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- Szonja Szelényi, in collaboration with Karen Aschaffenburg, Mariko Lin Chang, and Winifred Poster, *Equality by Design:*

No doubt a study of the private Jewish school system of interwar Poland can tell us much, not only about identity formation and transmission in general but more specifically about the character of Polish-Jewish interactions during the interwar years. Shimon Frost's book may serve as a rough guide to some of the issues such a study must confront. But the task that Frost set out to fulfill remains incomplete.

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The Jewish Search for a Usable Past. By David G. Roskies. The Helen and Martin Schwartz Lectures in Jewish Studies. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. xii, 217 pp. Notes. Index. Photographs. Figures. Musical examples. \$24.95, hard bound.

Taking as his model the early twentieth-century Jewish *landkentenish* movement, which sought to bolster Jewish pride and foster Jewish integration with the surrounding population by improving the Jews' knowledge of their local geography, David Roskies takes us along for a breezy tour of several prominent sites of modern Jewish memory, some quite familiar and others strikingly "new." "The Shtetl in Modern Collective Memory" is certainly an itinerary many of us have been on before, though Roskies is one of our surest guides. But how many of us have been, like him or the students he speaks of bringing on an annual pilgrimage, to visit the collected heroes of secular Yiddishism and Jewish socialism at the Honor Row in Old Mount Carmel Cemetery in Queens? These sites, along with other stops such as the massive effort to document, according to the strictest academic standards, the life of Jews under Nazi occupation and the remarkably successful attempt to create a Yiddish-based Jewish communal culture transcending ideological lines in Montreal, are taken as illustrations of Roskies's implicit thesis—nowhere quite stated as such—that both the active refusal of oblivion and the paradoxical creativity of counter-memory are at the heart of Jewish continuity since the Enlightenment. Loss, writes Roskies, "is the precondition of renewal" (14, emphasis in the original).

What struck me as most fruitful is the way Roskies tells us of the byways of Jewish (and almost exclusively Yiddish) memory that seemed most powerfully to have informed his own *yidishkayt*. Here, for instance, is his description of Rokhl Auerbach's prose epic of the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto: "Here was a secular Jew who had to play all roles at once because she might turn out to be a sole survivor. Warsaw was Jerusalem and she its witness-as-threnodist, composing a new Book of Lamentations" (24). Roskies's identification with Auerbach is almost palpable. The difference is that the scholar in America at the end of the twentieth century has a bit more time to re-invent all of these lost ancestors—to play with them, not just to mourn them. To his credit, Roskies balances well the mourning inherent in any culture of loss with this sense of the creative power of the fragments of memory left behind and still recuperable.

That said, the book seems oddly hasty at points. Thus, in the course of a concluding chapter arguing that Zionism, like it or not, has provided the most food for thought of any twentieth-century Jewish ideology, Roskies takes the opportunity to respond to his critic Paul Breines. Breines had written in his *Tough Jews*: "Roskies, like [the writers] Sholem Asch, Fishel Bimko, and Isaac Babel, is on the lookout for tough Jews. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg [editors of an anthology of Yiddish literature] were not." To which Roskies retorts: "Precisely. Zionism raised the territorial and national consciousness of all Jews" (165). The reader immediately wonders: What about Howe and Greenberg?

Nevertheless, I think Roskies has helped us progress toward an understanding of the relations among nostalgia, innovation, and sustenance in Jewish culture. Perhaps the next book written along these lines will begin to document the creativity of Jewish memory-culture *now*.

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