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Phil Alexander

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Sounding the Holocaust, silencing the city: memorial soundscapes in today's Berlin

Phil Alexander 

School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT

Silence appears frequently in discourses of the Holocaust – as a metaphorical absence, a warning against forgetting, or simply the only appropriate response. But powerful though these meanings are, they often underplay the ambiguity of silence's signifying power. This article addresses the liminality of silence through an analysis of its richly textured role in the memorial soundscapes of Berlin. Beyond an aural version of erasure, unspeakability, or the space for reflection upon it, I argue that these silent spaces must always be heard as part of their surrounding urban environment, refracting wider spatial practices and dis/order. When conventions are reversed – when the present is silent – the past can resound in surprising and provocative ways, collapsing spatial and temporal borders and escaping the ritualized boundaries of formal commemoration. This is explored through four different memorial situations: the disturbing resonances within the Holocaust Memorial; the transgressive processes of a collective silent walk; Gleis 17 railway memorial's opening up of heterotopic 'gaps' in time; and sounded/silent history in the work of singer Tania Alon. Each of these examples, in different ways, frames a slippage between urban sound and memorial silence, creating a parallel symbolic space that the past and the present can inhabit simultaneously. In its unpredictable fluidity, silence becomes a mobile and subversive force, producing an imaginative space that is ambiguous, affective and deeply meaningful. A closer attention to these different practices of listening disrupts a top-down, strategic discourse of silence as conventionally emblematic of reflection and distance. The contemporary urban soundscape that slips through the silent cracks problematizes the narrative hegemony of memorial itself.

KEYWORDS Berlin; Jewish; silence; memorial; Holocaust; sound

Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live (Elie Wiesel, *Night*)

try as we may to make a silence, we cannot (John Cage, *Silence*)

CONTACT Phil Alexander  phil@moishesbagel.com

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Introduction: phenomenologies of silence

For A-7713, the autobiographical protagonist of Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir *Night*, silences are multiple, run deep and leave profound scars. The growing silence of unease in his hometown of Sighet, the heavy silence of the final family meal, the terrifying night-time silence of captivity, the hopeless silence of the dead and the dying, the implacable silence of the sky, the incomprehensible silence of God, and ultimately the unforgivable silence of the world.¹ For Wiesel, these silences – and the need to speak and write against them – would remain inescapable throughout his life:

one could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak. And so I persevered. And trusted the silence that envelops and transcends words.²

An unspeakability that both challenges and surpasses the contingency of language is a powerful and evocative trope,³ especially in relation to the Holocaust. However, conventional figurations of silence as lack of agency, proxy for death, or symbolic precursor to the divine have less to offer when applied to the spatialized silence of Holocaust memorial sites in the city of Berlin. This article therefore seeks to look beyond an easy elision of memorial silence with reflection, respect or meaningful absence (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010). Instead, I explore ways in which silent memorialization in fact co-exists with the everyday sonic life of the city. This means a consideration of the unpredictability and liveness of memorial spaces, their capacity to open up a parallel space of subjectivity (and history) by clouding the normative sense of silent past/sounded present. When conventions are reversed – when the present is silent – the past can resound in surprising ways.

This is particularly relevant to contemporary Berlin, a city where hotly contested memorial is often structured into the daily ever-present (Ladd 1997, p. 234), and sound is a provocative approach route. Ethnomusicologist Abigail Wood writes that 'nobody's sound space – not even that of the state – is immune from involuntary juxtaposition with the sound of Others' (2015, p. 71). Things heard rarely accord with physical borders or spatial markers, which means that the spaces of memorialization framed and defined by these silences are in fact continually inflected by the sounds of the city that surround them, and a sense of collision and ambiguity is never far away. Silence in these cases is multiple, richly textured, and heavily contingent, linking different – sometimes competing – sonic worlds. It signifies most powerfully not merely as a lack of sound but as the space *between* sound, the space into which sound flows. To be silent, to silence, to be in silence ... is to open up a subjectivity that problematizes the oral/aural grain:

Silence is the place of the 'I' in the listened-to world. However, this is not a confident, territorial 'I' but an 'I' in doubt about his position, for ever awkward about being in the middle of the 'picture' (Voegelin 2010, p. 93).

I aim to add to this awkwardness, moving silence and memory⁴ into an explicit connection with a sense of the city through an exploration of the particular role of sound within four Berlin Holocaust memorial sites. I argue that these silent zones need to be heard as *part* of their urban environment, refracting wider spatial practices and dis/order. Their quieter space 'apart' is always contextualized by the noisier city soundscape within which they are framed, and by a continual travel between the 'reality' of urban space and the metaphoric dimensions⁵ of silence (Arkette 2004, p. 159). This is a symbiosis that problematizes taken-for-granted cultural epistemologies positioning silence within an either/or of control vs. reflection, and urban noise as simply articulating the tension between individual freedom and public intrusion. I will argue instead that the sonic dialogues of these memorial sites create parallel symbolic spaces of historical slippage, spaces where *hearing* foregrounds a fluidity that is not always so easy to 'see'.

Although not speaking is a condition of the silences that follow, an absence of audible voices should not be equated with a lack of agency (Gal 2008, p. 338). The silences discussed here – whilst socially contractual – are not enforced; they do not represent suppression, nor are they a poetic metaphor for deliberate omission or collective forgetting.⁶ Silence in this article is rather an open space, a site of unpredictable interaction and juxtaposition. It is at the intersection of socially constructed silence and the ambiguous intrusion of urban sound that my analysis is located.

Silence is never complete, nor is it monolithic; there are many kinds of silence and, as John Cage famously noted, there is always 'something to hear' (Cage 1968, p. 8).⁷ An attention to silence in the city space is therefore also an injunction to think deeper about listening, and in particular the disruptive potential of what Caroline Birdsall (2012, p. 19) calls listening's 'intersubjective encounters'. One cannot reliably tune out nearby sounds and listen solely to distant ones in the way that one can visually focus on a distant point whilst disregarding things that are closer. Where the eye is directional and precise, the ear receives data more liberally and from all around – it is 'a *collagiste* ... a collector of fragments' (Schwartz 2003, p. 488), and an organ of creative combination. As soundwalker and composer Hildegard Westerkamp argues: 'No matter how hard we try to ignore the input, the information enters the brain and wants to be processed'⁸ (2007, p. 49), meaning that listening 'implies a preparedness to meet the unpredictable and unplanned, to welcome the unwelcome' (Westerkamp 2015, n.p.).

