Risking Representation: Performing the Terezín Ghetto in the Czech Republic

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Prehistory of the Project: “Staging Terezín”

This article details the last two years of our ongoing performance project based on the representation of Terezín, a World War II Jewish ghetto that was established in an eighteenth-century fortress town located in the present-day Czech Republic. Our continuing interest in Terezín stems from its unique position in the history of the Holocaust. From its inception in November 1941 until its liberation in May 1945, Terezín played several roles in the overall program of Nazi genocide. It began as a collection point where the Jews of Central Europe—most prisoners were from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Austria—could be gathered before transport to the death camps. In time, however, the Nazis exploited the ghetto for its propaganda value: it became a “model ghetto,” displayed to organizations such as the International Red Cross to counter evidence of Nazi atrocities. Because of this propaganda function, the Terezín prisoners lived in an environment quite different from that of camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka. Although thousands died here of “natural” causes such as hunger and illness, there were no gas chambers in Terezín; prisoners were not confronted with mechanized mass murder. Moreover, the true nature of the outgoing transports—mostly to Auschwitz—was carefully concealed from the prisoners themselves. Thus, although life in the ghetto was by no means “normal,” some forms and rhythms of normal life were preserved. Cultural activities, for instance, flourished in the camp; both archival evidence and survivor testimony bear witness to large numbers of lectures, concerts, cabarets, operas, and theatrical performances produced by prisoners during their internment.

The singular circumstances encountered by the Terezín prisoners pose steep challenges to those who wish to depict their experiences on the stage. Provoked by these challenges, however, we have decided to confront them directly by creating performance projects that attend not only to life in the camp, but also to the difficulties involved in its representation. Spanning a period of four years and produced in both the United States and the Czech Republic, the projects address a series of questions that reflect the shifting nature of our own inquiries. Why do narratives of Terezín life so often provoke shock, disbelief, even outrage when presented to US audiences? How do we weave the multiple and sometimes contradictory voices that emerge from the camp into a single evening of performance? And what emerges from encounters between Czech and US histories of the Holocaust in general, and of Terezín in particular?

A Summary of the Minnesota Project: Lisa’s Account

Alan and I initiated our first collaborative project in the summer of 2003, after discovering a mutual interest in Terezín as a site of performance. His questions had centered around ways the
Lisa Peschel and Alan Sikes

The theatrical performance that took place in the ghetto, and the ways survivors represented it in their testimony. Even though cultural activities in Terezín were eventually exploited by the Nazis as part of their propaganda campaign, they began on the prisoners’ own initiative; during the three-and-a-half-year history of the ghetto, the vast majority of performances were staged by prisoners for prisoners. Why had they chosen theatre as a site to exercise the limited agency allowed to them?

The summer 2003 project allowed both of us to revisit questions that remained unanswered, not only about the ghetto itself, but about the reaction of US audiences to the work: what challenges inhere in attempts to represent the Holocaust in performance, and what complications to such attempts are introduced by Terezín? For example, audiences in Austin had reacted with intense discomfort to two aspects of the ghetto represented in the plays I had written: the unique conditions that, because of Terezín’s specific functions, were quite different from those in other ghettos and camps, and survivors’ claims that certain experiences during their imprisonment—those linked to cultural activities, for instance—were actually pleasurable.

A six-week workshop with a group of graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota culminated in two performances for an invited audience. Much of the material was generated collaboratively based on our own reactions to survivor testimony and other documents from the ghetto, but the principal textual base was formed by excerpts from the many plays about Terezín I had written in my MFA program—plays that differed greatly as I worked through various dramaturgical strategies, attempting to translate Terezín onto the stage in a form intelligible for a US audience. In talk-backs, we learned that the points of audience resistance were basically the same as those that had arisen at the University of Texas, which led to new questions: Why fight to introduce a narrative that lies so far outside the dominant US discourse on the Holocaust? What did we and the audience stand to gain by exploring the history of Terezín? What were our rights and responsibilities in representing this history, and especially survivors’ personal experience, within a performance context?

A Summary of the Tallahassee Project: Alan’s Account

I explored similar questions in a new version of the workshop with students at Florida State University (FSU) in the summer of 2004. Lisa served as a long-distance collaborator from the Czech Republic; she had received a Fulbright grant to conduct dissertation research on prisoner experience in Terezín. As in the Minnesota production, the Florida workshop also included scenes from Lisa’s drafts, but they were interspersed with depictions of the camp based on survivor testimony. In this production, we devoted particular attention to the multiple narrative threads that emerge from Terezín and the multiple perspectives on camp life they can produce in performance. Prisoner experience in Terezín varied widely according to country of origin, linguistic affiliation, political opinion, and degree of religious observance. Certain prisoners were also favored over others; for instance, the “Ältestenrat,” or Jewish “Council of Elders,” in Terezín increased the rations of the young at the expense of the elderly, both because the ghetto depended on their ability to work and because their survival was considered more crucial. These disparate experiences in the camp inevitably led to differences in later accounts of camp life; in our Florida workshop, we attended carefully to these differences—at some moments juxtaposing conflicting bits of testimony with one another, at other moments re-staging the same scene multiple times from different prisoner perspectives.

The workshop drew the attention of the FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights. The center’s director, Terry Coonan, was very interested in our attention to the challenges involved in narrativizing histories of atrocity, and he asked me to re-stage the performance for a wider audience during the spring of 2005. Based on this production, the center offered me funds for further
exploration of the history and representation of Terezín. This confluence of Lisa’s research abroad and my financial support from the center allowed us to continue our exploration in a very different environment: we took the project back to the Czech Republic itself.

Ester in Terezín: The Act of Identification, the Problem of Empathy

Lisa’s Account

In the spring of 2005, Alan and I were able to take advantage of our opportunity to work together in the Czech Republic when we were invited by Joy Bashara-Ingram, an American teacher of high school drama, to conduct a workshop with students at the gymnázium in the small south Bohemian town of Pacov (population approximately 4,000), where she was on a Fulbright exchange as an English instructor. Derek Barton, a graduate student in German literature from the FSU workshop, joined us in the Czech Republic to complete our team of American collaborators. A text had surfaced in the course of my research that would serve as a starting point for the performance we would develop: a script based on the story of Queen Ester, which actually received its premier in the Terezín ghetto.

We welcomed this chance to work outside of the US dominant discourse on the Holocaust, to find out how the history of World War II was taught in the Czech Republic, to see how a group of students there would work with us on material about the ghetto, to find out how they would react to our perspective on their national history, and what we would learn from theirs. Due to the school’s limitations regarding time and resources, the instructors (other than Joy) and staff did not participate directly in the workshop, but provided much-needed advice and generous moral and administrative support. With their help, we quickly set up a rehearsal and performance schedule, but trouble soon arose: the students Joy had recruited as a cast told us that, due to end-of-year exams and other pressures, they would not have time to work with us.

