

Institution: University of York		
Unit of Assessment: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies (B - Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media)		
Title of case study: Performing the Jewish Archive: Preserving and breathing new life into theatre from the Holocaust for artists, audiences and educators		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Lisa Peschel	Senior Lecturer	Sep 2011 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Lisa Peschel's research on theatrical performance in the Terezín/Theresienstadt Ghetto during World War II has played a central role in the Performing the Jewish Archive (PtJA) project. Within the framework of PtJA, Peschel has preserved Jewish cultural heritage by locating previously lost scripts written by Czech- and Austrian-Jewish prisoners and breathing new life into them through adaptation and performance. Her research has influenced practitioners (artists and arts administrators) by exposing them to hitherto unknown plays and inspiring unconventional stagings that take into account their sometimes fragmentary and incomplete status. Peschel's productions have challenged common preconceptions about art under oppression for hundreds of spectators at six international festivals on four continents: the performances revealed the Terezín artists' role as active agents in their own survival, not as passive victims of the Nazis. Peschel's research has also influenced teaching practice through bespoke courses in the Czech Republic and in the UK, where she introduced drama as a new area of pedagogical practice in the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) continuing professional development programmes.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The main focus of the case study is Lisa Peschel's research on theatrical performance in the Terezín/Theresienstadt Ghetto, which featured as a major strand in PtJA, a 40-month, GBP1,800,000 project funded by the AHRC (Nov 2014-March 2018). This international project was led by PI Dr Stephen Muir at the University of Leeds and five CIs from the Universities of York, Leeds, Wisconsin in the US, and Sydney in Australia. The project explored little-known archives of Jewish music and theatre, recovered and performed lost works, and created an online archive of resources and research data for public dissemination and future researchers.</p> <p>As CI, Peschel developed performances based on the unknown scripts from the ghetto that she had previously recovered (including those described below, <i>Comedy about a Trap</i> and <i>Prinz Bettliegend</i>), survivor testimony she had gathered, and archival documents about the history and cultural life of the ghetto. She also developed research-based performances with co-investigators. For example, she wrote the script for <i>Jewish Cabaret from Terezín to Helsinki</i>, which wove together sketches and songs from the Terezín cabaret <i>Laugh with Us</i> and a Finnish-Jewish wartime cabaret, discovered by PtJA postdoctoral researcher Dr Simo Muir, with a historical narrative illuminating the context of both.</p>		
<p>Rediscovering Lost Scripts, Reinterpreting Their Context and Meaning</p> <p>Since coming to York, Peschel has researched and published an English-language anthology of scripts written by prisoners in the ghetto that she discovered during archival searches and interviews with survivors [3.1]. An introduction to each script presents her research on the writers and performers, and the production history of that script in the ghetto. Each script is also extensively footnoted to explain references to pre-war and wartime events and personalities. The testimony and the scripts themselves most crucially support Peschel's re-evaluation of theatre in Terezín, which counters the dominant perception of the function of culture in ghettos. Theatre-makers, rather than focusing on explicit opposition to the Nazis through satire and other forms of critique, engaged with their own community and staged narratives about their own experiences, most often by converting the harrowing events of daily life in the ghetto into comedy. Theatre functioned primarily as a form of self-expression intended to bolster their own (limited) agency,</p>		

both by introducing features of normal pre-war life into the hostile environment of the ghetto and by staging performances that humorously represented the prisoners as the masters of their own fate [3.2]. Peschel has continued to research the social effects of theatre in the ghetto, publishing scholarly articles that examine the role of humour in the plays [3.2], the survivors' own claims regarding the role of theatre [3.3], and the ways that theatrical performance may have countered potentially traumatising experience for the writers, performers and spectators [3.4].