A focus on the aural within memorialization, therefore, calls our attention to practices of meaning-making that remain obscured at the level of the

visual. More than simply a complementary sensory perspective, I follow Jaques Attali in arguing that this shift has a social dimension, promoting an increased focus on what Attali (2009, p. 7) terms 'subversive noise' (or in our case silence). Silence reveals the fragments and traces hidden within these memorial geographies, their metaphorical dimensions '[atune] our ears to listen again to the multiple layers of meaning potentially embedded in the same sound' (Bull and Back 2003, p. 3). Tracing these auditory layers adds a valuable – and hitherto overlooked – perspective on what memory scholars Erll and Rigney (2009, p. 2) describe as 'an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than as reproductive' that is at the heart of culturally-situated memorial practice. This is a silence that promotes closer *listening*, a silence that in its liminality becomes a force for the transgression and subversion of borders both temporal and spatial, producing an imaginative space that is ambiguous, affective and deeply meaningful.

Sounding the city

In popular discourse – and indeed in everyday life – the sound of the city is anything but silent. The noisy city itself enfolds an ideological continuum, with perhaps the pleasantly privileged buzz of a Gershwin-esque Fifth Avenue at one end and the dystopic chaos of an Orwellian Two Minute Hate at the other. Mediaeval accounts of city visits frequently emphasize cacophony, din, heterophony, and a Babel-like profusion of languages and cries (Bailey 2004, p. 29). The popularization of the term *soundscape* itself, by composer and educator R Murray Schafer in 1969, underscored a critique tracking humankind's gradual aural descent from pure (natural, rural) to corrupted (industrial, urban) sound, from holy silence to unholy noise (Schafer 1994, p. 254). Whilst this perspective is both ideologically loaded⁹ and somewhat oversimplified in its grasp of urban modernity, more important here is that an uncritical conception of silence as spiritually enriching, as a rest for the weary soul (and ears) from the cacophony of the now, is problematically narrow.¹⁰ As well as a calm space for meditative reflection, silence is also a harsh mechanism of order and control (in schools, on the parade-ground, in a courtroom).¹¹ Maintaining silence can signify dignity and forbearance, but also awkwardness and lack of confidence (Saville-Troike 1985, p. 17).¹² And at the same time, we must set an embrace of restful silence as the domain of the sacred against the negative discursive space of absolute silence as symbolic of the ineffable and the evil.¹³

The contrasting soundscapes of Berlin articulate similar contradictions. Away from the stag weekends, all-night clubs and *arm, aber sexy*¹⁴ media-cool, Berlin is often a surprisingly quiet city, compared at least to other internationalized hubs such as Barcelona, New York, Dakar or Mumbai. Traffic –

vehicle and pedestrian – is for the most part orderly, kindergarten children walk in well-behaved lines to the playgrounds that spring up on so many street corners, heavily-pierced and well-tattooed anarchists still wait patiently for the red *Ampelman* to turn green even when the road is clear (MacLean 2014, p. 385), and cyclists ride smoothly and politely (unlike Amsterdam's bell-happy brigade). The sound of a raised voice on the U-Bahn is unusual – more often than not belonging to a tourist – and blotchy-faced street drinkers mostly keep their own unintrusive company. It is easy to hear church bells on a Sunday.¹⁵

Such relative quiet in a capital city sets into relief the transformative power of its noise.¹⁶ Weekends from springtime onwards, for example, famously witness the radicalization of Mauerpark's drab weekday bleakness and quiet monotony into a humming mini-festival, a 'proliferating illegitimacy' (de Certeau 1984, p. 96) of competing sounds. Echoed throughout its transient and internationalized public spaces, contemporary Berlin's daily street performance – fleeting, mobile and diachronic – is an implicit response to the relentless surveillance and competing proprietorship that divided and monitored the postwar city. And indeed, in a city that has hosted so many competing ideologies over the last hundred years, auditory life has frequently doubled as a means of control and a way of speaking against it – a spatialized 'struggle between authorized and unauthorized sound' (Revill 2000, p. 601). Weimar-era cabarets offered a gaudy, sexualized and loudly guttural underground excess while the repressive noise of National Socialism grew above (Jelavich 1993). During the latter part of the city's partition, bands like *Einstürzende Neubaten* created worlds of industrial sound that both sprang from and subverted the noiseless *ennui* of everyday late Cold War life.¹⁷ And more recently, the excitable buzz of klezmer music has come under fire for proffering a distorted simulacrum of Jewish sound, for too easily (over-)filling the silent Jewish absence (Morris 2001, p. 376).

Between the day-to-day local quiet and international bursts of joyful noise, deliberate and conscious silence in the city is often the province of memorial and commemoration – a site of order, respect and distance. Silence is not simply produced by these urban memorial spaces. In dialogue it also *produces* them: their silence signifies their function. But 'totalizing discourses' (de Certeau 1984, p. 38) and incontestable histories will frequently come unstuck, and in the memorial sites discussed below an unambiguously official-space ideology (as opposed to the unofficial sonic boom of the streets) rarely goes unchallenged. In a city where memory is both ubiquitous and contested (Huysen 1997, p. 60), silent spaces frame memory but also problematize it: the reference-points of these *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989) become numerous and clouded. Through its covert signification¹⁸ and disregard for physical boundaries, silence as remembrance becomes a zone that

the past and the present can inhabit simultaneously – highly appropriate in a city whose very fabric enacts daily the play of multiple temporalities.¹⁹

The four case-studies that follow track this sense of back-and-forth, framed by the sound of the city itself. They explore how a lived and embodied silence signifies beyond the symbolic evocation of absence or forgetting and escapes the ritualized boundaries of formal commemoration. My first focus, Peter Eisenman's (in)famous Holocaust Memorial, mines an uncanny silence that migrates between the urban present and historical traces. A memorial walk of November 2013 analyses some of the potentially transgressive meanings of silence as a wilful state in the city space. My short discussion of Gleis 17 at Grunewald station addresses a silence that opens heterotopic 'gaps' in history; and finally I contrast one example of sounded history in the contemporary city through the work of singer Tania Alon. The continual dialogue of sound and silence can offer ways of being and knowing significantly different in function and affect to other signifying practices (Smith 1997). Running through this discussion, therefore, is a perpetual seam of where and how past and present Berlins clash noisily – or silently – into each other (Till 2005, p. 196).

