industrialists' mansions in the former Jewish quarter of Hohenems, coincidentally, the mansion that now houses the town's Jewish Museum. The story concerns several taboos that are carefully shared and passed on from generation to generation. It is also the story of a particularly attractive artefact, at least from the perspective of an exhibition curator. When this woman was still a child living in Belgium, she visited her grandmother in Hohenems, who lived in the old, gloomy mansion with its garden. Her grandmother had inherited the mansion from her parents. She had married in Antwerp, and returned to Hohenems in 1906, when her husband, a failed businessman and gambler, lost his money and committed suicide. Their son had finished boarding school and entered military service in Belgium, married his non-Jewish girlfriend, and become the father of a little girl. In

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1936, when his mother had to pay off his gambling debts too, in order to prevent worse, she sold the mansion to a gentile physician in Hohenems and moved into a smaller apartment inside the same house. The aura of loss had thus been in the air before the Nazis took her to Vienna and then to Theresienstadt, her last journey.

For her granddaughter, the fascination of life in the villa as a child was summed up in a music box, resembling a large gramophone. When I met her in 2006, I was similarly fascinated with this masterpiece of home entertainment on display in her living room. A record on the turntable was waiting to perform 'Wiener Blut'. When she, and her father visited Hohenems again in about 1948, knowing that her grandmother would never return, they were given her grandmother's belongings, including the music box, which the gentile physician and his family had kept for her or her family throughout the war. But this trajectory of the objects is only one part of the story.

The woman I met was raised as a Christian, just as her children were raised as Christians. The Jewish part of the family that ended in the Holocaust is mixed with the bad luck of men who gambled and lost. Both the family's Jewish history and the memory of the bad luck of its men are passed over as a taboo. Nobody in the family talks about their Jewish heritage, yet everybody probably knows about it (as something not to mention). She carefully explained to us how ambivalent, even negative, she felt about the fact that the gloomy mansion of her childhood had become a museum and a public space, a place where the memory of her family (for fifty years the most successful Jewish family in Hohenems) had become a public issue. Yet when asked for an interview for a media installation in the museum, she told the whole story of her family, openly and at length, unhesitatingly accepting that the video would be used in public for the exhibition. But as a curator asking to borrow the music box for the exhibition, I ran up against a wall. The music box still had a life to live and a task to fulfil; it had to transfer the ambiguous tune of 'Wiener Blut' from generation to generation. The time to begin a new life in the museum had not yet come for this music box.

c) The third case is more humorous, even if it is humour on the edge of an abyss. Just a few months ago the son of the last cantor of Hohenems, Harry Weil jun. from Albuquerque, New Mexico, sent us a box in which we found his father's last *Lederhosen* (leather trousers)

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(see Ill. 1). Harry Weil sen. was apparently quite a character. A passionate mountaineer who made his living selling insurance, he served his Jewish community as a cantor when the Hohenems community was already too small to host a regular service and was about to dissolve in the 1920s and 1930s. Weil founded workers' choirs and swing bands in the Vorarlberg region, married a Catholic, became a Communist and then a Trotskyite, fled to Switzerland in 1938 while his brother was killed in Dachau, and emigrated to Chicago in 1939. After the war he fought in vain for restitution as the Hohenems municipality considered that he had 'voluntarily' gone to Switzerland. Weil started a business importing Austrian cheese to the USA, which allowed him to stay in touch with the friends he still had in Hohenems and Vorarlberg. He returned there on a number of occasions on *Heimatreisen* (home journeys) and, finally, in 1970 for his funeral at the Jewish cemetery of Hohenems. To complete this complex image, he returned in an urn, although in principle cremation is strictly prohibited for Jews. Nothing is taboo in this family, but their stories are too numerous to be told here. In the meantime, Harry Weil jun. has received a ring of honour from the Hohenems municipality, awarded in a humble, somewhat inappropriate, but heartfelt cere-



Illustration 1. *Lederhosen*. By courtesy of Jewish Museum Hohenems.

