



Rising from the Rubble

Creating POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews - with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

April 11, 2018

1 hour, 21 minutes, 23 seconds

Speaker: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time Transcription

00:00 [uctv University of California Television / www.uctv.tv]

00:12 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library Channel UC San Diego /
www.uctv.tv/library-channel]

00:15 Jerome Rothenberg: This is for Barbara. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett entered my life and consciousness in the early 1970s, at a time when she was then doing, what she was then doing already seemed of singular importance to many of us in the intellectual and artistic worlds in which we lived. So I'll start this part of her story and her accomplishments over the intervening years. The place where we met was New York and the first occasion was around a piece of folklore research and writing of hers that I was lucky to publish in *Alcheringa*, the first journal of ethnopoetics that Dennis Tedlock and I were then co-editing. Barbara's piece, written along with the scholar poet Harris Lenowitz, who would become my co-author a few years later on a big Jewish book, was a series of transcriptions from oral sources centered on Jewish ideas about the evil eye, called *kinehora* in Hebrew and in Yiddish. As such, it was a crucial asset - her - it was a crucial asset and I was immediately drawn to Barbara, whose work I saw as not only tied to Jewish matters, or to Jewish matters in isolation, but juxtaposed to such matters with a sense of culture, and language on an intercultural, and intergeneric level. All of this was delivered to me - to us - not in an academic setting so much but around the dinner table, or with drinks in hand, with Barbara and her artist husband Max Gimlet at center of those gatherings, first in their uptown Riverside Drive apartment, and later in their studio quarters on the gradually gentrifying Bowery, a hub also for artists, and intellectuals with a wide-reaching range of interests and inclinations.

02:17 Jerome Rothenberg: From that perspective, we knew her during her years at YIVO [Yiddish Scientific Institute], where she curated their outstanding collection of old-world Jewish photographs, culminating in the book *Image Before My Eyes*, a photographic history of Jewish life in Poland. Later, in her time in folklore and folklife at the University of Pennsylvania and finally in her co-founding of the Performance Studies Program at New York University bringing her widely diverse knowledge of folklore and anthropology - what people actually do in everyday life - into association with theater and performance practitioners, and scholars deeply involved with innovative and avant-garde practices in contemporary art and theater. In conjunction with this, her work in Jewish Studies as well as in Museology, the museum, notably as an agent of transformation, she writes. That work continued and led directly to her major and enduring work in designing and overseeing the core exhibition for the newly established Museum of Polish Jewry Polish Jewish History in Warsaw; called by its ancient Hebrew name Polin. Polin Jewish Museum. Polin, which would be Polska in Polish and Poyln in Yiddish. This will of course be the center of her talk today, and I don't want to impinge on that. I would like however to end this

introduction by reading - performing - for her a poem that I had newly written at just about the time that we first got together. It was the opening poem of a longer work of mine called *POLAND/1931*, my own Polin as it were, which was my attempt to reimagine, or newly imagine, a Poland that contained, as I wrote it, it then, a world of Jewish mystics, thieves, and madmen; a larger entity than that of simple shtetl village folk brought down by Holocaust, though I was quite aware of those as well. And only a few years later that opening poem, *The Wedding*, was translated into Yiddish by Amos Schauss, a rabbi and teacher at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. A wonderful gift that I was able to incorporate into my own performance of *POLAND/1931*.

04:49 Jerome Rothenberg: So what I'll read is the the opening of the poem in the Yiddish translation and then go into the poem and in English. Though I could do it the reverse way also. So, *POLAND/1931* the wedding becomes
POYLN/1931 "Di Khaseneh"

mayn miyakh iz ongeshtopt mit tishtekher
un mit fingerlekh ober mayn miyakh
kholemt fun poyln ongeshtopt mit poyln
in dimiyen gebrakht
tsu a shvartseh khaseneh
a naketer khosn shvebt iber
zayn naketeh kaleh metirifdikeh poyln
vi shreklekh dayneh yidn oyf khasenehs
dayneh shulen mit kamfer reykhesh un mandlen
dayneh termosn dayneh elektrishe tumanen
dayneh untermesh lebedik mit vurtseIn oy poyln
poyln poyln poyln poyln poyln

05:50 Jerome Rothenberg: *POLAND/1931* "The Wedding"

my mind is stuffed with tablecloths
& with rings but my mind
is dreaming of poland stuffed with poland
brought in the imagination
to a black wedding
a naked bridegroom hovering above
his naked bride mad poland
how terrible thy jews at weddings
thy synagogues with camphor smells & almonds
thy thermos bottles thy electric fogs
thy braided armpits
thy underwear alive with roots o poland
poland poland poland poland poland
how thy bells wrapped in their flowers toll
how they do offer up their tongues to kiss the moon

old moon old mother stuck in thy sky thyself
an old bell with no tongue a lost udder
o poland thy beer is ever made of rotting bread
thy silks are linens merely thy tradesmen
dance at weddings where fanatic grooms
still dream of bridesmaids still are screaming
past their red moustaches poland
we have lain awake in thy soft arms forever
thy feathers have been balm to us
thy pillows capture us like sickly wombs & guard us
let us sail through thy fierce weddings poland
let us tread thy markets where thy sausages grow ripe & full
let us bite thy peppercorns let thy oxen's dung be sugar to thy dying jews
o poland o sweet resourceful restless poland
o poland of the saints unbuttoned poland repeating endlessly
the triple names of mary
poland poland poland poland poland
have we not tired of thee poland no for thy cheeses
shall never tire us nor the honey of thy goats
thy grooms shall work ferociously upon their looming brides
shall bring forth executioners
shall stand like kings inside thy doorways
shall throw their arms around thy lintels poland
& begin to crow

08:00 [audience applause]

08:07 Jerome Rothenberg: Dear Barbara, it is all yours.

08:20 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Well thank you very, very much. I'm absolutely delighted to be here. And part of the joy of being here is to be here with Jerry and Diane, my very dear friends from 40, more than 45 years ago. I would like, of course, to thank our sponsors but I especially want to thank Susanne Hillman, who has done everything to organize this event and to make my presence possible. What you see here is the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto, the rubble of the pre-war Jewish neighborhood of Warsaw. This is where the ghetto was built and in the background, you can see the destroyed city of Warsaw. This area became rubble after the Germans suppressed the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and then a year later when they suppressed the Warsaw Uprising. And so it is here on the rubble of the ghetto that we have created the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and this site in, for me, is very meaningful because it tells, it basically, it's a statement about beginning from the rubble, beginning without a collection, beginning without a building, beginning without any historical fabric, but beginning with the greatest treasure of all which is the story that we wanted to tell. We opened the museum, we

had the grand opening of the museum, with the opening of the permanent exhibition in October of 2014 and this statement was made shortly after that opening, and I find it one of the most inspiring responses to this museum.