Developing 'Co-Textual' Productions

Peschel has created several practice-as-research productions based on the scripts she recovered, as a major element of PtJA, working with amateur and professional performers and university students in the US, the UK, the Czech Republic, Australia and South Africa. By adapting and staging the scripts as a research process, she and her collaborators learned not only how to make these scripts meaningful for present-day audiences, but also more about the possible emotional and social effects of performance in the ghetto itself. Peschel took a specific approach to adapting these sometimes fragmentary and incomplete texts for performance, known as 'co-textual performance' [3.5]: texts (including the scripts, survivor testimony and archival documents), historical information about the ghetto, and the performers' present-day relationship to the script were interwoven and performed. During a development process, the performers/creators engage intensively with the history of the ghetto and consider their own relationship to that history, articulating a connection between present and past. The co-textual production that grows out of this process is tailored to the potential interests of its specific present-day audience, while also remaining true to the history of the ghetto. For example, in South Africa, the multi-racial cast of *Prinz Bettliiegend* emphasised aspects of the plot that enabled them to perform their relationships to present-day discrimination as well. In other productions, such as *Harlequin in the Ghetto* (an adaptation of *Comedy about a Trap*) at the University of York, the performers engaged with the original author's critique of capitalism by creating and integrating scenes about their own experiences of economic exploitation into the performance [3.6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Peschel, L., *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape: Cabarets and Plays from the Terezín/Theresienstadt Ghetto*, Calcutta: Seagull Press, pp. 420, 2014. A volume in the series 'In Performance', edited by Carol Martin of NYU and distributed through the University of Chicago press.

3.2 Peschel, L., 'Laughter in the Ghetto: Cabarets from a Concentration Camp', in Dalinger, B. and Zangl, V. (eds.), *Theater unter NS-Herrschaft: Theatre under Pressure*, pp. 271-283. Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2018. This peer-reviewed volume presented selected papers from the international conference 'Theatre under the NS regime: Concepts, Practice, Correlations' held in Vienna in October 2014. *+

3.3 Peschel, L., 'The Cultural Life of the Terezín Ghetto in 1960s Survivor Testimony: Theatre, Trauma and Resilience', in Duggan, P. and Peschel, L. (eds.), *Performing (for) Survival: Theatre, Crisis, Extremity*, London: Palgrave, pp. 59-77, 2016. +

3.4 Peschel, L., 'Performing Continuity, Performing Belonging: Three Cabarets from the Terezín Ghetto', in Dean, D. (ed.), *A Companion to Public History*, pp 377-390. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018. +

3.5 Peschel, L. and Sikes, A., 'Pedagogy, Performativity and "Never Again": Staging Plays from the Terezín Ghetto. *Holocaust Studies* (special issue: Performative Holocaust Memory: Interactivity and Participation in Contemporary Memorialization of the Holocaust). Published online 4 March 2019, DOI. *^

3.6 Peschel, L., Sikes, A., et al., Video recording of the performance-as-research project, *Harlequin in the Ghetto*, performed 2 June 2016 at the University of York, <https://vimeo.com/180875566>. The reconstruction of the script from Terezín, *Comedy about a Trap*, begins at 05:00, co-textual adaptation *Harlequin in the Ghetto* begins at 47:50. ^

*=peer reviewed, +=returned to REF2021, ^=produced with peer-reviewed funding

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Peschel's work with the plays of Terezín has provided a vigorous and imaginative model of how to give a neglected archive renewed, sustainable and, indeed, self-renewing life in the public sphere. The re-activation, research-informed production and pedagogical value of these

fascinating plays illustrate how an archive can be invested with refreshed cultural agency in ways that can benefit many constituencies. The impact of Peschel's work can be found in the following four categories.

Preserving and breathing new life into Jewish cultural heritage

By recovering, translating, annotating and publishing the scripts from Terezín [3.1], Peschel had already preserved vital aspects of the ghetto's cultural heritage and the important insights the scripts reveal regarding the creative agency of people living under oppression. During its 40-month lifespan, PtJA organised six project-specific festivals in five countries: in the US in 2015 and 2016, the UK and the Czech Republic in 2016, and Australia and South Africa in 2017. The festivals carried the programmatic title 'Out of the Shadows' to indicate the work of excavation and exhibition entailed by the research project. Peschel was on the organising committee for all the festivals, was co-producer of two, co-created productions for all [3.5 and 3.6], and created additional performances for events such as Holocaust Memorial Day and York's annual Festival of Ideas, showing audiences the plays as lively, engaging and surprising performances. Thus these stunning scripts that might never have seen the light of day were preserved on the page and brought back to life on the stage.

