“Cold, Hunger, Fear, and Death” : The Silent Testimonies of Theresienstadt’s Youngest Witnesses

„Wo Worte fehlen, sprechen Bilder.”
— “Where words are missing, images speak.”

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ABSTRACT

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Michelle LaVergne

More than 150 000 Jews passed through the gates of the Theresienstadt Ghetto between 1941 and its liberation in 1945. Approximately 12,500 of them were children, only a few of whom survived. Some of these children left behind drawings and writings – fragments of memory resisting erasure. Focusing on one survivor's autobiography and her haunting description of her "four closest companions" – Hunger, Cold, Fear, and Death – this study investigates how children in Theresienstadt represented their lived experiences through pictorial and narrative creative expressions. At the heart of this study is a collection of over 4,500 children's drawings produced in the ghetto under the guidance of an art teacher in the children's homes.

By exploring the presence and significance of these four companions, supplemented with excerpts from children's diaries and memoirs of survivors, this study reveals how these themes were persistent emotional realities that shaped children's understanding and portrayal of their world. This research also considers visual contrasts between pre-ghetto and ghetto life, such as the depiction of smoke rising from chimneys, and what the absence of such imagery might disclose about memory, loss, and rupture. Through the analysis of visual culture alongside historical and literary sources, children's creative expressions emerge as silent testimonies of resilience, coping, and meaning making amid suffering. This research thus preserves the voices of children within Holocaust historiography and contributes to broader dialogues in Holocaust studies, memory studies, and the history of childhood.

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A Note on Names and Translations:

Names:
Terezín is the Czech name of the town, reflecting its native designation in the local Slavic language. It is located in the Litoměřice District in the Ústí nad Labem Region of the Czech Republic.
Theresienstadt is the German name for the same location, used by the Nazis to refer to the hybrid ghetto and concentration camp they established there.
Throughout this thesis, I refer to the location as Theresienstadt, except when quoting or referencing primary sources—such as drawings, diaries, or memoirs—in which the author uses Terezín. In those cases, the original name is retained to preserve the authenticity and voice of the source.

Translations:
This thesis draws on materials in multiple languages. Accordingly, foreign-language terms from German and Czech are italicized upon first use. Translations are provided in parentheses or footnotes where relevant. Translations were produced in consultation with a native German speaker, uni- and bilingual dictionaries, and PONS and DeepL, online translators.

List of Abbreviations/Glossary:

Abbreviations:

J.M.P. Jewish Museum in Prague

Glossary:

German Terms:
Ältestenrat – Council of Elders
Crematorium – crematorium
Entläusung – delousing
Ghettowache – ghetto guards
Heim – homes
Judenältester – "Jewish Elder"; the head of the Ältestenrat
Judenpolitik – Jewish policy
Judenräte – Council of Jews
Jugendfürsorge –Youth welfare
Jugendgarten – youth garden
Kindergarten – preschool
Knabenheim – boy's home
Konzentrationslager – concentration camp
Kranke – sick people
Krankheit/Seuche – disease/plague
Kultur – culture
Mädchenheim – girl's home
Normalarbeiter – normal worker
Schwerarbeiter – heavy labourer
Sündenbock – scapegoat
Unsere Aufgabe, Unser Weg – Our mission, our Way
Zentralleichenkammer – central mortuary

Czech Terms:
Bouřka – thunderstorm
butchy – a roll usually filled with jam
Vždy čerstvé zhoži – always fresh goods
Hospada– Pub
Motiv z Terezína – motif from Terezín
Na tržišti – to the marketplace
Nádraží – train Station
Povolaní do transportu – called to transport
Ráj – paradise
Reklamace – complaint
Schlojs – to purloin from communal property

Skola – school
Šlojska – sluices
Tři přítelkyně a letadlo – Three friends and a plane
Vedem – We See
Vyprodáno! – sold out!
Vzpomínky na domov – memories of home
Vzpomínky na život před deportací – memories of life before deportation
Zakázane ovoce – forbidden fruit
Zima/Dětské hry – winter/children's games
Zimní Sporty – winter sports
Život v Ghettu (deportovaný's batohem) – life in the ghetto (deportee with a backpack)
Život v Ghettu (Poprava Oběšením) – life in the ghetto (execution by hanging)

Greek Terms:
Hellada – Greece

Introduction

Having already lived six months in the Westerbork transit camp with her parents, located in eastern Netherlands, Gabriele Silten was familiar with the inhuman living conditions in ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, when she stepped off the train in Theresienstadt on 20 January 1944, her world got even darker. In a dimly lit room, warmed only by a small wood stove, lived more that twelve girls who slept in triple-tiered bunks, each barely two-feet wide. Made of wood, the beds housed bedbugs; the straw-sack mattresses that children slept on were inhabited by fleas. Everything had changed, the reality of a cozy home no longer existed, the ability to receive an education was out of reach, and the taste of fresh fruits and vegetables became a distant dream.

In the ghetto, flowers, butterflies and puppies ceased to exist, leaving only dark wood and concrete, and the rattle of bread carts transporting the deceased to the crematorium. Gabriele worked in the crematorium where her role, along with other children, was to pass along cardboard boxes of ashes.[1] Death was inescapable. Behind closed doors, residents held secret musical performances and children's operas in an attempt to distract themselves from the omnipresence of death that hung over them. Gabriele's internal flame flickered, and with it, the very sense of her own existence. Was she still human, or just a shadow wandering aimlessly through the streets?[2] As she would later reflect in her autobiography - "[m]y imagination has died; I can no longer imagine what life was like "before," how I used to be, what I used to do,

[1] R. Gabriele S. Silten, *Between Two Worlds: Autobiography of a Child Survivor of the Holocaust* (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1995), 140.
[2] Silten, Between Two Worlds, 170.

where I used to go."[3] Despite being in the presence of thousands of others, Gabriele existed alone.

Ruth Gabriele Silten was born 30 May 1933 in Berlin, Germany as the only child of Fritz Silten (b. 16 February 1904) and Ilse Silten (b. 23 February 1909). Her grandfather owned a pharmacy and a pharmaceuticals factory where her father made his living.[4] Growing up, the family had a maid who looked after Gabriele. In 1938, the Nazis forced her grandfather, Ernst Silten (b. 28 April 1866), to sell his factory and pharmacy.[5] As a result, Fritz Silten made the decision to move his family to Amsterdam where it was "safer" for Jews.

In May 1940, at the age of nine, Gabriele and her parents were deported to Westerbork, and then onto Theresienstadt in January 1941. While living in Theresienstadt, Gabriele worked as an ordinance (message carrier) and was one of the few children who lived with both her mother and father. Her father worked as a street cleaner, then as a pharmacist, while her mother worked first as a cleaner, then in the mica factory. In an oral history interview, Silten described the living situation as dormitory-style where one side was for women, and the other was for men. In May 1945, at the age of 12, Gabriele and her parents were liberated from the ghetto. They returned to Amsterdam that June, where they resettled and her father established his pharmacy.[6] In 1959, she immigrated to the United States and is still alive today.

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[3] Silten, Between Two Worlds, 170.
[4] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Fritz Silten," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed 24 April 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/fritz-silten; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Ilse Silten," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed April 24, 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/ilse-silten.
[5] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Ernst Silten," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed 24 April 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/ernst-silten.
[6] Gabriele Silten, oral history interview by Ken Rothschild, 13 April 1983, *Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, accessed October 2024, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn47726.

The Theresienstadt ghetto, which was in operation from 24 November 1941 until its liberation on 9 May 1945, was located in Terezín, a former military fortress in the former Czechoslovakia. It operated as a transit camp for Czech Jews from the former Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia,[7] but eventually saw the arrival of Jews from other parts of Europe such as Denmark, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary. When receiving notice for their deportation to Theresienstadt, individuals were typically given just a couple of days to a week's notice, although twenty-four hours' notice was also just as common, in an attempt to make it difficult for people to try to flee or try to resist deportation. A typical journey to Terezín took anywhere between one to three days, depending on the departure point. Crammed into cattle cars with no food or water, except for what they brought, and a makeshift hole in the ground to use as a toilet, Gabriele and her family experienced the kind of cruel and inhumane treatment that would also await them in Theresienstadt.

Theresienstadt served as a "model" ghetto, designed to make the outside world believe that Jewish people were living near normal lives.[8] Within the ghetto, there was the Theresienstadt church, the central bakery, the delousing station, a library, hospital, homes for the aged, men's and women's barracks and children's homes.[9] The ghetto, like pre-ghetto Jewish communities during this era, was required to have an *Ältestenrat* (Council of Elders) or a *Judenrat* (Council of Jews). This council was composed of twenty-four male Jews, including mostly influential

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[7] Holocaust.cz, "Anti-Jewish Policy after the Establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia," *Holocaust.cz*, accessed January 23, 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/final-solution/the-final-solution-of-the-jewish-question-in-the-bohemian-lands/anti-jewish-policy-after-the-establishment-of-the-protectorate-of-bohemia-and-moravia/. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was a partially annexed territory of Nazi Germany that was established 16 March 1939 (some sources note March 15) after the German occupation of the Czech territory and dissolved with the surrender of Germany to the Allies in May 1945. Anti-Jewish Policy after the establishment of the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

[8] Jana Renée Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth: Memoir of a Terezín Survivor,* trans. Elinor Morrisby and Ladislav Rosendorf (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 2.

[9] Saul S. Friedman, *The Terezín Diary of Gonda Redlich* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), xvii.

personalities and rabbis. The council's sole purpose was to enforce German orders, provide quarters for the evacuees, and expedite the "solution of the Jewish problem."[10]

When the Germans declared Theresienstadt an "autonomous" ghetto, responsibility was given to the *Ältestenrat* (Council of Elders), a body of Jewish functionaries led by the *Judenältester* (Jewish Elder) to manage the camp's internal affairs. Among their earliest and most consequential decisions was the prioritisation of the young over the old – a strategy intended to protect the future generation, but one that would ultimately shape the fate of many other prisoners.[11] Although formally charged with overseeing housing, sanitation, education, labour assignments, and rationing, the Council held little real power.[12] While it may have appeared to those living in the ghetto that authority rested in Jewish hands, the Council operated largely as an advisory body to the Jewish Elder and remained subject to German control. Yet, their influence was profound: a single word from a Council member could determine whether a human life would be spared or lost, placing an enormous moral burden on their shoulders.[13]

The Council was compelled – under pressure from the SS – to implement German orders, including the preparation of deportation lists. In doing so, it faced impossible moral dilemmas in its attempts to protect the vulnerable. At the height of the deportations in 1942, the Council sought to shield children from transports by establishing dedicated children's homes.[14] It also

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[10] Bernard Klein, "The Judenrat," *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no.1 (January 1960): 27; Friedman, *The Terezín Diary of Gonda Redlich*, 17, 25.
[11] Hannelore Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28: Friendship, Hope and Survival in Theresienstadt*, trans. John E Woods and Shelley Frisch (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 35, 43; Marjorie Lamberti, "Making Art in the Terezín Concentration Camp," *New England Review* 17, no.4 (Fall 1995): 105.
[12] H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: The Face of a Coerced Community*, trans. Belinda Cooper, ed. Amy Loewenhaar-Blauweiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 210; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *"Theresienstadt: Retirement Settlement for German and Austrian Jews,"* Holocaust Encyclopaedia, accessed 16 June 2025, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt-retirement-settlement-for-german-and-austrian-jews.
[13] Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, 211.
[14] Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 201; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *"Theresienstadt."*

tried to spare selected individuals by taking advantage of the fact they were permitted to draft "protection lists," and also negotiating *Reklamace* (exception claims), such as those based on illnesses.[15] However, each name that was removed from a transport list required another to take its place. Though deportations were often referred to as "resettlements," the Council was aware of the fate awaiting deportees. They may have chosen to withhold this knowledge to prevent widespread panic and despair.[16]

Within the Jewish Council of Elders, the department of Youth Welfare was given the responsibility to tend to the welfare of children and youths,[17] including their care, education and housing. Considered one of the most ambitious child-welfare projects behind ghetto walls, the Youth Welfare was devoted to helping children experience a life as close to their pre-ghetto lives as possible.[18] This meant ensuring children would continue to receive an education, which was done in secret; that children and youths participated in leisure activities such football matches, operas and plays; and creating a routine for children to follow, including consistent wake-up times and bedtimes, chores and dedicated mealtimes. This project also sought to distract children and youths from the disturbing reality of daily life in Theresienstadt by attempting to preserve elements of childhood. However, the council placed a particular emphasis on improving children and youth's access to food and housing.

In 1942, the Council of Elders constructed the children's homes: the *Mädchenheim* (girl's home), the *Knabenheim* (boy's home), and the *Kindergarten* (preschool). Jewish leaders divided the children and youths into rooms according to their age, language, and nationality. Children

[15] Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, 211.
[16] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 43; Lamberti, "Making Art in the Terezín Concentration Camp," 107; Felix Jiri Weinberg, *Boy 30529: A Memoir* (London: Verso, 2013), 59.
[17] *Jugendfürsorge* (Youth Welfare)
[18] Clifford, *Survivors*, 27.

living in these *Heime* (homes) were often between the ages of nine and fifteen, though younger children were allowed to live in the group homes as well.[19] These homes were equipped with special ration supplements, kitchens, and were also able to provide a degree of protection from immediate ghetto surroundings. Living in the homes was voluntary, though parents would often choose to send their children there because they had no other means of caring for them.[20] Space within the homes was limited; bunks only became vacant when their occupants were transported to the East.[21] While living in the homes, children were permitted to visit their parents, play outside, and receive an education, which was offered to them in secrecy. The educators and carers, who were responsible for the children, were each assigned to a room where they continued to share Jewish culture and traditions with the children and youth such as the celebration of Passover.[22]

The Girl's Home, which opened on 1 September 1942, was also known as L410 and was home to approximately 300 to 360 girls, with each room housing approximately twenty to thirty girls.[23] The Boy's home was founded earlier on 8 July 1942.[24] Children slept on triple-tiered bunks that were 70 cm wide by 170 cm long and were made of roughly sawn timber. Each room had a table and a few chairs. The children would store their belongings in their suitcases under the bunks. Jana Friesová, a child survivor, recalled that the girls in her room, room 15, also

[19] *Heim* can refer to an institutional organization or an orphanage in German. Within the children's diaries and memoirs, the terms children's barracks and the *heims* are used interchangeably.
[20] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 202.
[21] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, ix; Nicholas Stargardt. "Children's Art of the Holocaust." *Past & Present*, no. 161 (1998): 208. As of 6 December 1942, there were 3,541 children living in Terezín. Approximately 2,000 of them lived in the designated *heims*.
[22] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28*, 80.
[23] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 42; Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 98.
[24] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 42.

shared their clothes. Creating a communal closet allowed girls to have access to a variety of clothing which helped forge bonds of friendships.[25]

Life in the children's homes evolved around a set of daily routines. In their memoirs and autobiographies, survivors would emphasize the importance of these routines.[26] Within the homes, self-preservation became a basic desire for the children. While the carers understood this, as they too desired the same, they aimed to create a space with one goal in mind: to "uphold children's confidence in life, in people, and not to allow them to live without hope, or fall into moral decay and despair."[27] Carers within the home taught tidiness and cleanliness, ensured that children maintained their hygiene and a neat bunk-space[28] and required them to make their beds daily. Children were disciplined with 'house arrest' if beds were made badly or if they were caught stealing from others.[29] The number of thefts within the Girl's Home was minimal in comparison to the adult barracks but Friesová recalls witnessing carers disciplining the girls for their selfishness and greed.[30]

In 1944, Danish officials arranged for the Danish Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit both Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau. The visit was slated for 23 June 1944. To appear less crowded, ghetto officials were ordered to begin transporting Jews to the Auschwitz-Birkenau BIIb camp in September and December of 1943. The newly beautified town was a way for German authorities to impress upon the ICRC delegation that the rumours of an overcrowded, malnourished camp which was transporting its

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[25] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 94, 96.
[26] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 202; see also Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*.
[27] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 98.
[28] Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, 557-58; Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 116; Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 43; Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 208; Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 213.
[29] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 101; Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 204.
[30] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 102.

prisoners further East were false. Following the visit, Dr. Maurice Rossel, a representative of the ICRC, gave a report stating: "Let us say that to our complete amazement, we found in the ghetto a town which was living a nearly normal life."[31] As a result, the ICRC decided not to continue on to inspect Auschwitz-Birkenau because they were under the impression that it too was treating its prisoners in the same way.

Gabriele Silten, a child survivor from Theresienstadt, published her memoir in 1995 in which she reflected on her first fifteen years of life, specifically of life before and during the Second World War and the Holocaust. In her memoir, she dedicates a chapter to her four "companions":

> From the beginning of my time in Theresienstadt I have four companions in addition to Hans. Later, when Hans is gone, they will become even more important, but they are with me from the day I arrive. Two of them are not really friends, but they are close acquaintances until they, too, disappear. The other two become close friends. They are with me every day and every night, they never leave me, so I am never alone. Hunger is the first one to appear. […] He tortures me mentally by keeping images of food in front of my eyes. […] My second companion [… her] name is Fear. She is stronger than Hunger in her control over both my mind and my body. […] my third companion [, Cold …] caresses me from top to bottom so that I no longer feel the previous abuse from Hunger and Fear. […] My fourth companion [, … her] name is Death, and she is my most loyal friend.[32]

When reading Silten's memoir, I was deeply moved by this passage and became curious as to how other children and youth might have experienced hunger, fear, cold and death while imprisoned in Theresienstadt. It was this quote that inspired this research project. Upon further research, I discovered that scholarly material specifically reflecting on these themes within artwork, during this period, does not exist. As a result, I have chosen to focus this project on the creative expressions of children from Theresienstadt and ask what clues their creative practices might provide about their lived experience in the ghetto.

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[31] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 219.
[32] Silten, *Between Two Worlds*, 126-28.

This thesis draws upon the presentation and analysis of twenty-six children's drawings which are complemented by children's dairies and memoirs of child survivors from the ghetto. In my analysis of the drawings, I focus primarily on the presentation of the figures, the surroundings, the use of symbolism, and the colors, if applicable. In fraught times, the use of symbolism, figures and colors allowed youngsters to express themselves. In turn, I utilised diaries and memoirs to support my analysis of the images to better understand how young people related to Gabriele Silten's four "companions," namely Cold, Hunger, Fear and Death.

Research for this project included the analysis of over 4,500 drawings created by children in the Theresienstadt ghetto, available through the Jewish Museum in Prague's digitized collection, from which twenty-six were selected for closer examination.[33] The JMP created an exhibit titled "I have not seen a butterfly around here: Children's drawings from the Terezín Ghetto" which comprised over 4,300 drawings saved by Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, that had been created between 1942 and 1944. The aim of this exhibit was to educate high school students about the Holocaust, specifically from the child's point of view, by shedding light on the experiences of children and youth in the ghetto.[34]

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was an Austrian artist and educator who was deported to Theresienstadt on 17 December 1942 at the age of forty-four. Here, she encouraged children and youth, through artwork, to develop their own self-expression and convey their emotions and

[33] Jewish Museum in Prague Collections Database, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php; Saul S. Friedman, *The Terezín Diary of Gonda Redlich* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 126; Hana Volavková, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993); Jewish Museum in Prague, "Travelling Exhibition: I Have Not Seen Another Butterfly Around Here—Children's Drawings from Terezín Ghetto," accessed June 1, 2023, https://www.jewishmuseum.cz/news-detail/355-430/travelling-exhibition-i-have-not-seen-another-butterfly-around-here-children-s-drawings-from-terezin-ghetto/.

[34] Jewish Museum in Prague, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly Exhibit," https://www.jewishmuseum.cz/predmet-mesice/298/150/i-have-not-seen-a-butterfly-around-here-children-s-drawings-from-the-terezin-ghetto/.

personalities, as it was the greatest possible freedom for a child who lived in the ghetto.[35] In 1943, Friedl organised an exhibition of the children's drawings in the basement of the children's home, L410.[36] Just before she was deported to Auschwitz on 6 October 1944, she took approximately 4,500 drawings and hid them in a suitcase. After the war, they were recovered by Rosa Engländerová and Willy Groad, who were carers in the homes. The suitcase, full of children's art, was then transferred to the care of the Jewish Community Centre in Prague.[37] Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was murdered in Birkenau just three days after she arrived.

When consulting the JMP's digital collection of children's artworks, one of the challenges I encountered was how to interpret and understand what the children were trying to portray, if anything at all. With the help of diaries and memoirs, it became easier to understand young people's visual creations and the way children invested their emotions and experiences in their drawings. I also observed the use of recurring symbols and themes which provided a better understanding of how children processed their realities. Memoirs written by child survivors, often decades after the end of the war, provided crucial insight into how young people made sense of their lives in the ghetto.

Principal scholarly works such as those by Nicholas Stargardt, Rebecca Clifford, and Manon Pignot were consulted to better understand how, if at all, historians might be able to capture young people's experiences during this period, as well as the limits historians encounter when analysing such sources. Much of the existing literature around the themes of war, children, and artwork focuses on the question of 'how do we analyse these images?' However, as

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[35] Ellen Handler Spitz, "Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and Her Work in Terezín: Children, Art, and Hope," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 46, no.2 (Summer 2012): 2, 11; Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 192.
[36] Elena Makarova and Regina Seidman Miller, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944: The Artist who Inspired Children's Drawings of Terezín* (Los Angeles: Tallfellow/Every Picture Press, 2001), 32.
[37] Makarova and Miller, *Friedl-Dicker Brandeis Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944*, 36, 39.

Stargardt mentions, there is no established historical method for analysing the drawings produced by children themselves.[38] Scholars agree that children's drawings should be read as visual expressions of their own humanness and how they experienced and responded to their forced displacement.[39] As a result, it is important to approach children's artwork with caution and an open mind as it can be challenging to understand the precise meaning of the drawings and other primary documents.[40]

In a recent anthology on how children and youth experienced and understood war, historians Carolyn Kay and Mary Tomsic emphasize the value of analysing children's drawings to gain insight into how they internalized shared trauma and made sense of the world around them.[41] Focusing on images created on the German home front during the First World War, Carolyn Kay argues that although children were influenced by teachers and peers, particularly in group settings, their drawings reflect individual thoughts, emotions, and perspectives.[42] One of the central challenges she identifies in analysing artwork of this nature is recovering the child's voice, especially in the absence of written accounts or detailed literature on wartime pedagogy. She maintains that children's art, while shaped by pedagogical frameworks, should be interpreted considering the child's emotional, imaginative, and developmental context.[43]

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[38] Carolyn Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front." In *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth, and Conflict in Canada and Beyond*, edited by Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Burtch, 33–62 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 44; Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 197, 234; Mary Tomsic, "Politics and Emotion in Drawings by Children in Australian Immigration Detention." In *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth and Conflict in Canada and Beyond*, edited by Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Burtch, 224–48 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 235.
[39] Tomsic, "Politics and Emotion in Drawings by Children in Australian Immigration Detention," 236, 241; Kay "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 35.
[40] Clifford, *Survivors*, 12; Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 36.
[41] Tomsic, "Politics and Emotion in Drawings by Children in Australian Immigration Detention," 235; see also Kay "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front."
[42] Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 38.
[43] Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 36.

