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To cite this article: Sofia Pantouvaki (2018) 'Like Seeing Normal Life': children's opera *Brundibár* in Theresienstadt (1943–1944) and the power of scenographic metaphors, *Theatre and Performance Design*, 4:3, 173–203, DOI: [10.1080/23322551.2018.1541123](https://doi.org/10.1080/23322551.2018.1541123)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322551.2018.1541123>



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Published online: 28 Nov 2018.



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‘Like Seeing Normal Life’*: children’s opera *Brundibár* in Theresienstadt (1943–1944) and the power of scenographic metaphors

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ABSTRACT

Czech architect-scenographer František Zelenka was a well-known pre-war designer for the National Theatre in Prague, deported by the Nazis to the Theresienstadt ghetto, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, where he participated extensively in the inmates’ theatrical activity. Among his works in the ghetto, the children’s opera *Brundibár*, designed and directed by Zelenka, stands out. *Brundibár* was originally created in 1938 by the Czech Jewish composer Hans Krása and the librettist Adolf Hoffmeister in Prague. Despite the harsh living conditions, 55 performances are known to have been held in Theresienstadt between 1943 and 1944. The staging of *Brundibár* consisted of visual statements that were an integral part of the scenography and acquired meaning in the context of the ghetto. This article analyses Zelenka’s scenography by focusing on the visual metaphors embedded in the stage images he created, and offers an insight on the multiple roles of *Brundibár*’s original scenography and its impact. The aim is to underscore the power in creating and reading scenographic images under coercive conditions, with *Brundibár* as a paradigmatic example. It demonstrates the ways in which scenography may serve as a reminder of normality for children dealing with issues that cannot otherwise be confronted. The article concludes with a brief commentary on contemporary adaptations of the opera.

Czech architect-scenographer František Zelenka (1904–1944) was a well-known performance designer of Jewish origin who worked extensively with Czech theatres, including the National Theatre in Prague, during the 1920s and 1930s until the commencement of World War Two. In Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, in the summer of 1943, Zelenka was deported to the ghetto of Terezín – more commonly known by its German name, Theresienstadt. During the fifteen months of his internment (13 July 1943–19 October 1944), he participated extensively in the ghetto theatrical activity where he staged, amongst many other plays, the children’s opera *Flašinetář Brundibár* (Organ-grinder Brundibár), generally known as *Brundibár*.

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*Extract from a quote by Dagmar Lieblová, née Fantlová, Theresienstadt survivor and child performer in *Brundibár* (Theresienstadt, 1943–1944) in an interview with the author, 17 July 2006.

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This study¹ is based on unpublished materials from archives and personal collections that include written documents, such as diaries and poems, and visual materials, such as drawings and postcards. It is also based on significant primary survivor testimony as well as direct observation in Terezín² at different times and seasons for over ten years. The most important source that helped to formulate insightful observations on the contribution of Zelenka's staging of *Brundibár* in the ghetto were the Theresienstadt survivors' accounts. The research draws on the study of approximately 76 archival testimonies,³ while I have additionally conducted personal in-depth interviews for a total of over 80 hours with Theresienstadt survivors who were imprisoned in the ghetto when they were children;⁴ the last generation of people who can tell the story of the Terezín ghetto first-hand.⁵ These original interviews provided research material of remarkable value, not only documenting historical information, but also offering a wider range of individual life experiences and personal perspectives on the different effects of Theresienstadt theatrical activity on their lives, that significantly enriched the research.

The case of the Terezín ghetto (Theresienstadt)

Terezín is a small town in Bohemia, 60 km north of Prague. It was founded in 1780 by the Emperor Joseph II as a fortification town and was named after his mother Maria Theresa. Two years after the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia (1939)⁶, in November 1941, the town started being transformed into a concentration camp for European Jewry known as Theresienstadt. From 1942 until 1945,⁷ 150,000 people were transported to the ghetto, where they lived for different periods; numerous transports were organised from the Terezín ghetto to the extermination camps of Poland, first to Treblinka and other destinations and then mainly to Auschwitz.

Being neither a ghetto in the form of a neighbourhood within a city nor an extermination camp, Terezín is a unique example of an individual town completely transformed into a ghetto of isolation for European Jews of the highest social grade. High-ranking army personnel and leading personalities of science, politics and the arts were imprisoned at Theresienstadt, joined by working class people later on, as the ghetto developed and became extremely overcrowded. In a most absurd manner, given the context, all kinds of arts were developed in the Theresienstadt ghetto for both adults and children; this included graphic arts, visual arts, literature and theatrical performances and musical concerts. In the beginning, such activities were designed to relax the strained atmosphere of the ghetto. As more transports arrived at Theresienstadt bringing further individuals of important artistic background from European cultural life, the range and extent of cultural activities in Theresienstadt was unparalleled – in terms of scope and artistic standards – in relation to any other occupied place in wartime Europe (Dutlinger 2001). Culture helped the Theresienstadt inhabitants to preserve their respect for others as well as for themselves and to keep their faith in a better future after the war, even under the harshest of conditions.

The cultural and, particularly, the theatrical activities of Theresienstadt were hampered by the difficulty in obtaining material means, while the constant changes due to illnesses, deaths and transports required continuous replacement of cast members. Originally, these activities took place in secret. However, after the first two years of existence of the Terezín ghetto, the Nazi authorities realised that they could take advantage of the cultural activities of the ghetto's inhabitants to meet their own propaganda objectives by presenting

Theresienstadt as a 'model-ghetto town' – which is how it is largely known to the rest of the world to date. From that point on, most performances took place under the supervision of the Nazi officials. Given that regular education and schooling were not allowed in the ghetto where sports, drawing and craftwork were the only activities to be permitted, games and the visual and performing arts became the means to transfer education and to encourage the children to become active members of Theresienstadt life.⁸

Architect-Scenographer František Zelenka (1904–1944)

Prior to the Second World War, František Zelenka was a well-known designer working extensively in the performing arts. Like other celebrated Czech scenographers (i.e. the founders of modern Czech scenography Bedřich Feuerstein and Vlastislav Hofman in the early twentieth century, František Tröster, and later Josef Svoboda), Zelenka trained as an architect. He became enthralled with theatre and eventually started working as a set and costume designer, as well as architect and graphic designer. From a young age, František Zelenka worked at major Czech theatres such as the National Theatre (where he designed theatre plays from the classical repertoire as well as operas and new ballets), the Estates Theatre, various municipal theatres and the Liberated Theatre (Osvozené divadlo) in Prague for more than 130 productions. From 1926 until 1943, the year of his deportation to Theresienstadt, he collaborated with the most influential Czech theatre personalities of his time.⁹ These included the musician and leading avant-garde director and performer E. F. Burian, the director Jiří Frejka and his Dada Theatre, directors Karel Dostal and František Salzer, and the gifted comedians and writers Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich (V + W).

Theatre history and design scholar Vlasta Koubská remarks that modern Czech stage design in the early twentieth century 'saw the interconnection of influences of the most distinguished European art styles' (Koubská 2017, 21), including Austrian Art Nouveau, Russian Constructivism, German Expressionism, French Cubism and Surrealism.¹⁰ However, the artistic avant-garde that flourished in the interwar years in Czechoslovakia was composed of two main streams, 'Poetism dominating the artistic scene until the early thirties and Surrealism which became the major force by 1934' (Winner 1998, 407). As Brandesky notes, Czech audiences saw these 'modernist trends extended to the stage by talented [stage] designers' (Brandesky 2007, 22). According to Koubská, Zelenka's scenographic work was inspired by elements of these styles, notably Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, Constructivism and Poetism (Koubská 1997).

Zelenka was one of the modern Czech scenographers who collaborated in the Devětsil generation,¹¹ an avant-garde artistic association connected to one of Czechoslovakia's most celebrated avant-garde groups, the Liberated Theatre. The Devětsil group formulated the movement called Poetism, considered by many 'the most typically Czech artistic strain of the time' (Winner 1998, 407), which was applied to poetry, painting and theatre, as well as book design and typography.¹² Czech poetist theory and practice saw art as integrated into society (rather than an absolute or elitist value) transformed into an 'art of living' in order 'to refresh the human spirit and evoke the joy of a holiday mood' (Winner 1998, 408); it was driven by optimism and strongly influenced by a search for the 'new'. This approach was consistent with Zelenka's sense of creativity and freedom, his humour and his characteristic quality of 'ardent optimism' (Bartošová 2011, 149).

Through his work in different fields and roles, Zelenka was a key contributor to the development of the movement of Poetism.

Zelenka's artistic work has, at times, been described as 'a mixture of constructivism and poetry' (CSM 1994, 5) characterised by a 'fresh, capricious style' (Burian 2000, 46), reflecting 'an overt sense of joy in creating' and 'influenced by a poetic playfulness' (Koubská 2001, n.p.). His early scenographic designs were influenced by Russian-inspired Constructivism; in the 1930s, however, his designs moved towards 'scenographic features more characteristic of a certain [Czech] irony and symbolism' (Bartošová 2011, 148). Koubská, who was for many years Curator of the collection of stage and costume designs at the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague where Zelenka's scenographic designs are preserved, has colourfully written that Zelenka 'drew with childish spontaneity which transferred to the onlooker the long forgotten feeling of joy from unbridled games' (Koubská 2001, n.p.).

Besides architecture and scenography, František Zelenka was interested in advertising and in graphic design. To understand the value of Zelenka's scenography for the opera *Brundibár* it is significant to note that, alongside his work as performance designer, he was also an acclaimed poster designer. In 1931, he had a solo exhibition of 39 posters at the influential Krásná jizba Gallery in Prague, later followed by another two exhibitions of his posters in Prague and Essen.¹³ Until 1932, he designed not only the sets and costumes but also the posters of most of the performances in which he was involved. His series of posters for the Liberated Theatre (1929–1932) 'successfully combined elements of advertising with modern art' (CSM 1994, 5). This demonstrates Zelenka's skills in combining design and commercial advertisement, which was essential in constructing playful, humorous scenographic metaphors through the posters of the scenography of *Brundibár* in Terezín.

