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German-Jewish Urban Experience in the Third Reich

Space and Persecution in Diaries from Breslau

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Phenomenology of German-Jewish Urban Experience

This article aims to investigate the textual representation of National Socialist city space and everyday urban experience in German–Jewish autobiographical writing. Everyday history is always grounded in the local context of living conditions and therefore it is bound per se to specific places (see Zukin, Kasinitz and Chen). Similarly, from a geocritical perspective, Bertrand Westphal emphasizes that any analysis of space in literature should “maintain a geocentric focus, with a variety of texts gathered around a single place” (Westphal qtd. in Prieto 22). The representation of a singular city space must therefore be scrutinized within a corpus that addresses a specific geopolitical urban space.

As a case study, this contribution focuses on the urban space of Breslau as represented in the German–Jewish diaries of Willy Cohn (*Kein Recht, nirgends. Tagebuch vom Untergang des Breslauer Judentums, 1933–1941*) and Walter Tausk (*Breslauer Tagebuch 1933–1940*). Home to the third largest Jewish community in the German Reich (after Berlin and Frankfurt am Main), Breslau became Polish Wrocław after 1945. The history of the Silesian capital during National Socialism has not attracted major scientific interest for several decades, in spite of prominent German–Jewish intellectuals such as Fritz Stern, Walter Laqueur or Ignatz Bubis having resided in Breslau and having described its city life in varying degrees of detail in their autobiographies. In Cohn’s and Tausk’s diaries, the textual representation of Breslau’s urban

space is not merely a passive surface onto which anti-Semitism in the city is mapped, nor is it simply a negative constraint (see Cole 29). Quite to the contrary, Jewish autobiographical writing engages with multiple locations in Breslau that are redolent of public and private history and the memories these places evoke. Willy Cohn's and Walter Tausk's diaries are replete with lengthy descriptions of walks, detailed portrayals of city life and pre-1933 recollections of it. After that date, it becomes clear that Jewish Breslauers grow increasingly isolated. This contribution offers a counterpoint to the view, often found in literary studies on the city, that city life as a notion remains associated with relatively general conceptions of dynamism, diversity and density, even though public life in cities is not evenly distributed across the various urban spaces. It is concentrated in a variety of smaller locations that are connected in a number of ways. The aim of this article is thus to focus on the diaristic representation those smaller locations, those "heterotopias"¹, in particular the library, synagogue and cemetery, which, in their interconnectedness, constitute Jewish urban life in Breslau under National Socialism.

With few exceptions,² literary representations of Breslau under National Socialism have not reflected the current state of research on the city under the Nazi regime, nor have they tapped into new source material or adopted a new research perspective. Indeed, Breslau is "terra incognita for modern German and German-Jewish history", as Till van Rahden (17) has put it. In order to do justice to the interaction between the textual representation of Breslau under National Socialism and the city's historical relevance as an important centre of Jewish life in Germany, the spatial impact of anti-Semitism in the city will be situated in relation to the spatial self-orientation of the subject in autobiographical writing by Breslau's Jewish residents. In

¹ In this contribution, we follow Rachel Collins' definition of the "heterotopia" as a "space ordered by social conventions distinct from those that order everyday spaces" (140). A heterotopia thus offers temporary resistance against spatial domination by reigning powers.

² The historical research by Norbert Conrads, Manfred Hettling and Andreas Reinke, Till van Rahden and Leszek Ziątkowski, focusing mainly on the 19th century – and specifically that of Abraham Ascher and, more recently, Katharina Friedla, with their emphasis on Breslau during the Third Reich – has to be mentioned here.

research on autobiography, as Frédéric Regard emphasizes, the “poetic spacing of the self” (90) – the geographical foundation of the autobiographical “I” – has largely been disregarded, although life stories are always defined by geography (ibid. 95). In a similar vein, Edward Soja contends that autobiographical writing is highly relevant to socio-geographical research in that it comprises “milieux, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought and action” (114). The meaning of these “milieux” and “locales” to the self-understanding and self-construction of the autobiographical authors is at the core of this contribution.³ The geographies of everyday practice and social performance provide a useful point of entry for exploring this question. They draw attention to the day-to-day practices, stories, scripts, performances, and improvisations through which writing about Jewish life calls the urban setting “into being as they make it relevant for their own lives, strategies, and projects” (Rose 457) in ways reminiscent of de Certeau’s assertions about everyday practice, when he writes about people individualising different objects and places to make them their own.