Similarly, Mary Tomsic examines children's drawings from Australian immigration detention centres not merely as evidence of victimhood, but as political expressions through which children actively responded to forced displacement and confinement.[44] She argues that the drawings should be approached with the understanding that children are full human rights-bearing subjects, not simply passive victims or objects of advocacy. Like Kay, Tomsic draws on Nicholas Stargardt's conceptual framework to analyse how visual motifs, such as fences, barred doors, and windowless buildings serve as confinement imagery that reflected both institutional conditions and the child's agency. She urges scholars to take these artworks seriously as articulations of children's perspectives and assertions of humanness. As Stargardt reminds us, children's artwork captures "frozen moments of a social history lived in a very particular time and location" that have to be understood in their specific historical context.[45] Art historian Olga Ivashkevich in turn holds that children's art should be seen as a dialogue, as "children [often] 'reinvent' ideas, personal experiences, […] and social conditions in their art."[46]

As a tangible form of expression, artwork provided an escape for children from the everyday realities of living in Theresienstadt by allowing them to make sense of their new relationships and surroundings. It also provided them with an opportunity to hold onto what memories they could of their life before arriving to the ghetto. Sometimes children struggled to separate pre-ghetto life from ghetto life, whereas others did not. Whereas some children kept diaries, others created artwork, and as such these medias reflect their emotions, opinions, and their new life. Additionally, artwork reflected a 'longing-for' emotion that many felt and that was

[44] Tomsic, "Politics and Emotion in Drawings by Children in Australian Immigration Detention," 224.
[45] Tomsic, "Politics and Emotion in Drawings by Children in Australian Immigration Detention," 235; Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 233-34; Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 44.
[46] Olga Ivashkevich, "Drawing in Children's lives," in *When We Were Young: New Perspectives on the Art of the Child*, edited by Jonathan Fineberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 57; quoted in Carolyn Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front," 43.

also evident in many of the memoirs. What was depicted was not simply that what was or had been, but that what should have been and could have been – carefree scenes of outdoor play, for instance, or visiting the market square with their mothers, or families gathering around a dining table, graced with an abundance of hot food. With the aid of memoirs and diaries, scholars can make better sense of children's artwork and understand that each of their experiences was unique. For the few children who survived life in Theresienstadt, life never returned to what it was pre-war, as they had lost their family, friends, and childhood.[47] Thus, collectively, artwork, diaries and memoirs represent a valuable method of research by which scholars may understand how children processed their experiences in Theresienstadt.

Artwork created during this historical event is often considered a form of visual testimony, shaped by how children understood their lives before and during their time in the ghetto. Visual memory played a role in what the child chose to include or omit. However, much of the surviving art from Theresienstadt was created in group settings, whereby children influenced one another's drawings, resulting in notable similarities that can present challenges for analysis. As such, the following research questions lie at the core of this project: To what extent do these drawings reflect the lived experiences of children and youth in Theresienstadt? How might scholars draw upon children's art to interpret historical events? At a time when Jewish voices were systematically silenced, how did the children's home in Theresienstadt contribute to young people's perseverance and resilience? Through the analysis of children's artwork, diaries, memoirs and historical monographs, it will become evident that art encouraged

[47] Following this historical event, the girls of Room 28 in the *Mädchenheim* began to meet annually, starting in 1990, around Rosh Hashanah. Here they celebrate the holiday, their birthdays and share memories of Theresienstadt to keep alive the memories of those who did not survive.

the development of personal growth and young people's capacity for observation and reflection, which in turn allowed them to create and share complex truths of the world around them.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate how children's creative expressions from the Theresienstadt ghetto offer insights into their resilience, coping mechanisms, and the symbolic significance of recurring themes – Cold, Hunger, Fear, and Death – as their artwork bore witness to the Holocaust.

Chapter One: Hunger

"Hunger grows by leaps and bounds; he is in his element here. […]
He keeps me tired all the time."

Gabriele Silten's life was brutally interrupted when she arrived at Theresienstadt in 1944 at the age of eleven. One of her closest friends while living in the ghetto was her friend Hans. Yet, in her memoir, she also describes four other companions, one of whom was Hunger. She recounts how Hunger would tease her, as it would many others, and would talk to her about food from the past, now cruelly out of reach. Within the ghetto walls, food was a thought and an entity that bound together individuals and families; however, it was also something that the Germans interfered with. The Germans utilised a food rationing system, deliberately weaking vulnerable groups, to determine what food, in which quantity, and at what time would be distributed to prisoners. Furthermore, the Germans cruelly forced starving prisoners in the ghetto to cultivate and harvest food that was not meant for them.

Considered an opportunity to teach and learn, Jewish tradition recognizes food as a time for intimacy, fellowship, and connection, meant to strengthen the bonds of family and community.[1] This chapter seeks to explore the role food played in relationships between children and those around them, how it became a close companion, and how temporal boundaries ceased to exist as children merged past and present within the space of their drawings, as recollections of past experiences and present conditions converged in a single visual narrative. Rather than depicting specific points in time, these drawings bring together the past and present into a single image, shaped by emotions. As shall become evident, children's memories return to them based on what *matters* to the child emotionally in that moment.

[1] Rabbi Yehiel E. Poupko, "Eating as a Celebration of Jewish Life," *Jewish Chicago: The JUF Magazine*, accessed 24 May 2025, https://www.juf.org/news/thinking_torah.aspx?id=28094.

To better understand this phenomenon, the concept of *affect* offers a helpful lens. Affect refers to the intensity of feeling that persists within and around experiences, often before we can name them as emotion.[2] As Lindsey Dodd has argued, memory is not always chronological or rational; it is shaped by what "sticks" – moments that carry emotional weight, whether positive or traumatic.[3] For children, food was one of these "sticky" elements: memories of hunger, unequal food distributions across age groups, the taste of a sweet treat, or queuing for food surface again and again.[4] This is not necessarily because they were recent or significant, but because of how these memories made the child *feel*. These emotionally resonant memories often resurface in children's drawings, where scenes of home and scenes from the ghetto coexisted within a single drawing.

As will be shown throughout this thesis, several children's drawings and diaries reflect this blending of temporalities, particularly in scenes where a young boy, Pavel Weiner, expresses unfiltered joy over ice cream (p.21), or in depictions of gardens, which – despite offering a rare moment outside the ghetto's walls – are remembered for the hunger they momentarily relived through theft (p. 22-3). In this way, drawings become emotional narratives, where time collapsed, and remembered experiences were shaped more by raw feeling than by chronological order. The drawings do not aim to document history in a linear sense, but to transmit a child's emotional reality, one that is shaped by the loss of security, longing for home, and the nuanced realities of everyday resilience.

Upon arrival, ghetto inhabitants were given a food card which was stamped every time they collected their meal. Food that was once considered an everyday staple in pre-ghetto life

[2] Lindsey Dodd, *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 43.
[3] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 18.
[4] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 210.

quickly became a scarcity for those living in the ghetto, particularly after the implementation of a rationing system. Those living in the barracks collected their food from communal kitchens, whereas those who were fortunate enough to have an apartment, which would be shared with many others, were permitted to eat in their home. Those who ate food from the kitchens found that waiting a long time for food was common, especially as the kitchens fed upwards of 4,000 people each mealtime.

Food smuggling, including items such as charcuterie and lard, was a frequent occurrence in Theresienstadt. However, once the Germans permitted the reception of packages in the ghetto, these packages became integral to the lives of prisoners, particularly children. Although the packages were addressed to specific individuals, it was common for children to share the contents amongst their friends in the children's homes. These packages, sent by family members outside of the ghettos, often included items such as salami, sausage, cheese, apples, gingerbread, bouillon, and canned sardines. Diaries and memoirs frequently highlight the profound joy experienced upon receiving a can of sardines, underscoring the emotional and nutritional significance of these packages.

After the Germans repurposed Theresienstadt as a ghetto in late 1941,[5] responsibility was given to the Council of Elders,[6] to make decisions regarding the welfare of the youths. The Council decided that young people should be prioritized in the allocation of food rations.[7] By choosing to prioritize the future generation, the council placed the welfare of the youth above that of the elderly – a decision that left the elderly bearing the consequences. Children and youth

[5] "Case Study: Theresienstadt Ghetto," *Liberation of Theresienstadt – The Holocaust Explained: Designed for Schools*, accessed 28 December 2024, https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/theresienstadt-a-case-study/liberation-of-theresienstadt/.
[6] *Ältestenrate* (Council of Elders)
[7] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 35, 43; Lamberti, "Making Art in the Terezín Concentration Camp," 105.

received better access to food, hygiene, living conditions and special medical care, whereas the elderly experienced greater isolation, little to no medical care, and restricted food rations leading to hunger and death. Sights relating to this included bread literally being taken from the hands and mouths of the elderly.[8]

Unequal food distribution accompanied by a reduction in caloric intake resulted in increased mortality rates of the elderly. In May 1942, the self-administration implemented ration categories for food distribution. The *Schwerarbeiter* (heavy labourers) were permitted 500 grams of bread per day, the *Normalarbeiter* (regular workers) were permitted 175 grams of bread per day, while the *Kranke* (sick) were permitted 333 grams of bread per day. Individuals who were unable to work, including the elderly and the sick, were all lumped into the last group, the "sick." In 1943 or 1944, the Council of Elders assessed nutrition levels and implemented a new system based on caloric intakes. Heavy labourers now received between 2,141 and 2,500 calories per day; "normal workers" received between 1,530 and 1,800 calories per day; children received 1,759 calories per day; and the sick received between 1,487 and 1,700 calories per day. Children between the ages of seven and fifteen, as well as mothers with children under the age of three, were lumped into the category of "normal workers."[9]

If mortality rates in the children's block were low, this was largely on account of the larger food rations the children received. Their soup was thicker and warmer, and they also received milk, sweet treats such as ice cream or a piece of cake, and cucumber with sugar.[10] To

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[8] From the testimony of Zeev Shek in Kurt Jiri Kotouc et al., *We Are the Children Just the Same:* Vedem*, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezín*, trans. R. Elizabeth Novak (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); quoted in Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 43.

[9] Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 105-6. In her work, Anna Hájková notes that there is a discrepancy regarding the caloric intake of individuals, and that the higher numbers were reported by Benjamin Murmelstein, the last Elder of the Jews.

[10] Michal Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch: Changing Perspectives on his Memory," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 9. https://doi:10.1093/hgs/dcab015; Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, 116.

further increase the caloric intake of children, the Youth Welfare ensured that youngsters had access to fruits and vegetables before other groups in the ghetto did. The lack of nutritious food, especially for the elderly, is reflected in an anecdote by Pavel Weiner, noting that "when we carry vegetables, the old people would just pounce on us."[11] Such an act illustrates the severe malnutrition experienced by the elderly and their desperate need for the sustenance they were denied.

After analysing the diaries and memoirs of youths who lived in the ghetto, it is unclear whether they grasped the hierarchy of food distribution within the ghetto walls.[12] In part, this might have been because they were living in a space somewhat removed from the harsh realities of the ghetto, sheltered by the protection the children's homes provided. Šary Weinstein, a fourteen-year-old youth who lived in the children's homes described in her diary a typical menu that the children would have received. She also noted that the food was horribly prepared, and that the "soups look like water from a mop pail."[13]

> Monday: soup, millet; in the evening a little piece of bread
> Tuesday: soup, potatoes, turnips; in the evening was soup
> Wednesday: soup, potatoes, goulash, and a small piece of bread; in the evening was a small piece of bread
> Thursday: soup, dumplings, and gravy; in the evening was sausage and soup
> Friday: soup and pearl barley; in the evening were buns
> Saturday: soup, potatoes, and turnips; in the evening was soup
> Sunday: soup, buns with icing; in the evening was twenty grams of margarine, and a teaspoon of marmalade[14]

Despite the Youth Welfare's efforts, food occupied the minds of children as they were always hungry.

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[11] Pavel Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín: The Private Diary of Pavel Weiner, April 1944 – April 1945* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 79.
[12] Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," *Past & Present*, no. 161 (1998): 219.
[13] "Theresienstädter Kindertagebücher." Taken from the dairy of Šary Weinstein of Prague; quoted in Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 49.
[14] "Theresienstädter Kindertagebücher." Taken from the dairy of Šary Weinstein of Prague; quoted in Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28,* 49.

While the primary focus of this thesis is the analysis of drawings created by children living in Theresienstadt, it is necessary to incorporate diaries and memoirs written by children and youth to gain a more nuanced understanding of their living conditions and experiences. This project draws on numerous works written by youths aged eleven to fifteen; the memoirs likewise reflect the perspectives of this age group, offering valuable insight into their lived experiences. Although the children and youth who lived in the homes and barracks shared similar circumstances, the way in which they processed and understood their thoughts and feelings differed. It is also important to acknowledge that each experience was individual and that written records do not necessarily reflect the experiences of every child or youth who passed through the ghetto.

Pavel Weiner was born in Prague in 1931 and lived in Theresienstadt between the ages of ten and thirteen. Pavel lived in the ghetto with his mother, father, and older brother, until his father and brother were deported further east. It was not until the last two years of living in the ghetto that he began to keep a diary that offers a detailed account of the lived experiences of a child during this time. Reflecting heavily on hunger and fear, his dairy discusses many of his feelings and emotions, or at least as much as an adolescent boy was willing to express. Pavel's diary notes that New Year's Eve was a special moment for children in the ghetto, particularly for those living in the children's homes as they were given a festive dinner consisting of cabbage, gravy, meat, and two *butchy* (a roll that was usually filled with jam). In addition to this, they were given a bonus ration of bacon, butter, and salami.[15] During festive times, the children "kept thinking about [their family],"[16] as they were now separated from family back home and even

[15] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 212.
[16] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 212.

within the ghetto. The diary does not mention whether he refers to his family within the ghetto, family members who were transported further east, or family from his pre-ghetto life.

During rare moments of festivity, the children displayed what Pavel calls "childish joy."[17] He describes one such instance when the children were gathered in the dining hall on New Year's Eve and given a cup of ice cream. At twelve years old, receiving such a treat would normally bring joy. Yet Pavel's use of the term "childish" in describing this memory, one that mattered to him, reveals a sense of distance – an awareness that this joy was no longer natural or freely felt.[18] Instead, he tempers his happiness, as though it were wrong to feel joy. Before the war, such a treat would have been an ordinary occurrence; however, in Theresienstadt, it becomes a touching reflection of the hunger and sadness the child experienced.

The *Jugendgarten* (youth garden) was a series of gardens in which youth between the ages of twelve and seventeen worked.[19] Youths such as Marianne Grant, Maud Beer, and Pavel Weiner considered being assigned to work in the gardens an ideal job for various reasons. It afforded them a measure of freedom: fresh air, exercise, the opportunity to leave the ghetto for a few hours a day as well as the opportunity to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, whether they were permitted to have some or whether they stole it.[20] Located just outside the ghetto walls were the Bohušovice tree alleys, situated near three or four gardens where workers collected linden blossoms.[21] This task was favoured by Pavel because it permitted him to "see the outside

[17] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 115.
[18] Dodd, *Feeling Memory*, 215.
[19] "Testimony of Michal Barr regarding life in the Theresienstadt Ghetto," Yad Vashem Archival Collection, Moshal Repository, https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3550815; Michal Maud Beer, interview by Martin Korcok, August 2007, Centropa, https://www.centropa.org/en/biography/maud-michal-beer. Michal Maud Beer, née Stecklmacherova, was born on 7 April 1929 in Prostějov, Czech Republic.
[20] Glasgow Museums, description of *Youth Garden* by Marianne Grant, record no. 434059, accessed 2 June 2025, https://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=434059;type=101; see also Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*.
[21] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 91.

civilized world [like] free people, buses, fields and houses."[22] However, at the end of the day, their return to the "depressing atmosphere [of] crowded rooms, streets and reeking latrines" was inevitable.

Typical jobs within the gardens included watering plants, pruning trees, planting seeds, pulling weeds, and collecting ripened fruits and vegetables. Apples, berries, currants, pears, plums, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, lettuce, parsley, and potatoes caught the eyes of hungry youths.[23] Cruelly, this produce was meant not for them, but for German soldiers and their families. At the end of their work day, or sometimes during a break, workers were given a small ration of produce in exchange for their work; however, it was not enough for their growing bodies. Under close surveillance by the gendarmes, children still managed to smuggle fruits and vegetables for themselves, and sometimes their family, friends, or other prisoners, back into the ghetto.[24] However, they were not always lucky. When caught stealing, they would receive a punishment, which for some, such as Pavel, meant that they were barred from working in the gardens.

In his writing, Pavel mentions just how frequently he took vegetables from the communal gardens in which he worked.[25] Other children, too, seized the opportunity to pocket whatever vegetables they could or devour as many fruits and vegetables as their stomachs could handle.[26] Pavel shares multiple times in his diary that the best vegetables he had ever eaten in the ghetto was a cucumber salad with a bit of sugar on it.[27] This treat, in addition to condensed milk, quickly became a delicacy in Theresienstadt for many. While the Youth Welfare tried to ensure

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[22] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 91, 97.; "Testimony of Michal Bar," Yad Vashem.
[23] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 78-79, 114, 123, 132.
[24] "Testimony of Michal Bar," Yad Vashem.
[25] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 87.
[26] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 97, 237. Weiner uses the term *Schlojs* to indicate stealing. The glossary of his diary notes *Schlojs* as "to purloin from communal property."
[27] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 87.

that the children's homes received extra rations of fruits and vegetables, it is unclear whether this type of delicacy was given by the ghetto kitchens or if the individuals made it themselves.

In the ghetto, youth over the age of fifteen were required to work. A common location was in the bakery, which had advantages such as receiving permission to take home extra bread or buns. Other times, youth would pocket these goods. Pavel's mother worked in the bakery and used this to her advantage to help feed herself and her family, especially as Pavel had access to vegetables.

The relationship and the experiences between an adolescent boy, food, and family is reflected in Pavel Weiner's diary. Despite living in the children's home, he often visited his parents' apartment where his mother prepared the family's meals. He preferred his mother's cooking over the food prepared in the children's homes. And yet, the strain of starvation rations shaped encounters at the dinner table:

> Mother drops a pot of rhubarb on the floor and part of its contents pour out on the floor[.] For my mother, this is a tragedy. Unhappily, she starts to scrape the rhubarb off the floor[.] This really gets to me and [I] lose my temper.[28]

Food bound families together in complex ways but also had the power to tear them apart. For Pavel's mother, Valy, preparing food became an expression of love for her son. Whether through everyday meals or festive ones, gathering at a table provided a space for familial connection. After arriving to Theresienstadt, this was taken away from her. Children lived and ate in the children's homes as their family members lived in separate barracks and received food from the kitchen or prepared their own if their apartment was equipped with a stove.

The pre-ghetto and ghetto worlds stood in stark contrast to each other. The transition from one to the other was abrupt and brutal. Many children lacked proper understanding of why

[28] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,*119.

their world was being turned upside down. This lack of understanding can be seen in the children's artwork as it occasionally merges the past and present. As Rosa Englander, a teacher in Theresienstadt, writes: "the children who are not yet able consciously to grasp the causes of their experiences in Theresienstadt, find no links with their former lives, because children of this age live only in the present."[29] With the exception of Petr Ginz and Jana Friesová, the diaries utilised for this project rarely make reference to pre-ghetto life such as missing certain toys, friends and family members.

Themes of food combined with the home are most prevalent within children's artwork. As food was a primary factor in an individual's adjustment to and survival in Theresienstadt, it quickly became an object of fascination for people, especially children. Drawings portraying pre-ghetto environments often depicted food in markets or on tables within homes, whereas drawings of Theresienstadt frequently showed food in the context of queues. Artwork portraying food within the home often includes a table set with a vase of flowers, one plate (with or without food), and someone sitting on a chair. Some of the drawings also show trees through a window, or windows with tied back curtains and potted plants on the windowsills. These different elements portrayed in their artwork suggests that the idealized home with food and flowers on the table became a utopia for these children for whom hunger had become a constant companion.[30]

Food is often depicted as existing in both social and private settings in children's drawings, with the former often being related to a family or religious dinner such as Seder. Surviving children's artwork that is presented on the Jewish Museum of Prague's online

[29] JMPTC, 304; Rosa Englander MS, 'Unsere Aufgabe - Unser Weg,' quoted in Nicholas Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 224. Translation: Our mission, our way.
[30] Brenner, *The Girls of Room 28*, 91.

collection portrays this annual feast, which is celebrated at the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover, with many children in the company of one or two adults surrounding a large table. These drawings likely reflect the celebration of Seder within the children's home, because of the ratio of adults to children that are depicted. While food is rarely depicted on the table in drawings of Seder, there are always flowers, candles and the Star of David. To better understand the role that food played in the childrens lived experiences in Theresienstadt, this chapter now turns to drawings by Marie Mühlsteinová, Eva Hellerová, Rudolf Seidl, Ruth Ščerbáková and Eva Heská.

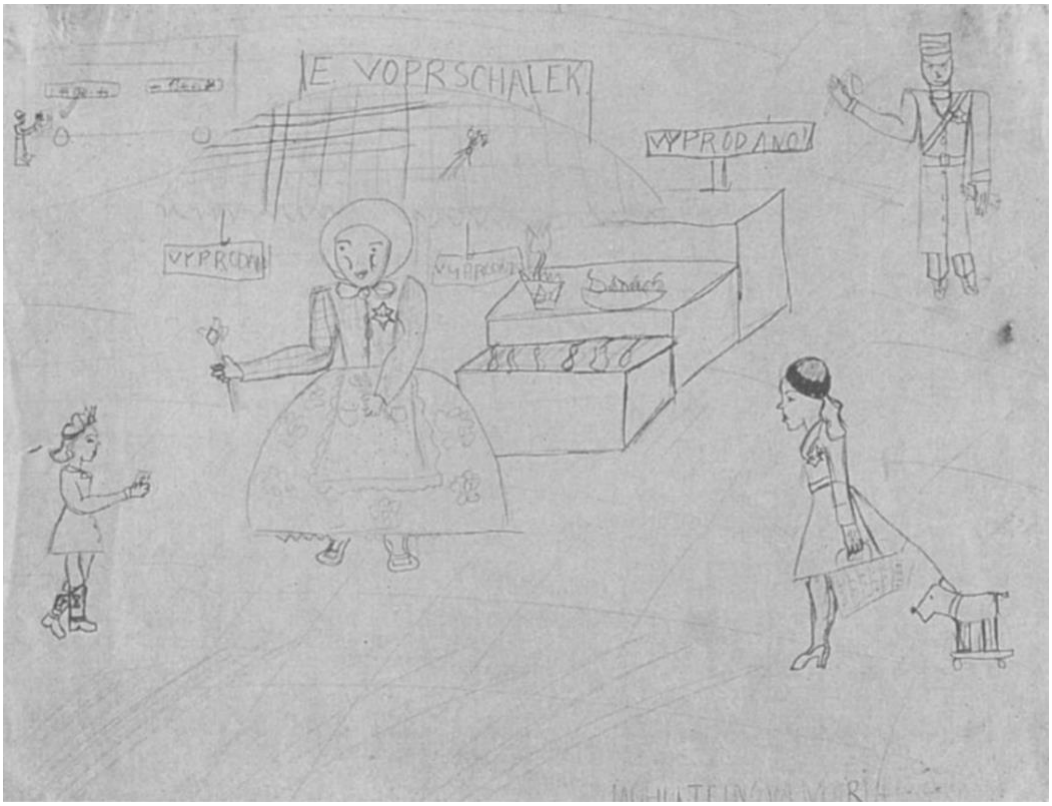

Figure 0.1 *Vzpomínky na Život Před Deportací* by Maria Mühlsteinová, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Mühlsteinová's drawing is titled *Vzpomínky na život před deportací* ("Memories of life before deportation").[31] Food, or rather the lack thereof, is the dominant theme in Marie's drawing, as is in many others. In the centre of the image, there is a grocery shop with empty shelves. Above the shelves are signs that read *Vyprodáno!* (Sold Out!). The empty shelves can be taken as a representation of the scarcity of food in their lives before arriving to the ghetto or may represent food scarcity within the ghetto. It is likely that the child is blurring the lines between past and present, just as Englander suggested. In the forefront of the drawing are two girls. The one on the right is pulling a toy dog on wheels, perhaps representing the loss of toys and even one's childhood. As historian Nicholas Stargardt has suggested, it may also refer to the pre-ghetto ban on Jews keeping pets.[32] The back right corner features a policeman waving his hand, which Stargardt suggests reflects a common motif in children's drawings: an individual directing traffic.[33] This common depiction could be a reference to the constant presence of an appointed Jewish individual watching Jews, enforcing laws, and controlling people. The back left corner features an individual selling newspapers to passengers on a bus, a depiction that alludes specifically to the pre-ghetto world.

