

**The Prosthetic Life:
Theatrical Performance, Survivor Testimony
and the Terezín Ghetto, 1941-1963**

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Lisa A. Peschel

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Dr. Margaret Werry
Associate Professor of Theatre Arts and Dance
Advisor

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

Abstract

During all periods in postwar Czechoslovakia when the World War II Jewish ghetto at Terezín (in German, Theresienstadt) could be discussed in the public sphere, Czech-Jewish Holocaust survivors created and circulated narratives about the cultural life of the ghetto and their own experience of agency and pleasure while engaged in theatrical performances. Focusing on two periods, the immediate postwar years (1945-47) and an early point in the political thaw leading to the Prague Spring (1963), I examine testimony that survivors addressed to their fellow Czechs in the public sphere as a rhetorical performance in its own right. The constative and the performative aspects of testimony have shifted over time; in each period, survivors needed or wanted their testimony to achieve different effects, and they provided different information about theatrical performance in the ghetto.

The survivors clearly adjusted their narratives in response to period-specific pressures as they tried to reinforce both their subjectivity and their subject position in postwar Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, the testimony of both periods shares a consistent core of themes, suggesting that theatrical performance in the ghetto functioned as a social practice that increased the prisoners' resilience and ability to cope with the traumatic events occurring in the ghetto on a day-to-day basis. Their postwar testimony reveals a related function: they resisted objectification within the sometimes hostile environment of postwar Czechoslovakia by establishing and conveying the meaning they ascribed to their own experience, thus remaining speaking subjects.

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Foreword

Theater Beyond the Curtain of Life

This essay was written by Jan Fischer, a survivor of the World War II Jewish ghetto at Terezín, a year after I began conducting interviews with him about the prisoners' theatrical performance.¹

Up the wooden stairs of the old barracks from the period of Maria Theresa climbs a group of people. All look forward to a rare experience. They have tickets to the theater. We are in the Terezín ghetto in the year 1944. In the small hall, the size of a schoolroom, Gogol's *The Marriage* will be performed. The times are gone when theater was played secretly, in attics and in cellars, so that the Germans would know nothing. Today theater and other cultural events are completely official and fall under the department which bears the elevated title *Freizeitgestaltung*, meaning Office of Leisure Time Administration. It sounds like a cruel joke, but the Germans, after making the decision they called by another elevated name, the *Endlösung*, or the Final Solution of what to do with the Jews—that is, physical liquidation—said to themselves, "why not still allow them to have a bit of fun?" and allowed all kinds of cultural activities. Music, theater, cabaret, lectures, all allowed; so they boasted to the International Red Cross, which sent a commission to look upon all that glory. The commission obediently inspected everything the Germans showed them, and then they could continue their murdering in peace.

¹ All translations from Czech and German in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted.

Let's return, however, to our theater. There are only wooden benches; the curtain is sewn of old sheets. In place of stage lights we have only lightbulbs with tin funnels. The decorations are created of scrap lumber, with beams and boards, old *art nouveau*-patterned blankets and curtains—and an old Russian interior is in the world. It was created by the great theatrical architect František Zelenka. He also took care of costumes, which he conjured up from old uniforms and clothing found in the storehouses of Terezín. From their worn nature there also emerged an effect of timelessness, which was not necessary to create artificially. There was, of course, no theatrical workshop to speak of. Everything was created by hand, in the artists' free time.

The actors are people from every profession. Only some of us have experience from amateur theater or school plays. The creation of our performance was not, believe me, easy. It was only possible to rehearse after work and in Terezín that lasted ten hours a day. The rehearsal space was an empty cellar.

The director of the performance was Gustav Schorsch, graduate of the conservatory and assistant director in the National Theater, the only professional. Schorsch was a perfectionist. He demanded maximum concentration and precision at rehearsals. During the rehearsals it was possible to experiment, but once the scene was prepared, everything had to work perfectly. Almost all the actors were young. Only youth could withstand that stress. Youth and enormous enthusiasm. After work, several more hours of rehearsal. Food? Let's not talk about that. Rest? To rest on bare boards in mass housing—women separate, men separate, and what's more, the threat of transports. Yes, transports to the unknown, which had recently been departing with

some frequency and no one asked whether the actors were just beginning to rehearse a new play. Perhaps it is like this: theater has an amazing inherent strength. The strength of the virtual world, upon which the Third Reich has no influence.

The hall is already full to bursting and the curtain can open.

I stood on that small stage and therefore I can tell the tale. It was a glorious feeling, but it is difficult to describe. Those on stage and in the auditorium breathed the same air, shared the same heartbeat, lived the same life. Life? Was it still a life? Those people had lost their livelihood, their families had been torn apart. The older people did not have a chance to survive. Health care was non-existent. No hospital; many doctors, but no medicine. Of course in conditions of poor nutrition and lack of hygiene there was a terrible mortality rate. Hunger ruled—cruel hunger, but the worst was tomorrow. Try to imagine a life without a future. We all lived in a terrible emptiness, where no one knew what would be. Cut off from the radio, from newspapers, from all news about the course of the war. There were only rumors. Supposedly this and that happened. Who said so? Well, so and so. But someone else said something else!?! But the war has to end sometime? It does, but will we wait it out until the end? And what will the Germans do? Give us a loaf of bread and a train ticket? No, the end will be no joke.

And so the auditorium breathes only the present and laughs with Gogol at those ridiculous puppets from the Czar's autocracy. They laugh at those helpless fools who live in the depths of that great incomprehensible Russia. The public knows, as do the actors, that there is no way out. They understand Gogol as a contemporary. They react, I would say, in unison.

The theater stops being theater. Because the stage and the auditorium belong to the same circus.

The circus of death.

I hope a similar theater will never be able to emerge. When someone asks me if I think our theater was good, I have to answer that I don't know. We were probably honest and inspired amateurs. We speak of form. But it was not about form. Our theater was not a social event. It was only about content, about sharing, about becoming aware that we were still human beings and that we were alive. Theater and life merged for a moment, time stopped and together we experienced the most beautiful and most terrible theater in the world. The theater of truth.

The truth of life and death.

Jan Fischer November 26, 2005

Chapter 1

Introduction: Hearing Terezín Survivor Testimony

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.

- Dominick LaCapra

While testimony is fallible, it nevertheless constitutes a linguistic product governed by a very powerful internal logic, which one can sometimes—but not always—manage to reconstitute: it *means* something which its reader is not necessarily prepared to hear.

- Florent Brayard

For even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness. Everyone asks only about the hardships and the "atrocities," whereas for me perhaps it is that experience which will remain the most memorable. Yes, the next time I am asked, I ought to speak about that, the happiness of the concentration camps.

- Imre Kertész

In this dissertation I explore a meaning in survivor testimony that many readers are not prepared to hear: the agency and pleasure Czechoslovak Jews describe in their testimony on theatrical performance in the Terezín ghetto. I listen to them because what the survivors describe is the most stunning use of theater I have ever encountered, and one I believe should interest us as scholars. Analyzing survivor testimony intended to circulate in the public sphere from two different postwar periods I argue that, although contemporary pressures did leave their mark on the testimony, the core significance the survivors assign to theatrical performance is unchanging: that it helped them cope with the more traumatic aspects of their ghettoization. If we engage with their testimony and explore the logic of their claims, the survivors provide enough specific information on their subjective experience of performance in the ghetto for us to reconstruct the mechanics of those trauma-ameliorating functions. The testimony, when examined specifically within the context of the period in which it was given, reveals yet another function: survivors presented their postwar narratives as form of rhetorical performance, attempting to effect a tenable position for themselves in the sometimes-hostile environment of postwar Czechoslovakia.

One survivor summed up the testimony of many when he claimed that theater offered an "escape from that amputated 'life'" in the ghetto. In response, I suggest that theatrical performance provided the prisoners with a form of "prosthetic life": a social space that became a realm of alternate experience. As survivors describe, within the many performance spaces in the ghetto they experienced a subjective sense of safety, they embodied and experienced elements of their prewar lives that were inaccessible to them in the ghetto, and they experience a sense of connection with their chosen

imagined national, political, religious and artistic communities as well as with their chosen concrete community of fellow prisoners. These aspects of their experience correspond closely with the steps many psychiatrists identify as the sequence of recovery of traumatized individuals. Thus, this study sheds a new and specific light onto the workings of what is often called "spiritual resistance" by examining theatrical performance, not necessarily as a form of symbolic engagement with the oppressor, but as a practice that increased the prisoners' resilience and ability to manage a massive crisis on a day-to-day basis.²

My examination also reveals similar functions of testimony in the postwar period. As an individual rather than a social practice, providing testimony did not generate the same subjective feelings of sharing a safe space. However, survivors' narratives did enable them to establish a sense of continuity with earlier periods in their lives. More crucially, their testimony served as a form of public performance by which they could attempt to re-establish connections with each other and with an imagined and concrete community from which they found themselves estranged: their fellow Czechs.

I also advocate for a new type of relationship to testimony by the survivors of the Terezín ghetto. After engaging with testimony from four separate periods, including my own interviews with survivors, as well as with scripts, set designs and other archival

² The phrase "spiritual resistance" and variations such as "creative resistance" and "creative defiance" have been used in a wide range of scholarship on art during the Holocaust. They appear in various essays in anthologies such as Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb, eds., *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and Anne D. Dutlinger, ed., *Art, Music and Education as Strategies of Survival: Theresienstadt 1941-45* (New York: Herodias, 2001). Use in individual articles and chapters includes Michael Patterson, "The Final Chapter: Theatre in the Concentration Camps of Nazi Germany," in *Theater in the Third Reich, The Prewar Years: Essays on Theater in Nazi Germany*, ed. Glen W. Gadberry (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 157-166, 159; and Helena Krejčová, "Czechs and Jews," in *Bohemia in History*, ed. Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344-363, 361.

documents from the ghetto, I believe that some of the aspects of Terezín theater that the survivors describe as most significant to them are the very aspects that have been marginalized in Western discourse about the Holocaust. My own critical and analytical standpoint is closely aligned with the survivors' perspectives, even those that are fundamentally incongruent with historiographic consensus. I argue that, in order to reintroduce their perspectives back into the discourse, we should treat their narratives as reliable evidence regarding their subjective experience of a particular set of theatrical practices in the ghetto. To demonstrate that reliability, in this dissertation I have set aside taboos on questioning Holocaust testimony and tested it for consistency by comparing testimony by different survivors across different time periods, as well as taking into account the effects of contemporary pressures upon their narratives. As I will demonstrate, their narratives stand up to scrutiny, even though they fall outside what Dominick LaCapra describes as the "canonized" historical narrative of the Holocaust.

Based on various discussions with colleagues during the ten years I have been working on this topic, I believe there are two fundamental reasons why scholars fail to engage more rigorously with Terezín survivor testimony about theatrical performance in the ghetto. Before describing my own methodology I will try to clear away a few of these objections.

One reason not to engage is fear that that Terezín survivor testimony about the cultural life will minimize or trivialize the suffering associated with the Holocaust. While ethically justifiable, this fear has its source in a deeply ingrained attitude that the survivors do not share: that the experience of pleasure indicates that the experience of

suffering did not take place. On the contrary, the survivors talk at length about the paradox of their co-existence. Acknowledging their pleasure within this limited space of theater does not deny their suffering in the ghetto itself. Regarding fear that Terezín survivor testimony will unwittingly support Holocaust denial, I suggest that we can count on the effectiveness of our own scholarship and arguments to demonstrate how the Terezín narrative relates to, rather than replaces or undermines, more established narratives of Jews' experience in other ghettos and camps.

Another reason not to engage with the Terezín survivors is that testimony about pleasure interferes with some scholars' desire to see something else: resistance, usually presented as the binary of resistance versus complicity. In our own field, a recent article by Emily Colburn-Roxworthy exemplifies the mindset I am arguing against—and, considering the prominent awards it received, suggests just how widespread that mindset is.³ In Colburn-Roxworthy's article on theatrical performance in the World War II Japanese-American internment camp at Manzanar, she described Cynthia Gates Fujikawa's attempts to discover the truth of her father's experience in the camp. Disappointed by a "frustratingly upbeat encounter" during which he described playing basketball and going to social dances, Fujikawa went to the archives and found Ansel Adams's official photographs of smiling internees. Colburn-Roxworthy described how "Fujikawa's astonishment and disappointment" emanated not only from these images that "repeatedly engage the viewer on a level that negates the tragic reality and

³ In 2008, Colburn-Roxworthy received both the ATHE Award for Outstanding Article and the ASTR Gerald Kahan Scholar's Prize for the article "Manzanar, the eyes of the world are upon you": Performance and Archival Ambivalence at a Japanese American Internment Camp," *Theatre Journal* 59, no. 2 (2007): 189-214.

consequences of the operation" but also from "her father's complicity in the government's subsequent disavowal of Japanese American trauma."⁴

The US government deserves harsh criticism for its treatment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and for ongoing efforts to deny the damage possibly caused by that experience. However, in their efforts to counter these acts of erasure, Colburn-Roxworthy and Fujikawa perform a negation of their own: what about the possibility that her father's pleasure was real? that he was not being complicit in disavowing trauma in the present, but rather trying to describe how the internees ameliorated it in the past?

Colburn-Roxworthy's goal in the remainder of the article is to find out "whether other forms of resistance operated through cultural performances" in the camps.⁵ While she agrees it is important to acknowledge what Karen Ishizuka, former curator of the Japanese American National Museum, calls "acceptance" as a form of "spiritual resistance," she seeks, and finds, different types of resistance: for example, Japanese cultural performances that had "sociopolitical implications that significantly undercut the hegemonic policy" of assimilation, including performances by the second generation staged for their less-assimilated parents.⁶

This search for "resistance" raises several concerns. If "resistance" is limited to a narrow idea of agency as explicit opposition to the oppressors and their goals, scholars may overlook the experiential complexity of prisoner acts and survivor memory. That is, if our only interest is "how did they fight?" we will not come to understand "how did

⁴ Colburn-Roxworthy, 194.

⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁶ Ibid. Based on her own later description of the second-generation performers, I suggest they were motivated more by a desire to please their parents than by an intention to resist hegemonic pressures.

they experience and remember their captivity?" or even "what do they believe helped them survive?" Colburn-Roxworthy also overlooks just how oppressive our own historiographic attempts to make the survivors' actions conform to that binary can be. Does Fujikawa's father, by failing to provide an appropriately resistant narrative, really deserve to be accused of complicity? Finally, formulations such as "acceptance as spiritual resistance" indicate we are expecting the word "resistance" to do far too much work.

Ultimately, both of these reasons why scholars fail to engage with Terezín survivor testimony—fear of minimizing the Holocaust and desire to see resistance—inadvertently reinscribe what Franz Fanon has identified, in the case of colonialism, as a pathological operation: when we fail to pay attention to how the prisoners exercised agency in ways that had nothing to do with the Nazis, we define the identity of the oppressed solely in relation to their oppressors.⁷ I think the time has come for us to examine ways in which the Terezín prisoners and survivors have defined themselves outside of that relationship.

Sources and boundaries

Testimony as a source does not offer a transparent window into the past, but it does provide access to the felt experience and significance of events to the survivors in their present moment. By tracking that "significance of events" across two very different present moments, I demonstrate that the core subjective significance survivors convey in both periods is quite stable. Therefore, I argue it is legitimate to examine the information they provide in their testimony, not only to find out how the survivors felt

⁷ See Kelly Oliver's discussion of Fanon's ideas in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 25.

about Terezín theatrical performance in the present of the testimony but how their subjective experience of performance may have helped them survive in the ghetto.

Working with survivor testimony, while it offers an insight into subjective experience that other sources do not, also introduces specific challenges. Personal narratives are "complex forms of evidence that demand sophisticated analytic techniques that build on recognition of their location and the intersection of the individual and the social."⁸ That is, an individual's testimony must be evaluated in the context of collective events and historical time, which means the researcher must draw on sources external to the individual's narrative and reconstruct the present needs that shaped the narrative about the past. Due to the demands of this thorough type of analysis, I have limited the body of testimony I will examine to a specific group of survivors, to two time periods, and to narratives that were intended to circulate in the public sphere.

I focus on Czech-Jewish survivors of Terezín who remained in Czechoslovakia after the war. When I refer to "the Czech Jews" I mean people from the Czech lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (very few Slovak Jews were deported to Terezín) whose ancestors were, before 1850, of Jewish faith. I choose this definition because, as Czech scholar Peter Brod points out,

In the era of totalitarian movements... every person of Jewish ancestry was sooner or later confronted with what that origin meant It is not a community founded on subjective choice and only a part of the community feels bound by common religion, history or national

⁸ Mary J. Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 41.

tradition, but we must count with its existence as a social reality, bounded by the view from the outside.⁹

Therefore I define the "Czech Jews" not as individuals who are Jewish according to Jewish tradition (that is, who were born of a Jewish mother), not as individuals who self-identify with a religious or cultural community, but as individuals whose fates were determined, during and after World War II, by the Nazi racial classification imposed upon them.¹⁰

I selected the Czech-Jewish survivors for my study mainly because they were, on average, the youngest of the three main national groups in the ghetto (the other largest groups were German and Austrian Jews). Many of the younger survivors lived to testify in several different postwar periods (in one case I was able to find testimony by the same individual from 1947, 1963, 1997 and 2005). In addition, because of their youth and linguistic affiliation, they represented a particular type of best-case scenario: they had the energy to perform after a full day of labor, sometimes acting in one show and going straight to rehearsals for another the same evening, and because they performed in Czech, they were less concerned with censorship than the German-speaking Jews. However, to demonstrate that their testimony was not radically different from the testimony of other groups of prisoners involved in the cultural life, I also examine narratives written by survivors two generations older: three Czechoslovak Jews who were age 60 or older when they were liberated in Terezín.

⁹ Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném československu," in *Židé v novodobých dějinách*, ed. V. Veber (Prague: Karolinum, 1997), 148.

¹⁰ The statement that Jewish identity is determined by the mother is found in the Mishnah (Kiddushin 3:12).

By limiting my analysis to the testimony of those who remained in Czechoslovakia after the war, I tried to ensure that variations in the testimony were due to personal opinions and experience rather than the diverse influences of different postwar national narratives regarding World War II and the Holocaust.

In this particular project I have the rare opportunity to work across historical time by comparing testimony from two different periods, sometimes by the same individual: from the immediate postwar period (1945-47) and from an early point in the political thaw in Czechoslovakia that led up to the Prague Spring (1963). Although I have gathered testimony from two additional postwar periods, the mid-1990s and my own interviews in 2004-2006, I chose to begin my analysis with the two earliest periods because this testimony is least susceptible to the vagaries of memory. It is also least susceptible to the influence of other survivors' narratives circulating in the public sphere. In fact, due to political shifts in postwar Czechoslovakia, the Terezín ghetto became a topic of public discussion only during certain periods of political openness. The only substantial collections of testimony that appeared in the public sphere before 1989 are from the immediate postwar period and from the decade of 1961 to 1971. Thus, although the survivors may have shared their memories of theater in the ghetto in the private sphere among their own group of friends, or with interviewers who were collecting testimony for archival purposes only, there were virtually no public narratives to influence their personal narratives between 1948 and 1958.

By examining only testimony in the public sphere—narratives that circulated, or were intended to circulate, in books and periodicals—rather than archival collections, I can best address the question of how social pressures were influencing the survivors'

narratives by selecting the forms of testimony that would have been most susceptible to such pressures. By drawing on additional sources external to their narratives—that is, through an examination of the sociopolitical situation in general and especially by analyzing narratives circulating in contemporary periodicals about the ghetto and about Czech-language theater—I can determine not only the contemporary social pressures on the testimony but what types of narratives the survivors might have used as models for their own testimony, as well as features such as genre conventions and phrases that might reveal survivors' affiliation with particular political or social group identities.

Examination of discourse in the public sphere also reveals specific rhetorical features of testimony as a performative utterance, intended not just to convey information about the ghetto but to elicit certain responses from readers that might effect change in the present. By examining these features I can observe the mechanics of how the survivors were influenced by others' narratives and how they tried to influence others in return.

For example, one feature is what Michael Warner calls a world-making operation. With his notion of *publics*, Warner describes the mechanisms by which public narratives construct our social world.¹¹ He builds on the work of Jürgen Habermas who has described the "public sphere," the intermediary domain linking society and state where the reasoning citizenry organizes itself as bearer of public opinion, as an aspect of modernity made possible by print culture. Warner argues that, in a pluralistic society, there is no such thing as "the public sphere"; rather, public space consists of networks of individual "publics." He defines "a public" (as opposed to "*the*

¹¹ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), 49-90, 50.

public") as a social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse: that is, not one that results from a one-way address or even a two-way conversation, but by the accumulation of texts through time, written and circulated by a group of people addressing and responding to each other.¹² It is this process of accumulation that creates an ongoing social space for encounter.

Periodicals such as newspapers function as one type of venue through which such discourse circulates, and each of the periodicals I will examine creates and perpetuates a particular public. Membership in a public that coalesces around a particular periodical, unlike "membership" in the body of citizens subject to the law of a particular state, is voluntary: it requires only that one attend to the discourse circulating by means of that periodical. However, this seemingly casual form of affiliation offers skilled rhetoricians an audience that they can shape through a particular type of "world-making" operation: by crafting their address in a way that attempts to close the gap between the implied public of their address and the actual targeted public of circulation. This type of world-making operation is visible in narratives by Terezín survivors and non-Jewish Czechs circulating in postwar periodicals.¹³

Another feature is what Sarah Ahmed calls *objects of feeling*, which allow researchers to track the boundary-drawing functions of emotion in public narratives.¹⁴ Pursuing the argument that emotion is "not what comes from the individual body, but what holds or binds the social body together," she analyzes how emotions represented in texts that circulate in the public domain "create the very effect of the surfaces and

¹² Ibid., 62.

¹³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place."¹⁵ For example, an object of feeling such as terrorism, portrayed as fearsome, aligns the individual subject with the collective of those who fear the same object and wish to erect social and/or legal barriers to defend themselves from it. In postwar Czechoslovakia, survivors and others circulated narratives about certain highly valued objects of feeling—for example, Czech-language theatrical performance—to perform their alignment with the supposedly shared postwar values of the social body, but also to define those values through their description of the object.

Examination of periodicals in the years leading up to the 1963 testimony reveals a shift in what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling": qualitative changes in social experience signaling the emergence of new social formations, such as a new social class.¹⁶ Such changes often manifest themselves in artistic production long before they can be named or defined and thus are detectable in published reviews of theatrical productions and films. Reviews from the early 1960s also indicate increased attention to the "residual"—the residue of previous social and cultural institutions that had not been incorporated into the version of the "traditional" that legitimated the Czechoslovak Communist Party's power.¹⁷ I have adopted the term "structures of experience" to identify a phenomenon related to "structures of feeling" but associated with the residual rather than with the emergent: a set of affective elements of consciousness and relationships formed during the survivors' prewar or wartime lives and associated with certain social formations and institutions, certain artistic forms and

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

¹⁷ Ibid., 122-123.

conventions, from the past. Czechs' new focus on both the emergent and the residual signaled social change, and this change created the conditions for Terezín survivors' testimony to re-emerge in specific ways in the early 1960s.

To summarize, this specific conjunction of authors, time periods and spaces of discourse—narratives by Czechoslovak Jews, from 1945-48 and from 1963, intended to circulate in the public sphere—produced bodies of testimony with their own distinctive features. These features call for a particular approach to analysis: an approach that acknowledges the hybrid nature of testimony as an utterance with both constative and performative aspects, conveying information about the ghetto while at the same time attempting to effect change in the present, and that considers each aspect's importance to the survivors.

Conceptual approaches to interpreting testimony

All interpreters of personal narratives bring certain assumptions to their analyses, and I will clarify mine below. However, first I will describe two other scholars' interpretive paradigms, arguing that, while certain approaches are productive in the case of Terezín survivors, others are not necessarily relevant and may even obstruct the development of the type of relationship that I am advocating for by preventing us from engaging seriously with the constative aspect of their testimony.

Dori Laub and Orly Lubin assume, as do I, that testimony functions as a performative, with the potential to effect change in the present. However, our approaches diverge in two aspects: what the interpreter considers to be the goal of that performative, and what role the constative plays in achieving that goal. The goal of testimony, in all three approaches, is related to the survivor's status as a speaking

subject: what balance of subjectivity vs. subject position does an individual's testimony effect?

Kelly Oliver addresses the distinction between subjectivity and subject position when she argues that the fundamental structure of subjectivity itself inheres in "addressability and response-ability": our ability to respond to and address others. As she writes, our experience of ourselves as subjects and ability to act as agents is maintained in the tensions between these two thoroughly intertwined elements:

Subject positions... are constituted in our social interactions and our positions within our culture and context. They are determined by history and circumstance.... Subjectivity, on the other hand, is experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness. And although subjectivity is logically prior to any possible subject position, in our experience both are always profoundly interconnected.¹⁸

In spite of this interconnection, a performative difference in emphasis between the goal of subjectivity vs. subject position must be considered in the analysis of testimony because, given certain social conditions, constative utterances that enhance subjectivity may undermine subject position and vice versa. For example, in the immediate postwar period when displays of Czech national feeling were central to Czechoslovak identity, a survivor's constative utterance about enjoying German-language performance in the ghetto would have seriously compromised his or her efforts to be accepted as a fellow citizen. I argue that the "encounter with otherness"

¹⁸ Oliver, 17.

that enhances subjectivity is one in which each partner can express his or her own reality and see that reality acknowledged by the other, establishing both as co-creators of meaning.¹⁹ In that case, the survivors' need to conceal certain aspects of their reality in the public sphere represented a limit placed upon their subjectivity—but a limit that they accepted, in order to craft a tenable subject position for themselves.

Laub focuses mainly on testimony as a performance of subjectivity; Lubin emphasizes a performed subject position. I examine the balance of both, arguing that the Terezín survivors, acting as agents within the limits of current social conditions, negotiated their own personal trade-offs, renouncing a degree of one element for the sake of gains in the other.

Perhaps the best-known approach to interpreting Holocaust survivor testimony is that associated with the work of psychiatrist Dori Laub. Laub describes the wartime objectification of the Jews as a process by which the Nazi system convinced its victims that they truly were "other," truly were inhuman, and thus they were objectified, losing the ability to bear witness as speaking subjects: "their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and therefore perhaps never took place."²⁰ The survivors, in narrating their own objectification in the camps to an "authentic listener,"

¹⁹ In Oliver's discussion of reality as a social category, she argues that "acknowledging the realness of another's life is not judging its worth, or conferring respect, or understanding or recognizing it, but responding *in a way* that affirms response-ability" (emphasis mine). She never states with completely clarity what this way of responding might be. As the following discussion will make clear, I argue that, outside of a psychotherapeutic session, a key element of such an acknowledging response is the integration of the survivors' claims regarding their felt and lived experiences into a shared social reality, which can take the form of a shared social narrative about the past. Ibid., 106.

²⁰ Dori Laub, "An Event without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival" in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 75-92, 82.

restore their destroyed subjectivity by becoming speaking subjects.²¹ This approach is relevant to the Terezín survivors' testimony if we consider the role of "authentic listener" to be filled, not by the postwar psychoanalyst, but their fellow prisoners in the ghetto, and by non-Jewish Czechs after the war.

The Terezín prisoners were not objectified to the degree Laub describes, and therefore did not lose their ability to bear witness as speaking subjects, to each other or to themselves.²² Survivor descriptions and set designs for performances such as the operetta *Girl of the Ghetto* reveal an active and ongoing process of communicating their experiences to each other, and the dozens of diaries and hundreds of drawings that have been preserved show that they continued to interpret their experiences to themselves.²³ Not all the Terezín prisoners were involved in the ghetto's cultural life, and not all wrote diaries or made drawings; many individuals fell into despair during their imprisonment and ceased communicating as speaking subjects. However, the state of prisoner objectification in the camps that Laub has in mind cannot be viewed as the general state of the Terezín prisoners.²⁴

²¹ See also Laub's essay "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge 1992), 57-74.

²² Physical conditions in Terezín were not as brutal as in other camps, and due to certain functions Terezín served, it was not in the Nazi's interests to convince the prisoners they were inhuman. For details, see the brief history of the ghetto at the end of this chapter.

²³ A souvenir program for *Girl of the Ghetto* [*Das Ghettomädel*] listing the scenes, songs and cast members is found in the Hefman collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. no. PT 3853.

²⁴ Certain groups in the ghetto were much more susceptible to this loss of subjectivity. According to survivor testimony, for a variety of reasons, the elderly, especially those from Austria and Germany who were deported without their families, suffered much more than Czech Jews, who were on average younger and more likely to have been deported with their relatives. This is reflected in mortality statistics: although Czech Jews were the most numerous national group in the ghetto, of the 33,000 prisoners who died in Terezín, only 6000 were of Czech nationality. See Livia Rothkirchen, "The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: 1938-1945," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*,

In fact, these expressive activities did much more than *reflect* the fact that the prisoners remained speaking subjects; as I will argue in detail in Chapter 6, such activities actually *effected* the prisoners' status as subjects. For example, through theatrical performances, actors and audience alike were able to express aspects of their own reality—for example, their ongoing sense of affiliation to certain national and political categories of group identity, affiliations that had supposedly been made irrelevant by the homogeneous Nazi-imposed identity of racial inferiority—and see that reality and thus their subjectivity acknowledged and confirmed by their fellow prisoners. This acknowledgement also established subject positions: prisoners viewed themselves, and were viewed by others, as members of particular social formations both within the ghetto and beyond its walls.

With their postwar testimony, survivors sought to reach "authentic listeners" among non-Jewish Czechs: those who would acknowledge and thus confirm the reality of loyal Czech citizenship that survivors performed in their narratives about the ghetto. In the immediate postwar period these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Even when the survivors accepted limits to their own agency as speaking subjects by omitting certain details of their reality, few non-Jewish Czechs responded to them in ways that confirmed, as a shared social reality, the survivors' sense of belonging to the social body of Czechoslovak citizens. However, in the 1960s, due to shifts in a wide range of social and political conditions, non-Jewish Czechs did become authentic listeners, responding to survivors' testimony in ways that reinforced both their subjectivity as creators of meaning and their subject position as members of the social body.

Certain assumptions that stem from Laub's specifically psychoanalytic approach are problematic in the case of Terezín testimony. That is, in his focus on the performative goal of restoring subjectivity, the constative of the testimony is virtually irrelevant and subject position is ignored. As Laub states, "in the process of the testimony to a trauma, as in psychoanalytic practice ... what is important is the situation of *discovery* of knowledge—its evolution, and its very *happening*."²⁵ As Thomas Trezise points out, such knowledge remains essentially *intrasubjective*; if the significance of testifying inheres in the act of speaking, then the constative of what is discovered in the process "can be relegated to a secondary status or even bracketed altogether."²⁶

In psychotherapy this bracketing is not necessarily problematic because the constative is not subject to public scrutiny. However, statements made through theatrical performance in the ghetto such as "I am a committed Communist" or in postwar testimony such as "my love of Czech music demonstrates my loyalty as a Czech" are actually performative utterances that require a public response, not just of acknowledgment but of acceptance of their constative aspects as a shared social reality, in order to be successful. Laub functions effectively as an "authentic listener" in his role as psychotherapist, but because that role requires bracketing the constative of the survivors' testimony, he could not have served as the kind of authentic listener that the prisoners and survivors needed to reinforce both subjectivity and subject position in the ghetto and in postwar Czechoslovak society.

²⁵ Laub, "Bearing Witness," 62.

²⁶ Thomas Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *History & Memory* 20, no. 1 (2008), 7-47, 23.

A danger arises when we continue to apply Laub's approach outside of its psychoanalytic frame. That is, we may "honor" testimony that does not meet our expectations by listening respectfully then interpreting it as the survivor's attempt to reinforce his or her damaged subjectivity, integrating it into a social narrative that is shared with other scholars but not with the survivors themselves. That interpretation becomes an excuse not to examine the testimony further. We neglect to ask the questions that could lead us to revise our own notions of reality.

For example, this problematic approach has been applied to the testimony of one of the Czech-Jewish survivors I examine in Chapter 3. In the essay Michael Philipp wrote for the German-language edition of Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder's testimony, Philipp describes Feder's narrative as a testimonial of "self-affirmation and the recovery of his identity" [*Selbstvergewisserung und Rueckgewinning seiner Identitaet*].²⁷ Carefully comparing Feder's 1946 testimony with the testimony of German-Jewish survivors given decades later, he explained discrepancies, such as Feder's "refusal to describe extreme pictures" of suffering in the ghetto, with statements such as "the leaving out of such unpleasant details is linked with his efforts to win something positive from the terrible conditions."²⁸ The overall implication is that because Feder did not conform to the story Philipp knows, Feder's testimony, while of course understandable and excusable as part of Feder's performative goal of "self-affirmation," is irrelevant to Philipp's reality.

²⁷ Michael Philipp, "Nachwort," in Richard Feder, *Jüdische Tragödie – Letzter Akt: Theresienstadt 1941-1945, Bericht eines Rabbiners*, trans. Gustav Just, ed. Michael Philipp (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2004), 237-261, 247.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

I am not at all arguing that Feder's testimony should be taken as a transparent representation of his experience; as I will demonstrate, his narrative was shaped by intense contemporary pressures. However, the assumptions Philipp makes in order to explain unexpected features of Feder's testimony prevent him from exploring other possibilities: that Feder's 1946 account may diverge from German-Jewish survivors' later accounts because his goals in postwar Czechoslovakia were quite different from theirs, or even that he may have had a quite different subjective experience of the ghetto. In short, when we simply bracket unexpected constative elements of survivor testimony as "self-affirmation," we acknowledge their right to try to reinforce damaged subjectivity but do not respond in ways that would actually help effect that subjectivity. We also deny them a subject position as the possessor of knowledge that could contribute to our own understanding of the ghetto and the postwar period.

While, for Laub, the survivors' subjectivity is paramount, Orly Lubin focuses on survivors' performative goal of creating a particular subject position. In his insightful study of Warsaw Ghetto survivors' narratives, he focuses on testimony that clearly does not reflect the survivors' own remembered reality from the ghetto. In other words: for a variety of reasons, survivors don't always tell the truth about their own experience. They may fictionalize or omit information about the past in order to secure a particular subject position in the present, if that subject position serves their postwar needs or the needs of a cause they support. Lubin's extreme example illustrates the need to take into account the survivors' present needs and desires and whether, in certain cases, those pressure are so powerful that the testimony may not contribute to our knowledge about

the past—but may provide great insight into the period in which the testimony was given.

Lubin examines testimony by Zivia Lubetkin and Tossia Altman, young Zionists and survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising who emigrated to Israel immediately after the war. According to Zionist leader Yoske Rabinovitz, Lubetkin's first, private account of the uprising, told to just a few members of the movement, was "unimaginably tragic," with "nothing in it of heroism."²⁹ However, Lubetkin soon accommodated her story to their needs. She translated her personal experience into a heroic collective narrative that, Lubin argues, served several goals: it supported the Zionist meta-narrative tracing progress from the diaspora to redemption in Zion, it absolved the guilt of Jews living in Palestine by reassuring them that someone else had "stood in" for them when they failed to act, and it "proved" the existence of a "new Jew"—a fighter who protected herself and others.³⁰ As Lubin concludes, "the Zionist collective assumed ownership of [the women's] stories and used their bodies as symbols of the uprising, of resistance and force."³¹ Lubetkin had renounced, at least publicly, aspects of her subjectivity in order to take on the subject position of the "new Jew": rather than witnessing to the truth of her own experience, she became the carrier of a politically necessary redemptive narrative.

Lubin's study demonstrates that cases do exist where the survivors' narratives, for complex social and political reasons, bear little resemblance to their own

²⁹ Orly Lubin, "Holocaust Testimony, National Memory," in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Daniel Tougaw (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 131-42, 133.

³⁰ Lubin, 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

remembered reality. However, his example does *not* provide yet another excuse to dismiss testimony that does not match our expectations. In his case, the testimony served as reliable evidence, not regarding the past of the Warsaw ghetto but regarding the postwar present of the Zionist movement in Israel. In my case, since I intend to use Terezín survivors' testimony as evidence regarding both the past it describes and the present in which it is created, Lubin's study illustrates the need to move past what Thomas Trezise calls the "unspoken taboo against testing the word of a Holocaust survivor."³² Since there are intense pressures on the Terezín survivors' testimony in the postwar period as well, I must investigate how their needs or desires to effect a tenable subject position in the present influenced their testimony about the past. This kind of testing, I argue, constitutes a response that reinforces the survivor's status as a speaking subject more effectively than unquestioning acceptance. As Trezise writes,

I would suggest that, instead of being construed as a sign of disrespect holding the witness accountable to certain objective standards in order to fulfill the responsibility of listening for others might well be considered a way of welcoming the witness herself into the community of these listeners.³³

In my view, "holding the witness accountable" means treating him or her as a co-creator of meaning and a potential contributor of valuable information about the events he or she describes. This translates into willingness to inquire more deeply into unexpected statements, in the interview itself or during analysis or both, to see whether those statements are products of current needs and desires (like Lubetkin's) and

³² Trezise, 24.

³³ Ibid.

therefore useful mainly as information about the present, or whether they have a relationship to past events that can be verified in other ways (by comparison with others' testimony, with archival documents, etc.) and thus open up new avenues of research. Such inquiry has greater potential to integrate the survivor into a shared social narrative about the meaning of the past than the usual "reverence" shown to testimony.

Lubin's example leads to a further question about testimony and subject position. The Zionist collective apparently used these women as symbols with their full consent, but problems arise when we place survivors in subject positions they themselves would not choose. As my analysis will reveal, various postwar Czechoslovak groups tried to use the Terezín survivors as symbols—of suffering, of resistance, of self-criticism—interpreting their testimony to achieve goals that were not the survivors' own. As I suggested in my discussion of Colborn-Roxworthy's article, we engage in such attempts ourselves. For example, it is relatively rare for survivors to use words like "resistance" [*odboj*] in their descriptions of the Terezín cultural life, yet we continue to use it regularly, in spite of the fact that some survivors—certainly not all, but some—object to such an interpretation. For example, Mirko Tůma argued, in an essay first printed in the 1970s, that most Terezín performances were far removed from political reality:

Indeed, I believe that the equation between artistic activities in Terezín and rebellion ... has been in most instances a *myth*. The theater and music were quintessentially *l'art pour l'art*, with *l'art*, however, transcending itself and acquiring a dimension of sheer survival.³⁴

³⁴ Tůma, Mirko, "Memories of Theresienstadt," in *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust: Texts, Documents, Memoirs*, ed. Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 265-273, 271.

Again, I suggest we stop placing them in subject positions that they might have no wish to occupy—even if we believe that those subject positions, such as "resistance fighter," might confer some status upon them. In addition, instead of attempting to legitimate the entire range of artistic activities in the ghettos and camps by calling them "resistance," I suggest that scholars recognize a difference between resistance activities that involved engagement, real or symbolic, with the oppressor, and resilience activities that contributed to "sheer survival," and acknowledge and investigate the importance of those resilience activities for the survivors.

In my own analysis of Terezín survivor testimony I assume that the survivors are acting as agents to strike a workable postwar balance between goals related to subjectivity and goals related to subject position. That is, they created and circulated narratives about the ghetto and its cultural life, employing rhetorical techniques such as the world-making strategies and objects of feeling that Warner and Ahmed describe, motivated not only by a need or desire to speak about the past but by their own goals in the present that could be served by a carefully crafted narrative. Rather than thoroughly fictionalizing the constative, as Lubetkin did, the Terezín survivors shaped their accounts by omitting certain memories from their public narratives (for example, involvement in German-language culture or "bourgeois" theater in the ghetto) and emphasizing others. They made decisions as agents regarding what aspects of their experience they would renounce in their public narratives and what aspects they would not—and they resisted sometimes quite intense pressures to tailor their testimony in ways that served others but did not serve their own goals. For example, in the immediate postwar period, the Communist Party circulated a narrative representing the

ghetto prisoners as helpless victims in the hands of the Nazi puppet-masters. Yet the survivors, in their own testimony, did not conform to this politically desirable model: they did not renounce the narrative of their own agency in the cultural sphere. Thus they balanced aspects of their testimony that supported subjectivity with those that supported a particular subject position, both of which are necessary, as Kelly Oliver argues, in order to function as an active social agent.³⁵

In this kind of performative the constative is again a crucial element, because it is not just the *act* of testifying that creates the desired effects but the listener's acceptance of the survivors' *meaning*. It is this engagement with and confirmation of the survivors' reality and its potential relevance to the listener's reality that integrates them into society and allows them to establish both subject position and subjectivity in the present — not just the present of Czechoslovakia in 1945-48 and 1963, but in our own day.

Thus, while I agree with Kelly Oliver that "we are obligated to respond to what is beyond our comprehension, beyond recognition," I really do think we should try harder to comprehend the survivors' testimony.³⁶ This does not mean aiming for full and transparent understanding, but for the goal of being able to acknowledge of their reality by incorporating their testimony into a social narrative that is shared among survivors and scholars alike. We are obligated to ask ourselves whether the reality the survivors describe—regardless of whether it is horrible beyond comprehension or too normal, even too positive, to be believed—is really so far beyond our powers of recognition. If, at first glance, the Terezin survivors' testimony is unrecognizable, we

³⁵ Oliver, 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

should investigate *why* their narratives diverge from the narrative we are accustomed to, to see how those narratives might make us re-evaluate our own assumptions about the survivors' reality and our own.

Chapter summary

In order to demonstrate the stability of the core of meaning that the survivors conveyed about theatrical performance in Terezín—its value in coping with the traumatic conditions of the ghetto—while they also adjusted their testimony to current conditions and their postwar goals, I have organized the dissertation based on the two periods of testimony I examine. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are devoted to the immediate postwar period, 1945-48; Chapter 5 examines the intermediary period up through the early 1960s, and Chapter 6 is devoted to the 1963 testimony. In the conclusion I return again to overarching concerns, especially those related to survivor testimony about pleasure.

In the remainder of this chapter I summarize the historical developments that determined the twentieth-century features of the Czechoslovak Jews as a social group and the position of Czech-language theater as an art form and social institution, then provide a brief history of the ghetto and its cultural life from 1941 to 1945.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the forces that shaped the testimony I will examine in Chapters 3 and 4. In the first section I describe the radical changes in social and political conditions that confronted the survivors returning to their homes in postwar Czechoslovakia, especially as reflected in the pages of the Jewish community's own newsletter. I argue that the unexpected "legal" difficulties they described were not the fault of the central government but rather due to a lack of social solidarity on the part of

their fellow Czechs who enforced the laws at the local and regional levels. In the second section I examine narratives about Czech culture in the concentration camps and about the Terezín ghetto itself, by survivors and others, that circulated in two periodicals: the daily newspaper of the Communist Party, and the weekly newspaper published by the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners. These narratives reveal how the new characteristics of the Czechoslovak social body, such as national-political notions of "Czechness" (a range of characteristics related to Czech nationalism) and "leftness" (a range of characteristics associated with a progressive political stance) were being hammered out in public discourse, and how belonging, in terms of insider or outsider status, could be effected in postwar society through discursive affiliation with certain "objects of feeling": by incorporating highly emotional topics associated with the core features and values of being Czechoslovak, such as Czech-language theater, into the constative of the narratives. The performative aspect of the survivors' narratives—their attempts to reintegrate into postwar society by affiliating themselves with these same objects, often through their testimony about the cultural life of the ghetto—was largely infelicitous: few narratives engendered an enthusiastic response from their fellow Czechs.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the only examples of testimony published in book form by the oldest generation of Czechoslovak Terezín survivors: three individuals who were over sixty years old at the time of the liberation. Although my overall project, due to my desire to compare earlier and later testimony by the same individuals, necessarily focuses on the testimony of younger survivors, this generation's narratives provide an illuminating contrast. While they convey the same constative in terms of the core

significance of theatrical performance to the prisoners—as a practice that enhanced their ability to bear the conditions of their imprisonment—they employ a somewhat different performative strategy to address the postwar problem of barriers to their reintegration. Unlike the younger survivors, who performed their affiliation with postwar political stances through testimony about the cultural life of the ghetto, the older survivors' narratives had a much more affective focus. That is, their narratives had the potential to generate feelings of solidarity among their fellow Czechs through their expressions of profound love for and engagement with Czech culture even in the ghetto.

In Chapter 4 I examine narratives by two survivors under 40 years of age who testified again in 1963 about the cultural life of the ghetto. These two young men occupied quite different postwar subject positions—one, a known prewar artist and German speaker, had to fight for reintegration into the postwar social body; the other, a working-class Czech speaker, was apparently accepted with little or no effort on his part—and their postwar goals were therefore different. While one fought mainly to re-establish a viable subject position for himself, and the other apparently wanted to influence the development of postwar theater to match his own artistic and political goals, their fundamental performative strategy was similar: they both overtly linked their narratives of Czech culture in the ghetto to specific postwar political programs.

In Chapter 5 I briefly describe the social conditions that, after the Communist rise to power in 1948, led to the disappearance of discourse on the ghetto from the public sphere, and then trace its re-emergence beginning in the late 1950s. Using the same methodology and three periodicals as in Chapter 2, I examine the changes in social and political conditions that allowed many politically suppressed narratives about

World War II, including narratives about the fate of Czech Jews during the occupation and in the concentration camps, to re-emerge in the public sphere. At the same time, new developments in Czech theater and other cultural forms, driven by emergent "structures of feeling" that foreshadowed greater political change to come, created an atmosphere much more receptive to narratives on the cultural life of the Terezín ghetto. This receptiveness was confirmed in 1961, when an original Terezín play reconstructed by a surviving actress was staged in Prague to positive reviews. The survivors began again to circulate narratives about Terezín theater, now driven not by a need to overcome social barriers by performing their belonging, but by the opportunity to effect the social solidarity that was being offered to them by responding to public interest.

In Chapter 6 I examine testimony by five Terezín survivors who, in 1963, due to aging and patterns of emigration, comprised a relatively homogeneous group: left-leaning Czech speakers who had been between 25 and 40 years of age at the liberation, including the two younger survivors who circulated their narratives in 1945-47. Speaking now to a receptive audience, they provided a wealth of constative detail specifically about the theatrical performances and their meaning for the prisoners. This testimony reveals why the survivors have been so tenacious in fighting for their interpretation of the cultural life of the ghetto as a space of agency: as they describe, the agency they were able to exercise in that space appears to have helped them withstand the potentially traumatizing effects of life in the ghetto, and the testimony provides enough concrete information to suggest the mechanics of how theatrical performance ameliorated the subjectivity-damaging effects of their imprisonment. Ultimately, in their testimony of 1963, they performed the same three steps Herman

identifies as the sequence of recovery of traumatized individuals (the creation of a safe environment, the remembrance and mourning of the traumatic event and resulting losses, and reconnection with oneself, others, and one's world), which I argue the prisoners performed, with crucial variations, in the ghetto theater. However, in the safer environment of the early Prague Spring, they were finally able to perform the long-delayed second step: they finally, publicly commemorated their losses. By circulating these long-suppressed narratives in the same period when many other Czechs were telling theirs, Czech Jews and non-Jews incorporated each other's stories into a more inclusive collective narrative about the war.

In Chapter 7, the conclusion, I turn again to the most controversial aspect of the survivor testimony: pleasure. Rather than regarding this as a trivial, inappropriate or even shameful aspect of the survivors' experience, I argue that a closer examination of pleasure may be the key to our understanding of *their own* understanding of the power of theater in the ghetto. A different perspective on pleasure may also help us break free of the resistance versus complicity binary and enable us not only to listen to the survivors with more receptiveness but to regard them as part of our community in a new way: to realize that they have something to teach us that is not about their past but about our present and what we stand to gain by becoming "authentic listeners," not just to them but to each other.

* * *

In the remainder of this chapter I present a relatively straightforward historical narrative describing the evolution of the status of Czech Jews and Czech-language theater in Bohemia up until the beginning of World War II, and the events of the Terezín ghetto

itself until the liberation in 1945. The narrative is based on well-known secondary sources respected by both Czech and US scholars; thus it represents a broad consensus among historians, most of whom wrote their studies after 1980, about the period up to the end of World War II.

The Czech Jews, Czech-language theater, and Terezín, 1780-1945

Three central factors that shaped Terezín survivor testimony on theater in the ghetto—the characteristics of the Jews as a social group in twentieth century Czechoslovakia, the place of theatrical performance in formation of Czech national identity, and the Terezín fortress itself—can be traced back to the ten-year reign (1780-1790) of the "enlightened despot," Joseph II, emperor of the multi-lingual, multi-national Habsburg empire that included the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. The simplest of these phenomena, the Terezín fortress complex, emerged as part of his plan to protect the empire against the Prussians. He ordered the construction of the Large Fortress, a town surrounded by massive walls, that held a peacetime population of 7000 to 8000 soldiers and civilians. At the same time, about a quarter mile away on the other side of the river Ohře, the Small Fortress was built; it was used for most of its existence as a military prison. Joseph II named the entire complex Theresienstadt (in Czech, Terezín) after his mother, the empress Maria Theresa. In the twentieth century, the shared name led to both intentional and accidental confusion of the two sites. Even in the twenty-first century, US tourists who have seen the Small Fortress, which more closely resembles our image of a concentration camp, sometimes assume they have seen the ghetto.

Joseph II also paved the way for the slow process of Jewish emancipation and assimilation. In the early 1780s he issued Edicts of Toleration for the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, territories that would belong to Czechoslovakia after World War I.³⁷ A central aspect of anti-Semitism among Czechs—the Jews' real or perceived affiliation with German- rather than Czech-language culture—also has its roots in this period. When Joseph II replaced the neutral Latin with German as the administrative language of the empire, German language and culture became the main vehicles of social advancement and integration not only for Jews but for Christian speakers of Czech. However, as the Czech National Revival movement gained momentum and Czech-language and German-language public life began to separate, Jews were increasingly compelled to ally themselves with one nationality or the other. Jews in Prague, for example, tended to ally themselves with the so-called German liberals, who rejected anti-Semitism and welcomed Jews into public life.

Jewish national alliances began to shift around the 1870s, and in the 1900 census, 56 percent of Bohemian Jews indicated Czech as their language.³⁸ However, school enrollment patterns reveal the Prague Jews still placed high value on a German cultural affiliation: even in 1910, almost 90 percent of Jewish children were enrolled in German-language schools.³⁹ Nevertheless, Bohemian Jews were increasingly attracted to the Czech national movement. As philosopher Emil Utitz wrote, the German-speaking Prague Jews—a group that included Franz Kafka and Max Brod—saw their

³⁷ Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4, 6. Full political emancipation was granted in 1867.