- 09:58 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: "It's not often that a museum *makes* history as well as chronicles it, and rare too when otherwise cautious observers ... remark at the opening of a new museum that it may prove a source of hope and pride that propels an entire society forward. Both of those things happened this week in Warsaw, with the opening of POLIN Museum," and this is from Arnold Eisen, the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Now this statement was made in October 2014. It is now approximately three and a half years later and we are in a very, very different situation and it will be interesting for us to have a conversation about that during the QA. Until we opened POLIN Museum - the building in 2013, and the core exhibition, the gala, and the grand opening in 2014 - the only indication that this had been home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, the only indication that of their presence, and their absence, was the monument to the Warsaw Uprising, the monument to the ghetto heroes. And that monument was unveiled in 1948 and you're seeing here the unveiling of the monument, 1948 on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And you can see that the rubble has not been completely cleared. It took decades to clear the rubble and you can see the destroyed city of Warsaw in the background. About 85 percent of Warsaw's core was destroyed when the Germans suppressed the Warsaw Uprising.
- 11:32 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: In the years that followed, in the decades that followed, the area was cleared and communist-era apartment buildings were built all around and the monument stood - together with a Plaza and a large park - a very large rectangle and simply kept empty. And in large measure those who lived in the area, excuse me, and children who were growing up there didn't know what the monument was about, didn't know anything about what had happened to before the war, and during the war. And you can imagine the housing shortage after the war and the immediate need to create this kind of housing. In 1993 with the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington [DC], there were several people from the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, a Jewish NGO [non-governmental organization] in Poland that had been established in 1951, who were very inspired by that, by the opening of that museum. They were there, present for the opening, and they had the feeling that if there was a Holocaust Museum in Washington, there should be a Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. And so in 1994, the mayor of Warsaw allocated that orange rectangle, that if in the event of a miracle such a museum should ever be built, that it would be located facing the monument to the ghetto heroes. And that is indeed what happened, and that is between 1993 and 2013. In other words, it took 20 years, but keep in mind that 1993 is only four years after the fall of communism. So, it's actually a very bold idea to have at that particular moment in time.

- 13:12 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Our concept was always that the museum would complete the memorial complex. That we would go to the monument to honor those who died by remembering how they died. And we would go to the museum to honor them by remembering how they lived, and how they lived for a 1,000 years which is an enormous and very, very important message because, quite understandably, that very rich, and long, and continuous history had been overshadowed by the catastrophic events of the Holocaust. In 2005, the Association was able to join with the city of Warsaw and the Ministry of Culture to actually found the museum. And an architectural competition was held and over 200 architects internationally submitted proposals for the building. And the winner is Rainer Mahlamäki, a Finnish architect, and what he delivered was a building that echoed the geometry of the monument, that was discrete on the outside, that was not higher than the apartments around it, and it's a, it's a brilliant building. I'll show you in a moment. I think his solution to the dilemma of how to create a building that would not quote overshadow the monument. The monument, the, the building is clad in glass and this is, I think of this as an architecture of hope on a site of tragedy. I think of it as a way of actually communicating the essence of this museum, which is to say that it's all about light, transparency, reflection, and openness.
- 14:49 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And the, the glass surface of the building is very responsive to the changing light of the day. The surface of the building, in fact, are a series of glass panels that are like scales on a fish. It's not sheer solid glass, but rather a series of panels. And silk-screened on these panels is the word POLIN, the Hebrew end, and Pyland the Yiddish word for Poland, in Hebrew and in Latin letters. And the, one of the most dramatic sides of the building, in fact, is the other side with the largest glass window in Poland, and this wonderful tree that was retained from the park. The brilliance of the building is that all the drama is on the inside, and the contrast between the, if you will, the minimalist sheer glass geometry of the exterior and the way in which the glass and its reflective and transparent qualities helps to dematerialize the bulk of the building, stands in sharp contrast to the organic and - shotcrete is a special technique for creating these beautiful organic forms that are inspired by the canyons of the Judean Desert on the inside. And the building inside is also very, very responsive to changing light during the day. The exhibition itself, you enter it from the main entrance and from the main floor.
- 16:12 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And the, the architects that, that entered the competition were actually given the master plan for the exhibition. In fact, in the years between the idea in [19]93 and the founding the museum in 2005, but the association - this little Jewish NGO - had done was to develop an exhibition plan, a master plan for the exhibition, without knowing what the building would be. Which is really extraordinary and given, given - if you remember the rubble - given that there was no, no collection, although they formed a collection, and given that even with forming a collection it was not possible, through objects alone, to tell a thousand years story beginning in the 10th century, we decided on a different approach. We

decided to create what I like to call a theater of history. And that is, you can call it a theater of history, theater of mise-en-scène, still life theater, but the idea would be to express the thousand-year history in a way that involved what we call narrative space. Where we make this space an actor, the space itself - the way it's organized, the way it is set out - it is actually working to communicate the story and the story unfolds as the visitor walks. If you don't walk, the story doesn't move. You move. Which is, for me, a defining feature of what makes an exhibition and why it's different from a movie, or a play. In a movie or a play what you're watching moves and you sit. But in an exhibition the, what you're looking at stays and you move, and that, that is really very, very important in understanding how it works.

17:53 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Now, of course, we did work with collections. The most important collection of this material, of the relevant material, in Poland, is at the Jewish Historical Institute, but these collections - across the globe, wherever they are - are largely 19th and 20th century, paintings, Judaica, Jewish ceremonial art, documents, and photographs, and we had a 1000 years story. So in 2005, the Museum was founded as a unique private-public partnership for a major cultural institution in Poland. And this is a key to its success, and also, going forward, to its relative autonomy or independence. And that is either museums in Poland - most of them are in fact state museums - they're, they're in fact controlled by the Minister of Culture. They're there, they're essentially state museums. There are private museums as well but this kind of private-public partnership is very special. And the city of Warsaw, and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage were responsible for the building and they put about 70,000, \$70 million US into the building, and they oversaw its construction. And the little Jewish NGO actually raised the money and produced the exhibition and were responsible for the story. And that I think is also a key to the success of this. And I like to think that only people who were so idealistic, and so unrealistic could ever have made such a project because in 1993 to have such an idea is really unrealistic and totally idealistic. And for an institution that had never rate - and also state institutions are fully funded and private institutions usually have their own source of funds. But to raise, as they did, over \$50 million US is really extraordinary, of which about \$40 million went into the exhibition and they really produced, I think, well - and we know from the awards that we've gotten - a very, very extraordinary, very, very extraordinary institution.

19:54 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So, I would say that as of 2016 there were 1.5 million visitors, but as of now we have about 2.5 million visits. So between April 2013 and now 2.5 million visits. And that is very, very exceptional. We've won all the major prizes: the 2016 European Museum of the Year award, the 2016 European Museum Academy prize, the 2017 Europa Nostra Award for our educational programs, and at least 20 other major, major, major awards. And so, what are some of the keys to what I value in this exhibition? Well, believe it or not, the fact that we didn't have enough money most of the time meant that we could take more time to think, and so it was a kind of blessing in disguise. On the one hand, there was a worry that we

would never finish, but we did. And, but, we, but fundamentally what happened was this, when the money ran out the, the designers stopped working. We worked with a very wonderful design company in England, in London, called Event Communication. And, but, when they stopped working we didn't. That is to say, our international team of academics - approximately 12 scholars from many different fields, from history, sociology, social psychology, literature, performance studies, anthropology, art history - from Israel, Poland, and the United States, a young curatorial team. And essentially, we kept working and as a result, we were able to come up with a very intellectually coherent, intelligent, I would say, approach to this history. And the, I want to at least signal a few of the principles that governed our, our approach.

