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IS EXPERIENCING HISTORY POSSIBLE? BETWEEN “DARK TOURISM” AND “THE HOLOCAUST INDUSTRY:” THE CASE OF TEREZÍN

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Słowa kluczowe: obóz koncentracyjny w Terezynie, „poppamięć”, współczesne przemiany pamięci o Holokauście, *Warsztat diabła* Jáchyma Topola

S u m m a r y

The article focuses on the representation of Terezín (Theresienstadt) concentration camp in contemporary Czech literary, historical, and educational sources. We should treat the ways of presenting Terezín in Czech public space as a beginning of the discussion about the popular, mass need for “adapting” memory about past experiences to the abilities of a new recipient. The basis for the following considerations is the 2009 novel by Jáchym Topol, *The Devil’s Workshop* (original title: *Chladnou zemí*), that presents the process of the revitalization of Terezín concentration camp, which seems to be another stage of a theatricalization or reconstruction of memory. The fundamental question is: How far is it from the Topol’s utopian vision to the actual reality, full of commercialized or institutionalized memory?

CZY DOŚWIADCZANIE HISTORII JEST MOŻLIWE? MIĘDZY „CIEMNĄ TURYSTYKĄ” A „PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWEM HOLOKAUST”. PRZYPADEK TEREZÍNA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł dotyczy reprezentacji obozu koncentracyjnego w Terezynie w wybranych czeskich tekstach literackich, historycznych i materiałach dydaktycznych. Sposoby przedstawiania dramatycznej historii Terezína w czeskiej przestrzeni publicznej mogą być traktowane jako początek dyskusji nad popularną, masową potrzebą „dostosowywania” pamięci o minionych wydarzeniach do możliwości poznawczych nowego odbiorcy. Punktem wyjścia dla niniejszych rozważań jest powieść czeskiego autora, Jáchyma Topola, wydana w 2009 roku (*Warsztat diabła*, przeł. Leszek Engelking, tytuł oryginalny: *Chladnou zemí*), przedstawiająca, między innymi, wizję rewitalizacji obozu w Terezynie. Fundamentalne pytanie w tym miejscu brzmi: jak daleko jest od utopijnej wizji Topola do dzisiejszej rzeczywistości pełnej skomercjalizowanej i zinstytucjonalizowanej pamięci?

Terezín is not a big city. Before the war, there were about five thousand souls. It lies at the confluence of the rivers Elbe and Eger. From bird's-eye view it looks like a stone star fallen to the ground, surrounded by red brick walls.
– Arnošt Lustig¹

We worked without rest, building a new life for the town on the ruins of its past.
– Jáchym Topol, *The Devil's Workshop*

The following article critically considers the question that does not sound novel but appears to gain validity and urgency (at least in the Czech Republic). The pretext for dealing with the subject of the contours of contemporary memory “belonging” to a certain place, inseparably connected with the memory of people who lived and died there, was the 2009 novel by the Czech author, Jáchym Topol, *The Devil's Workshop* (original title: *Chladnou zemí*).² The space in which part of Topol's story occurs is the Czech city Terezín, which was in 1941–1945 a Jewish ghetto and transit concentration camp. About 87,000 prisoners passed through the camp, and only 3,600 of them survived the war.

It seems that *The Devil's workshop* should be treated today as an important voice in European discussion on the modern transformations and ideologizations of historical memory. Topol's vision of revitalization (or “saving”) Terezín concentration camp – which is going to be officially demolished, according to the first fragments of Topol's novel – describes the limits of the phenomenon of “popmemory.” This term hides a very wide range of meanings, ideas, projects, tasks, and actions connected to popular (attractive and trendy) methods of saving and transferring experiences of the past to the younger generations. In some way, it is an obligatory educational approach today. But the “revitalization” of the Terezín concentration camp seems to be just another stage of the “theatricalization” of memory. In Jáchym Topol's vision, the “renewed” Terezín becomes a tourist hit by exploiting the emotionality of Western “bunk seekers,” who are looking for their roots and trying to find false relief in the place, where their ancestors suffered and died:³

¹ All quotations originally written in Czech (except the translation of *The Devil's Workshop*) were translated by the author of the article.