Zelenka's design work is distinguished by the use of clear lines, clear shapes, bold colours, symbols and graphic lines. The artistic quality of his theatre work has been celebrated both for the original combination of 'the playful and the poetic, constructivism and functionalism' as 'the best of the Czech avant-garde movement' (CSM 1994, 5) but also for the high standards of his design realisations (Bartošová 2011).

After the Nazi occupation, due to his Jewish origin,¹⁴ František Zelenka was forced to work under assumed names until his deportation to Theresienstadt on 13 July 1943. There he participated actively and extensively in the theatrical activity of the ghetto. Zelenka was employed in the Cultural Department of the Freizeitgestaltung ('Leisure Time Department') of the ghetto's Jewish self-government, which administered the camp's cultural activities (Adler 1960/2017). Records show that since he was such a renowned artist, Zelenka was greatly respected in Theresienstadt and was allowed to have a workshop and employ assistants. While in the ghetto, he designed 27 stage productions of operas, theatre plays and cabarets. These included Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* and Bizet's *Carmen*; Gogol's *The Marriage*, Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Measure for Measure* and Molière's *George Dandin*; the Jewish folk play *Esther*; as well as Karel Švenk's cabaret *The Last Cyclist*, Kurt Geron's cabaret revue *The Carousel*, and *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.¹⁵ On 19 October 1944, František Zelenka was sent to Auschwitz together with his wife and his eight-year-old son, where they perished.¹⁶ Zelenka arguably died at the height of his creative career at the age of 40. Of his artistic work in the ghetto of

Terezín, the special case of the children's opera *Brundibár*, which he both designed and directed, stands out as his most impactful work.

Scenography in the context of the Terezín ghetto

Theatre in the Terezín ghetto was shaped by the experience and condition of the people involved in it and by the available resources. The main feature of cultural and theatrical activities in Theresienstadt was that materials were very scarce: texts, scores and musical instruments used for the performances were sometimes brought to the ghetto in the inmates' luggage, but texts were in general hard to find (Šormová 2002).

In Terezín, there was no real theatre and no other dedicated premises for the presentation of cultural activities. Given the overcrowding and lack of space during the ghetto years, it was very difficult to find available room for such activities. The performances took place in the prisoners' barracks, in attics, cellars and later on, when not done in secret, on makeshift open-air stages in yards. According to theatre historian Eva Šormová (1997), the Theresienstadt theatrical community was unprepared for these conditions, as their concept of theatre was linked to traditional performance spaces; eventually, they had no choice but use the spaces available, which they adapted into theatrical stages. The main changes involved the creation of a stage, usually on an elevated platform 'delineated above all by the acting of the actors themselves' (Šormová 1997, 270); the arrangement of essential seating for the audience; and the provision of lighting through a primitive lighting system, so that the actors could be seen.

Rehearsals took place in uninhabited rooms, mainly in attics and cellars. One of the known rehearsal areas was the cellar of the Girls' Home L410; a harmonium was placed there, and rehearsals for Verdi's *Requiem* and Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* were held, as well as one of the main auditions for the children's opera *Brundibár* (Šormová 1973; Šormová 2002; Pantouvaki 2008). Another rehearsal space was the attic of the Boys' Home L417, where some of the *Brundibár* rehearsals took place. Musical performances were rehearsed in the cellars of the Hannover Barracks,¹⁷ whilst performances of plays were rehearsed in clandestine theatrical spaces created for this purpose.

The most famous theatrical space of Terezín was the theatre that was located in the attic of the Magdeburg barracks. Zdenka Fantlová, a Theresienstadt actress who survived the war, describes it as the 'main stage' and considers it as the most 'professional' of all performance spaces available in the ghetto, 'the sort of National Theatre of Terezín'.¹⁸ This theatrical space could seat 50–100 people on wooden benches and the stage was a kind of raised wooden platform. It was equipped with basic lighting devices operated by electricians. If they needed to wear a costume, the actors would dress in the corridors of the barracks (Pantouvaki 2008). Certainly, these conditions did not allow for any stage equipment, nor did the space provide any technical infrastructure for the sets. Survivor Eva Herrmannová recalls, 'It was so full every time, so full, [there were] no normal seats. Where you could sit or stand you sat and stood. It was a different atmosphere from now'.¹⁹

Other theatrical spaces included the gym in the former Terezín School (L417), which was used to host musical and opera performances, notably Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. The main hall of the former Town Hall was used as a concert venue and several other areas were adapted as stages for performances and cultural activities.²⁰ Another

significant space was the Sokol house or 'Sokolovna', a training hall used by the Czech Sokol movement.²¹ Sokol houses were built in the 1920s and 1930s in Czechoslovakia as leisure areas for physical and cultural activities; these buildings usually included a basic theatre hall for cultural activities. The Terezín Sokol house was built outside the fortification walls – where access was prohibited – and included two halls. During the 'beautification' action in which the ghetto of Terezín was prepared to be presented as a 'model settlement', the Terezín Sokol house was turned into a 'Community Centre' and the two halls were used for music and theatre performances. The Sokol house hosted the opera *Brundibár* only twice, both times in 1944: for a performance during a visit of delegates of the Committee of the International Red Cross and for a rehearsal of *Brundibár* filmed for propaganda purposes.

Considering the lack of theatrical means, theatre in Theresienstadt was primarily reliant on the performance of actors, who 'became the vehicle of the dramatic text and its essential message' (Šormová 1997, 271), supported by very few, essential elements of scenography that functioned on a symbolic level. The persons involved in theatrical creation were challenged to use imagination in order to express and support a character and a story. Eva Šormová remarks, 'under the pressure of Theresienstadt reality and its oppressive circumstances, the theatre community reverted to the elementary sources of theatre, to its very basics' (1997, 271). She provides a description of the scenographic means in Theresienstadt:

Since there was no backstage area, the actors' entrances were generally in full view of the audience, as in non-illusionary theatre, which indicates and reveals the fact that a performance is just a play. In several cases, the stage was separated from the audience by means of a small improvised curtain, at the back there was sometimes a kind of substitute for a painted backdrop, or the background was covered by something neutral. Often though, even this was missing and the performance was put on in an entirely bare room. [...] It is easy to imagine what was simply not possible here by comparison to a theatre operating under normal circumstances: nothing making it possible to develop theatre machinery and techniques, no special effects or magic for the sets, none of the affluence of a big show, no magnificent sets or costumes. (Šormová 1997, 270)

The design of the performances was subject to this spirit; an imaginative actor with the collaboration of an inspired scenographer (that, in most cases, being František Zelenka) produced original and persuasive characters in the simplest yet 'rich' in meaning and dramatically powerful spaces. Although no special or expensive materials were available, some types of basic supplies could be scavenged; sets and costumes were not as hard to make from cheap and simple materials, such as wood, cardboard and scraps of fabrics or sheets. Survivor testimony gives a vivid description of the resources available for use in scenographic realisation. Fantlová remarks that 'there were enough clothes from all the transports that came in and so there was material available, an enormous amount of available material. A thousand people at a time came in'.²² The actor Jan Fisher also describes,

we had a lot of old clothes, transports brought different things with them, which were confiscated. There were a lot of old, old clothes and uniforms and so on. [...] So [the theatre people] found everything and changed it a little bit and it became a costume.²³

Shrouds were another source of valuable material for stage use; Fantlová recalls, 'there was also an abundance of sheets, you know, 200 people were dying a day, so they had to have a lot of sheets to wrap them up'.²⁴

Yet the lack of suitable means often functioned as a strong source of inspiration. Koubska (2017, 23) notes that Zelenka ‘placed demands on himself despite his situation and he tried to create high-quality works under brutal conditions’. The descriptions of actress Zdenka Fantlová are particularly valuable on how Zelenka transferred his ideas to the actors who were personifying the characters,²⁵ so that the actor could support the essence of the figure as it was in Zelenka’s imagination.

Not only were the actors empowered by the restrictions on the stage components, but audiences were also challenged to co-invent and conceive what was being told and shown through this type of scenographic design. This intensified the ability of scenography to function through metaphoric associations, despite – or because of – the absence of means. As analysis of the scenography for the opera *Brundibár* shows, the Terezín ghetto spectators’ expectations and imaginations complemented and enriched the meaning of the design through scenographic metaphors that translated the images they viewed into full and complete stories.

Children’s opera *Flášeňetář Brundibár (Organ-grinder Brundibár)*

The story of *Brundibár* is a simple tale of good and evil. Aninka and Pepíček, two little children, have a sick mother who needs milk to get better according to the doctor’s prescription. The children visit the town marketplace where three sellers (an ice-cream man, a baker and a milkman) hawk their goods, but they do not have money to buy milk. Seeing the organ-grinder, called Brundibár, playing on the street corner, they decide to imitate him and raise money by singing, too. When they do so, their voices are too soft to be heard alongside his and annoy Brundibár who chases them away together with a policeman. During the night, which the children spend on a bench, three animals – a dog, a cat and a sparrow – come to their aid and advise them to set up a chorus together with other town children. In the morning, children from the neighbourhood join them in forming a chorus. They sing a beautiful lullaby, which moves the townspeople; then Aninka and Pepíček are rewarded with generous donations from the passers-by. In an unguarded moment, Brundibár sneaks in and steals their money. After a brief chase by the children and the animals, Brundibár is caught and the money is recovered. The opera concludes with all the children singing together a song of victory over the evil organ-grinder.

*Brundibár*²⁶ was originally created in 1938 in Prague by Jewish Czech composer Hans Krása and librettist Adolf Hoffmeister as an entry for a children’s opera competition of the Czech Ministry of Culture and Education. Krása reported in 1943²⁷ that ‘the most sensitive issue when planning the opera was, of course, the libretto’ and explained that both himself and the librettist Hoffmeister were in search of a story that would be appropriate for children, but not childish. He was satisfied that Hoffmeister finally succeeded in writing a cheerful text, which dealt with ‘an event from real life’, clearly emphasising ‘the useful purpose of the coherence of a collective or group in fighting evil’. The story is rather simple and contains a ‘hidden but clear message’: the fight between good and evil, presented as a battle of two worlds (Kuna 1998), a situation that the children in Theresienstadt understood and which filtered through their own experiences in the ghetto.