Before embarking, it is important to clarify the subject of this writing. With the exception of Tania Alon's voice, all responses are my own and I make no claims for distance or objectivity on their part. The outcome of a parochial perspective²⁰ is inevitably an emphasis on the metaphorical and the symbolic: my self-conscious subjectivity here is thus wholly deliberate and is intended to bring an immediacy and expressivity to this sensory discussion.²¹ This has a basis in the reflexive turn that is now very much an expectation in any fieldwork, but is also here offered as an explicitly mediating narrative voice. Writing of the move from an unsustainable Western-centric hegemony of ethnographic objectivity and neutrality into a world of 'partial truths', James Clifford makes the point thus:

Literary processes – metaphor, figuration, narrative – affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered ... the rhetoric of experienced objectivity yields to that of the autobiography and the ironic self-portrait ... The ethnographer, a character in a fiction, is at center stage. (Clifford 1986, pp. 4–14)

Whilst wary of the autobiographical and hoping to avoid the ironic, my aim is nevertheless to describe and to suggest, and in the process offer a very bounded phenomenology of a certain set of silences. Thus whilst I do find my own responses worthy of further excavation, I am also aware of the limits (in all senses) of this phenomenology. And if one outcome is an occasionally jarring disjuncture between narrative and analysis, I would ask that readers continually 'acknowledge the partiality and subjectivity of th[is] fieldworker' (Berger 2008, p. 66).

Interrupted silence in the Denkmal

Silence is not a natural accompaniment to sorrow or loss. Initial responses to death and tragedy are often far from silent, and many formal commemorative processes are neither noiseless nor solemn.²² A performative – often Western²³ – ritual, collective silence is one of the things that turns grief into commemoration, demarcating memorial time and space and simultaneously releasing everyday life from the burden of continual mourning (Campanini-Fleer 1994, p. 21). This silence is the public presentation of personal sorrow, a paternalistic subduing of the bereaved mother's wail or the abandoned infant's scream.²⁴

Memorial silence, we might say, *interpellates* its participants as controlled, responsible and reflective: the ontological sonic border indexing an epistemological, observable 'respect'. But in fact, silence is not quite so direct: its material lack of signifier leads to an unstable web of conflicting signifieds. And in Berlin, history itself is slippery; it is raw and partisan (Ladd 2000, p. 235). Silence here unsettles and ripples the narrative surface. The transition from sounded to silent acts like a wiggly line in an old television programme, heading back into the past whilst still viewing from the present.

It is this tension that resonates through one of Berlin's most famous (and inevitably controversial) recent constructions: Peter Eisenman's *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*,²⁵ also known as the Holocaust Memorial:

2711 sarcophagi-like concrete stelae (slabs) of equal size but various heights, rising up in somber silence from undulating ground ... take time to feel the coolness of the stone and contemplate the interplay of light and shadow, then stumble aimlessly among the narrow passageways and you'll soon connect with a metaphorical sense of disorientation, confusion and claustrophobia. (Schulte-Peevers 2013, p. 29)

Walking these curious routes, visitors share a mobile silence that is fluid and uncanny. Where daily individual journeys through the shared city space rely on a collective unspoken 'indifference',²⁶ to step into the *Denkmal* is to feel disturbed, out of sync, this indifferent confidence suddenly rattled. Cobbled paths refuse to stay level, heights vary radically, and the only constant sightline is directly ahead. The further one moves from the meandering shallow perimeter, the harder it is to see daylight or the way out. Large grey rectangular prisms rise on all sides, the negative space between them marking tracks that traverse the whole area. And sound changes, too, as one moves deeper into the stone maze: as the noise of the surrounding city recedes, sound moves from external to internal, from regulated buzz to angularity and surprise. Sounds become fewer but also – reflected off the stone surfaces – sharper and closer. The unstable sonic border collapses and the sense of present-time unease becomes recontextualized in the past.²⁷

The field of stelae is built around a paradigm of hidden space, of implicit silence. But hiding-places are fragile, and amongst these hard smooth reverberant surfaces the absence of noise is everywhere punctuated: the sound of laughter or children shouting, a gasp of surprise as strangers appear suddenly around corners. In the heightened aurality of near-silence, 'no sound is innocent' (Prévost 1995, p. 33), and keeping quiet takes on a particular and exaggerated tension. These disembodied and random aural collisions – both framed by and amplified in the surrounding quiet – slip easily into a metaphoric dislocation. The accidental reverberations bouncing off the reflective stone surfaces foreground displacement over community: where or *when* one is, is not clear. Transient echoes heard around corners transfer rapidly into imagined memories of isolation. One step either side means disappearing from view, but also looking away.

The Holocaust Memorial, like the Sinti-Roma Memorial, stands in the heart of the city – the official topography of the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate ruptured by these silent reminders of absence.²⁸ Yet it is important to resist the urge to melodrama, to be wary of the beguiling hermeneutic path that promises to unlock this space as a legible simulacrum of captivity and persecution (Åhr 2008, p. 285). For there is also a quasi-musical dimension to the *Denkmal's* fluidity, a more vital and seductive side to its silence – unlike, for example, the terrifying void of the Jewish Museum's Holocaust Tower (the most obvious Berlin parallel).²⁹ With his intriguing, if frustratingly vague, concept of *rhythmanalysis*, Henri Lefebvre (1996, p. 223) invokes this 'succession of alternations, of differential repetitions': lengthening shadows, thickening and thinning crowds, and slow aural time. Wandering Eisenman's paths and stone spaces, the changing patterns of these rhythms are brought in and out of focus. Visitors' criss-crossing steps foreground these cycling and varying rhythms in relation to the outside world, now at one remove. Aimless wanderings (Benjamin 1999, p. 598) and retracings in the quiet space undermine the idea of direction itself: 'to capture a rhythm one needs to have been *captured* by it. One has to *let go*' (Lefebvre 1996, p. 223). To capture the rhythms of this silence is to submit to its mobility, remade as the gaps between sound and the spaces of history.