[31] Marie Mühlsteinová, *Vzpomínky Na Život Před Deportací*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil, H: 209mm, W: 273mm, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/210569.
[32] Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 217.
[33] Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 218.

Figure 0.2 *Na tržišti* by Eva Hellerová, aged 12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Eva Hellerová created a drawing titled *Na tržišti* ("to the marketplace"), which is similar to Mühlsteinová's.[34] Situated in what appears to be a pre-ghetto environment, a woman in the foreground is depicted in a similar manner as the other drawings by children, appearing to be well fed, wearing a bonnet, an apron and a smile on her face. Behind the woman is a table with plants and baskets filled with fruits. To the left of the table is a sign that reads *vždy čerstvé zhoži* (always fresh goods). A mother with a young, smiling child can be seen in the centre of the drawing. To the right are people walking freely on sidewalks, something that Czech Jews were

[34] Eva Hellerová, *Na tržišti*, 1943, graphite pencil, H: 210mm, W: 297mm, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/220883.

forbidden to do after the implementation of the Nuremberg laws in 1935.[35] Other elements referencing pre-ghetto life in this drawing include buses, telephone wires and cobblestone walks.

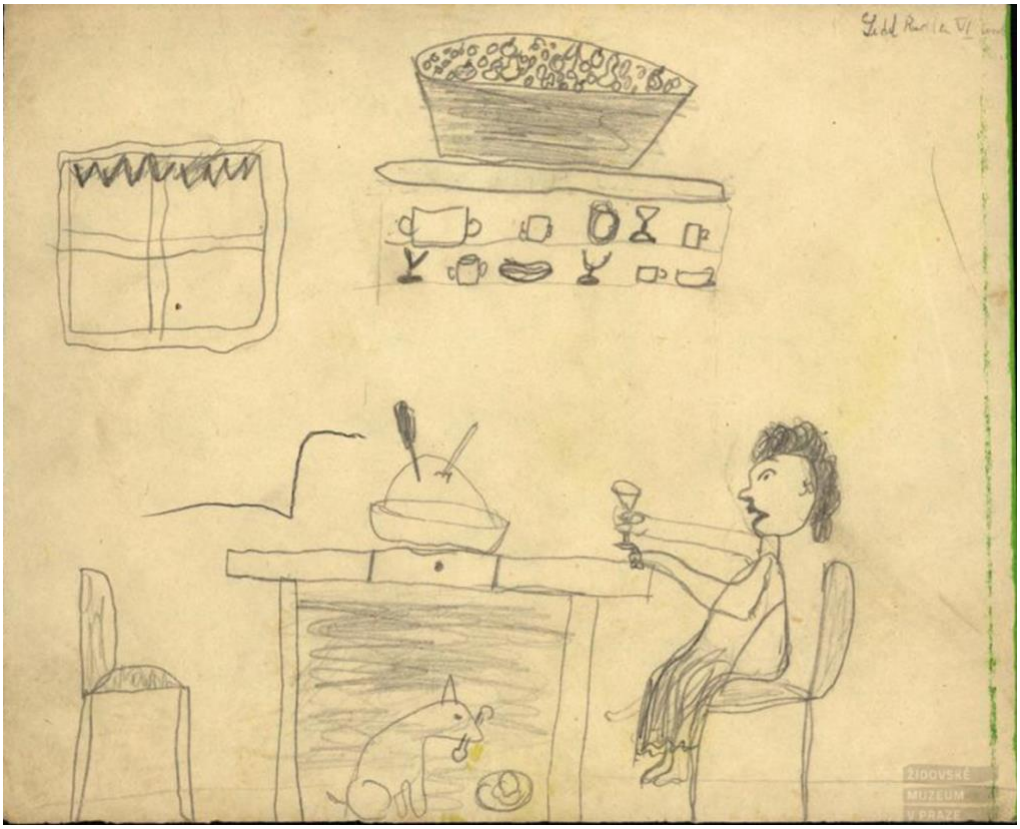

Figure 0.3 *Vzpomínky na domov* by Rudolf Seidl, aged 10-11, Theresienstadt ghetto

Thematic drawings of food situated within the home can be viewed in drawings by Rudolf Seidl and Ruth Ščerbáková. Rudolf's drawing, *Vzpomínky na domov* ("Memories of home") depicts a kitchen.[36] Visible within this drawing is a youth sitting, with a glass in their hand, at a table that has a tray of meat in the centre. Beneath the table, a dog is depicted with its own plate of food. Notably, the space behind the figure of the dog is shaded, perhaps to symbolically separate it from the rest of the scene. This visual obscuration may reflect the child's

[35] Pressburger, *The Diary of Petr Ginz 1941-1942,* 58.
[36] Rudolf Seidl, *Vzpomínky na domov*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil, H: 201mm, W: 249mm, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/212356.

attempt to erase a key element associated with pre-ghetto life, suggesting a desire to distance the present from a now lost past.

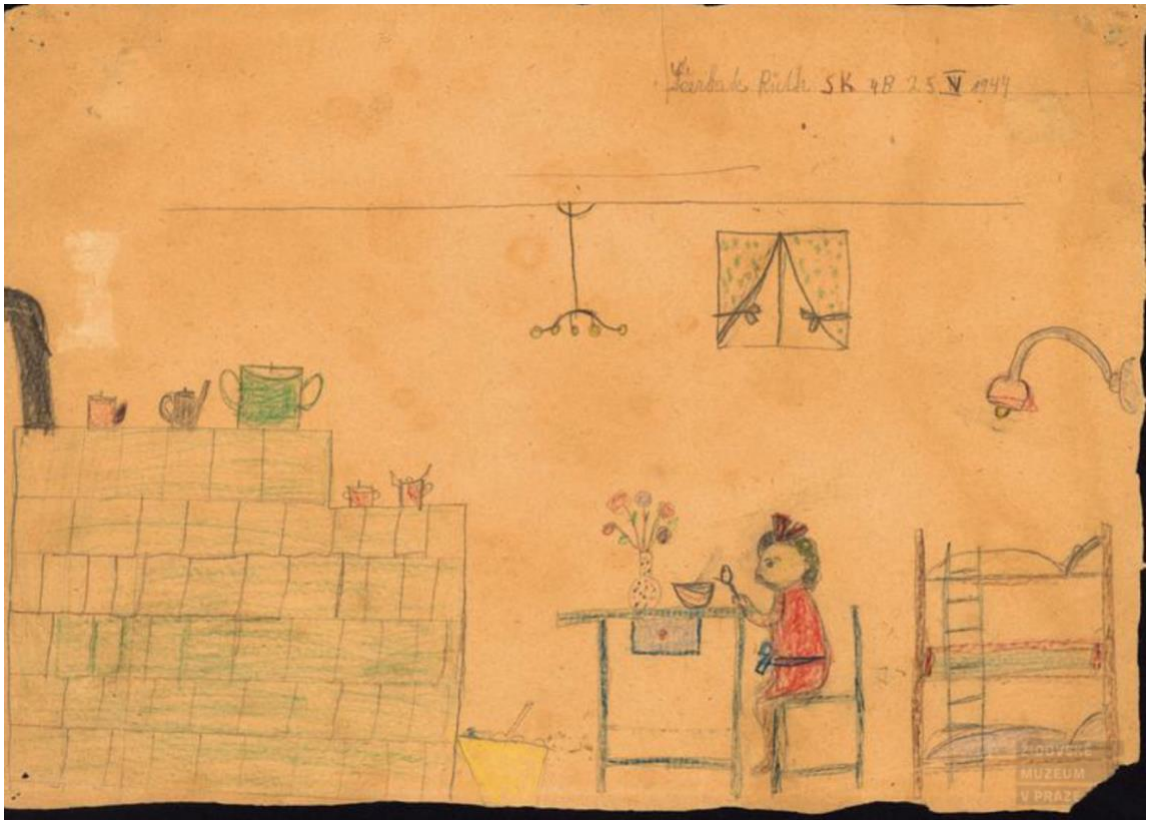

Figure 0.4 *Vzpomínky na domov* by Ruth Ščerbáková, aged 10, Theresienstadt ghetto

Ten-year-old Ruth Ščerbáková's drawing, *Vzpomínky na domov* / *Dům* ("Memories of home / house")[37] depicts a child surrounded by a blurred comprehension of past and present. The young artist presents pre-ghetto elements such as the tied-back curtains, flowers on the table and even a bowel of hot soup or porridge, all of which she may associate with comfort. She then includes elements of the ghetto, such as a grand brick stove with multiple tea kettles and pots on top. Combined with a triple-tiered bunk, her image suggests that multiple individuals may be

[37] Ruth Ščerbáková, *Vzpomínky na domov/Dům*, 25 May 1944, graphite pencil and crayons, H: 180mm, W: 253mm, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/218454.

sharing the room she has drawn. It was common for rooms in the children's houses to feature a small table in the centre of the room, which may be why Ruth chose to include the bunk in her drawing. As a result, this drawing portrays an erasure of the progression of time, suggesting that the memories of Ruth's past are vividly recalled but entangled with her experiences of the present.

Figure 0.5 *Ráj* by Eva Heská, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Children's desire for fresh fruits and vegetables is captured in Eva Heská's drawing *Ráj* ("paradise"), which depicts four individuals in a garden surrounded by fruit trees and animals.[38] Included in her drawing is a little pond, birds in the sky and the sun. One figure can be seen reaching for what appears to be an apple in a tree. Directly above this tree is written *zakázane*

[38] Eva Heská, *Ráj*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil, H: 201 mm, W: 247mm, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/210735.

ovoce (forbidden fruit).[39] Both symbolically and metaphorically, these trees of fruit represent an aspect of life whose bounty is tantalizingly close but out of reach – akin to the fruits and vegetables harvested by young gardeners like Pavel but designed for consumption by German families living outside the ghetto. The figures in the drawing appear not to be wearing any clothes, except for the bottom figure who wears a skirt or pants with shoes. While the absence of clothing might at first glance suggest material deprivation or even exposure to cold, it is also possible that this drawing depicts a summer scene, as indicated by the prominent sun, the fruit-bearing trees, and the overall sense of ease. In this context, nudity may not signify suffering but rather reflect warmth and playfulness. This highlights the complexity of interpreting children's imagery, where symbolic and literal elements coexist.

When Pavel, in his diary, describes working in the fields, he often recounts being surrounded by and collecting fruits which were considered forbidden. When Heská writes of the 'forbidden fruit,' it is a literal depiction of the food scarcity within the ghetto walls.

These drawings, and those in subsequent chapters, are reflective of the vividness of a child's memories that mingle past and present experiences. Through the medium of art, children were able to express themselves and process emotion such as longing for life before Theresienstadt, including a yearning for everyday items such as fruit, fresh flowers, and tied-back curtains. By analysing a handful of the thousands of drawings that survived, we can gain a better understanding of how a child processed their lived experiences. As Gabriele Silten wrote: "[Hunger] teases me, […] by talking to me about food, food past and present. […] He tortures me mentally by keeping images of food in front of my eyes."[40] Hunger reminded young people

[39] Correct spelling is *zakázané ovoce*.
[40] Silten, *Between Two Worlds,* 126.

in Theresienstadt of marketplaces with stalls emptied of food, tables with plates of hot meals, and fruit trees now forbidden.

Cold

"*Cold wins after several long battles, and I am happy with this victory. He caresses me from top to bottom so that I no longer feel the previous abuse from Hunger and Fear.*"

As physical sensations, both hunger and cold have the ability to kill. Harsh winters and inadequate clothing conspired to sicken and kill adults in Theresienstadt. Children cheated death by living in the children's homes, whose warmth, even in the winter months, helped protect their health and offered them greater physical and emotional resilience. While this chapter primarily explores how food shaped relationships between children and their families, it is also important to recognize the strong connections between cold and hunger.

The harsh environment – winters in particular – with a combined lack of warmth and food, posed significant survival challenges, highlighting the vulnerability of the human body. Scarcity during winter months meant a lack of fresh produce, underscoring the prisoners' reliance on nutritional sources such as millet, pearl barley, and potatoes for sustenance and energy.[1] As their bodies weakened due to lack of food, they became prone to illness. In addition to that, Jewish adults and children alike had to go without adequate clothing essentials like boots, hats, and coats. Starved of vital nourishment and physical protection from the unrelenting cold, it was nearly impossible for prisoners in Theresienstadt to keep warm.

The combined threats of Cold and Hunger had significant effects on the body, both physically and psychologically. Hunger physically weakened the body. Without sufficient nutritional intake, the body struggled to generate the heat and energy needed to stay warm and

[1] "Conditions in Theresienstadt," in *Theresienstadt: Case Study*, *The Holocaust Explained*, accessed 18 February 2025, https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/theresienstadt-a-case-study/.

active, thus leading to an accelerated decline in physical conditions. This was particularly evident amongst the elderly, whose age, pre-existing health conditions and reduced physical abilities made them more susceptible to illness. By contrast, children had higher metabolism rates, stronger immune systems and the societal support of the children's homes, all of which helped them to better withstand the lack of nutrition and warmth.

Cold poses a threat to the human body, even more dangerous than hunger. Whereas it is possible for the human body to endure hunger for periods of time, prolonged exposure to the cold can result in hypothermia, frostbite and even death within hours. Prolonged exposure also makes it difficult for one to move, think or even function. Cold's ability to override sensations of hunger reflects the body's physiological response, prioritizing warmth over the need to satisfy hunger. In addition, the body's physical weakening has psychological effects. The combination of prolonged malnutrition and exposure to extreme elements can lead to feelings of despair and hopelessness.

After analysing children's drawings from the Jewish Museum in Prague's online database, common themes that emerged included winter, snow, rain, and clothing. Drawings depicting winter often represent snow either as colored with white pencil, or as tiny light-pressured circles falling from the sky, whereas rain is depicted as long, sometimes harsh-pressured, slanted lines.

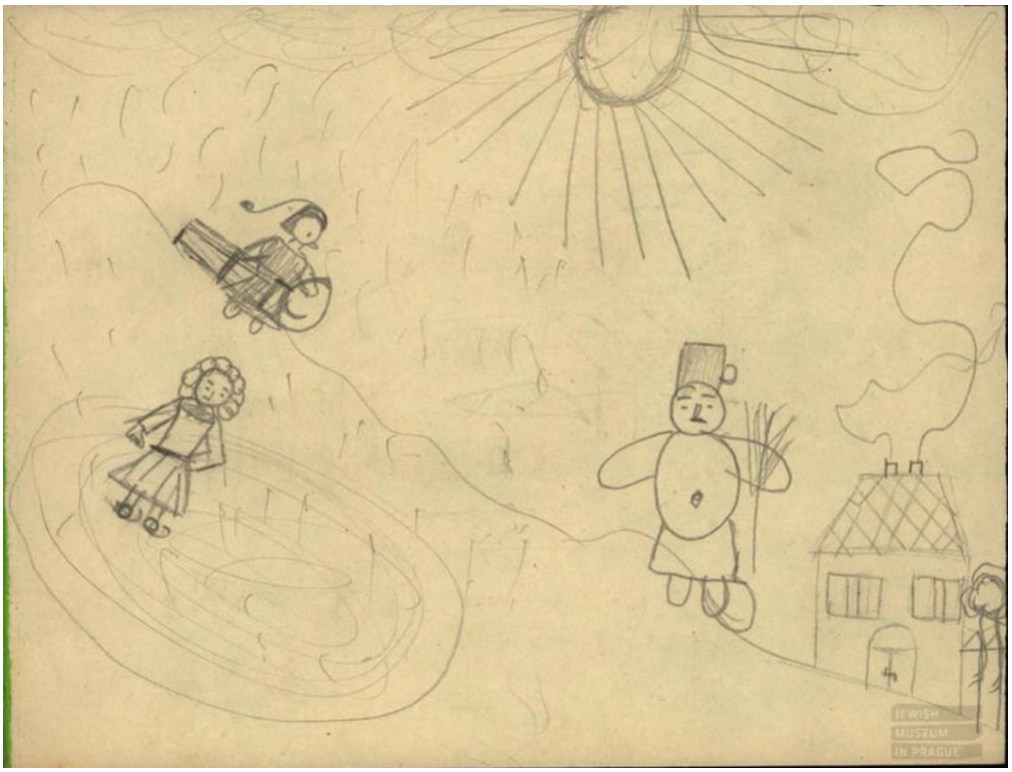

Figure 0.6 *Zimní sporty* by Nesignováno

Figure 0.7 *Zimní sporty* by Štěphán Pollak, aged 12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Drawings portraying the theme of winter appear in various environments, including the worlds of pre-ghetto and ghetto lives. Those titled *Zimní Sporty* (winter sports) portray winters prior to the child's arrival in the ghetto, as they situate individual figures near large hills. In the background we see houses with smoke rising from chimneys, symbolising warmth, security and normalcy, as seen in figure 1.6.[2] These depictions stand in contrast to the drawings with large, multi-story buildings with many windows, often representative of schools or military barracks as seen in figure 2.6 (chapter 2) and figure 1.8. Figures in drawings portraying life before the ghetto are often portrayed as figures with shape, rather than stick figures, and with facial features, giving them identities. Štěphán Pollak's drawing reflects what appears to be an earlier winter.[3] I suggest this because in this image, nine foreground figures are skiing and tobogganing, they wear hats, scarves and other winter accessories that were no longer available in the ghetto. The background featured a building with several doors and windows, one of which has a hat display. Two signs are featured on this building, one of which reads *HELLADA*.[4]

[2] Nesignováno, *Zimní sporty*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/211084.
[3] Štěphán Pollak, *Zimní sporty*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/213976.
[4] Greek: *Hellada* (Greece). The use of the word *Hellada* is of interest, because it could be how Pollack envisions the summer, warmth or even paradise, all of which would be considered better conditions to which he was subjected to at the time when he created this drawing. Pollak born 19 November 1931, in Prague. He arrived in Terezín on 4 September 1942 and was deported to Auschwitz 18 December 1943, where he was murdered. "Štěpán Pollak," *Database of Victims*, Holocaust.cz, accessed 28 March 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/115262-stepan-pollak/.

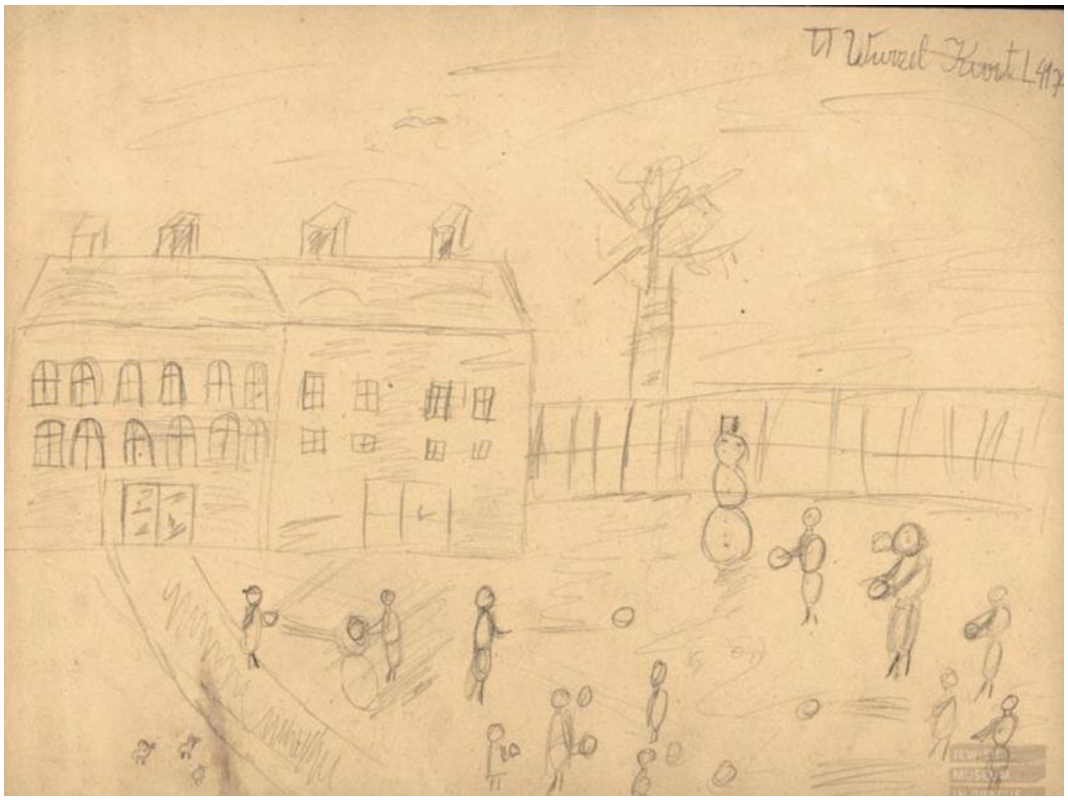

Figure 0.8 *Zima/Dětské hry* by Kurt Wurzel, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Often titled *Zima*, drawings such as Kurt Wurzel's Zima*/Dětské hry* ("Winter/Children's games"), portray winters within the ghetto.[5] These drawings often depict buildings with at least three floors, the walls lined with windows. There is a chimney without smoke and sometimes a fence. Lacking in depth, these artistic creations rarely depict hills; instead, they show flat terrain, reflecting the ghetto environment as described in diaries and memoirs. Individuals in these drawings are often portrayed as marshmallow-like figures, without hair, who are not dressed in proper winter attire. Despite near- or below-freezing winter temperatures, the figures are not shown with hats, scarves, or even footwear. These images are consistent with what is known about the ghetto's living conditions. Since most residents arrived during warmer months, they

[5] Kurt Wurzel, *Zima/Dětské hry*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/212052.

lacked proper winter clothing. When available, warm clothing was often in poor condition – torn and ill-fitting, offering inadequate protection against the cold.