³⁸ Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 226.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 224.

world as "a game preserve whose ground was always shrinking . . . an iceberg that the surrounding waters slowly eroded."⁴⁰

Other features of Czechoslovak Jewry as a social group—their relationship to Judaism as a religion and their political affiliations—also evolved greatly between the 1780s and World War I. The movement toward secularization in this period was strong, and by the turn of the twentieth century, the number of Jewish communities in Central Bohemia diminished, as had the "Jewishness" of the families still living in villages and small towns.⁴¹ However, even though religious piety declined sharply among Prague Jews, most retained some notion of religious and cultural heritage as well as a distinct sense of group identity.⁴²

Available choices for political alliances also expanded at this time. The first Zionist organizations appeared at the turn of the century and both German- and Czech-speaking Zionist groups formed before World War I. However, for the Bohemian and Moravian Jews, who perceived opportunities for social mobility within a Czech- or German-language milieu, Zionism's appeal was limited, as was the appeal of the socialist parties that also appeared during this period: the Social Democrats, who argued that German and Czech workers must unite based on common class interests, and the National Socialists (unrelated to the German Nazi party), who emphasized socialism with a Czech political and cultural affiliation.

⁴⁰ Utitz is quoted in Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin De Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

⁴¹ Wilma Iggers, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: A Historical Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 17.

⁴² Cohen, 78.

By World War I, a clear set of options for Jewish self-identification in the Czech lands had been established. As Hillel Kieval, writing on the period from 1870-1918, describes it,

[Modern Czech Jewry] grew out of the transformation of "Bohemian" Jewry: the Czech national Jew, the discoverers of Jewish nationality, the bilingual, but nationally indifferent, mass of rural and smalltown Jews, the bridgebuilders between German and Czech culture, and the every-dwindling number of defenders of the German cultural ideal. All of these tendencies are present in the modern Czech-Jewish community.⁴³

The interwar period saw an expansion of options in all these categories, but subsequently saw their increasingly rapid erasure as Nazi control spread over Europe.

Czechoslovak Jews who identified with Czech-language culture performed that affiliation, even in the ghetto, through the vehicle of Czech-language theater. Theater emerged as a site associated with Czech national identity during Joseph II's reign: in the late eighteenth century, as various European national theater movements began to develop, he granted the provincial governor of Bohemia, Count Franz Anton Nostitz-Rieneck, permission to build a *Nationaltheater* in Prague.⁴⁴ Although the count's main objective was to promote performances in German, he explicitly allowed for plays in other languages.⁴⁵ As the local nobles' resistance to Joseph II's centralizing reforms mounted, Czech-language plays served their goals by demonstrating a unique feature of

⁴³ Kieval, 4.

⁴⁴ The theater was planned specifically in imitation of the national theater in Hamburg, where Gotthold Ephraim Lessing served as dramaturg. See Jaroslav Vlček, *Dějiny české literatury III: Století osmnácté* (Prague: Mazáč, 1931), 212.

⁴⁵ Oscar Teuber, *Geschichte des Prager Theaters von den Anfängen bis auf die Neueste Zeit: Zweiter Theile* (Prague: K. K. Hofbuchdruckerei A. Haase, 1885), 95.

their territory—a territory they argued would be best served by localized rather than centralized administration.⁴⁶ The performances were tremendously popular and reviewers were enthusiastic about the "elevation of the Czech language" on the professional stage.⁴⁷

The Czech national movement gained momentum in the 19th century, and a separate Czech provisional National Theater was built in Prague in 1862. Works performed there helped shape notions of national identity by representing the characteristics of "Czechness" [*českost*]; for example, Bedřich Smetana's comic opera *The Bartered Bride* [*Prodaná nevěsta*] presented merry scenes of village life (1866). In 1883, the opening of a permanent National Theater building was celebrated with a performance of Smetana's opera *Libuše*, based on a historical myth about the Czech princess who prophesied the founding of a glorious city: Prague.⁴⁸ However, some artists were already beginning to chafe against the Czech patriotism that had defined the content and social role of art. In October of 1895, several young literary figures published a "Manifesto of Czech Modernism" that denounced "old directions" in art and politics alike and mocked "imitation national songs, versified folkloristic baubles," arguing in effect that these features were no longer necessary because the cultural program of building a Czech national identity had been achieved.⁴⁹ Less than twenty years later, World War I paved the way to building an independent state.

⁴⁶ Derek Sayer, "The Language of Nationality and the Nationality of Language: Prague, 1780-1920," *Past and Present* 153 (1996): 166-209, 183.

⁴⁷ František Černý, *Kapitoly z dějin českého divadla* (Prague: Academia, 2000), 21.

⁴⁸ The theater building, completed in 1881, was destroyed by fire before the public opening could take place. However, a huge outpouring of contributions, large and small, from all levels of Czech society enabled the theater to be rebuilt by 1883.

⁴⁹ Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998) 155.

1918-1941: From the Czechoslovak First Republic to the Protectorate

Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 from several former Habsburg territories: the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia, the former Hungarian territory of Slovakia, and parts of Silesia and Sub-Carpathian Rus. Since the fates of the Czech and Slovak Jews during World War II followed quite different paths, and many more Czech than Slovak Jews were interned in Terezín, this historical summary will focus mainly on the Czech lands. The characteristics of Czech Jewry continued to develop in the paths established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Czech-language theater continued to play a central role in the ongoing development of Czech national identity.

German speakers in Czechoslovakia found themselves no longer a cultural elite linking all the lands of the Habsburg monarchy but simply a minority population—a large minority of 22 percent, but a minority nonetheless.⁵⁰ The border regions with large German populations, who in this period began to be called the Sudeten Germans, resisted their incorporation into Czechoslovakia and sought union with Austria or Germany. Although these early attempts were unsuccessful, the ongoing "nationality conflict" ultimately played a major role in the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Most of Czechoslovakia's approximately 350,000 Jews, regardless of their linguistic and cultural affiliations, reacted optimistically to the formation of the new republic and trusted in the moral and political leadership of its first president, Thomas

⁵⁰ Of a total population of 13 million, Czechoslovakia's citizens included 3.5 million Germans, 700,000 Hungarians, and 400,000 Poles. See Ruth Bondy, *"Elder of the Jews": Jakob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 16.

Garrigue Masaryk.⁵¹ Trends established before World War I continued; in spite of an influx of religiously conservative Jews—refugees from Galicia who fled the advancing Russian army during World War I—religious piety continued to diminish. Thousands left the religious community completely or converted to other faiths, and intermarriage rates with non-Jews increased.⁵² Many Jews were active in the public life of the state and almost all political parties had Jewish members. Czechoslovak Jews were also well represented in the arts, including theater. However, specifically Jewish theater did not play a significant cultural role in Bohemia and Moravia, where there were few native Yiddish speakers. Traveling Yiddish troupes from Vienna, Berlin and Bucharest toured successfully, but a single traveling troupe called Habimah, based in Bratislava, was the first and only Czechoslovak troupe playing in Yiddish during the interwar period.⁵³ A few German-language Jewish troupes were established but failed to gain a permanent foothold.⁵⁴

As preserved scripts and programs from Terezín as well as survivor testimony reveal, the prisoners drew mainly upon more generally popular forms of theater that emerged in the postwar cultural boom. Czechoslovak artists embraced the influences of international artistic movements; for example, the directorial style of Karel Hugo Hilar,

⁵¹ Masaryk had earned the Jews' gratitude two decades previously when, as a young lawyer, he spoke out against the prosecution of Leopold Hilsner, a Jewish vagrant, for the alleged ritual murder of a Christian girl in a Czech village. See Sayer, *Coasts*, 145.

⁵² Iggers, "Jews," 23.

⁵³ Brigitte Dalinger, "Jiddisches Theater - Ein Grenzgänger zwischen den Sprachen und Kulturen," *Maske und Kothurn* 47, no. 3-4 (2002): 89-100, 92, 96. This Czechoslovak troupe, founded by Solomon Strammer from Hungary, is not to be confused with the Hebrew-speaking Habimah troupe that originated in Moscow and established a permanent home in Tel Aviv after the 1928-29 season.

⁵⁴ The Young-Jewish Stage in Brno, which identified itself as a "German-language literary theater with Zionism as a doctrine," remained open from 1929 to 1935. The Jewish Chamber Theater, established in Prague in 1935 and performing in German, lasted only a few months. See Ursula Stamberg, "Das Theaterleben der Jüdischen Bevölkerung Brünns," *Maske und Kothurn* 47, no. 3-4 (2002): 67-81, 78 and Dalinger, 98.

head of drama at the National Theater, combined elements of expressionism and realism, and his productions, including stagings of works by Czech playwright and author Karel Čapek, won accolades across Europe.⁵⁵ Law students Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich became overnight sensations with their *Vest Pocket Revue*, a series of short, satiric scenes with music, which opened in April 1927 and ran for over 200 performances.⁵⁶ As their style developed during the 1930s they moved towards an increasingly unified plot but maintained the combination of literate good humor, commentary on local and international events, and jazz music. Especially popular were their improvised sequences delivered directly to the audience, the *forbiny* (from German *Vorbühne*, forestage) where they satirized, among other things, Czech nationalist chauvinism. Also in April 1927, young director E. F. Burian presented his first "voiceband" performance, a striking form which blended complex choral recitation and nonverbal sounds with rhythmic, syncopated music.⁵⁷ All of these artists had Jewish colleagues who brought these popular styles into the ghetto.

Czech theaters became increasingly politicized as Nazi Germany's power grew. The National Theater suffered a great loss when Hilar died of a stroke in 1935, but Karel Čapek, who had set aside his playwriting for ten years to concentrate on fiction, returned to the national stage in the late 1930s with two devastating plays foreshadowing the horrors of war: *The White Plague* [*Bílá nemoc*] and *The Mother* [*Matka*].⁵⁸ Voskovec and Werich performed a series of increasingly pointed yet

⁵⁵ Jarka Burian, *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 24-28, 38.

⁵⁶ Burian, 41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁸ *The White Plague* was staged in 1937 and *The Mother* in 1938, both at the National Theater in Prague.

optimistic satirical reviews; their two final productions in 1937-38, *Heavy Barbara* [*Těžká Barbora*] and *The Eyesore* [*Pěst na oko*] played to packed houses and reinforced audience morale with their faith in the strength of ordinary but united people.⁵⁹ During the late 1930s and early 1940s E. F. Burian, who had founded his own theater in the fall of 1933, reacted to the threat of German domination by drawing on specifically Czech themes, especially those of folk and peasant culture. In the spring of 1938 he was working on a script named *Ester*, on a topic which soon became politically dangerous: the historical sympathy of the Czech people toward the Jews.

Hitler, after occupying Austria on March 12, 1938, turned his sights on the Czech lands, and Sudeten Germans who still resented their minority status in the Czechoslovak state played an important role in his plans. Although the German-speaking branches of the Communist and Social Democratic parties remained loyal to the Czechoslovak state, Konrad Henlein, head of the rapidly growing Sudeten German Party, maintained secret contact with Nazi Germany. He met with Hitler in Berlin just weeks after the occupation of Austria and he was instructed to make demands that Masaryk's successor, President Eduard Beneš, could not possibly accept.⁶⁰ As tensions escalated, the Czechoslovak government declared a general mobilization on September 23, 1938. Hoping to prevent war, representatives of England, France and Italy yielded to Hitler's demands to link the Czechoslovak border regions to the Reich. They signed the Munich Pact on September 30, 1938, without consulting Czechoslovak

⁵⁹ Burian, 51. When the Hebrew-speaking troupe Habimah from Palestine visited Czechoslovakia on its 1937-38 European tour, they staged their performance of *The Dybbuk* in Voskovec and Werich's Liberated Theater. Dalinger, 98.

⁶⁰ Chad C. Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

representatives. Beneš capitulated and ordered Czechoslovak forces to stand down, sparking violent protests in Prague.⁶¹ The Sudetenland became part of the German Reich, President Beneš went into exile, and the short-lived Second Republic had begun.

The traumatic effects of the Munich Pact upon Czechs can hardly be overestimated. As one Christian religious leader wrote shortly after the war, abandonment by her Western allies and the state's failure to fight had damaged the nation's soul.⁶² Adding salt to the wound was the fact that their involuntary sacrifice had been useless. Hitler had by no means been appeased: in March 1939 the Nazis took over the rest of the country. Slovakia, nominally independent, became a puppet state of Nazi Germany, and the Czech lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia became a German-administered "Protectorate." The occupation had begun.

In March 1939 there were approximately 118,000 people classified as Jews according to the Nazi racial laws living in Protectorate territories of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.⁶³ Before the occupation they had enjoyed a wide range of options for self-affiliation. For example, on the census, they chose from Czech, German or Jewish nationality. Regarding language, although a small proportion, mostly recent arrivals from Galicia, spoke Yiddish, most Czech Jews spoke Czech or German, and many were bilingual. They were politically active in parties across the political spectrum. For those who had not converted to Christianity, their relationship to Jewish religion ranged from Orthodox practice to atheism, with the vast majority falling somewhere in the middle,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² As evangelical religious leader Josef Lukl Hromádka expressed it, "We will carry it to our graves, our children and grandchildren will feel it inside them and will find no surgeon who can operate and remove it from their inner being." Quoted in Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 86.

⁶³ Rothkirchen, "The Jews," 59.

keeping the most important holidays and retaining certain cultural practices but not being especially observant. However, once the occupation began, Jewish self-identification mattered little; categorization according to the Nuremberg racial laws became all-important.

As increasing restrictions were placed upon the Jews of the Protectorate, institutions developed that continued to operate, in modified form, even in the ghetto. The Prague Jewish community, forced into negotiations with the Nazis, represented all the Jews of the Protectorate, and a *Zentralstelle*, or central office for Jewish emigration, was established in Prague.⁶⁴ In March 1940, the Nazis appointed František Weidmann (a Czech assimilationist) official head of the community and Jakob Edelstein (a German-speaking Zionist) as his deputy.⁶⁵ From that point forward there was only one legal body for Jewish affairs, the *Zentralstelle*, operating through the Prague Jewish community office.

A series of anti-Semitic regulations slowly pushed the Jews of the Protectorate out of public life and isolated them from the non-Jewish population. There was no Czech equivalent of the *Jüdische Kulturbünde* [Jewish Cultural Leagues] that organized Jewish performance and spectatorship in several German cities after 1933, but various cultural institutions were officially set up, or clandestinely organized, to allow Jewish performers to work and Jewish audiences to participate as spectators.⁶⁶ For example a Jews-only locale, the Café Nizza, employed musicians who, a short time later, would

⁶⁴ Approximately 26,000 managed to emigrate before deportations began in the fall of 1941. Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bondy, 141, 188.

⁶⁶ See Rebecca Rovit, "An Artistic Mission in Nazi Berlin: The Jewish Kulturbund Theater as Sanctuary" in *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust: Texts, Documents, Memoirs*, ed. Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 28-39.

find themselves in Terezín.⁶⁷ The Jewish orphanage also became a site of cultural activities; audience members arrived one-by-one or in pairs to avoid drawing attention to these illegal gatherings and sometimes stayed overnight to avoid violating the curfew. Recitals and musical evenings were also arranged in private apartments and suburban villas.⁶⁸

1941-1945: The Terezín ghetto

In October 1941 the representatives of the Jewish Religious Community were charged with suggesting to the *Zentralstelle* a location for a Jewish ghetto. Jewish leaders did not favor Terezín because it was far too small to hold the almost 80,000 Jews who remained in the Protectorate. However, when the Nazis selected Terezín from among various possibilities, the leaders hoped it would become a site where the Czech Jews could wait out the war and believed Nazi assurances that they would be allowed to run it as a relatively independent Jewish town.⁶⁹

The Jewish Community sent hundreds of young men to Terezín on the so-called AK (*Arbeitskommando*, in German, work detail) transports, AKI on November 24 and AKII on December 4, 1941, to prepare the ghetto for further transports. The young men who had "volunteered" for the AK transports were promised certain advantages (weekends at home, the transfer of their salary to their families) which, however, never materialized. Also arriving with the December 4 transport was the core of the Jewish leadership of the ghetto, the so-called Council of Elders [*Ältestenrat*]. The Council was headed by Jakob Edelstein, the former deputy head of the Jewish community. The

⁶⁷ Joza Karas, *Music in Terezín 1941-1945* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1985), 4.

⁶⁸ Karas, 5.

⁶⁹ Bondy, 241.

leaders were greeted by the furious members of AKI, who had already realized the reality they faced would be markedly different from that the Nazis had promised: rather than running an independent city, they would report to a Nazi commandant while taking full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the ghetto. This responsibility gave the Council of Elders some room to maneuver, and they assured the prisoners that, although they were unable to promise anything in advance, they would try to carry out their task honestly and fairly.⁷⁰

In the first period of the ghetto, which lasted from its founding until June 1942, the civilian population of Terezín still lived in their homes and the Jewish inmates were concentrated in several large barracks. They left only for work, guarded by Czech gendarmes: former members of the Czechoslovak army whom the SS hired for most duties that involved direct contact with the prisoners. According to survivor testimony most, but not all, gendarmes behaved decently towards them, treating them as fellow Czechs. Contact with civilians and visits to other barracks were strictly forbidden, and in January and February of 1942, sixteen men who had violated prohibitions by trying to send letters to their families, buy food in the Terezín shops, etc., were sentenced to death by hanging. These were the only executions carried out in the ghetto itself; later offenders were punished by being transferred to the Small Fortress, where many of them perished.

The hope of the Czech Jews—until June 1942, the only national group in the ghetto—that they would at least stay in their own country proved to be in vain. Already in January 1942 transports began to leave Terezín. Their destination was not revealed;

⁷⁰ Ibid., 252.

the prisoners knew only that the trains headed east. They lived in fear of deportation to the unknown, even though, until the very end of the war, very few knew the full truth about extermination camps and gas chambers.⁷¹

The first cultural activities of the ghetto—simple and improvised programs of songs, poems, and sketches—began to take place in the barracks immediately after the first transports of prisoners arrived. The Council of Elders, in an attempt to legalize these performances and head off the possibility that the prisoners would be punished for them, announced in the Daily Orders of December 28, 1941, that "friendship evenings" (*Kamaradschaftsabende*) could be held on the condition that the program be submitted in advance for approval.⁷²

The Nazi commandant apparently did not object to the performances and, as the cultural activities continued to expand, the Jewish leadership decided in February 1942 to establish an administrative body to oversee them. They appointed as director of the new *Freizeitgestaltung* [Office of Leisure Time Administration], Administration of Leisure Time Activities] a young rabbi named Erich Weiner.⁷³ This new branch of the so-called "Jewish self-government" slowly expanded; an undated organizational chart lists more than 30 divisions, including German theater, Czech theater, cabaret, opera and vocal music, instrumental music, lectures in different languages, chess and several sports, including soccer and table tennis.⁷⁴ The *Freizeitgestaltung* could officially employ artists and thus spare them from other forms of labor, and even, in rare cases,

⁷¹ See, for example, the testimony of Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder in *Židovská tragedie: Dějství poslední* (Kolín: Lusk, 1947), 103-04.

⁷² This order is quoted in Eva Šormová, *Divadlo vTerezíne 1941/1945*. (Ustí nad Labem: Severočeské nakladatelství, 1973), 22.

⁷³ Bondy, 291.

⁷⁴ Heřman collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. no. 3768.

exempted specific performers from outgoing transports.⁷⁵ Its administrators scheduled the limited number of available performance and rehearsal spaces, distributed tickets, and submitted lists of works to the Nazis for censorship before performance.

Performances also continued to take place outside of official channels, especially inside the barracks and the youth homes.

Older children were separated from the adults almost immediately upon arrival in Terezín and assigned to youth homes based on their age and language. The education of Jewish children was formally banned, but the instructors were supposed to keep the children occupied with singing, games, crafts, and cultural activities. In practice, the "cultural activities" constituted a curriculum that varied widely based on the values of each instructor. As Ruth Bondy describes it, "every instructor educated his class (about 40 children) in his image, and according to his world view: graduates of the Zionist youth movement did it in the spirit of Zionism; communists looked toward a socialist revolution; Czech nationalists, toward love of the homeland."⁷⁶

Although the day-to-day operation of the ghetto was largely in the hands of the Jews themselves, they quickly lost any illusions about a "self-governed Jewish city." They were robbed of the most basic freedoms, and living conditions—housing, food, hygiene, health care, etc.—were far below the level of the prewar lifestyle they were accustomed to. In addition they were subjected to random harassment and humiliation by members of the SS. Fortunately such contacts did not take place frequently. Since the day-to-day operations of the ghetto were mostly in the hands of the Jews

⁷⁵ See, for example, the "protection lists" and requests to remove individual artists and their families from scheduled transports in file O.64/23, the Theresienstadt Collection, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

⁷⁶ Bondy, 310.

themselves, fewer than thirty members of the SS were assigned to Terezín during the whole time of the ghetto's existence.⁷⁷

After the last members of the civilian population left Terezín, the second phase of its history began. On July 6, 1942 the barracks were opened and Terezín became a ghetto in the true sense of the word: the prisoners now filled the whole town, except for the buildings and spaces occupied by the SS. During the day they were allowed to move freely about the city, but an evening curfew was strictly enforced. The perimeter of the town was guarded from the outside by Czech gendarmes. An internal police force manned by the prisoners themselves, the so-called *Ghettowache* (Ghetto Guard), enforced rules within the ghetto.

In the summer of 1942 another change altered the character of Terezín. Jews from other countries began to arrive, especially from Germany (the first transports from Berlin arrived early in June 1942) and from Austria, and later from Holland, Denmark, and other Nazi-occupied lands. The basic composition of the population changed, not only nationally but by age: the German and Austrian Jews were on average a generation older than the Czech-Jewish prisoners. Many had been told that Terezín was a spa town where they could live out their days in comfort if they agreed to sign a housing contract that ceded all their property to the Reich. Completely unprepared for the conditions in which they found themselves, they quickly succumbed to exhaustion, hunger, illness and despair. The mortality rate, which until that point had seldom exceeded ten per day, drastically increased; almost 4000 died during the month of

⁷⁷ See Tomáš Fedorovič, "Neue Erkenntnisse über die SS-Angehörigen im Ghetto Theresienstadt," in *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 2006*, ed. Jaroslava Milotová, Michael Wögerbauer and Anna Hájková (Prague: Sefer, 2007) 234-50, 236.

September 1942, when the ghetto temporarily reached an unsustainable maximum population of almost 60,000 prisoners.⁷⁸ By the end of 1942 the mortality rate and further outgoing transports had reduced the population to an extremely overcrowded but sustainable level of between 40 and 50 thousand prisoners. In January 1943, to represent the influx of German-Jewish prisoners, Dr. Paul Epstein from Berlin was appointed head of the Council of Elders. Edelstein and later Otto Zucker continued to represent Czech-Jewish interests on the Council.

Although conditions in the ghetto had stabilized somewhat by the end of 1942 and being able to move freely about the town represented a vast improvement over confinement in the barracks, living conditions remained harsh. People lived literally packed into barracks and civilian homes, sleeping on rough-hewn wooden bunks and with only a small shelf for personal items. There was no privacy. Food for the prisoners, prepared by the "royalty" of the ghetto—the cooks—in several large kitchens, was distributed according to categories based on the prisoner's age and type of work (young people and those assigned to manual labor received increased rations). Lack of water was a great problem. The capacity of the local waterworks, built to sustain a city of under 10,000 people, could not meet the needs of a population four to five times that great. Maintaining a basic level of hygiene was difficult, and fleas, lice, and bedbugs plagued the prisoners and increased the danger of epidemics.

These difficulties were exacerbated by tensions among the prisoners themselves. For example, some of the Czech Jews resented the German and Austrian prisoners for overpopulating "their" ghetto; the newcomers resented Czech control of some of the

⁷⁸ Ludmila Chládková, *The Terezín Ghetto* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1991), 48.

most advantageous jobs, especially those associated with the food supply. Prewar class tensions carried over into the ghetto as well and some structures of privilege were recreated; certain prisoners were designated by the SS or by the Council of Elders as "prominents" and given preferential treatment, such as better housing and increased rations. Although many prisoners believed that both the national and class tensions were deliberately encouraged by the Nazis to keep them divided against each other, this realization was not enough to keep them from happening.⁷⁹

In spite of these hardships, Terezín did not belong among the most terrible extermination camps and slave labor camps that the Nazis created. Although all adult prisoners were obligated to work, and a small percentage of them were assigned to workshops where they manufactured goods for the German war effort, most did jobs that supported the daily operations of the ghetto. In the small crematorium outside the fortress walls, the bodies of the thousands who died of hunger and disease were burned and their ashes placed in individual cardboard urns. The prisoners were not confronted in Terezín with the horror of mechanized mass murder—a horror that many of them faced after their deportation to other camps.

A slow improvement in living conditions was due in part to a new role assigned to the ghetto by the Nazi propaganda machine. In November 1942 the International Red Cross, prompted by the World Jewish Congress, began requesting permission to inspect the concentration camps; after 477 Danish Jews were deported to Terezín in

⁷⁹ The Terezín "prominents" were divided into two groups. Group A was named by the SS; these were usually internationally known persons or former German military officers and their families. Group B was named by the Council of Elders and approved by the SS; most were professors and representatives of Jewish organizations. Daniela Řepová, "Emil Utitz a Terezín," in *Terezínské Studie a Dokumenty 2003*, ed. Jaroslava Milotová and Anna Lorencová (Prague: Sefer, 2003), 169-212, 184.

October 1943, Danish officials also asked to see the ghetto.⁸⁰ The Nazis realized that a carefully orchestrated visit could help them refute reports on the true situation in the concentration camps. Berlin officials agreed to allow an inspection, but first Terezín was thoroughly prepared for its role as a Potemkin village.⁸¹

The most fruitful months of the cultural life occurred during a period of relative stability in the ghetto, between November 1942 and September 1944.⁸² One of the first large-scale performances in the camp became an intensely emotional focus of Czech national, linguistic and cultural identification: on November 28, 1942, conductor Raphael Schächter presented the Terezín premiere of a work regarded as the Czech national opera, Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* [*Prodaná nevěsta*]. The opera was performed in Terezín approximately 35 times.⁸³ In December of 1942, a "café" was established where prisoners, according to a ticket system, could sit for a few hours with a cup of ersatz coffee and listen to music played by their fellow prisoners.⁸⁴ Cultural activities were openly allowed and even actively supported due to Nazi propaganda plans, but they sprang, above all, from the needs of the prisoners themselves. A sample of the offerings for the month of February 1943 provides an idea of the diversity of identities, loyalties, and affinities served by the *Freizeitgestaltung's* programming:

⁸⁰ Bondy, 340, 391.

⁸¹ The phrase "Potemkin village" appears often in survivors' accounts. Marshall Grigori Potemkin purportedly established fake settlements along the Dnieper River before Empress Catherine II's visit to the Crimea in 1787. As leader of the Crimean military campaign, he wanted to impress the monarch with the value of her new conquests. Terezín earned the nickname because of its status as a "model ghetto," i.e. a deceptive façade.

⁸² Outgoing transports did not cease during this period. For example, in May 1944, transports sent more than 7500 prisoners to Auschwitz to ensure that Terezín did not look overpopulated.

⁸³ Karas, 24.

⁸⁴ Chládková, 48.

CONCERTS: Jewish liturgical music, opera arias, *Journey though the Land of Music* (premiere), Raphael Schächter's Hebrew Choir (premiere)—20 performances altogether.

OPERAS: *The Bartered Bride*, *Rigoletto* (premiere—the cultural department's anniversary performance), *The Marriage of Figaro* (premiere)—10 performances altogether.

THEATER: Wolker's *The Tomb* (premiere); a revue, *Youngsters not Admitted* (premiere); a cabaret within the framework of the *Stolen Theater*; Cocteau's *The Human Voice*; opera evening; Thoren's *Cabaret with Skits*; evening of songs from Erben's *Flower Bouquet*; puppet theater; *Women's Dictatorship*—50 performances altogether.⁸⁵

The theater offerings in particular reveal the wide variety of group identifications that the prisoners could have performed by participating as actors or spectators. For example, the author of *The Tomb* [*Hrob*], Jiří Wolker (1900-1924), was a young Czech avant-garde author who had been adopted by the Communists as one of their own; *Youngsters not Admitted* [*Für Jugendliche Verboten*] was an evening of slightly racy comic songs and sketches in German; and the *Stolen Theater* [*Vyšlojzované divadlo*], was apparently named after the Liberated Theater [*Osvobozené divadlo*] of Voskovec and Werich.⁸⁶ *Flower Bouquet* [*Kytice*] by Jaromír Erben (1811-

⁸⁵ Bondy, 365.

⁸⁶ Souvenir posters for *The Tomb* and for *Youngsters not Admitted* have been preserved. The *Stolen Stage* appears in a list of Czech-language works performed in the ghetto. See the Heřman collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. nos. PT 4306, PT 3847 and PT 3862.

1870) was a Czech classic from the National Revival period, and *Women's Dictatorship* [*Diktatur der Frauen*] was a German-language three-act comedy from the early 1930s.⁸⁷

A *Stadtverschönerung* (city beautification) in preparation for the Red Cross inspection was officially ordered to begin in December 1943; throughout the spring of 1944 the "beautification" was carried out, mostly through the labor of the prisoners themselves.⁸⁸ The long-awaited visit of the Commission, which included three international representatives—two Danish and one Swiss—took place on June 23, 1944. The visitors were accompanied by several SS officers, representatives from the Reich Ministry of International Affairs and from the German Red Cross. The only prisoner included in the contingent was Epstein, who had received the title of "mayor" for the day and was only allowed to speak with the members of the commission in the presence of the SS. They followed a prepared path through Terezín with stops at the bakery, the bank, a performance of the children's opera *Brundibár*, and further sites of interest.⁸⁹ The members of the commission, in spite of certain doubts, expressed their general approval of the standard of living in the ghetto. Dr. M. Rossel, the Swiss representative, expressed surprise in his official report over the long delay in granting the Red Cross request to visit Terezín, since there was clearly nothing to hide.⁹⁰

Apparently inspired by the success of the visit, the Nazis created a "documentary" film about the ghetto. Prisoner Kurt Gerron, a well-known German-

⁸⁷ For details of these two productions see the Heřman Collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. nos. PT 4304 and PT 3845.

⁸⁸ Chládková, 50.

⁸⁹ H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 172-178.

⁹⁰ Bondy, 439.

Jewish actor and director of the interwar period, was ordered to direct it.⁹¹ A partially edited version of the film, created from the footage shot in August and September 1944, has been preserved, and offers the last glimpse of hundreds of prisoners.

At the end of September 1944, the period of relative stability came abruptly to an end. A wave of transports from September 28 until October 28 carried away 18,000 people, including the majority of prisoners of productive working age and almost all the active participants in the cultural life. Dr. Epstein was arrested and executed, most members of the Council of Elders were deported, and Dr. Benjamin Marmelstein, a leader of the Viennese Jewish community, became head of the ghetto.

After these transports, the ghetto entered its last phase of existence. Only 11,000 prisoners remained, many of them elderly and ill. Those who were healthy and capable of work struggled to manage the most essential operations of the ghetto, and Marmelstein declared a mandatory 70-hour work week until the worst of the crisis had passed. The situation began to stabilize at the end of 1944, but the incoming transports continued. Jews from Hungary and Slovakia arrived in the ghetto along with the last Czech, German and Austrian Jews who had been protected until this point because they were married to "Aryans." Slowly even the cultural life began to revive. It was clear that the war would end soon and all thoughts and hopes were pinned on that moment.

Nazi leaders, also aware of the coming defeat and hoping for merciful treatment after the war, negotiated the release of some of the prisoners to neutral countries: 1200

⁹¹ K. Margry, "Das Konzentrationslager Als Idylle: Theresienstadt: Ein Dokumentar-Film aus dem Jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet," in *Auschwitz. Geschichte, Rezeption und Wirkung: Jahrbuch 1996 Zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust.*, ed. Fritz Bauer Institut (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1996), 319-52.

were sent by train to Switzerland in February 1945, and the Danish Jews were released on April 15 to the Swedish Red Cross. The ghetto, however, faced a last, terrible trial: on April 20, 1945, death marchers began to arrive in Terezín, starved, ill, and with horrific stories of their experiences. Some of the Terezín prisoners, just days before the liberation, died of illnesses they contracted while trying to nurse those prisoners.

The last days of the ghetto were filled with chaotic events as the SS lost their power over the prisoners' lives and the Red Cross took over administration of Terezín. On May 3 the SS stopped trying to prevent escapes, and on May 4 a group of Czech doctors and nurses arrived to help battle the typhus epidemic that had broken out after the death marchers arrived. On May 5 the last of the SS officers left Terezín. On May 8 Soviet tanks, on their way to Prague, went through Terezín: the ghetto was liberated.⁹² Two days later the Soviets took control of Terezín and began repatriating the prisoners, but when the typhus epidemic could not be brought under control they imposed a two-week quarantine. Repatriation resumed at the end of May; the last of the former prisoners left Terezín in August 1945.⁹³

Of the approximately 74,000 Czech Jews who had been deported to Terezín, about 7,000 were liberated in the ghetto.⁹⁴ Of those for whom Terezín had been only a way station on the journey to various concentration and slave labor camps, only about 3000 returned.

* * *

⁹² Vojtěch Blodig, "Poslední fáze ve vývoji terezínského ghetta," in *Terezín v konečném řešení židovské otázky*, ed. Vojtěch Blodig and Miroslav Karný (Prague: Logos, 1992), 182-90.

⁹³ Chládková, 53.

⁹⁴ Of the 7000 Czech Jews liberated in the ghetto, just over half had been deported in the last months of the war. Most had been protected until that point by their marriages to non-Jews. Rothkirchen, "The Jews," 59-60.

These approximately 10,000 survivors returned to a Czechoslovakia radically different than the one they had left. For many, it was not a happy homecoming. In addition to their personal losses—some discovered were the only members of their family to survive—many found themselves trying to reintegrate into a society that had no place for them. Politically, all the right-wing prewar parties had been banned which, as Brad Abrams points out, "left roughly half of the prewar electorate politically homeless" and also generated negative attitudes towards a class to which many Jews had belonged: the bourgeoisie.⁹⁵ Plans to create a postwar "national state of Czechs and Slovaks" placed the German-speaking Jews in a socially and legally precarious position. And a phenomenon associated with both of these shifts, but which had taken on a life of its own, further complicated the survivors' return: postwar anti-Semitism.

As Kurt Wehle, a leader of the postwar Jewish Community, wrote forty years after the war,

With what hopes and expectations did Jews return to Czechoslovakia ...?

It goes without saying that many of them cherished hopes of finding members of their families alive.... But what concerns us most today is the yearning of the returnees to live again as equals among equals. In this regard, however, the returnees met with more disillusionment than they might reasonably have expected.⁹⁶

Rather than smooth reintegration into the community of their fellow Czechoslovak citizens, they encountered unforeseen barriers that complicated their

⁹⁵ Abrams, 55.

⁹⁶ Kurt Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia: 1945-1949," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, Volume III*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of American, 1984), 508.

transition back into civilian life and left them feeling like outsiders in the community they believed was their own.

Thus, a prominent feature of survivor testimony from 1945-48 was an apparently performative focus: survivors' attempts to effect their belonging within Czechoslovak society by affiliating themselves with the new national and political ideals. One strategy to establish themselves as insiders was by circulating narratives that featured the specifically Czech and left-leaning theatrical performances in the Terezín ghetto.

Chapter 2

The Survivors Return: *Kde domov můj? [Where is my Home?]*⁹⁷

The Terezín survivors' postwar testimony from 1945-48 emerged during a period of massive social change. The era of the multinational Czechoslovak state had definitively come to an end, yet the shape of the postwar "national state of Czechs and Slovaks" and the features of the social body of its citizens was still in flux. What place would the Jews occupy in the newly re-established state, and how would their testimony position them in relationship to non-Jews and their narratives about the war? In this chapter I argue that many of the barriers to their reintegration, which at first glance appear to be legal barriers, were actually social, caused not by the new government decrees themselves but by local and regional misinterpretations of the spirit, if not the letter, of the laws by their fellow Czechs. In response, some Terezín survivors adopted a strategy that was also used by other groups needing to overcome barriers to reintegration: they circulated narratives in the public sphere that emphasized the newly desired characteristics of "Czechness" and "leftness," in particular by writing about Czech-language culture, a topic of great postwar interest. Thus their testimony about the cultural life of the ghetto, crafted to address their social and political needs, served as a rhetorical performance with the potential to effect their belonging to postwar society.

* * *

Particularly telling for us will be how the Czechoslovak homeland receives our unhappy brothers and sisters who were or will be freed from concentration camps...and how it helps them find housing and work.

⁹⁷ *Kde domov můj?* was the title of the Czechoslovak national anthem; today it is the anthem of the Czech Republic (Slovakia selected a new anthem when it became an independent state in 1993).

Everything that I experienced here ... makes me optimistic [Jews] showed that they love Czechoslovakia and its people sincerely and deeply. Czechoslovakia and its international organizations answered faithfulness with faithfulness.... I believe that those who return will be happy again at home, when they get over the horror....

- Arnost Frischer

Certainly it was heartwarming on my return to have my little shoemaker from before the war serve me coffee and bread, resole my one pair of shoes free of charge and then slip me a 100-crown note as a parting gift. To be sure, I felt touched and comforted when a Gentile friend came and returned to me a suit which I had given him as a gift before my deportation. But on the other hand, imagine my feeling when, waiting in a long line outside the Housing Department, I heard a woman say, "Just look at all those Jews! There must have been some leaks in those gas chambers. It looks as if more Jews got back than there were here to start with."

- Kurt Wehle

* * *

All Czechoslovak citizens who had survived World War II—not only the Jews but Czech political prisoners returning from the concentration camps, soldiers who fought in the Allied armies, those who had spent the war in exile, in hiding or as members of underground resistance movements, and those who had remained in the Nazi-occupied

"Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia"—dealt with the chaos of starting over in a society where almost everything was in flux. All returnees, and especially those from the concentration camps, shared some of the practical difficulties of repatriation: standing in line at the Housing Department, trying to replace basic identification documents, searching for relatives who had not yet returned, etc. However, the task of reintegration that the Czech Jews faced was much more daunting: all the communities they identified with, from the real community of their family and friends to the imagined community of their fellow Czechoslovak citizens, had changed in ways that affected them much more radically.

One factor was simply the number of Jewish lives that had been lost. Thousands of non-Jewish Czechs had been arrested for potential or real participation in resistance activities during the Nazi occupation, including helping Jews, but their rate of survival was much higher. Drawing on various Czech sources, Benjamin Frommer estimates that between 36,000 and 55,000 non-Jewish, non-Roma Czechs—less than one percent of the prewar population—died violently during the war.⁹⁸ Thus, most Czech non-Jews who returned from the camps came home to a relatively intact family and social circle. However, the Nazis' so-called "racial persecution" of the Jews resulted in much more severe devastation: of the 92,000 Jews still in the Protectorate in the fall of 1941 when deportations began, 85 percent (78,000) had perished.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25. Almost the entire Roma (Gypsy) population was murdered by the Nazis. Of a prewar population of approximately 6,500, only about 300 were not deported; of those who were, only 583 came back from the camps. See Ctibor Nečas, *Holocaust českých romů* (Prague: Prostor, 1999), 173.

⁹⁹ Rothkirchen's more detailed figures, which I have rounded in the text, include only the Czech (not Slovak) Jews: in March 1939, when the Nazi occupation began, there were 118,310 Jews by race living in the Czech Lands. Of those, 26,111 emigrated before deportations began in the fall of 1941. Of the

How do these numbers translate into the survivors' experience? Some, especially spouses and children of mixed marriages, returned to families that had waited anxiously for their return. Some had managed to stay with a relative or friend during the entire journey through the camps or were reunited upon their return with other family members who had somehow survived. Others returned to find that they were the only person to have survived out of an extended family. Social networks among the survivors themselves, formed in the ghetto and later camps or shortly after the war in temporary housing, became sources of support, and for some, especially young Czech-speaking Jews who were reunited with loved ones or were otherwise able to reestablish a social base fairly quickly, reintegration into postwar life was relatively smooth. However, some survivors, unable to bear the disappointments they experienced upon their return, committed suicide after the war.¹⁰⁰

The approximately 10,000 Czech Jews who had survived Terezín and the concentration camps were joined by returning émigrés, members of Allied armies, those who had spent the war in hiding, and the Slovak survivors. By the beginning of 1946, there were approximately 46,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰¹ However, this number soon began to decrease as a wave of postwar emigration began. Zionists prepared to

remaining 92,199, 73,608 were transported to Terezín (about 60,200 of those were subsequently deported to other camps) and 7849 were deported directly to other camps. Almost same number (7,939) were arrested, caught in hiding, or committed suicide. Of those transported, 6,213 died in Terezín, and 57,083 in further camps. Livia Rothkirchen, "The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: 1938-1945," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, Volume III*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of American, 1984), 3-74, 59.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the fate of Ejsik Weiss in Helena Krejčová, "Český a slovenský antisemitismus, 1945-1948," in *Stránkami soudobých dějin: Sborník statí k pětadesátinám historika Karla Kaplana*, ed. K. Kaplan and K. Jech (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993), 163-4.

¹⁰¹ Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném československu," in *Židé v novodobých dějinách*, ed. V. Veber (Prague: Karolinum, 1997), 151.

leave for Palestine; others applied to join relatives in the various countries to which Czech Jews had fled before the war and in the early years of the occupation.¹⁰²

The number of émigrés was probably increased by a factor that greatly complicated the reintegration of those who decided to stay: postwar anti-Semitism. Although the Czech Jews by no means faced the same level of hostility as Jews returning to Poland or even Slovakia, the blow was all the more devastating because, for many, it was completely unexpected.¹⁰³ Based on their memories of life in the Czechoslovak First Republic (1918-38), when they enjoyed not only full legal rights but thorough social integration, their postwar expectations to live again as equals among equals were not unreasonable—and they were not the only ones to express surprise and dismay at the resurgence of discrimination against them. As Jan Masaryk, son of the revered first president Thomas Garrigue Masaryk and postwar Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in a September 1945 speech:

I hear, here and there, about anti-Semitism within the borders of our republic. Among Czechs and Slovaks there is no place for anti-Semitism. I will agitate and fight against it as long as I live We solved the Jewish problem during the First Republic to the satisfaction of

¹⁰² Legal immigration to the territory, still a British mandate, remained greatly restricted until Israel gained its independence in 1948. According to sources quoted by Brod, approximately 20,000 Czechoslovak Jews had emigrated to Israel by 1950. Although there are no reliable statistics on emigration to other countries, Brod estimates that several thousand more left for countries other than Israel. Brod, "Židé," 151.

¹⁰³ See, for example, descriptions of pogroms in and near the Slovak city of Topolčany in Krejčová, "Český," 168.

all interested parties.... We cannot resemble Hitler in any way, not even in our ideas.¹⁰⁴

What had caused this resurgence of anti-Semitism? Helena Krejčová suggests, given not only the length of the occupation but the persistence of Nazi efforts to eliminate Czech sympathy for the Jews, "anti-Semitism emerged into normal life, it became an everyday part of it, something more or less natural."¹⁰⁵ Jana Svobodová suggests a further, paradoxical but plausible reason for postwar anti-Semitism:

... a bad conscience regarding the victims of the Holocaust, a distaste for remembering that tragic chapter of history, an effort to deny or blank out consciousness of guilt for active or passive participation (for example only through comfortable unawareness) in the fate of those victims....¹⁰⁶

Setting aside for a moment the cause or, more likely, causes, how was this anti-Semitism manifesting itself, and how were the Jews experiencing and perceiving it? The barriers to reintegration that they faced were vividly narrated in the pages of *Věstník* [*Bulletin*], the Czech-language periodical of the Jewish Religious Community in Prague [*Židovská obec náboženská v Praze*]. Its first postwar issue was published in September 1945.¹⁰⁷ *Věstník* by no means spoke for all the returning Jews; by October of 1945, only 15,000 of the 46,000 in Czechoslovakia had officially registered with the

¹⁰⁴ From a speech by Jan Masaryk on September 17, 1945, quoted in *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 7, no. 2 (1945): 1.

¹⁰⁵ Krejčová, "Český," 170.

¹⁰⁶ Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích, 1948-1992* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994), 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Věstník* was established in 1934 and appeared under that name until fall 1939. During the occupation its functions were replaced by the so-called *Jewish Pages* [*Židovské listy/Jüdische Blätter*], published bilingually in Czech and German, that mainly served as an organ of Nazi commands transmitted through the leaders of the community. Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust*. (Lincoln, Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press; Yad Vashem, 2005), 332 ff99.

religious community.¹⁰⁸ However, the religious community continued to take responsibility, as they had during the occupation, even for non-religious Jews. Anyone who had been persecuted as a Jew by race, regardless of religious conviction or lack thereof, could join the community as a "B Jew" (from *bez vyznání*, without confession) and be eligible for postwar support; of the 15,000 members registered in 1945, a third were designated as "B Jews."¹⁰⁹

Věstník was edited mainly by older Jewish leaders who returned to Prague after spending the war in exile. Their shock at the devastation which had been wrought upon the community was palpable, but there was not much time for mourning; they faced a host of practical problems. For example, *Věstník* served an important function as a forum for legal advice, publishing articles on restitution of property and applications for citizenship, such as these guidelines appearing in the January 1946 issue:

February 9, 1946 is the deadline for requests from individuals of German or Hungarian nationality to retain Czechoslovak citizenship. Submit it to the regional National Committee.

¹⁰⁸ Kurt Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia: 1945-1949," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, Volume III*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of American, 1984), 511. Wehle claims that most of the Jews associated mainly with one another and kept close to the organized Jewish community, but that leaves thousands of people unaccounted for. Petr Brod describes a wide range of attitudes towards Jewishness among the returnees, "from conscious distancing from their origins to full identification with Jewry, including its orthodox religious forms." Brod, "Židé," 153.

¹⁰⁹ Wehle, "The Jews," 511. For the official definition used to determine who was eligible to receive benefits from the community, see "Pojem 'B' židů," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 8, no. 3 (1946): 22.

Decree 33 [the postwar citizenship law] does not relate to people of Jewish nationality, regardless of language. Confirm your citizenship, and if they reject it, turn to us.¹¹⁰

Why were the Czech Jews having to fight to retain their citizen and reclaim property that had been confiscated by the Nazis? Social change was being both reflected and effected through new laws at the state level, and Czechs' postwar zeal to draw boundaries regarding who deserved to be a member of the postwar social body was leaving many Jews on the outside.

A massive postwar political and national shift towards what I will call "Czechness" (a range of characteristics related to Czech national identity) and "leftness" (a range of characteristics associated with a progressive political stance) was taking place during this period, and not just in popular opinion. The so-called "National Front" government, led by the prewar president of the First Republic, Eduard Beneš, consisted of only four Czech parties. These ranged, as Frommer succinctly puts it, "from left to center (there was no right)": the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the National Socialist Party, and the People's (Catholic) Party.¹¹¹ In order to prevent another disaster like the Munich Pact, they abandoned the prewar ideal of a multinational Czechoslovak state with its sizable German and Hungarian national

¹¹⁰ "Pravní poradna: Státní občanství." *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 8, no. 1 (1946): 7.

¹¹¹ Frommer, 29. The Czech National Socialists (not associated in any way with the German Nazi party) were nationally oriented proponents of moderate, non-Marxist socialism. They were the primary intellectual opponents of the Communist Party in postwar Czechoslovakia. The People's Party, originally established as a Roman Catholic clerical party, also opposed the Communists. Bradley F. Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 61, 68.

minorities in favor of a Slavic national state of Czechs and Slovaks.¹¹² To formalize relationships with trustworthy new allies, political affiliations with the western European countries that had betrayed them were replaced by a new relationship with the Soviet Union.¹¹³ This foreign policy shift was accompanied by a shift in domestic policy toward socialism and, as Frommer pointed out, the elimination of the Czechs' own discredited political right wing.¹¹⁴

These decisions were codified in the so-called Košice program, named after the Slovak city where it was announced (Prague had not yet been liberated) on April 4, 1945, and enthusiastically received by the Czechoslovak public.¹¹⁵ Both aspects of this shift, however, were tremendously problematic for the Czech Jews. The new postwar ideals of Czechness and leftness were being constructed right along two sets of fault lines that many non-Jews perceived as the boundaries between themselves and their Jewish compatriots: bourgeois status and affiliation with German-language culture.

Rothkirchen cites several sources to argue that, unlike anti-Semitism in other Eastern European nations, "Czech anti-Semitism was lacking in two basic elements

¹¹² In the 1930 census, Czechoslovak citizens selected from the following categories of nationality: Czech or Slovak (67%) German (22%), Hungarian (5%), Ruthenian (4%), Jewish (1.3%), or Polish (0.6%).

¹¹³ In December of 1943 Beneš committed to a military alliance with Russia as a bulwark against German postwar revanchism. Frommer, 29.

¹¹⁴ For example, in August and October of 1945 several industries were nationalized (film, mining and heavy industry, grocery, stock market, private insurance); no compensation was provided for the former owners. Helmut Slapnicka, "Die rechtlichen Grundlagen für die Behandlung der Deutschen und Magyaren in der Tschechoslowakei 1945-1948," in *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938-1948: Aktuelle Forschungen*, ed. Richard G. Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, Arnold Suppan and Anna M. Drabek (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 155-92, 159. October 1946 saw the conversion to a planned economy. Abrams, 140.

¹¹⁵ According to a May 1946 poll, 62.9 percent of Czechslovaks supported the Košice policies "entirely" and 28.8 percent "with reservations." Abrams, 55.

common to rabid Jew baiters: racism and bigoted religious hatred."¹¹⁶ Instead, in the Czech lands, resentment against the Jews was usually due to long-ingrained stereotypes about their affinity for German-language culture and their bourgeois status. Neither of these stereotypes was completely groundless. In the 1930 census, 30 percent of the Czechoslovak Jews in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, mostly based on their linguistic affiliation, had declared German nationality.¹¹⁷ Regarding class status, although the Depression had certainly affected the Jews, many still owned property or were members of the professional classes. In the First Republic, neither of these characteristics had been especially problematic. However, in postwar Czechoslovakia, bourgeois status and formal affiliation with German-language culture was not just an issue of social stigma but legal action.

New citizenship laws aimed to create a national state of Czechs and Slovaks by expelling those who had chosen German or Hungarian nationality in the 1930 census, in which fully 22 percent of Czechoslovak citizens had selected German nationality. After much debate, the Allies finally approved plans for this enormous population transfer. The National Front government's Decree 33 from August 2, 1945 declared that members of the German minority, who had automatically become citizens of the Reich after the Munich Pact, were forbidden from regaining Czechoslovak citizenship.¹¹⁸ During the "organized transfer" from January-November 1946, more than 2 million

¹¹⁶ Rothkirchen, *Facing the Holocaust*, 303.