Judaism in Breslau

The Jewish presence in Breslau has a long history stretching back to the 12th century. In the 19th century, the two major synagogues were built (*Storchsynagoge* (1827–1828); the *Neue Synagoge* was inaugurated in 1872) and Breslau became known nationwide when the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* was founded in 1854. In 1925, the city’s population totalled 573,660 inhabitants, among them 23,200 Jews. Until the First World War, as Till van Rahden (242) has it, the Silesian capital was characterized by “mutual recognition” between Jewish and non-Jewish Breslauers:

³ The representation of Breslau’s urban spatiality in Jewish autobiographical writing during the Third Reich has been the object of previous research in Sepp and Augustyns. For more historical information concerning the politicization and organization of Nazi urban space, see Süß and Thießen.

Even if relations between Jews and other Breslauers prior to the First World War cannot be described as a harmonious symbiosis, they were close and marked by a large degree of mutual recognition. Only as a consequence of the First World War, Germany's defeat, and the postwar crisis did relations between Jews and other Breslauers deteriorate dramatically.

Christian–Jewish marriages were not exceptional (see e.g. Wolff 186) and a significant number of Jews held prominent positions in the economic (corn and textile trades) and cultural (press, university, theatre) life of the city (Schoeps 81). Before 1933, Breslau, much more so than Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, was known for its religious liberalism and, according to Hein-Kircher (202), it had “an important cultural bridge-building function.” With Adolf Hitler's ascension to power, however, the situation of the Jewish population deteriorated dramatically: Jewish stores were boycotted, Jews were banned from public and cultural life, non-Jewish partners in *Mischehen* (mixed marriages) were forced to divorce their Jewish partners. Eventually, in 1941, the deportations began: during the first transports, both Willy Cohn and Walter Tausk were deported to Lithuania. The last transport to Auschwitz left Breslau on 5 March 1943. After 1945, there were only 160 Breslau Jews who had survived.

The diaries of Willy Cohn and Walter Tausk bear witness to everyday Jewish life under the Nazi regime and lay bare the tension between spatial subordination and the tactical re-appropriation of lost space in Breslau. Cohn is considered the most important chronicler of Jewish life in Breslau, comparable only to Victor Klemperer, who is known for his representation of daily life under National Socialism in Dresden. Cohn was born on 12 December 1888, in the so-called *Dreikaiserjahr*, and was both a historian and a teacher. He completed his thesis entitled *Geschichte der normannisch-sizilischen Flotte*, to which he informally owed his surname “Normannen-Cohn” (Cohn x). Together with his second wife, Gertrud – called Trudi in his diaries – he raised five children. He was able to save three of them from occupied Germany by sending them to France, Erez Israel, and Denmark. In November

1941, the two youngest were sent to Kaunas in Lithuania together with their parents, where they were all murdered.

Apart from the diaries of Cohn, which constitute an important source of daily life in Breslau, the notes of Walter Tausk – a merchant and a converted Buddhist, born two years after Cohn, in April 1890 – are highly insightful of the workings of Nazi spatial politics in Breslau. With Hitler’s coming to power, the two men increasingly express their alienation from Nazi Germany. After 1933, Willy Cohn stresses time and again how he feels estranged as a German Jew in his native Breslau. In a diary note dated 27 September 1936, the historian expresses his inner detachment from the city⁴:

It is said that the *Führer* also comes to Breslau. On such days, we Jews avoid the festive road, not out of fear, but above all to preserve the obvious distance. It hardly touches us inside. In the past I was interested in everything related to the progress of the home province; that has changed now; you only have the feeling that you are a guest!⁵ (27 September 1936, p. 359)

Cohn was born and raised in Breslau. On multiple occasions in his diaries, he expresses his love to his native city. In the quote above from September 1936, however, he states that he merely feels like a “guest” in his own city. This sense of otherness in Breslau becomes increasingly vocal in response to the *völkisch* ideology and the Nazis’ anti-Semitic policy. Similarly, shortly before Christmas 1938, the diarist expresses how he no longer seems to belong to the social fabric of the city, how he feels like an outsider in his own *Heimat*: “I went to the city! [...] In the inner city, I feel like a stranger. There are people everywhere, who are buying the last things for Christmas. We don’t belong there anymore!” (Cohn, 22 December 1938, p. 571) Cohn records that he moves from being a citizen to a guest and then, to his distress, to a stranger. The diaries show that for the National Socialists, eliminating Breslau’s

⁴ For more examples see for instance: Cohn, 9 March 1933, p. 18; Tausk, 24 February 1933, p. 28.