Figure 0.9 *Zima/Dětské hry* by Kurt Wurzel, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Apart from figure 1.9 titled, *Zima/Dětské hry*, also by Wurzel, children are not seen engaging in winter activities.[6] Pictured within this drawing is a large building with a cross on top, likely a church, and a possible depiction of children on a toboggan going down a hill. In drawings that are more representative of the ghetto, children are seen engaging in snowball fights and making snowmen, activities that do not require sporting equipment. Oftentimes, wintery landscapes in the ghetto are depicted with the sun partially hidden behind clouds, as seen above,

[6] Kurt Wurzel, *Zima/Dětské hry*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/220714.

if at all, whereas many drawings reflecting pre-ghetto life portray the sun as visible, "bright," and large.

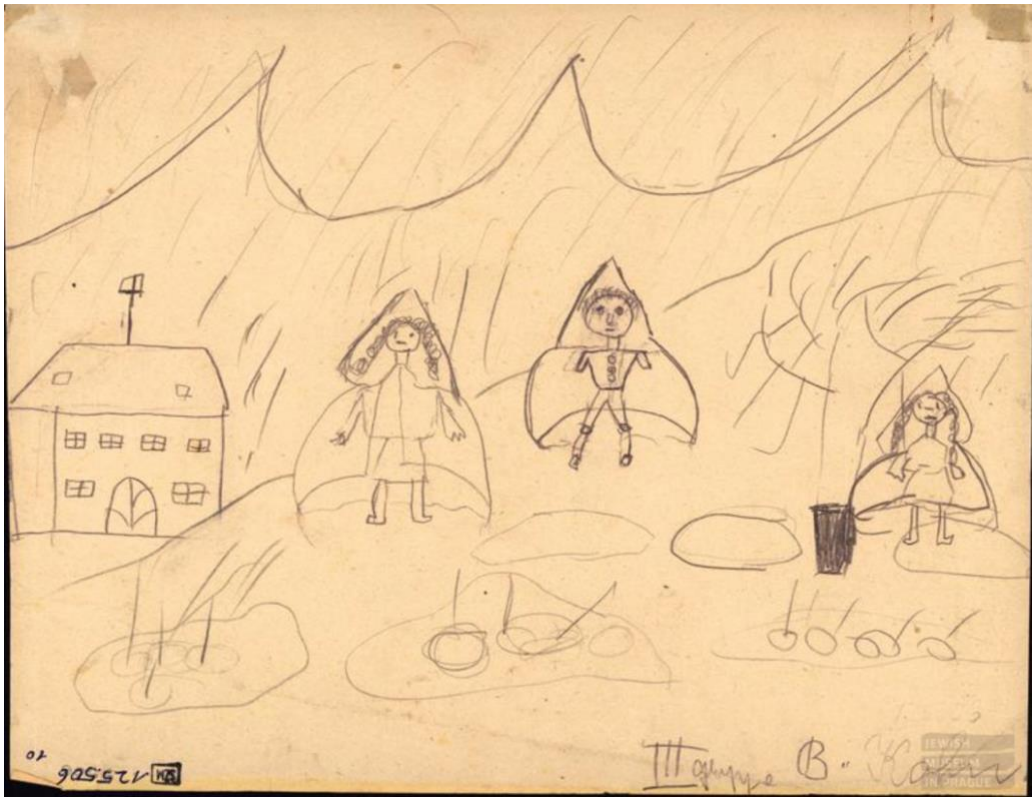

Figure 0.10 *Motiv z Terezína (průčelí kasáren)* by Berta Kohnová, aged 12-13, Theresienstadt ghetto

Rain, a subtheme associated with cold, also appears in children's drawings. Although it does not directly depict elements of cold, it highlights the dearth of appropriate clothing for inclement weather. Berta Kohnová's drawing, *Motiv z Terezína (průčelí kasáren)* ("Motif from Terezín facade of barracks") portrays a two-story building with many windows, likely the children's home.[7] The forefront pictures a small bare tree and three individuals, two girls and a boy. Each of these individuals wears what seems to be oversized raincoats, however they are not

[7] Berta Kohnová, *Motiv z Terezína (průčelí kasáren)*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/218101.

wearing rainboots or sturdy shoes. Surrounded by large clouds and falling rain, their little faces illustrate expressions of sadness as puddles filled with large hail (as represented by larger circles) surround their feet. Kohnová's drawing, and two other similar drawings by Eva Löwenbachnová and Edita Bikková (ages eleven and ten, respectively), which are both titled *Bouřka* ("thunderstorm")[8] speaks to the lack of clothes that would protect children against the rain and the cold. These drawings also reveal striking similarities in the type of scenes depicted; likely, children were sitting in the same space when creating the drawings and copying each other's work.

In her short essay, which she presented, while living in the ghetto in July 1943, Freidl Dicker-Brandeis brings forth the importance of creating art in collective settings. She highlights that by working in a community, "children inspire one another, [thus creating] a more stable environment," in turn allowing children to be inspired by each other.[9] Working within a group is a cooperative exercise. In turn, it prepared the children to "overcome difficulties that ar[ose] from shortages of materials, [in order] to help others."[10] Other drawings in the JMP collection that convey unfavourable elements feature large rain clouds and large thunderstrikes which are often red in colour, with small figures in the bottom corner. These drawings exhibit a more hastily executed style, likely representing the speed at which they were created and possibly the emotive state of the child at the time.

As physical sensations such as cold or hunger are difficult to capture in artwork, I complemented my analysis with written accounts of young people's lives in Theresienstadt.

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[8] Eva Löwenbachnová, *Bouřka*, 19 April 1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/211429; Edita Bikková, *Bouřka*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/218382.
[9] Makarova and Miller, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944*, 207.
[10] Makarova and Miller, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis: Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944*, 207.

Between 1942 and 1944, the boys' home of L 417 created the Czech literary magazine, titled *Vedem* (We See), which included poems, essays, jokes, dialogues, stories, and drawings. An article on "Rambles through Terezín" notes that the main heating source within the children's barracks, particularly in L 318, was coal from the large furnaces in the building.[11] However, the building was not heated with the intention of being hot and cozy, rather, to provide just enough warmth to protect children from the elements. Children also used leftover pieces of coal from the furnaces for drawing in addition to the graphite pencils that they had.[12]

In contrast to the children's barracks, the adults' barracks were mostly unheated and provided little shelter from the elements. A room that was crammed with 100 bodies would likely only have a tiny stove, around which people would gather to try and warm up. Adults frequently encountered challenges acquiring wood to fuel the stoves which were used for heating in both the workshops and homes. Firewood was seldomly distributed in the ghetto, and it was not permitted to collect branches, wood beams or boards that were found throughout the ghetto. Consequently, adults were forced to develop alternative methods of generating heat when wood was absent. When replenishing the stoves heated by coal, adults had to pick the coal, piece by piece with their fingers from the bins, and put them into the stoves as there were no shovels at their disposal.[13]

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[11] Michal Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch: Changing Perspectives on His Memory," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 35 (Spring 2021): 9; Matouš Bičák and František Tichý, "Rambles Through Terezín," *Vedem*, accessed November 2024, http://vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/11.html. For this building, the article notes someone asking if anthracite or brown coal was used. Brown coal was. Anthracite coal is a high-ranked coal, a hard, brittle and black lustrous coal, often referred to as hard coal. This coal has a high concentration of carbon and a low percentage of volatile matter. Brown coal (also known as Lignite) is the lowest grade coal with the least concentration of carbon, thus has a low heating value and a high moisture content and is mainly used in the generation of electricity. U.S. Geological Survey, "What Are the Types of Coal?", https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-are-types-coal.
[12] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth,* 117.
[13] Gerty Spies, *My Years in Theresienstadt: How one woman survived the Holocaust*, trans. Jutta R. Tragnitz (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1997), 77.

Memoirs describe the lack of proper seasonal clothing in the ghetto. Shops within the ghetto sold confiscated belongings from newly arrived prisoners, as well as items left behind by those who had passed or had been sent away on transports. These items, in addition to high-quality ware such boots, winter coats, and lingerie were often displayed in shop windows, but were either not for sale or prohibitively expensive.[14] Every six months, if fortunate enough, Jews would receive thread to mend socks, among other items, such as tooth cleaning powder.[15]

Whereas the children's diaries did occasionally mention the cold, they made specific references to the outside temperature, and not their poor physical conditions or meagre lodging. For example, Pavel wrote that he and his mother stood in line in the freezing weather just to get some winter gloves.[16] By noting the frigid air outside, Pavel shows that he could compare it to his residence, where it was warm enough to create a contrast. He was also in the process of buying winter gloves – a luxury most adults could not afford. This reference highlights the stark difference between his situation and the adult's detailed accounts of a harsh environment, where they struggled to stay warm in barely heated barracks.

John Freund arrived at Theresienstadt in 1943 at the age of twelve years.[17] In his memoir, he recounts that "it was terribly hot in the summer and [that they] froze in the winter."[18] The winter of 1942 was the coldest on record during World War II, with an average daytime high of - 9.2°C, and a cold spell during the last fifteen days of January 1943, with an average daytime high of - 14.9°C. Winter months had an average rainfall of 0.72 mm, and an average snowfall of 2.25 cm. The summers averaged a daytime high of 17.4°C, with August 1944 being the hottest

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[14] Eva Noack-Mosse, *Last Days of Theresienstadt*, trans. Skye Doney and Biruté Ciplijauskaité (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018), 45; Silten, *Between two worlds,* 157; Spies, *My Years in Theresienstadt*, 69.
[15] Noack-Mosse, *Last Days of Theresienstadt*, 93.
[16] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 216.
[17] John Freund, *Spring's End* (Toronto: The Azrieli Foundation, 2007), 28; Thelma Gruenbaum, *Nešarim: child survivors of Terezín* (London and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), xxvi.
[18] Freund, *Spring's End*, 29.

month on record, with an average daytime high of 21°C. Summer months, on the other hand, saw minimal rainfall, with an average of 1.3 mm.[19]

Pavel Weiner and his family arrived at Theresienstadt in May 1942,[20] but he only began keeping a diary in 1944, where he often addressed the cold, particularly during the winter of that year. While this was not his first winter in the ghetto, it was his first experience of a cold and snowy winter where the average daytime high was - 0.02°C, and the average snowfall was 2.15 cm.[21] The days leading up to Christmas were considered "freezing," and when the snow arrived, it was the first time that the ghetto resembled Christmas, however, by Christmas Eve, it was "dreadfully cold [and] the frost [was] bitter."[22] Weather data records show that the daytime high for 24 December 1944 was -10°C, and that the four days following were just as cold.[23]

Friesová's memoir recounts the last winter, questioning how people endured the winter of 1944, knowing that she only "survived by an act of [her] imagination, [often] longing to vanish."[24] Attesting to the cruel tricks that Cold and Hunger played on children, Friesová's memoir demonstrates the importance that imagination played in a child's life. Children had the ability to escape from reality through activities such as play or art, as reflected in their drawings of happy winter scenes like skiing or tobogganing. Adults, on the other hand, had to survive the gruelling winters without the kind of protection provided by the children's homes.

One of the greatest challenges scholars face when analysing the theme of cold in children's drawings is that it was difficult for the child to express the extent to which they were affected by the elements. Inconsistent heating and inadequate clothing left ghetto residents

[19] Český hydrometeorologický ústav, *Meteorologické prvky, Data Litoměřice 1940–1945*, Prague**.** The recorded temperatures are the daytime high.
[20] Weiner, *A boy in Terezín*, xix.
[21] Český hydrometeorologický ústav, *Meteorologické prvky.*
[22] Weiner, *A boy in Terezín*, 208, 210.
[23] Český hydrometeorologický ústav, *Meteorologické prvky.*
[24] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 170.

struggling to stay warm, forcing them to rely on food for energy. However, with limited food and warmth, people were constantly endangered by Cold and Hunger. While the child's drawing alone cannot fully convey the toll these elements took, diaries and memoirs reveal the psychological and physical effects Cold had on both children and adults. Those fortunate enough to live in the children's homes were afforded some protection, sheltering them from the most severe threats posed by Hunger and Cold. Within these homes, the resilience of children is evident – not only in their ability to withstand physical discomfort but also in their continued pursuit of joy and creativity despite harsh circumstances.

Chapter 2: Fear

"*In spite of Fear's control over me, […] She keeps my body limber so that I can flee at the smallest sign of danger, but she occupies my mind fully. […] She makes me look over my shoulder all the time.*"

Fear as an emotional state is often specific and time oriented such as being attacked by a German plane or summoned for transport further east. A more ambiguous element of fear is anxiety that constantly occupies our mind and reminds us of the thing we fear the most. In the collection of children's drawings in the Jewish Museum of Prague, fear is presented in two forms: as a constant hum of dread and anxiety that was contained, yet inescapable, often related to daily activities within the ghetto as well as a sudden spike of intense fear triggered by specific experiences such as the census and transports. This chapter seeks to analyse the ways in which fear is presented in these two contexts. In doing so, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the impact of fear on the lives of children, beginning with their arrival to the ghetto, followed by both everyday and collective experiences, and concluding with a discussion of transports further east.

When European Jews received a notice for transport, they could not even begin to imagine what awaited them. Eva Noack-Mosse, a native of Berlin Germany, was forty-three years old when she arrived in Theresienstadt on 12 February 1945, shortly before its liberation.[1] Noack-Mosse's memoir provides a detailed account of her arrival and time in the ghetto, akin to that provided by child survivors. Upon learning of the destination, Noack-Mosse recalls shuddering at the knowledge of being transported to Theresienstadt because "[they] only knew that this was a place from which nobody returned."[2]

[1] European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI), "Eva Noack-Mosse: Theresienstadt diary and other papers," Weiner Holocaust Library, accessed 3 February 2025, https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/gb-003348-wl504d.
[2] Noack-Mosse, *Last Days of Theresienstadt*, 24.

The journey to Theresienstadt was often long, depending on the train's point of departure, and it was overcrowded, offering no privacy. The duration of these train journeys was not recorded in children's diaries or memoirs. However, testimonies from Holocaust survivors recount journeys that lasted anywhere from seven hours to eight days, and in exceptional cases, up to two weeks.[3] The immeasurability of a journey's length was especially difficult for deportees, as trains were frequently delayed or left stationary on the tracks for extended periods. This uncertainty, combined with the disorienting experience of transport, added to their suffering. Lilly Malnik, a Jewish Belgian, was fifteen when she was deported to Auschwitz. She recalled being on the train for three to four days, yet historical records indicate her transport lasted only two days.[4] This discrepancy highlights how the psychological strain of transport made time seem distorted.

Further contributing to this sense of distortion were the spatial and sensory assaults endured during the journey. German freight cars used for transport in Hungary measured twenty-six feet two inches in length by eight feet ten inches in width and held between eighty and one hundred people.[5] Stuffed into cattle cars like animals *en route* to a slaughterhouse, Jews were forced to create makeshift toilets by carving holes into the floorboards, compelling them to relieve themselves in front of others. This violation of personal dignity caused deep internal shame, as they had no choice but to violate social norms. Forced to breathe air polluted by excrement, urine, vomit, and dead bodies, prisoners endured terrible hardship. They were subjected to other relentless sensory assaults. The slamming of train doors, the clanking of metal

[3] Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 94, 99, 114.
[4] Gigliotti, *The Train Journey*, 115.
[5] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German Railways and the Holocaust," Holocaust Encyclopaedia, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-railways-and-the-holocaust, accessed 18 February 2025.

wheels on the tracks, the shrill blast of whistles, and the screeching of brakes became imprinted in their memories.[6] These sounds remained with the individual, triggering heightened fear whenever they—or someone they loved—were placed on a transport from the Theresienstadt ghetto.

Following the first step in the resettlement of Jews, they were greeted by a fortress town-turned-ghetto. Wearing glaring green uniforms, bright red shoulder straps with numerous gold stars and cords, Czech policemen stood next to the turnpike that marked the entrance to the ghetto.[7] These unfriendly faces were the first interactions the newest arrivals had with Theresienstadt. After disembarking from the train, authorities divided prisoners into groups of ten, then sent them to the sluices.[8] The sluices consisted of several stations: examination of the list of arrivals, confiscation of money and valuables, a medical examination and *Entläusung* (delousing) station where they received a disinfecting bath, and had their hair cut short to allegedly combat lice.[9] The following drawings by Hana Bradyová and Anna Klausnerová capture the experience of transportation. This was one of the first moments where Fear introduced herself.

[6] Gigliotti, *The Train Journey*, 108.
[7] Helga Weiss, *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*, trans. Neil Bermel (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 70.
[8] Sluices (Czech: *Šlojska*, also referred to as *Schleusky*) were a processing area for prisoners entering and leaving Theresienstadt.
[9] Noack-Mosse, *Last Days of Theresienstadt*, 30.

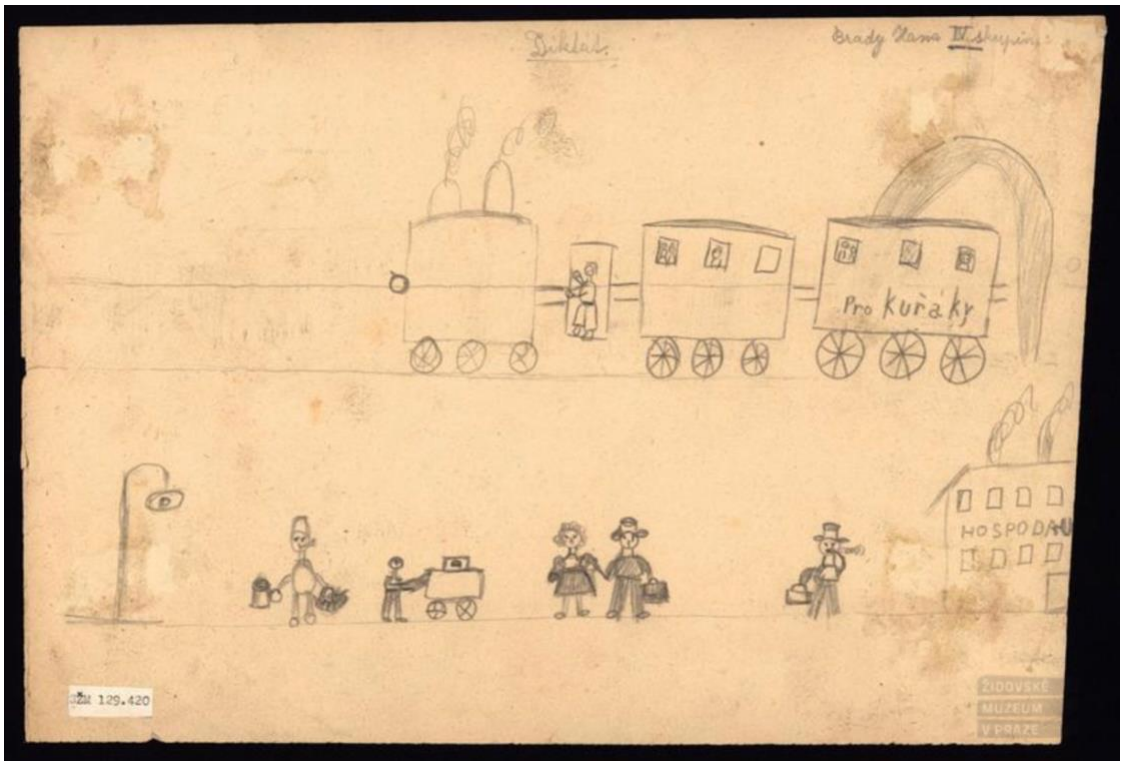

Figure 2. 1 *Nádraží* by Hana Bradyová, aged 12-13, Theresienstadt ghetto

Hana Bradyová's drawing is titled "*Nádraží*" ("Station").[10] The foreground presents a train platform with a single streetlamp, someone holding a basket and a cup, a smaller individual – perhaps a child – pushing a cart, a man and woman, both in nice clothes, holding each other's hands, and a man holding a suitcase next to someone wearing a hat and holding luggage. On the far right of this drawing is a building that reads "*Hospoda*," with two plumes of smoke rising from the roof.[11] However, the focal point of Hana's drawing is the train station situated in the background with a train exiting a tunnel. There are three-and-a-half cars: the engine, the caboose, and two cars that have people who can be seen in the windows. The last car of the train reads *Pro Kuřáky* which translates to "for the smokers." While it is unclear whether the train is arriving or

10 Hana Bradyová, *Nádraží*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/218430.
[11] Pub (Czech: *Hospoda*-)

departing, other elements suggest it is heading towards the ghetto. This drawing suggests that the child understands the progression of time as she tries to portray an account of the transition between pre-ghetto life, in the foreground, and ghetto life, in the background. The figures carry only minimal luggage, alluding to the fifty-kilogram luggage limit imposed on individuals placed on transports.

By interpreting this image as a transport heading towards Theresienstadt, it reflects multiple references of the departure from a past life. Smoke rising from the tavern represents a secure, warm and enclosed space, one that protected youth from the outside elements of the cold. The individual holding a basket and a cup may very well represent the ease with which they could procure food, whereas in Theresienstadt, food distribution barely met basic caloric intake. The couple holding hands alludes to the now distant memory of a time when Jews were permitted to wear their clothing without also having to pin a yellow star to every layer of clothes or without having to wear clothes with holes in them. The handholding represents the moment in which they felt safe with their person, whether it was their spouse, parent, sibling or friend. It was a moment where they did not fear being separated from their family members or travel companions because of their ethnicity and religion. While Hanna's drawing indirectly represents the fear of transports, it also marks the separation between her and the harsh realities of the ghetto.