What to do? The four of us could put something together ourselves and perform it for the students, but that would mean a much more superficial engagement with the students than we had hoped for. We had eight more days to rehearse before the shows scheduled for the following Friday (for the school) and Saturday (for a local audience), but how were we going to recruit actors? When, on our second day at the school, we were invited to join the teachers in the staff room to wish Věra Přibylová, the school secretary, a happy birthday, I for one was happy to accept the proffered shot of Becherovka. Fortunately, when we explained our plight to the vice principal, Mrs. Lomicová, she left the room and returned with the core of our cast: four girls from kvarta, two of whom had worked with their history teacher the year before to write a short booklet on the history of the Jews of the Pacov area. Later that day, a few boys from sexta were persuaded to work with us as well. By the time of our cast meeting that second afternoon, we were greatly relieved to discover that, in just a few hours, we had gone from zero to seven actors.

*   *   *

“To the extent that the Holocaust itself comes in some sense to be ‘canonized,’ one may expect that (as in the case of texts) certain issues tend to be avoided, marginalized, repressed or denied.”

—LaCapra (23)

If the Holocaust can be considered an event that has been canonized, or subjected to a “process . . . that entails acts of inclusion and (explicit or implicit) exclusion” (LaCapra 20), Terezín is one of those topics that tend to be avoided. The ghetto has little in common with the main points of reference in the dominant US narrative about the Holocaust: death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. In our previous workshops, actors and spectators were often hearing about Terezín for the first time and many were disturbed by the very unfamiliarity of the narrative, which
led to doubts regarding its veracity. I suspect the ghetto’s marginalization in US historiography is due in part to the way it challenges certain comfortable assumptions regarding prisoners’ agency during the Holocaust. The many survivor narratives from Terezín that depart from tropes of victimization and resistance raise difficult questions about the ways in which the prisoners tried to carve out a space where they could co-exist with and somehow survive within the Nazi regime.

If it is true that the Holocaust has been “canonized,” why do we attempt to resist this canonization, and what do we hope to achieve by telling a story that is disturbing to the audience? That is, what are our own interests that lead us to focus on Terezín? During all our workshops, we have attempted to be self-reflexive about that question. As non-Jewish theatre scholars and practitioners, we are drawn to the Terezín prisoners not because of ethnic or religious affinities, but rather by a desire to investigate the place of the ghetto and its cultural life within historical and ethical debates, and I view the attempt to fight certain forms of canonization as an ethical necessity. For example, survivor testimony and documents from the ghetto itself provide ample evidence that, in spite of the oppressive conditions within which they lived, the Terezín prisoners were not robbed of all agency. However, as I have observed, their choices regarding how to exercise that agency—to engage in cultural activities instead of gathering weapons and rising up against the Nazis—tend to make US audiences extremely uncomfortable. In a country that endorses the credo expressed by Franklin Roosevelt in 1939—“We would rather die on our feet than live on our knees”—strategies the Terezín prisoners employed to make “living on their knees” bearable for months or years appear to present a fundamental challenge to our system of values. I have observed many audience members’ attempts to ameliorate the discomfort of that perceived clash, either by trying to “excuse” the prisoners’ activities by emphasizing the “command performance” aspect of Terezín theatre rather than the prisoners’ choice to perform for one another, or by forcing the cultural life to conform to our value system by labeling it “spiritual resistance.” Many Czech-Jewish survivors object to this phrase, since they feel it denies aspects of that cultural life, such as the sense of temporary escape from the ghetto, that they continue to value highly.

In our US performance projects, we questioned acts of erasure that commit violence against both the historical subject and the present-day survivor, acts that purchase our own comfort by historiographically robbing the prisoners of the little agency that was not already stripped away by the Nazis, or by interpreting survivor testimony in ways that make it intelligible to us, but ignore the complex differences between their value system and our own. In the Czech Republic, we would not face the same challenges. At first, I was surprised by my Czech colleagues’ ease acceptance of theatrical performance as a valid strategy in the ghetto, but it seems that decades of communist rule had made this obvious to them: methods that helped people preserve a sense of their own worth and dignity while “living on their knees” deserved respect. However, in this first project in Pacov, new ethical questions arose regarding a different aspect of Terezín: its potential role in Holocaust pedagogy.

During the workshop itself, the project evolved into a much more explicitly pedagogical performance than those our previous collaborations had yielded. Although this evolution occurred due to circumstances rather than by design—we were working with younger students and on an extremely compressed schedule—in retrospect, I realize that the situation provided us with an unexpected opportunity: we were able to try some new pedagogical methods without having to confront the canonized US narrative head-on. Through extensive discussions with American and Czech colleagues who are actively engaged in education against genocide, I have come to believe that incorporating Terezín into the narrative could help address vital questions.

For example, how can students be taught to consider whether certain dangerous patterns are repeating themselves in other places and times? The limit situations of Auschwitz and the death camps are so extreme that students might rightly have difficulty transferring their features to other situations. But Terezín’s role as a collection point, as an intermediary phase of separation of the Jewish population, may be more easily extended to other situations where “enemies of the state” are being
separated from the rest of the population, and may lead students to pose difficult questions regarding whether the threats posed by other prisoners, historically and in our own day, are dangerous enough to warrant violation of their civil and human rights.

Additionally, what kind of affective relationship to the victims of the Holocaust should pedagogical programs strive for, if instructors hope that students will transfer that affect to new situations and be motivated to take action if they see a dangerous pattern being repeated? Terezín is extraordinarily well-suited to this experiment, in part because many personal artifacts created by prisoners in the ghetto have been preserved. These include diaries, letters, poetry, and play scripts written by teenagers. Through these artifacts, students can encounter prisoners their own age and perhaps even identify with them as individuals.

But was ease of identification with the prisoners what we really wanted?