¹¹⁷ In the 1930 census, 36.44 percent of the Jews in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia selected Czech nationality, 31.40 percent selected Jewish nationality, and 30.45 selected German nationality. Rothkirchen, "The Jews," 12.

¹¹⁸ Czechoslovaks of Hungarian nationality, the majority of whom lived in Slovakia, were also slated for deportation, but due to opposition from Budapest, London and Washington these plans were ultimately not carried out. Nancy Wingfield, "The Politics of Memory: Constructing National Identity in the Czech Lands, 1945 to 1948." *East European Politics & Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 246-67, 253.

"ethnic Germans" were deported to the American and Soviet zones of Germany.¹¹⁹

Decree 33 created a crisis situation for the Czechoslovak Jews: those who had selected German nationality in 1933 were faced with the possibility that, after years in the concentration camps, they would be deported again, this time to the land of their murderers.

Regarding the shift to the left, when the National Front government banned the prewar right-wing parties, including the largest prewar party, the Agrarian Party, many politically conservative Jews, along with their non-Jewish compatriots, found themselves without a party affiliation that represented their views. Even more problematic, however, were laws regarding property. In the fight against the class enemy, much property was being nationalized, and property left by the retreating Germans was first in line. Jews were disproportionately affected by these new property laws; many of their homes and businesses were technically "enemy property," since the Nazis had confiscated them or forced the Jews to sell them for a token price.

The source of these problems—the enforcement of these laws, as concrete barrier to reintegration—however, did not lie at the highest level of government. As the central government passed these laws to effect this shift towards Czechness and leftness, politicians included clauses intended to protect the Jews, and officials at the highest levels, across the political spectrum, consistently supported Jewish appeals when laws were applied unfairly.¹²⁰ However, this occurred with distressing frequency;

¹¹⁹ According to the most commonly quoted statistics, during this period, 2,170,598 ethnic Germans were deported to the Soviet and American zones of occupied Germany. Tomáš Staněk, *Německá menšina v českých zemích, 1948-1989* (Prague: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku, 1993), 21.

¹²⁰ I emphasize "across the political spectrum" because the Czech Communists are sometimes accused of overt anti-Semitism during this period. However, what sometimes appear to be bafflingly haphazard anti-

at the level of the local and district National Committees, which were controlled by their fellow Czechs, Jews were subject to misinterpretations of the law and even cases of petty harassment.

The National Committees, postwar administrative bodies that had replaced all forms of prewar local and regional government, regularly ignored directives from the central government and had become, as Frommer puts it, "Frankenstein monsters, unresponsive to their creators and a danger to the public."¹²¹ Wide-ranging authority in the hands of inexperienced or even blatantly dishonest people, some of them trying to hide their own wartime collaboration behind postwar patriotic zeal, often led to abuses as they took advantage of their power and interpreted laws to their own liking.

The citizenship law, Decree 33, was written with specific provisions to protect those who had "suffered under Nazi or fascist terror"—that is, Jews and anti-fascist ethnic Germans. However, the wording of the law and the accompanying Justification Report allowed for an unfortunate degree of interpretation at the local and district levels and placed the burden of proof on the Jews themselves to demonstrate not only their suffering but their allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic.¹²² For example, when the Jewish community of Teplice challenged the local interpretation of the citizenship

Semitic acts turn out, upon closer observation, to be part of a consistent and fierce attack on the "bourgeois class enemy." Communists often displayed admirable fairness regarding issues of citizenship.

¹²¹ Frommer, 48.

¹²² Paragraph 2 of Decree 33 protected those who had "remained true to the Czechoslovak Republic, never committed an offence against the Czech and Slovak nations and actively participated in the struggle for its liberation, or suffered under Nazi or fascist terror." However, the Justification Report to the degree qualified paragraph 2 as protecting those who suffered specifically "for their allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic." I am grateful to David Gerlach for providing me with a copy of his manuscript, "In the Borderlands: Minority Politics in the Czech Lands after World War II," in which he quotes the laws in detail (all translations into English in the manuscript are his own). The article was recently published as "Juden in den Grenzgebieten: Die Minderheitenpolitik in den Böhmischesen Ländern nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 2008*, ed. Anna Hajková and Jaroslava Milotová (Prague: Sefer, 2008), 12-47.

decree, the chairperson of the District Administrative Commission, Maria Vobecká, replied.¹²³

Racial persecution is not solely the legal condition, since the law requires that such a person "remained true to the democratic republican state idea of the Czechoslovak Republic." For many Jews this second condition is not fulfilled.¹²⁴

In November of 1945 Vobecká clarified the nature of the Jews' disloyalty: "[they] go around ... speaking German, which upsets the Czech inhabitants."¹²⁵ In the town of Strešovice, Jews' applications to retain citizenship could be rejected if, according to the evidence of a prewar subscription list, they had regularly attended the German-language theater before the war.¹²⁶

By the time that, in September 1946, the Ministry of the Interior finally issued an order that clarified the position of "people of Jewish origin" and eliminated the threat of re-deportation, approximately 1,500 Jews applying to retain their citizenship had been investigated based on questions regarding their "national reliability."¹²⁷ The "unhappy mistake," as Jewish community leader Arnošt Frischer described it, of having chosen German nationality fifteen years before had translated into months of uncertainty as individual Jews struggled with local and regional National Committee

¹²³ Administrative Commissions instead of National Committees were established by the Ministry of the Interior in regions where Czechs comprised less than a majority of the inhabitants. Gerlach, N. pag.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Gerlach, N. pag.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Gerlach, N. pag.

¹²⁶ Krejčová, "Český," 162.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 161.

leaders and Jewish community representatives repeatedly appealed to the central government for help.¹²⁸

In the case of property, a new restitution law declared on May 16, 1946 contained a clause that should have protected the Jews: all property transfers or sales that had been closed after September 29, 1938 “under the threat of occupation or national, racial or political persecution” were invalidated. However this law, as with the guidelines for citizenship, contained an unfortunate loophole: requests for the return of property could be denied if they went against “the public interest.”¹²⁹ This phrase, interpreted widely, was often used at the level of local and regional National Committees to deny Jewish claims.¹³⁰ These questions of interpretation affected thousands of people: of the 16,000 individual Jewish requests for restitution, only 3,000 had been granted by the end of 1947.¹³¹

These examples reveal that the main source of the survivors' "legal" problems was not actually legal but social: that is, not the governments' laws but their interpretation, due to a chronic lack of solidarity on the part of their fellow Czechs who were enforcing the laws at the local and regional levels. As Axel Honneth argues, ethical life is based on recognition, and three forms of recognition are necessary for "proper independent individuality and democratic society": love, legal recognition, and

¹²⁸ Arnošt Frischer, "Rok Osvobození," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 8, no. 4-5 (1946): 25-9, 28.

¹²⁹ Gerlach, N. pag.

¹³⁰ Perhaps the best-known struggle over Jewish property involved the textile mill belonging to Emil Beer of Varnsdorf. Gerlach provides a detailed explication; the case is described in Krejčová, "Český," 161, and Wehle, "The Jews," 522. Krejčová provides additional examples of property disputes.

¹³¹ Gerlach, N. pag.

social solidarity.¹³² Legal recognition supposedly ensures equal rights; social solidarity respects the particular worth and contribution of different groups of people. I argue that, in postwar Czechoslovakia, this division broke down: lack of social solidarity was actually powerful enough that, at the level of local law enforcement, it undermined the central government's attempts to guarantee the survivors legal recognition.

Here I must point out that, in seeking recognition in the form of social solidarity from their fellow Czechs, the survivors were not engaged in the type of pathological behavior that Ann Pellegrini criticizes as the colonized peoples' attempt to seek acknowledgement from the very group that has denied them of it.¹³³ Their perception of that denial as a new development, and their belief that it was not insuperable, points to a different kind of relationship. That is, the Czech Jews, based in part on the apparently successful resolution of the "Jewish question" in prewar Czechoslovakia, identified with the state and with the social body of its citizens. After the war, believing that they were entitled to belong, they sought to overcome the barriers to their reintegration.

The Czech Jews were well aware that these barriers were being erected, not by their own government, but by their fellow Czechs. Even outside observers, despite the efforts of Jan Masaryk himself and other highly placed officials' ongoing attempts to support the Jews, perceived this popular hostility. As Alexander Eastermann, who met with President Eduard Beneš and prime minister Zdeněk Fierlinger on behalf of the World Jewish Congress in December 1945, wrote in a May 1946 report:

¹³² Quoted in Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 47.

¹³³ Oliver, 26.

The long years of Nazi occupation ... have left an aftermath of which anti-Semitism is a principal factor.... There can be no question of the goodwill and good intentions of the President and government of Czechoslovakia, but it must be stated with regret that these assurances have not, as yet, been put into practical effect.¹³⁴

While this general lack of social solidarity was by no means good news, the situation was not hopelessly bleak. The central government did continue to come to their aid; they were not faced with state-sanctioned, institutionalized anti-Semitism. The Jewish Community also enjoyed the support of some prominent Czech intellectuals. *Věstník* regularly featured quotes from other newspapers that showed they were not completely alone in their fight against manifestations of postwar anti-Semitism.¹³⁵ In addition, one group of survivors demonstrated that fairly smooth reintegration was possible: young, left-leaning Czech speakers, many of whom had enjoyed a wide social network of non-Jewish friends before the war. Fully engaged upon their return with making a living, starting families, and in some cases, political activism, this group left few traces in the immediate postwar testimony.¹³⁶

Jewish leaders apparently realized that the only way to generate the social solidarity they so badly needed was to assimilate to these desired characteristics of Czechness and leftness. In *Věstník*, the official voice of the community, they created

¹³⁴ Quoted in Avigdor Dagan, "The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile and the Jews," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, Volume III*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, Gertrude Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of American, 1984), 449-498, 484.

¹³⁵ See, for example, a brief untitled article by Ferdinand Peroutka from *Svobodné noviny*, quoted in *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze 7*, no. 4 (1945): 30.

¹³⁶ In later periods these particular survivors emerged as the dominant voice, since they were the largest group of survivors to remain in Czechoslovakia after 1948. German-speaking and more politically conservative survivors as well as Zionists were much more likely to emigrate.

and circulated narratives that represented Jews as conforming to the new ideals, and tried to discourage anti-Semitism among the Czechs by linking it exclusively with their common enemy, the Nazis. For example, in a December 1945 *Věstník* article, Karel Kučera expressed the hope that the new postwar spirit of social justice would extend to the fight against anti-Semitism:

It is true that the Germans did not succeed in making the Czechs participate in Nazi brutality.... However we cannot help but recognize that that anti-Semitic poison of the Nazis is used today by reactionary factions of the nation against all Czech patriots....¹³⁷

Here Kučera engaged in a particular kind of world-making operation that discourse in the public sphere makes possible. As Michael Warner describes, the difference between the implied public of address and the targeted public of circulation allows a writer not just to address but to shape the public by trying to close the gap between the two.¹³⁸ Kučera, by imagining and addressing an implied public of address—Czech patriots who would agree that anti-Semitism, a pernicious Nazi import, appealed only to the reviled right-wing "reactionary factions of the nation"—then sending his address out to the targeted public of circulation, the actual readers of *Věstník*, attempted to shape those readers into a public that would "cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding" he had articulated in his article.¹³⁹ At the same time, he also supplied other members of the Jewish community with an example of the kind

¹³⁷ Kučera, Karel. "Jak proti antisemitismu." *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 7, no. 4 (1945): 30.

¹³⁸ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), 49-90, 54.

¹³⁹ Warner, 82.

of narratives they themselves could use to fight anti-Semitism and generate solidarity among their fellow Czechs.

In other gestures of belonging, *Věstník* itself was published only in Czech, and in its pages, community leaders encouraged their members to assimilate to Czech-language culture; for example, the December 1945 issue reveals that the Jewish Religious Community was offering instruction in Czech for "Jews with languages other than Czech as their mother tongue."¹⁴⁰ The community's performance of Czechness, however, never extended to overt performances of anti-Germanness. Even though disagreements between Czech assimilants and German-speaking Jews had been intense before the war, solidarity had developed during the six years of shared adversity. The community, even while assimilating itself to Czechness, fought vigorously for the citizenship rights of its German-speaking members.¹⁴¹

Community leaders also tried to combat stereotypes of Jews as members of the bourgeoisie; as Kučera wrote, "Social [motives for anti-Semitism] have today disappeared, for the Nazis have proletarianized the Jews and only reactionaries try to use this motive."¹⁴² At the same time, they appealed to the government for fair restitution laws and proper enforcement. Unfortunately, the slow rate at which cases were resolved meant that most were still in dispute when the Communists came to power in February 1948, at which point their appeals became virtually hopeless.

Six months after the end of the war, in spite of their own efforts and government support, they were still not being treated as "equals among equals." For example, in

¹⁴⁰ "Přehled o schůzích výboru a představenstva Rady," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 7, no. 4 (1945): 29.

¹⁴¹ Frischer, 28.

¹⁴² Kučera, 30.

January 1946, *Věstník* reprinted a notice from the Ministry of the Interior, ordering National Committees and legal commissions to stop using designations of racial origin or religion, i.e. "Aryan and non-Aryan," on official correspondence:

This approach violates the spirit of the democratic basis of equality of all citizens of the liberated state and it is necessary in it to spot the remnants of ideology brought to our land by the fascist occupiers.... Those who were persecuted by Nazi occupiers for religious or racial reasons [have the same rights as] those who were persecuted for political reasons.¹⁴³

The subjective experience of this failure is vividly represented in an article in *Věstník* by Pavel Eisner, a well-known translator and unofficial ambassador between Czech- and German-speaking Prague.¹⁴⁴ In June 1945, in a letter to the Communist Party that was published in their newspaper, *Rudé právo*, he expressed his readiness to embrace and integrate himself into the new order.¹⁴⁵ Just seven months later, at the end of a passionate essay on poet Heinrich Heine as a symbol of the world's unwillingness to accept the Jewish assimulant, he described the carefully concealed but still palpable discrimination against the survivors that no longer appeared to be "simple anti-Semitism" but a kind of "cryptoracism." He concluded:

I say all this as a non-member of the Jewish religious community, as the most radical assimulant, as a Christian by no means only pro-forma I

¹⁴³ "Pravní poradna: Zrušení označování rasového původu v úředním styku." *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 8, no. 1 (1946): 7.

¹⁴⁴ Eisner (1889-1958) was 56 years old in 1945 and was known for his excellent translations of Prague German writers such as Franz Kafka and Max Brod into Czech. A convert to Christianity, Eisner was protected from deportation through his marriage to a non-Jewish woman.

¹⁴⁵ Pavel Eisner, "Slůvko k budoucí práci," *Rudé právo*, June 12, 1945, 3. As he wrote, "You call in *Rudé právo* for the cooperation of all.... I put myself at your disposal Today already an old gray-head, I would gladly speak a word now and then to this beautiful young life."

say all this by no means because I regret the manner in which I have lived. But it is time to affiliate myself with the group [houf] of those whom the world around us, again and again, makes into a group.

Everything has failed and will fail, and never through fault of our own.¹⁴⁶

Signing his article "In the name of all pariahs of the world," Eisner became a frequent and eloquent contributor to *Věstník*. In his view, barriers to the goal of true reintegration, of living as "equals among equals" among their fellow Czechs, had become insuperable.

* * *

Testimony by individual Terezín survivors, however, suggests that not all of them had resigned themselves to pariah status. Their texts display performances of affiliation to the ideals of Czechness or leftness or both, but often through an intermediary object: Czech-language culture, especially theater, in the ghetto. Considering the huge interest in theater after the war and the active debates about its role in society, narratives that emphasized the Czech and leftist features of Terezín theatrical performances constituted a potentially powerful way to effect a role as insiders to these new ideals.

For example, one of the very first accounts of the ghetto to appear anywhere in public discourse was published in *Rudé právo*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, on June 27, 1945. It consisted of four short paragraphs titled simply "Theater in Terezín":

In the period of greatest Nazi oppression, Czech theater was born in

Terezín. Zdeněk Jelínek prepared the first Czech play *Comedy about a*

¹⁴⁶ Eisner, Pavel. "Heine a My." *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 8, no. 2 (1946): 11.

Trap which characterized the Terezín SS regime. Its success was as great as the risk of performance.... Under the direction of Nora Fried the folk play *Ester* was performed. In perfect directorial mastery there emerged Gogol's *The Marriage* under the direction of the late theater artists Gusta Schorsch and architect Fr. Zelenka. It was rehearsed in the period of prohibition of all cultural activities The whole Terezín theatrical troupe tried according to their possibilities to give Terezín a bit of culture. They did it with enjoyment and enthusiasm, ignoring the constant danger in which they were placed.¹⁴⁷

This text constituted a superb performance of affiliation to Czechness and leftness. Only Czech and Russian playwrights were mentioned, and the writer emphasized both the defiant nature of the performances and the Terezín actors' enthusiasm for their role as cultural workers. This brief account described not only a surprising quantity of works performed in the ghetto—in just four paragraphs, eleven plays and one recitation evening were mentioned—but an unexpected degree of agency and pleasure.

The type of pleasure described in this article appears in other narratives from this period as well and serves particular rhetorical ends. As Sarah Ahmed argues, writers embed certain *objects of feeling*—topics that carry a particular emotional charge—in texts that circulate in the public sphere in order to create social effects. As she argues, the emotions associated with these objects "create the very effect of the

¹⁴⁷ "Divadlo v Terezíně," *Rudé právo*, June 27, 1945, 3. Although no author's name, not even initials, appeared with the article, several clues in the text suggest it was written by one or more of the young Czech actors who performed in several of the plays mentioned.

surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place."¹⁴⁸ Both pleasure and fear affect these boundaries; while fear "creates the very effect of the surfaces of bodies" that position the feared object on the outside, pleasure opens up those boundaries and creates a "we" of those who share it.¹⁴⁹ Thus, through the description of pleasure, the author opened the possibility of creating a "we" with a particular type of reader: the reader who shared in that sense of affiliation with Czechness and leftness represented by the specific theatrical performances that the troupe staged in the ghetto.

Considering the nature of the contemporary discourse on theater, the writer could have reasonably expected an enthusiastic public response to this article. Perhaps due to the unique historical role that theatrical performance played in the formation of Czech national identity, postwar discussions on theater carried an especially powerful emotional charge—a charge that helped maintain an active and pluralistic debate about its proper postwar role right up until the Communist rise to power in 1948. Although a call for national unity was one of the most powerful postwar social forces, theater emerged as one of very few fields of discourse where Czechs argued for several equally strong and socially acceptable alternatives. These alternatives separated roughly into two camps: should artists serve a particular party, or should they remain independent and critical voices?

For example, the Communist Party, as might be expected, argued for the former. Their efforts to gain influence over artists, and even to nationalize Czechoslovak

¹⁴⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

¹⁴⁹ Ahmed, 68.

theaters, began very soon after the liberation.¹⁵⁰ For example, a large announcement on the front page of the May 29 issue of *Rudé právo* invited all interested "cultural workers" to attend a "demonstration about cultural politics in the liberated state." Speeches at this demonstration clarified the Communist vision of postwar Czech culture; for example, Communist Minister of Education and Culture Zdeněk Nejedlý emphasized that "culture cannot be without the avant-garde, but there are also so-called avant-gardes which lead away from firm reality. The best avant-garde are the people, the entire nation."¹⁵¹ With such statements the foundations for "socialist realism," the artistic style which had been state policy in the Soviet Union since 1932, were already being established.

Articles reporting on this and similar demonstrations, as well as programmatic articles about the postwar mission of theater and reviews of performances, quickly clarified the major points of the Communist program for theater: the preferred style was socialist realism, engaging directly with the problems of the day, and the socio-political functions of art were far more important than either aesthetics (including avant-garde aesthetics that led too far away from realism) or artistic tradition (especially bourgeois artistic tradition, including entire genres such as operetta). Czechness was to be modeled as Slavic folk ("national and people's") culture, and the Soviet Union offered the ideal cultural model. Leftist artists who returned from exile or from concentration camps after the war, such as E. F. Burian and Voskovec and Werich, were

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, "Divadelníci manifestují za divadelní zákon," *Rudé právo*, October 28, 1945 and Miroslav Kouřil, "Stavíme divadla," *Rudé právo*, November 1, 1945. In this period, when the government had already nationalized the film industry, the Communists made an unsuccessful bid to bring all the theaters in the state, professional and amateur, under the control of Communist minister of education and culture, Zdeněk Nejedlý.

¹⁵¹ "Velká manifestace českých kulturních pracovníků," *Rudé právo*, May 31, 1945.

almost hysterically embraced, while bourgeois dramatists such as Karel Čapek, regardless of anti-fascist credentials, were dismissed as having "little association with today."¹⁵²

Voices supporting a wider range of artistic styles and more diverse notions of the function of art, however, also made themselves heard. For example, in an article from September 1945, young journalist Miloš Vacík emphasized "free expression" to counteract the effects of years during which art was made to serve Nazi propaganda:¹⁵³

Free words and free thoughts open before us a wide new path, which becomes not only a test area, but at the same time an area where we will show all our capabilities, unused and until now hidden from the reach of Nazi attempts at *Gleichschaltung*.¹⁵⁴

Well-known artists and intellectuals reacted decisively when the Communists attempted to narrow this "wide new path." In October 1946 the party announced the creation of the Cultural Community, an organization intended to attract artists from across the political spectrum to "link the fate of world culture with the fate of the working man..." A week later their opponents announced their own organization, the Cultural Union, with a manifesto placing special emphasis on the autonomy of culture.¹⁵⁵ Pressure for postwar unity eventually led to the creation of a joint

¹⁵² Pokorný, J., "Poznámka k dnešní dramaturgii: Co mají hrát divadla," *Rudé právo*, June 6, 1945.

¹⁵³ Vacík was born June 6, 1922, arrested for membership in a resistance group in June 1944, and imprisoned until end of war, probably in the Terezín Small Fortress. An article authored by him includes what appears to be eyewitness testimony to the cultural activities in the Small Fortress. See Miloš Vacík, "Naše kulturní úkoly," *Hlas osvobozených*, July 20, 1945.

¹⁵⁴ Miloš Vacík, "Jak splníme své kulturní úkoly," *Hlas osvobozených*, September 27, 1945. The German word *Gleichschaltung* (literally, synchronization) came to indicate the enforced conformity of thought and behavior under the Nazi regime.

¹⁵⁵ Forty-one "cultural workers" signed the Cultural Community manifesto, while sixty-three supported the Cultural Union. This defeat was not just about numbers; among those sixty-three were many of the

organization, the Cultural Association. While scholars disagree regarding the question of whether one side or the other could legitimately claim victory, the important aspect for the Terezín survivors was the avid public interest in theater and the fact that a wide range of views about it could legitimately be circulated in the public sphere.¹⁵⁶ This increased the chances that a wide range of narratives on the cultural life of the ghetto had a chance to achieve a response.

Another factor that made the publication of testimony appear to be a reasonable strategy for the survivors to reach out to their fellow Czechs and perhaps generate some feelings of solidarity was the high value of testimony itself as a postwar object of feeling. This positive position was largely due to such testimony's association with a high-status postwar group: the returning Czech political prisoners. Journalist Václav Běhounek, in a fall 1947 article surveying Czech "prison literature" [*vězenská literatura*], estimated that over a hundred titles had already been published. Part of this outpouring, as Běhounek recognized, was due to the survivors' personal need to speak. He pointed out how the literature made the political prisoners' experience believable and their testimony credible, not only to themselves and their fellow prisoners who "filled in and confirmed their own experience" but among those who might be inclined to doubt:

These are ... books, about which a reader will say, *no, that is not true*, or: *that cannot be true*, but to that it is necessary ... to add: *it is true!* ...if we read more of such books we will see how the authors, completely

most important Czech artists and intellectuals. Alexej Kusák, *Kultura a politika v Československu, 1945-1956* (Prague: Torst, 1998), 223.

¹⁵⁶ For two detailed accounts of this conflict, see Kusák, 222-225 and Abrams, 222-233 and 289-295. While Kusák calls the entire event a political mistake on the part of the Communists and argues that they were unable to turn the Cultural Association into "their instrument," Abrams argues that the members of the Union allowed the final joint manifesto to conform too closely to Communist rhetoric, thus failing to provide opponents of the Communists with a clear alternative.

independently of each other, confirm consistent barbarity in the same and various camps....¹⁵⁷

However, part of the high status was determined by its political use. In this period the very act of testifying was considered a patriotic performance of Czechness, because it provided ongoing evidence to support a central platform of the Košice program: the expulsion of the ethnic Germans. As President Beneš himself had suggested, knowledge of German crimes would sway international public opinion in favor of the expulsion.¹⁵⁸ Providing the public with that knowledge was a mission the political prisoners took on with great zeal.

Perhaps because credibility was key to both their personal and political goals, the political prisoners established standards for written testimony in the first edition of their postwar weekly newspaper. They advised readers to craft their narratives in a straightforward and factual style with guidelines such as "Write simply and do not forget objective data: where and when the event happened and include the names you know," and "Do not write in an affected way, with flourishes in the manner of bad authors, but write in the way you tell it to your friends or your wife."¹⁵⁹ The book-length works from the ghetto that Běhounek identified in his article as "prisoner literature" tended to follow these guidelines.

Another rhetorical technique used by the political prisoners, however, was one that the Jewish survivors rarely employed: florid emotional appeals based on their suffering to justify almost all of their political demands. For example, a resolution the

¹⁵⁷ Václav Běhounek, "Naše vězeňská literatura," *Kytice* 2, no. 9 (1947), 385-96, 393.

¹⁵⁸ Frommer, 231.

¹⁵⁹ Redakce, "Pište Nám," *Hlas Osvobozených*, July 2, 1945, 4.

Union published in April 1946, when the expulsion was already underway, protested the government's consideration of applications for citizenship by those of "German" nationality.

To our uncompromising stance we link our tens of thousands of brothers and sisters tortured by German bestiality and our promise to them, that their sacrifice [*obet*] will not remain unpunished.¹⁶⁰

The high postwar status of political prisoners as "martyrs for the nation" enabled them to assume such an "uncompromising stance," even though the "Germans" they wanted to expel might have included those who had been persecuted by the Nazis for racial or political reasons. Such demands from the Jewish survivors, justified by their suffering, simply did not appear. Their narratives were focused not on demands for vengeance but on attempts to generate that basic form of recognition: social solidarity.

* * *

These two objects of feeling, postwar testimony and Czech culture, combined in the many published narratives about culture in the concentration camps. The Terezín survivors were by no means alone in circulating such testimony to demonstrate their Czechness and leftness. Although narratives about Czech culture in the camps were virtually absent from *Věstník*, they appeared in two other postwar periodicals circulated by groups that had their own reasons for needing to perform their belonging to the Czechoslovak social body: the Communist Party and the Union.¹⁶¹ Narratives in the periodicals circulated by these groups, *Rudé právo* and *Hlas*, may have provided models

¹⁶⁰ "Odsun Němců do všech důsledků." *Hlas Osvobozených*, April 12, 1946.

¹⁶¹ No articles on the role of art in postwar society appear in *Věstník*; the Jewish Religious Community apparently did not participate in these debates, and they published very few mentions of the cultural life of the ghetto.

for the Terezín survivors, demonstrating how they could bring their own descriptions into alignment with those of other groups that were using culture as a way to align themselves with Czechness and leftness.

Rudé právo was the official organ of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.¹⁶²

The influence of this newspaper's narratives upon the survivor's narratives was practically inevitable since, with a circulation of half a million copies daily, it reached the largest public in Czechoslovakia. The Communist Party also had many members and functionaries of Jewish origin, some of whom held positions at the highest levels. For example, Rudolf Slánský, as general secretary of the central committee, was second in the party only to party chairman Klement Gottwald himself. Even unlikely converts to Communism, as the case of Pavel Eisner demonstrates, appeared from among Jewish ranks, perhaps in part because joining the Communist movement, which was programmatically atheist and overtly opposed to racism, offered a chance to belong to a group where Jewishness apparently carried no stigma.

After the war the Communist Party enjoyed phenomenal growth, and not just from the ranks of its traditional base of industrial laborers; *Rudé právo* reached one of the most socially differentiated readerships of any postwar periodical.¹⁶³ Several scholars and memoirists of the period suggest some of this phenomenal growth may have taken place as wartime collaborators tried to avoid prosecution by throwing

¹⁶² *Rudé právo*, outlawed along with the Party shortly after the Munich Pact, was published underground throughout the war and began to appear daily again after May 9, 1945.

¹⁶³ At the end of World War II, in part because of heavy losses due to their involvement in underground resistance movements, the party had less than 29,000 members. By the end of 1945 it had 800,000 members, less than half of those drawn from the ranks of industrial laborers. Abrams, 57.

themselves behind the Communist cause.¹⁶⁴ However, as Abrams points out, "the sheer size of the party shows that many came to believe in its vision of the nation, its past and its future."¹⁶⁵ One of the most marked aspects of *Rudé právo* was its strong orientation toward that future and its focus, expressed in many articles concerning the political education of adults and youth, on developing "a new Czech and Slovak person"—a mission in which theatrical performance was to play an important role.¹⁶⁶

In the immediate postwar period the Communists faced an urgent problem: if they were going to have a political future, they had to shed their internationalist image. The strength of postwar nationalism made it essential, for the sake of electoral success, that they reinvent themselves as a national, even nationalist, party.¹⁶⁷ Ironically, like the Jews, the party found itself in the position of having to perform its Czechness, and *Rudé právo* was employed as a forum. The slogan, "Proletarians of all nations, unite!" which had appeared prominently on their prewar banner, disappeared for several years.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately the Communists devised a rhetorical strategy that tied Czechness inextricably to leftness, which was in turn inseparable from loyalty to the Soviet Union. But in the crucial early postwar months, they needed a convincing performance of Czech nationalist sentiment.

¹⁶⁴ Frommer, 320; Abrams, 146; Heda Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968* (Cambridge, Mass: Plunkett Lake Press, 1986), 69.

¹⁶⁵ Abrams, 57.

¹⁶⁶ The goal of shaping "a new Czech and Slovak person" was defined as a specifically theatrical one; the theaters of the liberated republic had a mission not only to shape this new person but "to carry him to freedom and to faith in himself." Jan Kopecký, "Organisujme dramaturgii," *Rudé právo*, May 29, 1945. Kopecký (1919-1992) worked as a dramaturg at the Municipal Theater in Kladno, where several young Terezin actors were employed after the war, the Theater of May 5, and the National Theater. In 1950 he started teaching at the theater conservatory in Prague and from 1960 he was a professor and later head of the department of theater history and theory at Charles University. It was through his influence that the 1963 survivor testimony was collected; see Chapter 6.

¹⁶⁷ Abrams, 94.

¹⁶⁸ The slogan reappeared on the banner of the issue for May 1, 1950, after Communist power was firmly consolidated.

The National Theater literally became one of the stages upon which the Communists performed their new role as a national party. For example, in an article called "The First Staging of *Libuše* in the Liberated National Theater" that appeared on May 29, the author waxed poetic about the performance:¹⁶⁹

During last night's celebratory performance of *Libuše* we cried tears of enthusiasm [*nadšení*], springing from the source of our feeling of finally achieved freedom. Nothing else could have been chosen for this occasion but *Libuše*, a work full of national symbolism....¹⁷⁰

The Communists chose brilliantly in terms of both the site and the opera itself as powerful symbols of Czech national identity.¹⁷¹ The author's description of emotion regarding these shared objects of feeling also functioned as a "world-making" strategy, potentially narrowing the gap that might have existed between his implied public of address (the one that, ignoring the party's internationalist past, accepted his Czechness without question) and the actual public of circulation (readers of *Rudé právo* who might express skepticism regarding the Communists' sudden "national turn"). The emotion embedded in the text played an important role in that world-making strategy: the communally-experienced rush of pleasure and relief he described could have opened boundaries by persuading even skeptics to join the Communists and the rest of their fellow Czechs in a joyful performance of affiliation to the homeland.

¹⁶⁹ There are no grammatical markers of gender in the article but I will assume that the author was male; according to Abrams, there were few prominent women in the party.

¹⁷⁰ pš, "První provedení *Libuše* v svobodném Národním divadle," *Rudé právo*, May 29, 1945.

¹⁷¹ Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's opera, an important work from the National Revival period, was peopled by characters from Czech national mythology. The opera culminates in Princess Libuše's prophecy of the future glory of the Czech nation—a passage that was censored during the years of the Nazi occupation.

In keeping with *Rudé právo's* focus on the future, testimony about the Communist political prisoners' wartime experiences did not play a large role in the periodical. However, narratives about certain camps that provided potential models for the new "Czech and Slovak person" began to appear in the summer of 1945. For example Buchenwald, because of the power the political prisoners wielded there, quickly became a center of rhetorical interest.¹⁷² Narratives about Sachsenhausen, where 1,200 Czech students were imprisoned after an anti-fascist demonstration in Prague, also served the party's desire to attract youth to its ranks. On November 18, 1945, several articles appeared to mark the anniversary of the demonstration; one described the surviving students' "almanac of resistance," a collection of essays and poems on their concentration camp experience.¹⁷³ Their narratives were also embodied: shortly thereafter, the students prepared a commemorative performance. In a brief article that appeared in *Rudé právo* a week later, an observer reported on the "remembrance evening" held in Lucerna, one of the largest halls in Prague.¹⁷⁴ Describing how the students "presented their real life in the concentration camp ... where even in those most drastic moments they were not deserted by ... humor," the writer praised them for their jokes about the Gestapo and parodies of the dreaded roll calls for being "not only a joke, whose mission was fighting laughter, but a satirical and political attack...."¹⁷⁵ Interestingly, the author both praised humor for its own sake and

¹⁷² See, for example, Vojtěch Hanzal's description of the political prisoners as fighters. He claimed it would be a mistake to think "the political prisoner stopped living politically, that he became passive, that his spiritual strength was broken. That he considered himself a sufferer, a martyr. The very opposite was true...." Vojtěch Hanzal, "Odboj proti nacistům v koncentračním táboře: Buchenwaldští političtí a vojenští bojovníci," *Rudé právo*, July 11, 1945.

¹⁷³ věk, "Sborník o 17. listopadu," *Rudé právo*, November 18, 1945.

¹⁷⁴ kk., "Ze sachsenhausenských 'luhů a hájů'," *Rudé právo*, November 24, 1945.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

began to conflate it with the function that, once socialist realism became the only acceptable artistic style, became its only proper goal: "fighting laughter."

Hlas osvobozených, the weekly newspaper of the newly established Union of Liberated Political Prisoners, also provided a model of how other groups were using culture as a way to align themselves with Czechness and leftness.¹⁷⁶ Although the Union did have Jewish members, their paper reveals not camaraderie and solidarity between groups who shared quite similar wartime experiences, but a curiously fraught relationship.

Although clearly left-leaning, the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners declared itself "an organization with political goals and missions but not of any one party."¹⁷⁷ Their Czechness was never in doubt, but their narratives, including narratives of culture in the concentration camps, appeared to serve a different sort of reintegration: they tried to communicate what they had experienced during the long years that they had been separated from their fellow Czechs. As Běhounek explained it,

We cannot forget that thousands of our people went through prisons and also died in them, men and women, often without news and without trace ... and here that [prison] literature gave the first glance into that inferno

...¹⁷⁸

In effect, Běhounek described how the political prisoners attempted to write themselves into the Czech collective memory of the war: by circulating narratives

¹⁷⁶ The first issue of *Hlas osvobozených* appeared on July 2, 1945. The organization's full name, used only on solemn occasions, was *Svaz osvobozených politických vězňů a pozůstalých po obětech nacismu* [The Union of Liberated Political Prisoners and Those who Survive the Victims of Nazism].

¹⁷⁷ "Z Programového prohlášení Svazu," *Hlas Osvobozených*, July 2, 1945.

¹⁷⁸ Běhounek, 386.

about their experiences during the six years the community had been divided, they contributed features to be incorporated into the shared narrative of “our war experience.”

Unlike *Rudé právo*, which focused intently on the present and future, *Hlas* served the returning political prisoners' need to tell their stories of the recent past.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, its pages reveal many more narratives that describe cultural activities in the concentration camps.¹⁸⁰ For example, in an article "Culture in Dachau," the author stated his plans to defer the writing about "torture, hanging, killing," necessary to warn future generations about "German depravity," in order to focus on the memory of his fellow prisoners who "with a word, a pen, a drawing, lifted the strength of resistance":

[S]ecretly they organized discussions with lectures, recitations, singing.... It was joyful work. Lectures were given daily, late in the evening about the Soviet Union, social insurance [sociální pojištění], theater, art Those were joyful evenings. We fought a tough but victorious fight with the Nazi horror, which wanted to turn us into animals. And they did not succeed.... We know that similar work took place in Buchenwald and other places. And it would be good if the documents of our "concentration camp culture" were collected and published.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ In the first issue the editorial board expressed this goal: "We founded and publish *Hlas osvobozených* because thousands, tens of thousands need it, who had to be silent for years, who suppressed their built-up feelings, thoughts and words ... and who only silently clenched their teeth and fists." v.d., "Náš časopis," *Hlas Osvobozených*, July 2, 1945.

¹⁸⁰ For an account of Czech political prisoners' theatrical activity in the concentration camps, see Bořivoj Srba, "Divadlo za mřížemi: Projevy české divadelní tvořivosti v pracovních, internačních a koncentračních táborech a věznicích nacistické Třetí říše," *Divadelní Revue* no. 1 (1995): 9-23.

¹⁸¹ j1, "Kultura v Dachově," *Hlas Osvobozených*, July 27, 1945.

Less than six months after the Dachau article appeared, the writers' call to "collect and publish" artifacts from concentration camp culture was heeded: the *Buchenwald Songbook* was published. A January 1946 article in *Hlas* praised the lyrics as "ethically grounded and politically clear" and praised all the Czech prisoners:

who were perhaps not drawn by a longing to undermine the power structure of the camp command, because for that they would have had to have at their disposal slightly different means than those that were at hand, but were drawn by the natural longing — to live, at least a little bit, in a human way.¹⁸²

These narratives from *Hlas* about culture in the concentration camps share many features with the articles in *Rudé právo* about the *Sachsenhausen Almanac* and especially about Terezín theater: the motifs of risk, of solidarity, of humanism in the face of conditions that would otherwise turn the prisoners into animals, of aesthetic quality and political significance, of devotion to specifically Czech and leftist artistic styles and cultural forms. However, the reception of these narratives varied greatly: while the Sachsenhausen students performed their works, judging by the size of the hall, to a large audience, and the *Buchenwald Songbook* was published to critical acclaim, the article on Terezín theater received no response.

A later attempt in the pages of *Rudé právo* failed as well. In a February 10, 1946 article, titled simply "Pepek Taussig," the author provided ample material to create a story of heroism and resistance, describing Taussig's ready smile, sense of humor with

¹⁸² MV, "Buchenwaldský zpěvník," *Hlas Osvobozených*, January 18, 1946.

which he "medicated Terezín hunger, suffering and misery," and love of working with youth, to whom he gave the "basic lessons" about socialism:

He was a strict critic of all Terezín petty bourgeois smallness, lack of solidarity among the prisoners, all cheating. He wrote many talks and sketches about Terezín life ... These tales and materials were preserved.... They deserve to be published.¹⁸³

Unlike the *Buchenwald Songbook* and the *Sachsenhausen Almanac*, Taussig's notes were not published until after 1989.¹⁸⁴

These accounts of the Terezín cultural life matched perfectly in style and content with narratives from other camps that had received an enthusiastic response, yet they did not circulate further. Readers were apparently not prepared to confirm the experience of the Terezín artists by publicly affirming their role as "bearers of Czech culture." One reason may have been that both the Communists and the political prisoners had other notions regarding what the narrative of the ghetto should be.

Just a few months after the end of the war, a clear "master narrative" of Terezín began to emerge in the pages of *Rudé právo*, one that gave the ghetto a specific role to play in postwar discourse. On July 13, 1945, journalist Václav Jirů published a long back-page article, illustrated with photos; the large headline "Death camp as a spa town" was followed by the smaller header "How the Nazis represented the murderous

¹⁸³ R., "Pepek Taussig," *Rudé právo*, March 10, 1946.

¹⁸⁴ Josef Taussig, "O terezínských kabaretech," in *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2001*, ed. Miroslav Kárný, Jaroslava Mílová, Eva Lorencová (Prague: Academia, 2001) 310-346.

fortress of Terezín. Concentration camp for film. The vicious face of Goebbels' propaganda."¹⁸⁵

Jirů began the article with a long paragraph about his own six years of wartime suffering, which had started with a trip to Terezín—but to the Small Fortress, as a political prisoner. He then passed control of the narrative to Dr. Hájek, a survivor of the ghetto.¹⁸⁶ Hajek pointed out features of the town that had been prepared for a visit of the International Red Cross Commission in June 1944.¹⁸⁷ As he explained, "these benches, the repaired park, paths and music pavilion are completely new ... actually a *potemkiniada*, a swindle and deception, in which the Germans were such masters."¹⁸⁸ He described how prisoners were forced to assist with the preparations and to "perform" the version of daily life the Nazis wanted the commission to see on the day of the visit and for a propaganda film that was made in the ghetto. The cultural life was represented in the article by a large photo labeled "View of the Terezín square with 'music pavilion.'"

Hajek's account is historically accurate, but missing from it is everything that transpired in the ghetto that was unrelated to the visit of the commission, including all the activities described in the June article on Terezín theater. Both narratives clearly have their blank spots; why did *Rudé právo* select the *potemkiniada* narrative as the identity of the ghetto? Whereas brave and resistant cultural activities were to be found

¹⁸⁵ Václav Jirů, "Tábor smrti jako lázeňské město," *Rudé právo*, July 13, 1945.

¹⁸⁶ The prisoner database of the Institute of the Terezín Initiative indicates that, of the seven prisoners named Hájek to survive the ghetto, one was a physician: Hájek František MUDr., born March 27, 1907.

¹⁸⁷ See the historical introduction in Chapter 1 for additional details.

¹⁸⁸ The notion of the "Potemkin village," meaning a false front, supposedly originated when, in 1787, Marshall Grigori Potemkin established fake settlements in the Crimea to impress Empress Catherine II during her visit in 1787. The Czech suffix *-iada* indicates an event related to the associated noun; for example, the *Heydrichiada* refers to the assassination of SS officer Richard Heydrich.

in testimony from several camps, Terezín offered a unique narrative of German deceptiveness that supported Communist arguments for expelling the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. Published just weeks before the Allies finally approved this massive population transfer, the article could have been used to brand as "deceptive tactics" any German efforts to talk the Allies out of something the Czechs saw as an essential step.

The timing of further *Rudé právo* articles about Terezín supports this theory. The next, which described Nazi intentions to "create a 'model ghetto' as an alibi in their Jewish politics," appeared during the politically sensitive period shortly after agreement for the transfer had been granted but before it had begun.¹⁸⁹ Another *potemkiniada* narrative about Terezín, along with other articles about German wartime cruelty, appeared in December 1945, as preparations began in earnest for the "organized transfer" of the Czechoslovak ethnic Germans starting in January 1946. Most of this lengthy first-person account, written by a sixteen-year-old girl, Helga Weissová, was devoted to the by-now-familiar narrative of Nazi deception:

On the square a band played, the park and coffee house were full of people ... they danced until dawn in black suits and evening dresses, specially lent for this occasion. People were commanded to do all of this, and woe to anyone who would have dared to say that they would not come.¹⁹⁰

Such a narrative, which emphasized not only Nazi deceitfulness but their brutal treatment even of children, could have helped the Communists in their fight to expel the

¹⁸⁹ "Terezín, přestupní stanice smrti," *Rudé právo*, September 12, 1945.

¹⁹⁰ Helga Weissová, "Dvanáctiletá za ostnatým drátem," *Rudé právo*, December 21, 1945.

ethnic Germans by stirring up Czech outrage at a time when some might have begun to pity them.

Rudé právo did not attempt to suppress articles on the cultural life of the ghetto, but their interests clearly lay elsewhere, in more politically advantageous uses of the Terezín narrative. The political prisoners, who wrote so enthusiastically in the pages of *Hlas* about the cultural life of other camps, also failed to engage with testimony about theater in the ghetto; their attention was focused on a different Terezín. The writers for *Hlas* claimed the Jews' suffering and their cultural achievements as their own, by concealing the ghetto, and thus the prisoners' Jewishness, behind another site with the same name: the Terezín Small Fortress, on the other side of the river Ohře, where political prisoners had been interned.

For example, just weeks after *Hlas* started publishing in July of 1945, announcements and reviews of various exhibits of prisoner art began to appear. One of them was for an exhibit of drawings by surviving artist Lev Haas, who actually was imprisoned briefly in the Small Fortress but created almost all of his works in and about the ghetto.¹⁹¹ In a review the works are described as being "from Terezín" and portraying the horrors of "a concentration camp," but the only clue to the actual origins of the drawings is the title of one work: "Ghetto." In an announcement in December 1945 for an exhibit of pictures by Bedřich Fritta that were preserved by being "buried in Terezín by his friends," praised for their value as "artistic testimony about the horrors of

¹⁹¹ Alice Rothová, "K výstavě Leva Haase," *Hlas Osvobozených*, August 18, 1945. It is unlikely that Haas himself intended to hide his own Jewishness, since he illustrated several of his fellow Terezín survivors' books.

Terezín and the brutality of Nazism and fascism," there is no mention of the ghetto at all.¹⁹²

But by far the most egregious example of Terezín's disappearance is a review on January 18, 1946 of the book *Gas, Gas then Fire* by František R. Kraus.¹⁹³ While praising the book as an excellent work of postwar reportage, the author neglected to mention that the narrative, and Kraus's path through the concentration camps, began in the Terezín ghetto. This was by no means lost on the editors of *Věstník*, who had published a review a month earlier. With the title, "The First Book about our Suffering," author Rodek clearly expressed the community's feelings of ownership regarding this story. Unlike the *Hlas* reviewer, he described Kraus's full path after his arrest: "He goes ... through Pankrac and Terezín, lives for a long time in the ghetto... is sent to Auschwitz, works in Gleiwitz"¹⁹⁴ Rodek called the book "the first work illuminating the horrible suffering of our Jewish co-religionists," yet it is exactly the Jewish aspect that was erased from *Hlas*. The political prisoners avidly claimed Kraus's suffering but assimilated him to their own story, disappearing his Jewishness.

Why was the ghetto erased from these narratives? If, in the immediate postwar period, suffering was one of the most potent forms of political capital, why not openly discuss the enormous suffering of their Jewish members to strengthen their claims? One reason may have been postwar anti-Semitism and an accompanying desire to disassociate themselves from their stigmatized Jewish fellow returnees. Questions

¹⁹² vd, "Výstava malíře Bedřicha Fritty," *Hlas Osvobozených*, December 6, 1945. Fritta's real name was Bedřich "Fritz" Taussig.

¹⁹³ "Plyn, plyn ... pak oheň," *Hlas Osvobozených*, January 18, 1946.

¹⁹⁴ R. Rodek, "První knížka o našem utrpení," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 7, no. 4 (1945): 31.

about Jewish membership in an organization for "political prisoners," although apparently always resolved in the Jews' favor, were raised from time to time.¹⁹⁵

Another may be the fact that, regardless of the Ministry of the Interior's defense of equal rights for all concentration camp returnees, all parties involved recognized that there was a difference between political and racial persecution.¹⁹⁶ Members of the Union may have feared that the value of their suffering as political capital might decrease if that suffering were associated with victimhood rather than martyrdom. That is, their suffering as martyrs for the nation—emphasized in numerous references to the camps as their "Calvary"—entitled them to the nation's gratitude, which translated into various political and social benefits. Suffering as helpless victims—not targeted for their resistance, but simply for their racial status—had less power to support their claims to postwar leadership and other advantages. Thus it may have served the political prisoners to co-opt Jewish narratives that increased their apparent suffering, but only if those narratives could be presented as political rather than racial persecution.

Somewhat of a turning of the tide occurred when one of their own took them to task. In October 1946, Union member Dr. Jan Černoš published a long article entitled "On Anti-Semitism." In this text, couched in appropriately leftist terms, Černoš defended the Jews against discrimination caused by, or excused by, accusations of German or bourgeois affiliation, and stated that antifascist education, which included

¹⁹⁵ For example, an article describing a meeting of the Union mentioned that "Representative Vodička rejected the opinion that persons persecuted for racial reasons should not be accepted into the Union." "Osvobozené vězňové v prvních řadách budovatelů republiky," *Zemědělské noviny*, May 4, 1947.

¹⁹⁶ Pavel Eisner stated this quite bluntly: "... a victim of a concentration camp *is not* a political martyr [*mučedník*], not a political repatriant." Eisner, "Heine," 11.

education about anti-Semitism, "will also be the backbone of the political education of members of the Union."¹⁹⁷

Thereafter, specific mentions of the ghetto appeared in *Hlas*. For example, in November 1946, an exhibit of Terezín artist Otto Ungar's work was identified as being from the ghetto, and in December 1946, a brief review mentioned the success of survivor Mirko Tůmu's book, *Ghetto of our Days*.¹⁹⁸ From this point on, although the practice of removing the Jewishness from Jewish narratives never completely stopped, the ghetto itself was granted an identity as a site separate from the Small Fortress. No articles, however, were published about theater in the ghetto; in the pages of *Hlas*, the Terezín survivors were not allowed to share in the political prisoners' narratives of "joyful evenings" of lectures and performances in the camps.

The narrative strategies employed by *Rudé právo* and *Hlas*—that is, intense focus on the *potemkiniada* narrative or outright disappearance of the ghetto as a separate site—could be criticized, from the point of view of twenty-first century scholarship, on several counts, including the historiographic erasure of the prisoners' agency in the ghetto. However, for the survivors themselves in this period, the most problematic aspect of these strategies was the pressure they exerted to limit their own agency in the *present*. That is, in a period when boundaries were being drawn around the social body that threatened to leave them on the outside, *Rudé právo* and *Hlas* were showing them acceptable narratives—or acceptable silences—that would perhaps earn them insider status. However, conforming to those narratives would mean renouncing a degree of postwar agency: they would have to abandon the opportunity to create their

¹⁹⁷ Jan Černoch, "K antisemitismu," *Hlas Osvobozených*, October 25, 1946.

¹⁹⁸ A Pol - mv, "Další vězenské knihy za hranice," *Hlas Osvobozených*, December 20, 1946.

own meaning by describing the significance of the cultural life as they had experienced it.