The reach of the festivals was great in that they were attended by 7,367 people in total, with 1,697 attending the productions created or co-created by Peschel - a significant number, especially considering that many of the performances were intentionally staged in small and intimate venues [5.1a]. In addition, Peschel gained AHRC Follow-On funding for 'Gido's Coming Home!', a six-month series of commemorative, pedagogical and artistic events in the Czech Republic, marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of Terezín composer Gideon Klein (August 2018-January 2019). Public-facing musical events and theatrical performances based on Peschel's research [3.1] reached almost 1,000 spectators - a remarkable number, considering the goal of reaching spectators in small venues and provincial cities such as Brno, Přeřov and Holešov as well as in Prague [5.1a].

For all these spectators, Peschel's development of co-textual performances has preserved not only the scripts, but also their context. By interweaving the sometimes fragmentary scripts with material from the history of the ghetto and the biographies of the writers and performers, Peschel has richly augmented the meaning of these works for present-day audiences.

In addition to being presented to live audiences, PtJA festival performances have been preserved on video and are available through a public-facing website created for the PtJA project: <https://jewishmusicandtheatre.org/>. According to the website's Google Analytics, from December 2017 to December 2020, the site has had over 8,000 individual visitors from over 105 countries and territories [5.1b].

Engaging arts organisations and practitioners with Terezín theatre

When organising the festivals, Peschel worked with local event planners and arts administrators, and during the creation of the co-textual performances, she collaborated with local directors, actors and designers. In the US, UK and South African performances, the actors were mainly undergraduate students. In Australia she worked with professional performers and, in the Czech Republic, with a local klezmer ensemble, The Flying Rabbi.

Exposing programming managers and artists to the Terezín plays has expanded their repertoires. For the professional events manager who was hired to manage the PtJA festival in the Czech Republic, the festival opened up a whole new area of repertoire and collaborators. She notes that 'colleagues and institutions now seek me out with offers to organize new projects with Jewish themes' and that she can now 'use my experience and knowledge of Jewish history and culture for the preparation of new projects' [5.2]. Other festival managers reported similar experiences. For example, the Coordinator of the PtJA Cape Festival, a South Africa-based cellist and Director of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival, wrote: 'my work as an artistic and programme director has changed because of the project. I now draw on the archive as a source for performance pieces at those festivals I help organise' [5.3].

Regarding influence on artists, one group affected was a young klezmer band, The Flying Rabbi, booked to perform *Jewish Cabaret from Terezín to Helsinki* for the Czech 'Out of the Shadows' festival. The performance not only introduced them to the Terezín prisoners' use of humour to cope with their captivity, they also engaged for the first time in spoken-word and theatrical performance, narrating the history of the ghetto and performing sketches in addition to the songs. As the ensemble leader wrote, the group added material from Peschel's cabaret to their permanent repertoire and, in 2020, were asked 'to revive [the show] for the Ha-Makom festival of Jewish culture in Holešov, and we hope to have an opportunity to perform it again at [...] further festivals in 2021' [5.4].

Other performers who acknowledge the lasting impact of the project on their development as artists include those who were undergraduate students at the time of the festivals. For example, one performer who was a member of the multi-racial cast of *Prinz Bettliegend* in South Africa has now completed his drama studies and is pursuing a career as a performer and songwriter. He was recently selected to participate in a highly competitive mentorship program at the Jakes Gerwel Institute, in the lyrics workshop run by a well known Afrikaans musician. He recalls the techniques the cast used to learn 'the songs that were so quick paced and we had to be able to get in and then quickly out and get it perfectly sounding [...] And I sort of just started using all of those techniques in my songwriting and in general, other methods of learning my lines and everything, so a lot of that established the different work methods that I've developed for myself' [5.5].

Changing spectators' views on culture during the Holocaust

Performances based on the Terezín scripts were staged at each of the six PtJA festivals and several of the *Gido's coming home!* events. For the US and UK festivals, Peschel and her colleague Alan Sikes developed two performances that were both titled *Harlequin in the Ghetto* and were based on the same fragmentary script written in the ghetto, *Comedy about a Trap*, yet explored the very different interests of the undergraduate students they worked with at Louisiana State University and the University of York [3.5]. Audiences had their expectations challenged in ways that are central to Peschel's research. In post-show questionnaires, this often manifested itself as surprise at the humour and its functions in the ghetto as well as at the politicised agency present in the work. For example, after the performances of *Harlequin in the Ghetto* in York in June 2016, an audience member wrote in a post-show questionnaire, 'I was surprised at how moved I was by the first (co-textual) performance and how hilarious I found the second (textual) show. The contrast between the two was very effective in terms of understanding the history of the piece.' Others had not expected the use of comedy or such overt political commentary: 'Surprised at the amount of humour in such scenarios'; 'Surprised how political the ideas were that were allowed' [5.6].