According to musicologist Milan Kuna (1998), Hoffmeister’s libretto is related to the satirical tradition of its era, represented by the plays of Voskovec and Werich.²⁸ Adolf

Hoffmeister himself, on the other hand, regarded *Brundibár* as a Brechtian teaching.²⁹ Bertolt Brecht was well-known at the time in central Europe; Krása and Hoffmeister were inspired by his work, specifically by a Learning Play, the school-opera *Der Jasager* (The 'Yes-Sayer') created in 1930 with music by Kurt Weill to a German libretto by Bertolt Brecht. Töller (2005: 48-49) refers to the connections between *Brundibár* and *Der Jasager* and quotes Cornelis Witthoefft observing that both works display an identical exposition and a similar crisis where 'obstacles at first seem insurmountable'. Nevertheless, as Witthoefft remarks, *Brundibár* 'can literally be described as a reversal of *Der Jasager* [...] While in the former what must be learnt is the necessity for the individual to make a sacrifice for the common good, *Brundibár* teaches solidarity on the part of the community with the individual' (Töller 2005, 48).³⁰

After the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia, public cultural activities were prohibited for Jewish people, so the opera remained unperformed. In May 1941, a group of Jewish artists decided to stage Krása's opera *Brundibár* as a gift to the director of the Jewish Boys' Orphanage in Prague, Moritz Freudenfeld, who was a great lover of music and the arts, on the occasion of his 50th birthday. The group included the musical director Rafael Schächter, the composer Hans Krása, the translator Emil A. Saudek, the composer Gideon Klein and the architect and scenographer František Zelenka. Schächter started rehearsals with the assistance of the young musician Rudolf (Rudi) Freudenfeld, son of the director of the Orphanage, who soon took over the musical preparation as Schächter was deported to Theresienstadt with the first transport in November 1941. The staging of *Brundibár* was then gradually prepared by Freudenfeld and the opera was covertly presented in Prague.

The first performances of *Brundibár* took place in the winter of 1942–1943 (Karas 1990), probably in October 1942 (Kuna 1998) and only twice, according to Freudenfeld's memoir (Franěk 1965). The performances took place in the dining room of the Jewish Orphanage; Zelenka undertook both the stage direction and the scenography of the production. He created a simple but clever set, based on the idea of separating the stage with a fence, an idea that was later developed in his staging of *Brundibár* in Theresienstadt (Figure 1).³¹ On the fence, there were three posters with pictures of a dog, a cat and a sparrow, with holes where the children playing the animals would put their heads. Karas (1990, 96) notes that, 'as a joke, Zelenka added another poster with the inscription "Volte 62541" (Vote for 62541),³² which was the telephone number of the Jewish Community in Prague', yet another indication of Zelenka's playful spirit and his intention to provoke the audience's minds to make connections between theatre and real life.

With the establishment of Theresienstadt, the main artists who had collaborated on the staging of the first performances of *Brundibár* gradually met again in the ghetto to which they were deported on different transports: Hans Krása, Rafael Schächter, Rudolf (Rudi) Freudenfeld and František Zelenka. In Theresienstadt, the artistic team was complemented by the Vienna-born Czechoslovak dancer and choreographer Kamila Rosenbaum(ová), also a ghetto inmate, who was known to some of the children since before the war because she ran a dance school in Prague (Pantouvaki 2008). In July 1943, Rudi Freudenfeld brought the piano score of *Brundibár* with him to the ghetto in his allotted 50 kg of luggage; there, the opera was re-orchestrated by Krása for the instrumentalists who were available to play in Terezín. In mid-1943, musical activities were flourishing in the life of the ghetto and hence it was decided immediately that *Brundibár* would be organised as a stage



Figure 1. Photograph of the Jewish Orphanage performance of *Brundibár* in Prague, winter 1942–1943. © Courtesy of the Jewish Museum in Prague, JMP/41.443.

performance. According to survivor testimony, both adults and children enthusiastically dedicated long hours of work to rehearse the opera, which was performed entirely by children soloists and a children's choir. Kamila Rosenbaum was in charge of the movement and the dancing in the Theresienstadt performances of *Brundibár*; she worked closely with Zelenka on the staging while also holding stage rehearsals with the children's cast when Zelenka was unavailable.

The premiere of the Terezín version of *Brundibár* took place in the ghetto on 23 September 1943 in the Magdeburg barracks attic theatre, where most of the subsequent performances were also presented, initially only with piano accompaniment. Between 1943 and 1944, despite the harsh living conditions, 55 performances are known to have been held in the Theresienstadt ghetto (Karas 1990, 98). It was not only the high artistic standard of the performances³³ that attracted the large numbers of audience, as much as the children's spontaneity and enthusiasm, which was perceived as a powerful breeze of optimism.

The success of *Brundibár* was such that the children's opera was selected to be performed for an International Red Cross Commission visit to Theresienstadt in June 1944.³⁴ For this occasion, *Brundibár* received Nazi permission to be presented in the Sokol house theatre in an 'improved' version with orchestra accompaniment, using Krása's Theresienstadt version for 13 instruments and an enriched set, which Zelenka had to build (Pantouvaki 2008). Another special performance of *Brundibár* was given at the second anniversary of the handing over of Theresienstadt to the Jewish Council of Elders, celebrated on 15 July 1944.³⁵ *Brundibár* also became part of the Nazi propaganda

on Theresienstadt in August 1944, when a fragment of the *Brundibár* production, the finale of the opera, was included in the now well-known propaganda film entitled *Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area*.³⁶ For that sole occasion, *Brundibár* was presented again in the theatre of the Sokol house. The end of the *Brundibár* performances in the ghetto came when the large transports from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz took place in September and October 1944.³⁷ Then the adult leaders of the production as well as many children of the cast,³⁸ including the young boy performing the character of evil Brundibár – according to evidence, the only character without an understudy – were gradually transported away and the performances came to an end.

Theresienstadt-related literature and Czech survivors' testimony describe *Brundibár* as the most popular and most loved work made by and for children in the ghetto of Terezín. Numerous testimonies confirm that a great number of children knew the music and the 'songs' of *Brundibár* by heart and would sing them whenever they had a chance. However, since the opera was not translated into any other language, the Czech libretto was incomprehensible to non-Czech-speaking children. Hence, the opera was popular mainly among the Czech children, whereas children of other nationalities did not participate; they probably did not watch any performances and – in some cases – did not know about the opera at all (Pantouvaki 2008).

Zelenka's design for *Brundibár*

Zelenka's scenographic and directorial concept for *Brundibár* focussed on the town marketplace by means of a few symbolic elements. These comprised a fence in three parts, made up of wooden planks that created an open space (a square) in the middle of a town. This concept is demonstrated clearly in Zelenka's drawings for the set (see Figure 2).³⁹ The realisation of the scenography in both the pre-war and the ghetto versions, however, did not include any other physical reproduction of the town (e.g. houses or a tree, as indicated in the drawings), nor any background, due to both financial and technical restrictions. Hence, the effect of the town was suggested by the presence of the children performers, a crowd of townspeople and schoolchildren, once their heads appeared singing over the fence. Through this scenographic choice, the performers contributed to the shaping of the performance space. This is an approach that Zelenka had already written about, as shown in his notes from 1928: 'an actor in costume is, as a static unit, the tectonic component of the architectonic composition of the stage' (Zelenka quoted in Bartošová 2011, 170).

The action of the opera took place in front of the fence on the main area of the stage facing the audience. The space behind the fence was used only by the chorus, who were not participating physically in the action and functioned as narrator-commentator instead. Behind the fence, there was a kind of bench on which the chorus stood in order to be visible to the audience while singing. When they were not singing, they were to remain out of sight, hiding behind the fence, sitting on the bench.⁴⁰ Zelenka, who was familiar with both Brecht's concept of *distanciation* as well as with the ancient drama and opera traditions in which the chorus is a commentator – elements that may have influenced his staging of *Brundibár* and informed his design – deliberately used the physical separation of the chorus from the action as a tool for his scenographic narrative. In doing so, the children participants were offered a chance to take a critical



Figure 2. Zelenka's drawing of the *Brundibár* set. © Theatre History Department, National Museum, Prague (S/XIX_a-5e). A later drawing that includes the posters on the fence and the sign 'School' survives at the Terezin Memorial archive.

position towards the action on stage and learn through participation. The chorus would only come forward at the end of the opera, to join the children in chasing Brundibár away.⁴¹ With this fence as his main spatial design tool, Zelenka succeeded in creating a scenographic space that became a metaphor of a public place/site and a place of solidarity and togetherness.

The fence was positioned upstage and extended along the perimeter of the stage. It was constructed with the help of a puppeteer called Brumlík, who was the supervisor of the L404 (=Q319) barracks that housed blind inmates. Brumlík recruited Jaroslav (Jerry) Rind, a 19-year old Moravian carpenter who worked at the old military riding school which the Nazis had converted into a joiner's workshop, to smuggle timber in order to construct the *Brundibár* sets (Plush 2014; Rind 2014). Rind testifies that he transported the materials from the wood workshop to the attic of the barracks in four or five trips and was rewarded for this risky task by being invited to see theatre performances.⁴²

Another significant scenographic element developed by Zelenka for the staging of *Brundibár* were the posters placed on the fence. Each one of the posters referred to one of the animals: Sparrow, Dog and Cat. The most detailed documentation of the posters that survives is the drawing by 13-year-old Ruth Gutmannová who saw the performance in Terezín and drew the main elements of the stage and some of the key characters (Figure 3). A close examination of her drawing, together with the few surviving photographs and film fragments showing the staging of the opera, provides important information on how the posters contributed to scenographic meaning.