*   *   *

One of our first tasks was to consult with the students’ history teacher to find out what they would know about the World War II era. Gymnasium Pacov is very fortunate to have a young and enthusiastic teacher of history, Mrs. Trachtová, who took it upon herself to ensure that the students had a thorough knowledge of the Holocaust. Until quite recently, there was no requirement that it be taught. Thus we did not encounter a Holocaust narrative different from that current in the United States, but equally canonical; based on individual teacher’s interest in the topic or lack thereof, students may have been presented with no narrative at all.11

But the narrative they had learned from Mrs. Trachtová was quite comprehensive. They knew about the Nuremberg laws, how the plans for genocide had been formulated, the role of Terezín as a collection point, how selection and extermination happened in the death camps—in short, most of what US high school students their age would know, but with an important addition: Terezín had been incorporated into that history. Knowing that, we went to the first meeting with our new cast not so much to find out what they knew, but to find out about their relationship to it: what they felt was important about Terezín, about the Holocaust, and about their history in general. They were just as curious: What was it about the Holocaust that had motivated us to come all the way to Pacov to do a workshop with them?

Their answers and our own were reflected in the script we eventually performed. For example, in the opening and closing scenes, we decided to reproduce the act of questioning by the students, the teachers, and ourselves:

Tereza: Who is the greatest Czech?

Venda: What is the place of the Holocaust in Czech history?

Katka: What happened in 1968?

Michaela: Who was Hitler?

Michal: Are young people interested in history?

Martin: Is this topic too depressing for youth?

All: Why do we want to ask these questions? (Ester in Terezín 1)

Later in the play, we attempted to answer at least one of their questions to us: Why were we, as Americans, interested in the Holocaust? Derek and Joy, in a scene where we all played ourselves, explained their own interest in the topic:
Derek: I think it’s important to understand what happened . . . how a nation or a regime can institutionalize mass murder. How can it get to that point? I don’t think the Nazis were evil. . . . But how can human beings develop such a capacity for inhumanity? If it happens in small steps, how do we recognize those steps? If you can answer that question, maybe you can prevent it from happening again.

Joy: I believe there are people who are evil, people with no sense of right and wrong. I’ve seen it with students, with other people, and the only thing to do is to be constantly vigilant. People have to watch their own governments: Is the government supporting genocide in some place? I think that the Holocaust is happening all the time. ([Ester in Terezín 23])

After this initial conversation with our cast, the four of us sat down to figure out what kind of performance we could realistically put together. One aspect of our previous projects—that of challenging the audience with information that was new and surprising to them—was simply not going to be a factor: Terezín had been well integrated into their knowledge about the Holocaust.

But the first meeting made us realize that we were going to face different challenges; for example, the language barrier. These younger students were not nearly as fluent in English as the group Joy had originally recruited. We were not going to be able to use the discussion-intensive collaborative methods we had employed in the past, and the performance itself, which we had envisioned in English with some Czech and German, was going to have to be Czech-based. As the only member of the American team who was relatively fluent in the language, I was going to have much more intensive translating duties than expected.

Based on these factors and the interests of individual members of our production team, we decided to create a collage-like script, still using scenes from Ester as the backbone of the performance, but bringing together a greater variety of materials than we had originally planned: survivor testimony, material from the booklet that the girls from kvarta had written, children’s poetry that Joy wanted to direct in group recitation, and German-language poetry that Derek would perform to represent the experience of the German-speaking prisoners.

Considering all these adjustments, what was going to happen to a topic we had explored in past workshops: the challenges inherent in attempts to represent the Holocaust, and especially survivors’ personal experience, within a performance context?

* * *

“. . . this flight of imagination and slipping into the captive’s body unlatches a Pandora’s box and, surprisingly, what comes to the fore is the difficulty and slipperiness of empathy.”

—Hartman (17)

In our US workshops, we had also created the scripts as a collage of materials from different sources, including survivor testimony and our own reflections developed during the collaborative process. Performance of the survivor testimony had always posed an ethical dilemma: What were our obligations to this text onstage? What risks did we take in translating it, editing it, selecting it, modifying it, and above all performing it ourselves? We were speaking the words of real people who had had an experience we could never claim to share. What were the dangers of attempting to identify in this way with the survivors?

Saidiya Hartman, a scholar of African American literature and history, cautions against identification that involves putting oneself in the Other’s place. She problematizes the strategy employed by John Rankin, a white abolitionist who tried to shock his fellows out of indifference by urging them to imagine themselves, their wives and children, on the auction block, as “narcissistic identification
that obliterates the other” (16). She expresses concern that, in the supposedly empathetic process of “making the slave's suffering his own, Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach” (19).

Two performance scholars draw conclusions quite different from Hartman’s. Susan Haedicke proposes that, through productions such as one she attended in Paris, Un Voyage pas comme les autres sur les chemins de l’exil (A voyage unlike any other on the road to exile), where each visitor was assigned a “composite identity” based on actual asylum-seekers in Europe and experienced a series of situations simulating their paths through immigration bureaucracy, even imaginary contact with the Other can change the self. Scott Magelssen writes of the program Follow the North Star at the Conner Prairie living museum, in which the mostly white participants attempt to put themselves in the place of black slaves trying to escape to the North. However, he does not see the result as obliteration of the slave:

in casting against type (both temporally and racially), the perceived and acknowledged difference between the lived bodies of the past and the present bodies of the second-person interpreters can function to distance the performer/spectator from her character—a form of Verfremdungseffekt—in a manner that would allow the critical separation necessary for thought. (23)

Haedicke agrees regarding the need for critical separation, noting that “the source of a potentially permanent change is perhaps … the ability to be self-reflexive about the experience” (112). Both acknowledge that the material for reflexivity is provided by the participants’ willingness to subject their bodies voluntarily to the experience of the fictional situation, an experience that enables them to have physical and emotional reactions that they may not have thought possible on an intellectual level. We had no desire to subject the students to a simulated experience of the harsh conditions of the ghetto, but what kind of experience would get them to engage bodily with the prisoners’ fate without falling into a too-easy identification that would concentrate their focus on themselves? This question seemed especially pressing, since we had neither the time nor the language to discuss the risks of narcissistic identification.

In retrospect, I realize that our performances also included a feature that inserted Brechtian distance between the actor and the role of the survivor: the scenes from Esther. When we began to plan the workshop, I suggested using the script for purely personal and pragmatic reasons: a Terezín survivor I was quite fond of had brought it to my attention, I was intrigued by it, and I wanted to get to know it better in hopes of subsequently attempting a historical reconstruction of the Terezín performance. But what I did not notice at the time was that the script provided a transitional site between the scenes where we commented, as ourselves, upon the prisoners’ plight, and the scenes where we “stepped into” their roles, performing testimony or events that took place in the ghetto. In the scenes from Esther, our actors played neither themselves nor the survivors, but roles that the prisoners themselves had played as actors (fig. 1).

