

“The Need to Be Recorded”: Gabriel Preil’s Archival Prosthesis in the American Diaspora

Yotam Popliker

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

ABSTRACT: “A poetics of the archive” has been preliminarily defined by critics as a poetics of re-collection and re-membering, a poetics in which the so-called proofs are subject to re-vision. The aim of this essay is to elaborate this definition and to argue, referring to Derrida’s conceptualization of the archive, that the poetics of the archive is in fact a “process of recording,” a poetic mechanism of consigning repeated memory impressions to a mnemotechnical supplement—a recording device. Focusing on the Diasporic Hebrew and Yiddish poet Gabriel Preil, this essay suggests that the process of archivization can be understood in his verse as a metaphor for his Diasporic ruptured self. The recording device in Preil’s verse functions as an “interior prosthesis” of memory that allows him to “record” and bring closer voices from distant spaces and different times, to collect impressions of the “ancient,” to re-member, to re-arrange the past as well as institute the future in order to re-create and re-produce an inherent structural Diasporic “loss.” This essay endeavors to show how this mechanism of the poetics of the archive works, indicating Preil’s Diasporic condition and recorded state of affairs: lacking a spontaneous memory or source of identity, existing and writing always already in the second degree.

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One must have a mind of winter
 To regard the frost and the boughs
 Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

 For the listener, who listens in the snow,
 And, nothing himself, beholds
 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.¹

They tell me I am recorded too—²

THE SPRING 1999 ISSUE OF *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, a biannual scholarly journal, was dedicated to the topic of “the poetics of the archive.” In the introduction, “Toward a Poetics of the Archive,” the editors, Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner, stated that as the essays in the issue demonstrate, the poetics of the archive “is a poetics of re-collection, of re-membering, in which all proofs are provisional and subject to re-vision.”³ Clearly, this definition emphasizes the prefix “re-,” which is being used to form verbs denoting action in the backward direction, in retrospect, action intended to undo a situation, or action done over, often with the implication that the outcome of the original action was in some way impermanent or inadequate or that the performance of the new action brings back an earlier state of affairs. If, according to Voss and Werner, “the archive is necessarily established on proximity to a loss,” by acknowledging this loss—“the *aporia* within the archive,” its heterogeneous and unruly contents—the poetics of the archive re-collects signs, figures, documents, images, etc., and edits them into a new form in order to re-think this “loss,” to retrospectively do over the “original,” to re-arrange those provisional and arbitrary so-called proofs.

On the one hand, Voss and Werner’s definition of “the poetics of the archive” is consistent with Derrida’s argument that “the archonatic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together”⁴—“consignation,” here meaning “to put in reserve,” “entrust to a place,” and “collect signs into a single corpus.” On the other hand, by focusing on the “loss,” it also takes into account the “archive drive,” that is, the anarchic nature of the archive, the “archivolithic force,” the “archive-destroying” force that violates the archival order.

The prefix “re-” in Voss and Werner’s definition implies, then—in addition to the act of recollection—the radical destruction of memory by the archive drive. The archival remembering is always re-membering exactly because, as Derrida argued, “*there is no archive . . . without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.*”⁵ The hyphen between “re-” and “membering” emphasizes the structural rupture between the person who remembers and the content that is being membered or collected in the act of archival remembering, with the “remembered” being always imprinted “outside” the remembering conscious on a “mnemotechnical supplement or

¹ Wallace Stevens, “The Snow Man,” in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9–10.

² Gabriel Preil, *To Be Recorded*, trans. Estelle Gilson (Merrick, NY: Cross-Cultural Communication, 1992), 15.

³ Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner, “Toward a Poetics of the Archive: Introduction,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): ii.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 (italics in original).

representative, auxiliary or memorandum.”⁶ According to Derrida, this archival necessity for an outside memorandum derives from the fact that the archival memory “will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, a live and internal experience. On the contrary,” argued Derrida, “the archive takes place at the originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.”⁷

The model that Derrida used in order to understand, in his words, this “domestic outside” structure of the archive is Freud’s technical model of the *magic mystical pad* (*der Wunderblock*). This machine tool, according to Derrida, is intended “to represent *on the outside* memory as *internal* archivization.”⁸ This mnemotechnical supplement is used as a “prosthesis of so-called live memory,” as a substrate where impressions of memory can be consigned, reproduced, and repeated; it is an exterior “model of the psychic recording and memorization apparatus.”⁹ Therefore, unlike spontaneous memory and the act of remembering, the idea of the psychic archive involves a “*prosthesis of the inside*,” that is, a technical tool that serves as an internal surface for re-collecting impressions of memory.