The study of these materials reveals that the first poster on the left (audience view) indicated a Sparrow on top of a piece of soap. The inscription was VRABCOVO MÝDLO; *mýdlo* in Czech means soap and *vrabec* means sparrow, so it seemed as if ‘Sparrow’ was the brand name of this particular type of soap advertised (‘Sparrow soap’ or ‘Sparrow’s soap’). The middle poster showed a Dog and a razor blade and included the inscription RAZOR BLADE and JOS. PEJSEK; *pes* in Czech is the dog, so this was a pun involving a person named ‘Joseph, the little dog’. It is rather strange and seemingly yet another joke that this poster includes the English word razor blade. In the word *razor*, the letter R is clearly separated from the rest of letters, so that the eye would read *r-AZOR*. In the libretto, the dog has the name AZOR, a common Czech name for dogs, so this was another witty visual connection that Zelenka created between the character of the opera (the Dog, named Azor), the spoken (sung) language that referred to the Dog’s name, and the product advertised (razor blade). The poster on the right showed a Cat sitting on a box

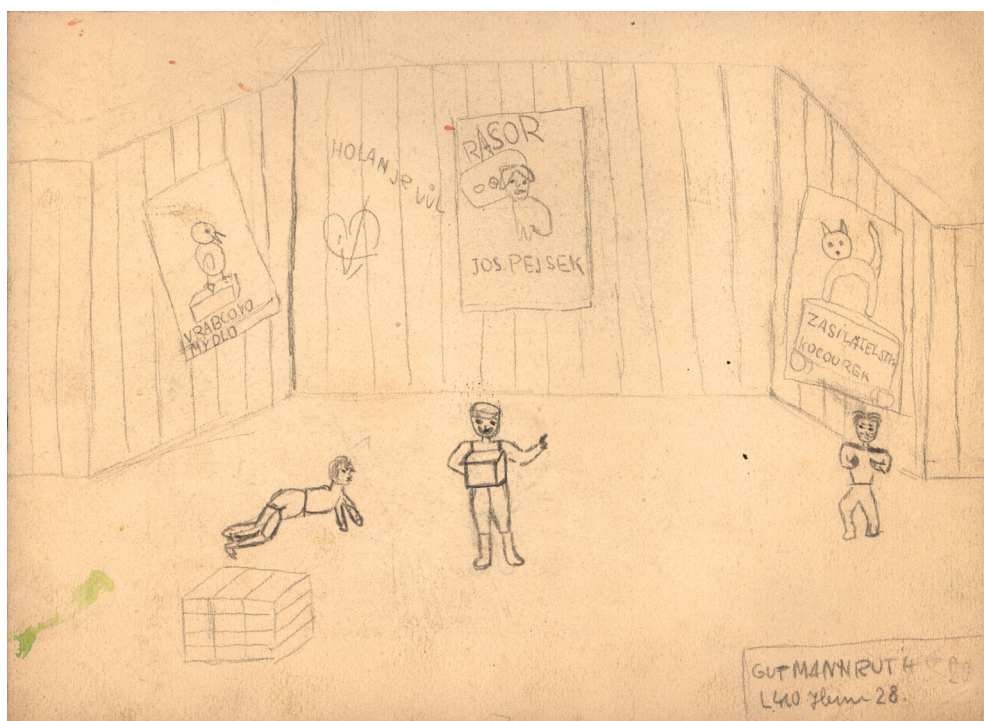


Figure 3. Drawing of the *Brundibár* setting by Ruth Gutmannová (1930–1944). © Courtesy of the Jewish Museum in Prague, JMP/133.007.

and the words JOSEF KOCOUREK and ZASÍLATELSTVÍ. Here, *kočka* in Czech means cat, hence the name of the person (presumably the owner of the advertised company) would be 'Joseph, the little cat'. The word *zasílatelství* means freight-shipping company (as *zásilka* means parcel, shipment in Czech); so this text, combined with the box-parcel drawn on the poster, was supposed to be an advertisement for a shipment company.⁴³ This analysis, that unites the reading of textual and visual materials but requires an understanding of Czech words, confirms that the reading of these scenographic images and the interpretation of their multi-layered meanings was possible only for the Czech-speaking audience.

Zelenka's experience in poster design is evident in his stage design for *Brundibár*. Zelenka had already used modern posters and commercial advertisements as part of his scenographic designs in his pre-war theatre work to indicate an urban environment or refer to his contemporary Prague.⁴⁴ In the posters for *Brundibár*, he combined his knowledge of advertising and visual communication, developed in his pre-war avant-garde work, with his personal sense of humour. The elements embedded in the *Brundibár* posters can be further examined through Zelenka's background with Czech Poetism and its tendency to create 'a lighter form of poetry which delighted in word games and pure humour' (Winner 1998, 410). Winner explains that 'the great achievement of Poetism was its free and often humorous play with the medium of the word in all its forms and at all possible levels' (1998, 408). These posters incorporated inventive image – and word-games, which served different purposes: they would recall simple elements of 'normal' everyday life, while also humorously connecting the names of the animals to the objects advertised on the posters, playing freely between libretto, story and action through the scenography. The posters are characterised by the use of clear lines and different fonts from commercial design (Figure 4), and exude creative originality, humour and joyful poetry, characteristics accredited to Zelenka's professional poster designs (CSM 1994).

Another important element connecting the design with the action was that there were holes in the fence at the points where the heads of the animals were drawn on the posters. When the 'animals' appeared on stage for the first time, the young singers would stand behind the fence, tear the paper surface of the poster and put their heads through the



Figure 4. A recreation of the posters of Zelenka's scenography for *Brundibár* made by the author based on the surviving visual evidence and survivor testimony. © Sofia Pantouvaki.

holes.⁴⁵ Through this effect – which echoes circus practices that Zelenka and other poetists might have looked at for inspiration (Winner 1998) – the images of the animals seemed to become alive in a magical way. The flat animals painted on the posters would turn into ‘real’ animal characters ready to help the children of the story. The scene was taking place during the night, so the music, the scenography and the action combined in a powerful way. Karas (1990) notes that the faces of the animals were lit by a single spotlight in this scene. The three characters would then come forward from the sides of the fence and continue their singing and acting centre-stage. The scenography and the action are particularly well-integrated in this scene and highlight Zelenka’s dual role as designer and director.

The way the posters were used and the visual connections that they provided create an important link to pre-war avant-garde Czech scenography. Seeing the posters on the fence also conveyed a fuller sense of a lively town corner. The fence with the posters was the only setting of the opera performances in the ghetto; this is one of the reasons why these stage elements were of significant value in creating the world of the story as well as a world the children performers and spectators would be invited to.

In addition to the inscriptions on the posters, Zelenka also used text on stage objects (props) such as on the Ice Cream Vendor’s carrying box, which had the sign ‘ZMRZLINA’ meaning ‘ice cream’ in Czech. This provided a direct and clear indication of what this object represented and was concurrently a reminder of this delicacy, which was so distant from ghetto life.⁴⁶

The surviving documentation of the Theresienstadt *Brundibár* production clearly shows a large painted backdrop. This was not normally part of the set, but was produced for specific purposes on the occasion of the International Red Cross Commission visit when the opera was performed at the Terezín Sokol Hall, where there was a real stage with basic equipment to hold a backdrop. The Nazi commandants claimed that ‘the stage was too dark, not gay enough for the children’ (Fraňek 1965, 257) and Zelenka was given supplies, such as sheets and paints, to paint a background behind the fence, picturing a whole town district in which he included a school. As Freudenfeld narrates in his memoir, Zelenka worked in his Theresienstadt workshop with a large number of assistants and, based on his original drawings, created a wonderful backdrop overnight (Fraňek 1965: 257). This not only demonstrated a real colourful town – while historians and survivors generally describe Theresienstadt as indeed rather dark – but also included a precious symbol: the sign ‘ŠKOLA’ indicating a school. The use of inscriptions was another frequent element in Zelenka’s pre-war designs and aimed at providing precise information to the spectator by indicating a specific location or identifying a certain building – as in this case. Zelenka added this sign to remind the children spectators that a school normally exists as part of a real town. The inclusion of this visual element aligns with Zelenka’s fine spirit of optimism looking at the future. The same version of the set with this backdrop was also used for the *Brundibár* performance filmed in August 1944 for the propaganda film; the film fragments provide us with some valuable visual material showing what the stage looked like and how the finale was performed by the ensemble (Figure 5).

Zelenka’s costume designs for *Brundibár* were very simple and were based on the use of ordinary everyday dress (Figure 6).⁴⁷ This was not due to lack of material, but was mainly related to his artistic decision and his intention to represent the characters as regular,



Figure 5. A caption and a still photograph from the Nazi propaganda film *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet* (1944) showing the *Brundibár* set: The fence with the posters (left) and the backdrop with the sign 'School' (right). (a) Caption: © V-3047, Yad Vashem Film Archive; (b) Photograph: © A.S 2977_175a, Yad Vashem Photo Archive.



Figure 6. Stills from the Nazi propaganda film (1944) showing the costumes (left to right): (a) Pepiček, Aninka, (b) Sparrow, Dog, (c) Cat, (d) Baker, Milkman, Ice Cream Vendor.

Source: *Brundibár-Opera behind the ghetto walls*, DVD (2005), Czech Television. Stills by Sofia Pantouvaki.



Figure 7. (a, b) Close-up stills from the Nazi propaganda film (1944) showing the makeup of the Cat, Dog and Sparrow (7a) and Honza Treichlinger's grimaces when performing the character of Brundibár (7b). Source: *Brundibár-Opera behind the ghetto walls*, DVD (2005), Czech Television. Stills by Sofia Pantouvaki.

recognisable children. Zelenka's other costume designs for Theresienstadt performances demonstrate that he could easily design the most elaborate costumes even without proper resources or costly materials. In *Brundibár*, the costumes for the two siblings, Aninka and Pepiček, consisted of some of their own clothes and other borrowed garments with some simple modifications. Pepiček wore a shirt and short trousers; in the film stills, we observe that his shirt was striped with a narrow collar and short sleeves. As the performer was a rather tall adolescent, his short trousers enhanced the impression of a young boy. Aninka wore a light coloured, possibly white shirt with short sleeves and a pinafore dress. Although the story identifies them as 'poor children', they both wear shoes. This design is modest and straightforward, representing a typical boy and girl.