21:49 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So, I like to say that we don't, that we reject the idea of a master narrative; that we don't want to deliver to our visitors a story with a beginning, middle, and end. That doesn't really raise any questions, create any openings. Our approach is what we call an open-ended past. And, but, Moshe Rosman, who is a wonderful historian of Polish Jews in the early modern period, he said, okay no master narrative. But you do have, what he called, meta-historical principles. In other words, I would say, ways of thinking about history. And here are some of the principles. I'm often asked, what's the most important period in the history of Polish Jews, and usually when I'm asked the person who asks already knows the answer. So usually they, it's, it's the Holocaust. Or, for many, especially in Poland it's the post-war years. It's the period they lived through. Or for some, it's the interwar years, the [19]20s and [19]30s, which is a period of my parents. Nobody says the Middle Ages, and the medieval historian always complained. She said, nobody's gonna be interested in my period and it's more than half the millennium. It goes 965 to 1500. And then the historian of the 19th century says, nobody cares about the 19th century, and it's the long 19th century. It goes from 1772 to World War I. And then I had donors who said, nobody's interested in anything except the 20th century. He said, and the rest of it you have no material. You just made it up. And so, our, our first principle was that the message, the message of 1000 years was an enormous message of continuous Jewish presence in this territory because you cannot say that about Spain, England, France, Vienna, Germany, parts of Italy. It's absolutely specific to this territory. And, okay so that's the first thing.

23:44 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: The second is that Jews are an integral part of the history of Poland. They're not only in Poland, but they're also of Poland and from the very, very beginning. And this is very important in the way that we would then construct the narrative. Third, we present a spectrum of relations, because the - I often get the, if you will a perspective on this history through the lens of the Holocaust, and if you will, a kind of perspective that wherever you are in the thousand-year history you're foreshadowing the Holocaust, and wherever you start from you're looking back through the lens of the Holocaust. And one of our fundamental principles of the way in which we tell the story is to work against the

Holocaust as being the determining frame for this thousand-year history. And so, it becomes extremely important to present what we call a spectrum of relations. A story of coexistence and conflict, cooperation and competition, separation and integration. Sometimes one of those terms is in the foreground, other times another term. Then, the idea that Jews created a civilization that is categorically Jewish and distinctly Polish, and because this territory included at times Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuanian, it was, if you will, categorically Jewish and distinctly regional, I would put it. So Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian as the major, as the major, major areas. And so, the idea here is that there is a kind of cultural symbiosis. And this is also very characteristic - that Jews became the largest Jewish community in the world and a center of the Jewish world. And this is critically important, in the 18th century half, the Jewish population in the world lived in the territory of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. 750,000 Jews, half the population, half the Jewish population of the world. And that doesn't happen if a place is a thousand years story of antisemitism, which is very often how this history is perceived.

25:48 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: The power of telling the story in the very place where it happened. I can't tell you how many times people said to me, why are you making this Museum in Poland? Well, why not. They said you should make it in New York. You should make it in Tel Aviv. You should make it where the Jews are. And I thought to myself, hmm making it in the place where the story happened is the single most powerful thing you can do. And this museum is for everyone. It's, it's not only for those whose story were telling. It's also for those who live in the place where the story unfolded, but it's also a story for the world. And finally, that this is a site of conscious, conscience. It is a place where we want to create a trusted zone for engaging difficult subjects. That we want to come to our visitors with trust, to trust them as people of good faith and openness. And we want them to trust us, that we will create a story, a narrative, an exhibition, a history, that is authoritative without being authoritarian. And there's a big difference between those two principles. So now, what I'd like to do is to give you a kind of walkthrough. It's rather more what I'd call a curatorial tour, a kind of backstory to the making of the exhibition, and to show you how those principles actually work in making the exhibition itself. So always there was the idea to start the, the visitors' path, a journey so to speak, in a forest. And when you come into the exhibition from that ground floor, you actually come down a very broad dramatic set of stairs and you find yourselves, yourself, in a glass forest on which are projected is, on which is projected a film that's really inspired by the wilderness forest - one of the last great wilderness forests in the northeast of Poland. And it's here that we tell, it's essentially, it's a space of historical imagination. It's a poetic space. And it's here that we retell the story that Jews told themselves about how they came to Poland and why they stayed.

27:55 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And we use the version of the legend by [Shmuel Yosef] Agnon, the Nobel Prize winner who was a wonderful writer of Hebrew literature. And the story goes something like this, there was, Jews are being

persecuted in Western Europe. They came east. They found themselves in a forest, and then the story varies. The clouds broke, an angel's hand pointed and they heard the words Polin, or they saw words - Hebrew words - carved on the trees, or they saw pages of the Gemara - pages of holy texts - floating down, and they, they thought when they heard the word, or they heard birds chirping Polin. They thought when they heard Polin, they thought they heard Hebrew. Polin - rest here. Here you shall dwell. Here you shall rest. And so, they said this is how we know it was divinely ordained that this is where we should be, and we should stay here until the prophet Elijah comes and announces the coming of the Messiah and takes us and takes us to the promised land. And so, it's a very counterintuitive way to begin a thousand years story of Polish Jews. And so, when we shift from this space of historical imagination to the Medieval gallery, we cross a threshold between legend and history. And we begin the story in 965. And I think it's very counterintuitive for our visitors that they see Arabic very early. The first languages they see in terms of these large quotations that we use is Hebrew, but then very quickly they see Arabic. Why? Because the very first description of Poland appears in a travel account by a Sephardic Jew from Cordoba who wrote in Arabic. It's one of the most celebrated Medieval travel accounts. His name was Ibrahim ibn Yakub and the account is dated around 965 and it just, it's and Polish school kids they know about this and about the Holocaust and nothing in between. so hopefully they will, they will know, they will know a lot more from, from an experience at our exhibition.

30:08 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Now there's a very fundamental principle here that I want to point out and that is that we drive the narrative through quotations from primary sources, from the period. And why? First of all, we want to put our visitors in direct communication, and direct touch with those whose stories were telling, and in their words, and, and, and only sources from the period itself. So no, nothing from the 20th century, no illustrations by Arthur Schick, only from the period itself. And what we're trying to do is to keep our visitors in the moment of the story. And we ask them not to look forward, not to anticipate what's going to come next, but rather to have the feeling that the horizon forward for them is similar to the horizon forward for those in the story itself. And that's one of the ways we try to pull back from that teleological drive to the Holocaust. And it becomes very important in the later periods, especially in the [19]20s and [19]30s, but actually, it's a principle that begins at the very, very, very, very beginning. And when we present these very important large quotes that carry the big message of a section of the exhibition, we do so in the original language, and in a font from the period, and everything is translated into Polish and in English. Now, what do you do when the period 965 to 1500 you have virtually no objects? Well, actually you have two objects. You have tombstones and coins. That, this is a 1203; it's the earliest Jewish tombstone from Poland. It's, it was found in the Jewish cemetery in Wrocław. Coins, that are the size of a dime, clearly not that big. And from tombstones and coins, you cannot tell a 500

years story. And so, and for us, it's the story that matters, small stories which through a careful selection of them, tell the big story.