⁵ The original quotes are in German; all translations are ours.

Jewishness meant not only physically removing Jewish bodies, but also renegotiating the place of public and private space in the city.

Jewish Urban Experience in the Third Reich

In recent decades, a number of architectural historians and geographers have deplored the lack of attention paid to the subject of Jewish spatial experience in the Holocaust, despite its inherently spatial nature (see e.g. van Pelt and Westfall; Charlesworth 464-469; Cole). To date this gap has not been filled: on the one hand, the focus in Holocaust Studies on the representation of German cities – mainly Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Munich – has been primarily on memorial city-scaping (e.g. the so-called *Stolpersteine* in German cities), musealization (e.g. the Jewish museum in Berlin), as well as transgenerational trauma and collective identity after 1990 – for example, Peter Eisenman’s *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* in Berlin city centre (see Ladd; Rosenfeld; Huyssen). On the other hand, research on the Jewish spatial experience under National Socialism is limited largely to analyses of displacement, ghettos, and concentration camps, mainly in Eastern Europe, as “*espaces concentrationnaires*” or “spaces of exception” (see Sofsky; Agamben; Neumann; Knowles et al.). In this context, the Ghetto of Warsaw is probably the best-known example.

However, in Germany, there was another, very specific situation: a “ghettoization without ghettos” (Kwiet). This means that German–Jewish segregation took place in the city itself: there was no physically separated ghetto. It is a phenomenon that Breslau resident Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who survived the Holocaust and wrote the autobiography *Ihr sollt die Wahrheit erben. Breslau – Auschwitz – Bergen Belsen*, underlines:

In Breslau, there was no such kind of ghetto, as we all know. But in one way or another, there was one, a “soft” ghetto. It didn’t take too much time to understand that we had all slowly gotten into isolation. (Lasker-Wallfisch qtd. in Hillauer)

The modes and forms of representing gradual spatial segregation in German metropolises between 1933 and 1945 have until recently not been the object of detailed analysis in literary studies, as Wildt and Kreutzmüller (7) have indicated:

Although a lot has been written about National Socialism, it is surprising how little the everyday history of the city has been investigated. [...] Our knowledge about the inner life of the German city in National Socialism and its own specific logic is very limited.

Against this background, we investigate how National Socialist urban space is represented in German–Jewish autobiographical literature. There are two important sides to this: on the one hand, the aim of a totalitarian regime is to completely abolish the boundary between public and private space. In order to achieve this ideological and spatial control, the distinction between public and private life has to be removed. Conversely, because Jews have to be segregated from the Nazi public space, this means German–Jewish community life has to be reduced cumulatively to the private sphere. As Guy Miron (132) has it:

The exclusion of Jews from German public spaces pushed them to turn to Jewish ones. [...] [T]he development of Jewish spaces met the needs both of Jews, who craved secure spaces, and of Nazis, who aspired to isolate Jews from the Aryan community.⁶

Miron also emphasizes how on certain official dates in the newly introduced Nazi calendar (e.g. 20 April, Hitler’s birthday) the completely politicized public sphere was closed off to Jews (124).⁷ This spatial exclusion echoes the situation of Jews during Christian holidays in the Middle Ages and was clearly documented by both Willy Cohn and Walter Tausk. Beginning in the late 1930s, the exclusion of Jews on Nazi holidays grew more extreme. On 3 December 1938, the “Day of German Solidarity”, and in a similar vein, Walter Tausk notes how the anti-

⁶ Correspondingly, Willy Cohn describes the spatial and ensuing social reduction of his life-world as a continuous process of “shrinking” (7 November 1938, p. 534).