In 2020, impact on a Czech audience was generated by the Flying Rabbi's performance at the Ha-Makom festival in Holešov. As a reporter for the city website wrote, 'the band from Prostějov was able to create such an unprecedented atmosphere that we often found ourselves in a situation where the smile on our lips was driven away by tears in our eyes. So many emotions arose from the performance that one was forced to process. And these are the moments that lead to deep reflection' [5.7].

A follow-up study was conducted in 2020 with audience members who attended the 2015 festival in the US to investigate long-term impact of the performance through changes in attitude about the prisoners' level of agency in the ghetto. One respondent noted 'surprise at how humor was presented'; another remembered the 'strength in the people of Terezín'. One clearly connected the production to the experience of the present, imagining what it was like to be an immigrant in the US under the Trump administration. After five years, respondents also noted that they had read more about theatre and the Holocaust, watched another performance of theatre produced in ghettos, and recommended these productions to others [5.8].

Enhancing Holocaust pedagogy through drama

Peschel's research has contributed to the practice of the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) by introducing drama to their continuing professional development (CPD) courses for teachers. As the HET's Education Officer notes, Peschel's work 'has been very important in expanding HET's CPD programme to include drama', a completely new area for the HET [5.9]. Peschel is now a regular contributor to these CPD courses (holding sessions in September 2016, February 2017, February 2019 and February 2020), thus far reaching 106 teachers [5.9] with a presentation based on *Harlequin in the Ghetto* about the use of drama in Holocaust education. The CPD has increased teachers' knowledge of this cultural heritage and its potential uses in the classroom. In a pre-event survey of 37 participants at the 2020 session, 89% reported their knowledge of theatre in the Holocaust as poor or very poor. After the session, 86% reported their knowledge as average or good. The session also inspired further action: just under 70% of the teachers reported they would discuss the workshop's themes further with colleagues and just under 90% were inspired to discover more about the topic. Ten of the respondents reported that they would change their teaching practice in the light of the session with one noting: 'Will be passing on the information to my drama department, whilst also establishing ways to expose our pupils to ghetto theatre work. An insightful work with Jewish agency at the heart' [5.10]. As the HET Education Officer puts it: 'Lisa's workshops [...] provide [teachers] with a rich array of scripts, and real-world examples of how to explore them with students in ways that conform with Holocaust pedagogy best practice' [5.9].

As part of the '*Gido's coming home!*' project, Peschel held a training class (September 2019) for 32 American Fulbright teachers on using the Terezín scripts for English-language pedagogy in the Czech Republic, and a day-long intensive workshop for 15 Czech and Slovak teachers on creating Terezín-based co-textual performances for Holocaust pedagogy (December 2019). Here, similar positive figures emerged from a survey of the latter group (with 13 respondents). The session improved participants' knowledge, with participants reporting a good or very good knowledge of the cultural life of the ghetto rising from 30% before the session to 100% in post-session evaluation, and over 90% of the teachers intended to integrate the material learned into their teaching practice. As one wrote, 'the seminar was very inspirational. I look forward to realizing at least some of the texts with students' [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 a)** Audience statistics (Performing the Jewish Archive and *Gido's coming home!*); **b)** Google Analytics for <https://jewishmusicandtheatre.org/>
- 5.2** Testimonial, Events Manager, Prague, Czech Republic, August 2020.
- 5.3** Testimonial, Director of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival Cape Town, South Africa, September 2020.
- 5.4** Testimonial, Leader of ensemble Flying Rabbi, Prague, Czech Republic, August 2020.
- 5.5** Interview with performer and former cast member of *Prinz Bettliend*, September 2020.
- 5.6** Audience questionnaires from *Harlequin in the Ghetto*, completed 2-5 June 2016, York, UK.
- 5.7** Review of performance in Holešov, Official website of the town of Holešov, July 2020.
- 5.8** Madison, U.S. (2015) performance, Qualtrics audience feedback report, September 2020.
- 5.9** Testimonial, Education Officer, the Holocaust Educational Trust, December 2020.
- 5.10** Evaluation summary for CPD training (Holocaust Educational Trust, February 2020, and *Gido's coming home!* December 2019).