² Jáchym Topol, *Chladnou zemí* (Praha: Torst, 2009); Jáchym Topol, *The Devil's Workshop*, trans. Alex Zucker (London: Portobello Books, 2013).

³ All italics by me. I have published some details about Topol's novel before, about its reception and various interpretations, also in the context of contemporary culture, sociological changes, and history, in two articles: “Someone Else's Scars of Topol, Someone Else's Scars of Poles – Between *Chladnou zemí* and *Warsztat diabla*,” in *The Aspects of Genres in the Holocaust Literatures in Central Europe*, ed. Jiří Holý (Praha: Akropolis, 2015), 213–228; “Pořád krmit paměť světa...? O (pop)paměti v současné české literatuře a kultuře,” in *Paměť válek*

I would never have believed the rocket-like rise of our case if Lebo hadn't been reading me the replies. Plenty of people agreed to help us, no questions asked. Those were the kind of people Lebo was looking for, people who didn't wonder whether or not the old town of evil should be torn down, who didn't need any deliberation or discussion, because *they knew that every splinter of every bunk should be preserved, every battered brick, every corner of the old fortress. Every inch of Terezín should exist always and forever, and, as Rolf would later write, feed the memory of the world.*⁴

However, the reasons why Topol's protagonists decide to build an alternative Holocaust "museum" are not obvious. On the one hand, they try to preserve the experiences of the past and help to bring relief to those "with dark cloud on their minds," the representatives of the so-called "third generation" whom Topol calls "bunk seekers." On the other hand, they are perfectly aware of the three pillars of modern tourism industry which researchers usually describe as "three E:" entertainment, excitement, education. Obviously, this model comes from the West, just like one of the heroines of Topol's story, Sara, a pragmatic girl with a ready-to-use business plan for making Terezín more attractive for tourists from all over the world. Sara's creative ideas bring ghetto pizzas, t-shirts with Franz Kafka's face and the inscription "If Franz Kafka hadn't died, they would have killed him here," therapy sessions, and special workshops of happiness for those overwhelmed with the consciousness of twentieth-century horrors.⁵ In this place, Topol's vision seems distant from purely literary projections. It shows quite well the vices and virtues (?) of the phenomenon called "dark tourism" or "thanatourism," simplistically defined as traveling to sites associated by history with death and tragedy.⁶ Moral, practical, business, and commercial aspects of this concept appear in many studies mostly published in the 2000s, when researchers began looking more carefully at the phenomenon that exists in European culture for many years.

a konfliktů, eds. Alexander Kratochvíl, Jiří Soukup, Matouš Jaluška, Vít Schmarc (Praha: Akropolis, 2016), 82–92.

⁴ Jáchym Topol, *The Devil's Workshop*, 28–29.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 35–36.

⁶ Among others, there is a new English publication *Thanatourism: Case Studies in Travel to the Dark Side*, which focuses on the extremely complicated symbiosis of the tourism industry and extermination sites. "Thanatourism ... has been variously termed 'dark tourism' ... 'grief tourism' ... and 'black spots' ... but all, in one form or another, describe tourism to sites associated with death and disaster. Although thanatourism is not a new practice ... it is an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in contemporary society... Many notorious global sites with complex and painful history have reported increased tourist numbers in recent years... most notably at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which has more than tripled its visitor numbers in the past two decades." Tony Johnston, Francisco Tigré-Moura, Pascal Mandelartz, "Welcome to the Home of Auschwitz Tours: The Online Marketing of Genocide Tourism," in *Thanatourism Case Studies in Travel to the Dark Side*, eds. Pascal Mandelartz, Tony Johnston (Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers, 2016).

Topol's novel from a few years ago accompanies the intensified "memory boom" that Czech public space witnesses during the last two decades, which demands a return to the past. The motive of a "demonstration" concentration camp and the city that "Hitler gave to the Jews"⁷ holds now a special place in the discussion on the condition of Czech memory. The role played by the city in the Nazi extermination machine remained a secondary topic in the Czech Republic for a long time. *The Devil's Workshop* can be used here as a point in the discussion about the most critical issues related to the appropriateness of historical memory transfer. The literary, grotesque, and (so far) exaggerated vision of Topol is hard to separate from contemporary situation in the European memory practices.⁸ Topol points out most of the benefits and threats that result from the medialization of memory and modern need for adapting historical message.