At this point it is important to stress that this prosthesis, this machine tool, is not optional. One cannot decide whether one needs it or not. As an amputee must wear his prosthetic legs in order to walk, the prosthetic archivization of memory is crucial in order to live, for it conserves the past as well as institutes the future of one’s own biography and self.

Thus, although it is not stated explicitly in Voss and Werner’s definition, their focus on the prefix “re-” embodies a crucial argument regarding the nature of “the poetics of the archive.” Re-collecting, re-remembering, and re-visioning of the alleged proofs indicate that the mechanism of the poetics of the archive is in fact a process of recording: consigning repeated memory impressions and signatures to an essential internal memorandum, a mnemotechnical supplement—a recording device.

In this essay I shall examine this “process of recording” in the poetry of the Yiddish and Hebrew poet Gabriel Preil.¹⁰ By focusing on three late poems that concentrate on the recording device—“Recorded” and “The Record” from the 1981 *Adiv le-'atzmi* (Courteous to myself) and “The Need to Be Recorded” from the 1987 *Hamishim shir ba-midbar* (Fifty poems in the wilderness)—I shall argue that Preil’s “need to be recorded” is an archival necessity to consign memory impressions to a mnemotechnical supplement: the record. As I shall show, Preil’s poetics of the archive is connected to his Diasporic state. Since he was a poet who wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish in twentieth-century New York, the record functions in his verse as a prosthesis of memory that allowed him to “record” voices of the “ancient” or of faraway places in order to hear their echoes in present time and place. Acknowledging his Diasporic condition, the record enabled him to re-member in order to re-create and re-produce his own loss of biography and ruptured self.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 13 (*italics in original*).

⁹ Ibid., 18–19.

¹⁰ This examination of the “process of recording” in Preil’s poetry is a part of a larger project I am working on where I intend to understand Preil’s poetry as a poetic space, which not only constitutes Preil’s own archive but also the Hebrew American poetry archive. Rephrasing Kafka’s statement in his diaries that a minor literature is a kind of a nation-diary, I would argue that Preil’s archive can be seen as a community-diary, which does not wish to “write” Hebrew literature’s history but emerges in order to protect and preserve itself. See Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–1923*, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1948–49), 1:191–93.

GABRIEL PREIL IN THE AMERICAN DIASPORA

Gabriel Preil was born in Dorpat, Estonia, in 1911 and raised in Krakes, Lithuania. In 1922, at the age of eleven, he emigrated with his mother from Europe to America and lived in New York until his death in 1993. Preil visited the State of Israel several times but basically remained an American Hebrew and Yiddish poet in the Diaspora, writing mostly in Hebrew far from his readers' community in Israel. He published ten books of Hebrew poetry and one book of Yiddish poetry. He also translated into Hebrew many American poets, such as Elinor Wylie, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and Robinson Jeffers. English translations of his poetry have been widely anthologized, and three volumes of his poetry have been published in English translation.

During the 1930s Preil joined both the New York Yiddish and the New York Hebrew literary scenes. While the Yiddish poetic milieu had adopted modernism, the Hebrew poetic milieu was more conservative and was affiliated both with romanticism and with the main principle of classical poetry, "anxious to preserve the innocence of feeling and purity of phrase."¹¹ Being a part of both milieus, Preil "schooled himself in Yiddish modernism" and tried to adopt this modernist style in his Hebrew poems. In addition, he was greatly influenced by Anglo-American modernism and was, in his own words, "the Hebrew parallel of the English-language imagistic poets" and, in this respect, a pioneer in the Hebrew American sphere.¹² Yet he refused to declare war against the values and styles of his Hebrew precursors. Unlike the eliminating and negating "modernists' narrative" that governed the Hebrew literary sphere in the State of Israel both critically and poetically—a narrative that was embodied, as Avidov Lipsker argued, in the national-political diachronic-critical term "the Literary Republic" (*Ha-republica ha-sif'rutit*) and that strove to overcome and dispossess the style of the precursors in order to assume the poetic throne and write history anew¹³—Preil's attitude toward the historiography of Hebrew poetry was more synchronic than diachronic. He did not negate the Hebraists or more conservative trends but absorbed and adopted their influence—along with modernist influences—into his verse.¹⁴ Paradoxically, he continued their tradition and started anew as a modernist at the same time, a paradox that led Yael Feldman to name him "the imagist romanticist" (*Ha-romantikon ha-imagisti*).¹⁵