Eerie and sharp, this irregular quiet is framed by invisible yet heard reminders of an outside world. But unpredictability can be playful: undermining narrative hegemony by repeatedly situating experience in the present moment, even as intellectually this space references the past (Seidler 2003, p. 403). Walk behind a child and the journey becomes a joyful game of hide-and-seek, a random selection of turns, trips, doubling-backs and disappearances. Laughing friends take pictures of each other's heads peeking over the top of the stones. Couples kiss in the liminal private/public space, unexpectedly stumbled upon by groups of tourists. Concealed around corners, noise precedes body and remains after it has disappeared. Visually separated from its

source and unpredictably reflected across multiple hard stone surfaces, sounds are reduced to – or perhaps revealed as – echoes and remnants, bringing to mind composer Morton Feldman's credo³⁰:

Decay ... this departing landscape, *this* expresses where the sound exists in our hearing – leaving us rather than coming towards us. (Feldman 2000, p. 25)

Within this disembodied silence, a foregrounded agency of sound means that listening itself becomes acutely active, a subject position that sound artist Salome Voegelin dubs *écoutant*: 'I meet the sound as verb and we are both doing: playfully walking through a geography of time and place' (Voegelin 2010, p. 96).³¹ Because of this, and despite its massive scale, the *Denkmal* – in this aspect at least – evades an implicit finality.³² Subverting the conventionally respectful and reflective, its silence is shot through with 'ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning ... a sieve-order' (de Certeau 1984, p. 107) of negotiated³³ spatial readings. Lurking amidst the epic size and scale, these silent spaces offer metaphorical traces and traversals that subtly undermine the strategies of History (with a capital H): 'enunciatory operations ... of an unlimited diversity [that] cannot be reduced to their graphic trail'.³⁴

Schweigeweg (*silent path*)

Just as shocking as the outrages of the cynical so-called 'Reichkristallnacht' [Night of broken glass], was the wide sphere of the population who blithely took part, with such efficiency that no-one raised their voice against it. (www.gedenkweg2013.de).³⁵

Noise, writes Jacques Attali, is 'equivalent to the articulation of a space', marking 'the limits of a territory' (2009, p. 6). Aural networks fix a community of listeners – albeit temporarily – in space and time.³⁶ We might, however, dig deeper here and also think about territory in relation to the *absence* of sound. In what follows, deliberate (and provocative) silence in the city marks out a certain space of memorial. But more than this, the ambiguity of such heavily urbanized silence also suggests a freedom to move through multiple territories and subjectivities, to slip back-and-forth across historical lines.

On 9 November 2013, I took part in a silent walk through Berlin marking the 75th anniversary of the November pogrom, a night that came to be known as *Kristallnacht*. More than simply signifying memorial (and defining memorial space), here silence itself becomes memorialized – invoking both the enforced silence of the slaughtered and also the fearful silence of those who did not speak against it. Silence, in other words, transforms from a tool of remembrance to become both its process and its object. What follows are my highly subjective responses, written the next day. These deliberately reflexive reactions are applied here to interrogate the ways in which this

performative silence might once again open up the past, but also the limits of such non-verbal embodiment.

A performative paradox: present but silent.

75 years ago, noise defined the night. Broken glass, stones through windows, shouts and threats. Today we mark our memory by refusing to shout back. We simply offer our slow careful footsteps along the same roads, the noise now that of buses and Saturday shoppers, the only broken glass from the odd bottle left on the street.

Silence turns thoughts inwards, bearing witness to the violence of historical noise by neither adjudicating nor complying. It is the silence of those rendered voiceless (for whom we cannot speak), but also of those who would not speak up. Here we identify in reverse: personal silence, multiplied, becomes a collective.

The event has two parts: *Schweige* (silent) and *weg* (path). It is fluid, moving, furred around the edges as people come and go, overtake and lag behind. To stand still and 'observe a silence' has boundaries, frames, clarity. To walk and be silent in a large yet loosely defined group is to muddy those boundaries, to move in the margins either side of static observance. Who is a participant, who is simply a passer-by? What noise is allowed (footsteps, coughs) and what do we forego (speech)? And there are children, who will never be silent for very long. There are elderly people who must at times articulate a need. This is human silence, communal and contractual. A disorderly silence (choice), not an imposed one (coercion). Just as our walking has a loose coalition – we are not marching in step – so our silence is real yet flexible.

The route is from Marienkirche to Oranienburger Straße synagogue. After speeches from civic and religious leaders, there is a sudden hush as the walk sets off. It is immediately odd, as if an actor has stayed on stage too long: something not quite usual. We shuffle out slowly, a bit of murmured chat or kids whispering questions. About 1000 people, most over fifty, moving calmly and deliberately – not gloomily – in the afternoon sun. No chants, slogans, or uniforms; only one banner at the front. All we are offering is the open signifier of our gathered silent presence. Mysterious (but not playful) in the center of the city.

First stop is outside the Berliner Dom. About ten young people stand on the steps holding placards with names and dates. Dressed in their everyday clothes, they are relaxed but attentive. In the middle of the steps is a microphone, and the teenagers walk to it one by one to read out lists of deportees. It is powerful at first, obviously, but after fifteen or so names, dates, ages and fates, the overwhelming emotion is in fact boredom. I think how even my father³⁷ would have started to look at his watch and make winding-up motions. But perhaps the *ennui* and dissatisfaction is important. After about twenty minutes an organizer quietly suggests that the leaders move on. The kids continue to recite names and tragic fates as we file slowly by.

We walk around the back of the museums and reappear on Unter den Linden, now on the turf of tourists, hawkers, bystanders. But we are loosely bordered-off,

even if the barrier is highly porous. People come up to ask what we're doing – the short responses are hushed, almost severe.

The next stop is the Altes Palais on Bebelplatz. I realize that we are standing next to the underground library, another sealed and silenced space of historical absence. A choir of young people, supported by a small brass ensemble, sings 'Shalom Aleichem' as we arrive – we listen in respectful quiet. Next is a Bach cantata, and then 'Dona Nobis Pacem'. Some of the crowd join in (few were able to do so with 'Shalom Aleichem'). The singing is pretty and gentle, and yet this is a *Schweigeweg* – silence is the whole point. I wonder what exactly we are listening to, and what for. Is this entertainment along the way? Are we praying? Voicing hope for the next generation? Or because music marks events (even silent ones). Although the performance is good, we don't applaud – it seems wrong.