32:08 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So, we went to illuminated manuscripts from the Rhineland which is the, was at the time the center of Ashkenazi-Jewish culture. And it's also the region from which Jews emigrated and left and then went to Poland to the, to the, to our territory. And so, we took those manuscript illuminations, we took Christian manuscript illuminations from the period as well, and we then turned to two of Poland's most favorite comic book artists. And we said to them, here are the stories. We've taken them from travel accounts, chronicles by rabbinical correspondence, from letters, from legal documents. Here are the stories. Here are the manuscript illuminations, Jewish and Christian. Illustrate them, and they did. And then we went to conservators, who are responsible for conserving the interiors of Medieval, and Renaissance, and basically the most wonderful churches in Poland. And we said, paint the walls. And so the result is not only painted walls but also hand gilded walls - actually gilded using traditional gilding techniques and real gold. And the result is a hand-painted gallery. It is as if you were in a life-sized illuminated manuscript, 360 degrees. And so, this is a way of making a virtue of necessity and we've organized this - it's a, really beautifully organized. The fundamental story in the Medieval gallery is how from a few traveling merchants, beginning in the 10th and 11th centuries, how by the end of that 500-year period does this territory begin to be the center of the Ashkenazi Jewish world? How did it happen? How is it that in the course of those 500 years there are now a hundred places where Jews are settled? Fifty of them are Jewish communities and there are about 15,000 Jews living in the territory. The process by which that happened is the story that we tell in the Medieval gallery.

34:20 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: When we move into the next period, we're moving into the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. By this time, because during the Medieval period Poland, Ukraine, Poland had absorbed Ukraine. And in this period, between 1569 and 1772, Lithuania becomes part of this Commonwealth. They joined together to be stronger, to fend off invasion from their neighbors. So the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth is often considered a Golden Age in Polish history and in Polish Jewish history, though we treat it in a more ambivalent way. We ask ourselves in which ways was it golden and which ways was it not so golden. And this is a very beautiful, beautiful gallery organized in two parts. Now in addition to the principle of driving the narrative with quotations from primary sources, our approach is also a multi-voiced narrative. And so, for example, here on our wall of words we present a variety of voices, from nobility, from a Karaite, from a from a rabbi, from a critic of the Commonwealth, around the question of whether Jews had it too good or not good enough. *Paradisus iudaeorum* is a phrase found in a satirical poem that is critical of everything in the Commonwealth, and Jewish paradise is a way of saying that Jews quote, had it too good. But there were many other things that the critic was criticizing regarding the Commonwealth. But the idea of putting all

of these statements together in a kind of dissonant chorus is a hallmark of our exhibition, which is that it is multi-voiced, with voices from the period. Now, this is the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It's an enormous, enormous territory. Maybe one of the most enormous, one of the most, one of them, one of the largest territories in Europe. And also one of the most diverse because it was a territory of many religions, languages, cultures, regions, and so that meant not only Catholics. The, the first non-Christian group in this territory were Jews, but they also were also Protestants of every stripe, also Tatars, Muslims, also the Eastern Orthodox. So it was a very, very diverse territory. And in order for this territory to be able to manage its diversity - it actually was exceptional in the early modern period for its religious toleration - which I think is actually a key to the expansion, and growth, and development of the Jewish community.

36:49 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Now there are two big messages we want to communicate in, in this section, which is the first half of the Commonwealth period. And one of them is that this is a, this is a period in which this territory becomes the center of the Ashkenazi Jewish world, and there are two hallmarks of that development. One is the rise of rabbinical authority. That is to say, where the rabbis in this territory are considered to be the big authorities, and the Yeshivas, the advanced religious schools that develop here so that people in Western Europe are actually sending their sons here to this territory to attend these Yeshivas. But the second is a very high degree of Jewish self-government, of Jewish communal autonomy, at the local level, at the regional level, and the national level. How do you communicate such abstract ideas to a visitor and especially to the 15-year-old Polish boy? Our hardship case. So we figure if we can reach a fifteen-year-old Polish boy, then we can reach everybody. So - and these are really - the rise of rabbinical authority, the, the high degree of Jewish communal autonomy - these are really abstract ideas. So, what is the evidence for the rise of rabbinic authority? One of them, actually the only thing we have but it's very, very I think very rich and very useful is Hebrew and Yiddish printing because this territory became a center for Hebrew and Yiddish printing. And so, we tell - if you will - we try to communicate that, those core ideas, through the history of printing. Now history of printing can also be pretty dry and so we figured what we'll do is give our visitors - we intended it for kids but adults love it too - the opportunity to print. And we created printing presses that are actually presses. That, they're not, it's not about rolling. You push the paper in and you have a thing that you do, that actually presses.

38:46 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And of course, some of us who love books - and we know that the library is sponsoring us today - will know that the history of printing is a fabulous topic, really wonderful topic. And so, what are they printing? Their printing Jewish printers marks and they're printing the title pages of some of the most important books printed at the time. And they, and they carry these things home, and some of them frame them, and hang them up in their homes if you can imagine. Jewish printers mark Jewish printers' marks and title pages in these Polish

homes across the land. It's something that nobody could ever have envisioned. Now of course we do show original books from the period printed in our territory. But here's a wonderful original book. But you know, it's a kind of a walk by because people can't read it, it's not illustrated, they don't understand it. You can only show one page at a time, and you have to keep on turning the pages for conservation reasons. So we decided to open those books by creating a kind of library and using the kind of stand you would find in a synagogue as a way to embed computer screens. And then to take some of the most important books that were - and early books, 1534 for the *Shaarei Dura* - and to open them up for our visitors. Now, what does it mean to open it up? The *Shaarei Dura* is intended for professionals, highly trained religious professionals, who can adjudicate whether meat is kosher. And the first few pages are all about the salting of meat. This is not exactly accessible content, you know, once we've opened the book. So we actually use a book like this to introduce the basic principles of kashrut, of Jewish ritual purity. Or here, we also want to show the interest of Christians - in the Christian Hebraist - the interest of Christians in the Hebrew language, and so here we have a book which is teach yourself Hebrew. And on the right we have books that were printed for women in Yiddish, usually, books of ethical conduct, err conduct.

