



The dancer Olga Metikovska

How the Current Archive - One Woman Show Came to Be:

Two of *The Archive's* original cast members (Itamar Galina and Avigail Karby) were drafted to the army shortly after the October 7th Hamas terrorist attack and the start of the "Iron Swords" war. Our Frankfurt presenters agreed to postpone *The Archive's* performance dates to March 2024. But I felt that it would be wrong to replace the two original performers with new performers. Therefore, somewhat reluctantly, I decided to work on a solo version of *The Archive* performed by myself and based on the LBI quartet materials. Choreographer, Anat Danieli and actress -Tali Kark joined me in the process and served as dramaturges and coaches. We took the quartet materials through a process of deconstruction and re-construction and transformed the quartet into a one woman show.

What changed?

The current solo version takes place inside an archival workspace (an intimate space containing a table, three chairs, archival folders, stacks of documents and an old violin). The audience is seated on three sides of the space. The format and setting of the solo version are a

"public hearing", where I, as an "archivist-self", reveal a series of consecutively numbered "exhibits" (documents and performative actions) which are presented to the audience as if they serve on an official panel examining the archival findings. Inside this perforated landscape I gather, sift, catalogue and reveal voices, characters, fragmented narratives, secrets and lies that are derived from my family's documented and undocumented history. I am an archivist, a hunter of ghosts and spirits asking the audience and the world to consider the ephemerality of life, people, memory, history and experience.



Neta Pulvermacher conducts ghosts and spirits. Photo: Salar Baygan, *The Archive* in Frankfurt's KFW Villa 102, March 2024

It seems that these questions of memory and history and their significance for understanding our current realities and world(s) are especially relevant and urgent now

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memories in the viewer thus fighting oblivion. For five months in 2023, we held our rehearsals and research actions in those spaces and slowly created the work.

For the LBI quartet production of *The Archive*, I have set the scenes in different areas of the institute: The first section took place in the courtyard garden, nestled between the two sides of the building. The audience was greeted at the gate in German, by two young LBI interns dressed formally with black ties. Upon their arrival the guests were offered coffee and cake in a true German fashion, while the dancers already inhabited the garden. Each of the performers was a character in an imaginary garden party in 1920's Berlin (before all hell broke loose).

Avigail sat on a bench in the garden and was floating a handkerchief inside a beautifully lit - glass aquarium filled with water. Itamar was seated on an armchair in the front corner of the entrance to the building – he was a character lost in his own world. His “handkerchief solo” was a homage to my father and his endless array of neatly folded handkerchiefs. Viola, the third performer was observing the action from behind the trees and bushes. She was the onlooker, a witness - taking it all in. I thought of the three of them as spirits of aunts and uncles, during the roaring 1920s. The accompanying music of the garden scene was Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, which we designed to be heard through an open window as though the music was a fragmented memory of itself.

A garden love triangle trio in which beautiful young people dance like there is no tomorrow followed the opening scene. (It is strange to think about this section in hindsight – because in many ways it reflected also on the blindness with which the Israeli government was pursuing its right-wing agendas during the Judicial Reform madness. For me the connection between 1933 Germany and 2023 Israel was palpable throughout our creative process that began in December 2022 and lasted through the premiere of the quartet in July 2023).

At the conclusion of the *Garden Trio*, the audience followed the performers into the Leo Baeck Archive, which is where they met my character for the first time. I sat in the Archive – immersed in reading, sorting and cataloging. I played myself lost in thought, full of questions that no archive could answer. The only light in the archive section was a reading lamp on my “archivist” desk, which cast a giant shadow of my head on the folders stored on the shelves. The LBI archive had a distinct smell of old papers and of history (if one can

smell it). The boxes holding important documents had intriguing titles: Hannah Arndt: Eichmann in Jerusalem, “Goldwasser Family Documents” and many others. To me the Archive site was the most important and poignant section in the LBI Quartet version, and the current one woman show version of the work, developed directly from the experience of performing inside the LBI archive.

One of the other sections that I originally created for the LBI Archive location, was the *Ghost's Choir* in which the stories of Erwin Rosolio (Grandma Tillis' brother), Olga Metikovska (mom's cousin, the dancer) and Vera Schwartz (The girl who sat behind my father in his Berlin elementary school) were revealed. The composer Netta Spiegel worked with us on these meticulously orchestrated spoken narrative section. It was both amazing sound work and an interesting theatrical form for delivering the three interwinding ghosts' stories.

In the *Ghost Choir* section, the three performers pulled out three large photos from the shelves of the LBI archive. The performers pulled them literary “out of oblivion” and then proceeded to tell/sing the stories behind the “exhibits” that they were holding. In this section the three different ghosts' narratives became progressively entangled and layered on top of one another.