This characteristic of contradictory and multiple influences clearly has close connections to Preil's Diasporic condition outside the national narrative of "the Literary Republic" and the

¹¹ Menachem Ribalow, "Ha-shira ha-ivrit be-Amerika" [Hebrew poetry in America], in *Sefer ha-shana le-yehudey Amerika* [Yearbook of Jewish America] (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1938), 264.

¹² Allison Schachter, *Diasporic Modernism: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 157–58.

¹³ Avidov Lipsker, *Shirat Yitzhak Ogen: Ecolog'ya shel sifrut bishnot ha-shloshim ve-ha-arba'im be-Eretz Yisrael* [The poetry of Yitzhak Ogen: Literary ecosystem in Eretz Yisrael, 1930–1940] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 215–25.

¹⁴ Allan Mintz rightly wrote that Preil's identity "is an identity that can be fathomed only in its multiple contexts. There is Preil the bearer of the romantic Hebraism of his Lithuanian ancestors; there is Preil the youngest member of the collegium of the Hebrew and Yiddish writers in America; there is Preil the Diaspora Hebrew poet who identifies with Beryl Pomerantz in Poland, Haim Lenski in the Soviet Union, David Fogel in Austria and France, and other poets writing outside of the center in Eretz Yisrael; there is Preil the citizen of the American republic of letters who resonates with the poetry of Whitman, Wallace Stevens, Edward Arlington Robinson, Conrad Aiken, and Frost; and, finally and undeniably, Preil the poet who was adopted and naturalized into postwar Israeli verse." See Allan Mintz, *Sanctuary in the Wilderness: A Critical Introduction to American Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 329.

¹⁵ Yael Feldman, "Ha-romantikon ha-imagisti: Shorshe'ha ha-kfulim shel shirat Gavriel Preil" [The imagist romanticist: The double sources of Gabriel Preil's poetry] (Tel Aviv: Hasifrut, 1986), 100–121.

backdrop of Jewish sovereignty, wandering between spaces (America, Lithuania, and Israel) and cultures (Hebrew, Yiddish, and American). His antinomic and heterogeneous poetic style and his refusal to prefer one style over another correspond with the paradoxical Diasporic condition. The Diasporic experience of exile—as opposed to the homogeneous purity of the nation’s republic—is generally understood as a state that “creates oppositions, antinomies, and contradictions.”¹⁶ According to Stuart Hall, the Diasporic experience is defined, “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity; . . . by *hybridity*.”¹⁷ Therefore, the Diasporic condition cannot be defined as opposed to the national one, which would maintain the binary of home and Diaspora, but, again after Hall’s definition, “by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture.”¹⁸ While the vector of rupture signifies a loss, the vector of continuity signifies a self who strives to establish, in Preil’s words, an “appeased” identity, on which I shall elaborate later.

Preil’s Diasporic condition has been well addressed by critics. Yael Feldman noted “Preil’s Exilic Hebraism.” She argued that Preil established a direct line (vector of continuity) between him and his grandfather as well as Hebrew nineteenth-century writers, such as Avraham Mapu and Michal, which signifies his “*commitment to Hebrew, conceived by the poet as a romantic ideal*”—he established this direct line, then, in order to justify “his eccentric Hebraism on American soil” (vector of rupture).¹⁹ Dan Miron argued that Preil’s poetry should be examined alongside “peripheral” and Diasporic poets such as David Fogel, Ber Pumerantz, and Chaim Lensky, who based their creative existence on a “conception of marginality,” freed from the burden and the obligation to fulfill the “great” nation’s goals and inspirations.²⁰ Finally, Allison Schachter focused on how communities of Diasporic writers and readers related to each other and to their shared languages, dealt with Preil’s “continued investment in the Diasporic, modernist aesthetic developed by Brenner, Bergelson and Goldberg,” and underlined his practice of autotranslation between Hebrew and Yiddish.²¹