40:48 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: There's also a very important economic story that we're able to present as a kind of way of closing out this half of the gallery. But the economic story, which is the role of Jews and managing the the assets on Noble estates, which meant managing the peasants, actually was a source of great conflict, and which erupted in the, in the case of the what's known as the Khmelnytsky Uprising in 1648, where Cossacks and the peasants rose up against what they considered their oppressors - meaning the Polish nobility, Catholic Church, and these Jewish lessees and, I would say, managers of the Noble estates. And so we use this as a kind of caesura to divide the period and to follow with the late 17th and 18th centuries. And this time we go from that big kind of view, of rabbinical authority, communal autonomy, the big map, that big picture and we zoom in on everyday life in the most characteristic form of Jewish settlement, what we call the Jewish town. And this is, and this is set in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Jewish town, we call it the Jewish town because the most characteristic places in which Jews lived and were concentrated were in towns. And especially in this period, in the towns, there were private towns owned by the nobility, and where Jews lived they formed a substantial proportion of the population. So for example, in my father's town of Opatów, in south-central Poland there were 10,000 - population of 10,000 - 6,500 were Jews. And in the [19]20s and [19]30s in Białystok, which is a city there were 50,000 a, pardon me, yes 50 percent of the population or more were Jewish. If you could imagine, San Diego 50 percent of the population Jewish. And we - just think about it, Philadelphia 65 percent Jewish. It's just hard to imagine such a thing.

- 42:47 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And the centerpiece of this gallery, because we feel that it communicates so many of the messages that we want to get across, is the wooden synagogue. Wooden synagogues of the 16th and 17th centuries - this was the era of the great wooden synagogues. They were spectacular. They were spectacular feats of wooden architecture, timber framing, and their interiors were magnificent as well. And even a tiny town that only had maybe 2,000 inhabitants, maybe five hundred Jews, they were actually building these incredible, they could be building these incredible wooden synagogues. Of course, they're, they're in larger towns as well, but the idea that a very small town could build such an incredible structure - a collaboration between local carpenters and Jewish carpenters, and, and, and a Jewish painters who decorated the inside. Now during World War II, during the Holocaust, the Germans destroyed all the wooden synagogues that were still standing. Not one of these fabulous wooden synagogues remains. But during the late 19th century, during the 1890s, and all the way through the [19]20s and [19]30s there were architectural historians who were very interested in these synagogues and who began to document them. So this is a photograph and these are drawings that were made - these were made actually between 1910 and 1914 - by Alois Breyer, who was an architectural historian in Vienna and he made hundreds of drawings, cutaways, cross-sections, floor plans, measurements, even color studies. And in the late 1890s Isidor Kaufmann, a Jewish painter in, in, in Vienna - he actually made this painting of the interior of the Gwozdziec Synagogue, which is the single best documented of all the wooden synagogues. All the images that I have just shown you are from one synagogue. The synagogue that once stood in Gwozdziec, which is today in Ukraine, because of all the wooden synagogues it is the single best documented. And it just turns out it was destroyed in World War I when the Russian front moved through Gwozdziec and the town burned.
- 45:02 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So this synagogue went up in flames then but we have this incredible documentation. And this is from that synagogue. So what did we do? We worked with a wonderful, educational studio in Massachusetts called Handshouse Studio. And their mission is to recover lost objects. And what they say is, you can never recover the original object in the sense of the original material, but you can recover the knowledge of how to make it by making it using traditional tools, materials, and techniques. And that's what we did. And the idea was that the value of what we would create would be the knowledge we would recover. But to recover that knowledge, we had to actually make it. And so we went to an open-air folk architecture museum in, outside of Sanok, in southern Poland. Skansen, if you know the Skansen Museums, and they said okay this whole area here you can use it. And we ordered 200 raw logs with the bark still on. And we collaborated with the American Timber Framers guild, and with European timber framers. And these are people that are so crazy about timber framing, they will go anywhere to timber frame. And they bring with them their tools. They bring with them their historical axes, adze, lathes, pit saws. And they bring them in golf bags and ski bags, I don't

know how they get them onto planes and get them through security. And I tell you, it's like Lord of the Ring. And, and so in three two-week workshops, we were able to complete the timber framing of the, essentially what would be the, the framing of the exterior of the ceiling of this synagogue and of its roof. And we were fortunate that we began the project early enough that the architect could create an opening in the gallery, so that when we created this - the top of it, which is essentially the roof - would come up into the main hall and would be visible when you come into the main hall. And you would be able - we left it open so you could look down into it to see actually how it was constructed.

47:10 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So, once the timber framing was done, it's all put together with wooden pegs like a puzzle. We pulled out the wooden pegs. We numbered all the parts. We piled them up under a tarpaulin, kept them there for two years, and then when we were ready, we brought all of these elements to Warsaw and we lowered them into the exhibition level. We reassembled all the parts, and we hoisted this 25-ton structure, and we suspended it from cables. And we were able to do so in the presence and the participant - and with the participation of Maria Piechotka, who is one of the architectural historians who was instrumental in documenting these with the synagogues. Now for the painted ceiling, we divided the painted ceiling into eight sections and each section was a two-week workshop with volunteers. We had about 300 volunteers and experts, whether they were timber framers or experts in this kind of wall painting. And these elements were completed, and these workshops were conducted in existing masonry synagogues in different cities and towns in Poland today, with the participation of the local communities who came in for workshops, who came in for lectures, who watched the process, and who came to really identify with the part of the project that was completed in their town.

48:37 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And this is the result. It is just stunning. It is absolutely fabulous and the value of it, of course, you can say, you know originally today - what happened was originally there was going to be something - it wasn't clear what kind of a synagogue structure but there was going to be something wooden synagogue. And there was a small, relatively small, amount of money allocated because the assumption was we would go to a theatre prop maker and give him a picture and tell him to make one. But to make it in this way, this is the gold standard in terms of museum education, in terms of community outreach, in terms of community engagement. It is the gold standard. And in terms of the idea that you had to materialize the object in order to recover the knowledge, it's just brilliant and so I think it's one of the most memorable experiences that our visitors have. And the bema, the central reader's platform, is a 100 percent scale and the ceiling and roof are 85 percent scale. And the bema was made in exactly the same way. Now what I love is the way that kids experience this, this wonderful structure. We have a kind of like a cushion with straps and the kids can wear it like a backpack - but they look like little turtles, you know walking around the museum - but when

they get here they're invited to take off their, their, their cushion, lie down, and I think, for some of these kids, it'll be the most memorable museum experience of their childhood. And then on the upper level, where the, the top of the roof comes up into the main hall, we were able to create a glass ledge on all four sides. And we can provide the whole backstory, how we made it, the history of wooden synagogues, and I can't believe that this kid is mesmerized by a map that shows the places where this, where the synagogues once stood. Maps actually are one of the best ways of communicating.

50:21 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: We come to 1772 and this big, that big red map that you saw, that big Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth is, has become what's called a Republic of Nobles. That is to say that the nobility are really in control. They can elect the king and they have gotten a lot of privileges from the king in order to get their loyalty. It's a highly decentralized country. It has a very weak army. And what happens is that Russia, Prussia, and Austria decide to partition the Commonwealth, and each will take a piece of the royal cake. And what you see in this very iconic image are these three powers tearing up the map of the Commonwealth. And the last king of Poland, his crown is slipping off his head. And this is the inspiration for this installation because what we want to communicate to our visitors is something quite difficult which is that between 1772 and World War I, there was no Poland. The, the territory of that map, it disappears. And now what you have is a piece of it is in the Russian Empire, a piece in the Austrian Empire, and a piece is part of the Kingdom of Prussia. And so, the whole 19th century is essentially a kind of palimpsest, in the sense that we're only interested in what happened in the pieces that were once part of that big red map. We're not interested in the whole Russian Empire, in the whole Austrian Empire, but we're really interested in the red map that kind of lies as a kind of a, I would say, a trace of the previous gallery in the 19th century. And so, we need to communicate strongly that there were three territories through the three rulers Catherine the Great, etc., and to really set the geography, and to set the story clearly from the very beginning because it's quite abstract.