The Three Ghost Characters “Gleaned” from the Archive:

About Erwin and his Manuscripts:

Erwin Rosolio was my Grandmothers' brother. Erwin was an aspiring author.

In 1933 when my father's family escaped Berlin and immigrated to British Mandate Palestine, Grandma, Tilli brought with her three hand-written manuscripts of her brother's novella, *Judah Sassenberg*, written between 1911-1913, during his medical school studies in Berlin. Erwin was killed in March 1918 serving as a medic for the German army in WWI. The three notebooks containing the drafts of his novella, marked A, M, and R and packed with Erwin's curly handwriting, are the only thing remaining of him.

Inspiration and Creative Prompts

Somehow the realization that I could touch the handwriting of Erwin Rosolio (that he penned around 1911-1913) triggered something in me. I kept thinking that these manuscripts outlived Erwin, my grandparents



Erwin Rosolio's three manuscripts for his novella, *Judah Sassenberg* (1911-13)

and my parents. This material evidence of his existence became a danced poem, a haiku for the handsome uncle (Erwin Rosolio) that wanted to be an author. The choreography is a delicate, hands, and arms duet that I imagine as a “reading” of Erwin's novella. Erwin's manuscript section appears both in the quartet and solo versions in different forms.

The LBI Quartet version also included a whole set of other vignettes staged in the LBI Research Salon and included original songs, a trio of squeaking violins, a rap number based on a 1931 cabaret song that I found during my research, entitled “The Jews are To Blame for Everything” and a section that I choreographed to random German words that I learned at home.

The Story of Vera Schwartz, The Girl Immortalized by My Father's Drawings

In the current solo version, the ghost of Vera Schwartz is introduced from underneath my “archivist work desk”. Seated under this desk, I pick up a drawing from one of the document stacks on the chairs and then declare: “That's Vera Swartz. She is the girl who sat behind my father in elementary school 254 in Berlin. Vera always wore pink shirts with a doll like collars, and she was blond and with blue eyes. One day Vera did not arrive at school and my dad wondered why. After a week the teacher told the class that Vera won't be coming back to school, because she fell ill with typhus, and she died. Dad started painting her from memory at age 90.... And he painted her again and again and again...I asked him why, and he said that he must paint her because he is the



Neta Pulvermacher holds a drawing of Vera Schwartz, the girl who sat behind her father in elementary school 254 in Berlin in the 1920s.

last person alive that remembers that Vera Schwartz ever existed.

Olga Metikovska, the Third Ghost

“This is Olga Metikovska, the dancer”, I whisper from under the table, as I hold one of Olga's 1936 photographs. “She was my mom's cousin. When I was accepted to Juilliard in 1982, Olga wrote me a long, twelve-page letter in German, in which she told me her life's story, before the war, when she was a dancer in Berlin, during the war when she hid in Czechoslovakia and after the war when she worked as a professional choreographer in a small theater in Bohemia. At the end of her letter Olga offered a word of advice from an aunt to her niece, she wrote: “Lieber (dear) Neta I am very happy and proud to hear that you were accepted to Juilliard to study dance. But I have an advice for you, perhaps you should consider studying another profession besides dance, because you never know where life might take you...” [Looking at Olga's dancing photographs I choreographed a short dance set to Bach's *Pastoral in C Minor for Piano*. The inspiration for the movement vocabulary dance came from the photographs. I imagined the kind of dance that she would have danced - channeled through myself - living in today's world.]

Looking for My Mother in the Streets of Frankfurt:

The first section that I made for the Archive: In late September 2022, a few days after I returned from my research trip to Germany, I rehearsed alone in the studio. Incidentally about the same time, I discovered the fabulous music of French composer, Eliane Radigue and chose one of her tracks which had a haunting drone sound that grows in complexity. During that first, post-trip rehearsal, I put on Radigue's track and gave myself the task of telling/singing the details of my trip to Frankfurt, while walking in the studio in straight lines, as if I am walking in the streets of Frankfurt. I held a violin case in my right hand and imagined that all the documents, secrets and facts from my family's past are stored inside of it.

In order to memorize and recall the details of the trip, I used an accumulation technique, whereby a word is said and then is repeated with an addition of another word and etc, until a whole sentence is built. At the end of each complete sentence I sang "Imma"(mother) three times in what felt like - a howling ritual of walking and calling out to my mother". It is strange to admit it but, when I was in Frankfurt, I really felt that my mother was accompanying me from above, whispering in my ear.

This intense section became an anchor for the work. It became an embodied "search and rescue" operation for the "secrets" that my mother never had the strength to share with her three children.