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mony. He returned to his family on the ranch in Albuquerque, only to stop by for a beer or two the following year.

So for this family, as for others, passing an object on to the museum is part of a controversial and ironic discourse of living a self-conscious diasporic life, using the museum as a kind of ironic focus of their own 'Hohenems Diaspora', as they put it, a Diaspora that functions through an osmotic family network, creating meaningful history with a twist, or rather, many twists. This, paradoxically, corresponds to a growing awareness of the way in which local people in Hohenems treat *their* memories of the Jewish presence. Harry Weil sen.'s *Lederhosen* found their way into our permanent display, along with the watch that Harry Weil kept after the First World War, engraved in memory of his service as a Tyrolean *Kaiserjäger*, fighting for Austria in the Dolomites.

d) The fourth object—two small brass stars, two centimetres wide—is the least spectacular and is also connected to the story of Harry Weil jun. in a way (see Ill. 2). In 2010, while working on an exhibition project entitled 'A Certain Jewish Something', we sent letters to local people and friends abroad, asking for 'their' Jewish 'something'. Without explaining who we were reaching out to in par-



Illustration 2. Brass stars. By courtesy of Jewish Museum Hohenems.

ticular, Jews and non-Jews alike, or what exactly we meant by 'a certain Jewish something', we asked people to go to Hohenems on a certain day in October 2010 and bring along the artefact of their choice and a text telling its story. They would be photographed with it, we explained, and recorded for a radio programme. Parts of this particular exhibition format, developed by Swiss writer and journalist Katarina Holländer, had already been successfully realized in Zurich, Augsburg, Frankfurt, and Munich, when we sent out our call. Many brought along their 'Jewish something' on that date. All the objects and their owners came from Hohenems itself, from the region between Zurich and Innsbruck, but also from as far afield as Rotterdam, Hamburg, Prague, and Frankfurt.

Horst, a man from Hohenems, brought along the little stars and their story. As a child (and a friend of the young Harry Weil jun.), he used to play around the old synagogue while living in the Rabbi's house (under the same roof as the Weil family until 1938), when the synagogue was looted by the Nazis. Everything inside vanished at that time. Ritual objects were melted down 'for the war effort', the Tora scrolls were taken away, the textiles destroyed, the furniture and decorations thrown out into the streets. The stars that Horst took away before they went missing were the only remnant of what had been inside the synagogue. For him they were two small stars (five points, not to be misunderstood), a small innocent piece of loot, a memento for himself. He kept them for a long time as a talisman, a lucky charm, and a memory of the world he had marvelled at when he was 6 years old. He kept the stars even when, much later, he became a member of the Board of the Jewish Museum. He never told anyone. The meaning of these objects definitely changed for him over time. What did they mean to him over the last twenty years, when the museum was in existence? Did he hesitate to give them back because he was shy about having 'robbed' them? Did he hesitate because he felt that he wanted to control his story himself and not pass it on into other hands?

### *III The Hidden Thread in the Jewish Museum?*

When I started working on this article, I reviewed everything relating to the subject in our new permanent exhibition and found that, in

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a way, the whole exhibition follows a thread that repeatedly asks a question about loss and recovery. It starts with a simple question in the staircase on the way up to the exhibition floors, asked by the daughter of an old Jewish family of innkeepers, born in 1897. In the 1980s the old woman from Hohenems still lived close to the Austrian border, in a small Swiss town called Widnau, where she had moved from Hohenems with her husband in 1936. When the museum's team went to interview her in 1987, she was wise and witty. She asked back: 'What do you want to create a Jewish museum in Vorarlberg with? People will have to bring stuff in the dark.' ('Mit was kann man in Vorarlberg ein jüdisches Museum einrichten? Da müssen die Leute ja im Dunkeln das Zeug bringen.') Even in old age, Jenny Landauer attentively observed what was going on in Vorarlberg, so close to her home. And she was still wondering where all the possessions from Jewish homes and the synagogue had disappeared to fifty years before.