In order to keep their situation in mind while we played these roles, we speculated within our performance about what the play might have meant to the prisoners and how it might have resonated with their experience in the ghetto. For example, in one scene from Esther, the king has commanded the Narrator to organize a feast. In the performance, a panel of experts interjected with information on hunger in Terezín, and characters from the play suddenly shifted to represent the Terezín actors themselves:

Narrator (calling to Venda and Lisa, in character): You cooks and winecellar keepers, be industrious at your work!

(Venda and Lisa enter with food and drink)

...
Narrator (stepping out of the scene to address the audience directly): But what did it mean to perform a feast on stage in Terezín?

(Attention shifts to “panel of experts”)

Michaela (to the audience): Nutrition was very poor in Terezín. The children, the future, received extra food. Old people—there were thousands of elderly Jews from Germany and Austria in Terezín—received much less. Workers received about 1,600 calories a day—enough to survive, but not enough not to be hungry.

Katka (to the actors): When you were hungry, didn’t it bother you to talk about food?

Lisa (as Terezín actor playing winecellar keeper): Of course it did.

Venda (as Terezín actor playing cook): But when you’re hungry, you can’t ignore it—you talk about food all the time. (Ester in Terezín 10)  

Through the experience of trying to inhabit, with our own bodies as actors, this specific text, we created an imaginary site of encounter with the prisoners. Then, by alternating this type of scene with others, we provided the students with varying degrees of Brechtian distance versus physical and emotional immersion in their characters. Looking back, I hope this alternation enabled them to perceive the difference at an experiential level—even if, at the time, neither we nor they would have been able to express the idea in so many words.
During the second week of the workshop, there was little time for theorizing; we had to get the show, now titled *Ester in Terezín, or The Place of the Holocaust in Czech History*, on its feet for the school performance on Friday. I had finished a draft of the script over the weekend and was working with two students to translate the English sections I had written into Czech, trying to stay just ahead of the scenes that Alan was directing. It was a delight to watch him work with the kids. With a combination of gesturing, pantomiming, and literally pulling them around the stage, he directed them without my needing to translate. Their confidence in their limited English visibly increased as they realized he could actually understand them. Joy coached us all on group recitation of the poetry and searched for background music and the final texts that we would need, such as a Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead. Derek assisted Alan and rehearsed German-language poems from Terezín that would fit into the flow of the script. And we, the four Americans, had to insert ourselves into the blocking; we would be performing with the students.

The performance we staged reflected the form of our encounters with one another. Questions were allowed to remain questions with no easy answers, and disparate elements were juxtaposed, with one often transforming into the other. For example, based on the girls’ research, the actors read statistics to place the specific case of Pacov within the larger context of the Nazi system of concentration camps, only to replace the anonymity of numbers with the names of those who had been their neighbors:

Michaela: In all, 92 members of the Jewish community in Pacov perished. In Auschwitz, 81 Jews died.

Katka: In Terezín, six Jews.

Michaela: In Dachau, two Jews, and in Ravensbrück, one Jew.

Katka: The only ones who survived were: Bader, Hanuš; Guttmanová, Nella; Margolius, Otto; Lustig, Jaroslav; Pachner, Leopold; and Ledererová, Věra. (*Ester in Terezín?*)

Another juxtaposition, that of the comic with the tragic, became a site for an unexpectedly dramatic engagement with the body. The scene in *Ester* where Haman, enemy of the Jews, is revealed to be a liar and executed appears to contain an element of comically stylized violence. According to the stage directions, the executioner and his assistant lead Haman to the gallows, attach his coat to a hook, and pull it up as Haman slips out of it; they leave the coat hanging on the gallows and all three exit (*Burian 60, 61*). In our version, the unintentional humor emerged from the sight of Katka, the tiny though fierce-looking executioner, trying to hang the much taller Michaela, who could not seem to stop fixing her hair even after she had been hoisted up.

But now, with Michaela finally motionless, one of the actors read survivor testimony about the execution of a group of young men in Terezín who were hung for the “crime” of trying to send letters to their loved ones. Two other actors symbolically conducted a burial and the rest recited Kaddish. Watching our recording of the performance, I notice that the student audience went uncustomarily quiet at this point. I suspect their perception shifted, as mine did, regarding the identity of the body onstage. Michaela the actor took on different roles, representing first the character of Haman and then one of the executed young men, but all the while (due to very basic/rudimentary costuming, cross-gender casting, and the hair-fixing) remaining clearly their friend Michaela. As she went still behind the image of the silent grave-diggers, the material fact of that specific body became more important than either role: this could have happened to one of their peers.
“Identification in Freud always works both ways: it is an assimilative or appropriative act, making the other the same as me or me the same as the other, but at the same time it causes the I/ego to be transformed by the other. What this suggests is that the borders of identity, the wholeness and consistency of identity, is transgressed by every act of identification.”

—Diamond (396)

After our final performance on Saturday, we held a cast party at Joy’s house. Aiming for at least a rudimentary measure of the efficacy of the workshop, I asked the students what they would change if they could do this all over again. Alan was hoping for some deep thoughts on their perspective regarding history, but we got something different and not altogether surprising:

Michal: I would say I liked it. I’m satisfied with it and I’m glad that we took part in this kind of action where you came here as foreigners; that doesn’t happen so often here.

Martin: I agree. I think that it was mainly an advantage that we could meet with you as Americans and actually even be coached in the language . . . and have those experiences.

Tereza: I liked it as it was, what should I say? It was great, it was fun. (Zeman et al.)

If our goal was to create an affective relationship to the Terezín prisoner as Other, I’m not sure if we succeeded. But, as we learned at our post-show party, it appears that the primary affective relationship that developed was to another Other altogether: they became fond of us, and we of them. In the act of questioning one another and listening intently to the answers, even across the language barrier, of trying to understand one another as we put the show together during those two intense weeks, we had put ourselves in their place, and they had put themselves in ours. And all of us had put ourselves into roles in the *Ester* script: there we encountered the prisoner-actors as we imagined them and one another as fellow actors (fig. 2).

If identification can be an engagement that changes both sides, what might these changes have been? My hope is that we left them with a greater willingness to explore the questions: Who am I, who is the Other, and what could exist between us?

I won’t speak for my collaborators, but I can say how the encounter with the students changed me and my relationship to my work. I had already developed a relationship with some of the prisoners who performed in *Ester*. I have met some of the surviving actors and talked with them about their experience of performing in the show, and read the testimony of several more. But now, watching the students laugh with Alan and moving among them myself, my image of the elderly survivors was infused by the students’ youthful vitality—a vitality that, for too many of the Terezín actors, was suffocated in the gas chambers of Auschwitz or wrung out of them in labor camps and death marches just months after *Ester’s* Terezín premiere. As I pictured both groups—our students and the young prisoners—in the play, neither obliterated the other; each made me appreciate and engage more deeply with the other.