There is a short silence and the choir picks up 'Shalom Aleichem' again to send us on our way. Now in the thick of Unter den Linden, we collide more and more with Saturday afternoon noise. The contrast seems to give purpose to our steps (and our silence). As I veer off at Friedrichstraße, I become aware of my tread and gait becoming suddenly faster and lighter, independent again. I feel like Verbal Kint as he leaves the police station.³⁸

Mary Fulbrook (2009, p. 127) writes that 'no physical site of memory has significance without participating witnesses'. But the nature of participation is as significant as the testimony it enacts. Unlike the Holocaust Memorial's many small and sudden dramas, signifying power is realized here through the subtle subversion of expectations: a conventionally noisy thing (a moving crowd) becomes a silent mass. Its aural presence removed, the physical fact of the crowd is oddly foregrounded.³⁹ In the city space it is usual to find many people not talking to each other, but far rarer to see them all – without words – moving and acting deliberately as one. Here, however, both togetherness *and* silence take center stage. And yet this silence, precisely because no one is 'talking' about it, remains ambiguous and open. Cultural associations and signifying strategies are implicit rather than stated: Quaker witnessing or Thoreau's non-violent resistance. And interestingly the idea of silent commemoration strikes me as not a particularly Jewish one, or at least not an Ashkenazi Jewish one.⁴⁰ Jewish prayer tends to be heterophonic – the varying tempi and volumes of concurrent recitation often lending an appealingly ragged, anarchic quality.

Where the accidental aural and physical juxtapositions within Eisenman's stone slabs index an individualized sense of dislocation and rupture, the loose unity of the *Schweigeweg* relies upon what Iris Marion Young (1990, p. 238) memorably calls a 'side-by-side particularity' – a specifically city-based set of spatial practices that enable the collective movements of multiple beings across common territories. But beyond individuals occupying shared space, togetherness here takes on a moral consensus that is absent from the daily urban 'politics of tolerance' (Tonkiss 2005, p. 23). It is a

consensus achieved specifically through a collective (and unspoken) recourse to silence within the urban space. And the sound/silence relationship is different here too. In the *Denkmal* and also Gleis 17 (discussed later), external urban sound enters into the memorial silence. Here, however, it is memorial silence – placing itself at the heart of the city – that inflects urban noise. Along the *Schweigeweg*, performative quiet bleeds into everyday sound, and it is the city that cannot avoid the involuntary juxtapositions of the silent crowd. By self-consciously removing/opposing daily noise whilst simultaneously locating itself in the middle of normative urban chance encounter, the silent walk thus ‘commandeers’ (Moore 1994, p. 83) the city for new uses, implicitly endowing its contingent urban togetherness with a loose yet unavoidable moral/ideological credo for this short period of time. To adapt Georg Simmel (1997, p. 184), our silent agreement, framed within the anonymity of the city, makes us – for now – ‘audible’ to ourselves and to each other.

Gleis 17

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. (Foucault 1986, p. 25)

With his concept of *heterotopia*, Michel Foucault theorizes a space of alterity, a space that confines (or liberates) difference by structuring a chronology and geography related to, yet separated from, the everyday world: a ‘counter-site’ within which other ‘real sites ... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (Foucault 1986, p. 24).

Gleis 17 is a well-preserved platform and section of railway track bordering the large and pretty woods of Grunewald to the southwest of the city. Places, dates and numbers cast in large webbed iron sheets along the platform’s edge commemorate victims of the many trains that left this spot, ferrying people to their deaths in camps further east. Bordered by trees and patches of rough grass, this is a place of silence and reflection. Birches – some taken from Auschwitz – grow up amongst the track’s far end, and weeds sprout between the sleepers next to a disused brick hut, indicating a railway that has long ceased to know the sound of trains or passengers. Unlike the Holocaust Memorial, Gleis 17 is already set apart from the noise of the city by its location in a quiet suburban area. Visitors are already interpellated: attuned to a sense of silence before reaching the platform.

Where the *Denkmal* encourages multiple and lengthy routes and retracings, Gleis 17’s hidden pathways are more subtle. Here, one lingers, stops, bends down, crouches, turns, and turns again. Although the platform is linear, its silence invites repeated interruptions and breaks in motion, an increased focus on small movements and small sounds, or their absence. And sonic traces and echoes exist here too. Walking slowly along the silent platform, the clearest sound is of one’s own footsteps, overlapping freely with

associations of solitude, lonely railway stations, fear and even romance. Also, of course, the beguiling yet disturbing idea of walking in someone else's tread.

Gleis 17 is also multiply heterotopic, a counter-site that juxtaposes and challenges space, form and time. The platform and tracks are 'real' yet lead nowhere, at least in the conventional sense; the silenced steel rails point to unseen geographies both extant (on maps) and imaginary (these tracks themselves will never again take us to them). Thus the platform and its apparatus – fully-formed and *in situ* – is rendered paradoxically functionless. This is not the emptiness of an endless Midwest line before the freight train comes thundering through. It is not an artefact relocated to a museum, nor is it a working reconstruction.

Dessingué and Winter (2016, p. 9) write that 'through the meeting with silence, the cognitive and analytical level is reduced to a secondary role allowing the perceptual and affective levels to predominate.' City train stations are places of human and mechanical mobility; platforms are full of noise, but a noise that in its ubiquity says very little. A silenced platform, on the other hand, resonates loudly⁴¹ – the mute tracks, dramatically stilled, stand in material and aesthetic opposition to the sounds of terror that they represent, and of which they were a part.⁴² The spaces and temporalities that Gleis 17 encloses are thus both 'incompatible' (Foucault 1986, p. 25) and fully connected. The unremarkableness of the track itself jars bitingly with the places of death wrought in iron along its side, and yet both are linked through the instrumentality of the rail network in the implementation of the Final Solution.⁴³ The contradiction, aptly, is perverse: that Gleis 17 'does' nothing is precisely what makes it mean much. It has been stripped of its function because its function was unspeakable atrocity. And yet its materiality signifies; its silence speaks.

