

# **Music, Sound, and Affect in Yiddish-language Holocaust Cinema: The Posttraumatic Community in Natan Gross's *Unzere kinder* (Poland, 1948)**

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## **Short Abstract (under 50 words)**

This article explores some of the makeshift musical strategies used in Natan Gross's Yiddish-language feature film *Unzere kinder* (Poland, 1948) to tell the stories of a group of Jewish children orphaned during the Holocaust. The article explores the notion of "posttraumatic" cinema through an analysis of the film's soundtrack.

## **Body Text**

[Starts on next page]

## Prolog

This article approaches the last twentieth-century fully Yiddish-language film feature, *Unzere kinder* (dir. Natan Gross, Poland 1948)<sup>1</sup> with a particular interest in its uses of sound and music. The film is interesting for many reasons, but for our purposes, as we shall see, it represents a unique and still very “raw” attempt to deal with the emotional aftermath of the Holocaust. Its use of music and musical performance in the context of post-atrocity survival is striking in that musical performance seems to stand here as both a possible therapeutic process and as a way of staging the authenticity of witnesses to the atrocities. It also works in the film as a way of reforming broken communities by emphasizing the socializing and commemorative outcomes of musicking.<sup>2</sup> The film is focused on the experiences of a group of child Holocaust survivors being cared for at the Helanówek orphanage just outside the city of Łódź in central Poland, and the orphanage functions as a kind of microcosm of traumatized Jewish communities all over Eastern Europe.

Studies of Holocaust cinema have tended, for the most part (with some notable exceptions), to focus on thematizations of the Holocaust in narrative fiction films.<sup>3</sup> What is interesting about *Unzere kinder*, in this regard, is that it is both one of the earliest fiction films responding to the atrocities, and it also stars child actors who themselves had had personal experience of the Holocaust, having stories of their own to tell (although, in the film, all dialogue is fully scripted by Natan Gross & Shaul Goskind). In this and many other senses, the film is thus a fiction film that makes claims to authenticity through its signaling of documentary film conventions. In what follows, I explore the film’s genre uncertainty, its open-ended, workshop-like approach to dealing with the emotional fallout of the Holocaust and its approach to the work of mourning. The article seeks to understand the relationship between three related lines of critical inquiry in the film: first, it seeks to understand the uses of sound and music in Gross’s film, in an attempt to understand some of the ways in which music (or musicking) is drawn on as a resource for its traumatized audience; second, it analyses the structure and function of affect in the film (theorizing some of the ways in which emotions are staged and worked through); finally, it asks how paying attention to sound, music and affect helps us to develop a theorization of what I am calling here the “posttraumatic community”.

## Listening to the Holocaust

Famously, when he saw the first newsreels depicting the horrific aftermaths of what later became known as the Holocaust (its name has remained deeply contentious),<sup>4</sup> Buchenwald survivor Jorge Semprún was made intensely aware of the emptiness of the silent cinematic medium, and argued

passionately for the need to “situate [the silent newsreel images] not only in a historical context but within a continuity of emotions”.<sup>5</sup> For Semprún the sonic deficit is also an affective (emotional) deficit: affect and sound are intimately connected here. Indeed, the silent cinematic mode of production seems to him not just deficient, but also as something that willfully intervenes in, breaks up and re-orders the experience:

Even though [the newsreel images] showed the naked obscenity, the physical deterioration, the grim destruction of death, the images, in fact, were silent. Not merely because they were filmed without live sound recording, which was standard practice at the time. They were silent, above all, because they said nothing precise about the reality they showed, because they delivered confused scraps of meaning...<sup>6</sup>

Semprún’s now famous statement from *Writing or Life* [*L’écriture ou la vie*] reminds us, as Alan Rosen has made clear,<sup>7</sup> that the visual stands for silence, and, we might add here, silence stands also for a question, a need or an urge to make meaning, to decipher:

What was really needed was commentary on the images, to decipher them.... And in order to remain as close as possible to the actual experience, this commentary would have had to be spoken by the survivors themselves: the ghosts who had returned from that long absence, the Lazaruses of that long death.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on sound as a crucial (and here missing) element of the representational machinery of the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath might simply be, in effect, an argument for literary convention, a convention in which sound is merely a metaphor or is interiorized for the reader, where “voice” can be given leave to emerge, as it were, in the written word. But I think this auditory fixation is more than merely metaphorical, and it is certainly not limited just to Semprún. A similar fixation is evident also in the work of David Boder whose recordings of interviews with survivors remain an invaluable resource for scholars of the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever also regularly underlines the importance of sound as in, for example, his short poem “A horde muzik”:

Ikh shpitz mayne oyren on tsu derhern  
a kol fun a khaver,  
a kol fun a khaver!  
Nokh vi mayn echo dertrogt zilk fun vaytn  
muzik fun velf  
in a blendiker halbrod.

[I prick my ears to hear  
the voice of a friend,  
the voice of a friend.  
But like my echo, carried from afar  
the music of wolves  
in a shimmering halfcircle]<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, then, this fixation on auditory culture is not an isolated phenomenon. For Boder, Sutzkever and Semprún, it seems, sound constitutes not merely a welcome addition to the representational machinery, but a kind of *authentication* that, to use Jean Luc Nancy's term, "enlarges" and gives the Holocaust "an amplitude, a density and a vibration".<sup>11</sup> Boder, indeed, keenly makes the case for survivors' voices in a general context in which survivor accounts tended to be largely discounted.<sup>12</sup> And Sutzkever is endlessly drawn to sketch out environmental sound, listening and the "music" of the forest throughout his early post-Holocaust works. Nonetheless, Boder, Sutzkever and Semprún, as well as song collectors like Shmerke Kaczerginski and H. Leivick, were not completely in tune with the mainstream attitudes to sound of their day: certainly, north American and Soviet ethnographic methods were no stranger to sound recording in the 1940s, but a deeply felt mistrust of first-person testimony and its consequent marginalization (in, for example, the Nuremberg Trials) makes Boder's radicalized turn to sound recording all the more remarkable. Indeed, the authenticity effect of sound recording had a particular intensity in this context.<sup>13</sup>

Responding to the challenge issued by Boder, Semprún, Sutzkever, Kaczerginski (and others) to attend to the role of sound in bearing witness to the Holocaust outlined above, this article explores the use of sound and music in Gross's film with a particular emphasis on its relationship with "emotion". The film is a productive case study in this context in that it stands both as the apotheosis of the long and rich Yiddish-language cinematic tradition, and as a testament to the complexities of film making in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. The film is responding, we might say, to the problem of posttraumatic comprehension. How, it asks, can we comprehend the manifold atrocities of the Holocaust when they seem available to us only when grasped piecemeal, synechdochically, in fragments, partial images, flashbacks, broken narratives? Indeed, as Joshua Hirsch has noted, "central to our understanding of the Holocaust as trauma is the fact of its having lain beyond the Western imaginative horizon" it is, we might say, in some sense "impossible".<sup>14</sup> A central question the film poses throughout is how victims should deal with this apparent "impossibility" and how we, in turn, should contribute to that project of making sense of the senseless. How, in other words, might we seek to represent or connect with the struggles of the victims to continue to live in the aftermath without denying it? In particular, the film focuses on the emotional worlds of the victims, and uses music to help cinema audiences connect with those worlds. Hence music stands as an affective *resource*, signposting the emotional turmoil of the children's posttraumatic predicament. As a result, musicking breaks constantly unto the narrative, interrupts storytelling, insists that we tarry in the *mise-en-scène*, and calls constantly, in an almost neo-Brechtian manner, for reflection on the action.