Yet, I was disturbed by the notion that the students’ encounter with us might have hindered rather than enhanced their ability to develop an affective relationship with the prisoners. The concrete presence of our living bodies was certainly more vivid than the textual presence of the prisoners that they were encountering onstage. Although I believe that any positive encounter with the Other serves the cause of anti-genocide education, I was concerned that we had inadvertently set up an identification that obliterated the prisoners—not through narcissism on the part of the students, but by overshadowing their presence in the play with our own.
In the next iteration of the project, we would address this issue by staging a new kind of encounter with the body, one that would allow a more challenging transgression of the borders of identity: the students would experience the living presence of the elderly Terezín survivors as advisors to our project and as audience members.

**Terezín in Translation: Language, Media, Memory**

*Alan’s Account*

“Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express.”

—Benjamin (72)

In his essay “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin argues that the single element linking all languages to one another is not their shared use as conduits of meaning, but their shared status as evidence of the desire for meaning-making. For Benjamin, the bond between an original utterance and its translation is forged not from a faithful transference of meaning from one language to another; rather, this bond arises from the fact that all languages share a common ancestor: a “pure language” anterior to any language known today. Benjamin understands this pure language as a mode of communication no longer fully accessible, a direct and unmediated form of expression that bypasses the process of signification. Yet while the full potential of pure language is never fully realized by any linguistic act, its elusive trace inheres in all such acts. This trace, therefore, functions as the wellspring of expression itself; it fuels efforts at meaning-making precisely by ensuring that such efforts will never fully achieve their intended effects.
I will return to Benjamin throughout this essay, for I believe his insights go some distance toward explaining my own investment in our Terezín projects. While my colleagues and I were all quite pleased with the results of our summer 2005 production, the experience merely deepened my questions about the means by which the theatre translates lived experience: Which aspects of this experience are open to translation? Which aspects, by contrast, remain untranslated because they are, to some degree, untranslatable? And, finally, how might our Terezín productions serve our interrogation of such questions?

In the autumn of 2005, Lisa informed me that we had received an invitation to return to Pacov in order to mount another Terezín production in the summer of 2006. She was intrigued by the prospect and, given my need to continue our explorations, I eagerly agreed to the return engagement. Together, we contacted our colleagues Derek and Joy about the chance to “get the team together” once again. I also busied myself trying to learn a bit of the Czech language. In 2005, I had traveled to Pacov with no knowledge of Czech at all; for the 2006 journey, I determined to return with an ability to use the language—not only as a way to facilitate the production process, but also as a means to explore the act of translation itself.

Lisa, meanwhile, was engaged in this exploration firsthand, for she was busy translating an original cabaret text performed in Terezín—a text that we could use as the basis for our new production. Lisa had unearthed two versions of the text within just a few months of each other. The first came from Hana Lojínová, who had performed as a dancer in the original production; the second came from Zdeněk Prokeš, artistic director of the National Theatre in Brno. Prokeš was, in fact, the son of Dr. Felix Porges, who, along with Vítešlav (Pidla) Horpatzky and Pavel Weisskopf, had written the cabaret text while interned at Terezín. After obtaining permission from Prokeš to make use of the material, Lisa composed an English translation of the text, then sent it to me and our other colleagues for consideration and commentary.

The text, variously titled *The Second Czech Cabaret* or, more colorfully, *Smejte se s námi* (or *Laugh With Us*), blended song and dance with comic sketches performed by the two writers Horpatzky and Porges, who also served as “emcees” for the other acts. The sketches were set in Prague after the war had ended and the inmates of Terezín had returned home; as they reminisced about the camp, Horpatzky and Porges dropped endless humorous references to life in Terezín. Lisa worked assiduously to illuminate these references for the rest of us, for they often yielded valuable insights into the cabaret itself. The final sketch, for instance, allowed Lisa to deduce the approximate date of the original performance. In the sketch, Porges played a young man filled with questions about the camp, while Horpatzky played a former inmate eager to answer his queries. At one point, Horpatzky claimed that the prisoners had possessed their own “illustrated news agency, *Mitteilungen,*” a line that prompted Lisa to include a note on the significance of the German-language interpolation. “On April 15, 1944,” she wrote, “the title of the daily bulletin […] was changed from *Tagesbefehl* ("Daily Orders") to *Mitteilungen der Jüdischen Selbstverwaltung* ("Announcements of the Jewish Self-government") in preparation for the anticipated visit of the International Red Cross.” The mention of the bulletin name thus led Lisa to conclude that “this reference dates the cabaret to the period between April 15 and September 24, 1944, when mass transports out of the ghetto began” (Horpatzky 14).

In some passages, however, the complexities of the text challenged even an experienced translator like Lisa. At another point in the same sketch, Horpatzky offered Porges a sample of the “homegrown, original, authentic language” developed in Terezín. “For example,” he began, “a friend came to me one morning and said *šahoj*, man, I was left out of the *Hundertshaft*, I lost my *eskartu*. . .” etc., etc. As the speech continued, Horpatzky peppered the original Czech not only with words from German, but also with hybrid words that blended Czech with German and even Hebrew. After offering annotations for the three terms mentioned above, Lisa suspended her translation with a note that “the paragraph continues in this vein” (Horpatzky 12). The fact that this point in the text
defied easy translation reminded me yet again of the desire that inheres in every translation, a desire endlessly renewed precisely because it is never wholly fulfilled.

As winter turned to spring and then to summer, my knowledge of Czech grew more substantial and I was eventually able to move back and forth between the Czech original and its English translation. Yet these mysterious terms from Terezín, absent from both versions of the text, reminded me always of the gap between an urge to expression and a meaning ultimately impossible to express. An ongoing prompt for my desire, this gap both undergirds and undermines my efforts to make meaning of life in Terezín.

* * *

“No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife—which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change.”

—Benjamin (73)

In his essay, Benjamin asserts that the relation of a translation to its original is marked by a transformation that renders the former ultimately incommensurate to the latter. For Benjamin, the passage from original to translation is accompanied by both survival and loss; in other words, meaning only survives this passage at a cost, for some aspect of that meaning is inevitably lost in the passage itself. Yet the slippage of meaning between original and translation inspires the very urge for meaning-making; in our work on Terezín, therefore, we seek to honor this slippage by attending carefully to its effects upon translation. Crucially, however, our acts of translation involve not only the movement from one language to another, but also from the past to the present and back again. This movement introduces a set of questions that hangs over all of our productions: How do we select, edit, and interpret survivor testimony in performance? May we modify testimony, and if so, to what degree and to what end? We all feel a deep sense of responsibility both to the survivors of Terezín and to the dead for whom they speak. But how do we shoulder this responsibility in our use of testimony in performance?