52:13 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And to look at the impact, we call this period *Encounters with Modernity* and we look at all of the new laws and regulations regarding Jewish dress, and settlement, and language, and education, and conscription into the army, and the role of the rabbi, and how Jews responded to the encounters with modernity. And that includes organized responses, the Jewish enlightenment, if you will, the incredible growth of the Hasidic movement - these are Jews that follow a more mystical approach to their, their religious life - and also the modern Yeshiva. So when my historians told me that we had to show the modern Yeshiva - not just the Enlightenment - not just Hasidism - but the modern Yeshiva, I said, but I don't think I can get that the fifteen-year-old Polish boy interested in the modern Yeshiva. I said, it just sounds really dry to me. I know it's historically important, but it, really I just, I don't, I, I just don't get it. I said, you know where's the material? Well, they said, no photographs, no paintings, no objects. You know, no

images. So how are we going to do this? So, we commissioned research as we do, and we asked a scholar in Israel to send us quotations from memoirs and travel accounts of either men who had attended one of these Yeshivas in the 19th century, or who had visited it. And when that material came in I was simply blown away.

53:40 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: It was the vividness of their memories, and the brilliance of a teaching method which honestly, if we could teach the way those heads in the Yeshiva taught, in, in the Yeshiva of Volozhin, or the Yeshiva of Mir in the 19th century. It was just amazing. And so, our designers said, you know what, do an animation. So I thought, animation in the 19th century? That's not good. I mean, it can't be Disney. It can't be the sort of, it has to somehow rather sit properly within our 19th-century visual language. So what did we do? We cast live actors and we painted them literally, and we filmed them in the various scenes to create a story based on an actual memoir of 24 hours in the Yeshiva of Volozhin - 24 hours and four minutes 45 seconds. And then in the studio, we actually created the scenography and we put the two things together to tell this 24 hours story. And when the film was made, we then projected it on canvas and refilmed it, so you could see the weave of the canvas. And so, the idea was that you had the feeling that a 19th-century painting had come to life and that you, you got the core message of the modern Yeshiva, which was the importance of study, even more, important than prayer. And that studying 24 hours a day would somehow rather bring about the, would bring the Messiah, and the, the idea of Torah for its own sake - study for its own sake and not simply to become a rabbi and make a living from what you had learned - that this was a core principle. And we were able to communicate it in four minutes, 45 seconds through this wonderful, wonderful animation.

55:33 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: When we come to the middle of the 19th century we, in a sense, in a sense announce the entire story that will follow, which is the story of rapid change brought about by the railway, the development of big metropolises, industry, social mobility, demographic expansion. And it's a beautiful multimedia treatment on that upper level, and it's a really, a wonderful installation. And the story here is really a story of new Jewish elites, the emergence of new - I would say - modern Jewish political movements, modern Hebrew and Yiddish culture, and, and also ways in which Jews responded to rising modern antisemitism, particularly racial antisemitism, and the story of emigration. And with the coming of World War I, all those empires collapsed, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Austrian Empire. The Empires collapse and it's only after World War I that they're, the independent, these independent states form, and specifically the Second Polish Republic, which was formally established in 1918. This year is the hundredth anniversary of Poland's regained independence, and this period is only two decades.

56:49 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: It's a variant, is very interesting, an important period that although it's only two decades and, although you can imagine the devastation after World War I and the economic hardship, and after 1935, especially with the

death of [Józef] Piłsudski the leader, the rise of the worst period of antisemitism - that despite all of that it was a period of enormous, I would say, political activism, and political vibrancy in the Jewish world, with the rise and the success of the Zionist movement, of the [unclear] Israel, the Orthodox Jewish party, and the Jewish labor movement. But it was also a period of cultural vibrancy because this is, this is a period where up to 40 percent of the population was not Catholic, and more than 30 percent of the population was not ethnically Polish. The largest minority were Ukrainians, then Jews, which were about 10 percent of the population, and then Germans and other groups. And what that meant was that the, that these groups were recognized as national minorities and that, at least on paper, they had national minority rights to have their own schools and languages. And this really, from the Jewish perspective, this encouraged incredible creativity in Yiddish and Hebrew, as well as in Polish and Jewish school systems and much that I think gave to the period an extraordinary quality.

58:15 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Now it was very important for us, in presenting the interwar years, that our visitors not be waiting for the Holocaust. That, that, although we had this idea in the back of our minds from the very, very beginning, when you came to the interwar years it was here that there was the greatest temptation for our visitors to see the interwar years as leading up to the Holocaust. There's a book for example by Celia Heller and she calls it *On the Edge of Destruction*. They weren't on the edge of destruction. They, they didn't have a crystal ball. They weren't prophets. People lived their lives and there, no one could anticipate that, certainly nobody in Poland could anticipate the Holocaust, the genocide. In fact, until only a few weeks before the Germans invaded Poland, there, the overall feeling was that there would not be an invasion. That when, on September 1st, 1939, the Germans invaded a lot of people were at the beach, they were, they were at the ocean, the sea. They were having holidays and they were called back. Come back, the Germans have invaded. So even that came as more or less of a surprise. So how people during the interwar years would have anticipated the genocide, it just, it wasn't the case. And we would like our visitors, in a sense, to somehow experience this period in its own terms. It doesn't mean it was a period devoid of antisemitism, but the antisemitism of the period was not a prelude to genocide. Whatever it was, it was not a prelude to genocide.

59:46 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So, it's only when you turn the corner - well first of all, what do you see at the end of the street is you see people looking up. And only when you turn the corner do you see what they're looking up at. And the people that are looking up are the American ambassador and his staff outside the American Embassy that are getting ready to leave. They're getting ready to, to - there's a few days after the invasion and the bombs are falling on Warsaw - and this is the beginning. This is how we really begin the Holocaust gallery. The Holocaust gallery begins, not with the rise of Hitler that, the story of Hitler's rise is a story for us of the [19]20s and [19]30s. It's a story that we tell through news accounts in the previous

gallery. Here we begin with the invasion of Poland and we keep the story within the borders of occupied Poland. And we, we begin the, the sort of the story of the Holocaust proper with the process of separation and isolation, culminating in the formation of ghettos. And because we are a site-specific museum - we are on the site of what had been the the Warsaw Ghetto - we make the Warsaw Ghetto art pars pro toto, which is actually a fundamental principle not to create kind of synthetic situations or try to be complete and do a survey of many examples, but rather to take one part that we were able to develop and to tell the larger story through it.