The character of the organ-grinder Brundibár also wore plain clothes: as seen in the fragments of the film, he wore a shirt, a jacket, a pair of trousers, a scarf around his neck and a pair of boots. The most powerful element in the image of the character of Brundibár was a very large moustache under thick eyebrows (Figure 7(b)). The inspiration for this moustache may have derived from the representation of villains in silent movies or in folk tales that were familiar to Zelenka. This moustache has often been described as an indirect reference to Hitler, despite the fact that the style of the moustache in the Terezin production of *Brundibár* is completely different from Hitler's.⁴⁸ There are vivid

descriptions from all surviving original cast members, who remember Honza Treichlinger, the young boy singing the role, referring to how he played with his moustache in an original and sarcastic way. This detail was used as a tool to provide an ironic twist intended to ridicule the evil man rather than make him a hateful character. Freudenfeld has written on this,

He [Honza] learned to 'twitch the whiskers' which we stuck under his nose. He twitched them so well, and at just the right time, that tension relaxed in the auditorium and often we could hear the children releasing their bated breath. (Fraňek 1965, 257)⁴⁹

The animal characters wore everyday clothes chosen according to colour: The Cat wore a completely black sweater and black trousers. Ela Stein-Weissberger who was playing the Cat specified that she wore her mother's sweater and her sister's black trousers. She has narrated, 'When [Zelenka] said 'how can you describe what is a cat', I said 'I like black cats, I'm afraid when they cross [the street]'. We were very much aware of what we were and what costume we were in.'⁵⁰ The Dog was costumed in a brown blouse with long sleeves and white shorts worn over his long trousers. Hana Pollak-Drori, who sang the role of the Dog in the ghetto only a few times when the regular performer was sick, accounts 'I think [the costume] was passed from one Dog to another, not everyone had a costume like that.'⁵¹ Finally, the Sparrow was dressed in short trousers, a shirt and beige dancing tights. The three children performing the animals were barefoot; this allowed movement but also intensified the impression of the non-human. Koubská (2001) observes that Zelenka created with amazing ease characters in which an inanimate world comes to life.⁵² In *Brundibár*, he created a presence of animate elements (the animal characters performed by the children singers) following the appearance of inanimate visual elements (their painted images on the posters). This served to illustrate the magical nature of the animal characters and it was achieved in a transformation shared directly with the audience.⁵³

The animal characters' features were strongly emphasised with the use of makeup: the Cat, the Dog and the Sparrow wore heavy makeup showing characteristics of these animals – whiskers and spots, whilst the Dog's makeup gave the impression of a two-coloured muzzle. Hence makeup associated the children performers with the animal kingdom. Some children remember Zelenka standing on the side of the stage taking care of last minute details before the performances and personally applying the precious makeup material (a makeup stick or shoe-polish) on the characters himself. According to survivor recollection,⁵⁴ the three performers of the animal characters wore makeup at all performances (Figure 7(a)).

The other characters of the opera wore symbolic accessories on top of everyday clothing: the Milkman, the Ice-Cream Vendor and the Baker all wore hats intended to signify their profession – a white cook's hat the first two and a dark men's cap the latter. The use of hats together with dark makeup around the eyes created an effect of an adult man and served to transform the young performers into stage characters of an older age. The Baker wore a short, thick moustache and had some type of white powder on his face that gave the impression of being covered in flour. On top of their main clothing – white shirts and trousers – the Baker and the Ice-Cream Vendor had long white aprons. The garments worn by the three sellers were probably donated by older people; this is

particularly visible in the Milkman's trousers which have a men's cut and are too large for a child performer.

The Policeman wore a white shirt, a long dark adult person's coat tied with a wide belt around the waist and a hat, which synthesised a costume that resembled – better, symbolised – a police officer's uniform. The chorus members were not in costume; they wore their everyday clothes and came to the front of the stage only for the finale of the opera. The intention of this costume design was in general to convey a sense of the character's identity, identifying professions where necessary and distinguishing the fantasy-like animal characters.

However, probably the strongest element relating to the *Brundibár* costumes was that, while performing in the opera, the children were permitted to remove their yellow stars. While imprisoned in the Terezín ghetto, the inmates had to wear the distinctive yellow badge in the form of a Star of David with the inscription 'Jude' (the German word for 'Jew'). The exception of not wearing the yellow star because of participating in an opera performance provided a unique feeling of momentary freedom. 'For those moments we were not branded with the yellow star, which meant that for this brief precious time, we were free', recalls one of the child performers (Stein-Weissberger quoted in Brenner 2009, 139).

The performers of the opera were young 'stars' in Theresienstadt; they were recognised by children spectators and adult audience alike (Brenner 2009) and, instead of their real names, they were called out by their character names. 'In the camp, they stopped calling me Greta and called me Aninka,' remembers one of the performers (Klingsberg in Connolly 2015). This was valid also for the performer of the character of Brundibár, who was one of the favourites of the ghetto. Freudenfeld wrote about him after the war: 'Honza, quite instinctively, made the character of Brundibár so human, that, although he played a wicked character, he became the darling of the audience, and not only of the children in the audience' (Franěk 1965, 257).⁵⁵

Personal interviews with child survivors revealed that relatively few children clearly remember Zelenka; his presence is vibrant in their memories mainly in connection to the performances – which he attended to make sure that everything was in place – rather than the rehearsals.⁵⁶ Considering the long list of theatre productions that Zelenka designed in Theresienstadt, it may be that he was constantly working and thus was not regularly present during the *Brundibár* preparation (see also Pantouvaki 2008). The images and the stage environment that he created for *Brundibár*, however, remain powerfully alive in the children's minds and memories.

The power of scenographic metaphors in the Theresienstadt staging of *Brundibár*

Child survivors from Theresienstadt acknowledge that theatre and culture, in general, helped them to carry on with their everyday lives during their imprisonment. However, survivors are also critical and careful not to overestimate the effect of theatre on their lives by also giving full accounts of the hard reality, which was present at all times. Most of them agree that, at the time, they were focussed on their survival and did not grasp the deviation from normality or the gravity of the situation until much later.⁵⁷

An adult former ghetto inmate, Jan Fisher, who was also a Terezín performer, has stressed the importance of considering the hardships of daily life in the ghetto when evaluating the functions of theatre in Theresienstadt. He remarks that something was needed to counterbalance witnessing death and illnesses every day; theatre was a counterpart to this daily routine. Therefore, 'art and music [in Theresienstadt] provided a way to forget and remember, to believe in and imagine the other world – the familiar, reassuring world of home' (Dutlinger 2001, 5). In many cases, the children longed to find connections to life at home through the stories and the images created by theatrical performance; this was particularly valid in the case of the opera *Brundibár* and, to large extent, happened through its scenography.

Scenographer Erik Kouwenhoven has defined scenography as 'the suggestion of space which transforms in the head of the spectator to anything possible' (quoted in Howard 2002, xiv). With the contribution of scenography, the spectator's mind participates in the action, develops a dialogue with the performance and draws a sense of life from the stage. Ptáčková (2007, 27) writes that 'the beginnings of modern scenic expression in the Czech lands are generally connected with symbolism and expressionism'; scenography attempting to provide a view of the real world through the world on stage, no matter how representational, extreme, abstract or paradoxical this view might be. Irrespective of the aesthetic characteristics of scenography, the world of the stage was clearly defined and separated from the real world; theatrical image was thus a convention. Yet, in Theresienstadt children's theatre there was an attempt to surpass this line and convey to the young participants that life as presented on stage could become real life.

Scenographic metaphors function on many levels and in diverse ways, under different conditions: through images, scenography can convey information which cannot be otherwise transmitted; it can afford a glimpse of something which cannot be seen directly; it can also help us understand with our eyes what cannot be put in words. Under specific circumstances, a visual metaphor can become an illicit form of communication, a form of resistance based on images and visual means represent what does not yet exist, but is possible and may exist one day (Pantouvaki 2008). Such scenographic metaphors are developed by theatre in order to provide personal and psychological support as well as social meanings, especially in situations where words would be too dangerous, as was the case in Theresienstadt.

Due to the importance of images for children, the adults working in children's theatre in Theresienstadt attempted to create a type of illusionary theatre despite the fact that they did not have the means to do so. In the end, non-illusionary conventions, such as a simple box representing the musical organ of the character Brundibár, were employed together with naturalistic representations painted onto surfaces (e.g. on the box itself or on the posters) in an attempt to make these stage elements seem 'real'. These scenographic components primarily included well-known objects and easily recognisable themes and practices from life during peacetime. In the Theresienstadt theatrical experience, these elements became vehicles for the understanding and the interpretation of stage images, most of which visualised 'real life' (Pantouvaki 2013).

It is essential to bear in mind that young children imprisoned in the ghetto of Terezín, particularly the smallest ones, had no memory or experience of pre-war life and had to be reminded of the past or be taught what 'normal' life might be like. The older children of Terezín dreamt of and wished for their return to free life and therefore these scenographic

images held specific visual meanings for them, as they associated the images with good memories from the past. On the other hand, very young children who had few and vague memories from pre-war life were introduced through visual representation to an impression of free life (Pantouvaki 2013). These younger children had to be taught what was generally considered a 'known fact' to be able to become 'concrete receivers, people for whom and in whose systems of belief, [signs would] have a meaning' (Williamson 1978, 40). Šormová (1973, 77) notes that, 'the adults were trying to create at least some illusion of normal life for the children, and bring in at least some joy'. Theatrical performance reproduced habits and practices from normal life – including the process of preparing a new theatrical staging – and gave life to pictures from a normal world. Both these elements became crucial for the children's balanced upbringing. Therefore, the scenography of the performances acquired a significant role in creating metaphors of life with which the children were taught to make associations. In particular, these metaphors became reminders and lessons to the children of ideas such as the beauty of life and the value of living in a family or in some type of democratic social structure. They also provided aspects of what 'normal' life was like (e.g. including schooling) and what it consisted of (e.g. freedom of choice, good food, etc.). By experiencing these stage images, the children viewers would make sense of the scenographic metaphors and their positive associations. From a semiological perspective, the visual elements of the theatrical action complemented the spoken text and became signs of the ideas that the adult creators aimed to express. These visual links served primarily as a metaphor to convey what life should be like and as reassurance that life would change back again to this 'normality'.