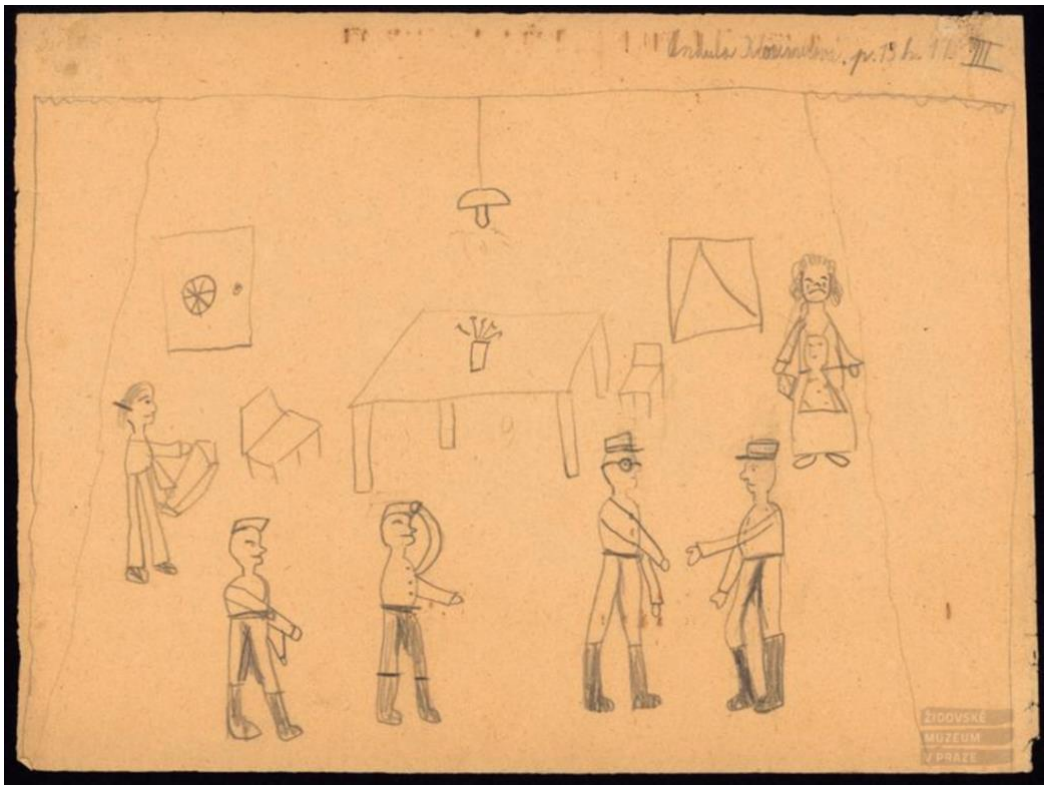

Figure 2.2 *Povoláni do transportu* by Anna Klausnerová, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Anna Klausnerová's drawing is titled "*Povolaní do transportu*" ("Called to Transport").[12] Depicting a closed room that served as one of the first waystations for new arrivals in the ghetto, this image includes six individuals, a door, a window, a light, and a table with two chairs. There are four men in the front centre who might be either German SS or Czech guards as they are wearing tall black boots, a button-down shirt, belt and hat, all representative of military uniforms.[13] The far left features a woman, who appears to be younger, holding something in the shape of a box. On the opposite side of the drawing is a woman who appears to be older by way of her curly hair, long dress and apron. In her right hand, she holds a handkerchief. She is visibly

[12] Anna Klausnerová, *Povolaní do transportu (?)*, 1943-1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/209848.
[13] Thomas Geve, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2021), 61. Here, this could be representative of the German SS uniform or the Czech uniform because both were present within the room for incoming Jews.

upset, as indicated by the tears running down her cheeks. Anna's drawing reflects the separation of a mother and child within the ghetto, and the fear that comes along with such an act in an environment where all they have is each other.

The two women in this room are separated by the four men and a large table with chairs and a vase of flowers. Above this table is a light with a beaming lightbulb, much like what one might find in an interrogation room. In the back left corner is a door with a vault handle, evoking the highly fortified environment in which these interactions take place.[14] What is striking is the contrast between the facial expressions of the guards and the two female arrivals. The uniform-clad guards who strike a pose of confidence wear a smile that is close to a smirk, whereas the Jewish deportees, freshly stripped of their belongings and old identities, appear fearful and forlorn.

Following admission, new arrivals were left to make their way to their new home. Within the ghetto there existed two types of housing: two-story houses and barracks. Before becoming known as the Theresienstadt ghetto, the houses had been used for military personnel of higher ranks, while the barracks housed remaining military members. Now, the houses housed upwards of sixteen people in one room, with rows of bunks like the barracks.[15] The majority of Jews lived in barracks, which were divided into three categories: men's, women's, and children's. Children were permitted to stay with their mothers, but oftentimes their families preferred to have them live in the children's home, with the exception of very young children. Also known as Block 31, the children's home housed children under the age of fourteen. It was established by Fredy Hirsch, one of the leaders of the youth welfare. The children's home created an environment that

[14] Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch," 5; Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 2; Otto Dov Kulka, *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death: Reflections on Memory and Imagination*, trans. Ralph Mandel (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 48.
[15] Noack-Mosse, *Last Days of Theresienstadt*, 31.

sought to shield children from the disturbing reality of life in the ghetto while also maintaining their physical and mental health.[16]

In the children's homes, young people's lives were governed by routines while adult educators provided guidance and support. Yet fear remained ever-present in children's lives. While it might recede into the background in the comparative safety of the homes, Fear did linger and subtly wove itself into the fabric of daily life – an unshakeable presence to which children gradually became accustomed.

Common sights of the fortress-turned-ghetto included brick and concrete buildings such as barracks, a bakery, an infirmary, and a brewery-turned-delousing station. In addition, there were several green spaces and a large quad in the centre of the town. Since this was formerly a military fortress, concrete walls surrounded the town, shutting Jews off from the outside world, making the houses and autoroutes just outside the town seem like an alternate universe. Despite this isolation, Jewish prisoners were fully aware of the ongoing war and the sounds that accompanied it such as planes and air raids.[17]

Eventually, the presence of planes, circling in the skies, became an everyday occurrence – a disquieting hum in the background. As Barbara Lorenzkowski has suggested in her work on sensory memories of wartime childhoods, "wartime sounds are kept as souvenirs," making the narrators 'earwitnesses' to these events.[18] Sound was much more than a sensation; it also offered vital information. To young people, sounds that were scary and unusual signaled a moment of

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[16] Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch," 9; Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 213; Weiss, *Helga's Diary*, 210.
[17] It is unknown if these planes were German or Allied. Raja Engländerová, born 25 August 1929, notes that it was clear to see a swastika; thus, it was possible that the circling planes were often that of the enemy. See also Pavel Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 148.
[18] Barbara Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War: Childhood Memories of the Wartime Atlantic, 1939–45," in *Small Stories of War: Children, Youth, and Conflict in Canada and Beyond*, ed. Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Paul Burtch (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 73.

rupture.[19] As Lorenzkowski notes, this rupture was associated with auditory memories that were vivid and precisely remembered because they stood in stark contrast to the quiet, distant hum of everyday life.[20] With frequent exposure to the sounds of enemy planes, the shouting of German and Czech guards, and the rickety sounds of bread carts rolling by, the ears of children became habituated to their auditory environment. Historians Nicholas Stargardt and Lindsey Dodd have both examined the ways in which children and youth made sense of war, noting that children possess "a different sense of danger and threats from adults."[21] Further developing this concept, Lorenzkowski suggests that familiar sounds were comforting to children and anchored them in their physical environment. By contrast, a sudden silence or unfamiliar sound was heard as a sign of danger.[22]

[19] Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War," 76.
[20] Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War," 82.
[21] Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War," 66; Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 16.
[22] Lorenzkowski, "Sensing War," 67.

Figure 3.3 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Nora Freundová, aged 10, Theresienstadt ghetto

Figure 2.4 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Ruth Heinova, aged 9-10, Theresienstadt ghetto

Figure 2.5 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Gertrude Kestlerová, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

At first, the presence of these planes in the skies enhanced young people's anxiety and fear. Over time, sightings of these planes became normalized and integrated into rhythms of everyday life. The Jewish Museum in Prague's online collection of children's artwork contains nineteen drawings created between 1943 and 1944, all of which are titled *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* ("Three friends and an airplane") and three additional drawings with the same theme but different titles. Three of the five drawings are created by unknown artists, the others are drawn by Nora Freundová (figure 2.3), Ruth Heinová (figure 2.4), and Gertruda Kestlerová (figure 2.5). The girls in the drawings are always depicted in the following manner: usually the two who are sitting face the viewer, while the third stands but faces away. Two of the three girls are dressed in a floral-print dress, while the third has a pattern-less or checkered-print dress. These girls usually

appear relatively young, except for one image depicting the girls of an adolescent age near a larger building with many windows, perhaps the children's home.[23]

Children often depict the world around them, enabling historians to analyse their artwork as a means of understanding their experiences and relationships with war. Despite the recurrence of identical images, which is common in collections like this, these drawings offer insight into both what is being communicated about war and the child's ability to interpret and reproduce it.[24] Analysing drawings within a broader framework, such as the concept of a "graphic community," highlights the strategies Dicker-Brandeis employed to help children express personal experiences of war and the effectiveness of these methods. The creation of drawing classes was meant to strengthen the child's ability to observe and appreciate reality.[25] As a result, the motif of an airplane flying above three girls can be viewed as a reflection of the child's life behind a fence, alluding to their imprisonment or sense of security within the ghetto during the war.

[23] *Nesignováno*, *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo,* 1943–1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/210213.
[24] Manon Pignot, "Drawing the Great War: Children's Representations of War and Violence in France, Russia, and Germany," trans. David H. Pickering, in *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars*, ed. Mischa Honeck and James Marten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 171.
[25] Markova and Miller, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944*, 39, 199.

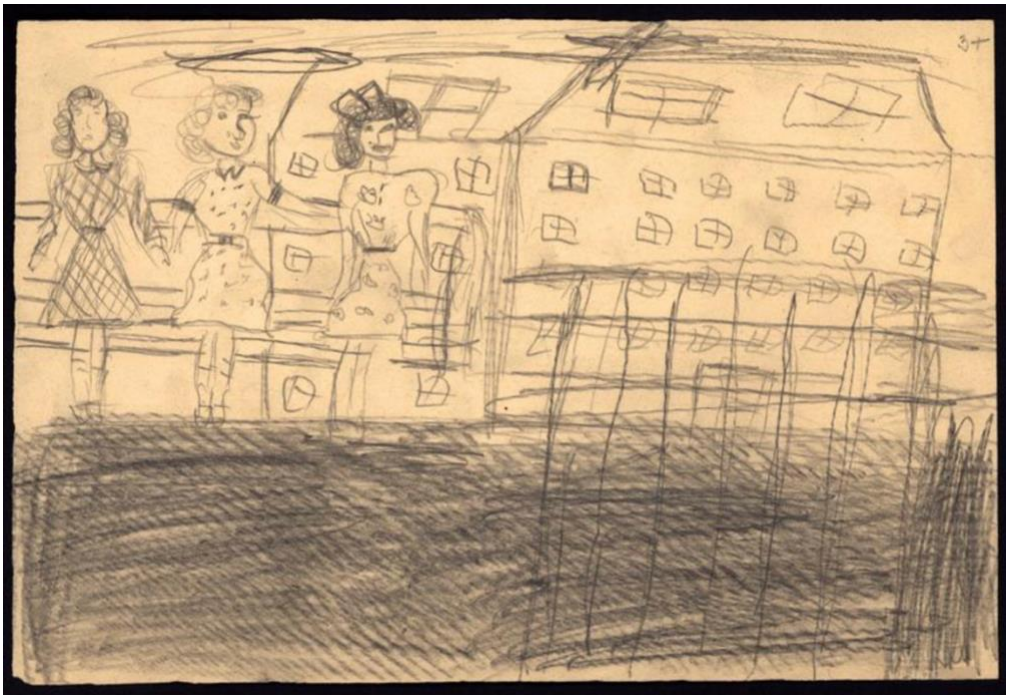

Figure 2.6 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Nesignováno, Theresienstadt ghetto

Figure 2.7 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Nesignováno, Theresienstadt ghetto

Figure 2.8 *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo* by Nesignováno, Theresienstadt ghetto

The passing of time within the ghetto is presented in this collection of children's artworks through symbolism such as the presence of planes and the lack of leaves on the trees. Five of the six images present children in a courtyard next to a building, two of which are labelled *SKOLA* (figures 2.3 and 2.4).[26] In addition, figures 2.3 (which features a school) and 2.7 both have smoke rising from a chimney signifying the safe and enclosed environments that were also meant to foster a sense of security, allowing children to be themselves, to learn and grow.[27] In contrast, the insecurity and vulnerability of Jews in Theresienstadt, particularly children, is presented through

[26] Czech: *Skola* (School)
[27] Nora Freundová, *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo,* 30 April 1944, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/220903; *Nesignováno*, *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo,*1943-1944, crayons on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, https://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/219961.

the depiction of three girls standing in the open space, exposed while engaging in their normal daily activities outside.

The similarities in these drawings offer insights into the space, and the process by which these drawings were created. Having been created over the span of two years, between 1943 and 1944, by girls ranging in age between nine and twelve, the images all portray the same scene. As Helga Pollak-Kinsky reminds us, upwards of eight children were gathered at a table during art time.[28] Dicker-Brandeis suggested that it was beneficial for children to work in large groups allowing them to get ideas from each other, further inspiring their artistic creations.[29] An environment such as this also promoted communication, respect, and sharing as children and youth were encouraged to help others and keep order amongst themselves. The creation of art within a group setting had significant influence on what the children created.[30]

Another possibility to explain the similarities is that the children saw this image on display at the ghetto's exhibition of children's art in 1943, thus inspiring them to create images of a similar nature. As Pignot argues, despite often drawing within a group, children's drawings also reflect a degree of autonomy, serving as "snapshots that teach us […] about the climate children live in, and their internalization of the conflict."[31] The concept of a 'graphic community,' coined by Manon Pignot, refers to the ways in which children living under similar conditions produced drawings that share common visual features such as recurring symbols and themes. These collective visual vocabularies emerged from shared experiences, including life in the ghetto, the influence of adults such as Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, and peer interactions. Pignot argues that

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[28] National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, "Obituary: Helga Pollak-Kinsky," accessed 31 January 2025, https://www.nationalfonds.org/announcement/obituary-helga-pollak-kinsky. Helga Pollak-Kinsky was born May 1930 in Austria and arrived in Theresienstadt January 1943. In 1944, she was deported to Auschwitz, but returned to Theresienstadt in 1945, where she and her father were both liberated.
[29] Markova and Miller, *Friedl Dicker Brandeis Vienna 1898 – Auschwitz 1944*, 207.
[30] Kay, "Children's Images of War from the German Home Front, 1914-18," 43.
[31] Pignot, "Drawing the Great War," 188.

viewing children's drawings through the lens of graphic communities reveals that, although they were shaped by external influences, children collectively processed trauma and made sense of their environment, which underscores their autonomy.[32]

Providing a unique window into their perceptions of war and daily life, their artwork reflects both their innate resilience and the omnipresent threats surrounding them. The collection of drawings titled *Tři přítelkyně a letadlo,* reveal an overlap between children's ways of knowing, shaped by their emotional geographies, as the young artists processed their surroundings through experience and art. Despite not having fully grasped the complexities of the ongoing war, as in the case of very young children, they continued to experience the war as an ominous presence within their daily lives. Older children, on the other hand, had a more developed understanding; to them, airplanes may have represented danger, bombings, and war.

The distant hum of overhead planes, and the fears of bombings evoked by the experience of the 1943 census, anchored children in their physical environment, the ghetto. Furthermore, the imagery mobilized – the girls in dresses, a building, a fence and a plane – foster a sense of unity, suggesting that this experience, or story, was shared amongst several children. In addition to ways of knowing, drawings such as this collection also represent emotional geographies, as they are a visual representation of how children understood and navigated their surroundings. For example, the sky typically represents openness and the possibility of infinite freedom, however, the addition of the plane immediately transforms this space into one of anxiety and danger, further trapping the child in the confines of the ghetto. The physical proximity of the girls depicted evokes the bonds of friendship and companionship forged in the children's homes.

[32] Pignot, "Drawing the Great War," 187-88.

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, the children's art teacher, believed in art as a form of creative release. Building on Johannes Itten's method of teaching students to break away from mechanical copying and encouraging them to develop their own forms of self-expression, Dicker-Brandeis' method had a positive impact on youth.[33] Accounts from survivors reflect on the memory of their teacher encouraging children to choose their subjects by reciting fairytales or listing objects and telling them to organise their art around it.[34] She taught children that the ordinary was worth reflecting upon.[35]

Friedl's students, Ednah Amit, Helga Polsky and Ela Weissburger (née Stein), recount how when "everybody put us in boxes – she took us out of them," encouraging children to draw "what we like to do [and] what we dream about" all of which "g[ave] us hope …[because] when you're concentrating on something beautiful, that's how we forgot where we were."[36] As a result, the images that survive exist because Dicker-Brandeis believed in the importance of recording emotional and sensory experiences in accessible forms, especially for children as it "provided insights into their souls."[37] In a world where children and adults were known as numbers, Dicker-Brandeis insisted that children sign their work with their names; for it was important to maintain their personal identity.

Little is known about the environment in which children drew, but Helga Pollak-Kinsky recalls being around other children for art lessons, and that "[they] had only one table. [They] could not have all worked together. Maybe there were eight in a group."[38] As an art teacher,

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[33] Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 193.
[34] Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 194.
[35] Linney Wix, "Aesthetic Empathy in Teaching Art to Children: The Work of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in Terezín," *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association* 26, no 4 (2009): 154.
[36] Makarova and Miller. *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis Vienna 1898-Auschwitz 1944,* 199; Wix, "Aesthetic Empathy in Teach Art to Children," 154, 157.
[37] Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, "*On Children's art*" (summer 1943), quoted in Wix, "Aesthetic Empathy in Teaching Art to Children," 155.
[38] Wix, "Aesthetic Empathy in Teaching Art to Children," 156.

Dicker-Brandeis' pedagogy was to stimulate the imagination and aid by strengthening the child's ability to "judge, appreciate, observe [and] endure" the world that surrounded them.[39] In doing so, children learned to trust the way in which they perceived and experienced the world around them, while also relying on the positive influence of male and female educators in the homes.

Room leaders and other adults in the children's group homes made every effort to shield children from the brutalities of war. As previously mentioned, they insisted on regular routines with consistent wake-up and sleep times, the implementation of chores, the establishment of collective art classes, and regular school lessons. The curriculum changed often, depending on which adults had been placed onto the transport lists. Maintaining a degree of control over the rhythms of daily life – whether through choosing their social interactions, engaging in sports, or spending time with their friends in their rooms, having pillow fights about boys, or discussing topics of interest – provided a source of strength as young people resisted the intrusion of Fear.[40] As noted by Jana Friesová, the carers "taught us how to value each moment of life […] protect[ing] us with all their strength [and] encourag[ing] us not to lose hope."[41]

Permitted to move freely through the ghetto after 1942, children quickly became exposed to the actual environment and conditions in which they and their families were imprisoned in.[42] They witnessed the injustices the adults and elderly experienced, and from this, they began to develop opinions, thoughts, and fears about the world that surrounded them. In her memoir, Gabriele Silten recounts playing a game with Hans,[43] her best friend in Theresienstadt, called "non-everything." This game consisted of things they knew but did not talk about, for example:

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[39] Wix, "Aesthetic Empathy in Teaching Art to Children," 154.
[40] Friesová, *Fortress of my Youth*, 96.
[41] Friesová, *Fortress of my Youth*, 117.
[42] Weiss, *Helga's Diary*, 84.
[43] R. Gabriele S. Silten, "A World Without Ghosts," accessed 13 January 2025, https://www.monikafelsing.de/images/Gabriele%20Silten%20%20A%20World%20Without%20Ghosts.pdf; "Eduard Cossen and His Family," *Joods Monument*, accessed 20 January 2025,

> We do not talk about transports; we do not mention people who have disappeared; we do not discuss what it might be like in the East. We don't know anybody who has ever come back to Theresienstadt from "Poland," therefore we know that wherever and whatever it is, it is a dangerous place. […] We have heard rumours about gas chambers, [… and] we know that they kill.[44]

Silten also recounts how they used to talk about "after the war," imagining futures that included having their own rooms again, though "we don't *really* remember what that feels like," and going back to school, though "neither of us *really* remembers what that's like."[45]

Many of the drawings within the JMP collection depict neither death nor violence. However, they do reflect the duality of fear and war as experienced by young people. Children's artwork frequently contrasts pre-ghetto and ghetto life with "safe" images, often lacking fearful references, depicting the artist's sense of happiness and security. At the same time, other drawings do not express this duality and portray elements more closely related to the child's experience at that moment, such as figure 2.9, and drawings in the subsequent chapter on death.

On 17 November 1943, a "census" was conducted in Theresienstadt, a day-long roll call that sparked intense fear among the ghetto's prisoners.[46] Discrepancies in the morning roll call had indicated that somebody had escaped the ghetto. Jana Friesová recounts what was perhaps one of the most fearful instances of the roll call.[47] Beginning at 5 a.m., every resident of the ghetto, with the exception of the sick, regardless of their age or ability, was ordered to assemble in the field just outside the gates of Theresienstadt. Here they stood, exposed to the elements,

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https://www.joodsmonument.nl/nl/page/484730/eduard-cossen-and-his-family; "Hans Cossen," *Holocaust.cz*, accessed 20 January 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/149701-hans-cossen/.
Hans Cossen was born 24 September 1935, in Norden, East Frisia. He was transported from Westerbork to Theresienstadt 20 January 1944, and then from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz on 19 October 1944, where he was murdered. Hans remained with his family until they were separated upon deportation from Theresienstadt. His father went to Dachau concentration camp, and Hans, his mother, and brother went to Auschwitz.

[44] Silten, *Between two worlds*, 125.

[45] Silten, *Between two worlds,* 120.

[46] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 118; Weiss, *Helga's Diary,* 113.

[47] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 119.

until midnight. They were not permitted any food, water, washroom or rest breaks. That evening, the carers asked the children to express themselves by writing about their feelings to help children articulate the nightmares that they had experienced that day.[48]

> 5 a.m.! We are standing in the courtyard of our Girls' Home, and we are freezing. […] At last the gate opens and we are leaving. […] The road ahead of us winds like a snake and we, the black shadows, go on and on. We arrive at a large meadow, or rather a huge grassy, crater-like area which looks as if it were created for the elimination of 33,000 people. They jostle us here and there until we are standing in endless rows. […] It is by now 12 noon. Nothing is happening. We are trying to give the old people courage. […] We are hungry. It is 5, 6, 7 in the evening. Eight, 9, 10. It has begun to rain. The plane circles relentlessly. Everyone's nerves are at a breaking point. […] What will they do with us? Nobody knows, all that we can do is wait – and wait. Little children cry with hunger and cold. […] No we will not give the Nazis the pleasure of seeing us frightened and begging. We, from room 25 hold each other's hands and, at that moment, we are friends. […] Suddenly the soldiers [shout "clear the valley," and] everyone fights for his own life [to return to the ghetto walls…]. What was it? Why was it? Nothing – only a trifling, practical joke of the Germans on 17 November 1943.[49]

While making their way to the field, everyone believed it was a death march – either leading them to an open space where planes would bomb them under the cover of darkness or to execution by machine-gun fire as they stood in rows.[50] At the time, nobody knew what the Germans intended to achieve by marching everyone into the field. The educators and carers in the children's homes were unable to protect their young charges from this harrowing experience, though they created a space for children at the end of the day to write down their experiences with the hope it would help them process their fears. In doing so, children were able to express emotions of fear, courage, nervousness and frustration. The Census was an event that united

[48] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 119.
[49] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 118-21. This was a diary entry by Rája Engländerová, age 13, who lived in room 25.
[50] Freund, *Spring's End*, 27; Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 119.

children. Diaries share that hundreds of people did not return from the field as many died of exhaustion or were trampled by those rushing to return to their barracks.[51]

This experience was an intergenerational one by which children were able to use their preserved strength to support others. For example, children tried to give the elderly courage by singing softly and whispering to each other because it was something that gave everyone strength.[52] Older children tried to comfort the youngest children who cried from hunger and cold while also trying to hide those who fainted because they feared the guards would take them away.[53] Rája Engländerová's diary entry describes standing in the field for almost twenty-four hours, whereas other sources suggest it was closer to eighteen. The written recounts of the memories of the day are evidence that time passes differently and much slower for everyone when experiencing a moment of great collective distress.