Arnošt Lustig, one of the Holocaust survivors, wrote: "Memory is like a spiritual spinal cord – without it, our body will be crooked."⁹ Relying on concepts formulated by Jan Assmann, Milan Hes enumerates three reasons for the recent growth of interest in the phenomenon of memory: 1) the increasingly advanced technology, including the development of mass media and "external memory" or "artificial memory" that begin to replace the living memory of witnesses; 2) the ethical premises, and 3) the urgent need to face the remembrance of authentic witnesses ("oral history," "twilight of the witnesses of the era").¹⁰

The reaction to all these factors is an extreme Jáchym Topol's vision in the second part of *The Devil's Workshop*. Terezín is only an introduction to the real devil's workshop, that the readers encounter in the "Belarusian section." There, the survivors of historical tragedies end up as fabricated, stuffed exhibits in the Belarusian "museum of the future." In Topol's vision, the challenge of preserving memory by making it closer, accessible, and tactile at any price, even for people who will not have a chance to talk to the survivors, becomes

⁷ Theresienstadt was a transitory concentration camp before transportation to death camps like Auschwitz. The city is known for its propaganda role in the movie *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (Hitler Gives the Jews a City), created to give a false impression of living conditions in Terezín, shown as a "model" city for the Jews.

⁸ Of course, the phenomenon that I describe in this essay is not typical for Czech space. We may point out numerous examples of such places and very diversified cultural, educational, and literary "attitude" toward them. However, in my opinion, there are significant differences in the national struggling with this subject. Unfortunately, the matter exceeds the scope of this article, although it might be an extremely interesting issue.

⁹ Cit. per Milan Hes, *Promluvili o zlu. Holocaust mezi dějinami a paměti* (Praha: Epocha, 2013), 19.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, 30–31.

a reaction to the process of progressive commercialization of memory. And, first of all, one of the methods to attract the attention of the modern recipient. According to this method, the terrible idea of building the Devil's Workshop, the Jurassic Park of Horror, the open-air museum of totalitarianism does not really sound so impossible:

That's the division of labour in the globalized world of today, damnit! Thailand: sex. Italy: paintings and seaside. Holland: clogs and cheese. Right? And Belarus? Horror trip, right? Don't look so serious, for fuck's sake! Arthur bellowed.... / *Visit the Devil's Workshop, the European monument to genocide!* Arthur declared in a booming voice, pouring everyone another round of vodka. / *Do we have the sea, the mountains, historic buildings? No, all our historic buildings were burned. So we'll build Jurassic Park of horror, a museum of totalitarianism....* Look at Auschwitz! Those whores the Poles, they know how to do it. A nice little hotel, bus ride from Krakow, tour of Auschwitz, lunch included: fifty-two euros, please.¹¹

The vision of Belarusian *Muzejko* with an exhibition of dead, stuffed survivors, who after several electric shocks begin repeating their pre-recorded stories, is an extreme reaction to the threat associated with all modern attempts to search for the most appropriate form of preserving the memory at any cost.¹²

I treat Topol's grotesque vision as a serious warning, as I will briefly discuss some methods of presenting Terezín in contemporary Czech historical and educational discourse. Each of the selected examples should deserve a detailed discussion of its own. However, I hope that they will signal the shape and direction of historical memory about Terezín in the Czech Republic, the methods used to answer the returning question of Shoah in Czech public space, and some interesting modern attempts at popularizing memory, which seem perfectly aware of the warning hidden in *The Devil's Workshop*.¹³

Recently, we easily notice striking changes in the artistic methods of aestheticizing historical experience and shifting the "Holocaust decorum" (Leszek Engelking's term) in contemporary culture. Modern art, literature, and education face questions about the adequate form of unspoken content, for which there still are no words and concepts capable of its description. However, aesthetic and formal experiments are recently accompanied by an intense return to testimony, the personal history that, according to Arnošt Lustig, "is also

¹¹ Jáchym Topol, *The Devil's Workshop*, 116.

¹² Cf. *ibidem*, 128–129.