Through Zelenka's sharp concept, the design of *Brundibár* carried several scenographic metaphors, bringing alive to the children's eyes and imagination images of pre-war everyday life that were then starkly lacking. The scenography of the opera used, physically present on stage, representations from 'normal' daily life. These representations were introduced, first, by the publicity posters on the set, which reminded the audience of advertising, commerce and the right to purchase goods. The posters included everyday objects related to daily habits, such as soap and washing, shaving and exchanging parcels freely – simple quotidian practices that were infrequent, not allowed or non-existent in the ghetto.

When the full set with the painted backdrop was made, the set was itself an image of free life: it portrayed a lively town with individual houses and included a school, signified by a painted sign; both private houses and schools were forbidden in Theresienstadt. This vibrant background, that Zelenka painted attempting to 'replicate the spontaneity and playfulness of a child's imagination' (Bartošová 2011, 167), provided children with a chance to experience a world full of colours and goods lacking from their ghetto life.

One of the few props of the performance documented in photographs, the ice-cream stall, was also a reproduction of a real life object. The storytelling offered further reference to the advantages of free life, including the enjoyment of ice cream, milk and bread. When the characters of the Ice-Cream Seller, the Baker and the Milkman appeared on stage and advertised their wares, they would verbally refer to delicious food through the libretto, which mentioned ice-cream flavours, bread, cakes and fresh milk. Child survivor Paul Sandfort recalls this part of the opera and his testimony shows how he imagined and longed for the delicacies described in this scene: '... candies, ice creams, chocolates, bread and milk

were things you just had to imagine and they were real [in the opera], so to speak. My mouth watered ... [...].⁵⁸ And he adds, 'all we had, of course, was dry bread! We children hadn't had real milk to drink for years; no eggs, no cake, no bonbons, and no ice-cream. [...] And the children acted as if these things were really there' (quoted in Brenner 2009, 169).⁵⁹

Theresienstadt survivor Dagmar Lieblová has said about Zelenka's scenography of *Brundibár*: 'It was like seeing normal life – and we were singing, we didn't wear the stars, there was a school and there were children going to school. It was all persons from a normal life.'⁶⁰ By offering a chance to remember what ordinary life looked like, the opera created a feeling of longing and hope for the day that they could lead such a real life. Hana Drori highlights the contribution of theatre-making, and specifically *Brundibár*, to providing a measure of normal life:

'For us it was just to see that in the world there are other things, other than hunger and diseases and death and transports and fear and bedbugs; and all these bad things we used to have there. I think that they gave us a lot of power to hope that we could overcome all this. It was like the other side of life, the good side. It was very important.'⁶¹

The children learned to appreciate these characteristics of life and, through theatre, they were taught what to expect from their lives in the future. The scenography preserved a sense that life would continue: that normal life would return and that the war would be brief (Pantouvaki 2008).

The world of a fairytale, in its narrative and visual expression through the opera, was used as a means that the children easily recognised and understood in order to perceive their situation and find ways to deal with it. The scenographic metaphors created on stage through the design of the performance became a distraction from suffering and a reminder of normality, providing psychological support, a chance for resistance and hope.⁶² The social morale of the opera was very close to the children's hearts; it reflected their perception of the world and their need for justice and rights.

Contemporary *Brundibár* productions

Brundibár has proved the most popular of all plays related to the Terezín ghetto and one of the most popular of all plays linked to the Holocaust today. There is very little evidence relating to the theatrical productions of *Brundibár* during the communist years of Czechoslovakia (1948-1989) as the communist regime was not particularly keen on staging or documenting performances of an old Jewish children's opera.⁶³ Nonetheless, there are three film versions of the opera *Brundibár* produced in 1954, 1965 and 1990 (Pantouvaki 2008). A film produced in 1965 in West Germany was complemented with testimony and commentary by many important survivors from Theresienstadt,⁶⁴ who narrated the plot of the opera intertwined with the history of the original performances in the ghetto. The concept of presenting the opera together with its background, done for the first time in this film, was later adopted by theatre makers who staged *Brundibár* accompanied by explanation on the particularity of its history. Contemporary performances usually go together with historical material, either in the accompanying programme booklet or by audio or visual means on stage, such as through narration, projection, or, very rarely, as part of the performance text.

Today an exceptionally large number of *Brundibár* performances can be traced around the world, mainly in Europe and the U.S.A. as well as in Israel, Canada, South America, Australia and Japan. The opera is staged both by professional companies and very frequently by amateur groups in schools or children's choirs worldwide. *Brundibár* was introduced to the English-speaking world sung in Czech when it premiered in the United States in West Hartford, Connecticut, on 8 April 1975. The world premiere of the English version⁶⁵ was held in Ottawa, Canada, on 14 November 1977.⁶⁶ The German premiere took place in 1985 by the St. Ursula Gymnasium in Freiburg am Breisgau by Maria Veronika Grütters, a Benedictine nun and music teacher who translated the original libretto into German and orchestrated the opera for her student orchestra from the piano score. In 1995, the German section of Jeunesses Musicales established 'The Brundibár Project' which originally performed the opera in three languages (Czech, German and Polish) involving survivors and eventually became a large pedagogical project for Holocaust education that generated hundreds of performances of the opera in Europe from 1999 onwards.⁶⁷ In the Czech Republic, a renowned *Brundibár* production is by Disman Radio Children's Ensemble of Prague, a staging that was close to the original ghetto production of *Brundibár* and was supported by the Terezín Initiative, the Theresienstadt survivors' voluntary organisation. This production was the first to perform in Terezín, in November 1991, in the original venue (the Magdeburg barracks) for the first time since the war to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Terezín Ghetto.⁶⁸ More recently, in 2014, *Brundibár* was staged for the first time in Sydney joined by local Theresienstadt survivors to mark the 70th anniversary of *Brundibár's* last performance in the ghetto.

One of the most well-known productions of *Brundibár* in the English-speaking world today is the version by playwright Tony Kushner (best known for *Angels in America*) with award winning illustrator and children's books author Maurice Sendak. The opera was performed in 2003 at the Chicago Opera Theater, directed and designed by Sendak with Tony Kushner's libretto. Following this collaboration, Kushner worked on a children's book inspired by the opera, illustrated by Sendak (Kushner and Sendak 2003). The book, entitled *Brundibár*, is a fairytale for children that retells the story of the opera; a note on its cover tells readers of its origin. Two years later, the book was adapted for the stage and was presented at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in November–December 2005, before moving to Yale Repertory Theatre in February–March 2006 and then to the off-Broadway New Victory Theater in New York City in May 2006. This production, which was widely publicised when it performed in New York, was directed by Tony Taccone and designed by Maurice Sendak with Kris Stone, with sets by Kris Stone and costumes by Robin I. Shane. It is performed by a combined cast of adult singers and a youth ensemble and is characterised by Sendak's enchanting and very colourful designs.

Compared to all other productions, this staging is certainly very different in terms of richness (in both budget and style) and gives a vivid narration of the story. Kushner presents the character of Brundibár through humour and satire quite like the original Theresienstadt performance. However, this adaptation has been widely criticised by survivors for a number of reasons. They argue that the style of the illustrations in the book as well as the spirit of the staging is completely different from the original European performances and generally out of context: 'This book from America ... [...] has nothing to do with Eastern Jews'⁶⁹ is one of the comments, as well as, 'It's how the Americans think it was. Almost all the pictures where you see the life or the circumstances are not true'.⁷⁰ This stage

adaptation of *Brundibár* is surely not aimed at recreating the original setting of the opera but rather is intended as a warning against contemporary apathy by saying that ‘tyrants of all times, in every generation, can be and must be resisted’ (Kushner 2006, 9).⁷¹

Conclusion: a legacy of the original design for *Brundibár*

The opera *Brundibár* is empowered by the circumstances in which it was originally performed. A survey of contemporary *Brundibár* performances (see Pantouvaki 2007 and 2008) shows what has become almost an ‘epidemic of productions’.⁷² These countless productions and the information accompanying them are associated with a series of myths and oversimplifications of the history and the effects of the opera then and now. *Brundibár* was, in fact, the most important work of theatre for children in Theresienstadt but the meaning of the opera is often exaggerated, almost as if the children’s survival itself had depended on it, which – as research has demonstrated – is not a realistic concept.

Although in most contemporary productions of *Brundibár* there is an attempt to somehow create a link between the opera and its background to highlight the power it generated under the exceptional circumstances of the Terezín ghetto period, this is rarely achieved. The very specific reasons that allowed *Brundibár* to offer strength and psychological support to the children of the ghetto cannot be understood today in the same way. As Milan Kuna has noted, ‘No other gift could be compared to that which Krása gave [the children] with his opera. Whatever the critics may say about this piece today – its mission which was fulfilled at Theresienstadt is unarguable’ (Kuna 1998).

Among the children’s performances, the opera *Brundibár* acquired a special role: Due to its subject and to the narrative concluding with a happy ending, where togetherness defeats the evil, the opera is often cited as an example of spiritual resistance, introducing values of life and giving a lesson on the power of unity. ‘It was also our fight against the evil’, comments a child survivor.⁷³ The malicious character Brundibár became a metaphor for evil, ‘not an abstract, imaginary fairytale figure, but the very personification of evil, which [the children] were encountering at every step’ (Kuna 2002, 20–21). The victory over Brundibár took on a symbolic significance for the Theresienstadt children, described as ‘a small victory in their own real lives’ (Kuna 1998) at a time when winning was a rare experience. Moreover, the symbolic use of the *Brundibár* characters, such as the animals, represented forces transcending human power that stories often embody. ‘[It was] between fairy-tale and reality. The animals and so on, that was the fairy-tale, and the police officers and Brundibár were the reality,’ comments another child survivor.⁷⁴

Probably the most important contribution of *Brundibár* was that it offered children a chance to experience childhood, to be children again. That is, to forget about reality and be involved in a kind of game, a theatrical performance, which allowed them to tell a story, sing and dance. Child survivor Anna Flachová-Hanušová has characteristically said: ‘*Brundibár* was a gift for our lost childhood’.⁷⁵ The opera *Brundibár* proved to have huge importance for the psychological support of children under these pressurised conditions, while the importance of the piece also for the adults living in the ghetto was immediately noted as well. The opera encoded an allegorical symbolism that was gratefully recognised and accepted by an audience that was sensitive due to its captivity. The Theresienstadt inmates, predominantly Czech, like Zelenka, used their theatrical tradition to find ways to understand, express and react to what happened in their lives.