* * *

Terezín survivors who created and circulated their own narratives about the cultural life of the ghetto faced a discursive field in which the stakes were exceptionally high. Since, as I have argued, most of the barriers to their reintegration were social rather than legal, there was intense pressure on their narratives to perform some of the labor of overcoming those barriers. Narrative affiliation with valued postwar "objects of feeling," such as "Czechness" and "leftness," could potentially engender feelings of solidarity among non-Jewish Czechs toward the Jews, which could translate into more concrete gestures—for example, by easing some of the "legal" harassment regarding their citizenship and property restitution.

Their own experience of the cultural life in the ghetto served as a topic for narratives that would affiliate them with Czechness and leftness, as well as the high-status object of Czech-language culture itself. The "insider" status associated with each of these topics, if their narratives translated into social solidarity on the part of non-Jewish Czechs, could effect a better subject position for the survivors. The topic also gave them an opportunity to talk of something they, like the political prisoners, appeared to take pride in: their agency in the cultural sphere. Although a few survivors were willing to provide the narrative of "cultural life as Nazi exploitation" that served the Communist Party's purposes and denied the prisoners' agency, the *potemkiniada* narrative did not play a prominent role in survivor testimony outside the pages of *Rudé právo*, or even in all the testimony inside its pages.

In the following two chapters I examine ways in which different groups of survivors negotiated these various pressures and influences. In all five examples of testimony I argue that the survivors crafted narratives as agents, choosing to submit to certain social pressures and resisting others, eliding memories that would have violated postwar conditions of membership in the Czechoslovak social body but protecting a particular core of memories in spite of pressure not to speak of them: those memories related to their role as active agents in the cultural life, pursuing goals and interests unrelated to the conditions of deprivation and Nazi domination in which they were forced to live.

Chapter 3

"It made me happy:" Testimony by Elderly Survivors, 1945-48

Postwar journalist Vacláv Běhounek, in his 1947 survey of "prison literature" by survivors of the various concentration camps and political prisons, listed five book-length works about the ghetto.¹⁹⁹ Three of them were written by survivors over 60 years of age at the time of the liberation: translator Anna Auředníčková, Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder, and Professor Emil Utitz. All three wrote their manuscripts in the period before the citizenship laws were definitively established, when the pressure to perform Czechness was at its height.²⁰⁰ In addition, all three faced certain problems that were more likely to affect them than the younger survivors. For one, members of this generation, born between 1873 and 1883, were much more likely to be German speakers and to have selected German nationality on the 1930 census, and were therefore more likely to face problems such as discrimination and legal complications with their citizenship.²⁰¹ They were also less likely to fit the rapidly emerging political ideal of revolutionary leftness. Therefore, each would have been served by testimony that effected the kind of social solidarity that might help them overcome legal, social

¹⁹⁹ Vacláv Běhounek, "Naše vězenská literatura," *Kytice* 2, no. 9 (1947): 385-96. The works Běhounek mentioned were *Psychology of Life in the Terezín Concentration Camp* by Professor Emil Utitz, *Ghetto of our Days* by Mirko Tůma, *Three Years in Terezín* by Anna Auředníčková, *Terezín Torso* by Irma Semecká, and *A Jewish Tragedy: The Last Act* by Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder.

²⁰⁰ In September 1946, the Ministry of the Interior issued an order that clarified the position of "people of Jewish origin" regarding their citizenship. Until this point, Czechoslovak Jews who had selected "German" or "Jewish" rather than "Czech" or "Slovak" nationality in the 1930 census had encountered various difficulties in confirming their citizenship status, which in the worst-case scenario could have resulted in deportation.

²⁰¹ Auředníčková and Utitz were both from Prague, and as school enrollment patterns in this generation reveal, the Prague Jews still placed high value on a German cultural affiliation. Even in 1910, almost 90 percent of Jewish children were enrolled in German-language schools. Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 224.

and even professional barriers. Such a performative would have facilitated their postwar reintegration into the society to which, as their testimony reveals, they felt they belonged.

In the style and content of their testimony, they each struck a balance between conforming to standards that had been set by other narratives circulating in public discourse, thus potentially improving their own subject position, and diverging from those models in order to preserve meaning that was apparently important to their own subjectivity. For example, they clearly conformed to, or attempted to conform to, the style of prison literature that had been established quickly after the war. This style required authors to adopt a relatively objective first-person voice that narrated the events they had experienced in a journalistic [*reportážní*] style.²⁰² All three Terezín authors conformed to this voice, yet in the final pages of the narratives by Auředníčková and Feder, whose literary habits developed in the prewar period did not match this objective voice as well as Utitz's, the authors reverted to those previously developed styles — styles which they had maintained during their imprisonment in Terezín.

All three engaged with the same objects of affect that had been established as valuable in the postwar periodicals. They performed their own affiliation with Czechness/leftness as national/political ideals and with Czech culture, especially theater, and elided certain features from their narrative that were fundamentally incompatible with belonging to the postwar social body, such as love of German-language culture. That is, these authors did not create works intended only for their own

²⁰² See Chapter 2 for more information on specific guidelines published by *Hlas*.

group and assumed to be unacceptable or of no interest to a wider public; they crafted their narratives with the larger non-Jewish Czech public in mind. In addition to Czechness, leftness and Czech culture, they also engaged with other topics that I will examine briefly in order to show a fuller range of the integrative strategies in their narratives. However, affiliation with Czech culture, for a variety of reasons, plays a prominent role in all three, and in a way specific to this generation.

For example, the range of political subject positions the older survivors could credibly represent in their narratives was more limited. Coming of age in a much different era, they were less likely than the younger survivors to be able or even interested in conforming to a revolutionary socialist ideal. A profoundly affective loyalty to Czechness, however, was something they could believably represent, especially through their love of Czech culture. Not surprisingly given their linguistic affiliations, some of their most emotional passages described not Czech-language theater but specifically Czech musical performances. Operas such as Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* [*Prodaná nevěsta*], for example, were objects of intense feeling shared with non-Jewish Czechs and thus an effective topic to draw upon in attempting to effect a sense of solidarity.

Descriptions of their affiliation with Czech culture also provided an opportunity to talk about their agency within the cultural sphere: agency in terms of the ability to pursue their own desires and engage in their own interests, to employ the talents and skills that they enjoyed using and were appreciated by their fellow prisoners, which provided them with a subjective experience of temporary escape from Nazi domination. By representing their engagement with Czech culture as a choice, rather than, as in the

preferred Communist narrative, something they had been forced to do to serve Nazi interests, they demonstrated that their affiliation was the result of love and loyalty rather than fear of punishment.

However, this narrative of agency in the ghetto may have served another, more surprising purpose. In a postwar era when social and political conditions had drastically reduced these survivors' ability to pursue their own desires and engage in their own interests, it may have served as what Deleuze and Guattari call a refrain: a familiar sound functioning as a "rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing center in the heart of chaos."²⁰³ Each survivor faced his or her own version of chaos. The prewar bilingual Czech-German social environment in which Auředníčková had thrived and had continued to enjoy in the ghetto was gone. Feder's Jewish congregation, which he had continued to serve actively in Terezín, as well as his own family, had been decimated. Utitz's forum for his lectures, which he had continued to deliver to a interested audience in the ghetto, the German University in Prague, had been closed. Thus their testimony about agency in the cultural sphere did more than enhance their subjectivity by asserting, in spite of outside pressure, the meaning they themselves assigned to their past experience. They may also have used these narratives as a base to try to create a sense of stability from which they could venture out into the uncertain postwar present.

Anna Auředníčková (born 1873, age 70 at deportation, died 1957) moved mostly in German-speaking circles but was fluent in both languages. She was a well-known

²⁰³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "1837: Of the Refrain," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 310-350, 311.

translator of Czech literature into German, popularizing numerous Czech authors, including Karel Čapek, for German-language readers. Auředníčková, a widow, was deported to Terezín alone on August 3, 1942; Nazi racial laws apparently did not apply to her daughter, whom she mentions frequently in her narrative as remaining in Prague.

Her book, Three Years in Terezín, was one of the earliest accounts of the ghetto. It was published (in Czech) in 1945, as the first book in the edition "Aktuality a Dokumenty" [Current Affairs and Documents] by publisher Alois Hynek. In her 115-page narrative she devotes approximately fifty pages (7-56) to a roughly chronological account from her deportation to the liberation, and an additional almost sixty pages (57-115) to short chapters describing specific aspects of life in the ghetto. The book featured illustrations by Lev Haas, the popular political cartoonist from Hlas osvobozených and fellow survivor of Terezín.²⁰⁴

Auředníčková, writing in the immediately postwar period when the fate of Jews of "German" nationality was most uncertain, belonged to the group of survivors who most urgently needed to demonstrate their affiliation to Czechness: those with a known relationship to German-language culture. Back in Prague, facing the radical devaluation of her prewar cultural affiliations and perhaps manifestations of anti-Semitism as well, she attempted to construct a viable postwar subject position by emphasizing her affiliation with Czech-language culture in the ghetto—a performance that could have shaped the public of her readers into a group that would accept her as a fellow Czech.

²⁰⁴ Haas, whose postwar work was mentioned in the previous chapter, and several other artists were arrested in the Terezín "affair of the painters" when their drawings depicting harsh conditions in the ghetto were discovered. They were transferred to the Terezín Small Fortress in July 1944 and deported on October 3, 1944 to Auschwitz.

The text on the book jacket, as a narrative strategically intended to appeal to the potential reader/buyer, framed her narrative in terms that fit neatly into postwar discourse:

Auředníčková, famous as promoter of Czech literature abroad, has translated more than seventy Czech writers.... She relates without exaggeration ... the Terezín hell: suffering, hunger, fear of transports, of death, horror of abuse and torture and hope in a happy ending and better future. The story is remarkable for the underground movement, in which the author carried on with the promotional work for Czech culture, as she was employed her whole life.²⁰⁵

The reader expecting a description of "hell" might have been surprised by her chapters titled "Sport in Terezín," "People Who Interested Me," and "Small Joys in Terezín"; those accustomed to political prisoners' accounts may have found it difficult to classify an extensive and apparently openly conducted public lecture series as an "underground movement." Her narrative diverged from the "received" narrative on the book jacket, reshaping two objects of affect: the ghetto itself, and the forms that resistance, i.e. an "underground movement," could take. Her intense performance of affiliation with Czech culture, however, corresponded with forms already familiar from the discourse in contemporary periodicals.

Her performance of belonging began with the first sentence of the book, when she immediately renounced any aspirations to special status based on her suffering. She identified Terezín as a concentration camp, but called it "mild ... in comparison with so

²⁰⁵ Anna Auředníčková, *Tri Léta v Terezíne* (Prague: Alois Hynek, 1945), book jacket.

many other places where there was no hope of return, where only death meant freedom from torture," thus claiming no special status based on extremity of suffering.²⁰⁶ She placed herself as one of a group of fellow sufferers just a few lines later, when she described the moment her transport order was delivered: "Just its [the doorbell's] ringing meant fear—fear was the keyword of that terrible period. The Germans wanted to strike terror in all whom they oppressed. I was afraid, like millions of others during those years."²⁰⁷ Thus she emphasized not the specificity of Jewish deportations but the fear shared by all Czechs during the Nazi occupation, creating a "we" by positioning herself with her readers, in solidarity with non-Jewish readers.

Indeed, the collective narrative Auředníčková created was clearly about the "we" of "we Czechs" rather than "we Jews." Her rhetorical performance of belonging to Czechness saturated the narrative from its smallest details (for example, frequent use of personal pronouns and possessives such as "we Czechs" and "our excellent artists") to its broadest themes (the Czech cultural life of the ghetto and her dedication to Czechoslovak presidents Masaryk and Beneš).

Throughout the book she occasionally gestured toward a leftist stance or at least a commitment to social justice, although these gestures often seemed to be based on on prewar bourgeois notions of philanthropy. For example she related that, when a fellow prisoner suggested she should be classified as a "prominent," which would have given her access to better housing and increased rations, she answered that she would not accept such a special position: "I was always socially oriented, and in Terezín I wanted

²⁰⁶ Auředníčková, 7.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

only to serve the poor and try to distract the sick and blind."²⁰⁸ Her unmistakably bourgeois prewar past, a past she described in great detail in her narrative, provided her with limited room to maneuver in terms of refashioning herself as a socialist.

However, there was one valid non-socialist option still remaining to postwar Czechs. Although she never overtly stated a political affiliation, she did provide enough information for readers to assume she may have been associated with the People's [Catholic] party. Although, as Rabbi Feder points out in his own testimony, "We [Jews] belonged to all political parties except for the People's Party," this option was open to Auředníčková.²⁰⁹ As she revealed several pages into her narrative, she was a baptized and practicing Catholic who participated in the religious life of Christians in the ghetto.²¹⁰

By establishing herself as a Catholic, she not only removed another potential barrier to "otherness" between herself and non-Jewish Czechoslovaks, most of whom were at least nominally members of the Catholic church (73.5 percent had registered as Catholics in the 1930 census), but provided a reason why, unlike the other authors of Terezín testimony, she expressed no opinion about Jewish identity or about anti-Semitism. The paradoxical narrative situation she created—the events she described, as her readers well knew, were determined by her Nazi-imposed status as a Jew, yet she herself never mentioned any relationship to this imposed identity—functioned as a world-making strategy by performing an option for her readers: that they could take

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁰⁹ Richard Feder, *Židovská tragedie: dějství poslední* (Kolín: Lusk, 1947), 9.

²¹⁰ Auředníčková 35. For a description of Christian religious practices in the ghetto see, for example, Jana Leichsenring, "Die Katholische Gemeinde in Theresienstadt und Die Berliner Katholiken," in *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 2004*, ed. Jaroslava Milotová, Michael Wögerbauer and Anna Hájková, 178-222.

interest in her story and circulate it further as a part of the shared narrative of the Czechs' wartime past, while regarding her Jewishness-by-race as irrelevant.

Auředníčková made no attempt to conform to the "model ghetto" narrative that identified Terezín mainly as an instrument of Nazi propaganda. She herself devoted only a few mentions and two pages to a description of the preparations and the visit of the International Red Cross commission itself.²¹¹ In her narrative, the cultural life of the ghetto was identified not with the objectification of the Jews through forced performances for the visitors, but as the key to a tremendously rewarding restoration of her own subjectivity in the ghetto. Auředníčková arrived during a period when the ghetto's resources were strained to the breaking point: in the summer and fall of 1942, thousands of elderly Jews from Germany and Austria were deported to Terezín, the mortality rate skyrocketed, and the Jewish leadership focused intently on saving the youth. She described the first weeks of hunger and loneliness in Terezín as an experience that brought her to the brink of suicide. Trying to find a way to occupy herself in some useful work, she volunteered to darn stockings for the nurses in a Terezín clinic, and this work led to a radical change of status for her. Among the nurses was a woman named Marta whom she greatly admired, a "lady in the true sense of the word." As Auředníčková describes it, "That delicate lady recognized that I was ... suffering ... and one day, when work was done, she asked me to tell her something about my life. Gladly I fulfilled her wish."²¹² That conversation led to a casual invitation to speak to a group of Terezín nurses about her literary work, and her

²¹¹ Auředníčková, 31-32.

²¹² Ibid., 24.

activities subsequently broadened to include talks for adults as well as educational programs for children and youth.²¹³

Although, through her prewar translation activities, she had long been an ambassador of Czech culture to the non-Czech-speaking world, her lectures represented a new field of activity. Before the war she had declined invitations to speak, but in the ghetto she overcame her nervousness: "now in Terezín, like a miracle, I fluently and gladly spoke for hours, without fear, and entertained to my joy hundreds and hundreds of poor souls..."²¹⁴ Records preserved in the Terezín Memorial support her claim that "in all I entertained listeners 348 times."²¹⁵

Auředníčková wrote of her affiliation to Czech culture not only as a performer but as an audience member. She did not write about Terezín theater specifically, explaining that, although she would have liked to attend the operas *The Bartered Bride* [*Prodaná nevěsta*] and *The Kiss* [*Hubička*], both works of deep national significance for Czechs, she was afraid that, because her father had been on the board of the Czech National Theater, "my strong memories would be too overwhelming; in Prague during the whole time of German terror I was not allowed to go to the theater."²¹⁶ She was, however, aware of theatrical works being staged in the ghetto, and implied their

²¹³ Ibid., 25.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 35. A preserved list of fifty of her lecture titles includes "A Review of Czech Literature," "Czech Poets," and "Reading Czech Novels." Elena Makarova, Sergei Makarov, and Victor Kuperman, eds., *University over the Abyss: The Story behind 520 Lecturers and 2,430 Lectures in KZ Theresienstadt 1942-1944*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Verba Publishers, 2004), 432.

²¹⁶ Auředníčková, 40. As she specified, her father was a member of the *Staročeské družstvo* [Old Czech Society] that had administered the Czech National Theater from its founding until 1900. In an episode that demonstrates the long-established connection between Czech theater and politics, the Old Czech Society, associated with the Old Czech Party, was replaced in 1900 due to the rising political fortunes of another party, the *Národní strana svobodomyslná* [National Party of Freethinkers] whose members were known as the *Mladočeši* [Young Czechs] by a new administrative body under their control, the *Společnost Národního divadla* [Society of the National Theater].

resistant nature by mentioning that the Nazis tolerated performances of plays by Karel Čapek, author of two of the best-known anti-fascist plays of the late 1930s, only because "they did not know the meaning" of his works.²¹⁷ Some of her most vivid descriptions were devoted to the experience of hearing Czech music in the ghetto. While acknowledging that the Czech cultural life was not the only national cultural life in the ghetto, she performed her own affiliation clearly:

I heard beautiful concerts, evenings of chamber music, which were truly a pleasure. Those good musicians were for the greater part my [Czech] countrymen. It was a holiday when, for an over-full hall, they played Dvořák, Smetana; works of composers of other nationalities were however played as well. But when some Dvořák quartet or Smetana's "From my Life" sounded, we, the Czechs, were ecstatic.²¹⁸ If Ančerl conducted Czech compositions, the audience was glad; it was not only a pleasure for our hearing but our spirits quivered at the sound, full of longing and love for the beloved homeland.²¹⁹

The emotional intensity of this paragraph recalls a rhetorical performance we have already witnessed—the *Rudé právo* journalist who described his experience of seeing the first postwar performance of the Czech opera *Libuše*—on behalf of another group that urgently needed to perform its postwar affiliation to Czechness: the Communist Party. Her narrative shares many of the same strategic features: she placed herself in the audience among "we, the Czechs," and invited readers to share in the

²¹⁷ Auředníčková, 39. His plays *The White Plague* [*Bílá nemoc*] (1937) and *The Mother* [*Matka*] (1938) were both staged at the National Theater in Prague.

²¹⁸ *Z mého života* is the name of Smetana's String Quartet No. 1 in E minor.

²¹⁹ Auředníčková, 36.

pleasure that the titles of these works, well-known objects of feeling for the Czechs, evoked, as well as in national pride in Karel Ančerl, a conductor for Czechoslovak Radio and, earlier, for the beloved prewar Liberated Theater of Voskovec and Werich. Recalling Ahmed's arguments on the rhetorical effects of emotion, the affect of her performance—pleasure to the point of ecstasy—had the potential to open boundaries, as with *Libuše*, and invite the readers' spirits to vibrate in sympathy with the prisoners', to share in a moment of *communitas* inspired by their common love for "the beloved homeland."

Her passionately performed devotion to Czech culture, however, did not come without a personal cost: in her narrative, she was silent about her equally passionate devotion to German-language culture. Although she did mention attending German-language lectures by speakers such as Rabbi Leo Baeck and Professor Emil Utitz, tailoring her descriptions to demonstrate how their talks would appeal specifically to Czechs, she did not mention her participation in other aspects of the ghetto's German-language cultural life. Other sources suggest just how much that involvement meant to her. For example, her fellow prisoner Philipp Manes, an active organizer of German-language culture in the ghetto and Auředníčková's contemporary, described in his diary a successful staged reading of Goethe's *Faust*, part II, in July of 1944.²²⁰ Reporting that the audience was struck by "beauty of the language" and "deeply gripping final scenes," he reproduced, with great pride, the text of a letter from a spectator, Auředníčková herself:

²²⁰ Manes was born in 1875, deported to the ghetto from Berlin in July 1942 and perished after his deportation from Terezin to Auschwitz on October 28, 1944.

The Faust evening was, for me and the whole circle of my friends, a great pleasure.... The wonderful words of Goethe are always an experience ... even the unbearable heat could not dampen my enthusiasm. I thank you ... that you devote yourself to such performances, that with such humble means you bring the listeners into another world²²¹

In his own estimation, "When one of the most important women in the Czech lands, who has lived in [the realm of] art for fifty years, speaks in this way, I am allowed to be a little bit proud of my work...."²²² Thus while Manes confirmed the important prewar subject position that Auředníčková described in her own narrative, he simultaneously provided a counter-narrative to hers: in postwar Prague, she apparently did not feel it suitable to reveal that she had had a circle of German-speaking friends with whom she also shared feelings of solidarity and pleasure and that her attachment to German-language art, which inspired similar emotional reactions of transport "into another world," was as strong and authentic as her connection to Czech-language culture. Instead, she represented German language only as a useful conduit for transmitting Czech culture to non-Czech speakers. Although she mentioned meeting Manes and trying to obtain a ticket to Faust, she did not describe her subsequent attendance, much less her reaction. Rather she focused on the fact that he shared a surname with renowned Czech painter Josef Manes (1820-1871) and that he

²²¹ Philipp Manes, *Als Ob's Ein Leben Wär: Tatsachenbericht Theresienstadt 1942-1944*, ed. Ben Barkow and Klaus Leist (Berlin: Ullstein, 2005), 346.

²²² *Ibid.*, 346.

immediately invited her to lecture to his audience about Czech literature, an invitation she accepted right away since "it was already my intention."²²³

Compared with the emotional intensity of her descriptions of the cultural life, Auředníčková narrated the liberation itself practically as a non-event. There is no climatic, victorious moment in her narrative; her testimony transitioned directly from rumors regarding Nazi plans to kill the prisoners at the very end of the war, to the SS officers fleeing the ghetto, to the arrival of health personnel, including Russians, who cared for the sick prisoners and thus prevented typhus from spreading further.²²⁴ This, however, is by no means the end of her narrative. Almost fifty additional pages follow in which she described other features of life in the ghetto. The chapter titled "People who Interested Me," where she described several fellow prisoners who perished after their deportation from Terezín, could be considered a testimonial to the fallen, a genre which was richly represented in postwar public discourse. Others, such as "Sport in Terezín," and "Small Joys in Terezín," appear to be frankly fond recollections of life in the ghetto itself.

Most striking is her penultimate chapter, titled "What My Listeners Most Wanted to Hear," which represents a remarkable re-staging of her own performance activity in the ghetto. Here she related various stories she had told in Terezín—stories she selected based apparently not only on what the Terezín prisoners wanted to hear but on what might also interest postwar listeners. These narratives, which also placed her socially as moving within upper bourgeois circles of the First Republic, included stories of President Masaryk, whose memory remained an important object of feeling across

²²³ Auředníčková, 43.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

the political spectrum, and of her encounters with other prewar personalities, especially those from theater.²²⁵ She devoted two pages to personal anecdotes about actors of the Czech National Theater, and claimed to have spoken to her Terezín listeners about a topic of great interest to the publics of the periodicals examined in the previous chapter: "the crown of all actorly art," Russian theater.²²⁶

What role did Auředníčková's stories about prewar theater play for her, not only in the ghetto but in her postwar narrative? Deleuze and Guattari provide an example of one aspect of what they call the *ritournelle*, or refrain: the child who comforts himself by singing under his breath, with the familiar sound functioning as a "rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing center in the heart of chaos."²²⁷ Ultimately I believe almost all cultural activities in Terezín were manifestations of the refrain, as "familiar sounds" from the prewar period transferred into the ghetto, but I will explore it here because this particular refrain has a complex relationship to Auředníčková's present. As Deleuze and Guattari elaborate, the refrain not only fixes a fragile but potentially stabilizing center point; it organizes a limited space of order around that center that functions as a "home," and can even serve as a safety line to guide one back out of that limited space into chaos again; as they put it, "one ventures from home on the thread of a tune."²²⁸ During her imprisonment, Auředníčková's stories established a fragile familiar point in the chaos of the ghetto, a point her listeners gathered around; it organized them, as a social unit, around a whole structure of shared memories, temporarily creating a sense of home in that unfamiliar space. But when casting her "thread of a tune" into the new

²²⁵ See Abrams, 118.

²²⁶ Auředníčková, 106.

²²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 311.

²²⁸ Ibid.

chaos of the postwar period, perhaps hoping to establish a home for herself based on those same organizing principles, she cast it, not directly from the First Republic, but from the ghetto itself. That is, the ghetto appears as a space of continuity with her past, and in which she constructed a sense of home strong enough to serve as the base for a further attempt to venture out into the unknown environment of the postwar period.

On the final page of her book she linked her testimony with a politicized narrative certain to be meaningful for most non-Jewish Czechs: the Prague Uprising, which began on May 5, 1944. A young Czech, a friend of her daughter's who brought her packages after the SS fled the ghetto, was killed during the fighting in the last days of the war. She devoted the final sentences of her narrative to him:

Bohouš Rousek showed his heroism during the revolutionary battles when the enemy threatened our Prague. He defended Prague on the barricades with a weapon in his hand ... and he fell. One of the heroes of our revolution. I gratefully remember him ... who heroically fought for our freedom.²²⁹

On one hand these lines, with their phrases "our Prague," "our revolution," and "our freedom," again performed affiliation with other Czechs. On the other, the question of naming this event had important political overtones. The Communists, wishing to associate it with the Soviets' Great October Revolution and the defeat of capitalism, called it the "national revolution" or even the "May Revolution." Their opponents, arguing that it had not been a "revolution" but simply a military action to drive out the Nazis, fought Communist attempts to take discursive ownership of the event by calling

²²⁹ Auředníčková, 106.

it "the uprising."²³⁰ Auředníčková's choice of "our revolution," the name preferred by the Communists, ended her narrative on a definitively leftist note.

Auředníčková, in spite of the book jacket's mention of "a better future," did not describe any scenes of her life after the war; she likely faced a difficult adjustment to the radically different conditions of postwar vs. prewar Czechoslovakia. The lingering of her narrative in Terezín itself may reflect a certain attachment to those last months in the ghetto itself, when her prewar past was still considered socially relevant—that is, her chapter may function as a performance of nostalgia not only for the prewar period in which she enjoyed contact with these luminaries, but for the days in the ghetto when she shared these memories with eager listeners.²³¹

Although her book was well received by some reviewers—for example, Běhounek mentioned her among about a dozen writers who had written "the best book about their imprisonment"—it was harshly criticized by others.²³² The tone of one review in particular illustrated the radical change in the status of her group affiliations. A journalist for *Hlas osvobozených* [*Voice of the Liberated*], the newspaper of the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners, published the following review, titled simply "Three Years in Terezín," on September 13, 1946, apparently some months after Auředníčková's book appeared in print.²³³ In it he accused her of not providing enough information to orient "the uninformed reader" and argued that she "trivializes tragic events by dismissing them with just a few lines, or she does not mention them all."

²³⁰ Abrams, 146.

²³¹ Her final chapter, "Small Joys in Terezín: Flowers, Animals, Packages" reinforces this impression of nostalgia for the ghetto itself.

²³² Běhounek, 388.

²³³ Ay, "Tři léta v Terezíně," *Hlas osvobozených*, September 13, 1946, 2.

Displaying some apparent class hostility as well, he commented sarcastically, "We expected even more moving chapters, for example, about the shining social relations of fifty years ago or those page-long life histories of meaningless people!" Ultimately, he described the problem as one of responsibility and accountability:

But those who come before the public with their experiences from such a tragic time must be aware that all things printed create a document of the period, and that they are answerable for the truth of their information and the impression that they convey to the reader. And because this author's concept distorts the picture of such great suffering, we must object against such a way of writing.... Today we know that Terezín was a waiting room to the gas chambers. Germans there played out for the world a farce about humanitarian treatment of the Jews and made of it a huge stage, upon which the prisoners played their miserable role, so that they could later be murdered. Ay²³⁴

The author clearly had a narrative in mind that he expected to be followed: the *potemkiniada* narrative established in the pages of *Rudé právo*. However, instead of a story of "great suffering" and the prisoners' "miserable role" as pawns in the Nazi propaganda campaign, he read a story of a seventy-year-old German-speaking bourgeois woman's successful struggle to establish a subject position of status among her fellow prisoners, who valued her past experience and her role among them as a storyteller and lecturer. Why did her narrative spark such a thoroughly hostile critique?

²³⁴ Ibid.

Although this critique appeared in *Hlas* before October 25, 1946, when member Dr. Jan Černoch published an article criticizing fellow members of the Union for anti-Semitism, I suggest the reviewer's hostility had more complex roots. Rather, it may have sprung from goals shared by most members of the Union, goals that Auředníčková inadvertently undermined with her narrative: the leftist goal of establishing the postwar irrelevance of the bourgeoisie, the nationalist goal of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, and their own goal of maintaining the powerful subject position they had earned through their wartime suffering.

Although Auředníčková attempted to give her narrative a leftist inflection, there was little she could do to hide her bourgeois roots. With his scorn for her past "shining social relations," the reviewer established his own "leftness," i.e. his own subject position as an insider in the postwar power structure, and consigned her and her stories to an irrelevant past; her (narrative) recreation of her bourgeois prewar world within the space of the ghetto was not about to be repeated in his postwar world.²³⁵ Even more in conflict with the Union's goals was her failure to focus on German brutality—the main justification for expelling the Sudeten Germans. The political prisoners had eagerly taken on the mission of ensuring that German crimes would not be forgotten, and her narrative failed to reinforce the narrative of collective German guilt that supported the expulsion.

The particular historical moment when this review appeared, however, points to another possible reason for the reviewer's objections to her narrative. Most of the

²³⁵ For an interesting parallel from the ghetto itself with a similarly hostile tone, see notes for a critique of the German-language "bourgeois" cabaret written by a young Czech Communist prisoner. Josef Taussig, "O terezínských kabaretech," in *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2001*, ed. Miroslav Kárný, Jaroslava Milotová, Eva Lorencová (Prague: Academia, 2001), 310-346.

political prisoners' postwar goals depended on their political and social capital as martyrs for the nation. They had established this group identity with narratives of how they had remained engaged in the national and political struggle even in the concentration camps, while suffering unimaginably brutal treatment by the Nazis. However, as articles in August and September 1946—two of them on the same page as the review—reveal, the public had had enough of the political prisoners' horrific stories and was losing interest in the "prison literature."²³⁶ The Union, however, was just about to establish its own publishing house; the political prisoners had no intention of relinquishing control over this narrative or allowing it to be forgotten.²³⁷ Although Auředníčková's narrative certainly did not contradict or undermine their own, her less gruesome story of coping with life in the ghetto, through her engagement in rewarding personal relationships and cultural activities, may have better suited the public's shifting taste. Therefore, in this particular moment—several months after the book was published—the political prisoners may have perceived a need to discredit her "distortion" of the "picture of such great suffering," to re-establish the narrative of Terezín that suited their program, and to redirect attention back to the narratives that served their political goals and increased their own status.

Regardless of the underlying motivation, the reviewer's purpose was clear: he sarcastically dismissed her recent role as a lecturer in the ghetto, and even potential hopes for a similarly respected position as a storyteller in postwar Czechoslovakia. For the public of *Hlas*, Auředníčková had violated not only their expectations but their

²³⁶ See, for example, Ota Kraus, "Koncentráky třeba do omrzení," *Hlas Osvobozených*, August 29, 1946, Oldřich Kryštofek's response, also titled "Koncentráky třeba do omrzení," *Hlas Osvobozených*, September 13, 1946, and "Co nám dala literatura vězení?" *Hlas Osvobozených*, September 13, 1946.

²³⁷ Miloš Vacík, "Náš kulturní program v sezoně 1946-47," *Hlas Osvobozených*, August 29, 1946.

demands regarding how Terezín should be represented in the postwar public sphere.

Thus he called into question "the truth of her information" and, in effect, suggested she should be silent. The Nazis had not robbed Auředníčková of her status as speaking subject in the ghetto, but this young reviewer was eager to do so in the postwar period.

Auředníčková's book represented an intensely personal project of reintegrating herself, as an individual, back into postwar society, with an emotional focus on Czech culture as an object of feeling shared with her readers. The next author, Rabbi Feder, also drew on testimony about the ghetto's cultural life to create a performative narrative with a much more ambitious goal: to place the remnants of Czechoslovak Jewry, now a tiny but still exceptionally diverse minority, in a more tenable postwar subject position.

***Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder** (born 1875 in Václavice near Benešov, age 67 at deportation, died in 1970, age 95) was raised in a Czech-speaking family but attended German-language schools and completed his university degree and rabbinical studies in Vienna. His published works, mostly textbooks for Hebrew language and Jewish religious instruction, appeared before and after World War I in both Czech and German. In 1917 he became the rabbi of the Jewish congregation in the small Czech city of Kolín. In June of 1942 he and his wife Hilda(1888-1942), were deported along with the entire congregation of Kolín Jews to Terezín; their children Rút, Viktor and Evžen were also sent to the ghetto. His wife died in Terezín just six months after their arrival; his children and their families perished after deportation to Auschwitz.*

His book, A Jewish Tragedy: The Last Act, was published (only in Czech) in 1947 (a German translation was published in 2004). In 1965 he recalled that he began

*work on the manuscript in August of 1945 and completed it a year later.*²³⁸ *In the thirty pages of section I, Feder described the prewar position of Czechoslovak Jews; in the following hundred pages of section II he described life in the ghetto, the liberation and his return to Kolín. Sections III and IV are devoted to accounts by others and an appendix that described the fate of the Kolín Jews. The work was illustrated with drawings by Karel Fleischmann and Pavel Fantl, both Terezín artists and physicians who did not survive.*

Rabbi Dr. Richard Feder, as an official representative and leader of the postwar Jewish community, occupied a very different subject position from that of Auředníčková. Strategies that were available and potentially useful to her—to speak only for herself as an individual, and treat her own externally imposed Jewish identity as a non-issue—were not at all compatible with his postwar responsibilities. Feder wrote very little about his own personal experience of the war years, almost always speaking as representative of a "we": at times specifically the Kolín or the Czechoslovak Jews, and at times all the prisoners of Terezín, at times the Jews of Europe as a whole. While describing "the last act" of European Jewry, and while dealing with an enormous burden of personal loss, he crafted a narrative with features that could have helped to reintegrate the remnants of his flock into the postwar social body.

Auředníčková began her narrative at the moment when her transport order was delivered, at the point when her Nazi-imposed Jewishness irrevocably separated her fate from that of her fellow Czechoslovaks, but Feder started at a much earlier point: the

²³⁸ Jiří Vondráček, "Richard Feder: Rabín, Myslitel, Pedagog," in *Rabín Feder*, ed. Zuzana Peterová, (Prague: G plus G, 2004), 9-16, 12.

period of the First Republic. While she nested her tales of prewar life within her narrative of the ghetto, which may even have functioned as a way for her to distance herself from her "stories" if they were poorly received, Feder treated each period consecutively, thus giving both the weight of past reality, as "historical fact." In both, although perhaps more markedly in the introductory thirty pages on the First Republic, Feder's text reveals a strategy aptly described by Derrida as a way in which the past is determined by the future: the performance of archivization inscribes the archivist and his future into the past that he or she interprets.²³⁹ As Kelly Oliver clarifies, the archivist crafts his or her collection "so that the conditions of possibility necessary for the future desired by the archivist are available from the past."²⁴⁰ Feder, as archivist, described the type of past which laid the groundwork for a postwar position of respect and equality for the postwar Jews. His narrative opened with the sentence:

Peacefully and safely and therefore satisfied and happy lived we, the Jews [židé], in the First Republic, the republic of Masaryk. We were her citizens with full rights, and not only on paper, but in real life. We had the same responsibilities, but also the same rights as other citizens and we could, without disadvantage, declare our nationality as Czech, Slovak, German, Hungarian, even Jewish. We could write ourselves [i.e. the word *Žid*] with a small or big ž.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 36, 67, 68.

²⁴⁰ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 137.

²⁴¹ Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 9.

In these initial sentences he described the near-ideal situation of the prewar Republic: Jews had been free to affiliate themselves to various group identities, including to nationality and to Jewishness itself, without disadvantage. Feder, even as a rabbi—that is, someone with a stake in the "Jewishness" of the Jewish people—clearly endorsed freedom of self-affiliation in his narrative. Regarding the choice of "small or big ž" to write the word *Žid* [Jew] which generally indicated whether an individual considered his or her Jewishness as a central or relatively incidental aspect of identity, he himself used the small ž everywhere in the book except when he wrote of the Zionists.²⁴²

Although he supported all national choices, he devoted special attention to the Czechness of the Czech Jews. For example, in his list of Jewish contributions to Czechoslovak culture, all that he mentioned were by artists who performed and wrote in that language: "All Czechs listened gladly to songs of Emil Pollert, enjoyed seeing [actor] Hugo Haas on movie screens and, in the theater, the works of František Langer, read with enjoyment the works of Vojtěch Rakous and Karel Poláček"²⁴³ Thus he reminded readers that the Jews not only valued the same objects of feeling, the same beloved works of Czech-language culture, that they did, but that they had helped create those objects.

²⁴² Apparently Feder used the small ž throughout his own writing. See Vondráček, 10.

²⁴³ Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 10. Pollert (1877-35), whose real name was Emil Popper (a common Czech-Jewish surname), enjoyed a long and successful career as a bass in the opera troupe of the National Theater. He was admired for his excellent diction in Czech-language roles. Hugo Haas spent the war in exile but his brother, the composer Pavel Haas, was deported to the ghetto. Some of the works he created in Terezín have been preserved. Of the three authors Feder mentions, Rakous died in 1935, Langer went into exile, and Poláček was deported to the ghetto where he, like Pavel Haas, perished after deportation to Auschwitz.

Feder also placed the Jews specifically in an acceptably leftist position, countering the stereotype of wealthy or bourgeois status by describing a wide range of class and party affiliations:

We were active mainly in business and in industry, but we did not take up leading positions.... Jewish youth demonstrated, why would I hide it today? an inclination to communism, but in the party of two red carnations they did not stand in the front ranks. Young Jews had a direct distaste for business, devoted themselves rather to trades. Among us were only a few of the very rich²⁴⁴

This effort to create an advantageous political and class position for them, however, betrayed some internal tension. For example, his mention of "the signature of Jewish industrialist Robert Mandelík on banknotes" just a page later somewhat undermined his claim that Jews did not have "leading positions."²⁴⁵ His phrase "why would I hide it today?" expressing a certain hesitation to affiliate Jewish youth directly with the Communists, may recall the immediate prewar and war years when the Communist Party was illegal and thus truly something to hide, or, it may betray a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the working class. As he wrote a few pages later, "Jews experienced a great metamorphosis from the intelligentsia to the proletariat. It was a sad thing, a step down the social ladder, but the period was so grievous that people did not even take note of the bitter humiliation."²⁴⁶ However, this is one of very few points in the narrative where Feder expressed some regret for loss of social

²⁴⁴ Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 9-10.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

standing. Elsewhere he portrays the Jews in suitably leftist terms, expressing admiration for "how fast Jews got used to physical labor and how well they did it."²⁴⁷

Feder did not paint an unrealistically rosy portrait of the prewar period. He conceded that anti-Semitism had existed in the First Republic, but dissociated it from Czechness and described it as a "weak" phenomenon, "completely dependent on German anti-Semitism."²⁴⁸ Much stronger was his description of the Jews' affective sense of belonging to the Czech homeland:

Then the Germans took away from the Jew even the last thing he still had, his home, that home with all its charms, that home, where his ancestors had lived for many generations ... where he was born, grew up, was educated, did military service, where he married and had children and raised them ... where he had thousands of acquaintances and hundreds of friends, whose language he spoke, whose songs he sang, whose music he listened to and passionately loved, whose ideals he supported, that home, with which he was linked with all his being²⁴⁹

Feder did not present an abstract love of country but rather a list of the specifics of belonging: a whole network of connections, not only to place but to his fellow Czechs. Countering stereotypes of Jewish alienation from the land and unwillingness to fight, he described their own sense of rootedness, their commitment to defending the country and its ideals, and their (supposedly mutually) rewarding personal relationships with their countrymen. In addition, he wove them into a network of shared affiliation

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

with Czech culture as well; the language, songs and music he "passionately loved" were integral elements of their own sense of belonging to Czechness.

Regarding the *potemkiniada* narrative, Feder, like Auředníčková, devoted very few lines to Terezín's role as a propaganda instrument. He described the visit of the International Red Cross Commission and the "beautification action" that preceded it in some detail, even picking up again the theatrical metaphor of his title by calling the visit "a great comedy to cry and to laugh at" and mentioning that "the sets stayed prepared for a reprise."²⁵⁰ However, those events occupy approximately four pages of the ninety-eight-page segment devoted to the ghetto itself.²⁵¹ Conversely, mentions of the cultural life in Terezín, ranging from sport, lectures and chess to concerts and theater, appear at several points in his narrative. In keeping with his own function as representative of a "we," he focused much more than Auředníčková on the role cultural activities played for the prisoners as a group, rather than as a source of individual subjectivity, and described a far wider range of performed affiliations.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the postwar need to perform the Czechness of the Czechoslovak Jews for the potential audience of non-Jewish Czech readers, Feder's most extensive description of performance in the ghetto, while mentioning other works, focused on Czech-language music and theater:

Singers, among them even one from Kolín, Franta Weissenstein, rehearsed *The Bartered Bride* and played it as a concert version fifty times. Even German Jews who did not understand a word of Czech tried to get tickets to this opera. *The Magic Flute* and other operas were also

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 82.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 78-82.

staged. Regarding plays, *Comedy about a Trap*, written in Terezín by young, critical author Zdeněk Jelínek, was rehearsed. Amateurs studied it with such love that they played it on various stages.... It was a true Terezín play. Then Wolker's *The Tomb* was performed, further *Camel through a Needle's Eye*, *The Third Ring*, and others. For youth the old *Play about Queen Ester*²⁵² was performed and Krasa's beautiful children's opera *Brundibár*. That was a true sensation for Terezín and was even admired by the Germans [Nazis]. When there were international guests in Terezín, the Jewish children had to play *Brundibár*. Zelenka's scenery for that play was captivatingly beautiful, truly unique and the children sang and played adorably. It was a performance Jewish youth could have taken on tour throughout the world, if only if only they had remained alive. *Fireflies*, which was played later, was also very beautiful. Young children went to see puppet theater and it did not matter to them that it was in the attic. Very beloved was Švenk's cabaret. Those boys made brilliant jokes about Terezín conditions and had both legs in the Small Fortress [i.e. would have been severely punished if caught]. German cabaret was produced often in the courtyards, so that all had a chance to hear it. Song and music were the best medicine for the melancholy of our hearts, even if it did not bring healing, but only a momentary relief.²⁵³

²⁵² Here Feder refers not to the adaptation by E. F. Burian but a version written in the ghetto for children by prisoner Michael Flach. Flach survived and the text is extant.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 69.

Although he ended his description on a melancholy note and his memories were burdened by his knowledge of the artists' and especially the children's fate, Feder opened a window onto an astonishingly active and diverse cultural scene. Unlike Auředníčková, who conveyed an emotional sense of ecstatic transport, Feder's main feeling appears to be one of almost fatherly pride, not only in the richness of the offerings but in the fact that the German Jews, and even the Nazis themselves, admired the Czech cultural offerings. Although he specifically mentioned the fact that the Germans' interest led to a dubious honor—"Jewish children had to play *Brundibár*" for the International Red Cross commission—his description did not at all imply the prisoners' objectification, nor did he express outrage, as *Rudé právo* journalists might have, over the Nazi's exploitation of children to further their goals; rather, he celebrated the Czech Jews' role in the ghetto as the perpetuators of Czech national patrimony. The cultural life overall is represented here as a space of agency and pleasure and even, in the case of Švenk's cabaret, of daring and defiance.

This passage is also packed with specific cultural objects of feeling shared by non-Jewish Czechs. *The Bartered Bride* and many of the plays he mentioned were beloved in the prewar repertoire; František Zelenka was a famous set designer who, like conductor Ančerl, was associated with the beloved left-leaning Liberated Theater. Czech puppetry had a time-honored tradition and *Fireflies* was based on a well-known, in fact specifically Catholic, Czech children's story.²⁵⁴ All in all, this text could have appealed to the Czech reader on several levels: national pride, shared pleasure, and even, with Švenk, an element of resistance.

²⁵⁴ Jan Karafiát, *Broučci: Pro malé i veliké děti*. (Prague: Slavia, 1876).

Although integrating the Jews into Czechness appeared to be Feder's primary narrative goal, he also vividly described other group identifications effected through performance in the ghetto. For example, elements of the Terezín cultural life that virtually disappeared from later testimony were the Hebrew- and Yiddish-language cultural programs, designed by the Zionists to promote a specifically Jewish identity and prepare young people for emigration to Palestine.²⁵⁵ Feder introduced the "shalomists"—those who greeted each other with the word "shalom," Hebrew for peace—and their way of life in the ghetto:

They were spiritually close to each other, therefore requested and were granted common lodgings. In them they passionately cultivated Hebrew culture, arranged courses of Hebrew for beginners, the more advanced spoke together exclusively Hebrew, sang Hebrew songs and lectured extensively about all Jewish problems. [...] When they danced the "hora" on the courtyard they had many spectators.²⁵⁶

Feder represented the "shalomists" as a relatively self-contained group within the ghetto, with their own markers of belonging: a shared greeting, a shared language and shared forms of song and dance, as well as shared lodgings. However, their practices of insidership were not exclusionary; in his account they welcomed, and drew, an interested audience to their outdoor dance performances.²⁵⁷ In fact, he described a

²⁵⁵ Mentions of specifically Jewish cultural activities are exceedingly rare in the 1960s testimony, most likely for the following reasons: because those who were directly involved, the Czechoslovak Zionists, had long since emigrated to Israel; because other prisoners knew little about programs in the Zionist housing; and because those who did know were discouraged from talking about them by the intense pressure to assimilate after the Communists came to power.

²⁵⁶ Feder, *Židovská tragédie*, 78.

²⁵⁷ The specifically Jewish cultural program in Terezín was apparently, except for the very active lecture series on Jewish themes, quite limited in scope. For example, specifically Jewish theater among the

"touching scene" he witnessed in the ghetto where a Hebrew-language cultural form, Hebrew songs, served not as a marker of difference but as a way to overcome barriers between Czech-Jewish and German-Jewish youth, who "felt like foreigners for a long time, while we [Czech Jews] acclimatized quickly":

One evening Czech youth met in the courtyard and started to sing....

Their song attracted the German [Jewish] youth [and] they also started to sing, but sang for understandable reasons only Hebrew songs. So they took turns singing Czech and Hebrew. But suddenly someone brought an accordion, started playing a waltz and the Czech boys took German girls to dance and German boys took Czech girls and they made friends.²⁵⁸

Thus pleasure facilitated community-building: when the "German" youth, overcome by a desire to share in the entertainment, made "for understandable reasons" the conciliatory gesture of singing in Hebrew, national and language barriers were overcome in a scene of shared enjoyment. This scene, especially considering the long theatrical tradition of dance as a symbol of social harmony, could also be read allegorically. Feder presented the possibility that Czechs and Jews could share and

Czech Jews, few of whom spoke Yiddish, was in the hands of just two groups. Prague director Irena Dodalová, assisted by Evžen Weisz (Weisz, whom Feder mentions as Eugen Weiss, came from the Carpatho-Ukrainian region that formed the eastern tip of prewar Czechoslovakia and was probably a native Yiddish speaker), organized a few programs based on classic Yiddish works. See, for example, the souvenir poster for a Terezín performance of Yitzkhok Leibush Peretz's *The Golden Chain* and Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye the Milkman*, Heřman collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. no. PT 3918. Walter Freud, a young German-speaking Zionist from Brno, organized several performances on Jewish themes and to mark Jewish holidays. A preserved script written by Freud vividly recreates the atmosphere of the life of the young Zionists in Terezín. See Walter Freud, *Purimspiel*, in *Divadelní Texty z Terezínského Ghetta 1941-1945*, ed. Lisa Peschel, trans. Dalibor Dobiáš and Michael Wögerbauer (Prague: Akropolis, 2008), 362-413.

²⁵⁸ Feder, *Židovská tragédie*, 52.

mutually enjoy each other's culture forms; difference and solidarity were not mutually exclusive. However, for the sake of harmonious co-existence with non-Jewish Czechs, one sacrifice would have to be made: Jews would have to renounce German-language culture.

For Feder, as for Auředníčková, the end of the war was not a prominent moment. In the final pages of his narrative on the ghetto he described the arrival of the death marchers from other camps and the beginnings of the administrative disassembling of the ghetto, but he was preoccupied with another topic: "Although we sincerely celebrated the defeat of the high and mighty Germans ... still we were anxious, because we impatiently awaited news from the east, news from our children and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, parents and acquaintances."²⁵⁹ When former prisoners of Terezín returned to the ghetto to seek their own loved ones, "they brought us the unbearably sad news: in Auschwitz and Birkenau and other places the Germans gassed over 4 million Jews"²⁶⁰ Although he did not mention here his own losses, this statistic, for Feder, was no abstract number: his own three children, and most of his congregation from Kolín, perished after deportation to Auschwitz.

The end of the war was by no means the end of his book. At this point, Feder embarked upon a qualitatively different narrative: a passionate twenty-five-page text resembling a sermon. Incorporating numerous Biblical quotes and following his descriptions of events with explications that often sought a moral or metaphysical lesson, Feder railed against the Germans, agonized over what the prisoners could have done, mourned the senseless murders. As Auředníčková returned, at the end of her

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 99.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 100.

book, to her lecture-performances in the ghetto, I suggest that, here, Feder drew upon his own type of refrain: a sermon with which he tried to impose, through content and form, a limited space of order within the vacuum of loss to which he had returned. Completely abandoning the guidelines from the Union to write objectively and "without flourishes," guidelines he had largely followed in the first section of the book, he began to write expressively, lyrically, struggling to assign meaning to the enormity of what had befallen the Jews.²⁶¹

In this text, which unavoidably dwells on the topics of persecution and suffering, two forces in particular exist in tension: the kind of caution Auředníčková exercised in placing herself within the community of sufferers, versus a palpable urge to lament the depth of the injustice against his own people. For example, he began three paragraphs in a row with variations on the phrase "Germans murdered Jews" before continuing, in the fourth, with the kind of the leveling comparison seen in Auředníčková's narrative and the pages of the Jewish community's Bulletin:

Hitler hated the Jews.... Hitler also hated Czechs and all Slavs.... He started with the Jews, because they were the weakest.... After them would have followed Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians and the whole European intelligentsia²⁶²

Ultimately he presented a heart-rending account of Jewish loss, introduced by a reference to the sheer and incontrovertible numbers that led to the qualitative difference

²⁶¹ Redakce, "Pište Nám," *Hlas Osvobozených*, July 2, 1945.