Looking for my mother in the Streets of Frankfurt. Photo: Laura Bianki

More "Secrets" Found in the Family Archive:

In 2019 when we packed our parents' home, after my father passed away, I found two letters from the psychiatrist who treated my mother for many years, Dr. Elik Yoffe. The letters were addressed to the general family practitioner and elaborated on my mother's depression and the recommended treatment prescribed.

Turning the Letters to Performative Action:

During a creative residency for *The Archive* project, in Bogliasco, Italy in January 2023,

I re-read these letters and became curious. I decided to google the doctor. Well, it turned out that Dr. Yoffe was still alive and still seeing patients.... I decided to brave it and call him from Italy. He answered, I introduced myself and then asked: ... Dr. Yoffe can you please tell me something about my mother? He listened and then replied: "Please call back after 7pm".... I never called again.

You may ask yourself why didn't "she" call again? There are two reasons for that: The first is - that I "chickened out", I felt that maybe it's better not to know "everything" about my mother's depression, and secondly, I thought that it would be fascinating (even if scary) to construct an imaginary meeting between myself and Dr. Yoffe, when I would get to ask him questions about my mother, but only my part of the conversation will be heard.

I tried this very idea in the studio at Bogliasco and improvised in four different tasks the imagined meeting between Dr. Yoffe and myself. I video-recorded the sessions and - stored the files in my computer (which is, when one thinks about it - an elaborate archive in and of itself). It was an intense emotional experience "to imagine-meet" my mother's psychiatrist.

The transcription of that brief phone call with the doctor and a version of the imagined meeting ended up being a very important layer and backstory for *The Archive*. In the current solo version, it appears first towards the beginning of the work as and a second time as the final section of the work, when I finally "meet" Dr. Yoffe and ask him to tell me something about my mother. The final psychiatrist meeting scene is juxtaposed against a simultaneous dialogue, where I urge my mother to please get up from

her bed. This final scene goes back and forth between addressing the doctor (in front of me) and begging my mother to get up (behind me).

Post-Memory

The concept of "post-memory" became the conceptual frame of *The Archive*. The term describes the relationship that the "second generation" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before, referring to experiences they "remember" (as though these memories were their own). These "memories" were passed on by means of stories, images, and behaviors of immediate family and the community. Post-memory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by a "real" recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. The lives lived and the events that shaped the initial memory and trauma(s) did happen in the past, but their effects continue into the present through "post-memory", which is activated and felt by the second and third generations of those who experienced and lived the initial traumas.

More Context regarding the idea of post-Memory:

Post-memory subject (in this case – my new work, *The Archive* does not serve as a witness or an archival action, but it offers a new way to engage with the black holes left by memory and history. This term [post-memory] could not have emerged outside of the contemporary context, which is at once characterized by the advancing disappearance of contemporary witnesses of the 20th century's major events and traumas and a steadily increasing number of "memory-deprived" images that circulate widely. In this sense, the post-memory subject's ultimate task is to interrupt the flow of images, activate one of the pictures, and integrate it into the dynamics of memory, triggering the small miracle of recognition. But what is the post-memory subject actually fighting? Oblivion, of course, and the gradual disappearance of lived experience and memories. The oblivion that the post memory subject is opposing is less about forgetting because of the shortage of documents from the past, but rather because of their abundance. We are surrounded by so many digitized memory traces that it becomes increasingly difficult to choose from and rank them. If there is a danger of forgetting, it is the result of our inability to situate the mass of documents and images in

an experience - that could help us connect between the past, the present and the future.

Experiments and Process

I have had many false starts while creating *The Archive* and made three complete versions of the work before arriving at what is now the touring solo version. After three years of work, constructing and deconstructing the materials, I finally understood that the work itself should be set as an embodied archive. *The Archive* in its present format and form, premiered in Frankfurt's Villa 102 in March 2024. It is constructed as a series of events inhabiting a post-memory archival landscape, where I present "exhibit" after "exhibit" following the traces of my German Jewish family history. It would have been impossible to arrive at the current setting, structure, theatrical and movement language without going through all the previous versions of the work. It is as though *The Archive* had to include the history of its own creative process before it could become a "real" archive.

The current solo version also includes a small exhibit of historical family documents, books, old photographs and artifacts and the audience is invited to roam and explore this archival display before and after the performance.

Milestones in The Process:

The Quartet Version Premiered in July 2023 at the Leo Baeck Institute, Jerusalem.

The Archive's quartet version is interesting to discuss because through its intense creative process I created the theatrical and movement language for the work. It also provided me with the setting where I could situate my family's imagined and real narratives as an immersive, site-specific work that moved through Jerusalem's Leo Baeck Institute (LBI). LBI is an international Institute with branches in Israel, Berlin and New York. It is dedicated to the research and preservation of the history and culture of German Jews. Therefore, it was a kind of perfect location that gave the work context and setting.