This powerful tradition kept alive the significance of values and ideas about free life, even in the most difficult of moments.

The staging of *Brundibár* consisted of a series of visual statements that were an integral part of scenography and acquired meaning in the context of the ghetto. The imposed situation led to feelings of fear, instability, anxiety, powerlessness, helplessness, and loss of control. Theatre helped to confront and deal with these feelings by suggesting alternative ways of experiencing ghetto life as well as by offering alternative activities – and alternative imaginary realities. ‘*Brundibár* is one side of it, that you can escape reality and survive for some time at least, living in the world of dreams. A flight into humour; a flight into irony.’⁷⁶ Thus, the simple yet witty and imaginative scenographic metaphors created by Zelenka’s design took the children to a dream world that did not exist in Theresienstadt reality, a world that was similar to the imagery of ‘normal’ life.

Theatre in Theresienstadt was used as a means for personal and collective survival, which could not be achieved through material means. *Brundibár* succeeded in saying with music, images and theatrical action what could not be easily said with words. The mastery of theatre artists such as František Zelenka and his collaborators in staging *Brundibár* for the Theresienstadt children adds a concrete example that demonstrates the power of creating and reading scenographic images under coercive conditions. Therefore, *Brundibár* can be read today as a paradigm of the ways in which scenography may contribute as a reminder of normality for those displaced or disempowered and as a symbolic safe space when dealing with issues that cannot otherwise be confronted.

Notes

1. This article is a revised and extended version of a paper presented in a general panel curated by the Scenography Working Group at the IFTR 2016 conference ‘Presenting the Theatrical Past’ at the University of Stockholm. The article draws materials from the author’s PhD thesis entitled *The Effects of Theatrical Storytelling and Scenography on Children: The Case of Children’s Theatre in the Ghetto of Terezín (1941–45)*, University of the Arts London, 2008, enriched and updated with additional research.
2. In situ observation in Terezín has been an important tool in understanding bibliographical research, as well as for the visualisation of the described living conditions in the environment of the ghetto and for the perception of certain aspects of survivors’ narrations.
3. These came primarily from the archives of the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Terezín Memorial; also partly from the British Library National Sound Archive available as audio recordings.
4. Personal interviews were held between 2002 and 2007 with survivors living in Prague and Brno in the Czech Republic, in London and other areas of England, in Vienna, New York, Israel, Germany and Denmark.
5. The rarity of these materials as well as the content and especially the style and quality of the narrative highlights the importance of recording such evidence while it is still possible.
6. The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis began on 15 March 1939. The creation of the Theresienstadt ghetto was decided in October 1941 and the transports of people to the ghetto started a month later. There is rich historical research about the Theresienstadt ghetto, its organisation and function (see Adler 1960/2017; Lederer 1983; Blodig 2003; Chládková 2005).
7. The ghetto of Terezín was liberated by the Soviet Army on their way to Prague on the evening of 8 May 1945 (Blodig 2003) near the very end of World War Two in Europe. The day of liberation is vividly indicated with Russian flags in some children’s diaries.

8. For more information on education and children's activities in the ghetto of Terezín, see Makarova (1990), Franková (1998), Milton (2001), Blodig (2003), Pantouvaki (2008) and Brenner (2009).
9. Important sources on the work of Czech theatre creators of the 1920s–1930s, directors and designers, include Jarka Burian's books, *Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (Burian 2000) and *Leading Creators of Twentieth-Century Czech Theatre* (Burian 2002). The volume *Czech Theatre Design in the Twentieth Century – Metaphor and Irony Revisited* (University of Iowa Press, 2007) edited by Joe Brandesky discusses characteristics of Czech theatre design from 1920 until 2000 but unfortunately does not include František Zelenka, who is mentioned as a missing 'artist of note' in the introduction.
10. Joe Brandesky writes in relation to this that Prague artists benefited from their geographical placement in Europe as art movements from East and West met in the centre. Symbolist, Cubist, and Surrealist influences came from Paris while Futurist and Constructivist ideas arrived from Moscow. Secessionist and Expressionist principles crossed the nearby borders from Vienna and Berlin. In all cases, Czech artists absorbed and transformed these movements for their own purposes. (Brandesky 2007, 19)
11. The Devětsil artistic association was the most important in Bohemia; it was founded in 1920 reminiscent of the Bauhaus, which had been founded a year earlier in Weimar (Koubská 1997).
12. Karel Teige, artist and theoretical leader of the Czech poetists, has explained Poetism as 'the transformation of language into visual art in relation to the rise of photography, film, and new developments in book printing' (Rakušanová 2018, n.p.). For Teige, the goal of art was 'not rational comprehension but maximal emotivity' (Teige in his 1928 'Manifesto of Poetism' quoted in Winner 1998, 408).
13. According to Bartošová (2011, 148), this gallery was 'a design and exhibition space that promoted the work of those considered to be the best Czech artists, architects and designers' and became, during the 1920s and 1930s, a significant promoter of progressive crafts, applied arts, and design.
14. As an artist of Jewish origin, 'Zelenka had to stop his artistic activities in 1939 because of the Nuremberg Laws, which forbade Jews from such work' (Koubská 2017, 23). Between 1939 and 1941, he managed to make set designs for several productions in secret with the support of some friends; his last design for public theatre was *As You Like It* (1941) directed by František Salzer (Koubská 1994).
15. Several of Zelenka's drawings from Terezín were saved by his mother, Kamila Zelenková, who survived the Holocaust and sold them to the Czechoslovak state in the 1950s (Koubská 2017).
16. The exact date of Zelenka's death remains unknown.
17. Musicians rehearsed in individual vacant rooms, while pianists had a small room in the Magdeburg Barracks with a piano installed there for practice and rehearsals.
18. Interview of Zdenka Ehrlich, née Fantlová, with the author, 1 May 2006.
19. Interview of Eva Herrmannová with the author, 13 July 2006.
20. These included the following spaces: a hall in the block of FIII youth flats, a hall in children's Home L318 that hosted stage plays for children, a hall at the Ghetto Guard Headquarters in L315 (used until 1943); some areas in the Engineering Barracks L311 and Dresden Barracks, which were used as lecture and theatre halls. Also, the former cinema in L514, used as a concert and theatre hall and the warehouse on the first floor of the Hamburg Barracks, which hosted cabaret performances. For more information, see Šormová (2002), Blodig (2003) and Pantouvaki (2008).
21. The Czech Sokol movement (from the Slavic word for 'hawk' or 'falcon') is a volunteer movement that associates physical and spiritual development; it therefore actively practices various sports and physical and cultural activities. Since its founding in 1862, Sokol movement has had a long and well-established tradition in the Czech Republic.
22. Interview of Zdenka Ehrlich, née Fantlová, with the author, 1 May 2006.
23. Interview of Jan Fischer with the author, 30 October 2006.

24. Interview of Zdenka Ehrlich, née Fantlová, with the author, 1 May 2006.
25. Fantlová played Queen Vashti in the folk play *Esther*; she remembers:

The Queen had a costume made of two sheets, one white and one black together. The black was on top and it had big cut-out holes, eye-shaped, so that the white could sort of come out. I had also a paper crown. [...] His [Zelenka's] instruction to me was: 'You know I would like you when you cross the stage to look like a baroque angel, like a baroque statue over a grave'.

Another narrative provided by Fantlová that relates to the same play:

King Ahašver had a sheet, with a hole in the middle, [it went through the head] so it was flowing and the edges of the sheet were empty tins of something put at short distances. When the King dressed in the rehearsal, Zelenka's remark was 'Karel, when you walk I would like you to sound like a moving sacristy'. You know, in the church when they cling-a-ling-a-ling, because the tins were moving and touching making sound.

Both accounts are from the interview of Zdenka Ehrlich, née Fantlová, with the author, 1 May 2006. Zelenka's cultural, visual and sensorial references are quite striking when considered in the context of Theresienstadt.

26. The word 'brundibár' is colloquial Czech for a bumblebee.
27. Krása's lecture on *Brundibár* was held in summer 1943 in Theresienstadt on the occasion of the first-year anniversary of Boys' Home L417.
28. Karas (1990) describes Hoffmeister as a 'Czech leftist avant-garde playwright'. Hoffmeister was actually a founding member of the Devětsil association.
29. See Hoffmeister introducing the opera in the film *Der Vorletzte Akt – Brundibár [The Last Act – Brundibár]* (1965), directed by Walter Krüttner.
30. Witthoefft describes *Brundibár* as

a teaching of the Brechtian kind, to the extent that its focus is not primarily on producing an (ideological) teaching or insight, as one might think when hearing the term, but rather on a particular attitude, which is supposed to be learned by practice. And the learning is not restricted to the dramatis personae or the audience, but rather above all the actors themselves are meant to learn. (quoted in Töller, p.48)
31. Karas (1990) considers this set to be 'ingeniously conceived'; I strongly disagree with this view as the *Brundibár* set embedded different levels of scenographic metaphors and, therefore, multi-layered meanings. My analysis of the Theresienstadt set for *Brundibár* in the following section gives the reasons for this disagreement.
32. In the photograph (Figure 1) this inscription seems to be on one part of the wooden fence, rather than on another poster.
33. It is important to note that children were auditioned at the presence of Schächter and Freudenfeld, possibly also Krása, in order to be part of the *Brundibár* performances in the ghetto. Child survivors refer to the 'masterful acting' and remarkable singing of the children's cast; the young soloists seem to have had excellent performing abilities and some of them had already participated in opera performances by adult professionals in the ghetto. For more information on the auditions, the rehearsals and the cast's performance in the *Brundibár* performances in Theresienstadt, see Pantouvaki (2008).
34. Because the International Red Cross was concerned about what was really happening in Theresienstadt, it organised a commission, which inspected the Terezín ghetto on 23 June 1944. For this reason, the Nazis gave orders for a beautification plan of the ghetto, which would 'embellish' the real conditions of life in Theresienstadt and organised a cultural programme for the visitors.
35. Two years earlier, on 6 July 1942, the original Terezín civilian inhabitants were sent away and the entire town turned into a ghetto. Kuna (1998) refers to this event as an 'absurd celebration' of the day that extended the status of a concentration camp to the entire town of Terezín, a celebratory event probably ordered by the SS. He describes that members of the Council of

Elders held speeches in Czech and German and then a 'high level' performance of *Brundibár* was presented.