For Hirsch, then, the Holocaust exceeds the epistemological technologies that have been brought to bear on it. Rather than seeking to grasp the Holocaust in experimental *Fragmente*, to use the title of Benjamin Wilkomirski's highly controversial (and fraudulent) Holocaust "witness" novel, Hirsch proposes a theoretical orientation from which to encounter the Holocaust that he terms the "posttraumatic". This article takes Hirsch's theoretical framework for the posttraumatic as its starting point whilst also recognizing that his approach is not uncontroversial, allowing as it does for a questioning of the conventions of witnessing, narrating and thereby bringing the truth claims of Holocaust testimony and witnessing into a problematic relationship with the consideration of the stylistic norms of witnessing, testimony and other kinds of memory work. However, if we are to try to understand how the field of atrocity "arrives" to us, how it is that the Holocaust and other genocides or acts of mass violence enter our sphere of audition and vision, then Hirsch's approach is very promising. *Unzere kinder* stands in particular as an example of a troubled posttraumatic form, shot through with genre ambiguity, and a pervasive uncertainty about how to represent atrocity and, as mentioned above, how to help us to connect to the emotional worlds of the victims and their lives in the aftermath. Although Hirsch is dealing specifically with cinema (defined very broadly), his work has profound consequences for Holocaust Studies more generally in that, like several other key scholarly works on the Holocaust, it has sought to think the question as to how the "technologies" or culturally-constructed conventions of testimony and witness-bearing intervene in our construction of the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup> What, in other words, do these conventions omit? How do they shape, change, embellish or otherwise conventionalize Holocaust narratives? Most important for us here, then, is the question as to how these conventions, historically and technologically limited as they undoubtedly are, discipline auditory culture in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. And, beyond the question of their disciplining, how are cultures of musicking shaped by the early aftermath posttraumatic predicaments in which survivors found themselves? As we shall see, *Unzere kinder* explores these questions intently and quite openly, juxtaposing a number of strategies for dealing with difficult and disturbing memories, and does so with a particular focus on auditory culture.

### **Listening to *Unzere kinder***

It is clear from Semprún, Sutzkever and Boder's incitements to *listen* to the Holocaust that, for them, the auditory dimension constitutes a significant resource in doing posttraumatic memory work. Moreover, the absence of sound in the newsreels points for Semprún in particular to a missing experiential dimension, what I termed above the "sonic deficit" in representations of the Holocaust. In foregrounding musicking and the sung and spoken Yiddish word, *Unzere kinder*

demonstrates a startling and at times bewildering fixation on sound production, as if to fill that sonic deficit. In what follows I explore this rush to fill silence in the film's narrative structure by way of a brief synopsis, and explore some of the ways in which the narrative thematizes music and sound.

The film's soundtrack, curated by composer Shaul Berezowski (with much of the non-diegetic music composed by him) and assisted by sound technician Jan Barczak, is a patchwork of pre-existing melodies and songs, many of which are specifically attached to the Holocaust, such as "Zog nit keynmol", the famous partisan march, sung by the children for the two comedians at the orphanage, or the "Yugnt himn" sung during the credit sequence at the opening of the film. Berezowski assembles a fascinating leitmotif-like soundtrack that speaks to the initiated about the meaning of the action: fragments of well-known songs are interspersed with orchestrated music, switching rapidly between diegetic to non-diegetic uses throughout the film. The structure of the soundtrack, therefore, is consistently episodic. Perhaps one reason for this episodic (fragmentary) piecing of the soundtrack is that the film was made during a key moment in the early aftermath of the Holocaust when questions about the authenticity of representations of the (in English as yet unnamed) Holocaust begin to circulate among the survivors. The film struggles to find ways of negotiating the competing demands of posttraumatic narrative cinema and it is in this struggle, I argue below, that we find traces of the filmmakers' quite specific historical predicament, in the challenges they face in dealing with the pro-Soviet authorities in Poland, and in the numerous ways they tried to workshop representations of traumatic memories through musicking. Significantly, the film operates at the interstices of two genre conventions, recycling material from Gross's 1947 Holocaust film documentary *Mir lebn geblibene* ["We live on"], and openly inspired by Alexandr Ford's Yiddish-language film documentary *Mir kumen on* ["Here we are"] (Poland, 1938) about the Jewish children's Medem sanatorium near Warsaw. Hence, narrative fiction and the documentary urge are intertwined in *Unzere kinder* from its inception, and this mixing of genres points to a pervasive sense of openness in its relation to questions of authenticity.

### *Brief synopsis*

The film begins with the orphaned children and the directress of the orphanage (played by Nusia Gold) standing by a street billboard advertising a show to be given by the two well-known Yiddish comedians Shimen Dzigán and Yisroel Schumacher.<sup>16</sup> The children beg the directress to let them attend the performance and she gives in to their request on the condition that they stay "ruik" ["quiet"] during the performance, insisting emphatically "... ober ruik vos ruik *heyst*" ["and quiet means quiet"].<sup>17</sup> We then cut immediately to the children in the theatre, together in a box with the

directress struggling to get them to settle down. Once they are quiet, we watch (with the children, as proxy for their gaze) the two Yiddish comedians perform a sketch about the Nazi-occupied ghetto(s) in which they sing “Ikh benk nokh mayn mames maykholim” [“I long for my mother’s home cooking”] written for the film by the composer Shaul Berezowski (1908–1976) with words by Schumacher. The children are not impressed with the whimsical and sentimentalized portrayal of life in the ghetto and boo and jeer at the performance, bringing it to a premature close. They proceed to explain, during their “apology” to the performers in their dressing room afterwards, what it was really like to live in the ghetto, and perform a short rendition of the chants they used for begging for food coupons in the ghetto, “Oy di vone” [“Oh the coupon”]. This offers us a first glimpse of the film’s candid exploration of authenticity: by deliberately juxtaposing these two scenes, the film sets up the whole reason for the comedians’ visit to the orphanage; they are conflicted about how to respond to the children’s devastating realism, but agree to go to visit the orphanage the next day to learn more about the children’s experiences. The film thus unfolds as a journey of discovery for the two comedians, and they stand as our guides in the “hoysz fun koshmarn” [“house of nightmares”] in which the children live.