I worked on the quartet version of *The Archive* with three wonderful performers/collaborators in addition to myself, Itamar Galina, Avigail Karby and Viola Gasparotti. Together we experimented with creating the work's theatrical and movement language and with compositional ideas, whose purpose was to situate "dry" archival documents and facts as shared embodied experience, that in-turn would generate new lived

The Archive / The Jews are to Blame for Everything

A reflection on the creative research process, the challenges and questions

Neta Pulvermacher

There is no sense in waiting
(N.P. January 2023)

When the last person who remembers is gone, entire worlds, relatives and characters, disappear forever. What remains?

The Archive is based on true facts, documents, letters, photographs and artifacts that documented the lives of my German Jewish family before, during and after the Second World War. Prior to WWII my mother's family lived in Frankfurt and my father's family resided in Berlin. In *The Archive* I searched for the ghosts, spirits, fragmented narratives and voices that might hover in the sites (real and imagined) that were once my family's home. The project has taken me to Berlin, Frankfurt, Italy, New York, Florida and throughout Israel. It begins with this section as I sit at my "archivist desk":

*Something brought me here,
I didn't know you'd all be here,
I didn't notice when you entered...
They are not here, and they are not coming...
There's nothing here,
There's nothing here for you...
It's Just this room and you and me...
and they're not here, and they are not coming....
Go Home, Go Home!*

How it all started

In the past few years, after both of my parents passed away, I have become increasingly obsessed with the holocaust and with my family's German Jewish history and heritage, incessantly perusing old pictures, the Frankfurt family tree dating back to 1690, diplomas, hand-written German letters, army decorations, certificates and artifacts.

I was particularly drawn to explore the unexplainable something(s) that remain in these documents and objects. Call it ghosts, spirits or voices. They were calling me.

My paternal grandmother, Matilda Pulvermacher Rosolio kept an assortment of documents, letters, certificates, photographs and memorabilia inside a red leather folder that she brought with her to British Mandate Palestine when the family escaped Berlin, shortly after Hitler rose to power, in May 1933. Something about this assortment of old family papers and photos made me curious. Every few weeks I would take out the documents, artifacts and letters, spread them on the floor, or my table... and ask myself: "hmmm... what kind of people were they? Whom did they love or hate? And also... how much of them is



Letters and documents from the family archive

still present inside these dusty documents? or, passed on to me in the "cultural" genes that I carry in my body and soul and that I most likely have passed on to my son." At that point in the process - I had no clue - as to how these historical family materials might become a something... a performance, a dance, a book or an exhibit. All I knew was - that I had to listen to these fragmented narratives and voices from my family's past.

More considerations and questions that were part of the process of making *The Archive*:

What constitutes an archive? What do we keep in our private and institutional archives and what is missing from them? How can my family archive become an embodied experience? What is carried on in our body and mind of past generations? I am thinking of memory as a living, perishable archive... our body as an archive... and I keep asking myself, how can I create an experiential performative archival landscape? And what should/would it look like?

Unsure how to create the work and wanting to follow my nose and intuition, I decided to travel to Germany.

So, in the summer of 2022, I arranged a research trip for myself to Berlin and Frankfurt. For two weeks I wandered the streets and city squares following the paths where my family once walked. I brought with me the red leather-bound folder that Tilli, my paternal grandmother, carried with her to British Mandate Palestine in 1933. Deciphering locations and addresses from the documents and letters in the folder, I visited past homes, schools, train stations, gardens, archives, memorial sites and cemeteries. But... there was no one left alive to tell me about the distinguished gentleman photographed behind the large wooden desk (Morris?)... or, the stunning beauty in the photo, marked "Klara Zaling, Berlin 1890" and why did Thomas Mann write to Grandma Tilli?



Klara Rosolio Zatlina, my great grandmother. The most beautiful woman in Berlin around 1890.

Searching for My Mother... and the Psychiatrist Letters

My mother, Naomi, Frieda Fleischer Pulvermacher never spoke about her life in Frankfurt. I knew very little about her or my maternal grandparents' lives prior to WWII. My father told me (after my mother passed away in 2005) that mom was convinced - all her life, that her father, Leopold Fleischer, took his own life. According to my father, she was the last to see him alive before he drowned on July 26th, 1938. She escaped Frankfurt the next year - in May 1939 with her Zionist Youth movement group and immigrated to British Mandate Palestine. Mom was fifteen years old when she left Frankfurt and her mother behind. My grandmother, Paulina Fleischer, was sent to her death in 1942.



My mother 1939, Frankfurt