Although all these critics acknowledged Preil’s connections to the Diasporic condition, I believe that a further critical discussion of Preil’s poetic mechanism and the way his poetry deals with the rupture and the loss embodied in his Diasporic condition is still needed and that the concept of the archive and the process of archivization, of recording, can add depth to our understanding of these issues. If we seriously consider Michal Ben-Naftali’s observation that the mind can be seen as a metonym for the machine tool of the archive, that the concept of the archive contains the dynamic and economic structure of the psyche, where impressions are consigned and gathered together on the “outside” substrate of the mind,²² then it seems plausible to accept

¹⁶ Sophia A. McClennen, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 235.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁹ Yael Feldman, *Modernism and Cultural Transfer: Gabriel Preil and the Tradition of Jewish Literary Bilingualism* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986), 43–54, quotation on 51 (italics in original).

²⁰ Dan Miron, “Beyn ha-ner la-kokhavim: Al shirat Gabriel Preil” [Between the candle and the stars: On the poetry of Gabriel Preil], in *Asfan stavim* [Collector of autumns], by Gabriel Preil (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1993), 294–96.

²¹ Schachter, *Diasporic Modernism*, 152–73, quotation on 155.

²² Michal Ben-Naftali, “Hatimah” [Epilogue], in *Makhalt arkhiv* [Hebrew translation of Derrida, *Mal d’archive* (Archive fever)] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006), 119.

Preil's process of recording as a metaphor for the re-creation and re-construction of his ruptured Diasporic self. As I shall show shortly, Preil's poetics of the archive embodied in the machine tool of the recording device, the interior prosthesis of the mnemotechnical supplement, is a crucial poetic mechanism that offered him a sense of reconciliation in the Diaspora, a way to deal with the structural loss of origin and source of identity.

THE RECORDED SELF: A RE-GATHERER OF TIME AND SPACE IMPRESSIONS

“Recorded”

What is Mozart doing here in Jerusalem at the end of Succoth,
now, when the evening is a fresh source and the moon an assured guest?
Somehow I wanted to believe in his kinship with King David,
with Solomon's choirs.

An unlikely accord to judge by the violins in his voice and fiery chorales.
It is simpler and quicker to tell how we arranged to fly in the same plane:
when a piano darkened crystalline sentences and sang night into dawn.
Mozart is repeating his deeds in the amiable air.
He is recorded.

Let's take a minute to think about Bartok's mandarin:
frenzied, he dances in neglected gardens.
Was he a monk who fell? Perhaps a libertine who failed?
Perhaps his Hungarian character is Chinese?
Or are his Chinese ways Hungarian?
All the same, he feels a sort of shattering, appeasing sadness.
Bartok impresses, wins favor.
He is recorded.

They tell me I am recorded too—
I sit and peel an apple with emotion.²³

Let us start from the end: the last couplet of the poem. The Preilian speaker turns from the recorded state of affairs of Mozart and Bartok, from their recorded music, to the recorded self; from a literal use of the verb to a metaphoric one that emphasizes his Diasporic identity: “I am recorded too.” According to the speaker, his sense of “self” cannot be understood in terms of origin or seed, of a live voice. The proposition “I am what I am,” which signifies a relation of identity, of essence, cannot describe his Diasporic identity; the “self” lacks a source of identity, an essence—it is composed only of impressions or echoes of the source. This unsolved Diasporic tension is manifested, for example, in the speaker's rhetorical questions regarding Bartok: “Perhaps his Hungarian character is Chinese? / Or are his Chinese ways Hungarian?” It seems that the speaker, by emphasizing the allegedly awkward nature of the Hungarian-Chinese mixture, intends to highlight the confusing ambience that Bartok's mandarin creates in his own

²³ Preil, *To Be Recorded*, 15.

recorded self or archival mind. The recorded Bartok's mandarin is characterized as a "frenzied" person who "dances in neglected gardens"; and if one listens to Bartok's *The Miraculous Mandarin Suite*, this "frenzied" impression is clear: the suite begins in a whirl and the first impression is of entering an unknown territory. The listener expects harmoniousness, but this quality suddenly seems "neglected." Still, as discussed above, the record is a device that enables one to re-collect and re-gather these impressions in order to deal with loss and the fractured self: to re-create and re-construct that loss on an interior prosthesis. Therefore, regarding the inherent inadequate existence of the Diasporic condition, the recorded Bartok and the recorded condition in general actually lead, in Preil's words, to a "sort of shattering, appeasing sadness."