*Figure 1: The children chant “Oy di vone” in the comedians’ dressing room*

That next day, the comedians take a train as far as they can on the way to the orphanage and then continue on foot, discussing their anxieties about what they will find and argue about the “material” they will be able to mine for their reworked ghetto sketch. After resting to nurse their sore feet, the comedians encounter a Jewish farmer who tells them (with a clear nod to the demands of Polish communist state propaganda) that there are many Jewish farmers there, all having been given land, livestock and tools after they were freed from the camps by the Red Army. The farmer offers to give them a lift in his cart to the orphanage. The comedians arrive as the children are playing football and they are all eventually ushered into the main building of the orphanage. There they are met with a meal and the children sing Hirsh Glik’s famous “Partizaner marsh” or partisan march “Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg” [“Never say you are on the final road”].<sup>18</sup>

After speeches of welcome from the directress, and the presentation of gifts of flowers, Schumacher addresses the children directly, telling them that he and his partner are there to “learn from them”. He then asks them to perform something for them; the children dutifully deliver a short series of staged choreographed numbers to the great amusement of the other children. Once everyone has settled down, the comedians address the children again, this time introducing their

own performance of Sholem Aleichem's *Kasrilevke brent* based on a story of a town gripped by inaction as their town burns to the ground (discussed in detail in the next section below).

Figure 2: Dzigal and Schumacher's performance of *Kasrilevke brent*

After their spectacularly virtuosic performances, the comedians ask the children if they have seen any real fires ["un ver fun aykh hot gezen an emese sreyfe"]; they are overwhelmed with volunteers, all shouting that they have, especially when the Germans burned the Warsaw ghetto. One child states coolly "Ikh hob gezen a fayer, ober es iz nit geven kayn vaser. Men hot nit gelozn." ["I saw a fire. But there wasn't any water. They didn't let us"]; when asked "wu hostu gezen dos fayer", [where did you see the fire], the child answers clearly and defiantly "In Varshe, ven es hot gebrent dos geto" [In Warsaw, when the ghetto burnt]. In an attempt to understand the children's numerous stories, the comedians suggest a competition in which the children each act out their experiences, but the directress cuts them short and sends the children off to bed. Once they are all safely in bed, Schumacher sings Joseph P. Katz's pre-war song "Tsvey vayshe toybn" ["Two white doves"] sending the directress (Nusia Goldman) to her room, distressed by the memory of her own "doves" lost in the war; she hears their voices as auditory fragments whilst the strains of the song continue on the soundtrack; we then cut to two women in the kitchen emotively discussing the murder of children in the Holocaust. Finally, that night, the two comedians get lost in the large orphanage. They press their ears to the doors children's rooms, and overhear them telling each other their harrowing stories of loss and survival. This is one of the most disturbing sequences in the film where each child shares her or his trauma in a series of flashbacks in which the atrocities are only implied, never fully shown (I deal more with this below).<sup>19</sup> Finally, next morning, the children engage in raucous mimicry of the comedians' *Kasrilevke brent* performance in the playground, as if to underline the futility of trying to visit the house of trauma: the comedians' attempts at entertaining the children become material for ridicule and mockery (in a kind of perverse mirror image of the comedians' desire to collect "material" for their ghetto sketch form the children).

### **Eavesdropping on/in *Unzere kinder***

The film's narrative, then, is structured around the encounter between two communities: the children's community of posttraumatic survivors (what in Yiddish was called the *sheyres hapleyte* or "living remnant") and the "outside" community largely (although not completely) untouched by atrocity that can only ever briefly visit the posttraumatic community, never really getting to the full

emotional and ethical turmoil of the first community's world. To a certain extent, then, the film is an act of translation. It is interesting, in this context, that the film employs some (but not all) Polish-speaking Jewish child actors from the orphanage at Helenówek (near Łódź) who had to learn their lines in Yiddish, and all of whom were themselves survivors of the Holocaust, thus making more complex the relationship between Yiddish, testimony and authenticity. Through the musical performances, theatrical vignettes and *mise-en-scènes* described above, the children and the comedians come to occupy a kind of middle ground in which first-person testimony and 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-person witness bearing reach a fragile rapprochement. In essence, then, the film frames itself as an exploration of posttraumatic affect, and works as a workshop for trying out different imaginations and representations of the Holocaust, thereby trying to come to terms with an array of competing affective responses to it. It is sound and music in particular that effect these explorations, and the film represents a unique and remarkable contribution to our understanding of early aftermath attempts at repairing traumatized communities through the use of music. One of the key theoretical problems that attends any reading of Gross's film, then, is how to make sense of the relation among musicking, listening, and witnessing in this posttraumatic context: how, that is, do the various competing ways of representing memory and trauma *through sound and music* make claims to evidentiary and affective authenticity? Who is listening and to whom are we, by proxy, really listening?

Since the film was never shown in Poland and therefore had no definitive release there<sup>20</sup> (it was released in a slightly different version in Israel in 1951, without much success and withdrawn shortly thereafter), it is difficult to ascertain what the "definitive" version of the film might have been. The film's contestation of affect is set up in the very first few minutes before the action even starts. The voiceover of the opening on the commercially available DVD (which is based on the nitrate print with French subtitles found in 1979), for example, seems emotionally divorced from the rest of the movie, and its rather labored declamation, voiced by Yiddish actor Binem Heller, "Dos iz der dor vos hot zikh bafrayt fun nekhtens koshmar" ["this is the generation that freed itself from yesterday's nightmare"], cuts abruptly into what looks like it might have been the originally intended opening of the film, with a long shot of the children and the orphanage directress riding through the Polish countryside in an open carriage drawn by a horse.<sup>21</sup> The music for these two prolog sections raises interesting questions about the film's design. The initial "serious" declamation, using film fragments from Gross's documentary *Mir lebn geblibene*, is accompanied by Shaul Berezowski's arrangement of Bayse Ruben's song "Yugnt himn" ["Youth hymn"] written in 1942 (lyrics by Shmerke Kaczerginski). Kaczerginski included this song in his 1947 collection of ghetto songs *Dos gezang fun vilner geto* [*The Song of Vilnius Ghetto*] which evidences