⁷ In this context, Cohn records: “So today is the birthday of the Führer, and you can hear marching music and singing all the time. Lots of swastikas can be seen. [...] We are not going for a walk today.” (20 April 1939, p. 633)

Semitic spatial regulations make it clear that Germany as a *Kulturnation* – “the country of Gutenberg, Luther, Kant, Beethoven” – is sliding back into the dark Middle Ages:

Today is “Day of German Solidarity,” as you can see from the plant that was in our mailbox yesterday. The Jews therefore have house arrest from noon to eight o'clock, according to the decree and law of the beginning of the week, that is, they cannot leave their homes, “since they are uninvolved in German solidarity.” [...] Until then, abomination continues to abomination, this country of a Gutenberg, Luther, Kant, Beethoven, etc. sinks deeper and deeper into the Middle Ages. And it will now even introduce a curfew and regulation for Jews, where they do may not show themselves. Everything locally regulated. (3 December 1938, p. 206)

This image of the dark Middle Ages to refer to the precariousness of their own situation is used several times both by Cohn and Tausk⁸. Tausk remarks that everything is locally arranged, which refers to the fact that space is not a neutral dimension. Spatiality is not a given, not stable, and its functions go beyond that of a mere context, as John Randolph (225) expresses it: “space is itself not simply a container for human action, but also an artifact of human existence: not simply a ‘context’ for textual interpretations, but a mode of intellectual production deserving of interpretation in its own right.”

Spatial Tactics, Privacy and German–Jewish Diary Writing

After 1933, Willy Cohn experiences the ‘shrinking’ (e.g. 1 November 1938, p. 533) of the Jewish life-world as a result of the production of National Socialist space. On 16 March 1933, for instance, he relates how Jewish Breslauers are systematically removed from their professions and in that way discarded from public life, as was the case with Jewish judges and lawyers. Willy Cohn himself was suspended as a teacher on 18 June 1933. He not only remarks on the changes that have been thrust upon Jewish citizens since 1933 in general, but also on the countless changes brought about in the city of Breslau itself. On 21 March 1933, the day of

⁸ See e.g. also the following entries: Tausk, 17 March 1933, p. 41; Tausk, 1 May 1933, p. 70; Cohn, 8 September 1941, p. 978.

the so-called *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enabling Act), celebrated in Nazi Germany as “Potsdam Day” (see Miron 125), the Cohns choose not to go through Breslau’s inner city, a decision which deals a symbolic blow to their idea of their personal freedom of movement. They get a ride home by car instead: “I drove home with Ernstl, by doing so, one avoids the inner city! Today nationalism is boosted to the boiling point!” (21 March 1933, p. 21) Similarly, on 1 April 1933, Cohn decides to use public transport instead of walking through the inner city: “I have driven with the 26 to not go to the inner city” (1 April 1933, p. 24). A number of weeks later, the diarist summarizes his spatial experience of the inner city in the early days of the Third Reich as follows: “One does not like to go to the city anymore” (29 April 1933, p. 36).⁹ These altered modes of transportation that ensue can be understood as spatial compensation “tactics”, as defined by Michel de Certeau. In the following years, the daily lives of Jews grew increasingly secluded in an ever-expanding number of areas in Breslau. Another note, from 1935, shows how Willy Cohn developed the ‘tactic’ of avoiding the inner city as much as possible: the advertising billboards in the inner city of Breslau are covered with posters displaying the rabid anti-Semitic propaganda tabloid *Der Stürmer*. On the hate speech and crass provocation professed by *Der Stürmer* and its ubiquitous presence in the public sphere, the diarist notes: “Going onto the street is no pleasure either. The obnoxious articles of the *Stürmer* everywhere” (12 August 1935, p. 259). Michel de Certeau’s theory on strategies and tactics makes apparent how space is used and perceived by societal actors. While the Nazi regime wanted to obtain complete control over all aspects of public and private life, German Jews, for as long as they could, used specific tactics to counteract Nazi spatial segregation. These tactics are directly linked to the loci of Jewish exclusion and may be seen as practices of the ‘weak’

⁹ Although the diarist recognizes, on the one hand, that he needs the library for his research, on the other hand, he would like to leave Breslau, which has become an overtly anti-Semitic city: “I would like to avoid the manifold complications of the big city, although of course such a relocation in a spiritual relationship is not so easy, especially the question of library use!” (Cohn, 25 July 1933, p. 63)

to cope with spatial limits imposed by the ‘powerful’ and to preserve or recreate their lived space.