Yet it was the transports that evoked the sharpest fear. Much like the fear that transportees experienced when arriving in the ghetto, the fear of being transported to the ominous East occupied their minds daily. Though children benefitted from the physical and emotional shelter afforded to them by the children's homes, they were not exempt from transports. In his diary, Pavel Weiner often viewed the calls for transports as "brief [moments] of hell on earth" in that one never knew if they were going to be called.[54] For him, the definition of transports further east was "knapsacks, suitcases and hunched Jewish figures underneath them [who were subjected to this] just because the Germans wanted it, [and therefore] thousands of people must leave their bundle and go away into the mist."[55] Pavel's diary provides an emotional account in

[51] Freund, *Spring's End,* 27; Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 118.
[52] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 119.
[53] Friesová*, Fortress of my youth*, 119.
[54] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 47.
[55] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 43.

September 1944 regarding his experience with transports. A single transport, consisting of 5,000 men between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five was called; it included both his brother and father.[56] In his account, emotions such as fear, sadness, frustration and anger overcome the child as he grapples with the departure of his male relatives. This transport was divided into two groups, departing one day apart for a work camp in Dresden, Germany.

Transports from Theresienstadt often went east to locations such as Riga Latvia, Minsk and Baranovichi Belarus, Raasiku Estonia, and camp-ghettos in Izbica and Piaski, located in the Military General Government of Lublin, the Warsaw ghetto. Upon arrival to these locations, and camps such as Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz, many Jews were directly sent to the gas chambers.

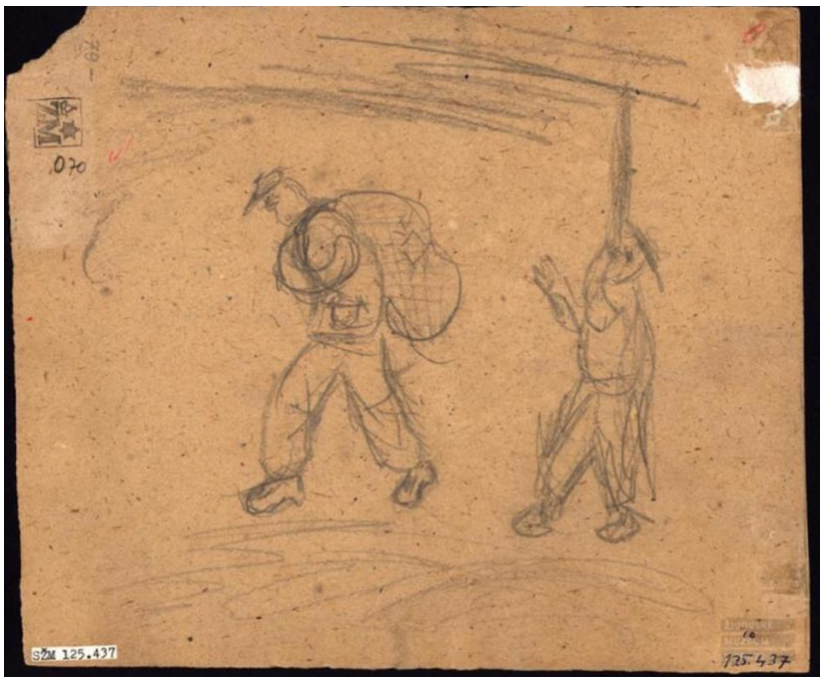

Figure 2.9 *Život v Ghettu (deportovaný's batohem)* by Valtr Eisner, aged 10, Theresienstadt ghetto

[56] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 159-60.

Valtr Eisner's drawing is titled *Život v ghettu (deportovaný's batohem)* ("Life in the ghetto, deportee with a backpack").[57] This drawing depicts a hunched-over man wearing a hat, coat and pants while carrying a large backpack. As Pavel recounts, transportees were permitted a knapsack or their suitcase of up to fifty kilograms, a bedroll and a small suitcase with food for their journey east.[58] On the day of departure, those selected for transport were corralled into a parade ground situated at the centre of each of the multi-story garrison buildings,[59] and were brought to wait at the *schleusky* (sluices).[60] In this image, the pack has a patch sewn on, alluding to the weight limit Germans placed on Jews as they packed their lives into a single suitcase when arriving to or departing from the ghetto. Following this individual is a guard, by way of his erect posture, who is holding a rifle, reflecting his position of power. Helga Weiss created a similar image, with a prisoner, also hunched over from the weight of his sack, carrying a smaller bag in his hand. Behind the individual is the *Ghettowache* (ghetto guards) who formed a chain to separate those leaving and prevent others from reaching them.[61]

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[57] Valtr Eisner, *Život v ghettu (deportovaný's batohem)*, graphite pencil on paper, Jewish Museum in Prague, http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/224180.
[58] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 160-61.
[59] Felix Jiri Weinberg, *Boy 30529: a memoir* (London: Verso, 2013), 65.
[60] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 163, 237. *Schleusky*, also known as *Šlojska* (sluices) was a processing area for prisoners entering and leaving Theresienstadt.
[61] Weiss, *Helga's Diary*, 144. *Ghettowache* (Ghetto watch/guards)

Figure 2.10 The Departure of Transport by Helga Hošková-Weissová, aged 14

This image alludes to the physical, emotional, and mental components of deportation. The physical component is portrayed by the weight of the sack which carries one's entire life and prized possessions, while the hunched-over individual, without a facial expression, represents the emotional turmoil one endured while being persecuted and threatened. The grey space behind the figure may further suggest a sense of isolation and loneliness, despite being surrounded by thousands who shared the same collective experience.

If one of the primary goals of the youth department in Theresienstadt was to shield children from the brutalities of camp life, the carers were ultimately unable to do so, for the fear of the unknown was beyond their control. For example, while execution in the ghetto was uncommon, death was ever present – in the hospital, in the streets and in the crematoria. The passing of corpses piled onto the bread carts heading towards the crematoria or the dead bodies lying in the street were sights children witnessed and images that became engrained in their

memory.[62] Fear of the unknown was one that the carers in the homes tried to soothe, but one they could not protect children against.

Within these drawings, the theme of fear is neither mentioned in the titles nor depicted through facial expressions or body language, apart from the crying female in figure 2.2. Instead fear presented itself in more subtle ways such as the colour scheme used in the drawings.[63] Images were created with graphite pencils, sometimes featuring sharp lines or edges and spaces with darker shading, all likely representative of fear and the blur of the uncertainty surrounding them. Graphite pencils may have been more readily available, but coloured pencils or crayons were also in existence in the ghetto as other drawings in the JMP's collection utilise colour such as reds and browns. Several of the existing drawings from the JMP collection depict Czech Jews as smaller people, representing the inferiority of both their personal feelings and actual existence in the eyes of the enemy.

The carers' dedication to the well-being of children was invaluable, as it helped them find courage within and develop the perseverance needed to survive. They provided solace by encouraging questions and fostering creative outlets such as writing, art, and play to help manage their fears. However, Fear presented herself to Theresienstadt as a whole, manifesting most prominently in the constant threat of deportation. The shared experience of transports became one of the most significant ways in which children and adults alike related to each other. The ghetto's self-administration was responsible for organizing departing transports up until the point where prisoners boarded the trains, in addition to the selection of people to be included. Large-

[62] Weinberg, *A Boy in Terezín*, 54.
[63] Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 230.

scale transports, of upwards of 1,000 people, was the one thing threatening to tear this fragile collective apart.[64]

The self-administration did everything in their power not to separate families, therefore they made the difficult decisions to add entire families to the transport lists.[65] After receiving a notice, Jews were able to do a *Reklamace* (complaint) to be removed from the list.[66] While there were several reasons for why someone might file complaints, two of the most common were illness and the status as essential workers. Workers would appeal to their bosses that their work was indispensable so they would be permitted to stay.[67] To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, the Jewish council removed sick individuals from transport lists. For example, Friesová and her mother were excluded because she had a sore arm.[68] However, if a request to be removed from transport was granted, it left others in fear, such as Pavel Weiner, who feared he and his family would be put on the transport list instead.[69]

Calls for transports were terrifying, particularly for those who were given only a few hours' notice in the night and were called to meet in the early hours of the morning. With an enforced curfew in the ghetto, it was common for people not to know whether their loved ones were leaving. On the other hand, those living in the children's homes knew who would be going and were fortunate enough to have the support of the educators and other children within their rooms. Taught to come together and help the child included on the next transport, diaries note that girls would help the other girl(s) pack, put together food, write notes or poems for each other

[64] Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 212.
[65] Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, 201.
[66] *Reklamace* (complaint) diaries and memoirs only refer to these complaints by the Czech translation.
[67] Weiss, *Helga's Diary*, 211-12.
[68] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth*, 268-69.
[69] Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 40.

and choose an outfit, sometimes even giving their friend one of their favourite dresses.[70] The creation of the homes counterbalanced the miserable reality of life within the ghetto by reminding children that while this experience was personal, it was also a collective one. Discussion surrounding transports in children's diaries and memoirs demonstrate emotions of not only fear and sadness, but also compassion, empathy, confusion and anger. Children found ways to remain optimistic as they knew that "the world turns and times change [and they] all hop[ed] the time [would] come, when [they will] be able to go home again."[71]

Fear was a constant companion for adults and children alike during their time within Theresienstadt. She presented herself as a constant hum of anxiety that arrived while planes flew in the airspace above or when a child had to stand guard in case the SS arrived during secret school lessons.[72] Meanwhile, the homes and other adults encouraged and supported children to express their emotions, often through art. Within the JMP's collection of children's drawings, fear is portrayed in a discrete manner. Often presented thematically, fear is conveyed through elements such as colour, darkness, line thickness, the relative size of figures, and the presence of hostile figures like the Germans, all of which contribute to the emotional impact of the drawings. However, analysing children's drawings presents two key challenges. The first is determining whether the child's primary goal was to reflect on the emotion of fear. The second is the inherent subjectivity of interpretation, which requires scholars to closely examine details within the drawings to establish connections.[73] Given these challenges, diaries and memoirs play a crucial

[70] Friesová, *Fortress of my youth,*102; Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 233. Deportees were also permitted to take with them their suitcase of up to fifty kilograms.
[71] Anonymous, "Homesick," in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezín Concentration Camp 1942–1944*, ed. Hana Volavková (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 36.
[72] Ellen Handler Spitz, "Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and Her Work in Terezín: Children, Art and Hope," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 46, no 2 (Summer 2012): 6.
[73] Stargardt, "Children's art of the Holocaust," 199.

role in deepening our understanding of how Fear continuously, yet silently, visited the children of Theresienstadt.

Chapter 3: Death

"*[She] keeps her hand on my shoulder or on my head; [and] teaches me to welcome her, not ever to be afraid of her, no matter in what form she presents herself.*"

Between 24 November 1941 and 8 May 1945, more than 150,000 Jewish prisoners walked through the gates of the Theresienstadt ghetto. Approximately 35,000 of them died within the ghetto, while more than 87,000 men, women, children, and youth were deported further east on a total of sixty-three transports. It is estimated that 12,500 of those imprisoned were children, only 142 of whom survived until the ghetto's liberation.[1] While living in the ghetto, the fear of the unknown occupied the minds of Jewish prisoners. Facing death and adversity on a daily basis, it was considered a triumph to simply survive another day. What children and youth feared most of all were the transports. Even the young knew those who left would not return. Transports were a gateway to death. As we shall see, transports to concentration and extermination camps were not the only deadly threats to children and youth. Every day, Jewish prisoners in the ghetto died from exposure to illnesses, lack of food and nutrients, medical neglect, and exhaustion from forced labour. Death was everywhere.

In her autobiography, Gabriele Silten evocatively described her "closest" companions, among whom were Hunger, Cold, and Fear. As she turns to her fourth companion, the reader quickly realises that she is the one who had the tightest grip on the child:

> She walks on my right side [holding] me by the hand. […] She comforts me [,] numbing the last bit of me which Cold has not […] reached. […] I see her in many forms: starvation, disease, beatings, hangings. […] I no longer pay attention to them [… -] they are as natural to Theresienstadt as the Nazis passing by. […] I do not want to go with her […] but she comes to me without my asking. I welcome her care […;] no one else has time to care for me. Her name is Death, and she is my most loyal friend.[2]

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[1] "Terezin Ghetto," Terezín Memorial, accessed 3 July 2024, https://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/terezin-ghetto.
It is also important to note, that these numbers vary by sources. The number that I present is the median of what has been offered to scholars in sources.
[2] Silten, *Between two worlds,* 127.

Following the rise of the Third Reich, targeted policies and ideologies led to the systematic persecution of six million Jews. The Holocaust, a direct consequence of the Nazi regime's radical ideology brought into existence Silten's companion, Death. Its presence was constant. Every day, children were confronted with dead bodies they encountered throughout the ghetto, such as on sidewalks or in the courtyard. Every day, they feared for the fate of their loved ones in the ghetto who might succumb to illness or starvation. Every day, they bore the knowledge that those who had left on the transports would never return.

In her memoir, published fifty years after her liberation from Theresienstadt in 1945, Silten described Death as a "most loyal friend" whose presence was beyond her control and who "comes without my asking." The violence of the Holocaust shattered young people's sense of security. The omnipresence of death represented a heavy burden, particularly so for a child.

Nicholas Stargardt draws attention to the silences woven throughout children's testimonies. In his *Witnesses of War*, he observes that although children at Auschwitz-Birkenau processed much of their daily trauma through imaginative play, such as "Rollcall," where older children played at being *Kapos* and guards, beating the younger ones for "fainting," they never reenacted death. Hanna Hoffmann-Fischel, an educator in the camp, once came across children playing "Gas Chamber." Yet even then, they did not pretend to die. Instead of entering the hole dug into the earth that they had nicknamed a gas chamber, the children threw stones into the pit and mimicked the cries of those inside.[3]

Curiosity and even envy toward the guards were not uncommon among children in the ghettos, nor was persuading one another to play both the roles of enemies and victims. These

[3] Hanna Hoffmann-Fischel, report for Yad Vashem, reprinted in Deutschkron, *...Denn ihrer war die Hölle*, 50–51, quoted in Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 215.

moments of role play offered a momentary sense of control and a means of trying to make sense of their world. Yet death itself remained outside the bounds of imitation: it was too horrific and too real. What children could not bring themselves to play at is telling in its absence.

Silences surrounding death also extended into the postwar period. When asked about his experience in Auschwitz, Yehuda Bacon, aged fourteen at the time, described how the *Kapo* and *Sonderkommando* treated the most beautiful women differently, leading them into the gas chamber last and placing them in the oven separately from everyone else.[4] Unable or unwilling to hear more, the interviewer interrupted him. Bacon never recounted that memory again. Similarly, after surviving Auschwitz, Kitty Hart and her mother were instructed by a male relative not to "talk about any of the things that have happened to you. Not in my house. I don't want my girls upset. And *I* don't want to know."[5] In discouraging survivors from speaking about their experiences, these silences became more pronounced, resulting in narrative gaps that imply something vital was being withheld or avoided. Stargardt interprets these silences not as gaps in memory but rather as markers of trauma. These gaps invite us to consider not only what children expressed, but also what they withheld, and how, in these withheld stories, silence could speak as powerfully as words or images.

If death remained elusive in children's drawings, young people did convey their anxieties, emotions, and experiences surrounding death in their diaries. Within their diaries, they also approached death through examples of disease and transports, such as when loved ones or friends were deported to further east. More often, it was from the vantage point of adulthood that writers of memoirs and autobiographies recalled how their younger selves had wrestled with the constant, shattering presence of death. When writing, children and survivors often witnessed

[4] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 223.
[5] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 361.

different forms of death. Companions such as Cold, Hunger, and Fear brought instability to one's life, but the ultimate fear was Death in her many forms. Despite the unwavering efforts of educators, children's homes could not shield children from what everyone feared most.

This chapter explores the diverse experiences of death and illness within the ghetto, focusing on the threats of disease and looming transports. Given young artists' reluctance to capture death in paintings or words, this chapter draws on the vivid portrayals of death in the artwork of Josef Novák and Auschwitz survivor, Thomas Geve, who produced his drawings and accounts in the immediate wake of liberation while still a teenager as well as written accounts from other ghetto residents. Lastly, this chapter examines how desensitisation to death and exposure to violence within the ghetto influenced children's perspectives and their portrayal of these traumatic experiences.

Josef Novák was born on 25 October 1931 and was deported from Prague to Theresienstadt on 24 April 1942 with his parents. His mother, Irma Nováková, was born on 15 December 1901; his father, Ervin Novák, was born on 13 August 1891. Josef, Irma and Ervin were all deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz on 18 May 1944, where they were murdered upon arrival. Novák's drawing, see figure 3.1, offers his visual perspective on death, which mirrors the *in-situ* writings of young victims and survivors. His depiction of a Jewish prisoner pulling a funerary cart to collect a body being burned over a fire is suggestive of the crematoria, symbols of death, which will be explored further in this chapter. Drawings like his, which illustrate a dissociative state where days dissolve into a nightmarish blur of continuity, become representative of an attempt to regain control over his perception of time, searching for a definitive "before" and "after."

Thomas Geve's (né Stefan Cohn) artwork offers a uniquely personal and meticulously detailed account of life in the concentration camps. His collection of eighty drawings was created over two weeks between 16 May and 5 June 1945 to show his father what he had endured.[6] Albeit having a naïve and childlike style, Geve's collection provides a structured and thorough account of the horrors he and others endured.

Holocaust studies literature suggests that the adult perspective of death is often perceived through an existential and historical lens, as survivors grapple with the burden of memory. Primo Levi, for one, movingly reflected on his awareness of his mortality. This existential lens, focusing on the inevitability of death, ties into the concept of the absurdity of human existence. The dehumanisation of an entire group of people led prisoners to search for meaning in an environment that seemed indifferent to their existence. For example, in *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi describes how prisoners, who were reduced to numbers and stripped of everything, still found ways to make choices that preserved their humanity. Sharing food allowed them to remember that they were not alone in their suffering. These acts of solidarity were reflections of their resistance to the dehumanizing conditions surrounding them:

> *Je crois que c'est justement à Lorenzo que je dois être encore vivant aujourd'hui, […] pour m'avoir constamment rappelé, par sa présence, par sa façon si simple et facile d'être bon, qu'il existait encore, en dehors du nôtre, un monde juste, […] et intègres que ni la corruption ni la barbarie n'avaient contaminés, qui étaient demeurés étrangers à la haine et à la peur.*[7]

In their writing, adult survivors reflect on their experiences and share their perspectives of survival, offering insight into the absurdity of death within the horrors of concentration camps,

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[6] Hannah Kaye and Orly Ohana, "Thomas Geve – The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz," *Yad Vashem Blog*, 8 January 2025, https://www.yadvashem.org/blog/thomas-geve.html.

[7] Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* (*Si c'est un homme*), trans. Martine Schruoffeneger (Paris: Julliard, 1987), 189. **(**Translation: **"**I think it's precisely to Lorenzo that I owe my being alive today, [...] for having constantly reminded me, through his presence, through his simple and easy way of being good, that there still existed outside our own world, a just world […] and a world of integrity that neither corruption nor barbarism had contaminated, which remained foreign to hatred and fear.")

death marches, and gas chambers. Unlike children, adult survivors often use language and structured storytelling as a means of processing grief, frequently incorporating philosophical reflection. For example, in his memoir *Night*, Elie Wiesel writes:

> Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.[8]

Here, he offers a structured reflection, employing repetition to emphasise the depth of his grief and trauma, particularly about the death of children and the loss of faith. The adult experience, shaped by time and reflection, differs from the immediate and fragmented expressions found in the writings and drawings of young people such as those by Josef Novák and Thomas Geve. Capturing raw, real-time events, these works offer a distinct perspective on death—one that lacks the philosophical distance or narrative coherence often present in adult accounts, as the experience has not yet been fully processed or understood. In contrast to adult survivors, a child's written perspective often relies on imagery, symbolism, and open-ended questions to grapple with trauma and loss. For example:

> Spring has now arrived […] The flowers are growing, and everything is waking up to a new life. […] they rejoice that they can look again at the world. Why can't I? […] the state I am in today may lead to my mental collapse […] This is fate, isn't it?"

Pavel's diary entries do not make direct reference to death; rather, he approaches the subject through the imagery of flowers that wilt and the uncertainty of his fate.[9]

While Pavel's reflections remain subtle, they speak to a broader reality: death, due to disease, starvations and deportation, was a constant presence in the ghetto. In January 1943, the average life expectancy in Theresienstadt was 72.51 years. This number plummeted to 70.14

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8 Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 34.
9 Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín*, 166, 220.

years in June 1943, and by December 1943, it decreased even further to 69 years.[10] Between 24 November 1941 and 31 January 1944, 29,113 of those imprisoned at Theresienstadt died, 8,506 died because of illnesses.[11] Ghetto documents also recorded 211 attempts at suicide, 273 suicides, and 16 executions.[12] It was also reported that "several incidents of negligent homicide occurred at the hands of the SS, particularly during transports," yet exact numbers remain unknown. What is certain are the many instances of fatal neglect and the calculated disregard for human life both in the ghetto and on the transports.[13]

Young people at Theresienstadt would have been aware of the frequent transports from Theresienstadt to the East. In 1942, thirty-five transports left the ghetto, transporting 43,871 people, 2,094 of whom were children under the age of fourteen, to concentration camps. The following two years saw ten transports with 18,328 people and eighteen transports with 25,997 people depart eastward. Altogether, between 1942 and 1944, there were sixty-three transports carrying 88,196 people eastward, 5,006 of whom were under the age of fourteen.[14]

The ghetto's self-administration made the difficult decision to allocate higher food rations to children and youth, a measure that consequently meant lower rations for the elderly. While the exact number of deaths specifically related to malnutrition is unknown, records note that approximately 33,000 people, twenty-five per cent of the ghetto's population, died from disease, malnutrition, or other forms of mistreatment while imprisoned.[15] The Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia and Moravia registered 33,521 people who died from

[10] H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945: The Face of a Coerced Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 466.
[11] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 466.
[12] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 472.
[13] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 472.
[14] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 500.
[15] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 4.

"exhaustion and illness" in Theresienstadt.[16] Common diseases within the ghetto included meningitis, infectious jaundice, pneumonia, and typhoid fever,[17] all of which were primarily caused by frequent transports. The constant movement of people into the ghetto, involving transport in inhumanly overcrowded cattle cars and exposure to unhygienic conditions, had weakened the Jewish prisoners, rendering their bodies even more susceptible to disease.