Since performance is the medium for our translations, some intervention into testimony is inevitable, for a medium invariably exerts some effect upon the material that it transmits. And since a primary goal of our productions is to foster critical engagement between past and present, we often employ intervention as a way to interrogate received historical narratives. Yet, we do not employ such interventions lightly, and our use of modified testimony is always accompanied by careful attention to the effects of the modification itself. Nor are our interventions purely intellectual in nature; at times, affect plays an important role in negotiating the passage from past to present. Shannon Walsh, who appeared in an earlier Florida version of our project, recalls a moment in performance when she was overcome by emotion during the delivery of survivor testimony. Within the testimony, the survivor first recounts a story in which she narrowly escapes transport from Terezín to Auschwitz, then adds that she enjoyed a pleasant summer in Terezín after her close call. The survivor explains that “the trains were engaged with the Hungarian Jews. They had no trains for us. And thousands of other Jews in Hungary went to Auschwitz in that time. And we were left in peace, for the entire summer” (Staging Terezín 27). At our final performance, Walsh briefly broke down in sobs while delivering this line, yet she did not intend her emotional intervention to offer an empathetic link between a prisoner in the past and a performer in the present; rather, the break in her voice signified a break between past and present. Walsh recalls that “the fact that this woman had to pull, was forced to pull, joy out of a moment when people were dying and she was spared—I found this terrifying” (Walsh 1). With this intervention, therefore, she gestured toward the magnitude of survivor experience—an experience resolutely not her own. In all our productions, we seek to foreground such interventions, and in so doing, we hope to alert audiences to the ways in which our work is always a translation of the past placed before their view in the present day.
During the spring of 2006, Lisa created a new script for our upcoming Pacov production, one designed to effect just this sort of translation from past to present. She called it *Když se pláčeme* or *Can’t Cry for Laughing*; the script combined scenes from the original cabaret text with survivor testimony and new segments that commented on the cabaret through direct address and dramatizations of events from Terezín. In May 2006, my other colleagues and I met Lisa in Pacov, and together with our student performers—four of whom had worked with us in 2005 and seven new cast members—we devised a method of staging that could reinforce the encounter between past and present already outlined in the script itself. We sought to establish this notion of encounter during the opening moments of the production. The curtain rose upon a typical cabaret setting: a soloist stood center stage and sang the opening song from the original cabaret, while the other performers sat at cabaret tables arranged on either side of the stage, sipping drinks and perusing cocktail menus (fig. 3). At the end of the musical number, the cabaret spectators applauded, then one by one they broke character, turned to the viewing audience, and delivered the opening lines of the new performance text:

Michal: Sixty-two years ago this song opened a cabaret performance written and performed in the spring of 1944 by prisoners inside the walls of the Terezín ghetto.

Jirka: Terezín, as the Nazis described it, an “independent Jewish settlement,” led by its own Jewish self-government.

Michaela: Terezín, as the survivors describe it,

Tereza: A place where thousands died of hunger and disease,

Michaela: And from which thousands more were sent to die in other concentration camps.

Katka: But also a place where, against all odds, they managed to create, for themselves and for each other, some joy. (*Can’t Cry for Laughing* 2)

This opening moment provided the model for the rest of the production. The performers moved freely between past and present moments by shifting frequently from cabaret characters to contemporary commentators. We also decided to strengthen this sense of movement between past and present by asking each of the performers to take their turn at playing the “emcee” roles originally portrayed by Horpatzky and Porges. Lisa wrote lines to establish this conceit, and in rehearsal, we developed a bit of blocking to handle the shift from one pair of performers to the next. In the opening scene, two boys, both named Martin, assumed the emcee roles by donning hats and dinner jackets. Then, as the transfer of roles drew near, two girls rose from the café tables, approached the Martins, and took on their roles by taking up their hats and coats:

Tereza: We can’t put ourselves in their place, can’t experience what they lived through. But we can listen to what they left for us, and listen to the survivors.

*(The girls approach the Martins from behind and pull off their jackets. They then hand the jackets to the Martins, who put the jackets on the girls. Finally, the Martins remove their hats, place them on the heads of the girls, and take their seats at the cabaret tables.)*

Michaela: We can try to enter their roles. For a moment, stand in their shoes. And if we are successful, this text will speak again. (*Can’t Cry for Laughing* 4)

Our efforts to craft this translation from past to present were aided enormously by visits from Pavel Stránský, a Terezín survivor who had actually written lyrics for three of the original cabaret songs. Now a noted writer and lecturer on Terezín, Stránský took interest in our project when Lisa recognized his name in the original script and called to confirm his identity. The rest of us met...
Stránský when he arrived at our rehearsal one day, having caught a ride to Pacov from Olga Strusková, a documentary filmmaker who wished to record our project for a segment in her forthcoming film on Holocaust education. Lisa had met Strusková just before our earlier 2005 production, and throughout the next year, the pair worked closely with each other to find funding for their respective future projects.

Both Stránský and Strusková offered me profound insights into the links between past and present forged in our production process. Certainly Stránský offered valuable information on the original cabaret text. On one occasion, for instance, he illuminated an obscure historical reference that Lisa had long been unable to decipher. At one point in the aforementioned scene between the young man and the old survivor, the conversation turned to the yellow Star of David that Jews were forced to wear during the German occupation. “What if it did not suit someone?” the young man naively asked. “For example if that ugly color did not look good on them?” The old survivor then replied: “That didn’t matter. It was simply commanded, I think according to some grandmothers, and it had to be worn” (Can’t Cry for Laughing 22). This reference to “grandmothers” had puzzled us all, but Stránský explained that it was a joke about the Nuremburg laws passed by Germany in 1935—laws that defined a Jew as anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent. We were all delighted to learn the solution to this riddle, and it seemed to me that past and present had in a flash coincided with each other, that testimony had offered us an unmediated moment of mutual recognition and understanding.

The immediacy of this moment was soon broken, however, for almost at once Strusková asked Stránský to repeat his explanation so that she could capture it on camera. I almost never work in film or any other electronic medium, and so the very strangeness of this request jolted me from my reverie. Yet after a bit of thought, this initial strangeness gave way to familiarity, for despite the
profound and often rehearsed differences between live and electronic media, I found in the request a similarity between film production on the one hand and our Terezín productions on the other. A moment captured on film is preserved for years or perhaps even for centuries to come, and thereby it is made available for repeated viewing from one generation to the next. Yet the availability of this moment is purchased only at the price of its immediacy in the here and now. Our Terezín productions, however, fulfill a similar mediating function, for within them, the survival of a moment from the past is likewise accompanied by the loss of its immediacy for the present. Our invocation of testimony inevitably effects its alteration—a change that hinges, as always, on a relation between survival and loss.