36. Through this propaganda documentary, also known under the ironic title *The Führer Donates a Town to the Jews*, the Nazis would try to reassure the international public opinion.
37. The months of 'the great transports', as survivors often refer to them.
38. Contrary to a myth surrounding the opera, the children were deported together with their parents during the massive transports to Auschwitz and not because they participated in the *Brundibár* production.
39. This was the central design idea also in the first staging of *Brundibár* at the Boys' Orphanage in Prague, as can be seen in the original photograph.
40. According to chorus-member survivors (e.g. Eva Herrmannová, Dita Kraus-Polachová, Dagmar Fantlová-Lieblová), even when not singing, the fact of being behind the fence to wait seemed to the children like adventure and a game. Dita Polachová has vividly narrated:

It was great fun to be there, behind the fence. We knew that the audience wasn't aware that we were there. And we knew the surprise; we always heard this surprise in the audience when suddenly behind the fence a crowd of faces appeared. (interview with the author, 24 September 2006)

41. Eva Herrmannová, opera specialist and herself a Theresienstadt survivor who was singing in the *Brundibár* chorus in the original ghetto performances, underlines the importance and uniqueness of the original production in that almost no director who staged *Brundibár* after the war ever used the idea of the fence or the clear separation of the chorus-commentator. Interview of Eva Herrmannová with the author, 13 July 2006.
42. Rind has narrated, 'If I were caught, I was supposed to say, "it [the timber] is to repair the bunks for the blind people"' and only later on he found out that the wood was used for the production of *Brundibár*, which he then saw many times (Rind 2014, n.p.).
43. I am grateful to survivors and original cast members Eva Herrmannová and Ela Stein-Weissberger for their invaluable contribution in analysing the wording and imagery to synthesise the content and meaning of the posters. Interviews with the author on 15 November 2002 and 13 July 2006 (Eva Herrmannová) and 22 September 2006 (Ela Weissberger).
44. See, for example, his designs for the ballet *The Glass Virgin* and other ballets for the National Theatre in Prague (1928) (Bartošová 2011).
45. Detailed descriptions of the action are based on survivor testimony in personal interviews with the author, among others with Eva Herrmannová, Anna Flachová-Hanušová, Hana (Handa) Pollak-Drori and Ela Stein-Weissberger.
46. Food in Theresienstadt was poor and insufficient and was distributed with ration cards. There was no food with vitamins or any fruit, vegetables or milk products. The menu regularly comprised a kind of watery wheat-coffee, soups made of lentil powder or potato peels, occasionally a small piece of meat and some bread twice a week (Huppert and Drori 2000).
47. Information on the costumes was provided mainly by survivors from the Theresienstadt original cast members including Hana (Handa) Pollak-Drori, Ela Stein-Weissberger, Greta Hofmeister-Klingsberg and Anna Flachová-Hanušová in personal interviews and was combined and cross-checked with original visual material from photographs and stills from the film.
48. Despite the widespread belief that the children of Terezín had identified Hitler as the 'tyrant' *Brundibár* described in the libretto, the vast majority of child survivors today agree that the character of *Brundibár* was for them a general metaphor of evil, which they defeated.
49. Child survivor Helga Kinsky, née Pollak, who was often in the audience also recalls: 'He always made some fun with his moustache and the children who sang with him said they always waited for what he would do the next day, he always did some new trick' (interview with the author, 6 May 2006).
50. Interview of Ela Weissberger, née Stein(ová), interview with the author, 22 September 2006.
51. Hana (Handa) Drori, née Pollak, interview with the author, 20 September 2006.

52. This is particularly evident in Zelenka's designs for ballet costumes in which objects such as musical instruments, money, letters and envelopes, etc. come to life (for further analysis see Bar-[tošová 2011](#)).
53. As Brandesky (2007, 5) notes, Czech directors and designers 'were drawn to non-realistic methods of stage production, knowing that their audiences had been conditioned by the legacy of puppetry'.
54. Interview of Ela Weissberger, née Stein(ová), with the author, 22 September 2006.
55. 'At the end, when he's thrown out, we welcomed him back on stage with open arms. He was one of us, our lovable Brundibár', recalls Greta Klingsberg, who sang the role of Aninka in the ghetto (Connolly 2015, n.p.),
56. The preparation of the opera with the children performers was undertaken primarily by Freudenfeld (whom the children had nicknamed 'Baštik' and who was their musical coach) and the choreographer Kamila Rosenbaum. Surprisingly, most of the child survivors interviewed could not recognise Zelenka, while some of them could not confirm that he really was the stage director. A few child survivors remember him well and recall that he was always in a good mood and well-prepared with a humorous attitude, something that older and professional actors who worked with him in Theresienstadt theatre productions also confirm.
57. Some accounts confirming this include the following: 'I think that if you are in a situation like a ghetto or a concentration camp, you are so occupied with it that you don't have too much thought about what happened' (Hana (Hanka) Weingarten, née Wertheimer, interview with the author, 19 September 2006).

Reality was everyday life. You asked me if [life during the Theresienstadt imprisonment] was in a bracket - No. [...] Did I feel it was something like a stage play? No. It was real life, and that was it at the time. (Rita Knopf, née Hahn, interview with the author, 24 April 2006)

58. Interview of Paul Sandfort, née Rabinowitsch, with the author, 19 September 2006. See also Pantouvaki (2013).
59. However, other child survivors claim that, when participating in *Brundibár*, they were particularly focussed on the story of good and evil and on the children's victory and they 'did not think about the ice-cream' (interview of Eva Merová, née Landová, with the author, 28 October 2006).
60. Interview of Dagmar Lieblová, née Fantlová, with the author, 17 July 2006.
61. Interview of Hana (Handa) Drori, née Pollak, with the author, 20 September 2006.
62. *Brundibár* and its dream world could be detected in children's drawings and became an example that was later followed by other similar cultural activities for children in the ghetto, such as the staging of the Czech fairytale *Fireflies* (Broučci).
63. There is no officially recorded material on the few early post-war *Brundibár* theatrical productions, but only rare references in the survivors' testimony.
64. These include Rudolf Freudenfeld/Fraňek, Zdeněk Ornest, Josef Bor, Norbert Frýd and Adolf Hoffmeister. *Der Vorletzte Akt – Brundibár* [*The Last Act – Brundibár*] (1965). Directed by Walter Krüttner. Production Cineropa-Film, Munich, Federal Republic of Germany.
65. The first English version of *Brundibár* was translated by Milada Javora and Joža Karas and was published by Tempo Praha in 1993.
66. Both productions were conducted by Joža Karas (Karas 1990).
67. Eva Herrmannová has noted

there are over 80 study versions [of *Brundibár*] in German schools, but the opera is studied in different languages and presented on the most important opera [stages] and [in] concert halls around the world, e.g. in London, Essen, Trieste, Leipzig, Utrecht, Antwerp, Washington, New York, Geneva, Montreal, Vienna (State Opera and Chamber Opera), Paris (National Opera), Berlin, Frankfurt, Oslo, Stockholm, Brussels and Barcelona, where it was studied by thousands of children's choir members. (Herrmannová 1999)

- Excerpt from the programme of the Prague Children's Opera production of *Brundibár* in 1999.
68. This happened after the fall of the Communist regime, and was originally organised on private initiative
 69. Interview of Eva Herrmannová with the author, 13 July 2006.
 70. Interview of Dagmar Lieblová, née Fantlová, with the author, 17 July 2006.
 71. Survivors have critiqued the re-appearance of *Brundibár*, in the coda added in this production threatening to return, considering it an example of the contemporary American ideology of the evil always lurking in our everyday lives. Kushner's version indeed 'uses post 9/11 themes and the larger Holocaust experience in Europe as a thread of commentary throughout his work, both visually and textually' (Aipperspach 2014, 2). The impact of this ending contrasts to the power of the opera's storytelling as experienced by the Theresienstadt children for whom, while imprisoned in the ghetto, it was significant that good prevailed in the end. This is reflected in the following remark: '[The story] was written so that we, the children, defeated *Brundibár* and then, that was it' (interview of Dagmar Lieblová, née Fantlová, with the author, 17 July 2006).
 72. Expression used by Anna Hanušová, née Flachová, in an interview with the author, 21 September 2006.
 73. Interview of Hana (Handa) Drori, née Pollak, with the author, 20 September 2006.
 74. Interview of Eva Merová, née Landová, with the author, 28 October 2006.
 75. Interview of Anna Hanušová, née Flachová, with the author, 21 September 2006.
 76. Interview of Paul Sandfort, née Rabinowitsch, with the author, 19 September 2006.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the Theresienstadt survivors who provided their personal stories and memories; this work would not have been completed without their contribution. Special thanks to the National Museum and the Jewish Museum in Prague and to the Yad Vashem Archive for granting image permissions; also grateful to the National Film Archive in Prague. The author also wishes to thank the reviewers of this paper for their insightful comments and suggestions, and Darryn Trowell for his invaluable support.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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