But once more, the silence is 'everywhere punched and torn open' (de Certeau 1984, p. 107), sounding a parallel rupture in spatial and temporal narrative. To spend some time here with open ears is to yet again experience an immediate and felt aural clash between competing subjectivities, and between 'slices in time' (Foucault 1986, p. 26). Although a self-contained memorial site when approached from the nearby road, Gleis 17 is also adjacent to the complex of platforms forming the working Grunewald S-Bahn station: carrying passengers in and out of the city and reachable directly from Grunewald station itself. Ascending the steps from the S-Bahn underpass, one carries these everyday sounds of railway life into the silent memorial space. The quiet of this furthest platform is therefore distantly inflected by the unremarkable, quotidian noise of daily commuter public transport life.⁴⁴ These are not sound effects, yet the aural connection back in time to when similar sounds marked the singular yet everyday terror of these particular railway tracks is inescapable. Gleis 17's silence is what opens it up to the materiality of lived sound – jumping across the physical space of the contemporary

S-Bahn platforms to complete a perceptual loop that cuts through the reflective memorial quiet into the disturbing resonances of the past. In a small part of our listening selves, the silence of these tracks enables them, through imported local sound, to come sinisterly alive again, forcefully disrupting an implicit “moral geography”, whereby certain forms of conduct belong and others do not’ (Leyshon *et al.* 1998, p. 23). Yet at the same time, the distinctive *mundanity* of suburban railway noise, curiously, pushes home nothing so much as the normativity necessary for effective genocide.

We might turn back here to Lefebvre and his elusive rhythmanalysis. As competent urbanists, we skillfully internalize the differing rhythms of the city, learning to live by them but not ‘hear’ them. A train platform is normalized through its noise and movement, rhythms of mobility that in their predictability signify the very everyday-ness of the city. Stillness and silence at the platform’s edge arrest these rhythms, isolating them and making their difference audible. Simultaneously as silence offers a space apart from the ongoing rhythms of the urban, therefore, it forces us to hear these rhythms anew. Thus the proximity of silent memory to the daily sounds of train life exposes perceptual borders as similarly permeable, revealing what Jay Winter (2010, p. 3) describes as ‘hidden deposits’ that are ‘dynamic, unstable, and at times, intrusive.’ Through these conflicting geographies and temporalities, in the quietness of the railway tracks, silence again becomes a way of hearing the past.

As a final perspective, I want to step a little way out of the silence and listen in instead on a slice of Berlin Jewish memorial *sound* – similarly caught here within a web of history, memory and cultural identity. It explores a way of hearing history through the sound of the present, in the process producing a particularly personal experience that is nevertheless fully grounded in the city of Berlin. Once again, it is the sensory and physical immediacy and affect of sound coupled with its ability to open up rather than close down meanings that is at the heart of this connection – a complex set of resoundings within the public city space.

Sounding memory – Tania Alon

Tania Alon was born in Berlin. Her parents both survived the war: her father in Berlin and her mother in Dortmund. A Yiddish singer, she is one of the few German-born and -raised Jews⁴⁵ on the German klezmer/Yiddish scene.⁴⁶ Tania has been performing Jewish music for most of her life – beginning, as she puts it, with the *ma nishtana*⁴⁷ when she was three years old. Singing at events *outside* her own various Jewish communities, however, and in the 25-piece ‘klezmer orchestra’ – populated almost exclusively by non-Jews – she helped assemble in Hanover, Tania frequently felt that her background made of her something between ambassador and museum-piece curio:

In other places I always had to explain. The most Germans, if they hear that you not only do this music, but that you are a Jew, that you are really Jewish, they are very shy and very touched. And they don't have really the possibility to talk *ehrlich*, real, because they don't want to hurt me and I don't want to hurt them.⁴⁸

For Tania, then, her music promotes dialogue (the chance to 'explain') whilst paradoxically creating its own form of silence – stifling the ability of some fellow Germans, upon meeting a 'real' Jew, to speak *ehrlich*. Tania noted the symbolic boundary erected by her fellow non-Jewish musicians, inflecting her Jewishness as something rarefied and special. And as the subject of increased and overly careful attention as an 'authentic' Jew (a sort of meta-Jew), the day-to-day particularities of her own *German*-Jewish experience and identity are, for Tania, often notably missing from the musical world she inhabits. They have been drowned out, in fact, by the noisy sound of German klezmer music.⁴⁹

The occasional need for self-imposed silence is also a responsibility Tania feels very strongly, connected as it is to her own family history. This is particularly the case with songs from or about the Holocaust:

In the beginning sometimes my mother was listening to my concerts. And I know that it's impossible for her to hear those songs [of the Holocaust].⁵⁰ And she's the only survivor of the family who is still alive and I'm the only daughter and we are very very close. But I believe that it is important to show that we are still here now. We are still alive ... I want to show what is alive, not just the past.

An inherent historical tension in Tania's music, then, is inescapable. On a personal level, in that certain repertoire causes too much distress to those close to her (and is therefore to be 'silenced'), but also on a wider social level, as a force to be confronted and ultimately quieted by the sound of the lived present. One of the ways that Tania addresses this tension is through her singing at *Stolpersteine* ceremonies: informal gatherings that accompany the embedding of small brass memorial plaques in the pavement outside houses and apartments to mark the deportations and often subsequent murders of former residents.⁵¹ The inauguration and laying of each new *Stolperstein* is frequently marked by some sort of recitation or performance – present-day noise here both memorializing and confronting the past – and when I interviewed her in 2014 Tania had recently sung at a ceremony for the grandparents of a Chilean family. She describes the connection to her own life powerfully:

[They died] on the Riga Transport. Nobody knows where, there is no grave. This is a substitute for a grave. And for me it's a substitute to do it myself, for my family. I can't do it, because I have no people to ask. They are dead. And it's very important for me to find people that have some memory of this time, you know? Their stories are sometimes so similar to my story. My grandmother also died on the Transport to Riga. No-one knows where she lies now. So for me it is very important.