A total of 1,129 confirmed cases of measles between 1942 and 1943, resulting in a total of eight deaths, were recorded. Affecting 2,100 individuals, tuberculosis spread easily as a result of overcrowding within the ghetto. Only seven of these cases were children under the age of fourteen.[18] At the height of the epidemics, between one-third and over half of children under sixteen years of age were sick.[19] Spotted typhus, a malicious and infectious type of typhus, ravaged the ghetto right before its liberation in the spring of 1945. This disease spread by body lice, which ghetto residents referred to as 'clothes lice'; the only way to prevent its spread was to isolate the sick, which was difficult to do in overcrowded conditions. As a result, twenty-five per cent of ghetto inmates died of this disease in a single season.[20]

Seriously ill children and youths were transferred from the care of the children's home to the department of health where nurses took on their care. Otherwise, children remained in their beds until they recovered. The hospital in Theresienstadt was located in the *Vrchlabí (Hohenelbe)* barracks, a former military hospital, and was fitted with beds, sheets, doctors, and nurses.[21] Silten recounts that the doctors and nurses were 'real' but did not have access to either proper

[16] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941–1945*, 38.
[17] Kateřina Horáčková et al., "Paediatrics in Theresienstadt Ghetto," *Central European Journal of Public Health* 28, no.2 (2020): 156, doi: https://doi.org/10.21101/cejph.a5557; Silten, *Between two worlds*, 142.
[18] Horáčková, "Paediatrics in Theresienstadt Ghetto," 157.
[19] Horáčková, "Paediatrics in Theresienstadt Ghetto," 158. Horáčková classifies individuals aged four to fifteen as children, and individuals aged sixteen to twenty as youths.
[20] Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941*–1945, 461; Silten, *Between two worlds*, 171.
[21] Vrchlabí is a town in the Czech Republic, known in German as *Hohenelbe*.

medications or necessary supplies, thus making medical care very difficult.[22] Departments, such as surgery, urology, internal medicine, and infectious diseases, also existed.[23] Herbert Fischl, who lived in Theresienstadt from ages fourteen to sixteen, contributed to the *Vedem* magazine of the children's home.[24] In his excerpt, "The Psysician and Terezín," he reflects on the work of one of the most dedicated workers in the ghetto, the Physician.[25] While the hospital did not have an operating room, a recovery room or reliable sterilising methods, Dr. E. Mladý was determined to help a patient with appendicitis.[26] Fischl notes that the operation was a success, and that the patient was nursed back to health. While death from illness was a daily threat to those living in the ghetto, doctors and nurses fought to assist the ailing, despite lacking essential medical supplies and receiving no financial compensation for themselves.[27]

Exposure to typhoid posed the greatest threat to children, as the disease was primarily transmitted through dirty hands. The significance and success of children's homes were evident in this context. In maintaining the physical health of their young charges, Fredy Hirsch and room leaders inspected the children's clothing each day for lice and ensured that children bathed daily, even if it was only with cold water.[28] As a result of the implementation of strict hygienic practices, the exposure to disease was significantly reduced amongst children in their care. Carers also implemented structured daily routines such as maintaining a tidy and clean bunk and

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[22] Silten, *Between two worlds,* 153.
[23] Silten, *Between two worlds,* 153.
[24] "Herbert Fischl," *Holocaust.cz: Database of Victims*, accessed 21 February 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/140625-herbert-fischl/. Fischl was born 7 September 1928 in Prague. He arrived at Theresienstadt on 10 December 1941 at the age thirteen. He was deported to Auschwitz on 1 October 1944, where he was murdered.
[25] Fischl, Herbert, "The Psysician and Terezín," *Vedem: Rambles through Terezín*, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/21.html.
[26] Fischl, "The Psysician and Terezín," *Vedem: Rambles through Terezín*, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/21.html.
[27] Fischl, "The Psysician and Terezín," *Vedem: Rambles through Terezín*, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/21.html.
[28]Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch: Changing Perspectives on his Memory," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 6, https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcab015.

group space.[29] By creating the children's home, focusing on the well-being of children and youths, and offering extra rations of food to the young, educators and Jewish leaders successfully sheltered children and youth from illness and disease. However, it was an entirely different situation for adults and the elderly.

Theresienstadt's role as a ghetto did not include the gassing of Jewish individuals. Instead, death came by stealth. Weakened by a starvation diet, the biting cold, and ever-present illness, the elderly died while the middle-aged struggled. Very few accounts have survived that describe funeral practices and mourning rituals in the ghetto. To Josef Stiassny, who lived in Theresienstadt from the ages of twenty-five to twenty-seven, we owe this description of a funeral procession that was published in the *Vedem* magazine. His article, titled *"The Hearse,"* addresses the symbolism of the ghetto funerary cart: a once solemn object had transformed into an object of everyday use.

> Mourners would walk behind the black cart [which carried the deceased in] a wooden or metal coffin, depending on the fee paid for a first, second- or third-class funeral. […] We turned our backs superstitiously when we met them somewhere on the road [for these] carts were symbols of death to us, those huge lumbering coffins, filling us with terror and dismay. [… The carts were a] symbol of another world […] the last resting place [… and] suddenly they were being used in the public service.[30]

The symbolism of the hearse-turned-milk or luggage cart served as a constant reminder of the omnipresence of Death's presence within the ghetto.[31] Daily, the cart collected the deceased and made its way through the streets to the mortuary. When not transporting the dead, it was repurposed as a symbol of life, carrying bread and luggage throughout the ghetto to the living. Over time, prisoners began to view the cart not only as a hearse, but as an everyday object.

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[29] Friesová, *Fortress of My Youth*, 116.
[30] Josef Stiassny, "The Hearse," *Vedem*, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.
[31] Petr Ginz, "Rambles Through Terezín," *Vedem*, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.

The Central Morgue was created on 12 August 1942, and by 9 April 1943, when Petr Ginz published the 17th issue of *Vedem*, 21,000 corpses had already passed through the corridors of the morgue. Tucked away in the back corner of the ghetto, as it was off limits to prisoners, the Central Morgue's entrance was described as resembling the gates of hell.[32] The men who worked as attendants at the *Zentralleichenkammer* (Central mortuary) handled the corpses with care and respect as they placed the wrapped corpses in coffins made of planks that were then stacked in dead-end tunnels waiting to be taken away. Ginz also described the building as a gloomy place filled with silence, in which an oppressive terror of death lay over everything, and only the occasional whispers coming from attendants working in the building could be heard.[33] In total, an estimated 33,000 victims were cremated in the crematorium between 7 September 1942 and mid-March 1945, and then had their ashes placed in urns which were then placed in the ghetto's columbarium.[34]

When writing his piece for *Vedem*, Ginz asked Dr. Bock, the manager of the crematorium, additional questions, such as how many of the deaths were related to infectious diseases. As Dr. Bock replied, "we don't keep records of that. I only know that 120 died of typhoid."[35] Petr then asked Dr. Bock what happened to the bodies people saw being removed from the barracks, the infirmary, and the streets. As the physician told him:

> They usually died in the infirmary. After the post-mortem examination by the doctor, the corpse is immediately brought here, where it is washed in keeping with religious observances, dressed in a shroud and placed in a coffin. Everything is done under the

[32] Ginz, "Rambles Through Terezín," Vedem, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.
[33] Ginz, "Rambles Through Terezín," Vedem, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.
[34] "The Jewish Cemetery and Crematorium," *Terezín Memorial*, accessed 10 July 2024, https://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/the-jewish-cemetery-and-crematorium.
[35] Ginz, "Rambles Through Terezín," Vedem, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.

> supervision of the rabbis. After cremation, the remains are placed in urns, for which a columbarium is being established in the casemates.[36]

The ever-present reality of death spread throughout the ghetto, becoming an inescapable backdrop of life for both adults and children. While children lacked the language, cognitive and emotional ability to fully process the horrors, drawings became a means of expressing their fragmented understanding of loss, fear, and the ability to cheat death. Their artwork not only reflected what they had witnessed but also spoke to the ways they internalised the omnipresence of death in their world.

In Theresienstadt, Majoşel (né Martin Mayer) lived in the former Dresden Kaserne barracks, and remembers there being a room where the dead were stored.[37] Kikina (né George Repper) mentioned in his interview that they had become desensitised to death as they would run around and play ball, jumping among the dead bodies "as if they were objects lying on the ground that you could jump over."[38] He goes further to say that these types of experiences made for a demystification of death.[39] All three of these men, who lived in room 7 under Franta Maier's care in L417, describe how these experiences desensitized them to the omnipresence of death.[40]

In her diary, Helga Weiss recounts watching nine young men, around twenty-years of age, maybe even younger, who were condemned to death being forced to dig their graves because they had sent news about themselves to their mothers.[41] One of the laws stated "*§ 8. The smuggling of letters is punishable by death. Any attempt will be judged as the completed act*

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[36] Ginz, "Rambles Through Terezín," Vedem, accessed 21 July 2024, http://www.vedem-terezin.cz/en/rambles/34.html.
[37] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 130.
[38] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 63.
[39] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 64.
[40] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 64.
[41] Helga Weiss, *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*, trans. Neil Bermel (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 17, 82.

itself."[42] Apart from Weiss's written testimony, the diaries, memoirs and autobiographies consulted for this project offer no reference to premeditated deaths. Pavel Weiner's diary provides a detailed account of his separation from his father and brother, who were both placed on a transport, perishing a short time after their deportation.[43]

In turn, very few surviving artworks by children depicting death exist. Of the over 4,000 children's drawings that survive from Theresienstadt in the JMP online database, there are approximately four that engage in some form with death: Josef Novák's *Život v ghettu (Poprava Oběšením)* (Life in the ghetto: execution by hanging), Štěpán Pollak's *Vražda na divadle* (murder in the theatre), Karel Sattler's *Život v ghettu (pohřeb)* (Life in the ghetto: funeral), and an anonymous artist's *Kreslený příběh: vražda, dopadení zločince, poprava* (Cartoon: murder, criminal capture, execution).

[42] Friesová, *Fortress of my Youth,* 2.
[43] "Pavel Weiner: Boy Chronicler of Terezín (Part 2)," *Butterflies in the Ghetto*, 10 November 2015, https://www.butterfliesintheghetto.com/pavel-weiner-boy-chronicler-of-terezin-part-2/; Weiner, *A Boy in Terezín,* 159-61, 166-67. Pavel does not mention it in his diary; he never learned that his father and brother had died in December and January, respectively, following their deportation from Theresienstadt.

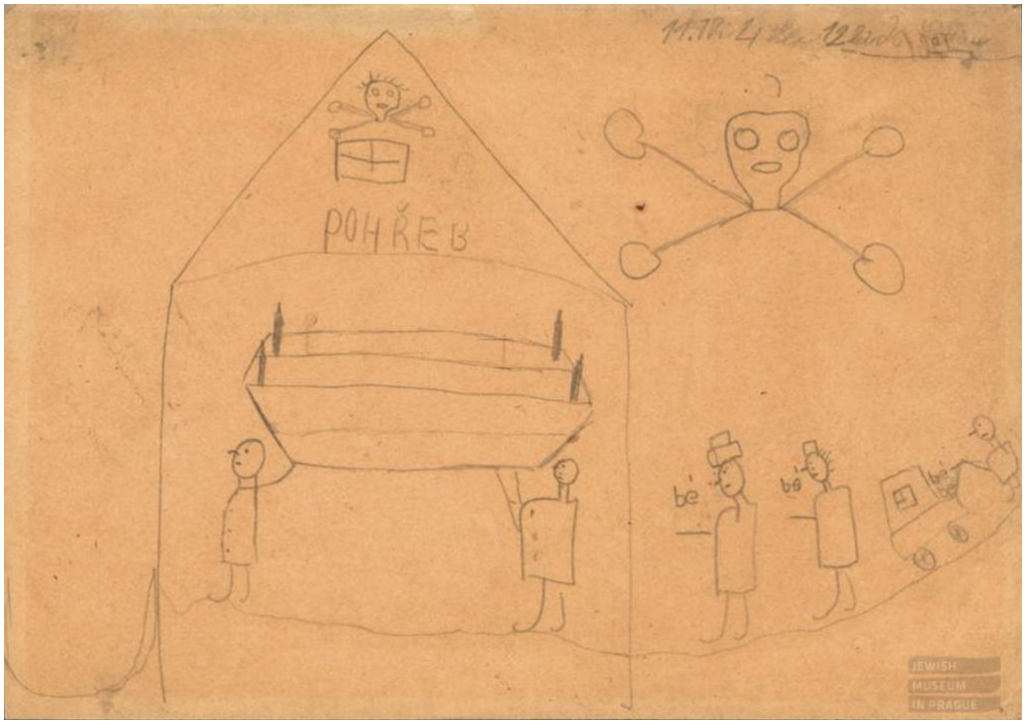

Figure 0.1 *Život v Ghettu (pohřeb)* by Karel Sattler, aged 11-12, Theresienstadt ghetto

Born on 16 November 1932, Karel Sattler was deported from Prague to Theresienstadt on 8 September 1942 with his siblings and mother. On 4 October 1944, he and his family were deported to Auschwitz, where they were all murdered.[44] Sattler's drawings portray an enclosed building with a small window and a skull and crossbones at the top. On the inside are two individuals holding what appears to be a casket. To the right of this building are three individuals in a line, one of whom is pushing a pram. Each individual is proclaiming "*Bé*."[45] The big open

[44] "Regina Sattlerová," *Holocaust.cz: Database of Victims*, accessed 21 February 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/120313-regina-sattlerova/; "Robert Sattler," *Holocaust.cz: Database of Victims*, accessed 21 February 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/120314-robert-sattler/; "Kamil Sattler," *Holocaust.cz: Database of Victims*, accessed 21 February 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/120307-kamil-sattler/.
Sattler's mother, Regina Sattlerová was born 21 July 1911, his brother, Robert Sattler was born 14 June 1934, and his other brother, Kamil Sattler was born 27 February 1936.

[45] "*Bé,*" *Slovník současné češtiny*, accessed 19 March 2025, https://www.nechybujte.cz/slovnik-soucasne-cestiny/be. Translation assisted by PONS Czech-English Translator, accessed 29 March 2025, https://en.pons.com/text-translation/czech-english?q=vyjadřuje+dětský+pláč%2C+nářek.+Bé%2C+já+jsem+se+ztratil. *Bé*, a Czech expression, conveying an individual's cry or lamentation. For example: "*Bé, já jest se ztratil*" ("Bé, I'm lost").

space above features another skull with crossbones. Sattler's drawing suggests that he may have lost someone close to him in the ghetto, as the individuals are crying, however, it is not known.

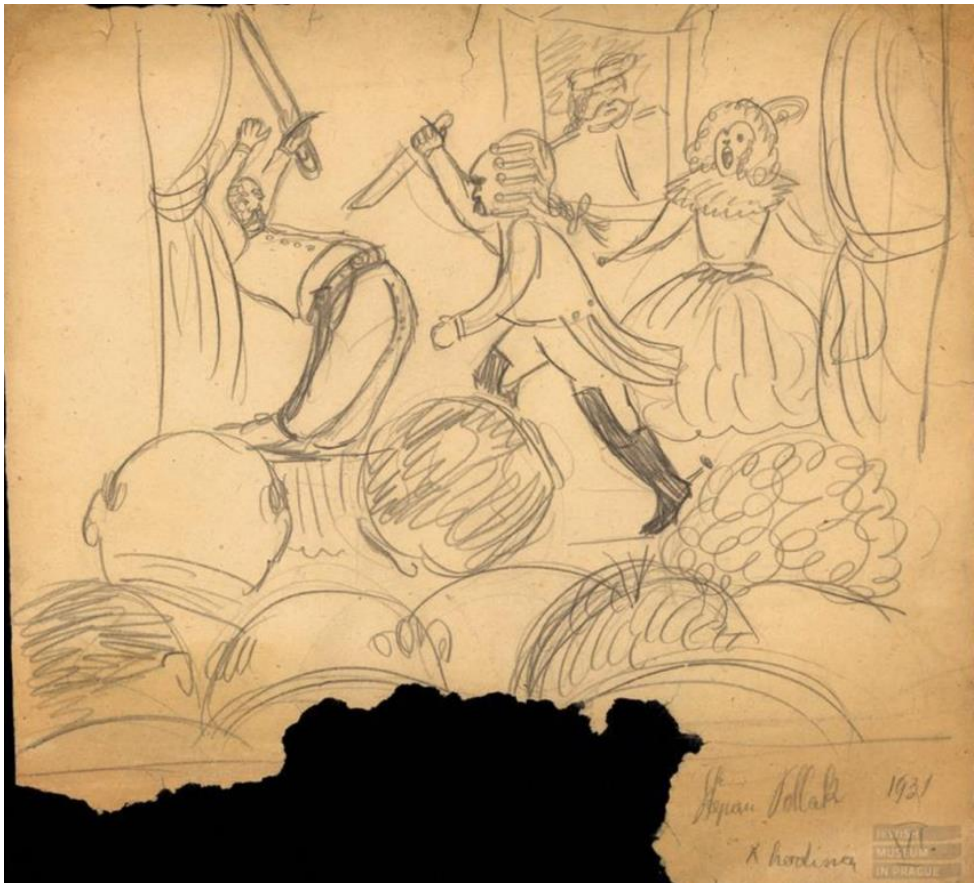

Figure 0.2 *Vražda na divadle* by Štěpán Pollak, aged 12-13, Theresienstadt ghetto

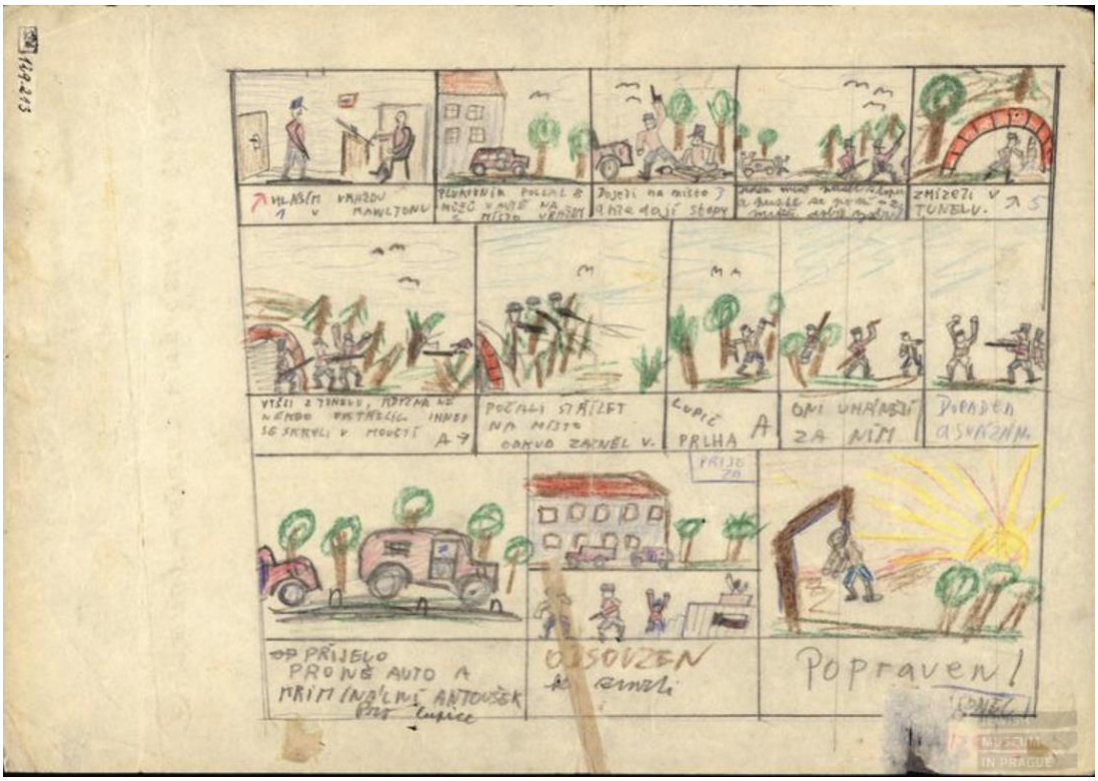

Figure 0.3 *Kreslený příběh: vražda, dopadení zločince, poprava* by Nesignováno, Theresienstadt ghetto

Štěpán Pollak was born on 19 November 1931, and was deported from Prague to Theresienstadt on 4 September 1942, where he lived in the children's home until 18 December 1943, when he was deported to Auschwitz and murdered.[46] Pollak's drawing reflects a more theatrical approach to death. Six individuals can be viewed watching a performance in which a wealthy man is seen stabbing an individual who is leaning backwards. A wealthy woman watches in horror. This drawing may reflect a scene of the cultural life that occurred within the ghetto. The last image, a thirteen-pane cartoon created by an anonymous child, portrays a murder, a criminal capture and an execution. The location of where the events take place in this cartoon is unclear, as there are cars, trees, and a possible green field. There are figures in red

[46] "Štěpán Pollak," *Holocaust.cz: Database of Victims,* accessed 14 March 2025, https://www.holocaust.cz/en/database-of-victims/victim/115262-stepan-pollak/.

tops, blue bottoms, and hats holding guns as they chase an individual through a tunnel before capturing and hanging them.

Figure 0.4 *Život v Ghettu (Poprava Oběsní)* by Josef Novák, aged 12-13, Theresienstadt ghetto

Josef Novák's drawing *"Život v Ghettu (Poprava Oběsní)*" (Life in the Ghetto, Execution by hanging), fusing pre-ghetto and ghetto life, is one of the few surviving artworks created by children depicting death. In the top left corner, we see two homes nestled amongst trees with smoke rising from the chimneys, which can be seen as a representation of a secure and protected lifestyle. Small in size, this portion of the drawing may be a distant memory of Josef's. Situated in the middle of Novák's artistic narrative is a boy leaning against a lamppost, with a dog milling about, a scene representative of normalcy. In the centre of the image, perhaps representative of the abrupt transition from pre-ghetto to ghetto life, is the depiction of the execution of a Jewish prisoner. Approaching the dead man is another person carrying a pole with the Star of David on top and pulling a trolley as he is preparing to collect the individual.

As the image is at the forefront, this is likely a representation of an event that occurred in Theresienstadt. The proportions of this part of the drawing, and the abundance of negative space surrounding it allow the viewer to focus their attention on this specific element. Its placement alludes to the presence of fear and death in Novák's experience in the ghetto, as it overshadows his memories of home. Worth noting is that in his analysis of Novák's drawing, Nicholas Stargardt notes that this scene does not accurately represent a Theresienstadt hanging because the image refers to the role of the hangman who worked in the ghetto.[47] Adler's monograph on the history of Theresienstadt notes that in early 1942, there were sixteen public hangings in the ghetto.[48] Anyone who was caught attempting to escape from the ghetto was executed by public hanging in the Central Market square.[49] As this drawing demonstrates, children did bear witness to these executions.

As Silten quotes, "I see [Death] in many forms: […including] beatings."[50] Upon John Freund's arrival to the ghetto in 1942, at the age of twelve, the first act of violence he witnessed was when an SS man, who was walking by, suddenly kicked and threw an elderly man to the ground.[51] The elderly man had done nothing except being in the wrong place at the wrong time with an SS guard. Sights of people being hit or kicked while marching towards a transport were common. In contrast, Robin Herz revealed that he never saw a beating or an execution.

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[47] Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 224. Yehuda Bacon looked after the Fischer (the Hangman) while both individuals were in Birkenau, and he liked the Hangman because he would share his food with the children from the children's home in Theresienstadt.
[48] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945,* 86-88; H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt*, (2017): 86-88, quoted in Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," 224.
[49] Freund, *Spring's End*, 28; Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 139; Felix Jiri Weinberg, *Boy 30529: a memoir* (London: Verso, 2013), 54.
[50] Silten, *Between two worlds,* 127.
[51] John Freund, "Deportation," *The Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program*, accessed 30 June 2024, https://memoirs.azrielifoundation.org/recollection/#display-asset|34802.