1:01:13 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And so, the Warsaw Ghetto - to understand what, you know, what it was - you can see it's the purple area in the city of Warsaw. 450,000 Jews, at its height, were squeezed into 1.3 square miles, in a city of 50 square miles. In other words, a third of the population of the city was living in 2.6 percent of the city's space. That meant about 7.2 people per room. So just to get a sense of what the, of what, you know, what the ghetto meant, that was at its peak. Now we, the the Holocaust gallery tells the story of the Holocaust within occupied Poland, all of it, not only the Warsaw Ghetto but clear the Warsaw Ghetto is a focal point. And here you can see in a way the power of our approach. And so, what we've done is to work with an extraordinary body of material, and the material we're working with is the material in the Ringelblum Archive or the Oyneg Shabbos Archive. And what happened in the Warsaw Ghetto is that Emanuel Ringelblum, who was a historian of the Jews of Warsaw, a social activist from the labor Zionist movement - the left-labor Zionist movement, and who, who I would say immediately understood the importance of documenting everything that was going on, and he formed a secret team. And in secret, they would meet on Saturdays, which is why they called their code, why their code name was Oyneg Shabbos or joy of Sabbath. They would meet on Saturdays and they would carry out absolutely incredible documentation of everything going on. And their idea was that, at the end of the war, they would use that archive to write a history of the Warsaw Ghetto.

1:03:02 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: However during the great deportation, in the summer of 1942, when they realized that 300,000 Jews were deported and that they wouldn't survive, they packed the archive up into tin boxes and into milk cans and they buried it in at least two places, possibly a third. We're not sure about the third place. And then, immediately after the war, three people of the team who survived went out into that rubble, that whole rubble of the ghetto, and they found the first cache of materials. And then in the [19]50s, earth-moving equipment - when there was obviously an attempt to create buildings and to move the earth - by accident the second cache was found. And the third cache, we think, is under the Chinese embassy. Now, they've let us dig, I mean, we actually have been able to go there and dig, but we've never been able to find it. And there are some thoughts that maybe, maybe, maybe it's - there wasn't a third. We really don't know. And even if we could find it now, after all those years, there's no chance that - and the second cache was hid, was hidden actually just before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In other

words, approximately nine months later, more or less. So but, let me just sort of highlight here what we've done, and that is that we have provided two narrators, our multi-voiced narrative. One is Adam Czerniaków, who was head of the Judenrat, the Jewish Council which the Germans set up to run the ghetto, and carry out its orders, and he kept a diary in Polish. And on the other side is Emanuel Ringelblum, who organized the secret archive, and he kept a diary in Yiddish.

1:04:44 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And these two narrators actually accompany the visitor throughout the story until, for different reasons, their voices go silent. And so, the whole story is driven by those quotations. There's actually relatively little text but there, but we, but there are other ways in which we communicate. But to give you a feeling of the power of this, there, the section on hunger - or the section rather on not, there not being enough provisions - the excerpt from the Czerniaków diary he says, I went to the, I went to the German authorities to try to get more food. And the excerpt from the Ringelblum diary is, what shall we do when we don't have enough food? Give a little bit to everybody and nobody survives, or give more to some and some will survive. Which is actually from the Talmud. It's a, it's a, it's a wonderful story from the Talmud. Now you can see completely different perspectives from these two people. So that's really very critical, plus the idea that there's no post-war survivor testimony here. There is no recollection; everything is immediate from people who do not know what will happen next, and we want our visitors to feel that. We present Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust, not only in the Warsaw Ghetto but more generally within Poland, a spectrum of relations from the Polish righteous, people who risked their lives to help Jews, to the schmaltzovniks, the blackmailers, and others who basically took advantage of the situation, and who were really, did terrible things, and a large number of people who range across that middle ground. We, we now think that the division between perpetrators, victims, bystanders is really being challenged, and challenged because these are actually much more flexible categories. There are victims that can be perpetrators. Perpetrators who can be victims. And bystanders is a kind of residual category, and that there's a lot of, there's a lot of nuance within that category. That needs to be addressed and we try to.

1:06:50 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So we come to the end of the Holocaust gallery and it was always our intention to create a kind of metaphysical break and not just keep on marching on in the story, to somehow rather have our visitors stop, and take a deep breath, and then continue. And when we continue into the post-war period, I should say, that there were many people who said to us that we should end this story with a Holocaust. And we said, absolutely not. We will take it into the post-war years. When we come to the post-war period we have a different map of Poland. Now, the blue line shows you the map of the Second Polish Republic, the map of Poland in the [19]20s, the [19]30s, and during the Holocaust when Poland was occupied by Germany and the Soviet Union. The red line is the Poland of today. Now, what's important, critically important to understand here, is that everything that

is on the right-hand side between the red and the blue, Poles, and Jews were relocated from that area. They, because that, those, that, that area that had been Poland before the war, and had been occupied during the war, that area, that area was given back to or given to Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. So what happens to the Polish citizens, the, those people who had been Polish citizens there before the war? Jews and non-Jews both were relocated. They were, they were - expelled isn't the right word - they had to leave. Then, look at the yellow. The yellow are the territories from Germany that were given to Poland. And those that were forced to leave, on the right-hand side, many of them settled in the yellow area, in the area of Lower Silesia and and also Upper Silesia obviously. And so, what you had is a massive, massive redrawing of borders, relocation of populations, and you can imagine, the post-war situation, what that means in terms of creating a new post-war country, and particularly, given that it was, that communism was imposed on Poland in the post-war period.

1:09:07 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So of the 3,300,000 Jews that were living in Poland before the war, 90 percent of them were murdered. And of those who survived, most of them - at least up to 300,000 or so - survived in the Soviet Union. They were quote, saved by deportation, and approximately 50,000 survived coming back from concentration camps, and about 25,000 of them - half of them - were in hiding. So clearly hiding or trying to pass as not Jewish, to pass as Aryan, or pass as Polish was not a way to survive. And so, the approximately 250,000 of those who survived came and were in, in, in Poland in the immediate post-war years. And the big question for them was whether to stay or to leave. And we tell the story of leaving on one side of the gallery, and the story of staying on the other. And they came back to a destroyed country, to a destroyed place, to - they were often the only person of their family who survived or the only person in their town who survived. And the question of staying or leaving was the most pressing question. And the story of the post-war years is - on the leaving side, the story is that most of them left. And the story on the staying side is the untold story, a very, very interesting and untold story. And so, one of the first things that the survivors did was to register, try to find one another, but also to memorialize those who perished. And so, the creating of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument is a story that we're able to tell here. How it was created. And we have newsreel footage in Yiddish, with a Yiddish narration, of the unveiling which is really kind of amazing. And also some of the factors that drove them to leave.