Indeed, in the mid-1930s, a way to re-create temporarily the spatial experience of the bourgeois travel culture recorded in the autobiographical texts was to travel beyond the borders of Germany (see Cohn, 25 November 1934, p. 183).¹⁰ Driving through small towns and rural areas exposes the Cohns repeatedly to the powerful Nazification of public space. In time, however, these journeys become impossible and the city streets serve merely as corridors that link Jewish closed spaces. In spite of the fact that in Breslau there are no formal physical boundaries, it becomes clear that public urban space is increasingly to be avoided by Jewish Breslauers. Indeed, for them, the city *volens nolens* has become a no-go zone, because – as reported by both writers – most of the Jewish victims choose not to go through the inner city anymore, but look instead for detours, for alternative routes, involving, for instance, alleys or specific neighbourhoods.

The city centre was also the locus where totalitarian power was staged and performed.¹¹ Such public displays – intended to express collective fanaticism and enthusiasm – included omnipresent propaganda, the conspicuously dominant visibility of police and paramilitary forces, and frequent mass gatherings accompanied by torch marches and military music. In Breslau, one such mass event is staged during the visit of Adolf Hitler in March 1936, when the Jewish citizens of Breslau are not allowed to leave their houses nor to open their windows. Walter Tausk notes how on this occasion the spatial politics of National Socialism brings to

¹⁰ As a personal counter-measure against the increasing control and lack of freedom in the city of Breslau, Cohn undertakes a series of journeys across Silesia in 1934 to give talks in other synagogues. This enables him to experience the openness and freedom of travel: “I live an odd life now, I spend much time on trains. I know every train station in Silesia, every waiting hall, every announcer. I feel at home everywhere!” (Cohn, 25 November 1934, p. 183).

¹¹ In this context, in early 1933, the diary writer describes the politicized urban realm in the following manner: “The image of the inner city has completely changed: from all the public buildings, you see the swastikas and flags. We see the most impossible figures as SA-men running with pistols, people who would never have become soldiers under normal circumstances” (Cohn, 9 March 1933, p. 18).

the fore “a pathological Jewish fear” (22 March 1936, p. 143). Before the event, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) had distributed guidelines for Breslauers on how to behave during Hitler’s visit. Tausk stresses how Jews no longer have *droit de cité* during Hitler’s visit¹²:

In all the houses along the way in question, SA sent notes to the landlords in the houses concerned about the behavior of the inhabitants during the passage. This is the most beautiful and most remarkable: Jews, Jewish lodgers in Aryan and Aryan subtenants in Jewish houses may not open the windows nor keep them open, otherwise the lock-up service will shoot inside. Jews may not appear on the street during this time, but if they are found anyway, they will be arrested immediately! (1936, p. 144)

The public space, as the authors record, is entirely taken over by flags, parades, and the massive presence of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, Hitlerjugend, and other Nazi organizations.¹³ As a consequence, Jews have no option but to encapsulate themselves and retreat from public urban life: “We live in our private being” (Cohn, 22 March 1936, p. 315). Because Jews are progressively excluded from public life, the diary functions as an intimate *Ersatzöffentlichkeit*, a substitute public space. In this regard, Walter Tausk notes the following on 8 August 1933: “It will soon be so far that one can only talk to oneself, and then a diary gains great value” (100). By writing this, he shows that the diary is a compensation space for the loss of previous communication places; replacing the conversations that they engaged in every day on the street. Moreover, one could say that keeping a diary is also a kind of tactic. On the one hand, writing is important as survival tactic: “It sometimes seems stupid that I also write the little things in this book, but often my strength to live and work depends on it” (Cohn, 28 May 1940, p. 800). On the other hand, the diarists oppose themselves to the anti-Semitic propaganda. National socialist propaganda submerges the public space as the triumph of an authoritarian, ideological and monological discourse. The diarist, for his part, conceives his writing as a triumph against

¹² See also Cohn, 23 March 1936, p. 315.