The emotional punch is clear: sounding against the enforced silence of those who can no longer tell their own stories. The survivors also link Tania to her own murdered family, her own living sound in the city street addressing – in memorial function and material form – the absence and silence of her grandmother. But this is not just about the past, nor about the missing or dead. Equally important for Tania is the way that these stones and their ceremonies resonate in their contemporary urban space. The aural presence, the inescapable now-ness of sound forces a connection between these personal histories (and the histories for whom they stand) and today's city, the space within which their memories and legacies continue to be discussed, mourned, and argued over:

Everybody can do it, but in this moment the *Stolpersteine* are lying on the floor, it is *öffentlicher Raum* [public space]. It no longer belongs to the house, nor to the person who initiated it, *sondern es gehört Berlin. Ein teil Berlins* [instead it belongs to Berlin. A part of Berlin].⁵²

The personal story that each *Stolperstein* tells and the lived resonances of Tania's singing overlap with the public, everyday space within which they physically exist. The stones and their songs become synecdoches, connecting to other victims, to their families and friends. And more than this, to the city of Berlin itself: the sounded urban space acts as a probe, drilling down to bring the historical city into the here and now. The reverberations that Tania sends into the city space, like all sound, will ultimately be absorbed by it. But not without leaving *traces*, sonic moments 'that reveal rather than hide the discontinuous, often traumatic evolutions of the city's past' (Ward 2011b, p. 93).

Conclusion

Visitors to memorial sites, writes Susan A Sci (2009, p. 43), 'are willing to leave their private lives and enter into the public via engagement in an act of remembrance in the co-presence of others'. Written across the city space, this tension between the public and the private, between togetherness and difference, is at the heart of the complex and contradictory resonances of Berlin's silent memorial sites. It is an aurality that works along axes both temporal and spatial: the meaningful unpredictability of fleeting sonic collisions inside the Holocaust Memorial; a city walk that in its collective silence confounds subjectivities and social boundaries; the heterotopic juxtapositions of Gleis 17; and Tania Alon's sounding against the private/public history of her native city.

Berlin's history as a city of borders and transgressions⁵³ is only partly counteracted by its more recent joyful international inclusivity, and absent presences persist in the urban hum. But far from reinforcing historical separation, the inflection of silent memorial space by the lived practice of sound disrupts a top-down, strategic discourse of silence as unambiguously

emblematic of reflection and distance. The contemporary urban soundscape that slips through the silent cracks opens up parallel gaps in history, collapsing chronology and distance and illustrating powerfully a co-existence and interdependence between urban sound and silent memorial.

These different practices of hearing (Back 2007) foreground the unpredictable four-way conversation between silence, sound, the past and the present that produces inevitably conflicting subjective affects: silence becomes ‘a way of listening, not an acoustic verity’ (Brooks 2007, p. 110). This increased attention to listening promotes a parallel sense of ambiguity and juxtaposition that is at times hidden from the visual. Slippery, immediate, and semiotically open, the aural can subvert narrative hegemony and prise open layers of meaning. Because of this, it is an essential oppositional force to set against attempts to ‘streamline collective memory’ (Assmann 2015, p. 328), a reminder that ‘the world is not [just] for the beholding. It is for hearing’ (Attali 2009, p. 3). Thus to argue for a deeper consideration of silence’s capacity to reach into historical territories, to construct temporal bridges and to re-cross contested borderlines, is more than just an aesthetic privilege. An acknowledgment of the ambiguous role of silence in the urban space is directly linked to an acknowledgment of the ambiguous function of memorial itself – an acceptance of the sonic paradox that continues to resound in the Berlin city space.

Notes

1. Most explicitly in the original Yiddish title: *un di velt hot geshvign [And the World Remained Silent]*. Yiddish and German speakers can transitively ‘silent’ (*shvaygn/schweigen*), whereas in English and French one can only intransitively ‘silence’ someone or something (including oneself, of course). Whilst coincidental, this ambiguity between silence as an action and silence as a state of being sets an appropriate tone.
2. From Wiesel’s 2006 Preface (n.p.).
3. ‘If the soul attend for a moment to its own infinity, then and there is silence. She is audible to all men, at all times, in all places’ (Thoreau 1929, p. 435). Note also Thoreau’s equating of silence with the metaphorical feminine, not the authoritative masculine.
4. e.g. Winter (2010), Dessingué and Winter (2016).
5. ‘the tangle of physicality and symbolism, the sedimentation of various histories, the mingling of imaginings and experience that constitute the urban’ (Highmore 2005, p. 5).
6. Silence as representative of an inability to acknowledge difficult truths is a device characteristic of Memory Studies treatments (e.g. Laborie 1995, Lok 2014).
7. Foucault writes that silence is ‘less the absolute limit of discourse ... than an element that functions alongside.’ (1978, p. 27).
8. See also Michel Chion’s suggestion that ‘the ear in fact listens in brief slices ... We don’t hear sounds, in the sense of recognizing them, until shortly after we have perceived them’ (Chion 1994, pp. 12–13).

9. As Ari Kelman notes, Schafer's original purpose is 'lined with ideological and ecological messages about which sounds 'matter' and which do not' (Kelman 2010, p. 214).
10. See also Kahn's critique of John Cage and his silences: 'When he celebrates noise, he also promulgates noise abatement. When he speaks of silence, he also speaks of silencing.' (Kahn 1997, p. 557).
11. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) for example, details silence-as-control in the school (174) and in the prison (254), whilst also pithily observing: 'The silence of the law must not harbour the hope of impunity' (98). See also Attali on the relationship between noise control and social control (2009, p. 7).
12. It is important to stress that the particularities of silence from d/Deaf, nonverbal, or autism spectrum perspectives are well beyond the scope of this article.
13. Whether birds do or don't sing at Auschwitz is ultimately less important than the suggestive power of the question itself. See, for example: <http://www.birdforum.net/archive/index.php?t-84847.html> [accessed 22 August 2017].
14. Mayor Klaus Wowereit's infamous 'poor, but sexy' 2004 description of his city's 21st century appeal – reproduced on postcards and t-shirts, this neat aphorism is now arguably something of a branding millstone around the civic neck.
15. In these ways, Berlin resembles other German cities as much as other internationalized capital cities. At the same time, Berlin is often considered by residents of other German cities to be excessively noisy. On different responses to noisy kindergarten children across cultures, see Pinch and Bijsterveld's discussion of the Scandinavian SoundEar (2011, pp. 3–4).
16. *Noise* being more sociocultural index than acoustic fact: 'an issue less of tone or decibel than of social temperament, class background, and cultural desire' (Schwartz 2004, p. 52).
17. <https://neubauten.org/en/biography> [accessed 12 September 2015]. See also Moran on East German 'convenient silence' (2004, p. 217).
18. Think, for example, of the open adjectives that attach so readily to silence: *pregnant, uncertain, eerie ...*
19. cf. Elsaesser (2009, p. 37): 'Berlin remains impossible to grasp or keep in focus ... A city of superimpositions and erasures'.
20. Further on, this project would doubtless benefit from the involvement of respondents, perhaps through more experimental ethnographic methods such as audio diaries and their subsequent critical evaluation.
21. See Fran Morton (2005, p. 662) on 'the liveness and richness of real time ... the spaces which are created in the "now"'. Also Ben Highmore's discussion of description as 'both a form of vigilance ... and a form of self-reflexivity' (Highmore 2018, p. 251).
22. An Irish wake, for example. Also see Tolbert (1990) on Karelian lament and Feld on Bosavi 'expressive weeping' (1990).
23. Witness UK journalist Boris Johnson's dismay at the 'Latin American carnival of grief' following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (<http://www.historytoday.com/thomas-dixon/it-british-weep>. Accessed 27 October 2017).
24. Of Northern Territory mourning rituals, Magowan appositely notes: 'The indeterminacy of [women's] crying *sounds*, as opposed to the *sense* of crying-songs, renders the act of crying potentially powerful and dangerous and in need of regulation by men' (2007, p. 85, italics in original).
25. 'Memorial to Europe's Murdered Jews'. The ongoing debates began long before construction: it is arbitrarily dropped onto a site with no Holocaust resonance;