from the start the film's intimate relationship with the documentary urge of what in Yiddish was termed *zamlar-kultur* or the culture of collecting.<sup>22</sup> The abrupt edit to a 2-minute long shot of the children in a carriage accompanied by Berezowski's cheerful march-like song "Zing mit undz" as if untouched by the horrors of the *khurbn eyrope* (Yiddish-language term for the Holocaust). The sequence ends as the children (and the camera with them) disappear into a tunnel and the camera fades from the darkness of the tunnel to a scene leading us into the heart of the sunny city of Łódź, teeming with life, just before the first spoken scene with the children and the directress standing by the street billboard advertisement for the comedians' show. The mismatch of these first two prolog sequences (the labored heroic tone of the historical narrative and the light, sunny ride into town) points to the key thematic of the film – its querying not just of the relation between bearing witness and living after trauma, but also of the mismatch of the two affective orders: "survival" as an abstract and ethical imperative (as a kind of heroic narrative) and survival in the vernacular complexities and joys of the everyday. This incommensurateness jars not just because the editing of the film poorly manages the transition (again this points to the makeshift nature of the commercially available copy) but also because the two worlds spring from two radically different cinematic conventions: a "hymn" (a famous and canonic song from the Holocaust, drawn explicitly from documentary conventions of the time) and the cheerful folk march (quotidian survival, making use of narrative cinema conventions). What also differentiates the two sequences (putting aside for the moment the fact that the first march is in the minor and the second in the major key), is their radically different imaginations of Yiddish vernacular traditions. The first makes references the musical vernacular only in the abstract, in a somber orchestrated arrangement – the unrelenting march meter and the fulsome orchestration (rising trumpet figures announce the opening of the sequence) and the uniform tone of the children's choir point to a certain studied composure: this is "serious"; we must take heed; this is a music that speaks of "truth"; it is *didactic*. The second, picking up on the upward dotted anacrusis of the first, transforms that rhythmic cell into a polka- (or *zniefach-*) like rhythm. This song is less homogenous in texture: the voices here are both young and adult, together in a more variegated vocal texture, emphasizing a more collective or dialogic tone, and the song references well-known Ashkenazy folk dance forms such as the *kolomeike*, *terkish*, *shkotshe* or perhaps even a fast *freylekb*. In its explicit engagement of vernacular musics, with which the film's composer Berezowski was intimately familiar, this sequence opens up a set of affiliational systems that are designed to pluralize, to open out the cinematic fabric to myriad everyday voices.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 2: "Yugnt himn" from Kaczerginski's *Dos gezang fun vilner geto*

Ira Konigsberg reads *Unzere kinder* as querying the relationship between art (that is, artifice, fiction, narrating) and reality. Indeed, he reads the rather lumpy swinging between performative moment (such as the comedians' stunning performance of *Kraslinske brent* based on a short story by Yiddish-language author Sholem Aleichem) and testimonial/confessional moments in the film (such as that moment towards the end of the film when the children tell their disturbing stories to each other at night in their dormitory) as pointing precisely to a kind of structural impasse in the film.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to imagine any context in which questions as to the truth-effects of narrative are not in play to a certain extent in posttraumatic cinemas of this nature. I do not mean this as a kind of constitutive "doubt" in testimony, or as a simple undermining of its "truth", but it does raise the question as to what it would mean to think rigorously about the "messages" of testimony as always-already embedded in their own material specificities, in literary, verbal, symbolic conventions, always beholden, that is, to the operation of patterns of constructing, saying, thinking that precede the event and its telling, and, especially in *Unzere kinder*, its *performance*. In this sense at least, the distinction Konigsberg draws between performance and testimony in this film, whilst persuasive to a certain extent, might also be critiqued as "naïve" to use a term that Konigsberg uses himself. What is particularly complex in this film (and indeed in much narrative cinema that deals with the Holocaust), is the tension that is played out not between performance and testimony per se, but between competing ethical demands made on narrative: on the one hand, the film is drawn to the need to "tell" the children's stories (the site, for Konigsberg, of the children's "authenticity") and, on the other, to the need to deliver the children, as proxies for all members of the *shayres hapleyte* ["living remnant"], from the "hoysz fun koshmarn" [the "house of nightmares"]. In other words, the tension played out here is not just between artifice and the "real", but between a number of radically different kinds of *authenticity effect*. Indeed, the film's complex and quite self-conscious layering of different narrative conventions (comedic drama, music hall, cabaret song, dance, no-nonsense aping of rituals of begging, testimonial, confession, screen memories and the involuntary return of auditory fragments) points to something quite specific about the film's historical location: by no means would it have been clear, I suggest, which narrative modality would have been appropriate for dealing with the enormity of the Holocaust: that uncertainty is constitutive.

The doubled opening sequence described above (with its hymn/march dichotomy) underlines this constitutive uncertainty. The sequence of "performative" and testimonial moments that weave their way through the film help eloquently demonstrate this uncertainty:

1. Dzigan and Shumacher's Ghetto mawkish minor key song "Ikh benk nokh mayn mames maykholm" ["I long for my mother's home cooking"], heckled loudly by the children in the theatre;
2. Children's apology in the comedians' dressing room and their whimsical, but chillingly realistic performance of their "real" begging cries in the ghetto in "Oy di vone" ["O food coupon"];
3. After the comedians' long walk to the orphanage across the fields in the summer sun, the welcoming performances by the children at the orphanage;
4. Dzigan and Shumacher's extraordinary performance of *Kasrilevke brent* ["Kasrilevske is burning"] a dramatised version of Yiddish author Sholem-Aleichem's short story "Kasrilevker sreyfes" ["Kasrilevske's fires"] (1901-10);<sup>25</sup>
5. Shumacher's performance of the song "Tsvey vayse toybn" ["Two white doves"] and the directress's withdrawal to her room, hearing her lost children's voices as auditory fragments;
6. Two kitchen hands emotively discussing the murder of children;
7. The two comedians overhearing the children's harrowing stories in a series of flashbacks in which atrocities are implied, never fully shown (the perpetrators invariably represented as faceless *acousmétres* or "beings in sound", to use Michel Chion's nomenclature).<sup>26</sup>
8. The children's mimicry of the comedians' *Kasrilevke brent* performance in the playground.

Each episode is, at least from the perspective of its narrative logic, unique – each draws on a quite particular narrative/performative modality and there is no uniform tone or narrative logic here, only loosely stitched together fragments. Sentimentality ("Tsvey vayse toybn") jostles with spectacle (*Kasrilevske brent*), whimsy ("Mame's maykholm") with life-and-death subsistence ("Oy di vone"), professional (canonic) theatrical practice (*Kasrilevke brent*) with amateur enthusiasm (the children's numerous performances, especially of "Zog nit keynmol"); and the film slips between different auditory technologies for representing the Holocaust, using auditory fragments as markers of the characters' interior world, flashbacks, theatrical stagings and second hand testimony, all as ways of getting to the impossible enormity of telling.

The performance of *Kasrilevke brent* by the two comedians is particularly interesting in this regard. As noted above, it is a dramatized version of a famous section of the Sholem-Aleichem collection of short stories *Dos naye kasrilevker*, completed in 1901, with music written by Berezowski. The section of the story on which the performance is based is entitled "Kasrilevker sreyfes" [Kasrilevke fires] in which several buildings go up in flames in the town of Kasrilevke and the people of the town bemoan the catastrophe and the fact that no one is properly equipped to,

or indeed willing to, help put out the fire. The comic effect of the original is based precisely around the relationship between “kvetshing” (complaining) and buck passing, between the loud and deliberate identification of fault and the absence of any remedy:

“vaser! vaser!” shreyen di vos rateven fun der sreyste, “gikher! gikher! trogt aher di eymer! dos vaser!”

“vosere eymer? voser vaser?” entferen zey di lesher “ir zet dokh, az s’iz nisht keyn tropen vaser!”