¹³ The “aestheticization” of political power in the public arena is confirmed by Willy Cohn. On this occasion, he records: “There is a lot of traffic on the streets today. S.A., H.J., B.d.M., Flags, Military commands” (22 March 1936, p. 315).

the tyranny. When the aim of the National socialists was to obscure what was really happening to the Jews, the diaries are written in a state of urgency to oppose to the National socialist's triumph:

At the end of this 20th diary I hope to be able to continue my notes, not for myself, but for posterity. The truth is unbelievably suppressed, [...] It is damn dark in 'New Germany', and yet, scattered here and there, is some light that, despite all the 'darkening from above', continues to glow, perhaps miserably, but it continues to glow and one day will form a bridge of light [...] here and there a flame continues to glow - and one of them is this diary as well. (Tausk, 21 January 1934, p. 123)

This entry clearly indicates that Walter Tausk considers his diary as an important medium against the delusional arguments and falsifying discourse of *völkisch* ideology. He is intimately convinced that the reality of persecution in Third Reich needs to be documented, archived and transmitted to the next generation. The exclusion from public life also pushes the Jews towards a re-orientation of their lives, which will become increasingly more introverted. The private home, which once functioned in the bourgeois class primarily as a space of consumption, now has to function as a space of action and creation. The diarist Willy Cohn, for example, uses private tactics in order to preserve remnants of his bourgeois habitus and continue to express his selfhood (see Miron 139): he takes up stamp collecting (see e.g. Cohn, 9 January 1940, p. 741),¹⁴ reorganizes his personal library (3 March 1939, p. 609) and starts writing his memoirs (27 March 1937, p. 384).

The persecution and discrimination led to a perceived need for a "spiritual counterweight" to redefine oneself and to return to Jewish traditions again, which in the past were often abandoned in favour of assimilation: "It is now a gloomy weather outside, but the more one pulls back on himself, develops his inner life. One has to catch up so much in his Jewish development that life will not suffice. - I wish only that more and more Jews in Germany

¹⁴ The stamp collecting shows how the private home has been invested with new activities against the backdrop of the increasing reduction in the Jews' freedom of circulation in the Third Reich: "I dealt with my stamps, the only thing that distracts me a little on critical days [...]" (Cohn, 11 November 1938, p. 538).

see, that one can find only a certain emotional counterweight” (19 November 1935, p. 299). The closed domestic space leads the diarist to turn his attention to his personal past. He writes “I have built myself a different world” (10 June 1935, p. 239). Indeed, these diary notes illustrate the extent to which the Jewish space has become ever more confined. The authors go to great lengths to narrate how they attempt – at least temporarily – to come to terms with their forced marginalization in Breslau’s urban context by using specific compensatory spatial tactics.

Jewish Heterotopias of Breslau

From 1933 onwards, the cemetery, the library, and the synagogue become very important in Willy Cohn’s and Walter Tausk’s Third Reich diaries. These places can be regarded as “heterotopias” (Foucault), as other spaces that play an increasingly central role as loci of spatial re-orientation. These loci are not only concrete physical places, but, more importantly for the purposes of this article, also give rise to manifold reflections on questions of identity, community, past, and future. The textual representation of these heterotopias indicates the subversive or contestatory role of these sites. They are closed marginal spaces, microcosms that actually exist but, most importantly, have a quasi-sacred role as the repositories of the fantasies of the persecuted Jewish authors. In this sense, heterotopias are a way of combining the material and metaphorical senses of space that contain an underlying literary quality as “the greatest reserve of the imagination” (Foucault 27); they also establish a deep and ambivalent relationship with the world at large and the sphere of utopia (24). Therefore, the heterotopia “indicates a fertile link to literary dreams of ‘other spaces’” (Thacker 23). The cemetery, library and synagogue are interconnected in that they constitute an archive of transgenerational German–Jewish experience. They are portrayed as the last safe havens for the Jewish community in Breslau. In these places, Jews attempted to use space as they did before. In what

follows, we will describe what characterizes them as specific heterotopias, i.e. places that offer temporary resistance against the spatial domination of the Nazi regime. The Jewish cemeteries are represented by Willy Cohn as the last spaces in which German Jews can conduct open-air activities, for instance allowing their children to play freely¹⁵ or engaging in leisure activities such as walks (see Borut 349; Bar-Levav 53-68). In August 1935, Willy Cohn writes in his diary:

I went for a walk with Trudi; we have been looking at the new quarter at the Kürassierstraße, where all streets have names of the navy. At the restaurant “Gartenschönheit” hangs a big banner “No Jews allowed”. In Germany, we will soon only be allowed at the cemetery! (19 August 1935, p. 263)