From Jenny Landauer's quotation on the staircase, the thread goes up into the building's attic, now hosting the part of the permanent exhibition that presents the time between 1938 and today, explicitly addressing the subject of looting and trust. On their way through the museum, visitors come across all kind of allusions to the questions of who owns the material heritage, how it was lost, and how it was sometimes recovered. One example is the long list of objects looted from the synagogue, disguised as a formal protocol signed by the mayor and the chairman of the Jewish community, listing the Tora scrolls (26), Tora binders (440), Tora curtains, Crowns, Rimmonim, and even the bronze bust of Salomon Sulzer from the synagogue's staircase. Visitors also find the paper wrapping from a package that Jewish refugees cautiously deposited with a Bregenz innkeeper before they illegally made their way over the border into Switzerland. On the wrapping paper they had written: 'for officer Gr.', that is, Paul Grüninger, a Swiss police officer who in 1938 helped hundreds of refugees to get into Switzerland and to obtain papers enabling them to stay. He had also personally smuggled their belongings through the border controls on both sides until he was fired by the Swiss authorities and the last package, waiting for him in Bregenz, was confiscated by the Gestapo. The objects in the package were carefully listed on a document that was found, along with the wrapping of the package, in the Vorarlberg State Archives when this

exhibition was being researched. But the objects themselves are long gone, having found their way in the Nazi system of looting. What remained was the wrapping and the list of valuables. Ironically, these two things, at least, were kept almost exactly where they had once been left for the courageous police officer who never came back. The State Archive today is housed in a narrow street opposite the old inn, the Gasthaus Zehbäck, whose clientele around 1938 included outlaws of all kind, political resisters, smugglers, and prostitutes.

Some of the thousand or so Displaced Persons, survivors who went to live in Hohenems and Bregenz after the war and established an Orthodox community there, also turned to smuggling. Their stories of border-crossing businesses side-stepping the rules are too numerous to tell here. They also tried to encourage locals from Hohenems to cooperate in individual acts of restitution. Like Harry Weil sen., who lived in Bregenz some of the time after the war, they published appeals for the return of ritual and other objects that they needed for their own use in the synagogue. They promised confidentiality and anonymity. But apart from one Tora mantle that appeared in the dark of the morning in front of a house one day and some Menorahs for private use which were offered in exchange for hard currency, nothing turned up. Saul Hutterer, a Bobov Orthodox who headed the DP community until 1950, kept such a Menorah sold by someone in Hohenems for the rest of his life in Antwerp. It was a cheap little piece but obviously meant a great deal to him right up to the time of his death just two years ago.

The Hohenems exhibition ends with a puzzle, a display case filled with ritual silver objects from a synagogue along with a few less 'ritual' objects like a silver spoon and a pair of silver sugar tongs (see Ill. 3). The Tora crown and the Rimmonim are the kind of exhibits more traditionally oriented visitors desperately look for in the exhibition but do not find until they reach the last display case. In 2005 the local court in Bregenz informed us that they had found a cardboard box filled with dirty old silver objects in the evidence vault, the room where old exhibits (as they are also called in the language of the court) are kept. A professional valuer, probably a jeweller, had written on the box in 1955: 'Worthless (probably Jewish) church decoration.'

The court files have long since been thrown away, the valuer has disappeared from the scene, and there is no evidence in the archives



Illustration 3. Silver objects. By courtesy of Jewish Museum Hohenems.

or the newspapers of the time that would help us to identify the provenance of these objects. The hallmarks in the silver made it possible to identify when and where the objects were crafted. This trace led to the east, to the Ukraine, Poland, and Russia. But how did they get to Bregenz? The curators cannot give the visitors more than questions. Did a Nazi bring them back on his return from 'duties' in the east and try to sell them after the war? Did a refugee from 1938 leave this package in Bregenz? Did the objects belong to a Jewish DP after 1945 who was trying to smuggle them into Switzerland? Or did a non-Jewish DP from the Ukraine try to sell them in Vorarlberg? The story of lost and found remains open, and when visitors walk down the staircase of the museum and again see the witty old woman's remarks about bringing along stuff in the dark, different answers to this question have emerged into the light.<sup>8</sup>