“vos heyst, es iz nisht keyn vaser?”

“nisht keyn vaser heyst, az s’iz nisht keyn vaser!”

“vu iz ahingekumen dos vaser?”

“oysgeloyfen bey Groynem dos gantse fesel vaser – un geh shray khay vekayem!”<sup>27</sup>

[“Water! Water!” shouted those working against the fire, “quick, quick, bring the buckets! The water!”

“What buckets? What water?” answered the firemen, “can you not see there’s not a drop of water.”

“What do you [does that] mean, there’s no water?”

“No water means there’s no water!”

“Well where’s it all gone?”

“it has all run out of Groynem’s barrel – and there’s nothing you can do about it!”]

The comedians, sticking closely to Sholem Aleichem’s original dialogue, make much of the comedy of impotence in this sketch – the rapid changes of costume and the changes in tone, voice and mannerism are impressive. This performance is thus particularly interesting since, as Konigsberg rightly points out, there is a certain perplexing artifice to it, and therefore a strange dislocation from the rest of the narrative.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, to amplify Konigsberg’s contention here, the performance – elegant, funny, extraordinarily *theatrical* in its self-conscious and technically accomplished performativity – seems to stand as an isolated moment in the film, structured almost as a kind of narrative “reserve”.<sup>29</sup> The film invites this kind of reading: the sequence of the performance in the theatre at the start of the film of the ghetto sketch “Mame’s maykholim” and the children’s response to it, followed by their “performance” of “Oy di vone” in the comedians’ dressing room, is clearly set up in order to invite precisely this kind of true/false juxtaposition. But the similarities Konigsberg recognizes in the theatre ghetto sketch and the performance of *Kasrilevske Brent*, I would argue, are not quite that simple: the one is mawkish, deliberately overdetermined, where the other is breathtaking in its efficacious use of the technologies of theatre and film (without film editing, the rapid changes of costume would not be possible). Indeed, what the Sholem-Aleichem performance points to is precisely the material and technological specificity of film as a narrative medium, whereas the ghetto sketch is mired in the what Bertolt Brecht refers to as the *Guckkasten* [“gawkbox”] tradition with its conception of the “vierte Wand” or “fourth wall” through which the audience peers onto the action on the stage.<sup>30</sup> Hence the two episodes are quite distinct in that they represent competing technologies of musical theatre and memory (and the difference in the

children's reactions to the two performances underlines this point). Certainly, both performances (in the ghetto and in *Kasrilevke*) speak of communities in crisis, of what Sholem-Aleichem called "di kleyne menshelekh" [the small people] seeking (and failing) to adapt to the new traumatic order in times of terrible crisis. The first sets out to capture a representational failure, the second sets out to capture something of the "old way of life" ["dos alte lebn"] now lost.

One way to understand the tension between these different musical-affective regimes is as an expression of the Jewish victim community's attempts at integrating Holocaust narratives into their communities' sense of their own history. As Laura Jockusch has shown, during the first half of the twentieth century, a new Jewish (mostly Yiddish-language) tradition of historical documentation emerged, especially in Eastern Europe. This new documentary approach to community history, which Yiddish speakers referred to as *kburbn-forshung* or "disaster research", contrasts with the older Jewish tradition of what David G. Roskies has termed a "literature of destruction".<sup>31</sup> The newer tradition sought to put in place a strong evidentiary base and relied on ethnographic and other professionalized approaches to documentation, whereas the older tradition focused on the meaning and affective fallout of the violence. Hence two competing models for how to make sense of the Holocaust were available to Jewish communities, one focused on what Jockusch terms "facticity" and the other on interpretation and the emotional consequences of the atrocities.<sup>32</sup> The distinction between the two, of course, is difficult to maintain in practice since literary and testimonial conventions blur and interweave and, as Patricia Clough has made clear, even ethnography itself relies on literary conventions born of the social realism of the nineteenth-century novel and intensified by the realist traditions of narrative cinema in the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, the two traditions are at odds with each other; they display radically different literary tones, draw on different constructions of reality and do not agree on the purpose of, or modality for, remembering atrocity. In this context, I suggest, we can start to understand the complexity facing the film makers of *Unzere kinder*. In the scene in the theatre dressing room theatre after the ghetto sketch, for example, Schumacher refers to the children as "der mamiše kval" ["the original source"], emphasizing the authenticity of the children's experiences (the *kburbn-forshung* perspective, so to speak), whereas Dzigan cautions, "Far mir iz dos a tema tsu baveynen un nisht tsu shpiln" ["For me this is something to mourn and not to perform"], emphasizing the affective demands of the older "disaster literature" tradition. Moreover, as we have seen, the film draws explicitly on materials and ideas from earlier documentary films, in particular Aleksandr Ford's 1938 documentary film *Mir kumen on* [*Here We Are*] about the Medem Sanitarium for Jewish children near Warsaw, and even more directly on Gross's own Yiddish-language documentary *Mir lebn geblibene* [*We Are Still Alive*] (Poland, 1947),

key scenes from which are re-used largely unchanged in *Unzere kinder*. Hence the patchwork quality of *Unzere kinder* can be attributed both to the complex epistemological and socio-cultural contexts for the making of the film (the interaction of the two traditions) and to the simple expediencies of film making in uncertain economic conditions.

The two performances “Ikh benk ...” in the Łódź theater and “Kasreilevke brent” at the orphanage, then, are failures of a different kind. But what really distinguishes them is the distinct *affective* orders each seeks to enact – the sentimentality of the ghetto sketch, its convention-bound qualities, and its fidelity to a certain kind of melancholy, contrast starkly with the spectacularization of community impotence in the face of disaster in *Kasreilevke*. Film operates here, then, rather like a workshop for exploring competing models of community memory. Indeed, the orphanage itself has a very interesting function in this respect: the orphan-characters in the film are real orphans, as mentioned above, all having their own Holocaust survival narratives to tell. That institution is therefore a kind of proxy space, delivering to the Yiddish-speaking audiences mourning the loss of their communities a new kind of community, as if the film were a cinematic equivalent of a *Yizker bukh* (a kind of Jewish memorial book) written by survivors as a way of remembering lost communities.<sup>34</sup> It stands for the possibility of a reparative communitarian politics that would no doubt have resonated very powerfully with Jewish communities in Poland trying to piece together their lives, and with the new communities of the British Mandate for Palestine, soon (in 1948) to emerge as the new nation of modern Israel. Indeed it is this question of community that lies at the center of this complex and challenging film.<sup>35</sup> If we are to make sense of it, we need to think, I suggest, about the relation between authenticity, performance and community as being forged urgently and as being thought through, therefore, in a makeshift and quasi-improvisational manner. It is the delicacy of the communitarian here (its vulnerability to a second annihilation) that charges the film with its affective turbulence and to which I will now turn.

