

# Jour fixe Kulturwissenschaften

Jour fixe Kulturwissenschaften

## Of Ghosts' (In)ability to Haunt: Polish Dybbuks

Zuzanna Dziuban (ÖAW)

Since the late 1980s, dybbuk(s) have proliferated, both literally and figuratively, in Polish dramas, performance art and film. Constructed and reconstructed by Polish authors engaging with 'Jewish themes' and asking (or making assertions) about the positionality of Poles towards the victims of the Holocaust, the dybbuk, in its Polish artistic renditions, has been highly sensitive to transformations in cultural, political and affective constellations. But one thing has remained consistent across the various framings and reframings of the figure (by the authors themselves, as well as by the critics of their work): the dybbuk has been firmly established as a figure of memory, in particular of Polish memory about Jews – its ghostliness bridging the impassable hiatus between absent/present, present/past, and living/dead. In this paper, Zuzanna Dziuban works against this dominant interpretation. What Dziuban proposes, instead, is a reading of the figure of the haunting dybbuk through the prism of a series of 'unacknowledged continuities' – the continuities inscribed in the Polish framings of the dybbuk and also in the obdurate symbolic/political/material realities through which it travels. Rather than a figure that induces remembrance, Dziuban argues, the Polish dybbuk speaks of the ability to perpetuate and/or transform the continuities in the social, economic and symbolic order, of the ability to unveil and/or disavow the persistent presence of the frames and sensibilities. Rather than present an internal criticism on Polish wartime behavior, applying this image testifies to lingering power structures between the Poles and Jews, both living and dead, based on othering, violence and exclusion. Thinking through various renditions of the figure, both those from the 1980s and more contemporary versions, such as the 2015 movie *Demon* (dir. M. Wrona), Dziuban asks about the (potential) transformative power of the 'Polish' dybbuk; in other words, its ability or inability to haunt.