In our own translations from past to present, we seek continually to invoke this relation of survival to loss, and our 2006 production was no exception. Indeed, in this case, our invocation was aided by the fact that a relation of survival to loss was actually woven into the circumstances surrounding the original cabaret text. Of its two principal authors, Porges had returned from Terezín, while Horpatzky had perished after his transport to Auschwitz. The contrasting fates of Horpatzky and Porges prompted Lisa to write a coda for her new performance text; together with our other colleagues, we crafted that coda into a final scene that foregrounded the twin themes of survival and loss. After singing the musical number that closed the original cabaret, the ten performers who represented the original cabaret cast descended from the stage and formed a line in front of the audience. Then Lisa, who had so far served merely as a prompter in the corner of the stage, approached the line and handed transport slips to those whose characters had actually undergone transport from Terezín. Other cast members, still standing upon the stage, offered commentary on the action below:

Tereza: In the fall of 1944, mass transports sent thousands of Terezín prisoners to Auschwitz . . .

Michaela: Including Pidla Horpatzky.

Jirka: Some prisoners survived until the end of the war in Terezín . . .

Petra: Some even survived Auschwitz and the other camps . . .

Lisa: But of the 140,000 prisoners deported to Terezín, about 120,000 of them perished. (Can’t Cry for Laughing 24)

As Lisa finished her line, the performers who represented the survivors took their places once again with the rest of the cast. Those who represented the dead, however, appeared on a balcony overlooking the audience and offered their own tribute to the deceased—a final recitation of their names:

Michal: One of them was named Pavel Maier.

Barbora: One of them was named Franta Weissenstein.

Marcela: One of them was named Kurt Maier.

Světlana: One of them was named Pavel Weisskopf.

Martin: One of them was named Pidla Horpatzky. (Can’t Cry for Laughing 24)

The production ended with the two performers playing Porges and Horpatzky—in fact, the two boys named Martin who had played the roles at the beginning of the show—speaking their last lines to each other across the distance that divided floor from balcony. With this final image, we sought to embody the relation of survival to loss that irreducibly marks the transmission of any testimony.
By rendering this mark visible in production, we hoped to highlight the high stakes involved in the translation from past to present—stakes that seem particularly profound in our attempts to make meaning of Terezín itself.

* * *

“Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point . . . a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux.”

—Benjamin (80)

In his essay, Benjamin employs a geometrical metaphor to suggest that a translation maintains contact with its original only at a single point—the starting point of a path that the translation traces for itself through the infinitely open field of language. The translation, perforce parted from its original by the “pure language” that engenders them both, cannot follow the trajectory of its antecedent, and this divergence of texts ensures a divergence of meaning as well. Despite their contact at what Benjamin calls the “single point of sense,” the original and its translation will generate and disseminate a host of different meanings—some separated by only the subtlest of degrees, some wholly contradictory of one another. Yet these differences that divide the translation from its original also spur the very act of translation, for the inability of any text to capture the fullness of meaning within language provides the impetus for the proliferation of texts themselves.

This insight from Benjamin offers yet another perspective on our Terezín projects, for the dynamic he describes characterizes not only the translation from one language to another, but also the translation from memory to history. Certainly, the custodians of history may efface or exploit memory in order to serve a range of cultural, political, and ideological interests. How, then, is memory altered when transmitted from one individual to the next? When incorporated into collective historical narratives? Or when marshaled into ethical service for the sake of our Terezín productions?

The high stakes of such questions became clear for me at the third and last performance of our 2006 production. To be sure, our first two performances had proven quite successful. Our first audience of local schoolchildren cheered loudly for their colleagues upon the stage, and our second at a nearby retirement center warmly welcomed the young performers to their residence. The atmosphere at our third performance, however, was electric. The audience included guests from around the country, including a number of Terezín survivors. Energized by their presence, the performers gave their all to the production; in a scene reminiscent of an opening night at the opera, they received an immediate standing ovation and took so many curtain calls that I simply stopped counting them (fig. 4). But the most gratifying moment of the day came later, when many of the survivors joined the performers backstage to share their memories of the camp and offer their thanks for bringing them back to life. This encounter, which brought many present quite openly to tears, also brought home to me the impact of our projects and their role in the translation of memory into history.

Even the aftermath of our performance seems to testify to this process of translation. Our 2006 production was attended by Miroslav Prokeš, another son of Dr. Felix Porges who happens to sit on the Prague City Assembly. Impressed with our work, he invited the performers to present the production in Prague. The performance took place on 27 June at the Prague School of Construction and Horticulture; unfortunately, by that time I had already returned to the United States, but Lisa informed me that the performance was a great success.

Yet, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Prague production lay in the reason that Prokeš had extended his invitation in the first place. When he first spoke with Lisa, Prokeš had praised the production as a potent reminder of Nazi atrocities in the Czech lands, and Lisa had assumed that his interest in bringing the production to Prague stemmed from his own Jewish heritage. Two weeks
later, however, Lisa learned that Prokeš was a member of the communist party—still a powerful force in Czech politics—and that his political affiliation had at least partly motivated his invitation; at a time when the abuses of the old communist regime are increasingly equated with those of the earlier Nazi occupation, Prokeš is eager to paint the Nazi past in bleaker colors than those used to depict the communist era.

Of course, such flights from original intentions always characterize later translations, and doubtless our production resonated with other viewers in equally unanticipated ways. Indeed, I could never have anticipated my own reactions to the project as it unfolded. Certainly, I have long been aware of the dangers that inhere within the insistence upon “objective” history, but this awareness existed primarily on an intellectual level—at least until my involvement with this project. Yet, in struggling with my colleagues to stage the history of Terezín, I have encountered the high stakes of history in living, embodied circumstances. In many cases, these encounters revealed moments within my own view of history that had crystallized, unbeknownst to me, into unquestioned assumptions about relations between past and present. My interrogations of such moments have just begun, but I hope that the theatre will continue to afford me opportunities for their exploration; the stage, it seems, offers potent reminders of the ways in which history always hinges upon translation.