the lack of void-ness undermines its purpose; its excessive scale negates any sense of personal history; alongside the perennial question of whether there should be a central memorial at all (Young 2002, p. 69). Although important, these discussions are not for this article. Indeed to take a sonic perspective is a way of getting around discourses of finality and scale: moving from sight to sound shifts the focus from the grandiose to the episodic. On the site and its controversy, see Åhr (2008).

26. In Fran Tonkiss' excellent description, 'the improvised ballet of the streets' (2005, p. 22).
27. Irit Dekel's extensive ethnography reads the performance of silence at this Memorial as a form of 'speakability' (2013, p. 94), enacted by individuals as a collective statement of affect and reflection. Alongside this performative silence, the silence/sound dialogue that I discuss in fact relies upon the *non*-silence of at least some visitors.
28. There are other parallels. Inside the partially reconstructed golden-domed synagogue on Oranienburger Straße is a vast courtyard, originally the synagogue's main hall but now an empty and open silent space. And of course running through Berlin like a seam – or a tear – is the absent presence of the Wall itself, its former route traced by a stone and metal line along the ground.
29. See Libeskind (2009). For a comparison between the two sites, see Ward (2005).
30. Fittingly, Feldman's work explored the intricate tensions of near-silent notes, sonic collisions, and subtly varied repetition.
31. Voegelin's adaptation of Barthes' *écrivain* ('writer') – a transitive, subjective and individual meaning-maker (Barthes 1982, p. 191) – yields tempting further possibilities: a *touchant*, a *dégustant*, or even a *sentant*?
32. On monumental 'finality', see James E. Young, the only foreigner (and Jew) on the original Holocaust Memorial selection panel: 'A finished monument would, in effect, finish memory itself' (Young 2002, p. 70).
33. Hall (1980, p. 137).
34. de Certeau (1984, p. 99).
35. Accessed 7 September 2015 (website no longer operational).
36. See, for example, Alain Corbin's finely wrought study of the sound of bells in nineteenth century rural France (1998).
37. Himself a Liverpoolian Jewish teenager at the time these deportations and murders were taking place.
38. The iconic final scene of 1995's thriller *The Usual Suspects*, where arch-criminal Roger 'Verbal' Kint, who has been pretending to be crippled for the whole film, calmly escapes capture and gradually 'sheds' his disability in the process.
39. The same weekend saw an event in Friedrichshain called 'The Night of the Singing Balconies', a musical celebration where all 36 performances were given from apartment balconies to crowds on the streets below. The organizers, when denied permission to repeat their wonderful night a year later, responded with *Die Nacht der Schweigenden Balkone* [The Night of the Silent Balconies] – a neighborhood walk interspersed with stops under balconies where this time the performers stood silent.
40. In fact, one need not work too hard to find something comical in the idea of trying to persuade a group of 1000 modern-day Jews to remain quiet. Just think what Woody Allen or Jackie Mason might have done with it.
41. 'Silent sounds can be loud, as much as noisy sounds can be quiet' (Voegelin 2010, p. 81).

42. Wiesel's *Night*, for example, frames the sonic vocabulary of departing cattle trucks in explicitly physical, aggressive terms: 'A prolonged whistle pierced the air. The wheels began to grind.' (Wiesel 2006, p. 22).
43. On the German rail network and deportations, see Hilberg (1998) and Ben-Horin (2016).
44. Aural 'bleed' across open spaces is of course not an unusual feature. What is especially dramatic about this example is the particular quality of the juxtaposition: modern railway noise encroaching upon tracks that have been purposely silenced.
45. Tania's identification as a *German Jew* is strong – her family has been in Germany for three generations.
46. See Alexander (2016) for a fuller exploration. Other notable German-Jewish Yiddish singers include Jalda Rebling and Karsten Troyke.
47. The 'four questions' of the Passover *seder*, traditionally asked by the youngest child present.
48. All Tania's quotes come from a personal interview (Steglitz, Berlin, 16 June 2014), conducted in an animated composite of English, German and Yiddish.
49. The Jewish-German dialogue within the German klezmer revival has been hotly debated, at times with a disturbing level of accusation and vitriol. It is not my focus here. See Alexander (2016), Waligórska (2013), Ottens and Rubin (2004).
50. The impossibility of hearing here makes a striking complement to Elie Wiesel's impossibility of staying silent discussed at the start.
51. The 'stumblestones' also resonate in popular culture: on 9 November 2013, the daily *Berliner Zeitung* carried the front page headline '75 years ago Jewish synagogues and houses burned in Berlin. This Berliner Zeitung is a Stolperstein'.
52. Tania Alon, interview.
53. See Till (2005), Ward (2011a), and Silberman *et al.* (2012).

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Notes on contributor

Phil Alexander gained his PhD in 2016 from SOAS, University of London. Since March 2017 he has been working as a Research Associate at Glasgow University on the AHRC-funded project 'Jewish Lives/Scottish Spaces', looking at early twentieth century Jewish musical practice in Scotland. He is also a busy and active musician, composing and performing klezmer and jazz regularly around the UK.

ORCID

Phil Alexander  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9567-7134>

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