²⁶² Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 100-102. Feder also incorporated Jews among other groups in an earlier example. Before the visit of the commission, the Nazis objected to a painting in the children's pavilion of a tigress carrying her cub in her mouth: "To take a young one in her jaws is dangerous and the Germans will not stand for it Not even animals are allowed to be harmed. A Jew, Pole, Russian or Czech is, however, something else." Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 81.

between their experience and that of the political prisoners who, for the most part, had returned to intact families who had eagerly awaited their return:

Five percent [of the Czech Jews] survived, but for what? Children without parents People look at them, why did you not die as well? And we old ones are completely abandoned. We see happy children on the street, but our children are dead and do not even have a grave.²⁶³

Unlike non-Jews who emphasized their own groups' suffering in order to claim the right to postwar leadership, Feder aimed his description of Jewish suffering towards a different goal: an appeal for solidarity. He concluded, in a brief coda to his 25-page sermon, with a passionate warning to the Czechs to be on guard against postwar anti-Semitism, even including a rare mention of the Germans themselves as victims:

History teaches us that the enemy of the Jews is the enemy of all humanity. Whoever hated, persecuted and killed Jews in the end also hated, persecuted and killed even his own brothers.... Hitler, great enemy of the Jews, also wiped out millions of Slavs and many Germans.... Therefore, never expect salvation from the enemy of the Jews!²⁶⁴

Thus, by framing the fight against anti-Semitism as a project that non-Jewish Czechs should share in, not only for the sake of their Jewish friends but for their own sake, Feder presented a narrative that could have generated feelings of solidarity and possibly actions that would have potentially protected and reintegrated the Jews as well.

²⁶³ Ibid., 122.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 127.

Feder, as religious leader of a community, drew on his own specifically performative forms and described culture in the ghetto in terms of how it forged and strengthened bonds between and among particular national and religious groups in Terezín, as well as bonds between Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs. Professor Emil Utitz, author of the third work from this generation, spoke from a subject position of similar status, but from within a very different type of discourse. He presented his testimony on Terezín within the framework of an academic study, thus conforming to the calls for "objective" treatment of wartime topics yet explaining the prisoners' plight, and their choices, in ways that could have generated sympathy and understanding among non-Jewish Czechs.

Emil Utitz (born 1883 in Prague, age 59 at deportation, died 1956) was apparently bilingual but conducted most of his professional activities in German. Everything he wrote through 1938, including his last prewar work, Writings of the Prague Philosophical Circle [Schriften des Prager Philosophischen Cercles], was published in that language.²⁶⁵ Utitz was a professor of psychology and aesthetics before the war. He taught in Germany at the universities in Rostock and Halle but was forced to leave his position after Hitler came to power in 1933; he returned to Prague and taught at the German university there. He was deported to Terezín with his wife Otilie on July 30, 1942, where he became head of the ghetto library and supervised a branch of the lecture series.

²⁶⁵ See, for example, his works *The Artist* [*Der Künstler*] (1925), *History of Aesthetics* [*Geschichte der Aesthetik*] (1932), and *Person and Culture* [*Mensch und Kultur*] (1933).

His book, Psychology of Life in the Terezín Concentration Camp, was published in Czech—his first work in that language—by the Worker's Press (Prague), which was linked with the Social Democratic Party, in 1947 and in German by the Continental Edition Verlag (Vienna) in 1948. No translator is indicated in the Czech edition. Utitz divided his brief account—only 61 pages—of the psychology of Terezín prisoners into fifteen short chapters according to specific phenomena in the ghetto, such as "Rumors," "Work Morale" and "The Building of Groups." Illustrations were by Heilbrunn, Otto Ungar and Leo Haas.²⁶⁶

Within the framework of his own familiar type of refrain, the academic study, Utitz managed not only to counter the objectifying "model ghetto" narrative but to explain the logic behind the prisoners' voluntary engagement in the cultural life. Although he devoted one chapter specifically to "Cultural Efforts," as a professor of aesthetics, head of the ghetto library and a popular lecturer, he was predisposed to take an interest in cultural phenomena and remarked upon it in several chapters on various themes.²⁶⁷ He demonstrated how that behavior, which might have been condemned, based on the logic of the resistance-complicity binary, as collaboration, functioned as a choice made by the prisoners as active agents for their own self-preservation.

Utitz, like Auředníčková, was a Czechoslovak Jew known for his affiliation with German-language culture. Having selected German nationality in the 1930 census, he

²⁶⁶ No further information is available on Heilbrunn. There were 22 adult male prisoners by that name in Terezín. Ungar, like Haas, was arrested and deported to Auschwitz in the Terezín "affair of the painters." He was liberated at Buchenwald but died in a clinic at Blankenheim on July 25, 1945.

²⁶⁷ Auředníčková mentioned hearing his lectures, and Makarova, Makarov and Kuperman list forty-two titles, including "The Art of the Playwright," "On the Tragic," and "Art and Reality." See Auředníčková, 39 and Makarova, Makarov and Kuperman, 527.

was required to apply for renewal of his citizenship after the war.²⁶⁸ However, his text did not convey a similar sense of urgency about performing affiliation to Czech-language culture. Perhaps in keeping with his stated aim of objectivity he did not focus exclusively on Czech- or even Jewish-specific performances of identity, instead describing the full range of national and political orientations represented in the ghetto. He also made no attempt to compare the Terezín prisoners' suffering (or his own personal suffering, or any generalized notion of Jewish suffering) with the suffering of other postwar Czech groups. Nevertheless, within the framework of his objectivity, he managed to make his own affiliations, as well as his opinions regarding the postwar situation of the Czechoslovak Jews, vividly clear.

The narrative of Terezín as the "model ghetto" was obviously known to him, and throughout his own narrative he countered the portrayal of the prisoners and their institutions as mere pawns of Nazi propaganda. In a three-page introductory chapter, "The Environment," he immediately established the difference between Nazi intent and prisoners' experience: "for us it was important to create truly functioning institutions; the Germans envisioned the theatrical magic of outward appearance, to impress foreign visitors."²⁶⁹ Providing an example drawn from his own work with the lecture series, he described how the Nazis exploited the lectures as a "calling card" to be displayed for visitors, yet constantly threw obstacles in the prisoners' path by threatening them with prohibitions, which they avoided by giving false titles to talks on potentially

²⁶⁸ Daniela Řepová, "Emil Utitz a Terezín," in *Terezínské Studie a Dokumenty 2003*, ed. Jaroslava Milotová and Anna Lorencová (Prague: Sefer, 2003), 169-212, 196.

²⁶⁹ Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentracním táboře* (Prague: Delnické nakladatelství, 1947), 9.

controversial topics.²⁷⁰ Thus he revealed the fundamentally doubled nature of many of the institutions in the camp: while they ultimately did serve propaganda functions for the Nazis, they also served important functions for the prisoners themselves.

In this particular example he also established the lecture series as a site of resistance, where prisoners actively deceived the Nazis in order to protect the integrity of their own public sphere as a space of agency where they were able to achieve their own goals. However, Utitz's narrative suggested a more subtle form of resistance in his description of a site often mentioned in the "model ghetto" narrative: the ghetto coffee house. While conceding that it was established as part of the Nazi program of deception—an "insane idea" of the German leadership, coming at a time when there was a severe housing shortage—he described the important role it began to play for the elderly and others:

It offered the opportunity to creep out of their overcrowded housing, to chat, to hear music and page through old yellowed illustrated magazines. Many welcomed it as something that did them good, to be able to sit on a real chair. Some evenings the youth recovered from the effort of their work with cheerful cabaret offerings. What was thought up as bold farce could somehow serve the general interest.²⁷¹

Regardless of Nazi intention, the Jews in effect took ownership of these and other spaces that were forced upon them as part of the propaganda campaign, using

²⁷⁰ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 10. Ruth Bondy points out that a lecture originally titled "On the Building of Palestine" was renamed "Jacob at the Well" in the version of the lecture schedule submitted to the Germans. Ruth Bondy, *Elder of the Jews": Jakob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 326.

²⁷¹ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 26.

them as spaces where they could restore the daily social practices they missed from their prewar lives in the abnormal environment of the ghetto.

After brief chapters on "Changes in Character," "Rumors," and "Flight into the Past,"²⁷² Utitz engaged again with the cultural life of the ghetto in a two-page chapter entitled "Images of the Future."²⁷³ Here he argued that the prisoners' hopes for life after the ghetto were intimately tied with expectations that they would return to their pasts—that is, to a world just like the one they had left behind.²⁷⁴ He described performance as a way in which they simultaneously accessed the lost, fervently missed world of the past and projected themselves into their envisioned postwar lives. In the process of noting Austrian, Czech and Zionist Jews' attachment to their own cultural forms, his personal affiliation became clear as well:

If the sentimental song "In the Prater [Park] the Trees are Blooming Again" was sung, almost all the Viennese men cried, and even more, naturally, the Viennese women. Memories and hope [of returning] merged, painful memory and tiny, quivering hopeThe glorious concert performance of *Bartered Bride* was, for the numerous Czechoslovaks, a joyful act of worship. When the sparkling melodies

²⁷² In the chapter "Changes in Character" Utitz described, for example, the useful numbness that helped prisoners bear their own powerlessness. "Rumors" in Terezín, with their usual content regarding the rapidly approaching end of the war, constituted their own form of world-making. "Flight into the Past" described an intensely performative notion in which people narrated their prewar lives to their fellow prisoners, telling stories which sometimes matched and sometimes far exceeded the conditions of their pre-Terezín existence. Utitz specifically mentioned the important role of listening; prisoners gladly heard each other's tales, since they knew the speaker would return the favor and subsequently become an audience for their own narratives.

²⁷³ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 23-24.

²⁷⁴ His claim is supported by an extant Terezín script, *Second Czech Cabaret*, where the comic duo returns to a postwar Prague unaltered from its prewar form. For an abridged version see Lisa Peschel, "Nonsurvivor Testimony: Terezín Ghetto Theatre in the Archive and the *Second Czech Cabaret*," *Theatre Survey* 48, (2007): 143-167.

sounded, full of life, the bright tears ran down their cheeks. Prague, so close yet so unreachably far, home [domov], the firm tie of belonging. In taking it in, inhaling this strong, healthy, stirring music, the confidence of return; the vision of the Moldau with the old stone bridge and rows of statues of the saints, and high above it the cathedral and castle. There should wave, and will wave again, our own flag [*naše vlajka*]. And for the Zionists, the singing of their Hebrew songs and their characteristic circle dances were a holy prophesy, that one day they will be able to kiss the longed-for soil of Palestine; that they will reach, after a thousand years of wandering, their goal in the land of their fathers.²⁷⁵

In spite of Utitz's overall goal of objectivity, his description of The Bartered Bride dominated the paragraph. He began by speaking of the Czechoslovaks in the third person, not immediately claiming the affective memories as his own. However, as he continued, describing the powerful nostalgia for Prague, and even the vivid visual imagery evoked by the strains of Smetana's music, he ultimately placed himself within the "we" of "we Czechoslovaks" with his phrase, "our own flag."

His passage provides the opportunity to dig deeper into the experience that Auředníčková also described when listening to music in the ghetto, for their descriptions contain common elements. For example, for both, the music resonated not only within hearing but on a deeper affective level where emotion became physically tangible—as Auředníčková wrote, "our spirits quivered at the sound"; Utitz described

²⁷⁵ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 23.

"inhaling" the music—while both associated it intensely with "the homeland." I suggest their descriptions are so vivid because the familiar and beloved melodies activated what I described briefly in the introduction as a "structure of experience"—a sense of return to, or intense recall of, a whole complex of remembered meaning, of strands of memory intertwined in a previous era.²⁷⁶ That is, the opening strains of the overture served as the ritournelle or refrain, both establishing a familiar point in the unfamiliar environment of the ghetto and evoking a whole network of remembered images, sounds, smells, emotions, relationships associated with the work, which imposed a sense of familiar order upon the disorder of the ghetto. It was not only the density of the previously constructed network, the relationships between individual elements of memory forged in the past, that gave the experience its visceral, physiological power, but the activating of a network, or even forging of a new network, of social relationships in the present: the prisoners heard this music in a social environment where they knew, seeing the tears in others' eyes, that those around them were sharing the experience as well. In the end, Utitz's stirring description had the potential to draw the non-Jewish Czech reader, who most likely also had a vivid structure of experience activated by the same music, into that network: for example, to create a sense of solidarity through shared attachment to Prague as object of feeling, a shared urge to protect the city against those who would claim it with a foreign flag.

In the next chapter, entitled "Work Morale," Utitz again engaged with the double nature of ghetto institutions, arguing that, "behind the Potemkin facades that the

²⁷⁶ I will return to the notion of "structures of feeling" in more detail in Chapter 5.

German leadership energetically conjured up lay hidden ... much honest work."²⁷⁷ He counted among the "laborers" in the ghetto those whom the journalists of *Rudé právo* called "cultural workers":

It was no pleasure for small groups of artists to go into the houses of the sick and elderly, into crowded, poorly ventilated, stinking rooms, always risking the possibility of contagion.²⁷⁸

In this portrayal of art as a social service, as a good to be distributed to the needy, Utitz presented a complex reply to the postwar debate regarding the role of culture: should artists serve the party as the Communists demanded, by engaging politically with postwar reality, or should art remain a realm of free expression? Utitz in effect turned their formulation inside out: artists engaged with the reality of the old peoples' misery by providing them with something they desperately needed: an escape into nostalgia and fantasy. In a later chapter, writing against artists who became conceited about their positions in the ghetto and did not want to participate in activities such as performing for the sick, he wrote "The danger developed, that from this service to the public would emerge a kind of l'art pour l'artismus."²⁷⁹ Thus he pointed out, in effect, a "third way": art as a socially conscious practice that would serve "each according to his needs," acknowledging that engagement with reality was not in every audience's best interests. In fact, considering the Jewish leadership's focus on youth, which manifested itself in lower rations for the elderly, such performances represented

²⁷⁷ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 26.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

one of the few manifestations of solidarity and compassion their fellow prisoners could express without jeopardizing the goal of helping the youth survive the war.²⁸⁰

Utitz made very few statements that could be considered overt political positioning. More characteristic of his narrative is the politically evenhanded way he expressed admiration for both the Communists and the Zionists for their exemplary sense of solidarity with other prisoners, which they regarded respectively as fellow victims of fascism or fellow Jews.²⁸¹ He recognized these and other forms of group identity, such as religious practice, that were based on self-affiliation.²⁸² However, he refused to describe the Jews as an essentialized group, finding the ghetto itself the best evidence against a definition of Jewishness based on cultural or racial features:

I often ask myself if the uninitiated would recognize all present as Jews, in the sense of the Nuremberg laws ... The differences were so marked ... one should not underestimate the enormous role played by habit, experience, upbringing, milieu and culture. The race-fanatics have forgotten this.²⁸³

It is not surprising that, in an era when the Jews' fate had been determined by externally opposed racial laws, Utitz would take advantage of every chance to counter such classifications. However, he did not resist the urge, although framing it as an observation confirmed through various comparisons, to identify one Jewish characteristic as something that has gone "right into the blood": a specifically Jewish

²⁸⁰ In a 1947 article Utitz acknowledged the reason for his interest in these activities: he had been instrumental in initiating them. Emil Utitz, "Ústřední knihovna Koncentračního Tábora Terezín," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 9, (1947): 548-549.

²⁸¹ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 47.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 47.

relationship to suffering, and corresponding ability to bear hardship and disappointment.²⁸⁴

Utitz devoted an entire short chapter to "Cultural Attempts," distinguishing, for example, between the Czech- and Hebrew-language vs. the German-language theatrical performances in the ghetto:

The latter relied upon actors by profession with ingrained habits, which led to ham acting and bad provincial style The Czech and Hebrew²⁸⁵ theater had at their disposal very talented young directors and were served by enthusiastic amateurs. That was the right path, by which excellent things were achieved.²⁸⁶

Criticism of the German-language "bourgeois" theater, as the 1963 testimony will reveal, was also common among the young Czech-speaking left-leaning prisoners. Their critique was often so biting that, like the *Hlas* journalist's review of Auředníčková, it appeared to be motivated by their own desires to place themselves in a particular Czech or leftist subject position rather than by sincere engagement with the artists' work.²⁸⁷ Utitz's evaluation, on the other hand, appears more as a practice associated with his professional identity, especially since he even acknowledged, in a way that younger survivors rarely did, that the German-speaking actors might be from "our large scenes": that they might be German-speaking Czechoslovak Jews. In addition, although he did claim in an earlier chapter that the Czech Jews were the

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

²⁸⁵ See previous footnote on specifically Jewish and Yiddish-language performances by Irena Dodalová et al.

²⁸⁶ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 54.

²⁸⁷ See previous footnote on Josef Taussig's critical notes written in the ghetto.

leaders in the areas of music, theater and cabaret, he did not credit this position to innate superiority or greater talent. Instead he listed a host of factors that contributed to the more vigorous Czech cultural scene, such as the retaining of talent due to a lower level of emigration and a greater feeling of comfort and ownership: Terezín, for the Czech Jews, was "the last remnant of home," where they stood "in a common front with their compatriots against the invaders and oppressors."²⁸⁸ Thus he encouraged Czech readers' pride and emphasized Jewish solidarity with them, without encouraging nationalist bigotry or appearing to engage in it himself.

Utitz also wrote of the temporary relief and even the sense of liberty the prisoners experienced when engaged in cultural activities, and praised the artists who provided it: "What a mood, what kind of jokes, irony, humor poured out in the cabarets! How many hours of relief from tension and of good cheer; thousands thank these improvising artists"²⁸⁹ Again, expanding upon the affective experience, he described a sense of pleasure that was difficult to place within any particular political framework, but it was clear that he considered pleasure an end, a good, in itself, and the artists' role in providing it as a socially valued contribution.

Utitz, like Auředníčková, did not describe his postwar experience. However, three short final chapters were followed by a two-page conclusion in which he engaged briefly but directly with the question of postwar Jewish fate.²⁹⁰ As he described, shortly after the liberation, the owner of the building where Utitz was living appeared in Terezín and struck up a conversation:

²⁸⁸ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 49, 48.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁹⁰ The chapters are "Vanity and Delusions of Grandeur," "Provisional Existence," and "Spiritual Contagion," in which he described certain Jewish leaders' adoption of the ways of their oppressors.

He was avidly interested to learn of our fate, because he was in no way an anti-Semite; during the war he had supported Jews to whatever extent he could. He asked about the size of the losses and the number of the remaining. My answer did not suit him, and very surprised he wanted greater information: "I considered the Germans a completely thorough people; why have they not made a completely clean slate of it!"²⁹¹

Utitz concluded with the hope that the "question of such a laughably small minority" will soon be solved, since "wounds from enemies do not burn and cause pain as long as [injuries from those] with whom one fought, in times of need, as brothers on the same front."²⁹²

* * *

The testimony of these older survivors, while all three pursued the goal of reintegration into the postwar Czechoslovak social body, revealed differing patterns of affiliation and renunciation in response to the pressures on their narratives. All three, to some degree, renounced or at least underplayed their attachment to German-language culture in order to perform their affiliation with specifically Czech culture, and made at least symbolic gestures toward affiliation with characteristics associated with leftness. Regarding Jewish identity or related suffering, Auředníčková, as a baptized Catholic, apparently felt no need to remark upon it. Feder and Utitz, while both writing about various ways that Jews performed a range of political, religious and national group identities and simultaneously resisting any externally imposed definitions of Jewish identity, did make explicit although restrained statements on the postwar status of the Jews. Apparently

²⁹¹ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 68.

²⁹² Ibid.

aware that intense focus on their own suffering would not serve their goal of reintegration, all three attempted to generate solidarity by presenting their persecution in a way that included them within the Czech community of sufferers (although, in Rabbi Feder's case, this effort revealed a large degree of tension).

None of the three supported the narrative sanctioned by *Rudé právo*—that of the ghetto as a "huge stage, upon which the prisoners played their miserable role"—devoting little attention to the visit of the International Red Cross Commission and focusing instead on their own goals and achievements in the ghetto. Based on their narratives, I believe the memories of their successful fight for agency in the ghetto simply meant too much to them for them to renounce it voluntarily, especially in a postwar period when their subjectivity was threatened by the loss of family, friends, language, social position, political and professional status and perhaps even citizenship. Affiliating with a narrative that argued for their complete objectification would have required denial of both their past and present subjectivity—and not just their own but that of their fellows who perished and could no longer speak for themselves.

All three survivors described an intensely emotional relationship with specifically Czech culture. For this generation, the affective performance in their narratives—the performance of a choice, in the ghetto as a space of limited agency, to affiliate themselves actively and proudly, as performers and spectators, with Czech culture—may have been the single most productive strategy for generating solidarity that they could have employed.²⁹³ Considering the diversity of their linguistic and

²⁹³ This notion provides another clue as to why they may have rejected the "model ghetto" scenario: representing their performance of Czech culture as something they were forced to do would have nullified one of their most powerful strategies in fighting for reintegration.

political positions, it would have been difficult for them to perform convincingly the dominant forms of Czechness and leftness that appeared in the postwar periodicals featured in the previous chapter; the attempts they did make in their narratives, especially those of Auředníčková and Feder, evince a certain strain. Rather than affiliating with postwar political ideals or goals, they appealed to a sense of affective linking through the shared emotional experience of pleasure generated by common objects of affect.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, pleasure works as a rhetorical strategy by opening boundaries, by creating a "we" of shared enjoyment, by inviting the reader to affiliate with the same object of affect, creating a sense of groupness and belonging. However, there is an excess in these narratives that is difficult to explain in terms of strategy alone. All three survivors mentioned pleasure even when it was not "necessary," that is, in contexts where it was not directly linked with Czech culture. For example, Auředníčková wrote at one point, simply, "...there were more and more listeners and the success made me happy." Utitz, in addition to exclaiming about the pleasure generated by the humor of the cabarets, called the entire cultural life "an astonishingly cheering picture."²⁹⁴ Feder addressed the issue of pleasure even more directly. Following a description of countless frustrations and the constant harassment of orders and commands a prisoner encountered in the course of a day, he wrote:

But a person would be wrong if he claimed we were sad. We could not suppress the longing for fun and laughter and young Jews sang, played soccer, girls exercised on the ramparts. Children raced each other and

²⁹⁴ Auředníčková, 55, Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 65.

played at running and jumping and they didn't care that that made them hungrier.²⁹⁵

As Běhounek recognized after the war, one of the functions of testimony was its ability to confirm for prisoners that they had really experienced what they remembered experiencing: by reading the testimony of others, they were able to verify memories that their postwar listeners may have found difficult to believe. In postwar Prague, perhaps confronted by suspicious reactions to a narrative that seemed not too monstrous but, especially in relation to others' accounts, too ordinary, even too positive, to be true, the survivors may have begun to doubt the reality of events that they had regarded as a remarkable achievement and source of pride. Perhaps these superfluous mentions of pleasure were intended, not for non-Jewish Czechs, but for each other, for their fellow survivors, as a reminder that, ironically, one of the last places where they were not required to renounce valuable aspects of their personal linguistic, cultural and political affiliations was in the ghetto.

Even more potentially vulnerable to accusations of trivialization, especially considering the postwar emphasis on resistance in the camps themselves and engagement with present reality, were comments on escapism, yet all three survivors remarked on this phenomenon. Auředníčková wrote, "I heard beautiful lectures, and for an hour we completely forgot about the hardship of our banishment."²⁹⁶ Utitz also described the lecture series as a place one practically "stormed into" in order to leave behind "the unsatisfying, angonizing world of everyday life" and the cultural life as a

²⁹⁵ Feder, *Židovská tragedie*, 52.

²⁹⁶ Auředníčková, 36.

"realm of spiritual freedom."²⁹⁷ Feder mentioned chess players as some of the happiest people in Terezín, who "started their game and forgot the whole world around them."²⁹⁸

I will return to these topics in subsequent chapters. Appearing in narratives about an environment where, as Feder himself wrote, people died not only of hunger, exhaustion, and lack of medical care but "of apathy" when "life stopped giving them pleasure," the prisoners' postwar representations of pleasure and escape in the ghetto deserve closer examination.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 63, 65.

²⁹⁸ Feder, *Židovská tragédie*, 53.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

Chapter 4

A Prosthetic Life: Testimony by the Younger Generation of Survivors, 1945-47

Journalist Václav Běhounek, in his article on prison literature, mentioned two book-length works by Terezín survivors under the age of forty.³⁰⁰ Because the authors did not remain in Czechoslovakia to give testimony in a later postwar period, both of those works fall outside the boundaries of my analysis. However, I was able to locate two short essays intended to circulate in the public sphere that were written by members of this younger generation of survivors. Karel Reiner's testimony was likely meant to be published under the auspices of the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners, and František Miška's essay was published in a memorial volume for one of the young leaders of the cultural life in Terezín.

This younger generation of survivors tended to reintegrate more smoothly into postwar society, and not just because they enjoyed the flexibility and energy of youth. In terms of affiliating to the new postwar ideals of Czechness and leftness, the younger generation was much more likely to view themselves, and be viewed by others, as belonging to these group identities. Unlike the authors of the older generation, many were either monolingual Czech speakers or completely bilingual and could simply stop speaking German in public. They were simultaneously less likely to be identified as bourgeois, due to prewar convictions—they may have been committed leftists before

³⁰⁰ Běhounek described their works as follows: "*Ghetto of our Days* by Mirko Tůma ... captures from Terezín only the basics and sets aside everything useless and petty from the external and internal fates of the ghetto, from its work and self-government organizations and from its problems of assimilants and Zionists. Purely personal experiences from the ghetto were related by ... the little book *Terezín Torso* [by Irma Semecká] with its accent on the grimacing face of love and sex." Václav Běhounek, "Naše vězeňská literatura," *Kytice* 2, no. 9 (1947), 385-96, 392. Semecka's work consists mainly of short stories and poems written in the ghetto itself, many with an erotic dimension, and includes a short original script, clearly leftist in orientation, written for a children's performance celebrating the first of May.

the war—or postwar fate: many who had come from bourgeois backgrounds had lost their entire families and, able to rebuild their lives in other ways, did not spend time fighting for restitution of their parents' property. Thus fitting the identity of young Czech leftists, the younger survivors were less likely to be perceived or treated as outsiders.³⁰¹

This did not mean, however, that their path was always smooth. Reiner, for example, faced challenges to his claim for citizenship, a barrier that he, like the elderly survivors, could have overcome with testimony that performed his emotional affiliation to Czech culture. However, he and Miška took a different approach to establishing their affiliation to Czechness. Unlike the older survivors' narratives that emphasized the deeply affective experience of their engagement with Czech culture, the younger survivors' testimony described a cultural scene where theater was inextricably intertwined with specific political and ethical programs. Indeed, rather than experiencing the destruction of subjectivity that Dori Laub describes as the fate of Holocaust victims, many young survivors testify to their emergence as political subjects in the ghetto. Some who arrived in Terezín with progressive convictions developed clear and specific goals regarding the role and significance of theatrical practice in their political activism; others who had been politically unaware developed a set of political, ethical and aesthetic commitments that profoundly shaped their postwar lives.

³⁰¹ See, for example, a positive mention of young survivor Mirko Tůma's account of the ghetto. A Pol - mv, "Další vězenské knihy za hranice," *Hlas Osvobozených*, December 20, 1946. Their easier path to reintegration did not mean, however, that they did not commit acts of renunciation in their testimony; both survivors I examine below neglected to mention their involvement in German-language performances (for example, Büchner's *Woyzeck*) or stagings that could have been considered bourgeois (for example, Rostand's *The Romantics*). Neither of them mentioned the specifically Jewish cultural scene in the ghetto, but this may not represent a renunciation; neither were Zionists and they may not have known about, or been interested in, that aspect of Terezín culture.

In fact, this postwar commitment to politically engaged artistic practice may have engendered their own version of Deleuze and Guattari's refrain: they projected the theatrical order they had developed, or fought for, in Terezín upon a postwar theatrical scene in which various groups competed to define what postwar Czech theater should be. This political focus may explain to some extent why they make fewer overt mentions in their testimony of theatrical practice as a coping mechanism in the ghetto—or perhaps their political convictions, in themselves, helped them cope by preparing them for the ghetto and for postwar changes that took the older survivors by surprise. Heda Kovály, a Czech-Jewish survivor of this generation whose husband belonged to the Communist Party, explained why committed leftists were in a better psychological state, both in the camps and after the war:

They suffered for an idea, for something they had chosen, not for what they were. Also they knew what to expect from the fascists. The collapse of the old order only served to confirm their convictions. Their world was not turned upside down like ours, but moved quite logically in the direction in which they fully expected the bourgeoisie to lead it.³⁰²

Thus the young leftists had watched history play out just as their political beliefs had predicted, and they were now ready to take part in the building of a new order; as survivor Norbert Frýd wrote, they were certain that, "with victory over this barbarity, something absolutely new had to come."³⁰³ For many, that "something new" meant socialism, and as Jan Kopecký wrote in *Rudé právo*, theater had a central role to play in

³⁰² Heda Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968* (Cambridge, Mass: Plunkett Lake Press, 1986), 65.

³⁰³ Norbert Frýd, "Culture in the Anteroom to Hell," in *Terezín*, ed. František Ehrmann, Ota Heitlinger and Rudolf Iltis, 207-217 (Prague: Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, 1965), 209.

the creation of the "new Czech and Slovak person." Speaking from a more stable, even powerful subject position than the older generation, the younger survivors employed their testimony on the cultural life of the ghetto not just to affiliate with theater as an object of feeling but to shape its postwar form and direction.

Karel Reiner (1910-1979) was recognized as a promising young composer in the prewar period and studied with noted microtonal composer Alois Haba, but his artistic activities were by no means limited to so-called "serious music." He was intensively involved in the cultural life of the First Republic, working with groups ranging from dance music orchestras to avant-garde theaters, including the theater of E. F. Burian.³⁰⁴ During the occupation he was employed by the Jewish community and thus was protected from transports until the summer of 1943, when he and his wife Hana Reinerová were deported to Terezín. There, as a latecomer, he fought to establish a position for himself in the cultural life of the ghetto. Just over a year later, in the fall of 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz and from there sent to a labor camp at Kaufering. He survived a death march and returned to Prague at the end of May 1945; there he was reunited with his wife, who was liberated in Mauthausen. No other members of their immediate families survived.

In an autobiographical work written the early 1970s, Reiner himself described what he remembered of writing his 1945 essay, which he called "very sharp in formulation [and] stylistically somewhat confused":

³⁰⁴ Milan Kuna, *Dvakrát zrozený: Život a dílo Karla Reintera* (Jinočany: H & H Vyšehradská, 2008), 94-95.

I returned to Prague on May 22. I began to work on the report, at the earliest, around the 10th of June. I wrote the first version and the definitive second version in five to six weeks. As can be seen, I had an urgent need to talk as quickly as possible about everything which had built up in me over the last six years ...after the first explosion of writing I see that I probably calmed down....³⁰⁵

Although both versions have been preserved—the first in Reiner's personal papers, the second in the archives of the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners—here I will examine the shorter, much more emotionally vivid first draft, pointing out several of the text's more unusual features, including the harshness of his commentary, that may be at least partially explained by the fact that he wrote it immediately after his return. Reiner did not clarify whether he had sent his report to the Union with the intention of seeing it published (it was not) or simply to ensure that it became part of the official record, but biographical information suggests that he may have had specific reasons for wanting to make the constative of his testimony publicly known: his application for citizenship was being contested.

Decree 33, the law that required those who had selected a nationality other than Czech or Slovak in the 1930 census to apply for Czechoslovak citizenship after the war, was issued in August 1945. Since Reiner's family had selected Jewish, not German nationality on the 1930 census, his application should have been a mere administrative formality.³⁰⁶ However, he was forced to appear before a commission and prove his

³⁰⁵ Karel Reiner, "Komentář k životopisu," unpublished manuscript, 1971,123.

³⁰⁶ Kuna, 14. Jewish applicants for citizenship were sometimes required to prove their loyalty before their citizenship was restored. See Chapter 2

loyalty to the Czechoslovak state before his citizenship was finally restored.³⁰⁷

Considering the timing of Decree 33, the first draft of Reiner's essay was probably written before this legal battle began. However, he may have realized immediately upon his return that any association with German-language culture was going to be a liability, and his German-language secondary schooling was not the only problem: Czech was not his native language. Reiner grew up in the west Bohemian German-speaking town of Žatec (in German, Saaz), in a German-speaking and religious Jewish home; his father was a cantor. Reiner had thoroughly demonstrated his affiliation to Czech-language culture; he studied Czech language in his German secondary school, moved in mostly Czech-speaking artistic circles and even passed the state exam in Czech language in 1934.³⁰⁸ However, traces of German-language influence were detectable in his Czech until the end of his life.³⁰⁹ Therefore, it was vital for him to perform his Czechness.

However, pages before he explicitly affiliated himself with Czechness, he performed his belonging to another group: politically progressive young artists.³¹⁰ Instead of simply affiliating himself *with* them, he positioned himself, with them, *against* their common enemies: the Jewish community leaders in occupied Prague. Representing the young artists as martyrs, he accused the leaders of being "Czech and Zionist chauvinists," of serving as a "bureaucratic bulwark against the rebellious young intelligentsia," and of "lack of interest in the cultural workers, which led directly or

³⁰⁷ Kuna, 166-67.

³⁰⁸ Kuna, 16.

³⁰⁹ K. Reinerová, telephone interview with L. Peschel, September 15, 2008.

³¹⁰ Reiner did not overtly state his own political self-affiliation in his essay, but it is not hard to deduce: the leftists are the only ones who escaped his ire. According to Kuna, although Reiner did not actually join the party until 1948, it was publicly known that he had sympathized with the Communists, working in the theater of E. F. Burian before the war and communicating with members of Communist cells during the occupation to try to help victims of "racial discrimination." Kuna, 208.

indirectly to the death of many of the best artists, scholars, writers etc."³¹¹ Reiner was not the only survivor to vent his fury against the Jewish community leaders; several articles in *Věstník* reveal that Reiner's accusations represent only the tip of a very large iceberg.³¹² However, in his specific case, these accusations may have served his postwar reintegration through a strategy much different than that the older survivors employed.

That is, rather than representing himself as a member of the community of all who loved Czech culture, he affiliated himself with the more specific community of politically progressive Czech artists. To represent himself as a proper leftist after the war, he needed to distance himself from one group of their enemies: bourgeois nationalists. In the prewar period, Communists applied this label to those who opposed the international solidarity of the proletariat.³¹³ Due to the early date of his writing, Reiner had probably not yet realized that nationalism had acquired a new, intensely positive valence.³¹⁴ By attacking the leaders—his former employers—as "Czech and Zionist chauvinists," he drew specifically political boundaries around the community of progressive artists with himself as insider, aligning himself with a collective drawn together by its fight against a shared enemy—and by its common political goals.

³¹¹ Karel Reiner, "Naše činnost 1939-1944," unpublished essay, 1945, 1.

³¹² As James C. Scott points out regarding the disempowered, "the calculus of blame ... finds a target quite close to home." Victims tend to direct their fury, not at the ultimate source of their oppression, but at those "within moral reach; they are a part of the community and therefore ought not to be indifferent to the consequences of their actions." James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 161.

³¹³ Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném československu," in *Židé v novodobých dějinách*, ed. V. Veber (Prague: Karolinum, 1997), 150. This applied to "Jewish nationalists" as well, since the Communists viewed Zionism as a bourgeois strategy to distract Jewish workers from fighting their real enemy: capitalism.

³¹⁴ As I described in Chapter 2, in an atmosphere of intense national feeling, the Communists had to portray themselves as a Czech national party for the sake of electoral success. Hostile rhetoric against Zionism also temporarily ceased due to Stalin's hopes that a new Jewish state might be led by socialists.

Reiner's approach to suffering also differed from that of the older survivors, who placed themselves in solidarity within the national "community of sufferers" and did not emphasize the severity of Jewish persecution. By emphasizing his community's persecution—not the community of Czech Jews but the community of progressive artists—he claimed the political and social capital generated by wartime suffering; the image of young left-wing artists as martyrs for the cause could very well have supported their efforts to legitimate their right to postwar leadership.

In his descriptions of the cultural life of the ghetto, Reiner, like the older survivors, does not emphasize Terezín's role as the "model camp" and the Nazis' exploitation of their cultural activities. He referred to the ghetto's propaganda function only once: "I came to Terezín in the period when the conditions were already consolidated and everything was being prepared for the filming and the visit of the International Commission."³¹⁵ In fact, Reiner provided very little information about the conditions of deprivation in the ghetto itself and did not describe his deportation as a radical break. Rather, the overwhelming impression is one of continuity: the ongoing nature of his fight for progressive art and the fierce battles he apparently waged in Terezín with various other artists and Jewish authority figures.

Reiner may have taken this critical stance toward the cultural life of the ghetto in part to maintain his image as a rebellious, progressive artist, but it could also have stemmed from personal resentment. His efforts on behalf of Jewish artists during the occupation, which included arranging employment for many Jewish musicians in Prague and smuggling four crates of sheet music into the ghetto, had not translated into

³¹⁵ Reiner, "Naše činnost," 4.

a warm welcome when he was finally deported to Terezín.³¹⁶ Reiner found himself excluded by the artists he had worked so hard to support—which may have generated some of the harshness of his commentary, not only towards the Jewish leadership but of the cultural scene in the ghetto overall. That is, perhaps resentment of his limited role in the ghetto fueled a desire to perform the role of the high-status outsider, a role with which he was familiar from his prewar activities: the critic.³¹⁷

For example, although he praised the unusual richness and variety of work taking place as not having "an analogue even in a large city during a period of peace,"³¹⁸ and even mentioned the German (though not the specifically Jewish/Zionist) cultural community, he generalized Utitz's critique of a few specific artists for *l'art pour l'art* to portray it as the overall situation of the ghetto and an impediment to his efforts to engage in "goal-conscious work":

It [the cultural life] was ruled by cliques, intrigues, fear regarding position (contingent on fear of transports to the east),³¹⁹ arbitrariness in arranging programs (.....), eternal arguments and dissent, [and] the braking of all good efforts to build up a musical-pedagogical workshop for youth.³²⁰

³¹⁶ As his wife pointed out in a 1963 interview, when they arrived in Terezín, "Reiner was told ... not to get mixed up in the culture. This disfavor ... lasted almost three quarters of a year." Hana Reinerová, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963 (I am grateful to Eva Šormová for providing me with her notes from this interview and from additional interviews with other survivors in 1963). As Reinerová clarified in a later interview, she believed the reason was the other artists' wish not to share scarce resources with him. Hana Reinerová, interview with L. Peschel, August 31, 2006.

³¹⁷ Reiner had been writing essays of music criticism for various publications since 1934. Kuna, 85.

³¹⁸ Reiner, "Naše činnost," 5.

³¹⁹ Official employment as an artist by the Jewish self-government could protect prisoners from being assigned to an outgoing transport. See Chapter 6.

³²⁰ Reiner, "Naše činnost," 5. I have reproduced ellipses as they appear in the original typescript. I am not sure what they indicate.

Only after setting the scene of opposition to his work did he finally overtly perform his own affiliation to Czech art. Although his restraint in proclaiming his own Czechness might have been due to a desire not to brand himself as a "bourgeois nationalist," once his leftist credentials had been established he emphasized this aspect of his work:

From the Czech composers Gideon Klein played ... Janáček and Suk, E. Krausová-Steinerová [played] Suk, B. Kaff [played] Janáček and Haas ... Reiner played Novák, Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Jirák, Suk, Vomáčka and Vycpálek and in addition lectured systematically about Czech music.³²¹

The works by the composers Reiner specified range from beloved classics to the newest, most avant-garde works and placed Reiner as an insider regarding modern Czech music. He continued with a brief description of the Czech-language theatrical life, not mentioning his own personal involvement, which in some cases was significant, but listing works that would have been recognized by the postwar audience as significant Russian and Czech works:

Czech theater played *Fateful Game of Love*,³²² *The Marriage*,³²³ *Ester*, against whose authenticity there was a fight (the Czech people supposedly could not have written a play friendly to the Jews!) and the

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² *Lasky hra osudná* by Karel Čapek.

³²³ *Ženitba* by Nikolai Gogol, directed by Gustav Schorsch.

*Bagpiper of Strakonice*³²⁴ was prepared, puppet theater was played, works were recited (Erben's fairy tales and so on).³²⁵

Although Reiner's list reveals his affiliation with these works, he also positions himself by emphasizing a political disagreement regarding one of them. As he and his colleague Norbert Frýd, director of *Ester*, both claim in later testimony, the Zionist leadership of the ghetto did not believe that the script, prepared for production by E. F. Burian before his arrest as a political dissident, was based on an authentic Czech folk play.³²⁶ As Reiner described it, the leaders saw the play as Czech assimilationist or leftist propaganda intended to strengthen the bond between Czech Jews and non-Jews, whereas the Zionists—again, as bourgeois nationalists—would rather have weakened that bond in order to encourage Jewish emigration to Palestine—thus Reiner's ironic aside, "The Czech people supposedly could not have written a play friendly to the Jews!"

Thus it appears that Reiner's testimony on the ghetto served mainly as a discursive site where he could position himself as an insider among young left-leaning artists and disavow potentially disadvantageous associations with the Jewish community leadership. He clearly performed his own affiliation to progressive politics and to Czechness (although not to Czech "chauvinism"), and distanced himself from a particular manifestation of Jewishness—Zionism as bourgeois nationalism—that he perceived as a barrier to both Czechness and leftness, while at the same time distancing

³²⁴ Reiner uses the nickname *Švanda dudak* for the comic opera by Josef Kajetán Tyl, *Strakonický dudák aneb Hody divých žen*, a significant work of the National Revival period.

³²⁵ Reiner, "Naše činnost," 5. Karel Jaromír Erben's tales were considered significant words of the National Revival period.

³²⁶ Norbert Frýd, *Lahvová pošta aneb konec posledních sto let* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1971), 215. Frýd and Reiner had both collaborated with Burian before the war.

Czechness from anti-Semitism by portraying the association as too absurd even to consider (i.e. by portraying the Jewish leader's doubts about Ester's authenticity as ridiculous). He deployed suffering as political capital by focusing on the persecution of the artists, not the Jews.³²⁷ In fact his own description of the cultural life of the ghetto was inseparably linked with his own status as an artist, which was in turn inseparable from his political views, and also became a narrative platform from which he exercised his role as critic:

Quantitatively too much was put on, qualitatively however the content answered the face of the ghetto: without a basis in the past, without a goal for the future, mixing the most various influences according to the conflicting angles of selfish interests, that was Terezín art.³²⁸

Reiner did manage to establish for himself the postwar subject position he assumed in the narrative, re-establishing his career both as a composer and a critic. However, further trials lay ahead: he was soon to find that the Communist regime would be no artists' paradise.

In the next example of testimony another young Czech-Jewish artist, whose loyalties to Czechness and leftness, unlike Reiner's, were apparently never questioned by his fellows, used his secure postwar position as a speaking subject to circulate a particular narrative: to present Terezín theater to a public interested in progressive

³²⁷ Although Reiner did not write at all about the much more extreme suffering that followed in the concentration camps after Terezín, he did mention the possible consequences: "The artists left [Terezín] ... for Auschwitz and only in the coming months will it be revealed, which of them have survived." Reiner, "Naše činnost," 5.

³²⁸ Ibid.

theatrical practices, holding the prisoners' methods up as a model that might serve postwar artists' political goals.

František Miška was born in Prague in 1919. His father left the family when he was a child and his mother raised him with her sisters' help. Both his parents were from small villages and both were apparently native Czech speakers. He finished his secondary education at a business academy just before the Nazis banned Jews from educational institutions (where he may have studied German; various mentions in his autobiography and later testimony indicate he speaks it fluently). He was interested in theater from an early age and was a member of the left-wing theatrical troupe Collective of Young Theater Artists (Kolektiv mladých divadelníků), a group to which some of his fellow Terezín prisoners, including Gustav Schorsch, had also belonged. He was deported to Terezín in December 1941, shortly after the ghetto was established, and performed in several Czech-language plays before his deportation to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944. From there he was sent as a slave laborer to Birkenau; as the end of the war neared he was sent to Gross-Rosen then Bolkenheim and was finally liberated at Buchenwald in April 1945. He was the only person from his family to survive. He returned to Prague and by the fall of 1945 was already working as an actor in the Czech provincial city of Kladno; he also played some roles in postwar films. He married a non-Jewish Czech woman in 1946.

Miška's testimony appeared in a memorial volume published in Prague in 1948. The volume was edited by Jan Kopecký, a young journalist whose articles on theater

appeared in *Rudé právo*.³²⁹ It was dedicated to young Czech theater director Gustav Schorsch, who is universally acknowledged among the survivors as producing some of the finest work in the ghetto. Kopecký had known Schorsch before the war and had worked as a dramaturg at various theaters since 1943.³³⁰ The volume included Schorsch's own letters and writings, testimonials by his prewar theatrical associates, and essays by several Terezín survivors who worked with him or knew him in the ghetto, including Professor Emil Utitz. I have selected Miška's testimony from among the various contributors to the volume because he was Schorsch's only colleague from Terezín who also gave testimony on the cultural life of the ghetto in subsequent periods.

The events of Schorsch's wartime fate, as described by Kopecký and the other contributors, make it clear that his path was determined by the Nazi race laws. However, the nature of the volume as a tribute to Schorsch's life and work, and most likely the attitudes of the mostly young and uniformly leftist contributors as well, determined that his Jewishness was not a topic in their narratives. That is, unlike Feder and Utitz, who remarked in their works about common features, or lack thereof, shared by the Jews of Terezín, the writers' narratives focus on Schorsch's life and artistic achievement as an individual and not as a member of a group persecuted by the Nazis.

How did Miška employ his testimony in order to position himself within the postwar social body? With a print run of 2000 copies, this volume was clearly meant to

³²⁹ In this period, in addition to his journalistic activities for *Rudé právo*, Kopecký published a volume of his essays about the function of theater after the war (*About New Czech Theater*, 1945) and wrote the introduction for the postwar publication of Calderon's *Mayor of Zalamea*, translated and adapted in the ghetto by Tůma and Schorsch.

³³⁰ Jan Kopecký, untitled essay in *Nevyúčtován zůstává život: Sborník prací Gustava Schorsche a vzpomínek jeho přátel*, ed. Jan Kopecký (Prague: Václav Petr, 1948), 156-161.

reach beyond the circle of Schorsch's own friends and acquaintances.³³¹ Therefore Miška's testimony functioned as a dual rhetorical performance: not only to the collective of mourners, but to a wider circle of artists interested in Czech theater. Due to Kopecký's prominence in postwar culture, the contributors could expect that the volume would actually reach that wider audience. Regarding his own subject position, Miška had no need to legitimate it within the essay by establishing his Czechness and leftness. As an individual, according to his 1997 testimony, he was from a Czech-speaking family which had most likely registered Czech nationality in the 1930 census; even in the unlikely event that they had registered Jewish or German nationality, issues regarding the expulsion of the "ethnic Germans" had long been resolved by the time the book was published and his citizenship would have been assured. Thus his essay, as opposed to Karel Reiner's 1945 essay, shows no sign of a rhetorical struggle to establish his political and national affiliation but rather appears to take his Czechness and leftness for granted, as an undisputed social reality. In addition, the very fact of his being invited to contribute to the volume indicated his status as an insider in Kopecký's circle, which gave him impeccable Czech and leftist credentials.

Miška apparently believed, however, that Schorsch's own national credentials needed to be established for the readers; given Schorsch's extremely Germanic-sounding name, this was probably not an unreasonable assumption. Thus, although Miška devoted most of his essay to describing Schorsch's exemplary personality and theatrical practice and placing Schorsch's and thus Miška's own Terezín work within very specific postwar debates on theater, he embedded within the essay confirmations

³³¹ This number seems to match the norms for such literature. Feder's *Židovská tragédie*, for example, had a print run of 3000 copies.

of Schorsch's Czechness. First, he established and repeatedly emphasized Schorsch's uncompromising performance of affiliation to his own beliefs in the way he lived his life in paragraphs such as the following:

If he had wanted, or maybe only said the word, they [the ghetto leadership] would have arranged decent clothes for him, and certainly also more food and a proper apartment. He never did anything like that.... He did not lie, he did not pretend anything and in no way did he pose. The concentration camp morally corrupted so many people that this aspect of Schorsch's character is certainly worth a mention.³³²

Immediately after this paragraph he described the following event as the ultimate proof of Schorsch's determination to live according to his own principles:

He [Schorsch] behaved in all situations simply uncompromisingly, strictly according to his conscience. In the camp at Fürstengrube [where he was deported after Terezín and Auschwitz] some SS-men wanted him to recite to them in German. He told them that he didn't know how. [*Řekl jim, že neumí*]. Maybe it would have saved his life. All of his behavior was actually a profession of his conviction and faith.³³³

Why would Miška choose this particular episode from among many as an example of ethical behavior? Considering the importance of Czech national and linguistic affiliation after the war, this mention, although fleeting, cannot be considered insignificant or unintentional. Miška's actual phrasing, "he told them that he didn't know

³³² František Miška, untitled essay in *Nevyúčtován zůstává život: Sborník prací Gustava Schorsche a vzpomínek jeho přátel*, ed. Jan Kopecký (Prague: Václav Petr, 1948), 135-138, 136.

³³³ Miška, untitled, 136.

how," is ambiguous; it could mean that Schorsch actually did not know German, or that he lied to the SS officers, telling them that he did not; or that he lied to them and told them he didn't know how to recite, at all or in German. Evidence regarding whether Schorsch actually did speak German is contradictory, but the key factor is this: he refused to perform for them in their language, perhaps at the cost of his life.³³⁴ He remained true to the integrity of his art and to his Czechness, and thus died, not a victim, but a martyr for these causes. Miška emphasized Schorsch's commitment to Czechness again on the following page, describing how young people in the ghetto were "fascinated by Schorsch as a person, his true human, artistic and national feeling."³³⁵ Thus he placed Schorsch, for the wider audience of readers who had not known him personally, in the correct national camp, legitimating Schorsch as a suitable role model and thus clearing the path for the postwar readers' unqualified respect for him as an artist and a person.