For the young, the omnipresence of death led to its normalisation. In an interview with Thelma Gruenbaum, Špulka (Erich Spitz) recalls that, between 1933 and 1939, individuals would come to his family home and share horror stories of the growing violence and persecution targeting Jews. Deported to Theresienstadt in 1942 with his family, Špulka explains that, at eleven years old, the relocation initially felt "like an adventure," in that despite feeling disoriented and displaced, "you could play with other children."[52] From his perspective, life in the children's home created a sense of autonomy from their parents as "[we] didn't belong to our families [because] the *Heim* was [our home],"[53] allowing children to experience what could only be described as a fragile echo of normal childhood. Their everyday reality was marked by a profound paradox: the routines of school, play, and friendship unfolded in the constant presence of cold, hunger, fear, and death.

Robin recalled that the constant presence of death in the ghettos and camps led to a state where individual deaths ceased to provoke shock, fear, or surprise**.** He describes how in one transport to Auschwitz, "a collaborator came and they beat [a man] up and he died and it didn't mean anything."[54] He goes on to describe seeing people hanged and mountains of dead bodies, experiences that were bereft of meaning; it "didn't mean a thing." "A dead body was a dead body, not a human."[55] It was only after the war that Holocaust survivors began to grasp the full extent of the Nazi's systematic persecution of the Jewish population.

In terms of children's artwork, the absence of death is partly due to the unwavering efforts of the educators at the children's home, including Freddy Hirsch and Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, who sought to protect the children. While images of play, nature, and domestic warmth

[52] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 58.
[53] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 64.
[54] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 139.
[55] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 139.

appear in children's drawings, their diaries also recount how Bar and Bat Mitzvahs would be celebrated in the ghetto, what they hoped to achieve after the war, and which team would win the big football match.[56] To play, to create, and to find joy did not mean being oblivious to the suffering; rather, these acts existed alongside it. Still human, they were capable of feeling and remembering the small, beautiful moments. Yet they continued to suffer from hunger and cold, and they feared both the unknown and the violence around them.

Despite falling victim to the cruelty and violence of the world around them, children were cognizant that the shelter and protection of the children's homes allowed them to experience a sort of normalcy. Evident in their drawings are frozen moments of joy, play, nature, and domestic warmth, testaments of their ability to reclaim their lost world, preserving them against the uncertain future. The tiny details revealed the resilience of children amidst their pain and suffering, suggesting that they were neither naïve nor oblivious to the suffering around them. The eyes of Theresienstadt's children bore witness to Death's loyalty to the adults of Theresienstadt, consistently by their side embracing them. Death was immediate, unpredictable, and ever-present, yet it was also slow, unfolding through starvation and illness. For some of these children, the most painful part of their experience in the ghetto was having to see their parents in such a weakened and despondent state.[57] They observed that the adults were the ones who did not get enough to eat and slowly starved to death; the ones who endured inhumane living quarters; and the ones who realised that if the war did not end soon, the Nazis would succeed in their quest to resolve the 'Jewish Problem.'

Following the Białystok ghetto uprising in August 1943, a transport of 1,260 children arrived in Theresienstadt. Upon their arrival, the SS isolated the transportees from everyone else

[56] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 74, 113; Silten, *Between two worlds*, 120.
[57] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 113-14.

living in the ghetto to quarantine them from disease. However, it was suspected that it was also to ensure the children did not share outside information with those living in the ghetto.[58] Shortly after their arrival, the same transport continued to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In April 1945, prisoners who had once lived in Theresienstadt began returning from the East after the evacuation of other concentration camps and the closure of roads leading to Auschwitz. The arrival of returning transportees revealed to the ghetto the haunting truth of what happened to those who had been deported from their midst. As Pavel Weiner recounts:

> About 4 o'clock, a long cattle train steams in. From the small barred windows look [out] yellow and skinny faces. All of them have prisoner garb. […] They are from various *Lager*, but primarily from Buchenwald. […] They look awful – unshaven, dirty, and thin. My insides are revolting. What injustice! Why all this suffering? Why? What is happening with my father and my brother? Now, my fear is only intensified.[59]

Curiosity struck young Pavel as well as others living in the ghetto. Having worried intensely about his father and brother, unaware that both had perished shortly after leaving Theresienstadt, Pavel, alongside many others, began to comprehend how endangered his life was. The return of transports was a moment where children and youth were finally exposed to what the educators had tried to protect them from for so long, and the children were now aware of the injustices being done to Jewish people:

> I run in the direction of the transport. Just as we arrive, the sick are being unloaded: individually, on stretchers, or *en masse* in one cart. Several of the women who arrived had been to Theresienstadt before. It [was] a sight I have never seen before and never want to see again. They look like dead bodies.[60]

The impact of the Nazis' actions against the Jews began to affect even those who had never left the ghetto. People returning to the ghetto were living proof of the Nazi regime's genocidal intentions. Survivors told others about the realities of life in the concentration camps,

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[58] Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945,* 508; Aharony, "Fredy Hirsch," 8.
[59] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim,* 51; Weiner, *A boy in Terezín*, 225. *Lager* (camp).
[60] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 51.

and the gas chambers, leaving the residents of Theresienstadt, including Pavel, in disbelief: "it [was] supposed to be the twentieth century, [why] are innocent children […] being gassed and killed."[61] Another transport brought back children to Theresienstadt who were struck with fear when they were asked to take a shower, which for them was a euphemism for the gas chambers. Once nursed back to health in Theresienstadt, the children from this transport were sent back East, where they perished.[62] Witnessing the return of these transportees was the first time that children of Theresienstadt truly understood the meaning of death and began to grasp the forms it could take, even in the youngest of humans. Up until this moment, children had become habituated to the sights of deceased bodies lying in the streets, particularly the elderly. However, for the children and youth of Theresienstadt, the arrival of this specific transport, many of whom were the same age, was a shock.

Thomas Geve (né Stefan Cohn) was born in 1929 in Stettin, Poland, which belonged to the Weimar Republic at the time. When he was just thirteen years old, in 1944, the Nazis came to power and began implementing decrees which placed limitations on the daily lives of Jews. Thus, Stefan, like many other children, only knew a childhood circumscribed by decrees and marked by violent surveillance. In 1939, he and his mother, Bertha, moved to Berlin to live with his grandparents. Experiencing antisemitism and threats of deportation, Thomas quickly learned that "there was to be no equality [and that their] only weapon was pride."[63] He and his mother were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on transport no. 39 on 29 June 1943.[64] Geve cheated death. As a thirteen-year-old of solid height and build, he was assigned to work in the camp. His

[61] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 52.
[62] Gruenbaum, *Nešarim*, 53.
[63] Thomas Geve and Charles Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021), 23.
[64] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz,* 60; "Bio," *Thomas Geve*, accessed 15 July 2024, http://www.thomasgeve.com/bio.html.

mother, Berta Cohn (b. 1906), was murdered in Auschwitz after their arrival.[65] On 18 March 1943, Hulda Goetze, Geve's maternal grandmother, aged 69, was also deported to Auschwitz with other elderly Jews, where she later died of hunger or exposure to disease. She was cremated on 19 June 1944.[66]

After eighteen months in Auschwitz, on 18 January 1945, as Soviet troops were approaching, Thomas was evacuated from the camp and took part in the Death March to the west. Lasting approximately fifty hours, the march brought them to Loslau, Poland, just over sixty kilometres west of Auschwitz. Prisoners were permitted only four hours of rest, and their only source of food was snow. Once at Loslau, the surviving prisoners were loaded onto cattle cars and transported to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Shortly thereafter, Thomas was transported again, this time to Buchenwald concentration camp. Buchenwald was liberated on 11 April 1945, but he and many others chose to remain. It was during this time that Thomas created a series of eighty drawings describing life within a concentration camp that would become a visual testament to the horrors and realities of the Holocaust. It is worth noting that he had never actually seen the inside of a gas chamber, but felt the importance of depicting it to complete his chronicle of the camps.[67] In June 1945, Thomas boarded a train with other youths to Switzerland, where he lived in a Red Cross home for teenage boys called *Zug* (train)[68] and was later reunited with his father in England on 2 November 1945. As of 2024, Thomas Geve lives in the central

[65] Regina Sattlerová, "Page of Testimony for Herbert Fischl," submitted to *Yad Vashem* in 1956, *Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names,* accessed 10 April 2025, https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/names/11736649.
[66] "Bio," *Thomas Geve*, accessed 15 July 2024, http://www.thomasgeve.com/bio.html; "Hulda Goetze," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed 15 July 2024, https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=1474140.
[67] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 360.
[68] "Bio," *Thomas Geve*, accessed 15 July 2024, http://www.thomasgeve.com/bio.html.

region of Israel and continues to educate the world on the Holocaust by speaking to the media and giving lectures at schools and Yad Vashem.[69]

Following the liberation of Buchenwald, Geve felt the importance of documenting the truth of what he and millions of others had witnessed and lived through**.** Had he not begun this project about a world which his father had not experienced, and in which his mother had perished, who would believe the extent of Hitler's and the Nazis' evil?[70] It was not just about the day-to-day life, transports or death, it was also about their struggle and perseverance for survival. Geve collected "a stack of postcard-sized swastika-imprinted questionnaires of the Nazi Party and seven short, coloured pencils, I embarked on sketching camp life."[71] While living in Auschwitz, he began creating black-and-white sketches of camp life from small pieces of charcoal but was forced to leave them behind. However, these images were ingrained in his mind, making them easy to recreate. Over several weeks, Thomas created his new sketches, outlined in pencil and filled them in with watercolours that he had received from an American soldier. For Thomas:

> Depicting the dark, sad, colourless life in the camps in all the seven colours of the rainbow made my heart rejoice and spurred me on. Those creations, in honour and memory of my friends and comrades, became another precious victory.[72]

[69] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz*, 291-92.; "Bio," Thomas Geve, accessed 15 July 2024, http://www.thomasgeve.com/bio.html.
[70] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 358.
[71] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz*, 280.
[72] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz*, 281.

Figure 0.5 *Gefahren und Schrecken im KL (Auschwitz)* by Thomas Geve, aged 16

One of Geve's drawings, titled *Gefahren und Schrecken im KL (Auschwitz)*, *(Dangers and horrors in the KL Auschwitz)*,"[73] depicts four locations that presumably represent death: *Krematorium, Krankheit Seuche, Bock* and *Bunker*. These four panels suggest that the dangers of death were everywhere one turned. The first panel on the left, titled *Krematorium* (crematorium), is painted dark blue and features a brown building with three windows and a plume of smoke rising from the chimney. The dark blue colour alludes to the power that the crematorium held over one's life, as it was a literal representation of death.

The second panel features a 'beaming' skull surrounded by light green at the top of the image, and in the centre, a single person lying in a bed. Entitled, *Krankheit Seuche*

[73] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz*, 130. "*KL*" references *Konzentrationslager* (concentration camp).

(disease/plague), this image represents disease and illness. Both Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau had infirmaries, nurses and doctors, but lacked proper medical equipment to heal patients. Due to ravaging illness and diseases, the infirmaries served more so the purpose as a waiting room for the crematoria. The image of the skull 'beaming' down on the bedridden individual suggests that this moment of healing was overshadowed by a forthcoming death.

The third panel, titled *Bock*,[74] is entirely yellow, except for a small white space that depicts a prisoner bent over a table and an SS guard holding a stick, presumably prepared to beat the prisoner. While yellow is often associated with positivity, it can also evoke deceit, betrayal, and the experience of falling victim to a false or misleading reality. In this context, the use of yellow may serve to contrast the supposed "model ghetto" image of Theresienstadt with the underlying brutality it masked.

Prison guards resorted to vicious violence on a daily basis. Beatings occurred when a Jew attempted to escape, fainted during roll call, or ran afoul of the SS guards.[75] Although children were not typically subjected to this kind of violence, they often reenacted what they had witnessed through games. These included playing "Block Elder," "Roll Call," and other scenes in which they mimicked punishments such as "hitting" a "prisoner" for misbehaving.[76]

The fourth and final panel, titled *Bunker* (Bunker), is painted entirely brown with a small open white square in which a prisoner is seated on a stool. The significance of brown as a colour of choice is two-fold: it can represent sadness, loneliness and isolation, much of what is depicted in this drawing, but can also be representative of strength and resilience. Life within camps and

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[74] "The Language of the Camps," *The Forgotten Camps*, accessed 2 February 2025, https://www.jewishgen.org/forgottencamps/general/languageeng.html. There exists no direct translation of this term. However, in this context, *Bock* is likely a shortened version of *Sündenbock* (scapegoat). The *lingua franca* created by camp prisoners during the Holocaust served both to describe the specific realities of camp life and to communicate across language barriers. The term *Bock* could also mean 'scaffold' in English.
[75] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War,* 214.
[76] Stargardt, *Witnesses of War*, 214.

ghettos was not only an unprecedented experience that permitted the close bonding of individuals, but it was also a very isolating experience as one was ripped apart from one's family and stripped of everything. Nonetheless, despite experiencing brutality, Jews fought to survive. For many, even those who did not survive, expression through art and writing was their way of testifying to this historical moment of Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews. It was a way in which they shared moments of sadness, fear and horror, as well as moments of friendship, hope, unity and victories. Emotive expressions through artwork, such as drawings made by the children of Theresienstadt, permitted prisoners to persevere and hold onto every ounce of humanity and kindness within themselves.

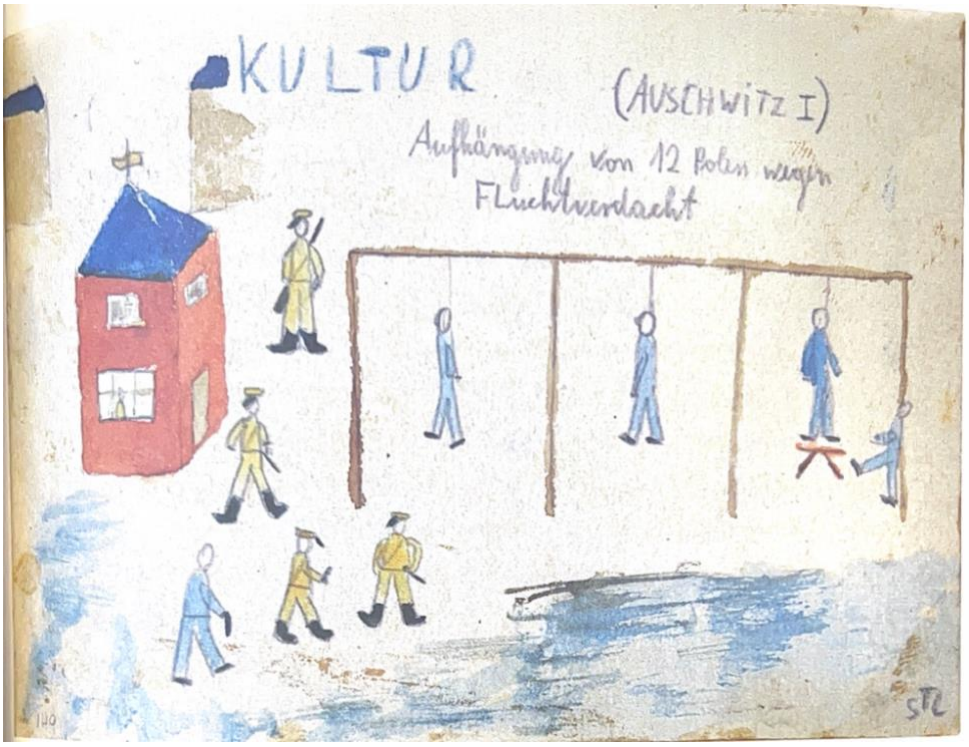

Figure 0.6 *Kultur* by Thomas Geve, aged 16

Geve recreated a drawing depicting public hangings and torture in Auschwitz, a sight which quickly became a habitual one for prisoners of Auschwitz. Titled *Kultur* (Civilisation), the

focal point of this image is three Jews being hanged, one of whom has a stool under their feet. There is another prisoner who appears to be pushing the stool out from that prisoner. To the left, there are four SS guards, and an additional Jewish prisoner. An unidentified brown two-story building with a blue roof and a person in the window can be seen on the far left. The person in the window suggests that the hanging was available to the public's eyes.

At the top of the image, Geve has written: *Kultur. (Auschwitz I) Aufhängung von 12 Polen wegen Fluchtverdacht* (The hanging of twelve Polish people suspected of trying to escape).[77] In the collection of children's art from Theresienstadt, I have only come across one image depicting death by hanging, and that is Josef Novák's *Life in the Ghetto (execution by hanging)* (Figure 3.1), which was analysed earlier in this chapter. The focal point in both images is the hanging, however, they differ in representing the witnesses of the execution. In Geve's drawing, we see four guards and two additional prisoners who may or may not be waiting their turn. As these hangings were public, both children and adults were able to see that the SS could determine the fate of prisoners for any reason they saw fit. In Theresienstadt, as suggested by Novák's drawing, hangings might have taken place in a more discrete location, such as a yard that was removed from the public eye, to conceal the true intentions of the Nazi regime.[78]

By contrast, many of the surviving children's drawings from Theresienstadt examined in this project do not portray specific scenes related to the crematoria, death and other beatings. Instead, a child might depict death through symbolic elements such as skulls, wilting flowers, clocks, or butterflies, which reflect a personal interpretation of the theme. It was in young people's written accounts, including their diaries or memoirs, that we encounter vivid depictions

[77] Geve and Inglefield, *The Boy Who Drew Auschwitz*, 191.
[78] "The Last Execution in Terezín," *Newsletter: Educational and information bulletin of the Terezín Memorial*, accessed 3 May 2024, https://newsletter.pamatnik-terezin.cz/the-last-execution-in-terezin/?lang=en.

of death in the ghetto. Drawings created by child artists depicting transports, such as those examined in chapter 2, reflect a personalised history that is grounded in first-hand experience, such as their own or that of a close family member. Furthermore, their diaries and memoirs help prevent the dehumanisation of these young people by highlighting the specificity of lived experience. For example, these texts convey the emotional, relational and psychological realities they endured. Often written in the first-person narrative, the intimate voice of the "I" invites readers to engage with the writer's fears, hopes, and daily life. In turn, this fosters empathy and resists the attempt to reduce individuals to anonymous victims. By documenting these experiences, during the Holocaust, or shortly thereafter, diaries and memoirs bear witness to lived realities. They challenge any attempt at denial or historical erasure, thus legitimising the suffering and quest for survival of individuals.

Conclusion

At the heart of this thesis lies a simple question: how did children make sense of the unimaginable? I set out to explore how the themes of Cold, Hunger, Fear, and Death are reflected in the drawings created by young people in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. These images, drawn in the sheltered environment of the children's homes, open a window into the world of children who were forced to confront the collapse of ordinary life. Through visual motifs, symbolism and thematic recurrence, this project has demonstrated that children's drawings can serve as testimony, resistance, and memory. The drawings speak when words failed the young authors.

Children's artistic expressions during the Holocaust offer more than emotional resonance; they provide crucial historical insight. By analysing these drawings, the harshness of life in the ghetto becomes clear, as do the children's inner lives, including their coping mechanisms, memories, and hopes. Thus far, much of Holocaust historiography has focused on adult narratives; by contrast, this work has sought to emphasize that children were not passive witnesses. These children, some as young as six years old, interpreted, responded to, and recorded their world in ways that have largely been overlooked in scholarship and require further study.

Through the pedagogical efforts of artists and teachers such as Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the relative refuge provided by the children's homes, art became a force of resistance. This resistance was not necessarily overt or political, rather it was quiet, deeply personal, and profoundly human. To draw, to remember, and to imagine was, in itself, an act of defiance against a system determined to erase the existence of those it deemed undesirable. The simple act of signing one's names to a drawing allowed the children to reclaim a sense of self and assert their presence, their feelings, and their dreams.

The 4,500 surviving drawings in the Jewish Museum in Prague's online collection are not merely expressions of creativity. They are historical testimonies. Through a symbolic language, these drawings reveal how young people interpreted, experienced, and endured the Holocaust. Gabriele Silten's autobiography, *Between Two Worlds: An Autobiography of a Child Survivor of the Holocaust*, provided a powerful insight into the life of a child in the children's home. I was particularly struck by the harrowing description of her four companions in the ghetto: Cold, Hunger, Fear, and Death. The vividness of her writing made these abstract concepts feel almost like tangible beings. It was a deliberate decision to highlight the four companions and draw attention to how children represented the hardest aspects of life in the ghetto. These themes were not abstract concepts for them, rather they were daily realities. The absence of smoke from chimneys and the emphasis on clothing, isolation, or food queues, for instance, indicate more than material deprivation. They suggest physical and emotional responses to loss, uncertainty, and fear. In choosing a thematic approach for my thesis, I was able to turn to children's drawings not simply as representations of the external world, but as expressions of lived experience, shaped by memory, imagination, and trauma.

Among the theoretical frameworks that supported this research, Nicholas Stargardt's work has provided invaluable guidance. For example, he reminds us that children's drawings are not merely depictions of external events, but also evocative portrayals of their internal lives. His emphasis on viewing children as active participants in history, who are capable of articulating their experiences through art and writing, allows scholars to consider questions such as how do young people experience dehumanization? What can their small voices and drawings tell us that adult testimonies might not?

Through research, it has also become clear that as scholars we have an ethical responsibility when working with childhood narratives from the Holocaust. Their experiences demand to be seen as they were – not softened or idealized – for they are genuine historical testimonies. When given the opportunity to engage with their art, diaries, and memoirs, it is important to recognize not only their suffering but also the evidence of their creativity, intelligence, perseverance, and agency.

That said, certain limitations inevitably shaped the scope of this research. Many drawings remain undigitized or inaccessible in archives, and translations from Czech or German into English or French can result in nuanced alterations of meaning. Furthermore, the interpretation of visual material demanded a balance between objective analysis and personal interpretation, while also requiring a careful distinction between factual and subjective readings. Although each drawing was interpreted carefully and thoughtfully with attention to its context, it is important to recognize that some degree of speculation was involved.

Despite these limitations, this research underscores the importance of continuing to examine children's testimonies within Holocaust studies. Their voices, long marginalized, provide essential insight into the experience of genocide. Where scholars often rely on narrative coherence, children's testimonies embrace fragmentation, metaphor, and ambiguity. Rather than undermining the reliability of the testimony, these qualities reflect the disorienting nature of trauma itself.

It is my hope that this thesis contributes to the broader effort to include children's voices in historical narratives. Whether visual, written, or oral, their testimonies help to fill gaps in our collective understanding of the Holocaust. By analysing these works as both art and narrative, we

can begin to appreciate their complexity as records of lived experiences, as emotional expression, and most importantly, as acts of survival.

While reflecting on this project, I am moved by the silent power of these drawings. These drawings remind us not only of what was lost, but also of what endured, such as their imagination, their identity, and their will to live**.** Frequently dismissed as unreliable witnesses, children have been judged as too young, uninformed, and unable to clearly describe events. Yet their age does not make their testimonies any less valuable. On the contrary, they offer a visceral truth. The lens through which a child experiences historical trauma is not the same of an adult, and that is what makes their perspective so valuable.

Through a piece of paper and a pencil, we find evidence of the immense strength and perseverance of children who continued to create even as the world around them fell apart. As scholars, educators, and citizens, we must commit to preserving these stories and making space for them in our public memory. Not only do we owe these children remembrance, but also recognition. For their resilience, though quiet, creative and deeply courageous, continues to teach us how humanity can survive even in its most fragile forms. As the French proverb reminds us, « *la vérité sort de la bouche des enfants* » — and in Theresienstadt, that truth emerged not only in words, but in images

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