Returning to the last couplet, the image or impression of the speaker sitting and peeling "an apple with emotion" explains and clarifies his recorded condition and self. At a glance, the image seems enigmatic; but it becomes clearer after acknowledging the importance of the sign "apple" in Preil's poetry as a whole. An earlier poem of Preil's, "Memory of Autumns at Springtime" (*Ha-esh ve-ha-demamah* [The fire and the silence], 1968), starts as follows: "The Lithuanian autumn is no longer a boy / who makes apples dance in his basket."²⁴ In the same poetry book from 1968, the apples appear once again in the poem "Apples and Yesterdays": "Drowsily, in the rural night, / Passed through me the smell of late ripening apples. / A memory of a former morning has awakened in me."²⁵ The apples, then, are connected to Preil's past and his childhood memories of Lithuania, where he was raised until he immigrated to America. The apples have a similar effect on Preil as the madeleine had on Proust in his *In Search of Lost Time*: the recorded image makes the apples arouse Preil's involuntary memory and leaves an impression of an earlier state of affairs (and this is how Preil's utterance "Bartok impresses," for example, should be understood: recorded Bartok "leaves impressions"). On the one hand, Preil is far away from his birthplace and his family's landscape, and yet, on the other hand, he retains their impressions. Although he is at present in Jerusalem, the impression of his homeland feels close and vivid: he can "peel an apple [a Lithuanian apple, his childhood apple] with emotion." As an exile who is bound to three different cultural spaces and times (Lithuania, America, and Israel),²⁶ a recording device is situated inside him, an archival prosthesis that allows him to re-collect signatures from the past in the present, from Lithuania in Jerusalem.

The Diasporic condition embodied in the process of recording, then, concerns first and foremost a fluid concept of time and space. The Mozart image in the beginning of the poem shows clearly that while "the evening is a fresh source," Mozart's music is unmoored and far from its origin space. As opposed to both King David and Solomon's choirs, which are rooted, so to speak, in the space of ancient Jerusalem, the European music of Mozart can "appear" in the Mediterranean landscape only in the second degree, recorded. In addition, King David and his son Solomon are genuinely suitable not only because of the space where they both were kings,

²⁴ Gabriel Preil, *Autumn Music: Selected Poems of Gabriel Preil*, ed. Howard Schwartz (Saint Louis, MO: Cauldron Press, 1979), 22.

²⁵ Gabriel Preil, *Mi'tokh zeman ve-nof* [Of time and place] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1972), 47 (my translation).

²⁶ These three spaces are tightly connected to time in Preil's poetry. Every space signifies not only a place but also a period of time. Or in Preil's words: "There is no escaping my time. / It is Lithuania, it is America, it is Israel. / I am an imprint of these lands." See Gabriel Preil, *Sunset Possibilities and Other Poems*, trans. Robert Friend (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 51.

that is, Jerusalem, but also according to the poem's "now," "the end of Succoth,"²⁷ the Jewish holiday, the season when, according to Ashkenazi tradition, the book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) is read, a book whose author is traditionally presumed to be King Solomon.²⁸ It is not just the place, Jerusalem, then, that leads the speaker to think about King David and his son but also the time of year in the Jewish calendar—time and space categories that strengthen Mozart's, and Preil's, recorded and incongruous state of affairs. Nevertheless, while indicating the absolute spatial and temporal gap, or abyss, the recorded Mozart also brings closer distant times and spaces. This is why "[i]t is simpler and quicker," according to the speaker, to explain the Mozart image by telling of the arranged flight: planes simply shorten the time and the distance between places and bring them, as it were, conceptually closer. The plane makes the air "amiable," neighborly, because the distant spaces and times can be seen as neighbors, situated next to each other on the same street; and "Mozart is," actually, "repeating his [the plane's] deeds in the amiable air": Mozart's impression repeats (records) the plane's impression, which repeats (records) the Preilian self, who seeks to overcome the inherent loss, that is, the spatial and temporal (and cultural) abyss.