By aligning the young Czech artists' work in the ghetto with current artistic debates, Miška simultaneously created a subject position for himself and attempted to legitimate Terezín theater as a meaningful manifestation of agency (i.e. instead of a pathetic farce, as it was represented in *Rudé právo* articles about the visit of the International Red Cross) and as a model for postwar theater. For example, Kopecký himself, in an early postwar issue of *Rudé právo*, had protested against the brief rehearsal periods in postwar theater:

³³⁴ The possibility that Schorsch did know German but denied it to the SS contrasts with Miška's claim that "He did not lie, he did not pretend ...". In the postwar climate, lying to the SS was probably considered not only a forgivable breach but an ethical practice in itself.

³³⁵ Miška, untitled, 137.

Hurry and haste, results of the dependence of theatrical art on money, are some of the worst barriers to methodically thorough work in our theaters.

The pages of Stanislavsky's book ... where he recounted that the Russians, even before the war, prepared productions for entire long months ... appeared to Czech theater artists like fairy tales from a dreamt-of land this is, today in the USSR, the rule.³³⁶

In the introductory paragraphs of his essay, Miška argued for a style of work that corresponded perfectly with Kopecký's arguments and presented Schorsch as a model, praising his thoroughness and exemplary diligence in preparing for productions and the actors' corresponding dedication:

We rehearsed *Puppets*³³⁷ for 4 months, *The Marriage* for six months and recitation evenings of Czech poets for 2-3 months. I know that such a long rehearsal period is uncommon in our contemporary theater conditions. It will be necessary for us with all our strength to try to fix things in such a way so that it becomes the norm. It is one of the basic conditions of responsible work.³³⁸

But Miška did much more than simply echo Kopecký's 1945 arguments regarding postwar theater. As postwar periodicals reveal, the public of young intellectuals concerned with the status of art in the postwar period was deeply engaged with the question: should artists choose a political position and use their talents to serve a party, or should they stand outside the party-political arena and serve the public by

³³⁶ Jan Kopecký, "Divadelní práce kvapná," *Rudé právo*, June 28, 1945.

³³⁷ *Loutky*, original in German by Peter Kien, translated by Zdeněk Lederer.

³³⁸ Miška, untitled, 137.

remaining independent and critical voices? Through his testimony Miška made Schorsch's and his own position in this debate clear:

When he [Schorsch] arrived we were performing a play by Zdeněk Jelínek, *Komedie o pasti* [*Comedy about a Trap*]. It is, in a word, a play about how the SS and big capital will finally get it on the head. It was enormously successful with the audience.... But Gustav didn't like that theater. Not the content, not the way it was performed. He did not believe in a change of heart from one day to the next. He didn't want theater to influence people politically unless it would also make them morally conscious....³³⁹

Although the open disagreements that had ensued in fall 1946 between Communist and non-Communist artists had been supposedly laid to rest by the creation of a joint organization, the Cultural Association, the issue that separated the Cultural Community and the Cultural Union in the first place—whether art, as Soviet theater artist Mayakovsky put it, should "show people the way" down a specific path, or influence them in less direct but more ethically significant ways—was still hotly debated.³⁴⁰ Miška vividly described how Schorsch went about trying to make his audience "morally conscious" rather than aiming for quick political influence and, before making an overt attempt to persuade his audience to follow Schorsch's example, he painted a vivid picture of just why those working methods were so appealing. He

³³⁹ Ibid., 136.

³⁴⁰ See Chapter 2 for a brief description of the debates between the Cultural Community and the Cultural Union.

did not portray Schorsch as a-political, but rather as approaching political issues in a different way:

First of all, not to lie, not to pretend, to take responsibility for all that you do in your everyday life, and only then, with love for people and things, to begin to occupy yourself with political problems.³⁴¹

Starting with this further emphasis on Schorsch's uncompromising honesty and personal sense of responsibility, he then described how Schorsch formed a community of shared theatrical practice and how that community created a sense of belonging, based on common artistic values and ideals that depended on personal choice and practice, rather than on affiliation to certain approved political or national group identities:

Probably a month after his arrival in Terezín he began to do theater with us. To get to know people and to initiate them a bit into his method of work and his point of view, he opened a theater seminar. It was in the period when transport after transport left for Auschwitz. He simply ignored all of the exterior circumstances. He worked as if he lived in deep peace, and he had budgeted the seminar for 2 to 3 years.³⁴²

Here we see an approach radically different from most models of "resistance." Schorsch had a goal that lay completely outside the economy of power of the ghetto. Rather than allowing himself to be distracted by a fight against the Nazis or letting his performances be influenced through engagement with them in his theatrical work, he simply ignored the threat and pursued his goal. He did not even adjust his schedule to

³⁴¹ Miška, untitled, 136.

³⁴² Ibid.

the reality of outgoing transports; he made his plans as if they did not exist. Schorsch, although by all accounts a virtuoso at this particular approach to surviving in the ghetto, was not the only one who lived by what Utitz described as a rather widespread strategy. In a chapter called "Provisional Existence" he wrote, "We did not do our environment the honor of recognizing it as full reality. We simply passed through it."³⁴³ By bringing familiar theatrical practices into the ghetto with him and continuing to work as he had before the war, Schorsch created a refuge within the theater, not only for prewar attitudes towards art but towards time itself.

Miška described how Schorsch crafted a theater company from the students that attended his seminar. This troupe apparently did not suffer from the conflicts and petty jealousies that Reiner described, a situation that Miška himself acknowledged as difficult to believe:

Schorsch managed to create a troupe of people linked by theater. The actors liked each other and even though it sounds unlikely, they helped each other at their work. They had approximately the same artistic goals and for them it was not their own success but the success of the group that mattered. He achieved that through careful choice of people, whom he selected based on a principle which he consistently applied: rather a less talented actor but a person who could be relied upon and who had a perfect attitude towards the work.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentracním táboře* (Prague: Delnické nakladatelství, 1947), 62.

³⁴⁴ Miška, untitled, 137.

Considering the strength of the desire for unity among members of the postwar social body, a desire strong enough to bring even the Cultural Community and the Cultural Union together to establish at least the appearance of a rapprochement in the fall of 1946, Miška's description of Schorsch's working methods may have created a public by generating a response from those who longed for just such solidarity and ethical behavior within the postwar artist community. At the end of his essay he made an overt appeal to his readers to try to reconfigure the postwar theatrical field:

I do not write all this to glorify Schorsch or Terezín theater. I know that there were circumstances and conditions which no theater group had ever encountered before. Theater there, for people, was the only way out of depression and escape from that amputated "life." I write this way so I can return Schorsch's name to those who worked with him sometimes and who know his principles regarding theatrical work, so that they do not let themselves be discouraged by normal theater practice and remain true to his theatrical ideals. Schorsch selected his people and trusted them. It is trust that binds. It does not make sense to lament Schorsch's death and say that it can't be done without him because we haven't found a similar moral personality in the theater. Schorsch would have deeply disagreed with such an attitude. We have to find enough will, responsibility and integrity in ourselves and do theater without Gustav, steered by his principles, both artistic and human.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

By addressing an implied public of address, the concrete community of Schorsch's personal friends who would have responded to this appeal to "trust that binds," he simultaneously addressed his larger target public of circulation: readers belonging to the imagined community involved in debates about the role of art after the war. By attempting to shape that public into a group that would work according to Schorsch's ideals, Miška attempted to create not only a fitting memorial to his friend but also to a concrete community for himself: a community of practice where he could work among others who believed in the same ideals.

However, within this address to a larger public is another, more unusual address. The oddly incongruous and inconspicuously embedded (almost as if meant to be overlooked) line—"Theater there was for people the only way out of depression and escape from that amputated 'life'"—had nothing to do with current debates about the role of theater. In an era when young leftists felt that the future was in their hands, arguments for autonomy did not translate into support for escapism.

Miška's statement may have functioned as an appeal to non-Jewish Czechs, and especially to his fellow young leftists, for understanding of that choice and for recognition of the kinds of responses that could be considered ethical within the radically uneven power relationships of the ghetto. However, considering the political barriers to that understanding from those who had not shared his experience, I suspect it was meant more for his fellow Terezín survivors: the other contributors to the volume who had known Schorsch in Terezín, and additional survivors who were likely to read the book. Again, as Běhounek recognized, by publishing their works of "prison literature," the former prisoners confirmed each other's reality. By giving fleeting

expression to an experience many of them had shared but that, after the war, could hardly be spoken of, Miška not only verified that reality but justified their strategy of escapism as a coping mechanism. His choice of words, "escape from that amputated 'life,'" especially in light of Utitz's notion of "not recognizing the environment as reality," implied the creation of another, more satisfying reality within the realm of theater, one that served, so to speak, as a "prosthetic life": a space where they could achieve their own goals, the paths to which were cut off to them in the "amputated life" of Terezín reality.

* * *

The path to postwar reintegration for Reiner and Miška was different from that of the older survivors. They were able to effect insidership, not through shared affect but through shared action: through common political goals, which they expressed through their testimony about Terezín theater. Reiner, fighting for a postwar subject position in 1945, positioned himself according to orthodox Communist views on the role of theater. Miška, in publishing his views even after the Communists came to power in 1948, took a calculated risk with his more secure present subject position, attempting to reconfigure certain characteristics of the postwar cultural field from within. That is, taking advantage of the security of his own postwar affiliation with Czechness and leftness, he proposed an approach to which he had become committed in Terezín, one much less overtly aligned with either of these group identities: an ethical form of artistic work where Czech nationalism and the rapidly emerging outlines of socialist realism were not the ultimate measures of value. This artistic philosophy, although not following the party line of the increasingly powerful Communists, was certainly not

outside the realm of acceptable postwar argument, thus the level of risk was not great. But with his brief mention of theater as "escape" he described a less acceptable strategy for protecting threatened subjectivity—one whose value would not be widely recognized until Czechoslovak society had again been plunged into a period of terror and helplessness.

During the early years of the Communist regime both were professional artists, and thus in a position to fight for their respective artistic goals. However, Miška's hopes to establish a community of practice that would take the time to develop "responsible work," as well as Reiner's hopes of being able to work in a "goal-conscious" manner according to his own artistic and political principles, were not fulfilled. The "hurry and haste" Kopecký had blamed on capitalism soon turned into the "hurry and haste" of a planned cultural economy and the artistic limits imposed by socialist realism. One of their fellow survivors, Kamila Ronová, became a choreographer and actor in the Theater of Jiří Wolker, one of the most successful youth theaters under the new regime. As she wrote in a letter to a friend in England in 1949:

In the theater the work is successful enough, but I do not enjoy it anymore [*už mě nebaví*], because I have to fulfill the plan and we rush premieres one after the other, and what is sewed with a hot needle [i.e. prepared in a hurry] cannot creatively satisfy a person. So we rush with our tongues out and we are not always internally satisfied after the premiere, even when the critics praise it.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁶ Kamila Ronová, letter to Hella Guth, December 8, 1949. I am grateful to Ronová's daughter, Kate Rys, for showing me this letter.

Artistic fulfillment, however, was soon to become the least of their worries. The Communist rise to power was followed by a period of Stalinist terror accompanied by political purges and show trials with overtly anti-Semitic aspects. During this period, public discourse regarding the ghetto and its cultural life virtually disappeared from the public sphere.

Chapter 5

The Disappearance and Reappearance of Terezín Survivor Testimony, 1948-1963

Political events and public discourse from 1948 to 1963 shaped the features of the Czech-Jewish population that remained in Czechoslovakia as well as the performative and constative features of their 1963 testimony. After the Communist rise to power in February of 1948, emigration reduced the survivors' numbers and state-sponsored anti-Semitism virtually silenced public narratives about the ghetto, limiting discourse to the private sphere and the pages of the Jewish Community newsletter, *Věstník*.

By the late 1950s, however, a slow political thaw enabled many previously taboo topics, including the Terezín ghetto, to re-emerge in the public sphere. Although the Czechoslovak Communist government virtually ignored anti-Semitism as an element in their newly prominent public discourse against racism, wider public interest in new artistic representations of Jewish themes, including fiction, plays and films about the ghetto, revealed a willingness to engage with the specifically Czech-Jewish story of World War II.

At the same time, increasing dissatisfaction with the form of "amputated life" possible under Communist rule had led non-Jewish Czechs of the survivors' generation, as well as the generation of their children, to turn to the cultural realm in search of other options. The survivors' testimony on Terezín theater, in particular their descriptions of the influence of prewar theater and the escapism and pleasure they experienced in the cultural life of the ghetto, resonated with both generations' attempts. Public interest set the stage for the survivors' rich descriptions of the cultural life and its meaning for the prisoners, driven now not by a need to fight for belonging but by a desire to respond to

an invitation: the invitation to incorporate their testimony into the wider Czechoslovak narrative of the war.

* * *

The political events that took place from 1948 to the mid-1950s influenced the nature of the 1963 survivor testimony on the cultural life of Terezín in several ways. For one, politically influenced patterns of emigration meant that the population of Czech Jews who were still in Czechoslovakia to give testimony in 1963 was much less diverse than in 1945-48. For another, the state-sponsored anti-Semitism that culminated in the political show trials of 1952 drove discussion of the Terezín ghetto and its cultural life out of the public sphere for several years; the 1963 testimony did not represent a point in an ongoing public discourse but rather a re-emergence after a long silence.

In February 1948, in a parliamentary showdown with the non-Communist parties, the Communists came to power in a bloodless coup. By June 6, the transition to an all-Communist government was complete: Eduard Beneš resigned from the presidency; Klement Gottwald became president and Antonín Zápotocký prime minister of the "people's democracy" of Czechoslovakia.

Thousands of the Communists' political opponents emigrated after "victorious February," including many of the survivors of Terezín. At the same time, for the many young Czech Jews who were committed to the Communist cause—that is, all of those in the post-1948 periods of my study—this was truly a victorious moment that promised an end to economic injustice, anti-Semitism, racism, and all other forms of prejudice.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ As one Czech scholar points out, one of the "most typical features" of Czech-Jewish survivor testimony after 1989 is their attempt to explain and defend their postwar enthusiasm for Communism.

Many who lived through this period, Jewish and non-Jewish, described it later as a period of tremendous faith and idealism, when all their hopes for a more just society seemed to be within their grasp.³⁴⁸

The new government assured the Jewish Religious Community that their rights would be protected. *Věstník* published a statement by Vacláv Kopecký, minister of information, on the front page: "What has happened now in the Czechoslovak Republic is also the defeat of fascist anti-Semitic elements. The new regime wants to respect fully the religious, civil and social rights of the Jews."³⁴⁹ The new, Soviet-style constitution, passed in May 1948 included a guarantee of religious freedom.³⁵⁰

Another wave of emigration began shortly thereafter. Relations with Jewish Palestine were friendly during the early months of the regime, due to Stalin's desire for influence in the Middle East. When the state of Israel was founded on May 18, 1948, Czechoslovakia was among the first countries to extend official recognition—immediately after the USSR.³⁵¹ When immigration to Israel was legalized in 1948, thousands of Czechoslovak Jews left the country. Estimates vary, but according to the most frequently quoted statistics, of the 43,000 Jews who had returned to Czechoslovakia after the war from concentrations camps, from exile, after service in

Petr Sedlák, "Svět přeživších židů - prameny a jejich výklad," *Lidé města / Urban people* 10, no.3 (2008): 83 - 113, 98.

³⁴⁸ Marci Shore, "Engineering in the Age of Innocence," *East European Politics and Societies* 12, no. 3 (1998): 397-443, 402.

³⁴⁹ Kopecký, Václav. "To, co se odehrávalo v ČSR, jest také porážka fašisujících, antisemitických živlů." *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 10, no. 11 (1948), 1. Before it seized power, the Communist Party had denounced any form of bias against the Jews as a manifestation of Nazi ideology.

³⁵⁰ Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 20.

³⁵¹ Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press; Yad Vashem, 2005), 286.

Allied armies, etc., 15,000-19,000 left in 1948-49 for Israel.³⁵² The establishment of the Jewish state not only reduced the number of Jews in Czechoslovakia; it also limited the options of those who remained regarding ways of performing their identity as both a Jew and a Czechoslovak.³⁵³ As Vacláv Kopecký declared, "Jews have to choose between total assimilation and joining their nation in helping to build up Palestine."³⁵⁴ However, from August of 1949, requests for exit passports were refused in increasing numbers, usually with no explanation from the authorities.³⁵⁵ Changes taking place on an international scale were closing an escape route just as new dangers for the Czech Jews began to emerge.

Stalin's enthusiasm for the creation of the Jewish state disappeared after Israeli left-wing parties failed to win the January 1949 elections.³⁵⁶ Attitudes toward Israel in the Czechoslovak press changed practically overnight.³⁵⁷ Communists again condemned Zionism, as they had during the interwar period, as bourgeois Jewish nationalism, but now that they controlled the government, that condemnation translated into virulent state-sponsored anti-Semitism.³⁵⁸

In a series of political trials that took place from 1948 to 1952, suspicion was trained disproportionately on the Jews, in part because of Stalin's new anti-Zionist stance, in part because having foreign contacts—common for the many Jews who had

³⁵² See, for example, Petr Brod, "Židé v poválečném československu," in *Židé v novodobých dějinách*, ed. V. Veber (Prague: Karolinum, 1997), 151, and the footnotes to Heitlinger's discussion, 19.

³⁵³ Those who remained, probably between 15,000 and 18,000, re-established nine communities (out of 153 prewar congregations). The Prague community had 2500-3000 members, many of them migrants from other parts of Czechoslovakia. Heitlinger, 19.

³⁵⁴ Rothkirchen, *Facing the Holocaust*, 287.

³⁵⁵ Jana Svobodová, *Zdroje a projevy antisemitismu v českých zemích, 1948-1992* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994), 27.

³⁵⁶ Brod, 150.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-53.

³⁵⁸ Rothkirchen, *Facing the Holocaust*, 288.

spent the war in exile, or who had relatives abroad, including in Israel—was considered a potential sign of disloyalty.³⁵⁹ For the Czech-Jewish survivors, as Heitlinger puts it, "the (for them largely unexpected) official anti-Semitism of the 1950s soon replaced the wartime trauma with another trauma."³⁶⁰

The period of Stalinist terror peaked in overtly anti-Semitic and highly publicized political show trials. In November 1952 Rudolf Slánský, general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and thirteen of his colleagues, eleven of them Jewish, were tried for crimes of high treason and sabotage. All were convicted and eleven (eight of them Jewish, including Slánský) were executed in December of 1952.

Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 marked the beginning of the end of this period of terror. By the mid-1950s some of those sentenced in political trials had been quietly released from prison. One of them, Eduard Goldstücker, who was arrested in 1951 on charges of "Jewish bourgeois nationalism" and spent three and a half years in prison, tried to explain in his memoirs why not even the horror of the trials had destroyed the Czechoslovak Jews' faith in Communism:³⁶¹

Many of us heard the voice of the Russian revolution. It proclaimed the brotherly solidarity of all and liberation from poverty, backwardness and mutual antipathy. This program created an enormous wave of trust,

³⁵⁹ During this period, the Czechoslovak State Court condemned 233 "enemies of the state" to death, often based on evidence obtained through torture, and illegally incarcerated over 55,000 in prisons and labor camps. H. Gordon Skilling, "Stalinism and Czechoslovak Political Culture, *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1977), 269-70.

³⁶⁰ Heitlinger, 86 ff5.

³⁶¹ Eduard Goldstücker (1913-2000), an assimilated Slovak Jew who spent the war in London working for the Czechoslovak government-in-exile and was appointed ambassador to Israel in 1948, was arrested in 1951 on charges of "Jewish bourgeois nationalism" and spent three and a half years in prison. He was released in late 1955, and, during the political and cultural thaw that began a few years later, helped to rehabilitate another German-speaking Czechoslovak Jew whose works had been banned in his native country: Franz Kafka. His memoirs were published in two volumes in 2003 and 2005.

which was depleted only after a huge number of bitter disappointments.... The force of this almost magic attraction is inexplicable and incomprehensible for young people today.³⁶²

Thus when Czechoslovak Jews, especially those of Goldstücker's generation, again had the opportunity to speak publicly about Terezín, their desire to perform leftist affiliation was sincere and undiminished.

A political thaw across the Eastern Bloc began when, in his February 1956 "Secret Speech," Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev officially denounced Stalin's "cult of personality." However, not all East Block leaders were quick to follow him into de-Stalinization.³⁶³ Antonín Novotný, who became secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1957, was a dogged Marxist-Leninist who abandoned few of Stalin's policies and thus forced Czechoslovaks to suffer under what Z. A. B. Zeman called a "personality cult without the personality."³⁶⁴ He also refused to publicly exonerate victims of the Czechoslovak show trials.³⁶⁵ However, a slow thaw was underway that would soon bring discussions of this and many formerly suppressed topics, including the fate of the Czechoslovak Jews during World War II, back into the public sphere.

Narratives circulating in *Věstník* during the period of "anti-Zionist" repression, when all the activities of the Jewish Religious Community were closely monitored,

³⁶² Quoted in Heitlinger, 78 ff10.

³⁶³ Shore, 412.

³⁶⁴ Quoted in R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 319.

³⁶⁵ They were rehabilitated within the Party in 1963 and publicly in 1968.

cannot be considered part of public discourse.³⁶⁶ Rather, the readers of *Věstník* represented a counterpublic: they were well aware of their subordinate status in relation to "not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one."³⁶⁷ However, the periodical served an important function during the early period of the political thaw as a forum where certain topics could be discussed within the limited public of the community. Through *Věstník* the survivors discovered that a new narrative about the ghetto, one with which many Czech-Jewish survivors profoundly disagreed, was circulating widely, thus challenging them to tell their own version.

In 1955 H. G. Adler, a German-speaking Czechoslovak Jew of Karel Reiner's generation who had emigrated soon after the war, published his monumental work, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945: The Face of a Forced Society* in the West and in German; the first edition sold out in 1958.³⁶⁸ The work, which was highly critical of several ghetto institutions and personalities, including the Czech-Jewish leaders in so-called "self-government," immediately elicited protests from his fellow survivors who had remained in Czechoslovakia.

Professor Emil Utitz, Adler's fellow academic and German-speaker, published an impassioned two-page response in the May 1956 issue of *Věstník*, objecting to many

³⁶⁶ In November of 1949 a new law established the government's administrative and financial control over all religious communities. Although the government did not attempt to interfere with the celebration of holidays and other religious practices, attendance was closely monitored by state authorities. The Jewish Religious Community's paid functionaries all became employees of the state, and Jewish leaders' decisions had to be approved by the religious secretariat at the Ministry of Education and Culture, which reported to the ideological department of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Heitlinger, 20, 23.

³⁶⁷ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), 49-90, 86.

³⁶⁸ All references in this dissertation are to the 2005 reprint of the 1960 2nd edition: Hans Günther Adler, *Theresienstadt: Das Antlitz Einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005). This book remains the standard work on the ghetto. Adler (1910-1988), deported from Prague to the ghetto in February 1942, was deported to Auschwitz in October 1944 with his wife, who was murdered there. He was liberated in Niederorschel, a satellite camp of Buchenwald. He left Czechoslovakia in 1947 and settled in London.

of Adler's points.³⁶⁹ Although the pressure of constant surveillance undoubtedly shaped the article, the opinions Utitz expressed in 1956 were completely consistent with those in his own work published in 1947.

The very first thing Utitz addressed was Adler's evaluation of the ghetto's cultural life. He was apparently responding to a paragraph in Adler's work where Adler criticized the cultural life as having degenerated into an almost dangerous *Vergnügungssucht* [search for pleasure] that bordered on collaboration, and where he condemned one of very aspects of the cultural life that Utitz had praised—its role as a place of much-needed relief and escape—as self-deception:

Many of the still young and ... immature musicians and and theater people ... all but forgot the camp and the SS.... One deceived oneself, denied the present and, what is most alarming, naively and willingly fulfilled the wishes of the SS. The intentional deception of outsiders became the self-deception of the prisoners who gladly played along on the most gruesome stage in the land; the human worth was hollowed out by them, without the victims even noticing. The world stood in flames, the "Ghetto" wallowed in misery, but one still found time for little vanities and artistic intrigues.³⁷⁰

Utitz began his response by arguing for the social worth of the cultural life, pointing out that there were also many "serious artistic and scholarly programs" in the ghetto and that, although he himself did not support what Adler called "worthless

³⁶⁹ Emil Utitz, "Terezín," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 18, no. 5 (1956): 7.

³⁷⁰ Adler, 594.

'Tingel-Tangel,'"³⁷¹ he argued that "cabaret performances worked immeasurably advantageously, and in the hospitals and sickrooms they were often a true blessing." This time, however, Utitz took his argument further than in 1947, defending not only "art as social service" but pleasure itself as a force for life:

Adler ... accuses the Jews of frivolity, chastises them, that they did not keep in mind destruction and death and so forth.... Adler is wrong. There were many who knew well that their death was already a decided affair. But ... it appeared to them that passive gazing into emptiness, face to face with death, would rob them of their strength; rather they worked and created and tasted sometimes a rare pleasure that miserable life [živoreni] offered them.... Therefore I also regard optimism in the camp with a sense of protection. Without it the majority of prisoners would not have held out. They would have simply fallen into despair.³⁷²

Thus he presented not just the "social work" of providing pleasure, but the pursuit of pleasure in itself, as a form of agency, as a life-affirming choice, when it would have been all too easy for the prisoners to end their misery by committing suicide or otherwise succumbing to hopelessness. In an environment where, as Utitz himself had written in 1947, "too much numbness threatened one's health ... responsibility and life," he represented pleasure itself as a factor in the prisoners' survival.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Utitz, "Terezín," 7. Here synonymous for empty entertainment, the original Tingel-Tangel-Theater, founded in the basement of Theater des Westens in Berlin in 1931, presented biting political satire by some of the foremost artists in Germany.

³⁷² Utitz, "Terezín," 7.

³⁷³ Utitz, *Psychologie života*, 14.

Utitz died suddenly just months after this review was published, but other writers for *Věstník* continued to object to Adler's portrayal of the ghetto.³⁷⁴ Just a few months after Utitz's review was published, Dr. Rudolf Iltis announced another effort in the pages of *Věstník* to correct narratives circulating about the ghetto, but this time in the other direction.³⁷⁵ That is, while Utitz attempted to counter Adler's overly dismal evaluation of life in the ghetto, Iltis tried to oppose narratives that minimized Jewish suffering:

And therefore we meet often with the opinion, so far not entirely counteracted, that imprisonment in Terezín belongs in the lesser ranks ... of Nazi persecution It is therefore necessary to put in its proper light the history ... of the Terezín ghetto, tear off the deceiving mask that the Nazis put on it, and show its true face, marked by torture³⁷⁶

Iltis argued that the reality of Terezín had been "evacuated by the Nazi 'beautification action,'" implying that postwar Czechs were still being taken in by Terezín's false image as a "model ghetto." He announced that, for readers' edification, *Věstník* would begin publishing a series of essays about Terezín by authors such as Arnošt Lustig, Josef Bor, H. G. Adler and Josef Klaber, essays that would "present a

³⁷⁴ For example, in an article on the Leo Baeck literary prizes for 1958, one of which was awarded to Adler, the unnamed author remarked that his works were by no means the last word on the ghetto, because Adler "comes to conclusions and evaluations of people, which many of those familiar with the ghetto do not intend to leave unopposed." "Udělení literární ceny Leo Baecka za rok 1958," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 21, no. 2 (1959): 9. This opposition finally took more concrete form in 1964, when survivors Karel Lagus and Josef Polák issued their own 365-page work on the ghetto in a print run of 10,000 copies. Published only in Czech, it reached a much more limited audience than Adler's work. It was reprinted in 2006, perhaps in response to the 2005 reprinting of Adler's work. Karel Lagus and Josef Polák, *Město za mřížemi* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1964).

³⁷⁵ JUDr. (doctor of law) Rudolf Iltis, born January 8, 1899, was editor-in-chief of the publication department of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Lands. Due to his marriage to a non-Jewish woman he was deported to Terezín late in the war, on February 11, 1945, months after most of the Terezín artists were deported to Auschwitz. He remained there until the liberation.

³⁷⁶ Rudolf Iltis, "Terezín," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 18, no. 11 (1956): 5.

vivid picture of Terezín reality." Itis's approach to presenting this "reality" was new: Lustig and Bor, although their works were based closely upon actual events from the ghetto, were fiction writers.

This choice of fiction, taken in the context of political and social change in the late 1950s and early 1960s, likely offered more freedom to shape the public's understanding of the ghetto than attempts at "objective" portrayals. As Marci Shore points out, during this period "the regime vacillated between periods of liberalization and re-tightened control. Policy fluctuated in the political realm, while discourse in the cultural realm departed from Stalinist form."³⁷⁷ Indeed, the ghetto first began to re-circulate as a topic of narrative in the public sphere through works of prose.

The first representations of Terezín written from the point of view of Czech-Jewish survivors reached wider audiences in 1958, when two books by Lustig were published: *Night and Hope*, a collection of seven stories inspired by his own experience in the ghetto, and *Diamonds of the Night*, including stories not only about Terezín but other aspects of the Jewish experience of World War II. His books were enthusiastically received, demonstrating that a public for these works existed even outside the community.³⁷⁸

Another work appearing in 1958 not only demonstrated further public readiness for narratives on the Jewish experience of World War II but revealed an emerging split between the government's unwillingness to discuss anti-Semitism and non-Jewish

³⁷⁷ Shore, 419-20.

³⁷⁸ Both were translated into several languages and reprinted in multiple editions. *Věstník* announced Lustig's success with pride; a short article in February 1959 noted that *Night and Hope* had come out in a second printing, a third edition was being prepared in Slovak, and the Polish translation was soon to be published in an edition of 20,000 copies. In 1963 a successful film, *Transport from Paradise*, based on stories from *Night and Hope* was released, and in 1964 a film based on *Diamonds of the Night* also won critical acclaim.

Czechs' willingness to acknowledge its existence, even in their own country. A short work of fiction by a non-Jewish writer, Jan Otčenášek, titled *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness*, enjoyed enormous success.³⁷⁹ As the title suggests, it is the tragic story of two young lovers, separated by fate in the form of Nazi racial laws. Pavel, a non-Jewish Czech student, meets Ester, a young Jewish girl, on a park bench, and she reveals to him that she has defied her transport order. Now, with only the suitcase she packed before deciding not to report to the assembly point, she has no place to go. Pavel, without his parent's knowledge, takes her in and hides her in a small room his family has set up for him as a study; they fall in love. When the assassination attempt on Nazi *Reichsprotektor* Richard Heydrich takes place and martial law is imposed, they both realize how much danger her presence means for everyone who lives in the apartment building, some of whom know she is hiding there and have threatened Pavel and Ester in various ways.³⁸⁰ When she sees Nazi troops gathering on nearby Charles Square in pursuit of Heydrich's assassins, she flees the building and is shot. Pavel finds her as she lies dying and vows not to forget her, devoting his life to the fight for a more just society.

The Czech public embraced this story: the book was reprinted in 1959 and 1960 and quickly adapted as a stage play (1959), then a film (spring 1960), and even an opera (fall 1962).³⁸¹ However, that does not mean that the Czechoslovak government

³⁷⁹ Jan Otčenášek, *Romeo, Julie a Tma* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1958).

³⁸⁰ The assassination attempt against the highest Nazi official in the Protectorate, carried out by Czech parachutists who had been trained in London, took place on May 27, 1942. Heydrich died of his wounds on June 4. Nazi reprisals resulted in the execution of thousands of Czechs, and the villages of Lidice and Ležáky were razed to the ground on June 10 and June 24 respectively.

³⁸¹ The book was reissued multiple times in Czech and by 1962 it had been translated into Hungarian, Russian, German, English, Romanian, Polish, Dutch, French and Japanese. It was regularly reprinted during the 1970s, 1980s and after 1989.

endorsed all aspects of the narrative. According to the director of the film version, Jiří Weiss, Czechoslovak leaders who viewed an early cut of the film objected strenuously:

I was publicly accused of having made a Zionist film, its heroine being a Jewess whom no one is willing to help. They were particularly indignant over the scene in which the inhabitants of the house look on in silence as the girl leaves to certain death. In order for the film to be shown, I had to reshoot that scene, and several others, so that the non-Jewish citizens would come off at least a little better.³⁸²

Even if Communist leaders were not willing to acknowledge the existence of Czech anti-Semitism, past or present—in this period, the mostly Jewish victims of the Slansky trials had not yet been publicly exonerated—their power to censor such stories was limited. They were restrained by their own official anti-racist discourse: since anti-Semitism was classified as a form of racism, they had to take great care in suppressing narratives that appeared to critique it.

Anti-racist discourse had taken on new importance due to a goal Khrushchev had emphasized in his 1956 "Secret Speech": winning the allegiance of the new African states just emerging from colonialism.³⁸³ The effort to draw such countries into the Communist sphere of influence, a call these countries responded to in the belief that they would achieve greater independence from their former colonial powers, led to an increased focus on the prevalence of racism in the capitalist countries and its absence in Communist countries. However, as articles in *Rudé právo* reveal, the Communists paid

³⁸² Interview with Weiss published in Antonín J. Liehm's *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience*, (White Plains, N.Y., 1974), 53-82, 69.

³⁸³ Crampton, 282. During this period, Czechoslovakia established relations with the newly autonomous West African states of Guinea (1958), Ghana (1959) and Mali (1960).

little attention to anti-Jewish racism. Articles about the US portrayed the oppression of African-Americans, and they tracked avidly the struggles with school desegregation in the South.³⁸⁴ George Rockwell, who founded the American Nazi party in 1959, figured prominently in articles on the United States, but *Rudé právo* articles focused on his fascism and racist statements about African-Americans. Overall, there were very few mentions of the particular variety of racism called anti-Semitism.

Hlas, on the other hand, which in the late 1940s had virtually ignored the Terezín ghetto in public discourse, took a major turn.³⁸⁵ Not only did they explicitly name Jews as fellow sufferers during the war—for example, in an April 1962 article they stated, "Czech political prisoners belonged, together with Soviet citizens and Jews, among those who were in that period the most persecuted"—but their articles objecting to racism also mentioned explicitly anti-Semitic acts.³⁸⁶ For example, a July 8, 1961 article headed "Racist provocation in the West" included acts in New York committed against African-Americans and in Arlington against Jews, and in Munich the use of the slogan "*Juden raus!* [Jews out!]"³⁸⁷ By the early 1960s a division was clear: certain groups in Czechoslovak society were much more ready to confront the issue of anti-Semitism, at home and abroad, than the Czechoslovak government was.

How did the Jewish community respond to *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness*? In a February 1959 article "Otčenašek's Anne Frank," frequent *Věstník* contributor F. R.

³⁸⁴ See articles with titles such as "Medieval Age in the Twentieth Century" about protests against African-American students attending a white college, and "Racists in Alabama Continue in Provocation" about seven young racists who tried to set a bus on fire. Emil Šip, "Středověk ve dvacátém století," *Rudé právo*, January 14, 1961, and "Rasisté v Alabamě pokračují v provokacích," *Rudé právo*, May 23, 1961.

³⁸⁵ Further investigation is required to find out just when and why this turn took place, but by the early 1960s a new relationship had clearly been established.

³⁸⁶ Berdych, V. "Tak umírali." *Hlas revoluce*, April 1, 1962.

³⁸⁷ "Rasistické provokace na Západě," *Hlas revoluce*, July 8, 1961.

Kraus described the entire plot of the "slim little book ... about the unlimited love of young Jewish girl Ester and 'Aryan' student Pavel." Kraus also touched on the politically important topic of racism, concluding his review by praising the book's portrayal of Pavel's response to Ester's death: "he will put his hand to the work, to the building of a new society, a new order, that will judge all honorable people without difference of race and color of skin."³⁸⁸ However, the emotional center of gravity of the article was the question he posed: "what does the book say to the Jewish reader?" Apparently deeply moved, in a text uncharacteristically full of exclamation points and capitalized words (especially "WE"), he answered his own question:

WE however see in "our Ester" much more than Pavel's first great love, whom he hides from the world for her Jewish origins, WE see in her a great hero of the period of fascist darkness ... for clearly she announces that she is not a mindless animal that they can drive into a train car and carry away wherever they want.... He correctly captures her thoughts and relationship to the surrounding events ... he lets her speak realistically and act the way our girls at that time really thought and behaved: Ester simply defies injustice and with HER OWN means fights against fascism and war so that human society would be different in the future — much better. (emphasis in original)³⁸⁹

Although Kraus, in his conclusion, took the opportunity to position anti-Semitism under the umbrella of racism and thus label it as something good Communists

³⁸⁸ F.R. Kraus, "Otčenášková Anna Franková," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 21, no. 2 (1959): 9.

³⁸⁹ Kraus, "Otčenášková," 9.

must fight, most of his capital letters appeared in his reading of Ester as a hero, and one of a very particular sort: one who exercised agency, not in an exaggeratedly heroic way, but in a way he perceived as realistic, "the way our girls ... really thought and behaved." Otčenašek had created a sympathetic portrait, not of a helpless and objectified victim, not as the "fighter" represented by Communist models of virtue, but of a young girl who made an admirable choice. Although twenty-first century scholarship would not necessarily praise Otčenašek's portrayal of Ester's self-sacrifice to save Pavel from danger, Otčenašek had given Ester characteristics that, until then, had not been narratively available to Jews: she died, not a victim but a martyr, for something she herself (rather than the Communist Party) valued. Based on the intensity of his expression and the characteristics he focused on, it appeared that his desire to have their agency recognized, the agency they had exercised within a radically limited sphere of possibility, was fed by incredible emotional force.

Why did this story also elicit such a passionate response from non-Jews after so many years of silence in the public sphere? True, it is an appealingly romantic, even sentimental yet skillfully told story about young love, but was it striking a deeper nerve? Czech film scholar Antonín Liehm suggested that films on such topics might have functioned as an allegory for something else altogether:

Czech filmmakers had long since discovered that subject matter from World War II was an exceptionally good means of conveying contemporary messages. And so Brynych's *Transport from Paradise*, based on the stories of Arnošt Lustig, spoke through the mouths of the

Jews in the Terezín ghetto, not only to their executioners but to the Stalinists as well³⁹⁰

For non-Jewish Czech readers, *Romeo, Juliet and the Darkness* may not have been about the Jews at all but rather about their own experience of the period of Stalinist terror. Some of them may have identified with Ester, seeing her as an allegory for their own victimization.

Considering the long-lasting interest in this story, however, I suggest the attraction stems more from identification with Pavel: that non-Jewish Czechs embraced this narrative as a practice of forgetting that helped them form a new, more heroic identity for themselves.³⁹¹ Their surrogate, Pavel, replaced the historical fact of their relative inaction with a new set of "memories," accompanied by tacitly shared silences, in which they had all acted bravely and defended their Jewish neighbors. Pavel's heroism was emphasized by the fact that he tried to save the pretty, Czech-assimilated Jewish girl—assimilated even more in the film version, where Ester's markedly Jewish name was replaced by another Old Testament name much more common among non-Jewish Czechs, Hana—against the backdrop of a clear example of Czech resistance from the war: the assassination of Reichsprotektor Richard Heydrich.

The Czech Jews did not accuse non-Jewish Czechs of assuaging their own guilt with a false narrative. On one hand, Pavel was not an entirely fictional surrogate; non-Jewish Czechs, although not in great numbers, had been imprisoned, had been sent to

³⁹⁰ Antonín J. Liehm, *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (White Plains, N.Y., 1974), 105.

³⁹¹ Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59-71, 63.

concentration camps, and had been executed for helping Jews.³⁹² Hundreds, including Iltis's own wife, had resisted pressure to divorce their Jewish spouses, thus protecting them until the final months of the war. On the other, even if the Jews had wanted to make such an accusation publicly, that would have required a subject position of power which the Czech Jews simply did not occupy in 1958. However, based on Kraus's review and the enthusiasm with which writers for *Věstník* traced the success of Otčenášek's book, I do not believe it was lack of power that kept them from making such accusations: the desire for solidarity overcame any thirst for justice. Perhaps the fact that non-Jews embraced Pavel's story showed they knew it was what they should have done, and for the Jews, perhaps that was enough: the story formed the fictional base upon which to effect a real rapprochement.

Regardless of the reasons for the popularity of this particular story, the sheer volume and popularity of works on Jewish themes produced in the 1960s suggests that, even if non-Jews' interest began as self-interest or as denial, they eventually became interested in the Jewish experience itself.³⁹³ Even if the government, represented by Communist functionaries and by *Rudé právo* as the official organ of the Communist Party, did not appear interested in Jewish concerns, the Czech Jews apparently perceived that Czech non-Jews were willing to listen, for by the early 1960s, they were circulating more and more narratives. In one of the first forays into the public sphere regarding the cultural life of the ghetto, they quickly discovered new parameters

³⁹² See, for example, the narrative of the Catholic priest Josef Miklík, *Vzpomínky z Terezína* (Prague: C.A.T., 1945).

³⁹³ While articles in *Hlas* from the immediate postwar period reveal that some Czechs had objected to the flood of prison literature, I have found no evidence that the new wave of Jewish-themed literature caused resentment.

regarding acceptable features of a narrative that could be integrated into official public discourse.

In this atmosphere of public receptiveness to narratives about the Czech Jews' wartime fate, Terezín theater itself finally made a reappearance. In June of 1961, Terezín actress Truda Popperová, using her stage name of Jana Šedová and working with director D. Vostrel of Theater Rokoko, presented the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with a gift to commemorate its 40th anniversary: a reconstruction of Terezín performer Karel Švenk's play *The Last Cyclist*.

According to survivor recollections, in both the reconstruction and the original, the "cyclist" was a Chaplinesque protagonist named Bořivoj Abeles.³⁹⁴ Abeles, a petty-bourgeois shopkeeper in love with with the "pedestrian" girl Mánička, remained oblivious to the crisis that ensued when escapees from a lunatic asylum took over the government. Scapegoating the cyclists in order to conceal their own failures, the lunatics sent all but Abeles to "horror island," keeping him to exhibit to the people so that they would not forget the identity of their "true enemy." In the original Terezín version the lunatics eventually decided to get rid of Abeles as well by shooting him to the moon on a rocket. Abeles, gazing into Mánička's eyes as he smoked a last cigar, accidentally saved himself by lighting the fuse of the rocket while the lunatics were on board conducting a final inspection.

The 1961 version ends differently. The lunatics put Abeles on display in the zoo, but he was saved when a fight broke out in the asylum and the lunatics accidentally blew up the building and themselves. Injured by a shard from a mirror belonging to one

³⁹⁴ The improbable combination of a thoroughly Slavic first name and stereotypical Czech-Jewish surname makes survivors laugh to this day.

of the lunatics, he declared "... so many shards. And they are everywhere." His line was followed by a voice saying, "The Jews are to blame!" Other voices follow with racist remarks about the Roma, Africans and Asians. The play ends with Abeles addressing the audience: "Do you also have a shard in your eye? Say what you may, but I was imprisoned for four years. So why have I told you all this? Because I don't want anyone to have to go through it again."³⁹⁵

Early 1960s discourse on racism clearly guided the writing of the new ending. In Šedová's program notes she also aligned the play with contemporary political goals, writing that she and Vostrel followed the outline of the original to "write a new play that would ... just as thoroughly recall the senselessness and danger of all kinds of racism to people of the year 1961 as Karel Švenk achieved with his group of prisoners in 1944...."³⁹⁶ Thus Šedová strategically aligned herself with official rhetoric and, by rejecting racism publicly, drew boundaries that included herself and the Terezín prisoners, along with the Communist Party, as insiders, united against the racists and anti-Semites. However, she began her two-page essay by articulating different aims:

Maybe I should first of all explain how it was possible at all ... that in the middle of the Nazi concentration camp, a piece so progressive and dangerous in its ideas as *The Last Cyclist* could be played. The performance will certainly adjust two dangerous and incorrect views.

One opinion is that the prisoners must not have had it so bad when they

³⁹⁵ Karel Švenk, Jana Šedová and D. Vostrel, *Poslední cyklista*, unpublished manuscript, 1961.

³⁹⁶ Jan Šedová, notes in the program to *Poslední Cyklista*, Divadlo Rokoko, Prague, 1961.

could do something like this—and the second would disproportionately overestimate the heroism of the troupe.³⁹⁷

It appears that her primary concern was not necessarily to join the fight against racism in general but to correct the narrative of Terezín—an interpretation borne out by the fact that, in her testimony in 1962 and 1963, the topic of racism disappeared. That is, racism had apparently functioned largely as a topic to legitimate bringing a narrative from Terezín into the public sphere. However, once it had become clear that non-Jewish Czechs were interested in Terezín theater for its own sake, she no longer linked her testimony with this contemporary concern.

As could hardly be otherwise for a play that was performed as a gift to the Communist Party (another legitimating strategy), she first prepared the audience to expect a politically progressive work. However, one of the "incorrect views" she countered was somewhat surprising. In the pages of *Věstník*, Iltis had opposed the misconception that the Jews were less oppressed than the political prisoners; here Šedová countered that view as well. However, the narrative Utitz and others had opposed, that "the Nazis robbed the prisoners of all agency" was nowhere to be seen. Šedová referred to a new incorrect view: that the prisoners were heroes. I have found no evidence that the public regarded the prisoners as heroes; where was this claim coming from?

Šedová could have been engaging in a world-making operation: by projecting an audience whose admiration was so excessive it had to be restrained, perhaps she hoped to bring at least a mildly admiring audience into being. It could also have been

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

an attempt to head off resentment by groups whose position in postwar society depended upon their reputation for wartime suffering and heroism. At this early point in the thaw, however, when various long-repressed narratives from the war were just beginning to re-emerge, I believe this represents the 1960s manifestation of the same operation that, in 1945-48, led the older generation of Terezín survivors to downplay specifically Jewish suffering: Šedová did not attempt to establish primacy but placed the Jews among, and in solidarity with, the authors of various re-emerging narratives.

The Last Cyclist was reviewed in the Communist-controlled press which was, of course, deeply invested in the anti-racism narrative. Journalists for various papers praised the revised ending for speaking to "today's racism and Neo-Nazism," and for critiquing prejudice "universally applied to Jews, blacks, those with slanted eyes. That is today's Alabama and Angola, that is even today's South African Union."³⁹⁸ However, Šedová had also achieved the goal of influencing public narratives about Terezín itself. Writers praised not only Rokoko's production but the prisoners' own efforts with comments such as "you admire, even after all these years, the intellect and the analytical jokes of the creator of the original cabaret," and "even the most shameful and cruel conditions of the Nazi reign of terror did not manage to silence and destroy progressive art."³⁹⁹ *Rudé právo* called the play "a rediscovered historical document about our people, who in the most terrible conditions managed to fight with a theater both valuable and vigorous."⁴⁰⁰ After the silence that had greeted their attempts to generate

³⁹⁸ O. Kryštofek, "Poslední Cyklista v Pražském Rokoko," *Obrana Lidu*, June 16, 1961., and pk, "Poslední Cyklista," *Mladá Fronta*, June 10, 1961.

³⁹⁹ O. Kryštofek, "Poslední," and sk, "Terezínský kabaret po sedmnácti letech," *Lidová Demokracie*, June 10, 1961.

⁴⁰⁰ jo, "Poslední Cyklista," *Rudé právo*, June 27, 1961.

solidarity with Czech non-Jews in the immediate postwar period, a silence that had lasted almost fifteen years, their gesture of affiliation had finally received a response: the prisoners had been recognized as "our people."

Clearly, performing Terezín theater as an instrument in the generalized fight against racism had earned the survivors an audience. What other options did the reviews suggest as strategies to perform their belonging in the public sphere? A surprising interpretation, although one fully compatible with 1960s discourse, recurred in the reviews: the play as the prisoners' act of self-criticism. The *Rudé právo* reviewer stated this most succinctly, pointing out that "the admirable strength of this satire is not only in the criticism of fascism, but also that they aim [*míří*] into their own ranks: they critique the indifference of the petty-bourgeoisie who stick their heads in the sand until they themselves become the victims of evil."⁴⁰¹ This criticism of Bořivoj for his political indifference, with the implication that he himself was largely responsible for own his persecution, may offend the twenty-first century reader. However, considering the importance of self-criticism in Communist discourse, such comments can actually be read as a gesture of welcome that drew the actors of Rokoko, and by extension the Terezín prisoners, inside a particular community of practice.⁴⁰² Given Švenk's own

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. Other papers expressed similar sentiments, similarly phrased; one paper wrote that "Bořivoj Abeles and Manicka ...embody petty bourgeoisie who ... barely see past the ends of their noses and don't understand the historical truth until they get it on the nose." sk, "Terezínský kabaret." Another described Bořivoj as "a small person and a big symbol of all those who paid dearly for their own blindness." Alena Urbanová, "Poslední Cyklista v Rokoku," *Večerní Praha*, June 9, 1961. One more journalist praised Bořivoj, "at first a completely unaware Jewish small businessman, completely immersed in his shop" for transforming, by the end of the play into "a person who recognizes, understands, knows and sounds the alarm even today." O. Kryštofek, "Poslední Cyklista."

⁴⁰² As Marci Shore points out, the focus on "self-criticism" had been prominent in the language of Czechoslovak artists since the First Czechoslovak Writers' Congress of 1949; to break from the past and build a new society "entailed continual self-criticism to exorcise all lingering demons of bourgeois thought..." At the Second Congress in 1956, held shortly after Khrushchev denounced Stalin, the rhetoric of self-criticism remained intact, but was now aimed against the "incorrect methods" that had led

history as a Communist activist, it is also not out of the question that he intended just such a critique.

In any case the reviewers' praise effectively legitimated the narrative, especially since, at least in the revised ending, Bořivoj had obviously been successful in carrying out his self-criticism and was "repentant for his apolitical stance."⁴⁰³ In fact, one paper paid the play, and the theater, the ultimate compliment by comparing the work with a beloved model: "If they work honorably with *The Last Cyclist*, it will become ... a performance having the timely, hard-hitting atmosphere of the Liberated Theater of Voskovec and Werich."⁴⁰⁴ The hold of the "Terezín cultural life as Nazi propaganda" narrative in Communist discourse had been broken. It had now become acceptable for the survivors to talk about their role as agents in the cultural life of the ghetto—even if their own ideas of agency may not have included "firing into their own ranks."

What did *Věstník* make of the performance? In F.R. Kraus's review, which was not published until September of 1961, he perceived the political nature of the rewritten ending but did not necessarily see the target as "their own ranks." In a subtle turnaround, Kraus remarked that Rokoko had presented Švenk's work as an exclusively political play and "did not neglect to aim it [*zaměřit*] at today's audience, at the problem of current appearances of neofascism and racism in the world." Although he identified Bořivoj as "an apolitical person who is interested only in his little shop of mixed goods, and for that he hideously pays," the main focus of Kraus's review was Švenk himself

to the show trials and notions of the "sharpening of the class struggle" that interfered with the new doctrine of peaceful co-existence. In sharp debates at the Third Congress in 1963 the writers finally transcended the motif of self-criticism, but in 1961 it was still alive and well. Shore, 402, 418.