Fig. 4. The cast of Can’t Cry for Laughing. Front row (left to right): Petra Jalovecká, Tereza Sedláková, Venda Pavlíková, Katka Razimová, Michaela Chmelová, Olga Baštýrová, Světlana Kubačáková, and Lisa Peschel. Back row (left to right): Blanka Vondrášová, Joy Bashara-Ingram, Jiří Král, Martin Prokop, Martin Hamouz, Michal Matoušek, Alan Sikes, and Derek Barton. (Photo by Věra Průbylová, reprinted with permission.)
Final Questions and Future Directions

Although our series of performance projects has reached its conclusion, many questions that continue to inform our scholarship arose during these last two encounters in the Czech Republic and our subsequent collaboration on this article. The issues each of us have raised in the separate narratives we have produced—issues of identification and empathy in the essay from Lisa, and issues of translation and communicability in the one from Alan—intersect in ways that suggest areas for further exploration. How, for example, might identification give rise to an inaccurate or false translation? Consider how the assumptions of sameness invoked through oversimplified identification (“Character A in this performance is just like me”) bear a marked resemblance to assumptions of direct translation (“That word in language A is equivalent to this word in my language”). In each case, difference is assimilated into sameness: crucial nuances are swept away in order to produce easily palatable texts and performances.

Despite this danger, however, we believe that performance practices engaging both actors and audience in complex forms of identification and translation can support the recording and transmission of lived memory. Indeed, assuming that identification always involves a translation of sorts between the milieus of self and other, these two processes might mutually reinforce one another: on the one hand, identification allows the self to acknowledge the emotional, even visceral, affective experience of the other; on the other, in performance, the translation between self and other occurs within a zone of relative security that can foster critical reflection upon the experience itself. Perhaps this simultaneous invocation of affective experience and critical reflection can offer a strategy for confronting historical events outside the purview of our own project.

Our work together on this article has reminded us that no era holds a monopoly on atrocity. Perhaps the crucial question is this: If performance, through processes of translation and identification, can successfully transmit lived memory, can it also prompt spectators to go beyond a sensitive engagement with the past and engage with the humanitarian crises of the present? We hope that our work will prompt others to explore such questions within the arena of live performance.

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Alan Sikes is now teaching at Illinois State University, Bloomington-Normal. His previous articles have appeared in The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Text and Performance Quarterly, Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, and in the anthology, Querying Difference in Theatre History. He is the author of Representation and Identity from Versailles to the Present (2007).
Notes

1. The ghetto is more commonly known in the United States by its German name, Theresienstadt.


3. The prisoners’ role in establishing cultural activities is confirmed by survivor testimony and by the Terezin daily orders from 28 December 1941, which granted permission for “friendship evenings”—gatherings in which the prisoners performed songs and sketches for one another—on condition that the program be submitted in advance for approval (*Acta Tereziana* 65).


5. We have published a more complete account of our Minnesota and Florida productions in *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance*, see “Staging Terezin: A Performance-Based Research Project” (1.1 [2005]: 7–21).

6. The *gymnázium* is a secondary school for students intending to go on to university.

7. The Old Testament Book of Ester is the basis for the Jewish holiday of Purim, a festive occasion commemorating the survival of the Jews who, in the fifth-century BC, were marked for death by their Persian rulers. The biblical account features Ester, the young and beautiful queen, the villain Haman, who schemes to have all the Jews in Persia put to death, and King Ahasuerus, who, not knowing that Ester herself is Jewish, has been deceived by Haman into agreeing to the murder of the Jews. The script we used was a 1938 adaptation of a Czech folk-play (i.e., written from the point of view of Czech Christians) from the late nineteenth century that was first published by folklorist Dr. Čeněk Zíbrt in the journal *Český lid* (Czech folk) in 1914. The adaptation was prepared by renowned avant-garde Czech theatre artist E. F. Burian, apparently to demonstrate the historical sympathy of Czech Christians for Czech Jews (the script includes nineteenth-century non-Jewish peasant characters). Burian was arrested by the Nazis as a political dissident before the script could be staged, but his Jewish collaborators Norbert Frýd and Karel Reiner brought the script with them when they were deported to Terezin. Burian survived his imprisonment in several concentration camps and staged Ester himself after the war; Frýd and Reiner survived as well and continued their careers as writer and composer, respectively.

8. A popular liqueur manufactured in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) and purported to have medicinal properties.


10. Students 16–17 years old, roughly equivalent to US high school juniors.

11. For the interested teacher, support is available for Holocaust education. For example, the Educational and Cultural Center of the Jewish Museum in Prague leads workshops for teachers, provides pedagogical materials, and organizes schools’ participation in projects such as “Disappeared Neighbors,” where students can carry out research on the fate of Jews from their own communities. More information is available on their web site at <www.jewishmuseum.cz>.

12. Magelssen’s article also provides evidence that obliteration of the Other is only one possible point in a range of positions the empathizer can inhabit in terms of degree and type of identification. He provides examples
ranging from participants who refused to enter into the spirit of the scene, to a man who became so deeply immersed in the enacted situation that, when a museum worker playing a bounty hunter threatened his girlfriend, he physically attacked him.


14. I would like to take this opportunity to thank students Martin Smetana and, especially, Jan Poduška for their invaluable assistance in translating English sections of the script into Czech.

15. In one scene of the performance, we had quite literally taken one another’s places. As a moment of comic relief midway through the show, the four Americans and four of the Czech students acted out their version of what they imagined the other group said about them and about the project when they were not present.

16. This quote and the following citations from the cabaret text are taken from Lisa’s early unpublished translation. Recently, however, Lisa has published a slightly abridged but carefully annotated translation of the text (“Non-Survivor Testimony: Terezín Ghetto Theatre in the Archive and the Second Czech Cabaret,” Theatre Survey 48.1 [2007]: 143–67).

17. Fortunately for all of us, Terezín survivor Doris Grozdanovičová was able to supply Lisa with a full glossary of the terms from the original cabaret sketch. We extend our thanks to Ms. Grozdanovičová for her assistance.

18. A fortuitous accident during the final performance transformed Lisa’s experience of this scene. As she relates: “The presence of the survivors in the audience that day made me extremely nervous, and when I arrived on stage I realized I had forgotten to bring the transport slips with me. Needing a way to indicate the characters who were transported to Auschwitz, I decided that, instead of handing out the slips, I would extend my hand to those actors as I walked down the line. As each one took it, a bit uncertainly because of the unexpected change, as I held, for a moment, their warm and living hands, my consciousness of the sheer vitality of those young bodies intensified, and with it my sense of the grotesque injustice of the murder of their Terezín counterparts.”

19. The Prague performance was attended by representatives of the Terezín Memorial and the Czech Ministry of Education. Lisa has been asked to submit a formal report on our project, which will be featured on a ministry web site devoted to “best practices” in interdisciplinary pedagogy.

Works Cited


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