But this abyss also concerns the exile's loss of a community; and King Solomon is known as the king who gathered together the community of Israel. His figure, then, does more than signify the so-called rooted experience of time and space categories; it also implies the collectiveness of the recorded. The Hebrew root of "Qoheleth," QHL, is the same root as in the noun *qehilah*, meaning "community," and as in the infinitive *le-haqhil*, "to assemble, to become a member, to collect." The name of the book signifies, inter alia, the act of gathering together a community.²⁹ The importance of the root QHL in the poem is also embodied in the original Hebrew word that was translated in the poem as "choirs": *maqhelot*. These are Solomon's *maqhelot*, the assembled voices of the community. In order to re-create the loss of the origin or of the community, the exile must collect impressions; it is necessary to assemble members. In order to re-member, it is necessary to "member." The root QHL, then, functions in the poem as a linguistic key that indicates the crucial act of collecting inherent both to the concept of the archive, the process of recording, and to the exile's urge to find a place of belonging in a community. In the poem, Preil collects and consigns impressions of time and space and records them side by side in his poem, forming an interior archive—a record—of his own self and communal belonging.

²⁷ Regarding the holiday Succoth, it is worth pointing out that the name of the holy day is the plural of *succah*, meaning in Hebrew a "booth" or a "tabernacle." It is actually a temporary dwelling place. The speaker, like the "moon," is "an assured guest," feeling at home but only as a guest; his staying—in a way, like Mozart's—is temporary, unrooted, impermanent, and always in the second degree.

²⁸ Among other evidence, he is presumed to be the author of the book, for he introduces himself in the beginning of it as "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccles. 1:1).

²⁹ Many explanations have been given for the name Qoheleth (also frequently spelled Koheleth in English). A common explanation indeed links it to the Hebrew root QHL. Qoheleth is understood as a preacher or teacher (*qohel*) who gathers together his congregation in order to teach Torah, as a voice of wisdom who speaks in front of the community, or, after the Greek word *ecclesiastes*, as "a member of the ecclesia, the citizens' assembly in Greece." See Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—the Man and His World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 4. Although the critics usually emphasize his individual voice of wisdom, being a great teacher and philosopher, I believe that in the context of Preil's poem it is rather important to emphasize his characteristics as a gatherer, a collector, a re-memberer of the community.

THE MUSIC OF THE ANCIENT

In contrast to the state of affairs in "Recorded," the one in the poem "The Need to Be Recorded" prevents the speaker from collecting impressions, repeating them, re-memorizing and identifying "a shore," an ephemeral shore of identity. In "Recorded," Mozart's and Bartok's recorded impressions successfully "shook loose a smile." They enabled him, as he says in "The Need to Be Recorded," to master "the praise of apples," to see clearly ("Their melancholy music flowing ever brighter"), and to make past time impressions vital and real. In "The Need to Be Recorded," by contrast, the phrase "this place" is ambiguous (the original Hebrew phrase is *la-makom ha-sheni*, "the second place"). In "this place," then, although his poem's "music asks to be free," it cannot find this freeing, "shattering, appeasing sadness," for it is hard to see clearly, hard to hear the recorded music in cloudy New York City. The cloudiness, then, is the main setting of the poem, that is, the setting of exile and the Diasporic condition: "exile, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is a 'mind of winter' in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable . . . a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home."³⁰

"The Need to Be Recorded"

It's cloudy. There were no clouds in Jerusalem
when I wrote about Mozart and Bartok.
Recorded.

Their melancholy music flowing ever brighter
identified a shore in me.

I shook loose a smile at myself
and mastered the praise of apples.

With all her great age, the city lent me
new-made images.

Then I came to this place where I write:
very cloudy.

The rain has decided to fall.
Umbrellas flower quickly in the streets
and my music asks to be free.

My own great need is to be recorded.³¹

³⁰ Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 148–49.

³¹ Preil, *To Be Recorded*, 4.