### **The coming of a makeshift community**

In essence, then, *Unzere kinder* represents an attempt to reconstruct, repair or revive shattered communities in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. In Yiddish, the word used for “community” is “tsiber”, a *loshn-kooydesh* word borrowed from Hebrew; strikingly there is no indigenous word (in either its Germanic or Semitic lexicons) for “private” in Yiddish. Hence Yiddish has a particularly strong and inclusive notion of community in which belonging to community is linked intimately with identity, safety, wellbeing. This collectivist tendency, forged in the grinding poverty of the *shtetlekh* [“townships”] of Eastern Europe, has profound implications

for music making and its relation to community in rural Jewish culture from the turn of the century, and represented with touchingly gentle humor in Sholem Aleichem's *Kasrilevke* stories.

Communities, are always a kind of “work”; they are complex, open-ended and constantly self-realizing organisms that emerge as the result of a particular kind of cultural labor. As Miranda Joseph has suggested, we (in both the global-Anglophone and the continental European traditions) tend to think about “community” as always-already in place: the term seems to want to capture a certain social formulation before it encounters it, and speaks, therefore, in a manner that is prescriptive rather than diagnostic.<sup>36</sup> Joseph's critical corrective is welcome and offers a way into the complexity of thinking about community in posttraumatic contexts, and in *Unzere kinder* in particular. Indeed, as I show below, to understand community in posttraumatic contexts also opens up some productive theoretical avenues for thinking about community more broadly. In *Unzere kinder*, in particular, community is produced, deliberately, in acts of willful enactment, often using the demands of musical performance as a proxy for the demands of affiliation. By making it possible for members of its posttraumatic community to perform attachments to the communitarian, community members of the Helanówek community perform themselves to themselves, as it were; the children are thus in a state of constant enactment and re-enactment in which the *process* of belonging is staged for our consumption. This turn to thinking about the posttraumatic community enables us to move beyond the artifice/truth deadlock that has so often attended the question of representation in Holocaust cinema. In Gross's film, in other words, musicking works as a reparative ritual, a socially-binding remaking of the communitarian after its brutal dismantling.

In the Helanówek community, then, children and staff alike engage in a performative exploration of the *authentic*. To put it in slightly different terms, the community must be actively staged; the viability of a core communal fantasy, “dos alte lebn” [“the old life”] must be maintained by wanton (willed, anxious, insistent) ritualizations: singing, dancing, storytelling, laughing, weeping, mimicking, ridiculing. In the posttraumatic context of *Unzere kinder*, community as a fantasy or construct is always an abstraction. This is not the community in which the children grew up; these are not their parents, neighbors or school friends. This is an ad hoc community, an assemblage of *pleytim* [“survivors”]. As such, this posttraumatic assemblage constructs the reparative community through play. The community of Helanówek must be on its guard against the romantic conflation of belonging and place; it is seeking, it seems, to stave off a second annihilation and in the almost obsessive ritualizing of the performative it works through this structural impasse of a belonging where there is no belonging save in a shared experience of atrocity and loss: the comedians' *Kasrilevke* and Helanówek itself, then, are both idealizations of

the impossible community that can never again emerge, but which is performed as “possible” nonetheless, and this willful performativity of community is what stands between existence and a second death. The children’s play is deadly serious.

If the posttraumatic community of Helanówek is vulnerable, then, it is because it must live in a paradox, caught between the impossible return of the old community (Semprún’s “Lazaruses”, “dos alte lebn”) and the new life that must inevitably emerge in the Holocaust’s aftermath. This paradox makes the formation of community extremely challenging. Indeed, as if to recognize this, the film adopts a crudely behaviorist strategy, as if to say, “enact the rituals of being together and you shall be a community”. Echoing Althusser’s famous paraphrasing of Blaise Pascal,<sup>37</sup> the film’s behaviorist orientation can also be read as a critique of ideology in this strictly Althusserian sense: in other words, by pointing to the performative as constitutive of community (this community in particular), the film openly queries the viability of the posttraumatic community, lays bare the constructedness of this reparative assemblage.

In the end, these children ‘belong’ only by dint of their having suffered, and therefore the film must bear witness, in some way or another, to that shared suffering. Perhaps one of the most striking problems in the film, therefore, is the manner in which the atrocities of the war suffered by the children are held in check until quite near the end: only as the comedians stalk the corridors, like eleventh-hour ethnographers, are we shown anything of the atrocities. And, as we have seen, this “showing” is only partial, hidden to the side of the frame in flashbacks, seen (which is to say imagined, not seen as such) through the eyes of Yankele or the other children. Sound haunts these stories: we hear but do not see; or we sometimes see partially and only in the auditory field is everything disclosed. Thus the sonic deficit recognized by Semprún is filled but the visual field is necessarily curtailed to allow for that filling.

Perhaps what is most interesting and disturbing about this film is its inability (and, perhaps unwillingness) to take any shortcuts to redemption. Indeed, we might say, it is a symptom of the posttraumatic that it refute the redemptive, and seek, instead, a pragmatics of *afterliving*: the “morning after” in the film, the day that follows the harrowing traumatic narratives of the night aired in private (but nonetheless eavesdropped on by the two comedians), is nothing, after all, but a return, in the children’s irreverent aping of the comedians’ performances, to the mawkish melodrama of the first performance in the theatre in Łódź. In the end, I suggest, this film constitutes a key contribution to posttraumatic cinema, but also, in its disturbingly makeshift nature, it also points to the volatile nature of the posttraumatic community, susceptible to the ravages of performative turbulence, ensnared in a kind of affective ground zero just after the end of the atrocities.

## Conclusion: affective encounters

Where Gross's film "fails" as cinema, it "succeeds", so to speak, in bearing witness to the auditory fragmentary after-traces of trauma, and refuses to make them whole again. This is not easy, nor does it make for a cinema that carries in the pleasure of the image. The spectacular is rendered incomplete here, beset by unstable affective intensities, made even more intense by the constant presence of musicking, listening and other symptoms of a fraught auditory culture. These intensities cut across the narrative and radically curtail our pleasure in the image. The new affective determinants of the posttraumatic are still uncooked here: auditory turbulence characterizes this rawness in both the narrative and visual fields; sound, as the key affective agent, is consistently set loose from the logic of mid-twentieth-century narrative cinema, and drifts, ghost-like, from the vicious German perpetrator *acousmètres* in half-seen flashbacks and auditory fragments, to *acousmètres* of the lost victims, hymns of redemption and broken refrains as if remembered from half-absorbed modernist musical conventions.