⁴⁰³ pk, "Poslední Cyklista," *Mladá Fronta*, June 10, 1961.

⁴⁰⁴ sk, "Terezínský Kabaret."

and how, after twenty years, he and his fellow actors were finally being remembered—Švenk, "who distributed in a heroic and fearless way in the middle of the darkest jail the most valuable gift, the gift of a humorous look at our own tragic situation. It was often sardonic, raw humor, but immeasurably healing!"⁴⁰⁵

The notion of "humor as healing" was familiar to the prisoners from the prewar days, and intimately tied with the leftist avant-garde theater of Voskovec and Werich, especially during their last seasons when their satirical plays engaged directly with the fascist threat. In fact, this notion figured prominently in a *Rudé právo* reporter's account of Werich's return to Prague after the war, an event eagerly awaited by the Czech public. Greeted by a crowd at the airport, he wept upon seeing his mother. As the writer recounted,

He promised, at the same time, that it [his tears] will be for the last time. From this moment, he said, there will be only laughter [*legrace*]. For, Werich said to us, where there is laughter, there is health and we, gentlemen, need a very healthy nation!⁴⁰⁶

It appears this notion of "humor as healing" was intimately tied with the work of Voskovec and Werich, the Communists' favorite model of politically engaged art. Another connection between Švenk's work and the Liberated Theater appeared in an article Kraus wrote about the upcoming performance the previous May, before he had taken his cue from the rhetoric of the reviews. Remarking that it would be "a sin" if he

⁴⁰⁵ F.R. Kraus, "Terezínský kabaret na Václavském náměstí," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 23, no. 9 (1961): 11.

⁴⁰⁶ "Ruzyň 15.25 Stop Werich Přistal!" *Rudé právo*, October 10, 1945.

did not acquaint a wider public with the "Terezín anthem" composed by Švenk, the tone of his text recalls Utitz's 1947 praise of the cabarets:

What enthusiasm, when at the close of the cabaret revue the players took each other by the hand, came to the very edge of the stage, and sang this optimistic march song.... Applause and cheers knew no end, and finally the whole hall sang together.... Karel Švenk poured into the ghetto new life! And this was his text ... for which he composed the electrifying Ježek-like music:⁴⁰⁷

Kraus then printed the lyrics to the song in their entirety, footnoting the more obscure, ghetto-specific references and remarking, in a phrase reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's description of the refrain, "Until today it sounds in my ears and it will never abandon me."⁴⁰⁸ Švenk had constructed a memorable refrain by reproducing not only the style of Voskovec and Werich's composer, Jaroslav Ježek, but an image that theater historian Jaromír Pelc described in 1982 as "the most beautiful moment in the history of the Liberated Theater." His caption to a photo of Voskovec, Werich, and several other actors standing, hand in hand, at the edge of the stage reads:

At the conclusion of *Rag Ballad* the actors sing...the choral revolutionary song by Ježek, "Against the Wind." The public joins them. The performance thus regularly ended as a demonstration by progressive people against reactionaries.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ F.R. Kraus, "Poslední cyklista a terezínská hymna," *Věstník židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 23, no. 5 (1961). "Ježek-like" refers to Voskovec and Werich's composer, Jaroslav Ježek.

⁴⁰⁸ Kraus, "Poslední cyklista."

⁴⁰⁹ Jaromír Pelc, *Zpráva o Osvobozeném Divadle* (Prague: Práce, 1982), figure 80, N. pag.

Švenk had literally brought the refrain of Czech leftist youth into Terezín. As Auředníčková had sent her "thread of a tune," her stories from the ghetto, out into the chaos of postwar life, Švenk had brought a prewar refrain in the chaos of the ghetto itself, establishing a fragile center within the theater and a limited space of order around it: a ready-made order, constructed in their postwar lives and simply unfolded in the ghetto, of youthful hope and defiance, an order that predicted, as had the plays of Voskovec and Werich, a victorious end to the war and the better world of social justice to follow. Kraus concluded his recollections:

Now Karel Švenk is not forgotten! Words he wrote and music he composed are newly alive on the stage of Theater Rokoko. So will be paid, at least in part, the debt to the young artist who sowed within the walls of the dismal ghetto pleasure, optimism, defiance and hope!⁴¹⁰

The pleasure that Švenk's work had engendered was not associated with a vague notion of "spiritual resistance" in the ghetto. Rather, it was intimately connected with a specific remembered configuration of political, national, and cultural affiliations that evoked for the survivors the days before their ostracism, when, as Utitz had written, Jewish and non-Jewish Czechs had "fought, in times of need, as brothers on the same front."⁴¹¹

This emotional reaction to *The Last Cyclist*, although not evident in the reviews in the Communist-controlled press, was accessible to anyone who remembered the prewar work of the Liberated Theater. Another survivor, identified only by the initials

⁴¹⁰ Kraus, "Poslední cyklista."

⁴¹¹ Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentracním táboře*, (Prague: Delnické nakl., 1947), 68.

"lb," apparently believed that this sense of pleasure would be legible to the public of former political prisoners as well. In a review of *The Last Cyclist* published in *Hlas* on June 22, he wrote:

I don't know if anyone today, especially youth, can imagine what laughter meant in a Nazi concentration camp. Laughter welling forth from humor, which parodied fascism. We laughed sometimes even at ourselves, at our selfishness, our political blindness of the 1930s and 40s.... In spite of all harassment, dirt, ugliness and horror, or rather exactly because of them, we all sought stimulus through which it would be possible to live, and raw hope.... It was in the cabaret of Karel Švenk where we forgot our powerlessness of daily life⁴¹²

While he acknowledged an element of self-criticism he framed it in completely different language, referring to the healing effects of "laughter at ourselves" rather than "firing into our own ranks." However, like Kraus, he focused mainly on remembered pleasure and laughter, intimately tied with their political engagement against fascism. He did not deny the hardship of life in the ghetto, but described it as existing side-by-side with the "stimulus" and "raw hope" they experienced in the theater. He also described the cabaret as the site of a specific type of escapism. Based on his, Šedová's, and Kraus's narratives, it stands to reason that the prisoners would have "forgotten their powerlessness" in the theater; in that sphere they could act as agents, reconstructing elements of a prewar world infinitely preferable to the reality of the ghetto and living within that construction, even if only for a few hours.

⁴¹² lb, "Svědectví 'Posledního Cyklisty,'" *Hlas revoluce*, June 22, 1961.

This review by Ib engendered no condemning response in subsequent issues; it was apparently no longer taboo for Terezín survivors to testify to their ability to exercise agency and even experience pleasure in the ghetto. In fact, the focus on pleasure itself aligned the survivors with other trends emerging from the wider political and cultural thaw that was just beginning to make itself felt.

The early 1960s: structures of feeling, structures of experience

In the political realm, the slow process of change continued. For example, Khrushchev's second denunciation of Stalin in 1961 and pressure from both the Soviets and Czech intellectuals forced Novotný into a concrete de-Stalinizing move: he authorized a commission to investigate the validity of the political trials from 1949-1954.⁴¹³ In contrast, as articles in *Rudé právo* and *Hlas* reveal, changes in the cultural sphere were moving much faster. A brief examination of some of the same objects of feeling that had shaped narratives in the immediate postwar period—Czechness, leftness, suffering, and theater—reveals the backdrop against which these changes were taking place.

Soon after the Communist rise to power, *Rudé právo* became the voice from which all other newspapers took their cue. The performance of specifically Czech national identity that had been so crucial to postwar electoral success waned as the party consolidated its power, and by the early 1950s was again derided as "bourgeois nationalism." By 1961, Czechness and leftness had been thoroughly conflated and folded into Sovietness. There was little need for an individually Czech national past or vision of the future, since all the peoples' democracies, led by the Soviet Union, were

⁴¹³ Crampton, 319.

marching in lockstep toward the same point in time: the inevitable victory of communism.⁴¹⁴

Hlas and its public had undergone great change as well. In 1948 the paper's name was changed from *Hlas osvobozených* [Voice of the Liberated] to *Hlas revoluce* [Voice of the Revolution]. Since "anti-fascist resistance" was politicized as one of the founding myths of Communist Czechoslovakia, the organization was tightly controlled. Many members, disappointed by the loss of autonomy and objecting to the political purges and show trials of the early 1950s, left the Union or stopped paying dues during this period.⁴¹⁵ However, Anna Hájková argues, by the early 1960s some surviving political prisoners of the younger generation (the generation born, like the younger generation of Terezín survivors, between 1910 and 1925) had rejoined the organization, feeling that "they did not share so much with their surroundings; sometimes they felt an urge to reconnect with people they knew from their years in the camps."⁴¹⁶

This urge may explain their friendlier tone toward Terezín survivors; in spite of the political prisoners' postwar efforts to differentiate themselves from the "racially persecuted," the former may ultimately have found they had more in common with the

⁴¹⁴ Historical events from World War II that did not support this narrative, even though they remained in living memory, were absent from official discourse. For example, even the Prague Uprising, that highly prized object of feeling in the immediate postwar period, had been sacrificed on the altar of gratitude to the Red Army. The event re-entered public discourse when Karel Bartošek published a book on the Uprising in 1960. His work was republished in an expanded second edition in 1965 and was translated into German and English. In the introduction to the English edition Bartošek wrote that "much contradictory material has been written about who 'saved' Prague From this we can see the extent of the bitterness and currency of the problem." Karel Bartošek, *The Prague Uprising* (Prague: Artia, 1965), 11.

⁴¹⁵ Anna Hájková, "Život po Neuengamme: Zapomenutý koncentrační tábor v Hamburku a Svaz bojovníků za svobodu 1945-2000," *Dejiny a soucasnost*, no. 3 (2005), 15.

⁴¹⁶ Anna Hájková, "Those Wide Eyes of Children Murdered Too Young: The Sentimentalisation of the Holocaust in the Czech Collective Memory," paper delivered at the conference "Verfahren der Anamnese: Erinnerungen an den Holocaust in Ostmitteleuropa nach 1990," Humboldt University Berlin, 22-24 May, 2008, 16. I am grateful to Anna Hajková for providing me with a copy of her paper.

Terezín survivors than with other members of their generation.⁴¹⁷ In any case, by 1961, as we have already seen with their willingness to write about anti-Semitism, *Hlas* published articles of interest to victims of "racial persecution" much more frequently than they had in the late 1940s.⁴¹⁸ Jewish journalists were active contributors, sometimes writing articles on similar topics for both *Hlas* and *Věstník*.

Another fundamental change revealed in *Hlas* was a shift in the status of suffering as political and social capital. It had proved to be ineffective as a source of power and influence in a vital mission: the political education of youth. As a member concluded in 1963:

We will speak less about suffering, which youth can easily judge as unimpressive self-pity, and on the contrary we will talk concretely about how anti-fascists ... heroically fought the enemy on the war front and also ... staged resistance even in concentration camps and Nazi prisons.⁴¹⁹

This shift in *Hlas's* strategy potentially cleared away a source of tension between Jewish and non-Jewish members: it reduced the political prisoners' need to "defend their territory" as the primary victims of Nazi persecution. At the same time, this article as well as theatrical reviews in both *Rudé právo* and *Hlas* revealed that youth were seeking an alternative affective experience.

⁴¹⁷ Members of the younger generation of Terezín survivors and political prisoners were also more likely to share specific dimensions of their experience. Many young workers in Terezín, after months or years in the ghetto, had been deported to Auschwitz and survived subsequent slave labor camps, sometimes working side by side with the political prisoners.

⁴¹⁸ For example, in a 1961 article, "Untruths about Terezín," historian Josef Polák, also a survivor, critiqued the second edition of H. G. Adler's book on the ghetto. Josef Polák, "Nepravdy o Terezíně," *Hlas revoluce*, July 8, 1961.

⁴¹⁹ Polák, Josef. "Pro další vítězství socialismu a míru." *Hlas revoluce*, Jan 24, 1963.

In the face of these changes, one object of feeling retained the same high degree of importance it had enjoyed in the postwar period: theatrical performance. In the early 1960s it also served as a barometer of social change. In theaters, even the Communists detected the presence of what Raymond Williams calls the *emergent*—"new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships" which are "substantially alternative or oppositional to [the dominant culture]"—long before they were able to understand what that change meant.⁴²⁰

The ideological importance of art to the Communist Party was just as intense in the early 1960s as in the immediate postwar period. As a May 1961 article, "Socialist culture in our lives," stated, "art plays an increasingly meaningful role in the raising of the Communist person," and the author warned against "any kind of tendency toward ideological disarmament."⁴²¹ Frequent meetings kept artists in touch with the party line; for example, a January 1961 article announced the upcoming National Conference on Artistic Criticism, convened to discuss

the great societal function of the theory of art, aesthetics, and criticism in our society. It is clear that art in our era constitutes the development of a mature socialist society and the creation of the preconditions for the transition to communism, a meaningful instrument of re-educating people in the spirit of communist ideas.⁴²²

Even laughter was pressed into the service of speeding the transition from socialism to communism. Critic J. Opavsky described the visit of a comedy troupe

⁴²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 123.

⁴²¹ "Socialistická kultura v našem životě." *Rudé právo*, May 26, 1961.

⁴²² "Národní kongres o kritice umění," *Rudé právo*, January 8, 1961.

from the provincial city of Brno that performed satirical sketches about West German politicians and about situations such as confusion in a tray-manufacturing plant.

Although he praised them for the "tasteful, intelligent entertainment and valuable gift of healthy laughter," he argued that that did not suffice in today's socialist society:

We do not want, of course, for them to be less entertaining, that there would be less laughter in the auditorium.... However ... that laughter would have to be more energetic and aggressive, so that it had a clearer and more ambitious goal.⁴²³

Similar aims were expressed at the end of a three-day meeting of the Union of Czechoslovak Theatrical Artists in April 1962. A journalist summarizing the meeting emphasized the remarks of Zdeněk Nejedlý, who "spoke about the new popular audience as the inspiring strength of our theater, about ... socialist goals, about the new heroism which appears in our life and which even our art must express."⁴²⁴

However, although the desires of a "new popular audience" were actually beginning to make themselves known, Communist reviewers were at a loss as to how to interpret them. In that same issue of *Rudé právo*, reviewer František Černý wrote a survey article in which he described young people's enthusiasm for the various smaller Prague theaters. In a few paragraphs about the new Theater Semafor he described the scene as being crowded "shoulder-to-shoulder" and that "more attentive and eager

⁴²³ Opavský, Jar., "Třikrát 'Večerní Brna': Od legrace k Satiře," *Rudé právo*, September 9, 1961.

⁴²⁴ "Za bojovné socialistické umění," *Rudé právo*, April 2, 1961. Nejedlý, who as a member of the hardline old guard had been eased out of his position as Minister of Culture in 1956, was still active in such debates. See Jarka Burian, *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 84.

spectators you would hardly find."⁴²⁵ However, he struggled to understand the performance itself, which he described as "a montage of Dadaistic tales and songs," and concluded, "For a theater that has the trust of youth, however, that is not a good recommendation. Instead of clear words, a stupefying fog falls from the stage."⁴²⁶

This was not the first time this theater's growing popularity had baffled critics. In a February 1961 article, "Where is Semafor Pointing?" the reviewer wrote that "youth from seventeen to twenty filled the auditorium to the last seat" but was at a loss to explain their appeal, writing that "Semafor introduced itself with a program of songs in which we would vainly seek some deeper sense...."⁴²⁷

Emergent formations, so new that they cannot yet be clearly identified or described, remain, in Williams's phrase, "at the very edge of semantic availability"—clearly the case for the writers of *Rudé právo*, who perceived in Semafor's works only a "stupefying fog."⁴²⁸ However, emergent formations generate what he calls "structures of feeling": specific qualitative changes in social experience that "do not have to await definition, classification or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures."⁴²⁹ The older generation was definitely feeling those pressures; what were the reviewers to make of what appeared to be an act of artistic "ideological disarmament" by their own children? Clearly uneasy with this new development, the second reviewer, comparing the artists of Theater Semafor, Jiří Suchý and Jiří Šlitr, to the idols of Černý's generation, posed the question: "are they perhaps betraying Voskovec and Werich?"

⁴²⁵ The name Semafor (traffic light) also refers to the phrase "seven small forms" (*sedm malých forem*) of Czech theater.

⁴²⁶ František Černý, "Malé scénky neznamenají malé cíle," *Rudé právo*, April 2, 1961.

⁴²⁷ dh, "Kam ukazuje Semafor?" *Rudé právo*, February 5, 1961.

⁴²⁸ Williams, 134.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

What the reviewer could not know in 1961 is that, just a few years later, Suchý and Šlitř emerged as the clear Voskovec and Werich of their generation—a comparison they actively cultivated, even to the point of representing themselves, like V+W, as S+S. The parallel, however, lay not so much in their content as in their strategy. Both embodied on stage what political scientist Lyman Tower Sargent calls “utopian thought,” defined as “willingness to envision a dramatically different form of society.”⁴³⁰ In the 1930s that had meant performing socialism as a way to fight social and economic injustice and the threat of fascism; in the 1960s that meant performing an escape from ideological struggles that appeared increasingly meaningless.

Theater Semafor both effected and concealed this escape, which fundamentally opposed the dominant discourse's demand for political engagement, with the "stupefying fog" of their performances. As Vacláv Havel, who was 25 years old in 1961, recalled in the late 1980s, the lack of clear meaning was exactly the point:

The performances were not about anything. They were just a series of songs, one after another, and the songs themselves were about nothing in particular, but it was the delight in performance, the rhythm, the pure fun.... It was a manifestation of uncensored life, life that spits on all ideology and all that lofty world of babble; a life that intrinsically resisted all forms of violence, all interpretations, all directives.⁴³¹

In a hyper-politicized age, Suchý and Šlitř had stepped completely outside that field of struggle and created their own space with a different system of values, in which

⁴³⁰ Quoted in Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance : Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 455.

⁴³¹ Václav Havel and Karel Hvízďala, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvízďala* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 49.

one highly prized element was a particular kind of affective experience: the experience of "delight" and "pure fun." Paradoxically, through their "ideological disarmament," S+S were winning the battle for a universally valued prize: the avid and sincere interest of youth.

Young people's attraction to Theater Semafor may have increased their receptivity towards the Terezín survivors' testimony. That is, Czech youths' personal experience of escape from a totalitarian system, where even the functions of laughter were politically dictated, into a heterotopic space of freedom and pleasure in the theater, put them in a position to understand the experience of the Terezín prisoners. Although they may not have responded to the specifically political associations of the prisoners' "progressive art," this generation was equipped to admire rather than condemn what H. G. Adler had contemptuously called their "pleasure-seeking."

Meanwhile, in the pages of *Hlas*, members of the survivors' generation were performing their own act of "ideological disarmament," not by affiliating with the emergent but by drawing on the potentially resistant force of the residual. Raymond Williams differentiates "the residual" from "the traditional" in that, although both refer to aspects of the past brought into the present, traditional aspects are those that the dominant order has selected to create a narrative that legitimates its own power, while the residual refers to "certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed ... in terms of the dominant culture, [but] are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue of some previous social and cultural institutions or formations."⁴³²

⁴³² Williams, 123.

By the early 1960s, in spite of government efforts to ensure that artists conformed to the dictates of socialist realism, prominent theater artists were drawing increasingly on the residual for inspiration. Several prominent Czech artists, frustrated with the limitations of socialist realism, had recently turned back to their prewar roots, drawing their past practices into the present in search of more productive paths into the future. For example, between 1955 and 1958, Jan Werich and his postwar partner Miroslav Horníček revived several works from Voskovec and Werich's prewar repertoire at the Liberated Theater.⁴³³ Even more telling, in 1955, E. F. Burian, who just three years before had overtly renounced his avant-garde past and pledged to follow the socialist realist line more consistently, had rechristened his theater with its original prewar name, D34. He dedicated the next two seasons to a retrospective of his earlier, stylized productions.⁴³⁴

Article in *Hlas* reflect this turn to the residual as well. Under the guise of traditional discourse on "fighting socialist art," writers reintroduced beloved prewar artists who had fallen out of Communist favor back into the present. For example, in an article in February 1963, a writer for *Hlas* used the language of the traditional to bring several names back into public discourse. In the essay, "The Voice of Culture," his expressed goal was to argue that the artists of the past were still relevant in the present:

It is no coincidence that, in the years of the fight against fascism, we find the names of the best artists ... where the battle was toughest. ... those who were laughed at and denounced first by the bourgeois right and later by the fascists, who accused them of statelessness, cosmopolitanism,

⁴³³ Burian, 85. Voskovec had emigrated to the US for good after the Communists' rise to power.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

incomprehensibility. Picasso⁴³⁵ ... Mann⁴³⁶ ... and in this country, for example, Filla and Halas — only as examples.⁴³⁷

For Czech readers the mention of the painter Filla and the poet Halas was anything but casual. They knew that those prewar artists had been subjected not only to the disapproval of the bourgeoisie and persecution by the fascists but censure after 1948 by the Communists; the writer was bringing Halas and Filla, artists who had been intensely admired by those who came of age in the First Republic, back into official discourse after previous deliberate acts of erasure.⁴³⁸ In an aggressively transparent way, he also criticized those acts of erasure by implying comparison between the methods of the Communists and their arch-enemies, the bourgeoisie and the fascists.

Writers at *Hlas*, however, were not exclusively focused on the past. They also marked the creation of new narratives about the war and newly emerging artistic styles. In March 1963 a *Hlas* journalist described a new film about the Terezín ghetto, *Transport from Paradise*, based on stories from the collection *Night and Hope* by Arnošt Lustig. Although the title was traditional—"The Best Anti-fascist Films"—and the reviewer praised Lustig and director Zbyněk Brynych for their "new approach to the representations of people's fates during World War II, which deeply warn against the

⁴³⁵ Pablo Picasso was important to this generation, many of whom were actively involved or intensely emotionally invested in the Spanish Civil War.

⁴³⁶ Author Thomas Mann was often featured in the Czechoslovak press as an example of an anti-fascist German.

⁴³⁷ "Hlas kultura," *Hlas revoluce*, February 7, 1963.

⁴³⁸ Halas, a favorite of this generation of young leftists, whose works were recited in Terezín and other concentration camps and who firmly believed in a leadership role for artists in the fight for a more just socialist society, fell afoul of the Communists when his poems did not fit the compulsory optimism of the day. See Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 255. He died, only forty-eight years old, in 1949; his works were not published again until 1957. The painter Filla suffered a similar fate; a political prisoner in Dachau then Buchenwald during the war, he slowly recovered and began to paint again, only to be told before a planned 1951 exhibit that his most important new works, which did not conform to the dictates of socialist realism, were "abominable" [*ohavné*] and would not be displayed; he died two years later.

danger of fascism," the article also praised features of the film that were incompatible with the dictates of socialist realism:

Already in the screenplay, Lustig and Brynych managed to articulate ... the things that excited us about the book: the true, very deep and direct look into the psychology of the person in the ghetto, faith in his moral strength, which, in individual cases, terrible conditions can break, but which is fundamentally a basic, indestructible characteristic of the actual person.⁴³⁹

Art no longer had to present a clear model for how one should live in a socialist society. The individual's psychological struggle, and even failure in that struggle, had become a valid topic for exploration and portrayal. The types and themes of art that could be discussed openly in official discourse were expanding rapidly.

* * *

By 1963, when theater history student Eva Šormová collected the testimony I will examine in the next chapter, the survivors of Terezín who remained in Czechoslovakia represented a much more homogenous group than in 1945-47. As their numbers decreased due to death and emigration, their affiliation as a group with "Czechness" and "leftness" was achieved: those who remained to be interviewed were all Czech speakers and all committed leftists.

We have already seen testimony from two members of this generation: Karel Reiner and František Miška. In their texts from the immediate postwar period, they had performed their belonging to the Czechoslovak social body mainly by aligning their

⁴³⁹ "Protifašistické filmy nejlepší," *Hlas revoluce*, March 7, 1963.

discussions of art and theater with current political goals. What strategies for reintegration were available to them and their peers in 1963, and what were the characteristics of the non-Jewish Czechs as their audience?

Periodicals reveal certain changes that promised a more receptive audience. Although *Rudé právo* showed little interest in discussing anti-Semitism as a form of racism, their writers did respond to gestures such as the performance of *The Last Cyclist*. The public of *Hlas* readers, which had declared its intense loyalty to the government in the immediate prewar years and had shown little solidarity with the Jews, now appeared to chafe somewhat under the yoke of the Party but welcomed Jewish journalists and Jewish narratives.

The Terezín survivors and *Hlas* readers were also linked by certain affective structures. Williams proposed the phrase "structures of experience" while searching for a term to identify what he would subsequently call "structures of feeling," but then rejected "structures of experience" because "one of its senses has that past tense which is the most important obstacle to recognition of the area of social experience which is being defined."⁴⁴⁰ This sense of the past tense describes exactly what I want to identify: a structure of feeling that "precipitated" during the survivors' prewar or wartime lives and was associated with certain social formations and institutions, certain artistic forms and conventions, from the past—for example, the theater of Voskovec and Werich. Recreating this structure of experience in their 1960s narratives enabled them to do more than just show their appreciation for the Liberated Theater's prewar political and aesthetic program. It allowed the survivors to re-experience specifically affective

⁴⁴⁰ Williams, 132.

elements of consciousness and relationships—that is, a whole dense network of memories and feelings—that they associated with previous periods in their lives.

Discussing these "structures of experience" in the 1960s served more than a merely nostalgic function. Drawing on this past enabled the political prisoners and the Terezín survivors to bring into the present certain residual structures they believed were still valid, and created the potential for both groups to experience intense feelings of solidarity, not only within their own groups but with each other. Since most of Terezín culture was based on prewar structures, the former political prisoners were likely to respond to this affective dimension of the survivors' collective memory almost as much as other survivors did. In other words, returning to Deleuze and Guattari's term, both groups shared a common refrain: the performance practices the Czech Jews had brought into the ghetto were the same ones the political prisoners remembered from the prewar period and, to some extent, had practiced during their own imprisonment. That "limited space of order" both groups had been able to create during the years of their persecution was based on identical prewar structures of experience—structures that were now being re-activated to create a new post-Stalinist order. As these groups circulated narratives of the past that diverged from the "traditional" version that legitimated the Czechoslovak Communist government's power, this populist pressure from below, coupled with pressure from above—Khrushchev's directives to reform—soon resulted in change in the political as well as the cultural sphere.

A new factor—the younger generation—also constituted a potentially receptive audience. New "structures of feeling" emerging among Suchý and Šlitr fans, structures that appeared to share some affective dimensions with Terezín theater (mainly a desire

for escape and pleasure), suggested that youths' interests might be compatible as well with some interests of *Hlas's* public (i.e. with their newly expressed interest in formal experiment, in both prewar and contemporary periods). A new ability to listen and respond among members of all three of these groups, based on a common interest in past and present avant-garde art forms and the pleasure associated with them—and a shared disinterest in the government-imposed style of socialist realism—resulted in survivor narratives that, while still responding to certain contemporary pressures, revealed a much broader and more detailed picture of theatrical activities in the ghetto. The stage was set for a further phase of reintegration: that the prisoners would not only circulate narratives about Terezín theatrical performances' meaning for the prisoners, but that a non-Jewish audience would respond to those narratives.

Chapter 6

Theater as Resilience: The Younger Generation Testifies, 1963

By 1963, the social and political thaw underway in Czechoslovakia had created a new set of conditions for the reception of the Terezín survivors' narratives. For a variety of reasons, most barriers to their reintegration had disappeared; thus the performative aspects of their testimony were no longer focused on overcoming legal and social exclusion to effect a tenable subject position for themselves, and pressures to renounce certain aspects of their experience, while not completely absent, were greatly reduced.⁴⁴¹ Therefore I examine the 1963 testimony with a different question in mind: why was the narrative of their own agency and pleasure in the cultural sphere of the ghetto so important that they refused to renounce it in 1945-47, in spite of the pressures to do so, and why did agency in particular figure so prominently in the 1963 testimony?

I have argued in previous chapters that performing their testimony in the present protected the survivors' subjectivity by maintaining their role as creators of meaning about the events of their own lives. Shifting my focus from the features of their testimony in the present to the function of Terezín theater in the past, I suggest those performances protected their subjectivity in the ghetto in even more complex ways.

⁴⁴¹ Neither Fischer nor Reiner, for example, as the two survivors with the strongest relationship to German-language culture, discussed the German-language culture in the ghetto, while some others mentioned it freely. Fischer, although he mentioned plays by French, Spanish and Russian authors, did not mention a single play by German author, and only mentioned theater by the "German and Austrian prisoners" once—as being more conventional (i.e. less meaningful). Miška, on the other hand, mentioned that Büchner's play *Woyzeck* had been prepared in German by director Karl Meinhard, and acknowledged that an original play staged by Schorsch, *Puppets*, had been written in German and that a member of their own circle, Mirko Tůma, translated the play. Reiner, who had faced accusations after 1948 of "Zionist bourgeois nationalism," appeared to avoid discussing Czech culture in ways that might brand him a "Czech bourgeois nationalist." Milan Kuna, *Dvakrát zrozený: Život a dílo Karla Reinera* (Jinočany: H & H Vyšehradská, 2008), 209.

I have chosen to frame my analysis in terms of theory on trauma, based largely on my experience of presenting two lectures on my research to the survivor community in Prague in 2006. During the discussion after my first talk, which I had also framed based on theories of trauma, survivor Michaela Vidláková took the microphone:

About trauma: I think it's a bit of a mistake ... those who survived and went from Terezín to other camps always remembered Terezín like part of home, there we were still with our parents, there was still culture.... So today ... it's expected that what will be discussed is trauma ...no one can say that, in Terezín, there we fell in love for the first time, that sometimes we were happy, but today we can't say that to an audience ...

The discussion continued, with several survivors expressing their opinions on the level of trauma they experienced in the ghetto. The main theme that emerged, not only from the diversity of commentary but from the survivors' explicit warnings to me, was the futility of generalized claims about trauma: even those who had experienced roughly similar conditions in the ghetto differed greatly in opinions regarding how damaging the experience had been. One aspect of my lecture, however, was confirmed by all survivors present that evening: that they had experienced the cultural life as a site of at least temporary relief.⁴⁴²

On their advice, I make no attempt to generalize across the whole spectrum of prisoners' experience. Instead, I have selected the testimony of five survivors who represent the best-case scenario in terms of being able to exercise agency in the cultural sphere. By framing this chapter in terms of trauma theory, I do not attempt to claim that

⁴⁴² Although this particular group was unanimous, not all the survivors whom I have interviewed express this opinion. A limited number agree with Adler's opinion that the cultural life was self-deceptive.

they were not traumatized by their experiences. Rather, I explore the possibility that Terezín theater may have actually had trauma-ameliorating effects. By examining the constative of their testimony in light of factors considered to help people resist traumatization or recover from traumatizing situations I suggest that, in the theatrical sphere, they were able to establish a zone of relative safety within the dangerous environment of the ghetto. Within that space they were not only able to continue in practices from their prewar lives that were not necessarily possible within the "reality" of the ghetto, but they were able to exercise an even more significant act of agency: they constructed a sphere of meaning separate from, but sometimes articulated with, the ghetto. This sphere was intimately connected with their prewar reality, which remained intensely relevant to them because they expected to return to that world after the war.

* * *

In the spring of 1963 Jan Kopecký, who in 1947 had edited the memorial volume for Gustav Schorsch in which František Miška's testimony appeared, suggested to Eva Šormová, his 19-year old student of theater history at Prague's Charles University, that she write her seminar paper on the topic of theater in the Terezín ghetto. At that time there was virtually no secondary source material she could draw on, so she gathered information by conducting personal interviews with twenty-three survivors.

Responding to this specific expression of interest by a young, non-Jewish Czech, backed by the status of the institution she represented, the survivors accepted the invitation to participate in meaning-making regarding this aspect of the Czechoslovak past and conveyed to her an enormous amount of information about theatrical performance in the ghetto and its meaning for them.

The texts I analyze in this chapter are Šormová's reconstructions, more than forty years after the interviews, of quickly jotted notes from conversations focused specifically on theater.⁴⁴³ As Šormová described her interview methodology to me in 2004, she had presented a few basic questions regarding fellow theater artists or specific performances and then simply "let them speak."⁴⁴⁴ These extremely mediated texts suggest, rather than perfectly capture, the survivors' own feelings and turns of phrase, but provide an astonishing wealth of information on the theatrical life of the ghetto from various individual points of view.

From her list of twenty-three interviewees in 1963 I have selected five: Karel Reiner and František Miška, whose 1945-47 testimony I have already examined, and three more from the same generation: Hana Reinerová, Jana Šedová, and Jan Fischer. These three survivors also gave testimony on Terezín theater in subsequent periods, thus enabling me to continue my analysis in the future with later collections.⁴⁴⁵ All five were born between 1910 and 1921 (in 1963, age 42-53), and all five fit the "best case scenario" I am looking for: as young Czech speakers in the ghetto, they had the youthful energy and the linguistic access to participate in the vibrant Czech-language cultural life of the ghetto, a scene less susceptible to censorship than German-language performance. In their testimony, in which they not only described the performances but

⁴⁴³ Šormová preserved the handwritten notes she took during her interviews—in 1963, Czech students did not have ready access to tape recorders—and, upon my request in 2007, typed up ten sets of those notes. I am grateful for her generosity in sharing these materials.

⁴⁴⁴ Personal interview with L. Peschel, Prague, December 3, 2004.

⁴⁴⁵ Reinerová, Fischer, and Miška also participated in my interviews in 2004-05. Šormová interviewed very few of the youngest generation of survivors: those who had been young teenagers or even children in the ghetto, who had participated in the cultural activities of the children's homes and in performances such as the children's opera *Brundibár*, who are today the most vocal representatives of Terezín culture.

speculated on their value and meaning, they spoke more or less explicitly about the benefits they derived from participation.

Short individual biographies for each are found in Appendix A, but to summarize their lives and their relationships briefly: these five covered a wide range of theatrical practice in the ghetto yet also shared personal and artistic links. Hana Reinerová, Karel Reiner's wife, and Jana Šedová, whom we encountered in the previous chapter, were both from Czech-speaking, relatively non-religious families living before the war in smaller Czech cities. Jan Fischer's German-speaking parents had converted to Christianity; he was raised as a Lutheran but was aware of the family's Jewish roots and was completely fluent in both Czech and German, although he considered German his native language. Despite the fact that the Reiners arrived several months after the rest, all five knew each other in the ghetto. Although no performances featured all five, they had worked together in various configurations: all but Miška participated in the Terezín performance of *Ester*, Miška, Šedová and Fischer performed together in Gogol's *The Marriage*, and Miška performed in *The Romantics*, for which Reiner composed the incidental music. Thus their testimony provides various points of view on performances they were all familiar with and fellow performers they all knew.

The constative of their testimony is remarkably consistent across the five narrators and, in the case of Reiner and Miška, across a gap of over fifteen years. Therefore, instead of examining each survivor's individual voice, I will analyze the content of their testimony according to the themes that emerged in their rich and detailed descriptions of performance activities in the ghetto—descriptions which

suggest that performance may have helped them cope with some of the most traumatic aspects of life in the ghetto.

Most recent theoretical work on trauma draws on scholars, such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, who focus on the traumatic event as a sudden stimulus which cannot be assigned meaning and thus cannot be truly experienced. However, to capture the ongoing aspect of the Terezín prisoners' situation, I turn to psychiatrist Judith Herman, who studies groups subjected to prolonged, repeated traumatic events. She argues that the symptoms of trauma stem from a more general inability to react to a threat; as she puts it; "helplessness constitutes the essential insult of trauma."⁴⁴⁶ Considering descriptions such as *Hlas* writer Ib's description of the prisoners' "escape from powerlessness" during Švenk's performances, and even Miška's testimony from 2002 about their "longing to oppose dismal powerlessness with beauty," I believe Herman more accurately describes what the Terezín prisoners were facing.⁴⁴⁷

Herman points out that not every individual subjected to potentially traumatizing events actually suffers trauma, and that characteristics shared by a small minority of exceptional people appear to make them relatively invulnerable even in extreme situations: "those with high sociability, a thoughtful and active coping style, and a *strong perception* of their ability to control their destiny" (emphasis mine).⁴⁴⁸ However, my main interest is not in those exceptional individuals, but rather in the possibility that certain *groups* of prisoners may have been able to develop those characteristics as shared social features of their community through their participation in theatrical

⁴⁴⁶ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992), 41.

⁴⁴⁷ František Miška, *Když se pláč směje: Pout' divadelního režiséra* (Prague: Primus, 2002), 38.

⁴⁴⁸ Herman, 58.

performance. That is, performance, as an act of agency, is itself not only an active coping strategy, but participation in theater enabled actors and spectators to interact in an intensely social way with their fellow prisoners, to think through ways to represent their experience on stage in a more manageable form, and to enjoy a sense of control, for a few hours, within a limited space, over their own lives.

Based on her clinical practice, Herman identifies three steps as the sequence of recovery of traumatized individuals: the creation of a safe environment, remembrance and mourning of the traumatic event and the resulting losses, and reconnection with oneself, others, and one's world.⁴⁴⁹ Although all three of these steps appear in the survivors' testimony, they do not appear as a sequential process but rather all at the same time and with crucial variations.

Terezín theater as a safe space

Terezín theater, as an institution, consisted of a whole network of performance and rehearsal spaces located all over the ghetto. A preserved document lists eighteen performance sites including the ghetto coffee house, administered by the *Freizeitgestaltung* [Office of Leisure Time Administration], the branch of the Jewish self-government that administered lectures, concerts, theater, and other cultural activities in the ghetto.⁴⁵⁰ These sites ranged from cellar rooms and platforms built in attics to relatively well-equipped performance spaces. Outside of these official channels, prisoners also organized performances for each other in their own quarters, including the youth homes.

⁴⁴⁹ Herman, 155.

⁴⁵⁰ Heřman collection, Terezín Memorial, Terezín, Czech Republic, inv. no. PT 3765. See my introduction for more information on the establishment and functions of the *Freizeitgestaltung*.

Official employment by the *Freizeitgestaltung* could offer a measure of official safety: performers who were considered essential workers could apply for an exemption from outgoing transports based on their artistic activities. However, the kind of safety that even non-official participants in the cultural life experienced in the theater was based on another factor: a sense of control and safety engendered by the fact that the SS never violated this space.⁴⁵¹ In the ghetto, even walking down the street could mean a chance encounter with certain SS officers who were known for random acts of brutality; the prisoners' living quarters were subject to unannounced searches for "contraband" by groups of German women who stole whatever they pleased. However, in the performance spaces, prisoners soon discovered that they could count on being undisturbed for those few hours. Since the cultural activities were legal, SS officers had no reason to monitor them, and even less reason to appear at a performance in Czech, which few of them understood. Šedová traced the evolution of the theatrical scene and its legal status as follows:

The first signs: at the beginning of 1942 began Švenk's men's cabaret.

They played in the attics, everything was illegal.

Theater started ... in 1942, when all of Terezín was changed into a ghetto. Official permission...

Although it is likely, according to documents preserved from the ghetto, that the cultural activities were legal even during the period when prisoners were confined to their barracks, Šedová correctly captured the transition from performance in relatively

⁴⁵¹ Although there are a few accounts in survivor testimony of the Czech gendarmes who guarded the perimeter of the camp appearing unexpectedly during a performance, according to survivors they never interrupted a show.

hidden spaces to freedom of movement within the ghetto in the summer of 1942 and the new openness of the cultural scene once it was officially condoned.⁴⁵²

A remarkable feature of Terezín theater was its safety, not only from intrusion, but from censorship. As Miška remarked, "In Terezín there was freedom of repertoire like nowhere else."⁴⁵³ Theatrical prohibitions enacted outside the ghetto during the course of the war, such as a ban on Jews staging German classics and, after the Battle of Stalingrad, on Russian plays, did not apply in Terezín. The survivors listed a stunning array of works rehearsed and performed in the ghetto, ranging from *Faust* to plays by Griboyedov and Gogol to practically the entire repertoire from the stages of the Czechoslovak First Republic. The only real threat of censorship came from the Jewish Council of Elders. As Reiner mentioned in 1945, due to their politically-motivated disapproval, he had had to struggle to gain their approval for his performance. Šedová mentioned that the Council had also censored Karel Švenk's *The Last Cyclist*, but for a very different reason: the allegory was so transparent that they feared even the normally indifferent SS might punish the prisoners. Nevertheless, the Council largely gave the prisoners a free hand, and they responded with a remarkable volume of theatrical activity. Šedová lists twenty-eight titles, including both original plays and prewar works by artists including Cocteau, Büchner and Čapek; nineteen of them were fully staged.

Another aspect of the theatrical scene that afforded a sense of safety, this time not associated with the performances or performance spaces per se but the social

⁴⁵² The Terezín "Daily Orders" had already provided permission for rudimentary performances in the barracks in December 1941. See my introduction.

⁴⁵³ František Miška, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963.

networks that formed around them, was the social solidarity that developed. The value of a strong sense of community in enhancing all of its members' efforts to fight trauma has been demonstrated in a wide variety of circumstances. For example, psychiatrists Roy Grinker and John Spiegel observed that, with soldiers in battle, the most important factor in countering psychological breakdown was "the morale and leadership of the small fighting unit."⁴⁵⁴ Within and among various groups of young Czech-Jewish actors, different types of these "small fighting units" developed. For example, as Reinerová pointed out, "the Terezín audience was created by a fairly stable circle of people who visited the theater regularly."⁴⁵⁵ Among young Czech Jews, this circle likely began with a common interest in certain topics and performance styles based on shared categories of group identification that I will explore in the next section. However, these group identifications soon gave rise to more concrete communities, forged by the close proximity and the danger in which the prisoners lived. For example, a level of personal trust among theatergoers was necessary since actors and audience, even though the actual danger was likely minimal, did have to count on each other not to betray the content of some of the riskier Czech-language works to the SS.

More intense bonds of solidarity were established among members of groups who worked together regularly. Although Reiner's immediate prewar testimony had focused more on cliques and intrigue, Miška had described director Gustav Schorsch's actors as a group that supported each others's endeavors. In 1963 Miška elaborated on how Schorsch worked with his troupe:

⁴⁵⁴ Quoted in Herman, 25.

⁴⁵⁵ Hana Reinerová, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963.

Schorsch, before he began to do theater, organized seminars, where he wanted to bring all participants—future interpreters—to the same common spiritual basis, to reach the point where there was affiliation among them in their approach to the work, to the text. Maximal feeling of responsibility. If someone leads such a seminar, it has enormous sense, he will achieve much more than if he quickly did one performance after another.⁴⁵⁶

Two other survivors, Fischer and Šedová, had participated in Schorsch's seminars as well, and both described the practical exercises and scenes they engaged with in their 1963 testimony. The intensity of their bonds and their admiration for his leadership, however, comes through most vividly in their descriptions of the performance of Gogol's *The Marriage*, which I will examine separately below.

A sense of affiliation among members of Schorsch's group apparently translated into generosity, although not blind praise, regarding some of their colleague's work. For example, Šedová remarked on a production directed by František Zelenka, a well-known theater designer who worked often with Schorsch and who decided to try his hand at directing in the ghetto: "Zelenka's staging of Georges Dandin was directed badly, but it had excellent costumes and decorations, very imaginative, excellent arrangement."⁴⁵⁷ Fischer praised one of the actors in a Terežín production of František Langer's *Camel through a Needle's Eye* for creating an effect of "hugely human tenderness, he beamed humanity. It was a display of guilelessness...", even though he felt the staging did not measure up to the stylization or immediacy Schorsch managed to

⁴⁵⁶ Miška, 1963.

⁴⁵⁷ Jana Šedová, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963.

give his productions; "here were valid older theatrical conventions."⁴⁵⁸ Miška as well praised another group's staging of works by Jiří Wolker work as being "more an amateur attempt than a theatrical experience. But it was a sincere attempt."⁴⁵⁹

Lest the scene appear unrealistically idyllic, Reiner's accusations were not unfounded; solidarity sometimes crossed the boundary into cliquishness. This group's own sense of insiderhood had apparently developed in part through pointed criticism of others' work, recalled even twenty years after the performances were staged. For example, Šedová was not nearly as kind as Fischer regarding the cast of *Camel through a Needle's Eye*, calling them a "half-amateur second-class group." Miška, who in this period was preparing to make his own transition from acting to directing, was even more critical of some of his fellow actors.⁴⁶⁰ Of Vlasta Schönová's performance in Cocteau's *The Human Voice* he said, "She has a chesty voice, plays with technical effort, without deeper inward foundation. Declamation, pathos, dramatization."⁴⁶¹ He objected even more emphatically to another Terežín director's interpretation of Chekhov one-acts: "Until this day I don't understand what it was supposed to be about. Ružička did not understand Chekhov at all, it was something completely different than Chekhov."⁴⁶² However, Miška also acknowledged, apparently somewhat ironically, the function of this criticism in establishing their own sense of superiority. In a rare occasion when Šormová inserted a comment to ensure that the opinion expressed was attributed to her interviewee and not to herself, she noted, "Miška says: we had a little

⁴⁵⁸ Jan Fischer, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963.

⁴⁵⁹ Miška, 1963.

⁴⁶⁰ Miška, *Když*, 82.

⁴⁶¹ Miška, 1963.

⁴⁶² Miška, 1963.

bit elevated relationship to the rest of the groups because we were those who did art, while the rest were for us hams, boulevard actors."

Thus the "solidarity of the small fighting unit" that developed among Schorsch's actors did not extend to all their fellow artists, not even all their fellow young Czech actors. But returning to the notion of the safe space, even if the theatrical scene did not always engender mutually supportive relationships, it did protect them from trauma by engendering relationships that functioned according to normal, prewar dynamics. That is, rather than being preoccupied with their pathological state of helplessness in the face of the radical power imbalance between themselves and the Nazis, these young prisoners—in 1942, all were between 21 and 32 years of age—were engaged in the affectively intense yet normal relationships of affection, of personal rivalry, of artistic disagreements and competition. Rather than internalizing the Nazi view that the only thing that mattered was their group identity as Jews and thus inferior beings, they focused on stakes that mattered greatly to them as individuals and united the members of their "small fighting units," such as the aesthetic quality and political impact of their productions versus those of their peers.

Of course, creating a truly safe space was beyond the prisoners' power, but as Herman makes explicit, it is not true safety but a "*strong perception* of their ability to control their destiny" that ameliorates trauma. Their subjectively experienced sense of control over the space and time of a performance offered the prisoners the opportunity to forget their powerlessness, experience a sense of agency, and thus recover from the "fundamental insult" of trauma for a few hours. In fact, all of these aspects of safety—the inviolability of the performance space, the lack of concern about censorship, the

social bonds among the participants—present an image almost diametrically opposed to the narrative of Terezín as Nazi *potemkiniada*, of the cultural life as a site of objectification and exploitation, that circulated in the immediate postwar public sphere. Rather, the survivors' 1963 testimony conveys a sense of practically unlimited agency and ownership of that space as a site where they could exercise their own choices, form and express their own opinions, and develop strong bonds with their peers. Within it, they engaged in performance practices that may have ameliorated other traumatic aspects of their ghettoization.

Remembrance and mourning, remembrance and denial

Regarding Herman's second step in recovery from traumatization, remembrance and mourning, the prisoners effectively reversed it: in the performance spaces of the ghetto they remembered their prewar past and establish continuity with that way of life instead of recognizing a fundamental disjunction. As Utitz pointed out in 1947, few of the prisoners were willing or psychologically able to acknowledge that their deportation might result in permanent losses. Rather, they assumed that the postwar future would look just like their past:

It sounds strange, but it is literally true: although everyone knew that everything they owned before had been sold and stolen, scattered to the winds, they nevertheless thought to find everything just as they had left it. They did not see that they would have to enter into a fundamentally

different and changed world, that—even in the best of cases—hard and care-filled times awaited them.⁴⁶³

Therefore, the step of acknowledging and mourning losses was replaced by its exact opposite: vigorous denial of the possibility of those losses, and the representation and thus symbolic re-experiencing of many aspects of their prewar lives—aspects they could not experience during day-to-day life in the ghetto—on stage. Since the prisoners, having no idea that the social fabric of the First Republic would be rent and then re sewn into all-but-unrecognizable patterns, believed that the way of life they remembered would be restored, they constructed their theatrical experiences precisely according to the models of their prewar past.

On the most basic level, the prisoners established one kind of continuity that was not symbolic: the continuity of theatrical practice itself, both as a social institution and as a personal practice. Those who had regularly attended or created performances before the war, after years of being excluded from public participation during the Nazi occupation, were able to engage in these practices again after their deportation to the ghetto. More specifically, the prisoners established continuity between their prewar lives and their lives in Terezín by reproducing both the archive and the repertoire of the First Republic.⁴⁶⁴ They not only staged many plays that had been popular in interwar Czechoslovakia, but they created new performances based closely on prewar models—

⁴⁶³ Emil Utitz, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentracním táboře* (Prague: Delnické nakladatelství, 1947), 24.

⁴⁶⁴ Here I draw on Diana Taylor's distinction between "archival" memory embedded in documents, literary texts, and other items supposedly resistant to change, vs. the "repertoire," of embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing, etc. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19-20.

sometimes through the participation of individual artists who had helped develop those models. As Reinerová pointed out,

Czech theater in Terezín was strongly influenced by the work of E.F. Burian, Jindřich Honzl and the Liberated Theater.⁴⁶⁵ The influence of Honzl and the Liberated Theater was mediated by the designer František Zelenka, who worked with that theater.⁴⁶⁶

Both Šedová and Reinerová described performances that drew on Burian's popular recitation style, "voiceband," and Šedová repeatedly mentioned the influence of Voskovec and Werich upon the revues written in the ghetto by Josef Lustig and Jiří Spitz:

Lustig-Spitz: *Prince Bettliegend, Ben Akiba Lied* (after the example of the Liberated Theater, a pair of clowns, dialogues in entrances onto the forestage).

They wrote new song texts to Ježek's music for the revues of the Liberated Theater, inspired by Terezín conditions and reacting to them. Ben Akiba Lied: scene from a Roman circus A further scene in heaven with Maria Theresa. Two prisoners from Terezín arrive and talk about what is going on in the town now (Spitz was like Voskovec, Lustig - dry comic).⁴⁶⁷

By fitting Terezín itself into the aesthetic framework established by the beloved prewar duo, Lustig and Spitz reversed Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*: they forced the

⁴⁶⁵ The Liberated Theater was the theater of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich (see Chapter 5). Jindřich Honzl directed several of their performances.