Even more provokingly, the Jewish Museum in Vienna sent visitors to the 2005 exhibition *Jetzt ist er böse, der Tennenbaum* (Now he is angry, this Tennenbaum) off with a game to play. The playful exhi-

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the Jewish Museum Hohenems's permanent exhibition see Hanno Loewy (ed.), *Home Diaspora: The Jewish Museum Hohenems* (Hohenems, 2008).

bition about Austria's way of dealing with the past after the war was full of games the visitors were asked to participate in. It ended with a kind of memory box, a giant version of a letter case full of worthless memorabilia. The label said: 'These knick-knacks were bought at the local flea market without checking their provenance. Feel free to take one with you as a souvenir.' The museum had to refill the box from time to time as the visitors felt free to enjoy the game.

On a more serious note, the core of the first permanent exhibition in Vienna, opened in 1995 and curated by Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, asked who the material heritage belongs to, and whether it is possible to reconstruct the history of the Viennese Jews after 1945 through the substance of its own materiality. It did not present the objects themselves, nor did it construct a narrative that framed their presence in a traditional way. By making the fragmented traces of the past the subject of a holographic installation it relied on the illusion of three-dimensional images projected into a virtual space that only existed for the spectator. Twenty-one large glass panels formed a rectangle inside the exhibition space that people could enter in order to decipher the holograms. The technical nature of these holographic images meant that the image was incorporated into the foil between two glass plates in an endless multitude of repetitions that, only in the eyes of the visitor, formed a three-dimensional, haptic illusion, representing a desire to grasp the past and a desperate inability to do so. The images themselves were a carefully composed still life of artefacts brought together from different archives and museums all over the world, representing certain aspects of Jewish life, culture, and history in provocative and allusive combinations.<sup>9</sup>

While in Germany artists, scholars, and the public were engaged in a debate about negative memorials such as those created by Jochen

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the Viennese holograms see Reesa Greenberg, 'The Jewish Museum, Vienna: A Holographic Paradigm for History and the Holocaust', in Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (eds.), *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Ind., 2003), 235–50; Robin Ostow, 'Longing and Belonging—Home and Exile: The Jewish Museum in Vienna. An Anti-Heimat Museum? Or a Heimat Museum with an Accent?', in Klaus Hödl (ed.), *Der 'virtuelle Jude': Konstruktionen des Jüdischen* (Innsbruck, 2005), 71–82; Matti Bunzl, 'Of Holograms and Storage Areas: Modernity and Postmodernity at Vienna's Jewish Museum', *Cultural Anthropology*, 18/4 (2004), 435–68.

## Articles

and Esther Gerz, Horst Hoheisel, and Micha Ullman in Hamburg, Berlin, Saarbrücken, and Kassel,<sup>10</sup> a comparable discussion about the memory of the Holocaust in public space never took place in Austria. Instead, the Jewish Museum and its holograms became the focus of a permanent reflection of the possibility, ambiguity, and discomfort of exposing Jewish culture and history in a museum, forming a highly productive space of discourse.

The holograms are gone and this is not the place to discuss why and how that happened. But the questions they raised are still valid, even if the answers differ from those formulated fifteen years ago. Perhaps today they would relate more to our projections into the future than only into the past, to how our state of global migration is creating diasporas, and to identities in competition. The fact is that we are still collecting fragments and *Lumpen* (tatters), like the *Lumpensammler*, the collector Walter Benjamin imagined as his role model.

<sup>10</sup> For the discussion of 'negative memorials' see James Young, *The Art of Memory* (Munich, 1994), the catalogue of the exhibition James Young curated for the Jewish Museum New York.

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