*Figure 3: In a flashback, Yankele watches (and we listen) as the Nazi acousmètres take his mother away in the Warsaw ghetto*

It is, perhaps, only through thinking about affect that we can finally come to terms with the film's fragmentary structure since by no means does it add up to an avant-garde experiment in fragmentary form, nor is it a workshop for a new aesthetic order to come. What thinking about affect brings to our reading of the film is a sensitivity to lines of flight and intensity, and a permissiveness in thinking about the materiality of cinema that exceeds conventional (hermeneutic) film theory. For example, when Schumacher sings Joseph P. Katz's pre-war song "Tsvey vayse toybn" ["Two white doves"], as we have seen (and heard), the directress (Gold) leaves for her room and is distressed: the memory of her own "doves" lost in the war is triggered by the song. She hears the voices of her lost ones as auditory fragments whilst the strains of the song continue on the soundtrack. Here, the affective order stitches together two distinct filmic musical conventions, the (diegetic) singing as part of the "action" of the film and the (non-diegetic) soundtrack, not "in" the narrative as such, but lending the narrative a certain intensity. This drift from diegetic to non-diegetic (and the reverse) is not unusual in the cinematic convention and, indeed, the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic musics has been fundamentally and productively problematised in recent years,<sup>38</sup> but here the two conventions are tied together particularly strongly and function as a *singular affective unit* (song stimulus– memory – aural fragments – mourning - night). The line of flight from song to night, structured by this affective

mooring, runs counter to the lumpy narrative logic. The shift from well-known (public) song to private mourning constitutes also a shift from public to private memory, or rather a shift between two registers of memory, the culturally mediated public memory of song, on the one hand, and the private memory of lost loved ones, on the other. This affective unit is thus a vector, a direction, a line from one visual and auditory convention to another. What is more, this mourning at night is accompanied by scored music (by Berezowski), which seems to emerge out of the scene, indebted to the film scoring conventions that borrow from European modernist traditions. The affective coupling of song and orchestrated film music also delivers a certain ideological effect, positing each “private” memory as standing for a part of the collective trauma, which the whole community, save the two outsiders Dzigan and Schumacher, shares. Indeed, in the coupling of song to private traumatic memory, the film seems to be suggesting that we, like the comedians, if only for a moment, are not *intruding* on the scene of traumatic recall, but that we, like they, can *partake*, through song, in a shared act of mourning, positing vernacular (communal) song as a kind of third space beyond the public and the private. The cinematic “intrusion” on the directress’s mourning here, pointing up the complex challenges to cinematic convention made by the posttraumatic condition, and the complexities of representing private sorrow in an avowedly public spectacle, are ameliorated by this makeshift strategy of affective suturing or coupling of song and memory, memory and audition, audition and night, night and scored orchestral music.

The affective dynamics of this chain of couplings stands for the film’s structuring of affect more generally. Indeed, the film is dominated by an oscillating affective structure (between, for example, joy and remorse, hope and despair, innocence and terrible insight) that stitches incommensurate conventions together by regulating them with this rhythmic affective shuttling. This shuttling that overlays the narrative, moreover, is achieved by the soundtrack, the structure of which is thus always profoundly binaristic (affect, as a line of flight, is necessarily either arriving or leaving). I have already discussed the opening section of the film, and the affective disassociation of the two “marches” that characterize it. Here and elsewhere, lines of flight are swung back and forth: the Łódź theater performance, through which the comedians sigh their way with whimsy and sentimentality, swings to the children’s boos and their bare unadorned performance of begging for food in the changing room (“Oy di vone”), for example. The film’s affective order is profoundly unsettling and yet, as we have said, also *regulatory*. As the two comedians lose their way in the hallways of the orphanage, for example, and eavesdrop on the children’s horrific stories as if they were makeshift amateur ethnographers of atrocity (enacting the documentary urge of *keburbn-forschung*), the gentle tonality of the soundtrack gives way to a kind of makeshift musical modernism, more dissonant, strident and texturally fragmented. Similarly, as the comedians wake

in the morning, trauma gives way again to tonality, in the major key, and the raucous vernacular of the children's irreverent games. In both cases, uniformity is produced in the rhythm of affective shuttling back and forth.

As all this demonstrates, thinking about cinema, and *Unzere kinder* in particular, as affect-machine delivers a different model for negotiating the posttraumatic condition and enables us to look below (or above) the visual/narrative components for other kinds of regulatory dynamics. The affective coupling of +/-, to render it at its most general, disciplines the unwieldy posttraumatic materials of the narrative and stitches the makeshift cinematic order together. And this stitching creates a secondary and profoundly disturbing effect in the affective texture of the film, a kind of *fort-da* game: one minute we are welcomed in, to commune with the community, and the next we are pushed out, as if intruding, as if, like the two comedians listening to these stories, we can only *visit* the posttraumatic world of the orphanage temporarily. Since the film does not consistently allow us access to the communal, since it only opens itself up at certain points in the turning of each affective cycle, it is, finally, with the figure of the *eavesdropper* that we must content ourselves to identify. A key narrative shift occurs precisely as we, with the two comedians, eavesdrop on children's stories, told to each other at night in a frank and almost confessional tone. We are, then, located as listeners, garnering secrets, trespassing, and yet also as witnesses, as collectors of truth, as collectors of recollections, like protagonists of both *kehrbn-forschung* and disaster literature, eavesdropping on the "mamishe kval" of the children's stories. Semprún's, Sutzkever's and Boder's desire to sonically render the Holocaust discussed at the opening of this article is intensified in *Unzere kinder* by bringing to the confessional tone of Holocaust memory a certain *specificity*, a sonic character, a ghostly *acousmètre*-quality that Edison himself recognized in the phonograph as repository of the dead.<sup>39</sup> Sound technology is garnered here as a way of delivering us from Semprún's "confused scraps of meaning". If for Semprún (and, of course, Boder, Sutzkever, and Kaczerginski) the sonic delivers a "wonder" in the voices of the displaced, a materiality that cannot be erased or written out of any account of the Holocaust, *listening* to the Holocaust constitutes our key duty in this regard. The discomfort of our being necessarily excluded from the posttraumatic does not deliver us from that duty. It is this, more than anything, that *Unzere kinder* remits to its audience.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Yiddish title means “Our children”; the film was released in the US in 1951 with the English title *It Will Never Happen Again*.

<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). Small’s notion, taken for granted here, is that it is more useful to think about music as a process rather than a series of artefacts, hence his shift from thinking about “music” per se to “musicking”, the act of listening, performing or otherwise engaging musical processes.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the key exceptions include: Brad Prager, *After the Fact: The Holocaust in Twenty-First Century Documentary Film* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York and London: Continuum, 2011); Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 2004); Zoltan Kekesi, *Agents of Liberation: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art and Film Documentary* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015); Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012); *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and the Genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946* (Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially 84-5.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Semprún, *L’écriture ou la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); *Literature or Life*, trans. Linda Colverdale (New York: Viking Press, 1997), 200.

<sup>6</sup> Semprún, *Literature*, 200.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Semprún, *Literature*, 201.

<sup>9</sup> Rosen, *Wonder*, 19-20. David Pablo Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (Champagne Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949). See also Beate Müller, “Translating Trauma: David Boder’s 1946 Interviews with Holocaust Survivors,” *Translation and Literature*, Volume 23 (2014): 257–7.