⁴⁶⁶ Reinerová, 1963.

⁴⁶⁷ Šedová, 1963.

strange to conform to the patterns of the familiar, establishing the continuity of that framework's relevance even in the ghetto.

Reinerová also mentioned an original work written according to even older models: a puppet play based on classic fairy tales by the boys in her care in one of the youth homes.

The marionette play *Punished Devil*. The play had a simple plot: a princess is courted by a young prince, a devil wants to carry her off to hell, Kašpárek foils his plans and helps the prince get the princess. The dialogue was very simple and naively comic⁴⁶⁸

The boys, by recreating the puppet shows of their youth, including their traditional characters and fairy tale plot elements, had brought an element of their prewar lives into the ghetto. These performances, however, did more than simply reproduce the cultural artifacts the prisoners missed from their prewar lives; they offered opportunities to establish continuity with their former lives by performing and maintaining their own prewar national and political group affiliations. For example, the puppet play Hana Reinerová described represented much more than a distraction for the children. This was a form of education in national identity; as she continued in her testimony, the play "came from the traditions of Czech folk puppetry, Matěj Kopecký."⁴⁶⁹ Puppeteer Matěj Kopecký (1775-1847) was recognized by Czech historians as an important figure during the National Revival movement, when "trivial" theatrical forms such as puppetry served as an inconspicuous way to propagate national

⁴⁶⁸ Reinerová, 1963.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

legends and the Czech language itself.⁴⁷⁰ By assisting and advising the boys, Reinerová had not only performed her own affiliation to Czechness but had trained her young charges in performing it as well.

Affiliation with Czechness in the 1963 present of the testimony was occasionally performed by criticizing its opposite; for example, Reinerová mentioned that "Hans Hofer had a cabaret in German, but completely in the old style," and Fischer criticized a Czech performance for resembling "conventional theater ... by the German and Austrian prisoners."⁴⁷¹ However, in this testimony, affiliation was represented more often through enthusiastic acts of belonging rather than boundary-drawing to establish an outside to their insiderness. For example, Jan Fischer recalled recitations of poetry in the ghetto, explicitly recognizing the significance of public performance:

Schorsch's recitation evenings - Neruda, Dyk, Halas - a proclamation of Czechness, Czech poetry. Neruda, Dyk - poets with revolutionary content. To identify oneself publicly with these poets was a deed.⁴⁷²

His mention of "revolutionary content" points to the poets' political as well as national meaning. These three poets, although they belong to different generations, share one feature. Each, in his day, resisted the Germanic oppressor of the Czechs: Jan Neruda and Viktor Dyk opposed the Austrian Habsburgs, and František Halas, a favorite of Fischer's generation, was well known for his anti-fascist works.⁴⁷³ As the

⁴⁷⁰ This theatrical form had retained its importance; puppetry was mentioned frequently in the discourse circulating in postwar periodicals about the role of Czech theater.

⁴⁷¹ Fischer, 1963.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Jan Neruda (1834-1891), journalist and poet, inspired Pablo Neruda's pseudonym. A known Czech patriot, he was accused in 1871 of treason against the Habsburg empire. In his most famous work, the collection of short stories *Tales of the Little Quarter*, he satirically depicts the Prague petty bourgeoisie. Viktor Dyk (1877-1931) was imprisoned for anti-Austrian resistance during World War I. Halas's work

Hlas revoluce article in the last chapter revealed, to identify with Halas even in the early 1960s was a deed: a gesture against the worst excesses of Communist persecution of artists. For the Terezín prisoners themselves, however, this line of poets represented a particular type of continuity and an opportunity to perform their own self-affiliation: they were part of a long line of Czechs who had had to fight Germanic oppressors, and participating in or even attending such a reading allowed them to display their loyalty to Czechness publicly.

Reiner's focus on the Czechness of music in the ghetto had remained, but his own unambiguous affiliation to that music, clear in 1945, is missing from his 1963 testimony:

In dramaturgy of musical production there was an emphasis on Czech music, a great number of concerts took place, which were assembled from Czech compositions, also in the opera were Czech works (the first was Smetana's *Bartered Bride*), because for Jews in Terezín, who considered themselves above all to be Czechs, that was their culture and art.⁴⁷⁴

Perhaps more cautious in a period when "bourgeois nationalism" was frowned upon, Reiner spoke critically in 1963 of the "nationalistic and chauvinistic inclinations" displayed by some of the prisoners and the fact that "a part [of the Czech Jews] were bourgeois, a part were people of progressive thinking and Communists."⁴⁷⁵ However,

from the immediate prewar period included *Dokořán* [*Wide Open*], a collection of anti-fascist poems, and *Torzo naděje* [*Fragment of Hope*], poems reacting to the Munich Pact.

⁴⁷⁴ Karel Reiner, interview with Eva Šormová, 1963.

⁴⁷⁵ His colleague Norbert Frýd, in an essay written in 1963, exercised the same kind of caution. Describing the prisoners' emotional reaction to *The Bartered Bride*, he wrote: "It had nothing in common

in this later testimony, he described his own national and his political affiliations in the ghetto when he explained his intentions for the work *The Bagpiper of Strakonice*: in order to stage this nineteenth-century play with songs, based on a Czech folk tale, as a "strongly political performance," he had composed music "for two pianos, which worked with the motifs of the Czech national anthem and the Internationale."⁴⁷⁶

Although political power was obviously denied to the prisoners, even in the ghetto they continued to engage in the practices of full political subjects, forming and expressing their opinions—opinions they believed would be relevant after the war as well—on the stage to their fellow prisoners. In addition, the sheer selection of specific performances or styles, for example, drawing from the archive or repertoire of E. F. Burian or Voskovec and Werich, usually carried specifically political connotations; even when the content was explicitly political, the style alone gave the performance a political valence that the other prisoners immediately recognized.

For these young, left-leaning, Czech-speaking prisoners, this strategy of denying the possibility of long-term loss and continuing to perform affiliation to Czechness and leftness in the theatrical spaces of Terezín effectively established continuity, not only from their prewar lives into the ghetto but from the ghetto into postwar life. These group identifications, although in somewhat altered form, not only continued to be valid but became vitally important objects of feeling after the war; therefore, the young

with nationalism. Few true Czech nationalists lived in Terezín; to left-oriented majority they were laughable. But before Smetana and in that situation everyone bowed his head." Nobeřt Fryd, "Kultura v předposlední stanici," in *Theater/Divadlo*, ed. František Černý (Prague: Orbis, 1965), 213-229, 224.

⁴⁷⁶ Reiner, 1963. *The Bagpiper of Strakonice* [*Strakonický dudák*] by Josef Kajetán Tyl premiered in November 1847, during the Czech National Revival period. Švanda the bagpiper wants to marry the village girl Dorothy but he is too poor, so he decides he will earn money for the wedding by playing the bagpipes. His mother, the fairy Rosava, casts a spell on the bagpipes to help her son. After various misadventures the tale ends happily.

prisoners had "stayed in practice" and were prepared to reintegrate as insiders into postwar society. For Czechoslovak German speakers or members of the bourgeoisie, this same strategy may have ameliorated their experience of loss in the ghetto itself but had left them, after the war, with a set of carefully maintained affiliations that no longer had a home.

However, returning to the five young Czech leftist survivors, it is clear from their critique of certain shows that simply having Czech or leftist characteristics was not enough for them to consider a performance significant.⁴⁷⁷ In the next section I suggest that three specific performances the survivors named as "having impact" or being "meaningful" shared particular characteristics: those performances both evoked a whole rich network of associations that the prisoners had constructed before the war and allowed the prisoners to link that network with their lives in the ghetto.

Reconnection with oneself, others, and one's world

Regarding Herman's third step, reconnection with self, others, and one's world, she is by no means alone in recognizing the traumatized person's need to reconnect with self and others in order to recover from a traumatic experience. Theorists and practitioners writing about this need recognize narrative as the vehicle of that reconnection: trauma victims must be able to create a narrative of the traumatic event and address it to an empathetic witness in order to recover their subjectivity.⁴⁷⁸ Kelly Oliver, elaborating on

⁴⁷⁷ See, for example, Fischer's and Šedová's comments quoted above on *Camel through a Needle's Eye*. Even association with E. F. Burian's style was not enough to guarantee the significance of a work. Miška called Irena Dodalová's staging of a collection of Villon poems "an embarrassing affair, copying Burian's performances". Miška, 1963.

⁴⁷⁸ For example, Paul Connerton, drawing on Freud's 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," argues that transference, as an aspect of the relationship between analyst and analysand, sets up "an intermediate realm between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the

her notion that "witnessing," as the process of address and response shared with another, is in fact the fundamental structure of subjectivity, discusses Dori Laub's concept of the "inner witness": traumatized survivors, by interiorizing the interpersonal dialogue shared with the therapist, regain their ability to connect with themselves.⁴⁷⁹

In dealing with a potentially traumatizing situation in the present, the prisoners employed theatrical performance as a site of reconnection with self and others through embodied narrative activity. For the prisoner who had suffered some psychic damage, the fundamentally social, address-and-response nature of theater re-established a connection with others, and in doing so, provided a dialogue the prisoner could interiorize to restore the "inner witness." In fact I believe this is exactly the process survivor Eva Kavanová described in an essay she wrote in 1967:

The interaction of creators and spectators actually created a mass reaction. That mass reaction brought apparently contradictory results: it awakened in the listeners' consciousness that they perceived, understood, reacted individually, that they were capable of other feelings than those the Fascists forced upon them by condemning them to the herd. A mass reaction, although it sounds paradoxical, that strengthened the consciousness of the prisoner that, so far, he still existed as an individual.⁴⁸⁰

other is made," and describes this realm as consisting "to a very large extent of narrative activity." Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26.

⁴⁷⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing : Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 85.

⁴⁸⁰ Eva Kavanová, unpublished essay, 1967.

Šedová expressed a related sentiment in an essay she wrote in 1962: that Terezín theater managed "to weld a series of nameless transport numbers into an enthusiastic human collective."⁴⁸¹ To elaborate on a notion I proposed above, it appears that prisoners alienated from others and themselves because of their objectification, because of being "chained to a group identity" by the Nazis, were able to re-establish a sense of themselves as individual subjects through their feelings of solidarity with their fellow prisoners experienced in the theater.⁴⁸² I suggest these feelings of solidarity are inseparable from Terezín theater's relationship with voluntary group identification that I described above. That is, the solidarity was generated, at least in part, through the individuals' recognition that their presence in the theater represented their own act of subjectivity-restoring agency: that the audience of which they were now a part had been formed by all those individuals' performance of a personal choice of group affiliation, versus submitting to the one that had been imposed upon them by the Nazis. By serving as witnesses to each others' act of agency, the prisoners confirmed the reality of that agency; by responding to the performers' address they reinforced the performers' and their own threatened subjectivity.

Most interesting of all, however, is the notion of reconnection with "one's world," since, within the space of theater, the prisoners could exercise personal choice and select from various represented worlds. Certain performances were exceptionally effective in connecting their audiences, not just intellectually but affectively, with worlds from their past—worlds still considered relevant because the prisoners believed

⁴⁸¹ Jana Šedová, "Terežínské divadlo," in *Theater/Divadlo*, ed. František Černý (Prague: Orbis, 1965), 229-239, 239.

⁴⁸² Oliver, 35.

they would be restored in their postwar future—by evoking structures of experience. These specifically affective elements corresponding with Raymond Williams's concept of the residual—dense networks of memories and feelings associated with certain social formations and institutions from the past that were not part of their present reality in the ghetto—were reactivated when the prisoners performed works that served as refrains. Just as Karel Švenk, with his play *The Last Cyclist*, evoked the sense of pleasure and political agency associated with Voskovec and Werich's Liberated Theater, other artists in the ghetto staged works that triggered other, just as powerful associations from the First Republic.

In some cases these associations were reactivated and resonated only within the theatrical space. For example, many of the elderly prisoners, torn from their environment, could find no meaning in the reality of the ghetto. The only experiences that had meaning for them were the "escapist" performances that enabled them to immerse themselves in a reconstructed past, completely divorced from the present of the ghetto—as Utitz described in 1947, refrains recalling, for example, prewar Vienna and the Prater park.

For the younger Czech prisoners, however, the performances they described as having "meaning" or "impact" within the ghetto did more than simply reconnect them with the world of their past. Three performances that emerged prominently in the 1963 testimony, Karel Švenk's *Last Cyclist*, E. F. Burian's *Ester*, and Gustav Schorsch's production of Gogol's *The Marriage*, not only brought a refrain from their prewar world into Terezín but reactivated and made that refrain relevant, even to their present in the ghetto.

The Last Cyclist

Jana Šedová, as Švenk's close collaborator, provided the most vivid descriptions of his work. In her 1963 testimony she abandoned the 1961 strategies she had employed to bring his play, *The Last Cyclist*, back into the public sphere. Instead of linking the work with 1960s discourse on racism, she described Švenk's original ending in detail, dictated long passages of song lyrics, none of which were used in the 1961 show, and emphasized its meaning for the Terezín prisoners instead of for the 1961 audience.

Švenk himself, as a person, is the subject of curiously inconsistent testimony. He seemed to function as a kind of Terezín Rorschach blot that reflected more about the speaker than Švenk himself; descriptions of his actual skills as a performer in the 1963 testimony run the gamut from "he played the main role in all his shows" to "he did not like to act," from "he was a composer" to "he did not know how to read notes." However, his skills as a comic, his role as someone who brought laughter and optimism in the ghetto, and his political commitment, were consistently recalled. Even Reiner, in his extremely critical 1945 testimony, had called Švenk's work "daring," now Reinerová named his cabaret, with Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and *Ester*, as one of three performances that had "political impact" in the ghetto. As Jan Fischer recalled:

K. Švenk had the ability to react to the situation suitably, not with straightforward agitation.... In style similar to the form of revues of Voskovec and Werich. Jazz songs. The action only loosely structured, cabaret features and politically oriented.... Švenk at first glance and also in character worked like a frightened little Jewish clerk; he had however a great capability for dry humor.

By recreating this particular prewar style in the ghetto, Švenk did more than link the prisoners with a particular prewar structure of experience. By "reacting to the situation suitably" even in Terezín, he modified that refrain to give meaning to events in the ghetto itself.

Šedová, who characterized Švenk as "a talented comic and author, active in a Communist cell," who was "very specific politically," described details of *The Last Cyclist* that reveal this political specificity. Švenk not only incorporated many elements drawn from the prisoners' experience of the immediate prewar years, satirizing the tiny Czech fascist party and Nazi racial law, but took on class tensions in the ghetto:⁴⁸³

Scene on the boat. The boat had two decks, on the upper deck were prominents, on the lower proletarians. An SS-man counts them on an abacus. Social tension: prominents - proletarians.⁴⁸⁴

In Terezín, as Auředníčková mentioned, a small number of prisoners were classified as "prominents"—usually those who had enjoyed high-status positions before the war or had important Aryan relatives—and given preferential treatment. By representing this tension according to the interpretive framework of leftists in the First Republic, as a "bourgeois vs. proletarians" opposition, Švenk imposed the prisoners' own patterns of meaning-making onto the events of the ghetto.

However, making political sense of events in the ghetto was not Švenk's only mission. As Šedová described the original ending, in which Bořivoj saved himself by

⁴⁸³ She described the comic character of Jan Krysa (*krysa* means *rat*) Rozprašovač, who in the script leads the street organization *Fanglička*, as a clear allegory for Czech fascist Jan Rysa Rozsévač and his nationalist paper *Vlajka* (in Czech, *fangl* and *vlajka* both mean *flag*), and twice mentions a scene where a professor uses a machine to distinguish the cyclists from the pedestrians (Jews from Aryans). During the classification of the main character, Bořivoj Abeles, the machine broke.

⁴⁸⁴ Šedová, 1963.

accidentally lighting the fuse of a rocket that shot the lunatics to the moon, she made perhaps the most radical revision of her 1961 testimony: "The performance *Last Cyclist* had as its goal to give people a bit of optimism. The happy coincidence that saves Bořivoj Abeles." A hero who saves himself by accident did not fit the dictates of socialist realism, but it corresponded to the overall aesthetic of Voskovec and Werich's particular brand of leftist activism; in their own reviews they often played characters who inadvertently became embroiled in the main action and bumbled their way to a happy ending.⁴⁸⁵ In the ghetto, such an ending may have engendered feelings of optimism and pleasure associated with the familiar prewar style as well as comprising an important element in a refrain leading back to the First Republic.

Ester

The script *Ester*, adapted by E. F. Burian himself, was brought to the ghetto by Reiner and Norbert Frýd, another of Burian's prewar collaborators. Frýd, as director of the Terezín performance, also brought Burian's style into the ghetto. This production had served as an effective refrain for Reiner himself, but the other survivors did not recall it as having the same degree of impact.

Retaining to some degree his fighting progressive stance from 1945, Reiner mentioned again that leaders in the ghetto had "judged the play to be a fraud," but he focused most of his description on linking this particular refrain with the politically engaged theater of the 1930s:

The play *Ester*, in its political stance and point of view, was the most engaged work in the repertoire of Terezín theater. The staging originated

⁴⁸⁵ See Jarka Burian, *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 46.

from the script of E. F. Burian, who wanted to stage *Ester* already before the war František Zelenka designed the scenes and costumes

Reiner did not describe the plot of *Ester*, perhaps assuming it would have been familiar to Šormová due to Burian's own famous postwar production of the script. However, it is not hard to understand why he believed this production would have an impact extending beyond the theatrical space and out into the ghetto. Based on the Old Testament Book of *Ester*, which relates the story of the Jews' victory over their enemies, and performed in the style of naïve folk drama, the play embodied an optimistic ending to the prisoners' own plight and recalled Burian's own decision, during the dangerous days of the occupation, to prepare a script that performed the Czech people's affiliation with the Jews.

For the other prisoners, however, the production failed to make the script relevant to the world of the ghetto. As Fischer, who played the role of the Peasant, recalled,

Frýd's direction of the folk play *Ester* - the whole thing was an artistic enough affair which did not have social impact. A person did not feel it like a blow which would lift him out of his chair, like with Brecht....

Also some players made fun of Frýd's direction (he was no director)....

Ester was, in the given situation, too little. It was felt like a fairy tale on a great theme.

It seems remarkable that, considering the theme and evoked recollections of Burian's gesture of solidarity, Fischer would view *Ester* as "too little," but Miška and Šedová apparently concurred; neither described the performance as exceptionally

meaningful. Miška remarked only that the performance demonstrated "how people tried to find ... current-sounding texts, which were possible to relate in content to the present situation." Šedová, who played the Peasantess, recalled mainly Frýd's use of Burian's signature stylized movement.

Why did this performance have little meaning for Fischer, Miška and Šedová? I suspect that a third element was necessary for a Terezín production to "have impact"—aesthetic quality. Perhaps, as Fischer suggested, Frýd really was "no director"; artistic failings may have prevented the other prisoners from engaging thoroughly with the work. Thus, although this refrain was vivid for Reiner, whose structure of experience included personal work with Burian and enabled him to fill the production with meaning, the others did not experience a subjective sense of connection with the powerful structure of experience associated with Burian's work, nor the work's connection with the present of the ghetto.

The Marriage

Gustav Schorsch's production of *The Marriage*, on the other hand, left a deep impression upon this group of survivors, as did Schorsch himself. I suggest it was, in part, because he provided a superb type of leadership for his "small fighting unit," forging his actors into a social group that matched Herman's conditions for relative invulnerability in extreme situations. The bonds of solidarity among himself and his actors developed not only in rehearsals but in his seminars, and the survivors described the intensity of his emotional investment in those activities—and in them as performers. As Šedová recalled,

Schorsch was a very suggestive director, he lived through things with his actors, he went for a very concrete analysis of the role, he literally pumped atmosphere into the actors.⁴⁸⁶

Miška also described Schorsch's intense investment in rehearsals, where he literally played out the roles with the actors, and placed his style "between Karel Dostal [of the National Theater] and E. F. Burian," adding "Schorsch very anxiously attended to the quality of the performance from the artistic side and, from the social point of view, that it had some sense." Based on the survivors' testimony about the production, he achieved a resounding success on both counts with *The Marriage*.

In addition to Gogol's play being, as Fischer described it, "Russian, lively, against the stringent thought of the Germans," the version of the script Schorsch used had specific roots in the First Republic. During this period, when the Czech language was, to some extent, still in the process of being established as a literary instrument, skilled translators who could bring renowned works to the Czech stage were revered. In 1933 *The Marriage* was translated into brilliant modern Czech by Bohumil Mathesius, one of the most important interwar literary figures.

However, what differentiated Schorsch's production from Frýd's staging of *Ester* and other works the survivors described as having "little impact" was his strikingly original approach to the staging. Both Fischer, who played the suitor Chubkhin, and Šedová described a highly stylized performance. Schorsch's concept for Šedová's character, the matchmaker Tekla Ivanovna, "was of a caricature, the crooked painted

⁴⁸⁶ Šedová, 1963.

mouth should have symbolized the visible deceitfulness of the character."⁴⁸⁷ Fischer described Schorsch's directorial savvy in working around the limitations of his actors:

The selected level of style: exaggeration, in which the lack of knowledge of the non-actors was not to be recognized.... The characters were not like living people, but clear-cut types. The performance was tuned like a concert. Schorsch literally drilled entrance after entrance.⁴⁸⁸

Fischer located the heart of the performance in the characterizations, overtly comparing Schorsch's production with the fairy tale atmosphere of *Ester*: "the suitors in *The Marriage* ... were perceived as more ... monstrous, aggressive.... [with a] rough edge of pathological behavior Absolutely nothing darling about them."⁴⁸⁹ Miška pinpointed a specific moment where the comic façade dropped to reveal the darkness behind it:

The Marriage: The emphasis was placed on the characters - they work comically. The rhythm of daily life of characters, who awaken only in one short moment, so that they become aware of the senselessness of their behavior. Then they are carried away by the current of everyday life.⁴⁹⁰

Based on these comments it is possible to imagine the vivid, single moment when the absurd, intensely vain, self-centered and fallible characters, completely caught up in their petty pursuits, become conscious of their own monstrosity—and then return immediately to their unconsidered lives. While *Ester*, with its naïve folk verse, does to

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Fischer, 1963.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Miška, 1963.

some extent read like "a fairy tale," Schorsch managed to draw out both the comedy and the brutality of Gogol's work and draw parallels to the prisoners' life in Terezín. The problem of petty behavior and small-mindedness was something that needed interpreting in the present, for the prisoners faced it daily. The young Czech Jews, while at times implicated in these behaviors themselves, were intensely sensitive to the type of quarrelling and turf wars among the prisoners and their leaders that divided them against each other. Seemingly absurd behavior that would have been comic in another setting could translate into grave consequences in the ghetto. Petty corruption, for example, among those who worked to assemble lists of prisoners for the outgoing transports could mean a prisoner's life or death.

However, I suspect that much of the impact of *The Marriage* was its connection to a world much larger than Švenk's and Burian's particular politically inflected version of the First Republic, much larger than the ghetto itself—a world that Kavanová gestured towards when she described the individual who became a subject again in the theater:

What he heard from the mouths of actors confirmed at the same time that, as a spectator, he shared in the fruits produced by thousands of years of civilization in culture, in art, in the development of thought.⁴⁹¹

That is, Schorsch's production may have touched upon what the prisoners might have called universal human concerns. As the political prisoners' 1945 descriptions of culture in the camps revealed, the notion of humanism for those isolated from normal society was a dearly held concept. The Terezín prisoners were faced every day with

⁴⁹¹ Kavanová, unpublished essay, 1967.

what Auředníčková called "the hardship of our banishment." Schorsch, by staging a story that could have served as an allegory for every society's propensity to ignore larger issues for the sake of the trivial day-to-day routine, tied the actors and audience to, even implicated them in, a problem that extended far beyond the walls of the ghetto, far beyond even the First Republic. Schorsch's aesthetically excellent and socially meaningful production, not limited to the time or place of Terezín, allowed the prisoners to say something that could have great significance on any stage in Europe: thus they not only "shared in the fruits produced by thousands of years of civilization" but contributed to them.

* * *

In their 1963 testimony, the survivors provided a vivid picture of the culture life, one that suggests why the narrative of their own agency and pleasure in the cultural sphere of the ghetto had been important enough for them to resist pressures to renounce it. According to current theories of trauma, it appears completely plausible that theater served the function some survivors explicitly claim: by helping them resist traumatization, it helped them survive. Physically removed from the rest of the human community and forced to live in a world not of their own making nor of their own choice, theatrical performance offered a site where the prisoners could experience a subjective sense of safety, continue to engage in their prewar practices, and reconnected with "their world." The productions these young survivors described as most significant apparently enabled them to feel that they had, at least for a few hours, made the ghetto itself "their world" as well. Since they expected their prewar way of life to be restored after the war, the "limited space of order" these performance-refrains established not

only connected them with their past and present but opened channels of connection into the future as well.

In the present of 1963, when the survivors gave their testimony, the refrains established in the First Republic and brought into the ghetto, the same refrains they shared with the political prisoners, were functioning again as the "thread of a tune" that could open onto the future: in the early period of a political thaw, they drew on these familiar patterns to craft a new type of order within a promising chaos—an order that would culminate in the Prague Spring of 1968.

This gesture toward the future was also a gesture towards the past, and not just because both groups were reaching back to the residual. Although I have focused on the constative of the testimony in this chapter, Herman's three steps in the recovery from trauma suggest a performative function for the 1963 testimony as well. As Eric Santner points out, social acts of mourning are "crucial to survival, to reassembling community, to rearticulating kinship, to reweaving sustaining relationships."⁴⁹² In the ghetto itself, the prisoners had refused to acknowledge, and thus refused to mourn, the loss of their prewar way of life; in the immediate postwar period, more urgent concerns limited the mourning of Jewish losses largely to the pages of *Věstník*. In 1963 their narratives, not so much of mourning as of commemoration, narratives that, through Šormová and other scholars, could and eventually did emerge into the public sphere, may have performed that grieving process and made a gesture, as they wove their narrative into the larger narrative of the war, towards reweaving their relationships with non-Jewish Czechs.

⁴⁹² Quoted in Oliver, 110.

Chapter 7

Examining Testimony: Pleasure, Past and Present

In the preceding chapters I have argued that Czech-Jewish survivors' testimony about performance in the ghetto is a reliable form of evidence, not only regarding their needs and desires in the context of the contemporary pressures in which the testimony was given, but regarding the prisoners' subjective experience of performance in Terezín. What has this evidence revealed about the workings of theatrical performance in the ghetto and of rhetorical performance of testimony in the survivors' postwar present? After summarizing my findings I will turn again to the most controversial aspect of the survivor testimony: pleasure in the ghetto itself. Rather than regarding this as a trivial, inappropriate or even shameful aspect of the survivors' experience, I argue that a closer examination of pleasure may be the key to our understanding of *their own* understanding of the power of theater in the ghetto.

As my examination of testimony from both periods has shown, the survivors' narratives about the past of the ghetto were thoroughly shaped by the conditions of their present. Their testimony reveals attempts to conform to those conditions in order to establish a tenable subject position for themselves, but those attempts were balanced by their efforts to reinforce subjectivity by crafting the type of address that might elicit a response acknowledging the reality of their own past. In published testimony of the immediate postwar period, attempts to effect social solidarity with non-Jewish Czechs influenced survivors' choices regarding what aspects of the cultural life of the ghetto they would include in their narratives: which elements would facilitate and which would hinder their reintegration into the Czechoslovak social body? Survivors, however, did

not adopt the one explicitly desired narrative—the Communist Party's narrative of the cultural life as a site of objectification—to achieve a desired subject position. In addition, the consistency across various survivors' testimony regarding pleasure, even in excess of that "necessary" for their performances of affiliation to Czechness and leftness, suggests that these descriptions were motivated not just by the need to effect social solidarity but by a desire to describe that affect in accordance with their memories of their own lived experience. Eloquent descriptions of their ongoing sense of ostracism by writers like Pavel Eisner and Emil Utitz, however, suggest that many survivors considered their performative attempts at reintegration unsuccessful.

In 1963, when the invitation to describe the reality of their past in the ghetto finally arrived, the young, left-leaning Czech Jews—the only group of survivors to remain in Czechoslovakia—described a tremendously vivid scene of theatrical practice. Although I have examined only five survivors' testimony here, their narratives are consistent with others from this same collection and with other publications from this period, as well as with interviews with these same individuals and many more from 1990s and 2004. The overall impression is of Terezín theater as a significant achievement, not only from an aesthetic point of view but as a social practice that helped them cope with the conditions of their imprisonment. In this period, their address elicited the affirming response of public recognition. For example, in 1965, three essays by Terezín survivors were published in a book on Czech theater during the war by Dr. František Černý, who subsequently organized a commemorative ceremony in Terezín to recognize the artists; in 1968, a radio program based on Eva Šormová's work featured interviews with Jana Šedová and Norbert Frýd; and in 1973, Šormová's

own book was published. Although the book was condemned to undeserved obscurity by political events that again limited the circulation of narratives about Terezín in the public sphere, the history of the ghetto and its cultural life was never again silenced to the same extent as in the Stalinist 1950s.

This brings us to our own present. After 1989, survivor testimony began to reach a much wider audience: their narrative encountered the narrative created by Western scholarship on the Holocaust. This encounter has been difficult for some survivors as they adjust to a new set of contemporary pressures. For example, survivor Zdenka Fantlová, who played Queen Vashti in the Terezín performance of *Ester*, recalled speaking at a question-and-answer session after a February 2000 conference in the United States:

ZF: It was startling, how they can't comprehend...

LP: What was their reaction?

ZF: It was almost attacking me. "How could you play theater in a place where ... people were dying?" Because, for the rest of the world, theater means entertainment⁴⁹³

Scholars and the general public place certain demands on testimony, motivated not only by the factors I have described in the introduction—fear of minimizing the Holocaust or desire to see resistance—but by much more complex fears and desires. In future work I will examine even deeper structures that drive these demands: structures that are both revealed and reinforced by accepted wisdom such as Maslow's pyramid of needs, which represents cultural activities as simply a kind of flourish balanced on the

⁴⁹³ Personal interview with Lisa Peschel, London, March 31, 2005.

peak of our "real" needs, and described in theories such as Lauren Berlant's notion of the melodramatic narrative, with its elements of suffering and redemption, as the affective structure of liberal imagination. But in the remainder of this conclusion I will explore the aspect of Terezín survivor testimony that generates the most controversy today: pleasure.

Survivors' descriptions of remembered pleasure and, as I witnessed in the interviews I conducted myself, the experience of pleasure those memories engendered in the present of the telling, were often linked with the experience of intense engagement with a performance. In fact many of the survivors testify that, while intensely engaged in the practice of performance or spectatorship, they sometimes forgot that they were prisoners in the ghetto—or perhaps, more accurately, the ghetto simply ceased to be relevant to their experience of the moment. Professor of psychology Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called this a subjective state "flow," describing it as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter...."⁴⁹⁴ Some prisoners, like Gustav Schorsch, seem to have lived in this state most of the time, so focused on their own goals and activities that they did not devote much thought to the fact of their ghettoization.

This experience of engagement with the performance, so intense that the fact of their ghettoization faded into the background, is closely associated in survivor testimony with two other aspects of subjective experience: a sense of agency and a sense of solidarity.

⁴⁹⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 4.

Regarding the exercise of agency, in terms of having the power to set, pursue and even achieve one's own goals, theatrical performance as a "prosthetic life" offered prisoners the opportunity to exercise control over one realm of experience, even while imprisoned within an environment where their ability to control the conditions of their own lives was extremely limited. And especially during those moments of flow, the limitations the Nazis had put upon them became irrelevant: they had achieved engagement in an activity of their own choice that had intense meaning for them, completely independent of the Nazis' attitude towards it. As testimony from later periods reveals, this rewarding exercise of agency associated with theatrical performance was not always limited to the performance space itself; it extended into activities even outside the theater. In the ghetto, where multiple barriers seemed to block the achievement of even the smallest goal, finding a necessary prop or obtaining a ticket to a popular show were satisfying accomplishments in their own right. The ability to achieve one's own goals was not only pleasurable, but it counteracted what Judith Herman identified as the fundamental insult of trauma: powerlessness.

The experience of solidarity, another key factor in resisting traumatization, is built into the theater-going experience. Theatrical performance in any environment involves a dense network of social contracts: the following of a set of largely unwritten laws of behavior and perception shared by actors and spectators alike. Even in normal times theater functions like the "pilgrimage" that Benedict Anderson, drawing on Victor Turner, describes as a meaning-creating experience: people encounter each other in a common space, moving toward a common goal, and that encounter creates and confirms

both one's location in a network and one's self-identification with a category.⁴⁹⁵ In theater, acting together in relative unison according to a set of social contracts, the actors' and spectators' sheer participation demonstrates that the destination or goal—the performance itself, or even the mere fact, the mere social act, of performing and spectating—is important and worth an investment of time and effort. In the ghetto, a theatrical performance required vastly increased investment by both actors and spectators; the shared act of overcoming and then shutting out the reality of the ghetto to engage in an activity of their own choosing created an intense feeling of community—one that extended beyond the time and space of the show into the ghetto itself to maintain the intense social bonds among the groups of actors, and perhaps among their regular spectators as well.

As I suggested in Chapter 6, those subjective feelings of solidarity had the potential to extend even outside the ghetto, reconnecting the prisoners with their various imagined communities: communities that they imagined as continuing to exist during the war, that would continue to exist far into the future.⁴⁹⁶ Performances that had "national" meaning, like *The Bartered Bride*, could generate a sense of solidarity with the whole Czech nation. Performances that had "universal" meaning, like *The Marriage*, where the audience felt that not only the theme but the quality of the production would have drawn audiences even outside the ghetto, could create a feeling of solidarity with an even wider world.

⁴⁹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁹⁶ Unlike the sense of solidarity with their fellow prisoners, this subjective sense of solidarity, this kind of address, could not be confirmed with a response—but neither could it be denied, as it would be denied for many in postwar Czechoslovakia.

What pleasure makes possible: the prisoners' achievements

By engaging in performances that generated this pleasure of agency and solidarity, I suggest that the prisoners effected a revolution of a type that Foucault acknowledged in "Truth and Power":

There are many different kinds of revolution ... as many kinds as there are possible subversive recodifications of power relations, and further that one can perfectly well conceive of revolutions which leave essentially untouched the power relations which form the basis for the functioning of the state.⁴⁹⁷

By escaping into pleasure instead of "resisting," by recodifying power relations in a way that left the functioning of the Terezín "state" virtually untouched but transformed the experience for themselves, the prisoners were able to accomplish the very thing that oppressed or colonized peoples struggle with, and, ironically, the very thing we seem bent on denying them when we insist on testimony about suffering: they created and maintained a system of values separate from that of their oppressors.

The logic of critics such as H. G. Adler, who equated engagement-in-performance with escapism, and escapism with self-deception or even unwitting collaboration, demands that prisoners be focused on engaging with and overturning the values of the oppressors. If that goal had guided all their actions, then their freedom would have been just as limited as if they felt bound to live up to those values. That is, they would have succumbed to what Kelly Oliver describes, drawing on Franz Fanon and bell hooks, as one of the most pernicious features of colonization: the dominant

⁴⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power*, Vol. 3 of the series Essential Works of Foucault, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1994), 123.

group becomes the creator of values and meaning for the oppressed. Even after slaves are freed, Fanon argued, they remain oppressed unless they are able to create their own values; it is "the ability to overcome the logic of recognition instilled by the colonial situation ... that enables freedom and respect."⁴⁹⁸ Even if the prisoners had inverted that logic by orienting all their activities, or even just all their artistic activities, towards *opposing* the Nazis, they would still have been trapped within such a colonial logic of recognition.

Instead, within the heterotopic space of performance, prisoners lived within their own value system and generated a scarce and highly valued good: shared pleasure. Unlike colonized peoples or slaves who have lived for generations under their oppressor's value system, the Terezín prisoners could draw upon a complete system of values they considered to be their own: the entire structure of experience of the First Republic. They could draw from their own living memory a full range of models of individual and social behaviors and attitudes, all infinitely preferable to the Nazi model.⁴⁹⁹ Even if they could not always behave according to these models within the power relations that governed "the functioning of the state" of the ghetto, they were able to reconfirm their awareness of, belief in and commitment to these models within the space of the theater. In this way they were able to maintain their prewar value system and prepare for their expected return to "normal life," instead of adopting a value system that would have prepared them only for perpetual resistance and perhaps,

⁴⁹⁸ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing : Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 29.

⁴⁹⁹ Again, the Czech Jews had an enormous advantage over the German Jews in this respect. Discrimination against them had been imposed by an occupying power, as part of a system that the vast majority of Czechs considered illegitimate, rather than by their compatriots; therefore, that discrimination did not affect their sense of self as deeply nor bring the entire value system of their prewar society into question.

through close engagement, led to the inadvertent absorption of some of the values of their oppressors.⁵⁰⁰ In fact, I argue they achieved something with theatrical performance that Dori Laub claims was impossible: these "historical insiders" to the Holocaust maintained an "unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference" in the ghetto.⁵⁰¹

Just as performance-related activities such as searching for props extended out into the ghetto itself, the values performed within that unviolated space did not remain contained within it. Actors and spectators talked about, even re-enacted stories and songs from the performances with their fellow prisoners. Additional channels of circulation formed as well; as prisoners wrote about performances in the informal "newsletters" that circulated as single copies passed hand-to-hand, the material network of the actors and spectators evolved into a discursive public. That is, in an environment that recreated several conditions Habermas described as leading to the emergence of the early bourgeois public sphere, a rudimentary network of publics developed in the ghetto, providing this separate value system with a means to circulate beyond the space of performance itself.⁵⁰² Since this system was already familiar to the Czech-Jewish prisoners from their own prewar experience, the paths of transmission were smooth.

⁵⁰⁰ Utitz described exactly this problem in his chapter on "Spiritual Contagion." Dominick LaCapra deals with its manifestation among scholars as "transference" in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 72.

⁵⁰¹ Dori Laub, "An Event without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival" in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. (New York: Routledge 1992), 75-92, 81. As he continues, "...the very circumstance of being inside the event ... made unthinkable the very notion that ... someone ... could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed."

⁵⁰² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989).

Thus, instead of being trapped by the need to have their activities recognized by Nazi disapproval or prohibition, the prisoners stepped outside the Nazi-dominated economy of power, leaving that economy untouched while creating their own field of action where their prewar system of values could be maintained.

Based on my ten years of research into the phenomena of Terezín theater and the survivors' narratives about it, I am convinced that their true legacy is not just the plays themselves, not just the music that is widely performed today, but the methodology they developed for dealing with a social crisis of enormous proportions—especially since Terezín is by no means the only site where prisoners used such techniques. The work of Czech professor Bořivoj Srba reveals widespread use of theater by Czech political prisoners, as the articles in *Hlas* suggest, in several World War II concentration camps.⁵⁰³ Emily Colburn-Roxworthy's work on the Japanese-American internment camps could be read from a different angle, focusing on cultural activities as a coping strategy rather than as resistance. Langdon Gilkey described theatrical performance by Westerners imprisoned in the Shantung Compound in North China from February 1943 to August 1945.⁵⁰⁴ Numerous additional sites offer opportunities for comparative analysis.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Bořivoj Srba, "Divadlo za mřížemi: Projevy české divadelní tvořivosti v pracovních, internačních a koncentračních táborech a věznicích nacistické Třetí říše," *Divadelní Revue* no. 1 (1995): 9-23. Srba has written extensively on Czech theater during World War II. A list of his publications is available at <http://www.muni.cz/people/616/publications>.

⁵⁰⁴ Langdon Brown Gilkey, *Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women under Pressure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

⁵⁰⁵ Additional internment locations during World War II where cultural activities took place include the camp established by the Japanese for Dutch, Australian and English women prisoners on the island of Sumatra described in Helen Colijn's autobiographical work *Song of Survival: Women Interned* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1995). An example from a more recent crisis, Sri Lanka during the time of political terror in the 1980s, is described by Ranjini Obeyesekere, *Sri Lankan Theater in a Time of Terror: Political Satire in a Permitted Space* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999).

That is, I suggest we broaden our focus on "theater for social change" to include "theater for social crisis management." How can a society that is having massive and traumatic change imposed upon it employ performance, not for its powers of transformation but its powers of conservation? How can people use theatrical performance to preserve that which is worthy of being saved, and to protect themselves from being traumatized in a situation where they are relatively powerless—where their ability to exercise agency is largely limited to symbolic spaces such as theater? When is theater not a rehearsal for the "real" revolution but rather constitutes the Foucaultian revolution that does not change the structures of power but transforms oppressed people's experience of them? The experience of people in all the above-named sites of captivity can help us derive principles that may be effective, not just in dealing with the aftermath of a traumatic event that has already passed, but in dealing with crises unfolding in our own present—principles which, considering the number of stateless people interned for years in refugee camps around the world, could be applied immediately.

* * *

Perhaps the time has come for a more serious scholarly engagement with the notion of pleasure in performance. At the spring 2009 "Radical Intersections: Performance Across Disciplines" graduate student conference at Northwestern University, I was gratified to see that other scholars were dealing with this topic as well. In Professor D. Soyini Madison's closing remarks she had this to say about pleasure:

This might be the most radical intersection of them all. Not only because play and pleasure require that space ultimately serve imagination,

invention, and possibility but because for it to be invigorating and promising, we must “play well with others.” We must let Others inside the space in order to generate and sustain our play—in order to hear through the pleasure of play and laughter what is too heavy, too hard, and too tragic to be heard otherwise.

Her notion of pleasure as a space where many different sorts of barriers can be overcome overturns the oft-heard critique of "frivolity," suggesting that play might be the only structure robust and flexible enough to withstand certain pressures.⁵⁰⁶ As I extend my study of Terezín survivor testimony into the post-1989 period, the point at which we come into contact with this new group of Others, I look forward to investigating ways in which her notion of play intersects with Kelly Oliver's model of addressability and response-ability as the structure of subjectivity as well as of ethical engagement with others. Play and pleasure may be key factors in a new ethics of listening that better prepares us to engage with testimony we do not expect to hear.

* * *

In this moment, regardless of where this project goes in the future or what influence it may have on others, I can only be glad that every second I have invested in it has been worthwhile for its own sake.

Some years ago I read the work of Hank Greenspan who, at the end of his own study of prisoner testimony, listed several reasons why people argue we should listen to

⁵⁰⁶ Paul Connerton also used the metaphor of the "playground" when describing Freudian transference as "an intermediate realm between illness and real life," the realm of narrative activity through which the transition from illness to health is made. See *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26.

survivors: to teach tolerance, to thwart Holocaust deniers, to provide identity and hope, to bestow meaning on the suffering and loss. He concludes:

Let me speak frankly. I used to believe some of these assertions; I now believe very few of them.... The sufficient reason to listen to survivors is to listen to survivors. No other purpose is required. Just as none would be required to listen to any other people who endured what they endured in the world we share, with whom we share everything *except* those agonies and those memories.⁵⁰⁷

After many years with this project, perhaps I am beginning to understand him. I began to talk with survivors because I had questions of my own that I wanted to answer. Especially during the past five years I have spent hundreds of hours engaged in conversations with them, not only about our shared object of interest—Terezín theater—but about their lives in the First Republic, under Communism, in the post-Cold War world we inhabit together now. As I write these final lines I'm thinking of many, many moments during these years of work. I remember Jan Fischer imitating Gustav Schorsch's expression in rehearsals and laughing as he said to me, yet again, "you're surprised, aren't you?" I remember František Miška showing me just why his Terezín parody of Marc Anthony's speech from *Julius Caesar* was so funny. I remember Hana Reinerová laughing until she had to rest her head on the table while she explained the jokes in a fragment of a Terezín cabaret I had brought her.

That an eighty-something-year-old Czech-Jewish Holocaust survivor, with everything that identity entails, and a forty-something-year-old American academic,

⁵⁰⁷ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History*, foreword by Robert Coles (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 171.

with everything that identity entails, could sit across a table from each other and laugh together, at the same sixty-something-year-old memory, until tears streamed down both their faces, still seems like a miracle to me. Does it seem like a miracle to them that one of the few people left in the world who deeply, richly appreciates their Terezín jokes is myself? For if I pride myself on anything related to this project, I pride myself on my role as witness, cultivated through a long study of their language and history but due mainly to an inexplicably similar sense of humor, not just to their "agonies and memories," but to their pleasure.

Appendix A

Survivor Biographies (1963 Interviews)

Jana Šedová (Gertruda Popperová)

Interviewed: March 19, 1963.

Gertruda Popperová, nee Skallová, used the stage name Jana Šedová after the war. She was born February 26, 1920 and grew up in the small Czech city of Chrudím, about 90 km east of Prague. Her family was registered with the Jewish community but was not particularly observant. Her husband Otto Popper was deported from Prague to Terezín in November 1941; she followed in December. From April to June she was sent with a labor brigade of approximately 1000 other women from the ghetto to do forest work near the town of Krivoklat; there she began putting together cabaret-type programs for the other women. When she returned to Terezín she became active in the ghetto's theater scene. Her husband was deported to Auschwitz in September 1944 and perished; due to her work in the ghetto splitting mica, which was used in optical equipment considered important for the German war industry, she remained in the ghetto until the liberation. She and her older sister, who was not in the ghetto (she was arrested for listening to illegal radio months before Šedová was deported) were the only ones from their family to survive.

Šedová became a professional actress after the war and worked with several theaters around the country. She did not register with the Jewish community after the war and did not marry again.

Karel Reiner

Interviewed: April 4, 1963.

In the pre-war period Karel Reiner (1910-1979) was recognized as a promising young composer and studied with noted microtonal composer Alois Haba, but his artistic activities were by no means limited to so-called "serious music." He was intensively involved in the cultural life of the First Republic, working with groups ranging from dance music orchestras to avant-garde theaters (Kuna 94-95). After the occupation he was employed by the Jewish community and thus was protected until the summer of 1943, when he and his wife Hana Reinerová were deported to Terezín. There, as a latecomer, he fought to establish a position for himself in the cultural life of the ghetto. Just over a year later, in the fall of 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz and from there sent to a labor camp at Kaufering. He survived a death march and returned to Prague at the end of May 1945; there he was reunited with his wife, who was liberated in Mauthausen.

After a battle to retain his Czech citizenship, Reiner re-established himself as a composer and critic. During the 1946 conflict between the Cultural Community established by the Communists and the Cultural Union established by their opponents he sided outspokenly with the Union, on the side of artistic freedom (see Chapter 2). Even though he had long been a Communist sympathizer and joined the party, under some pressure, in 1948, as political tensions increased his contacts with Western composers were held against him, he was questioned regarding possible connections with Zionism, and his avant-garde style was branded "formalist." Even in 1956 his pre-1948 compositions still not played, but as the thaw progressed his career started to

revive. In the spring of 1961 he received formal recognition with an award for "excellent work" from the Prague mayor, and in early 1963 he was entering a new phase of artistic productivity.

Hana Reinerová

Interviewed: April 4, 1963.

Hana Reinerová was born April 19, 1921, in the south Czech town of Benešov. She grew up in Bulgaria; her father was a non-believer but the family kept the main Jewish religious holidays. The family returned to Benesov when she was a young teenager and she recalled that, while the Catholics and Protestants of the town had an adversarial relationship, both got on well with the Jews. The family was of Czech nationality but she learned German in secondary school. Her brother, a Communist, was arrested for resistance activities and died in Mauthausen in 1941. She completed a course in child care in Prague; she and Reiner were married in June 1942 and in later interviews she recalled many cultural activities that took place in their apartment and at the Jewish orphanage in Prague. After she and Reiner were deported to Terezín in July 1943 she was employed in the children's homes. She volunteered for a transport shortly after he was deported in fall 1944 and was sent from Auschwitz to a labor camp; she survived a death march and was liberated in Mauthausen.

She and Reiner were reunited after the war and had two daughters. Translators among the various languages of the East Block were in demand after 1948 and she achieved some renown as a translator of Bulgarian literature into Czech.

Jan Fischer

Interviewed: April 12, 1963.

Jan Fischer was born July 19, 1921 and grew up in an upper-middle-class German-speaking family in Prague but spoke Czech fluently; he was a baptized Lutheran. He became interested in Communist ideology as a teenager and joined the party in 1940 (illegally, since the party itself had been outlawed after the Munich pact). His father committed suicide before deportations began; he was sent to the ghetto in December 1941. At first he worked as a plumber, but after an injury was sent to work in the library. He subsequently became involved in theater for the first time in his life, performing in three plays (*Fateful Game of Love*, *The Marriage*, and *Ester*). His older brother Herbert and his mother were deported to Terezín on later transports but both were sent to Auschwitz and subsequently perished. He was deported to Auschwitz in September 1944 and then to a labor camp at Gleiwitz, survived a death march and was liberated in Blechhammer. He returned to Prague, married a fellow Terezín survivor and they had two children; his older daughter is a well-known Czech actress.

After the war, Fischer immediately became professionally involved in theater. For a few months he was employed as an actor, like Miška, at the municipal theater in Kladno, but in December 1945 became an assistant director at the National Theater. He welcomed the Communist rise to power, like many of his generation, with enthusiasm. Fischer became a professional director shortly before February 1948 and, although his career was not without ups and downs, worked steadily throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He remained a "true believer" in Communism all through the 1960s. At the

time of this interview he was head of the municipal theater in the provincial Czech city of Brno and had been a professional director for fifteen years.

František Miška

Interviewed: April 18 and 23, 1963.

František Miška was born in Prague in 1919. His father left the family when he was a child and his mother raised him with her sisters' help. Both his parents were from small villages and both were apparently native Czech speakers. He finished his secondary education at a business academy just before the Nazis banned Jews from educational institutions (where he may have studied German; various mentions in his autobiography and later testimony indicate he speaks it fluently). He was interested in theater from an early age and as a teenager he acted in the left-wing theatrical troupe Collective of Young Theater Artists (Kolektiv mladých divadelníků); Schorsch and Schönová were also members. He was deported to Terezín in December 1941, shortly after the ghetto was established, and performed in several Czech-language plays before his deportation to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944. From there he was sent to labor at Birkenau; as the end of the war neared he was sent to Gross-Rosen then Bolkenheim and was finally liberated at Buchenwald in April 1945. He was the only person from his family to survive.

He returned to Prague and by the fall of 1945 was already working as an actor in the Czech provincial city of Kladno; he also had some film roles. He married a non-Jewish woman in 1946 and their daughter was born in 1949. After brief engagements at various theaters he accepted a permanent engagement with the Prague municipal

theaters. In June of 1964, after years of hoping for an opportunity to direct, he received an offer in Pilsen and from then on was a professional director.

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