This seasonal cloudiness is a metaphor for Preil's state of mind and, as just mentioned, concerns the "this [second] place," after his return to the American Diaspora; but it is also connected in the poem to the concept of time. Unlike New York City and its relatively "young" age, the city of Jerusalem, "[w]ith all her great age, . . . lent me," says the speaker, "new-made images." As Preil sees it, the "ancient," or the music of the ancient—and not the novel—allows brightness and new images to be produced; the connection to the ancient brightens the present. And the "ancient," the *arkhē*, has clear etymological connections to the process of recording or, better, to *archivization*.³² The music of the ancient is the recorded music. In Jerusalem, states the speaker, the recorded music was "flowing ever brighter"; as a Jewish exile he could find an appeasement (a shattered appeasement) in the ancient city of Jerusalem, which signifies his community's *arkhē*. Jerusalem is where and "when the evening is a fresh source." The phrase "fresh source" is an oxymoron that signifies exactly this connection of the recorded to the origin: while the "source" implies the "ancient," the "fresh" is a "new-made image"; and the process of recording arouses signatures of the ancient—anew, afresh. The ancient time and space of Jerusalem, then, as opposed to the relatively young age of New York City, allow Preil to hear the recorded music, that is, the flowing water of the "fresh source" (*ma'ayani* in Hebrew, meaning "fountain," the origin from which the water flows) that brightens the cloudiness of the "second place."

After contemplating the former poem and the space and time of Jerusalem, Preil returns, in the last three stanzas of "The Need to Be Recorded," to present time and space, to "this [second] place." While doing so he also returns to the first utterance and setting of the poem: "It's cloudy." But the repetition is not identical to the first utterance (it never is); it signifies an important difference. First of all, the utterance "it's cloudy" becomes "[it's] very cloudy," as if thinking back to the appeasing sadness of the former situation represented in "Recorded" darkens the speaker's present situation. Second, the repetition adds a self-conscious and metapoetic aspect: "where I write: / very cloudy." The utterance is not just being said but is being imprinted as a typographic impression, "an inscription . . . which leaves a mark at the surface or in the thickness of a substrate."³³ By emphasizing the act of writing "it's cloudy" on a piece of paper, on a substrate, by reflecting on the cloudy setting of the poem, and by intensifying it, the processes of imprinting and repetition clarify the speaker's Diasporic condition, being in the "second place" (or degree) away from the first place, from an origin signified by the fountain of the "ancient."

Therefore, the Preilian speaker declares: "My own great need is to be recorded." The "need to be recorded" becomes even greater because in a way similar to how Mozart's and Bartok's recorded music bestowed on him an "appeasing sadness" in the process of recording, his "music asks to be free," to be the music of the ancient once again, that is, recorded. Freedom from the burden of Diaspora, for his part, can be found only in the process of recording. And presumably, in a way, by recording the impressions of the poem "Recorded" in the poem "The Need to Be Recorded," in this act of metapoetic archivization, Preil's music does find its shattered, appeasing freedom through the imprinted word; and so does Preil.

³² The concept of the *arkhē* (on the concept's etymology, see Derrida's *Archive Fever*, 1–3) should be understood here as coordinating at least two principles at the same time: a physical, historical, or ontological principle, "there where things commence"; and a nomological principle, or law, "there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given" (*ibid.*, 1).

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

TO HOLD, TO CONCEAL, TO RECALL

"The Record"³⁴

The poet reads lines
about the credences of summer.
The glass in his hand hides
And rekindles
a small fire;
a delicate wisdom flares;
the beauty of things
cannot be exhausted.

but the voice of the poet
recalls a shadowy sailor
cast up on a desolate shore
far from every certainty.³⁵

The poem "The Record" can serve as a good ending point to this essay. It reflects on the impressions that the record keeps in order to find "the credences of summer" in the uncertain Diasporic cloudiness of winter. Although the recorded voices that come out of the recording device are able to preserve "the credences of summer," the certainty of things, they are "far from every certainty" altogether. The recorded "voice of the poet / recalls a shadowy sailor / cast up on a desolate shore," far away from his home, from his origin. The recorded voice is "shadowy" in itself—a voice that has lost its brightness and clarity, an "unrooted" voice, one that can barely attest to the live and spontaneous one—a description that implies that the recorded impressions are vague. Still, despite the vagueness and "cloudiness" characteristic of the Diasporic voice and even though it is far from any credibility, it succeeds in capturing a faded impression, a faded signature of the spontaneous voice. The glass in the poet's hand "hides," as the speaker says, but at the same time it also "rekindles / a small fire," and "a delicate wisdom flairs" as a result. While "the credences" are being reduced, the "beauty of things" rises and "cannot be exhausted." The recorded, then, cannot bring seasonal certainties, but it makes an appeasing winter-beauty present. The recorded is a voice that acknowledges a loss, a loss of clarity, of the allegedly harsh proofs, but it is also where the "shattering, appeasing sadness" of the "beauty of things" offers comfort.