<sup>10</sup> Avrom Sutzkever, “A horde muzik”, in *Lider fun yam hamoves: fun vilner geto, vald un vander* (New York: Bergen-Belsen Memorial Press, repr.1968), 18. My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour and Emily Haslam, “Silencing Hearings? Victim-Witnesses at War Crimes Trials”, *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 15, no. 1, (2004): 151–177.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see Tony Kushner, “Holocaust testimony, ethics, and the problem of representation”, *Poetics Today*, vol. 27 no. 2 (2006): 275-295, 275. In this context, it is also worth noting how the Nuremberg trials sought to limit the uses of first-person testimony, conceiving of it as “unreliable” or too “emotive”. See in particular Sonali Chakravarti, “More than ‘Cheap Sentimentality’: Victim Testimony at Nuremberg, the Eichmann Trial, and Truth Commissions”, *Constellations*, vol. 15 (2008): 223–235.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, *Afterimage*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example: Katryn Ball, *Disciplining the Holocaust* (New York: SUNY, 2008); Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory* (Yale University Press, 1993); Stevan M. Weine, *Testimony after Catastrophe: Narrating the*

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*Traumas of Political Violence* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2006); Zoe Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Since Yiddish is written using an adapted version of the Hebrew alphabet, the spelling of Yiddish names in the Latin alphabet can cause some difficulty. In transliterations, surnames are often respelled using the phonetic system of the host language (Polish, Czech, Ukrainian or Russian, for example). Hence Shimen is sometimes transliterated as Szimon or Shimon, Dzigan is sometimes transliterated as Dzhigan and Schumacher is sometimes transliterated as Szumacher, Shumacher or Shumakher. I have adopted the host (Polish or German) phonetic spelling system used by the actors themselves for their own proper names throughout.

<sup>17</sup> When transliterating dialogue from the film, I use the YIVO system throughout, except for proper names (see note above).

<sup>18</sup> The melody of “Zog nit keynmol” is taken from a song by the Soviet-Jewish composer Dimitri Pokrass. It is collected with its Yiddish words in Kaczerginski’s *Dos gezang fun vilner geto* (Paris: Farband far di yidn in frankraykh, 1947), 52. The song became an official anthem of the Vilnius Jewish Partizans, and was subsequently sung widely by Jewish survivors.

<sup>19</sup> This eavesdropping on personal trauma would now probably seem somewhat problematic for an early twenty-first century audience, since we have come to develop a highly privatized sense of the personal narrative. In the context of early postwar attempts to recover a life from the atrocities, however, this somewhat utilitarian approach to recovery was not uncommon. For more on this see: Rosen, *Wonder*, 19-20; Müller, “Translating Trauma” 257; Beate Müller, “Historiographia be hakesher shel trauma: eduiyot shoah shel yeladim le-akhar ha-milkhama” [“The Historiography of Trauma: Early Post-War Child Holocaust Testimonies in Context.” In Hebrew] in Boaz Cohen (ed.), *Was their Voice Heard? Early Holocaust Testimonies of Child Survivors*. (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2016), 95-109.

<sup>20</sup> The film was banned in Poland because it did not show Poles in a sufficiently positive light. Konigsberg, “Our children”, 12.

<sup>21</sup> The film was made under a degree of supervision from the communist authorities, and the rather mawkish opening sequence may well be an addition required by the authorities.

<sup>22</sup> *Dos gezang*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> It is worth thinking here about a distinction made by Anahid Kassabian between what she terms “assimilating” and “affiliating” identifications. Her contention is that orchestrated scores of the Hollywood idiom tend to effect identifications which are absorbing and uniform, producing homogenous identificatory effects (her “assimilating” identification), whereas soundtracks that sample more widely from a range of popular/vernacular musical forms tend to effect more diverse and complex sets of identifications. Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 13ff.

<sup>24</sup> “We ... recognize the unreality of the film through our realization that the children are acting and their scenes are staged, but at the same time this staged quality undermines the unreality, boldly announcing to us that we are to distinguish between the children as performers and the children as themselves-actual survivors. Their authenticity is made most painfully clear when we eavesdrop on the children’s private conversations and hear them recall their Holocaust memories.” Konigsberg, “Our Children”, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Sholem-Aleichem, “Dos naye kasrilevke”, *Alt-ney-Kasrilevke*, volume 13 of the collected works, *Ale verk* (New York: Sholem-Aleykhem folksfond, 1920), 61-128; the section “Kasrilevke sreyfes” 113-119.

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<sup>26</sup> Chion describes the *acousmètre* in the following terms: “When the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualized – that is when we cannot yet connect it to a face – we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name *acousmètre*.” Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>27</sup> Sholem-Aleichem, “Dos naye kasrilevke”, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Konigsberg, “Our Children”, 16.

<sup>29</sup> As Konigsberg puts it, “The dramatization emphasizes itself as art and as separate from reality, and, along with the ghetto skit earlier in the film, contrasts with the authenticity of the children’s memories of their Holocaust experiences, both those they acted out in the dressing room and those which they describe and which are visualized in the film.” *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> “Im traditionellen Theater ist es so, als gebe es eine Art vierte Wand nicht nur um die Bühne herum, sondern auch zwischen Bühne und Publikum” [“In traditional theater, it is as if there were a kind of fourth wall, not just around the stage but also between the stage and the public”]. Bertolt Brecht, *Werke*, vol. 23 (Frankfurt and Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1995), 65, my translation.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); David G. Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Jockusch, *Collect*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* (New York, N.Y: Peter Lang, 1998). On so-called “ethnographic film”, see in particular Karl G. Heider’s now classic *Ethnographic Film* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, [1979] repr. and expanded 2009).

<sup>34</sup> For a useful and comprehensive account of the *Yizker bukh* in the post-Holocaust era, see Rosemary Horowitz, *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meanings of Yizker Volumes* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Dzigal and Shumacher’s investment in this new social order is attested by Yiddish poet Melech Ravitch’s description of the two comedians as “two Don Quixotes sitting on a park bench ... one dreaming of Palestine and the other of Birobidzhan [Stalin’s “secular zion]”. Quoted in Natan Gross, “Dzigal and Shumacher”, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 5 August 2010 (accessed 9 September 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> “Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe”, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press): 85-127, 94.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Ben Winters, “The non-diegetic fallacy: film, music, and narrative space,” *Music & Letters*, vol. 91 no. 2 (2010): 224–244; Jeff Smith, “Bridging the Gap: Reconsidering the Border between Diegetic and Nondiegetic Music,” *Music and the Moving Image*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1-25; Alessandro Cecchi, “Diegetic versus Nondiegetic: A Reconsideration of the Conceptual Opposition as a Contribution to the Theory of Audiovision,” *Worlds of Audiovision* (2010): 1-10; R. R. Ness, “A Lotta Night Music: The Sound of *Film Noir*,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47 no. 2 (2008): 52-73.

<sup>39</sup> See Anthony Enns, “Voices of the dead: Transmission/translation/transgression,” *Culture, Theory and Critique*, vol. 46 no. 1 (2005): 11-27.