In this entry, the cemetery is represented as a space of escape and leisure. However, this is not its only function, since, more importantly, it prompts the persecuted Jewish victims to reflection and to reconsider their origins and their sense of belonging. For Willy Cohn, the graveyard indeed symbolizes a link to his personal family history, one firmly rooted in Breslau: “In order to avoid the whole business a bit, I went today to where the Jews are really desired, to the cemetery Lohestraße, to once again keep silent conversation with my father” (22 March 1936, p. 314).¹⁶ However, his regular walks to the Jewish cemeteries – the last place where Jews feel free from anti-Semitic hostility – prove exceedingly burdensome, especially after the November pogrom in 1938, because Jews do not have the right to sit down on the benches anymore. During this walk, he notices how the general demeanour among ordinary German

¹⁵ For Susanna Cohn, Willy and Gertrud Cohn’s little daughter born in 1932, lovingly called “Susannchen”, the cemetery is the only place still available for open-air play: “In the afternoon, I went to play with Susannchen at the cemetery Cosel; the children play on an unused part of the cemetery. That’s the only thing that’s left for us. To go onto the playground, the children have to cross the whole cemetery: Susannchen has been impressed!” (Cohn, 16 July 1941, pp. 955-956).

¹⁶ In her autobiography, *Ich blieb zurück. Erinnerungen an Breslau und Israel*, Karla Wolff, 10 years old in 1942, recalls how she went to the graveyard in the Lohestraße in Breslau with her school. For her, the graveyard represented a space of security and freedom, although the pupils were confronted with anti-Semitic violence against them on the way to their destination (cf. 65). In 1943, in a similar vein, Wolff recounts how the Jewish graveyard had become a site of peacefulness, an “island” far away from the “other community”, the Germans, and from Nazi threats (cf. 85).

Breslauers is overtly anti-Semitic.¹⁷ In this, Cohn notices an apparent curtailment of living space (12 November 1938, pp. 540–541). His observations culminate in describing this radically reduced space in Breslau as a house arrest, (13 November 1938, p. 541). Indeed, following the 1938 pogrom in Breslau, public life becomes increasingly *aryanized* and restricted.

Another heterotopical microcosm to be scrutinized is the library. The practice of reading constituted a key experience in fashioning bourgeois identity, and for this reason libraries served as a work space (Miron 146). In this respect, public libraries were very important places. After the Nazification of public urban space, as Guy Miron (130) notes, libraries begin to function as unpolitical closed spaces where the values of the liberal era – critical reflection, objective research, the humanist idea of selfhood – can still be upheld. The library therefore becomes an inward space where writing can preserve a sense of dignity and autonomy: “Everything blooms like a fairy-tale, but it is in a great contrast to how we feel inside. [...] I’ve done something about the Sicily work. Science brings me over many things” (Cohn, 7 May 1933, p. 41). Cohn realizes that the library represents a space to pursue his literary aspirations (15 September 1933, p. 131). Walter Tausk too uses the library to realize his literary and journalistic aspirations (Tausk, 8 August 1933, p. 100).

Until 1935, libraries functioned as inclusive neutral spaces where Jewish intellectuals could find some sort of refuge. From 1936 onwards, however, they were forbidden to use the reading rooms. In 1939, their use of public libraries became forbidden altogether (see Cohn, 5 June 1939, p. 652). It comes as a devastating blow to Cohn when he is not allowed to use the

¹⁷ Willy Cohn describes how overt enmity towards Jews in the open space becomes exacerbated only in the ensuing years. Fingers are pointed at adolescents especially for being malicious and blatantly anti-Semitic: “It stands out how terribly raw the tone of youth on the street is; the fathers lack” (Cohn, 31 March 1940, p. 775). Regarding their family friend, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a victim of verbal and physical aggression while walking through the city, Willy Cohn deplores how Germans have become hateful and agitated in a *völkisch* manner: “Anita Lasker came in the evening [...] She told me that she, she looks very Jewish, is often molested and spit on the street, it is such a beautiful girl! Wicked people!” (6 July 1940, p. 816)

library any longer: “Today there is a ban on the use of the city library by Jews in the newspaper. Since 1904 I have used it and worked in it always faithfully for the science. It is very difficult to live without the library” (15 January 1939, p. 586). Subsequently to that, in June 1939 (see 1 June 1939, p. 650), Cohn is offered – through informal contacts – the opportunity to conduct research about his “Germania Judaica” in the library and in archives of the Catholic church in Breslau while being allowed to borrow books. The library is viewed as one of the only places of intellectual autonomy: Its importance to Cohn is reflected in his diary: “I always miss something, when I cannot go there” (21 March 1941, p. 918). Until his deportation in late 1941, the Catholic church library serves as one of his last places of introspection (21 March 1941, p. 918). While Jews continue to be subjected frequently to both verbal and physical aggression in the streets (see e.g. 6 July 1940, p. 816; 15 July 1940, p. 818), in a note from 16 October 1940, Cohn records how the Catholic library has assumed the status of a refuge for him and his little daughter, Susanna:

This morning I was with Susannchen in the Diözesanarchiv, where the child was very spoiled, both by Mater Huberta and by Mater Innocentia as by the director Engelbert and the Archivist Walter. She also got a lot to read. (859)

A heterotopia offers the opportunity for temporary resistance to the spatial domination (see Heynen 319). In this respect, the library serves as an alternative, intellectual microcosm, a space isolated from the outside world. Cohn refers to the library as a “refuge”: “Sometimes I feel life now purely vegetative. Fortunately, I still have a refuge in the Dombibliothek” (Cohn, 8 November 1940, p. 867).

Just as is the case for the cemetery and the library, the synagogue equally functions as a space of escape and reflection. In September 1933, three months after Cohn is removed from office, he is on his way to the library and then the new synagogue in Breslau, when he notes: “From there I went to the New Synagogue; one feels the need to reflect on oneself more as on

other days” (9 September 1933, p. 75). Whereas the library symbolizes intellectual concentration (see Miron 132), the synagogue is a part of Jewish daily life as a locus of spiritual introspection that is linked to intergenerational Jewish memory: “I stood with Ruth at the old places we used to have, and I showed Ruth the places that my father showed me over thirty years ago. This is how generations come and go. I also would like to show it Susannchen at the same place” (Cohn, 24 June 1933, p. 55).

Cohn in particular shows how the Jewish compensatory loci of cemetery, library and synagogue offer a spatial counter-balance against the aestheticization and festivalization of Nazi public space (see Birdsall 65) through mass rallies and open-air ceremonies. To both Cohn and Tausk, those rallies and ceremonies represent “space without memory” and symbolize entry into a radically new era of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (see Ozouf 128-129). In contrast, Cohn’s and Tausk’s writings about their lives – despite the radical differences in their ideological and religious convictions and beliefs – highlight how the Jewish public spaces in Breslau symbolized internal reflection and a return to remembering the past, a common Jewish past.

Conclusion

Diaries are less to be seen as an act of subjective self-revelation than as a relationship to an Other, less as an act of subjective self-expression of the author than as the production and point of articulation of various discourses. The analysis of Willy Cohn’s and Walter Tausk’s diaries written during the 1930s and 1940s in Breslau shows how the representation of shrinking lived physical space in Breslau yielded parallel mental processes that forced the authors to reflect on how they regarded themselves, others, and everyday events that constituted history in the making. In their diaries, the textual representation of heterotopias such as the cemetery, the synagogue and the library serves as a discursive platform for discussing the spatial

consequences of National Socialist policy and ideology in Breslau. The three heterotopias discussed in this contribution are interrelated yet fulfill different functions: whereas the library stands for intellectual autonomy, the cemetery and the synagogue – two paradigmatically Jewish places – are more related to the religious foundations of German–Jewish collective identity. These heterotopias function simultaneously as literary motifs and collective symbols. As collective symbols, they are known to all members of the Jewish community and provide a repertoire of images with which reality and the self are constructed.

The formulation of a phenomenology of German–Jewish urban experience under National Socialism can shed light on novel spatial practices and identity constructions. The production of Nazi space and the marginalization and seclusion of Jewish Breslauers elicits a range of tactics born of their continual attempts to recreate their lived space. By drawing on the theoretical insights of social geography (Soja; Lefebvre), this article argues that the autobiographical writings of Cohn and Tausk highlight the way in which the production of space is shaped by a hegemonic power that proceeds from the top down in controlling the lives of those subordinate to it. In contrast, the approach of history-in-the-making illuminates the ways in which the diarists constructed their experiences from the bottom up, reporting a variety of tactics in their daily practices in an attempt to try to appropriate the margins of National Socialist society. Their diaries are testimonies of lives that otherwise would have been excluded from official historical records.

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