In conclusion, I would like to point out two crucial verbs in the poem—"rekindles" and "recalls"—that capture in their English grammatical structure the main argument that I am

³⁴ This is an English translation of Preil's Yiddish version of the poem. Originally, the poem was written in Hebrew and collected in *Adiv le-'atzmi* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz ha-me'ukhad, 1981). The main difference between the Hebrew and Yiddish versions—and the reason I present this version here—is that the Hebrew poem starts by naming a specific poet who reads a poem, Wallace Stevens, who greatly influenced Preil's verse: "Stevens is reading a poem" (see Preil's *Sunset Possibilities*, 23). In the Yiddish poem, however, Stevens's name was omitted. I believe that this omission is connected to the different anticipations that Yiddish readers and Hebrew readers had regarding Preil's verse. But for our concerns, what is most important is that the recorded voice in the Yiddish version is not just Stevens's recorded voice but the recorded voice of the Preilian poet in general. It attests that this is Preil's voice in-itself.

³⁵ Gabriel Preil, "The Record," in *Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse*, ed. Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), 639–40.

making here: Preil's "need to be recorded" as a mechanism for reestablishing his own Diasporic ruptured self (and sense of belonging). True, the original Yiddish verbs or phrases do not have this enlightening grammatical structure, but their meanings in Yiddish do. The Yiddish phrase or line that was translated by Grace Schulman as "rekindles" is "*halt in ein tzind'n*" (*haltn* functions as an auxiliary verb that indicates a continuous and unending process), meaning "to hold, to keep, and to kindle the fire anew again and again."³⁶ The recorded voice, then, continually maintains and lights the "small fire" of the source. What is even more interesting is that the verb *haltn* appears in the poem next to the Yiddish verb *bahaltn*, meaning "to hide, to conceal," a verb that actually contains in itself the verb *haltn*. There is a linguistic bond between the verbs that reflects on the meaning: the action of concealing involves keeping, holding, and maintaining the hidden; and in the poem's context this involuntary act of keeping the hidden involves a continual and repetitive holding and kindling of the hidden. The record, then, hides and maintains at the same time. The second Yiddish verb—translated as "recalls"—*dermonen*, meaning "to remind, to remember," completes the definition of "the record": it hides and continually maintains in order to re-member. The recorded Preilian voice, this Diasporic voice, then, makes the listener—"who listens in the snow"—recall, remember, and recollect hidden and preserved impressions from the "shadowy sailor"-like character of the ancient.

Returning to the translated English verbs "rekindles" and "recalls," I would like to stress the "Untranslatable" factor of language that sharply points out here the importance of the prefix "re-" in Preil's poetry.³⁷ It emphasizes that the recorded self, Preil's "mind of winter," never simply contains and keeps—and hides—impressions of the spontaneous memory or merely mentions and remembers lost memory. Rather, the grammatical structure of the English verbs emphasizes that Preil's poetics of the archive—that is, the process of recording—functions in the backward direction, retrospectively re-members, and imprints memory impressions of the "ancient" on an "outside" recording device of his Diasporic self, in order to re-think an earlier state of affairs—in order to free his music.

The rain has decided to fall.
Umbrellas flower quickly in the streets
and my music asks to be free.

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³⁶ I would like to thank Dr. Roy Greenwald for this Yiddish grammatical clarification.

³⁷ I refer here to Emily Apter's definition of the "Untranslatable" and its poetic role. The Untranslatable, she argued, must not be understood "as pure difference in opposition to the always translatable... but as a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses." The Untranslatable can be seen, then, as a "mistake" in translation that actually clarifies creatively the meaning of the translated text and, therefore, can be helpful in the process of interpretation. See Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 20.