GERMAN-JEWISH SPATIAL CULTURES: CONSUMING AND REFASHIONING JEWISH BELONGING IN BERLIN, 1890–1910

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Space constitutes a fundamental dimension of human experience: nations inhabit countries; tribes dwell in territories; families inherit estates; and individuals constantly engage the ubiquitous, endless corners that fuse into one’s life—the bridge under which one first kissed, the stream by which she contemplated her options, the tree where they engraved their names, the tower, the intersections of roads, and so on. As always, social dynamics provide the interaction between people and places with substance—elevating some localities, denouncing others, and producing in the process the textures, both physical (architecture) and nonphysical (literature, folklore, heritage) that shape the way a certain space registers in our minds.

This essay presents an exploration into the confluence of place, consumption, leisure, and belonging through the lens of new Jewish spaces—primarily cafés, restaurants, and hotels—at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in Berlin. These sites, along with spas and theaters (through the aid of the modern Jewish press) emerged by the end of the nineteenth century as new centers for Jewish life in Berlin and other European cities. They complemented and also at times replaced more traditional spaces of Jewish life, especially the synagogue and other communal institutions, as hubs for Jewish cultural, social, and religious expression. Not all spaces needed to be inherently or obviously Jewish (religiously or halakhically) in order to become Jewish spaces. Moreover, the adoption of secular or non-Jewish spaces is by no means a modern phenomenon: ancient bathhouses, for instance, were sites for the appropriation

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3 I must thank Prof. Dan Diner for suggesting the notion of ‘belonging’ as a device for discussing the active participation in the creation and recreation of Jewish selfhood in the modern era.
of “non-Jewish” space for and by Jews, thus inserting a red-herring into the common division between the traditional and the modern eras. However, the scale and scope of the secularizing processes during the modern era make a study of less-customary Jewish spaces all the more salient.

Ultimately, I propose here nothing less than a theory of bourgeois Jewish consumption according to which bourgeois Jews (who made up the majority of Berlin’s Jewish population) participated in an array of common cultural practices and employed a shared set of cultural codes, which they manifested and displayed in and through particular spaces. Despite what might at first glance appear to be striking religious or political differences within the Jewish community, this Jewish culture of consumption, in fact, was common to most Jews in Berlin. Berlin’s bourgeois Jews used specific spaces to express a reformulated, oftentimes secular form of Jewish belonging that transcended differing political, religious, and even national conceptions of self.

Place, Consumption, and Jewish Belonging

The use of “space” as a heuristic category has been enjoying a surge of popularity among historians and social scientists. The geographic turn, as it is often dubbed, urges us to pay greater attention to the role of place and localities in the lives and cultures of individuals and groups, or, in other words, to pay heed to the function of place in identity formation, reproduction, and expression (not only religiously

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5 Jacques Ehrenfreund, *Mémoire juive et nationalité allemande: les juifs berlinois à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 45, 48–49. I understand the term bourgeois to refer to individuals of a particular socio-economic class, who were predominantly engaged in several professions (such as the liberal professions and commerce), and shared a common set of cultural practices (which included a level of education, Bildung, and similar leisure patterns).

6 It would appear that this is also true for large portions of Central and Western European bourgeois Jews. See: Béatrice Philippe, *Les juifs à Paris à la Belle Époque* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1992), 81–82.

7 In the field of Jewish Studies, for instance, an entire issue of *Jewish Social Studies* was recently dedicated to the topic of Jewish space, see: Charlotte Elsheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov, “Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (2005), 1–8.