1:10:56 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: There are many reasons to leave, didn't want to live in a cemetery, didn't want to live under communism, had no living relatives in Poland, but there were, there were living relatives, let's say, in, in the United States, or they were Zionists and they wanted to go to Palestine. There were many reasons to leave but one of the reasons to leave was post-war violence. And we, of course, tell in full the story of the Kielce pogrom in the summer of July, in July of 1946, as well as violence in, in other locations during this period of approximately [19]45 to

[19]48. And, as a result of this violence, there was immigration panic and, the over half of the Jews who are living in Poland at the time left. And so that is the first big wave of emigration. But on the living side, there's a really interesting story to tell about Jewish life under communism. And I don't know how many of you are aware of where - I'd be curious - where during the post-war years was the center of Yiddish book printing? Where, where was the center of Yiddish book printing in the post-war years? Germany, New York, Argentina. Buenos Aires, center of Yiddish book printing in the post-war years. Second center of Yiddish book printing in post-war years, communist Poland. It was communist cultural policy generally, I mean in Russia as well, but communist cultural policy was national in form, socialist in content. Now I don't really understand this policy because they're publishing [I.L.] Peritz, Shalom Aleichem, Mendele. They're publishing these Yiddish classics from the 19th century. I don't know what's socialist about them, except perhaps that they're about ordinary people. I mean it's hard for me to understand, the national in form means Yiddish, not Hebrew. Hebrew was Zionists. Hebrew was religious, no good, but Yiddish was okay. And so, we present actually the flowering of Yiddish culture under communism for those who stayed, very counterintuitive.

1:13:04 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: The last wave of emigration, and we're commemorating this year, is March 1968. This year is the 50th anniversary of March 1968 and we present it here as a propaganda campaign that was state-organized, state-sponsored. So what happened in March [19]68 was that there was an internal conflict or competition for power within the Communist Party, and there was social unrest, and specifically, there was a performance of a play by [Adam] Mickiewicz, a great Polish national, romantic national poet and author. And the authorities closed it down, presumably because it expressed a kind of Polish national sentiment. And the university students were furious, and they protested. And the government saw a way to somehow discredit this, this demonstration by blaming it on the Jews, on Zionists specifically. And this was linked with the Six Day War, and the Communists being on the side of the Arabs. And so, as a result, this anti, anti-Zionist but really antisemitic campaign made life for Jews living in Poland really difficult. And these are Jews that were largely assimilated, Polish speaking, identify with Polish culture. They were filmmakers, artists, intellectuals, professors, scientists, doctors, and as a result, they were either fired from their, from their jobs, harassed, and many of them felt there was no way they could stay in Poland.

1:14:43 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So of the 20,000 Jews that were left in Poland in March [19]68, 13,000 probably - these are very, very approximate numbers - 13,000 of them left, and they left under most, under the most humiliating conditions. They had to renounce their Polish citizenship and they were given one-way travel documents. They could take exactly \$5, a five-dollar American bill. And they had to make a long list of every single thing they took out, a book, a toothbrush, a comb. It didn't matter what it was, everything had to be listed and approved. And they, these are the people who had stayed, who were still there in [19]68, who didn't want to

leave, who had never intended to leave. And so if, this is a very bitter - and many of them are still to this day very embittered. And so, we have chosen to commemorate this anniversary, this 50th anniversary, and it has become a great source of controversy in the current political climate. We end it with the period, the period after 1989, and we try to communicate, on the one hand, there were, I would say, a the renewal of Jewish life on a small scale, and also the enormous interest of the Polish public in all things Jewish. We like to say, small numbers, big presence. That the actual number of Jews is relatively small, but that the - if you will - Jewish presence in Polish consciousness is actually really big.

- 1:16:10 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: Whether it's positive, an interest in Jewish culture and music and history, or negative in the form of antisemitism, Jewish presence in Polish consciousness is really, really big. And in order to convey something of what it means to be Jewish in Poland today, we interviewed about 20 people, and we asked them five or six questions. The questions were, were questions like, is there a future for Jews in Poland, is there antisemitism in Poland, does Israel matter to you, is religion important, is Judaism important to you, who can make Jewish culture? But there was one question that took me completely by surprise, and that is - it is a question I would never ask here. I could never have imagined asking this question in North America, and Canada, or the United States. And the question was, did you always know you were Jewish? I just, did you always know you were Jewish? I would never have thought to ask it.
- 1:17:07 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: So everybody wants to know how many Jews are in Poland. And I like the answer of our Chief Rabbi, Rabbi [Michael] Schudrich. He says I don't know exactly how many Jews there are in Poland. All I know is that the number keeps on rising but the birth rate doesn't go up. And of course, it tells you a lot, and I like to think of this Museum as contributing to the renewal of Jewish life. And how? To contribute a renewal in Jewish life by, if you will, working against the reasons why parents and grandparents withheld the knowledge from their children and grandchildren that they had Jewish birth parents, or Jewish grandparents, or a Jewish grandparent. And what were the reasons? Fear and shame. And so, this Museum with its glass building says there's nothing to fear, And with its wonderful, rich presentation of Jewish history and civilization, that there's nothing to be ashamed of and much to be proud of. And so, in that way, it's an incredible statement and incredible resource. And hopefully, we will, in the coming years - in the coming two years - create an epilogue to the exhibition on all the places where these Polish Jews went, and the lives that they created in the places where they made their new homes, and the legacy of this history of Polish Jews that they took with them and and and that they live with to this day.
- 1:18:39 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: And I end with this, this photograph because this is - well it's said that 70 percent of Jews in the world today have their roots in the territory of that big red map, of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - and this

photograph was taken in Toronto, my hometown. Now Jews tended, Jews from Poland tended to form hometown societies, Landsmanshaftn And they were very, very important in the beginnings of emigration because they provided interest-free loans, burial plots, support for the newcomers But by the time my father was in his early 90s, when he would go to a meeting on Sunday morning there were eight or nine people. He said it's over. It's finished. But a younger, a member of the younger generation decided to revive the Landsmanshaftn, the from my father's town, from Opatów, from Apt and - and I joined it of course. And I get an email, and it said on this Sunday such-an-such, we're going to all get-together and we're going to take a photograph of everybody from Apt, from Opatów. And 90 people showed up, including infants. So what that meant is that there was a kind of generational depth of connection to the place from which their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents came. And that, that for me was a kind of sign that there's a really important story to tell about the Diaspora of Polish Jews and the lives in the world that they've created from their experience, and from this thousand-year history. And so, this is an open invitation, in fact, my secret mission is to encourage you to come to Poland and to POLIN Museum.

- 1:20:35 [Rising from the Rubble: Creating the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews / April 11, 2018]
- 1:20:40 [Featuring Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and Professor Emerita of Performance Studies, New York University]
- 1:20:46 [Presented by, The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Deborah Hertz, Ph.D. / Director, The Jewish Studies Program, UC San Diego / Susanne Hillman / Program Coordinator, The Holocaust Living History Workshop]
- 1:20:51 [The UC San Diego Library / Interim Audrey Geisel University Librarian, Tammy N. Dearie / Interim Director of Communications and Outreach, Nicole Kolupailo]
- 1:20:56 [UCTV / Producer, Shannon Bradley / Camera Operators, Steven Anderson, John Menier / Editor, John Menier]
- 1:21:21 [The views, contents, and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the University of California]
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