¹³ Obviously, Topol's novel and contemporary artistic and educational projects discussed in this article might and should be considered with reference to well-known scientific concepts like the one by Jeffrey C. Alexander on the social construction of evil and the extremely important problem of experiencing it. Cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "A Cultural Sociology of Evil," in *idem*, *The meanings of social life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 109–120.

history. Just like a scar is evidence of an injury, and a used calendar is a testimony of an age.”¹⁴ I would like to mention as an example the volume of comic books prepared by various artists and published in 2011, *Ještě jsme ve válce. Příběhy 20. století* (We Are Still at War. Stories of the Twentieth Century).¹⁵ The volume seems to be a creative return to literary testimonies and should be analyzed as part of a wider project entitled *Paměť národa* (Memory of the Nation),¹⁶ conducted by The Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and The Post Bellum Foundation. The publication clearly marks the line between authenticity and artistic fictionalization which remains only an addition to authentic personal memories. The Terezín ghetto also became the background for several stories.¹⁷

The mention of this famous Czech comic book obliges us to remark on another artistic phenomenon. Since 2013, substantial discussions arose from the popular *Opráski české historje* (Pictures from Czech History).¹⁸ The comic strips, edited by mysterious Jaz, for whom there are no historical and linguistic taboos, were at first published on the Internet and later also in print. Their creator is probably a researcher at the Czech Academy of Science whose comics evoke extreme emotions; not only because of controversially presented historical content but also because of the language, which is distorted and full of errors that require specific decoding. Jaz plays with national identity; he ruins language rules and converts dramatic historical experiences, memories, and facts into anecdotes. The recipients of his works are mainly people aged 30–40, which means a social group that already finished school education. It is important because *Opráski české historje* require at least basic knowledge of history. They turn historical pathos into anecdote, using absurd and polysemy, verbal games built for example by sophisticated spelling mistakes. From his many pictures about the Holocaust, the example below sufficiently presents this intriguing phenomenon of popular culture:¹⁹

¹⁴ Cit. per Milan Hes, op. cit., 58.

¹⁵ Jana Fantová, Jan Palouček, eds., *Ještě jsme ve válce. Příběhy 20. století* (Praha: Post Bellum, Argo, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2011).

¹⁶ <http://www.pametnaroda.cz/> (acc. 15.04.2018).

¹⁷ *Ohromný kolotoč slunce*, script by Miloš Mazal, Adam Drda, drawings by Miloš Mazal; *Pavel Macháček a gestapacké razítko*, script by Mikuláš Kroupa, Prokop Smetana, drawings by Prokop Smetana, based on a true story of Pavel Macháček who survived Theresienstad Small Fortress, concentration camp Flossenbürg, and death march (cf. ibidem, 30–41, 42–53).

¹⁸ The spelling in original version of *Opráski české historje* is meaningfully deformed both in the title and particular illustrations. Unfortunately, it is impossible to include those language games in translation, which remains only philological and informative.

¹⁹ Vide <http://historje.tumblr.com/> (acc. 15.04.2018) and *Opráski české historje. F koztce* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2016).



How not to be excited about a journey

1. Hello, how are you?

Just fine, as for the times, you know.

2. And what about holidays? Are you planning something?

3. We have been always travelling with my wife by car to some Czech places.

4. But this year we will probably go abroad by train.²⁰

Of course, Terezín is now not only the object of interest among authors of graphic art and comic strips. There appear more and more publications devoted to the extermination of Jews, while scholars uncover new journals, writings, and personal stories from the time.²¹ But there is also more attempts at creating a message addressed to the younger audience.

²⁰ Source: <http://historje.tumblr.com/image/109185789198> (acc. 15.04.2018). Another picture presents a group of people dancing and singing in Terezín: “Our oven is broken, our oven is broken. Who is going to fix it?” In the second frame appears Hitler saying: “The oven is fixed for a long time. Who needs a ticket?” The third picture shows a train coming close to the death camp with a smoking chimney. The last caption reads: “The machine is running, the chimney is smoking” (Cf. *Opráskí sčeski historje*, 352). Culturally accepted tragic narrative about deportation to concentration camps turns here into a provocative narrative like a ghoulish joke.

²¹ E.g. Milan Hes, *Promluvíli o zlu: holocaust mezi dějinami a pamětí* (Praha: Epocha, 2013); Pavel Barša, *Paměť a genocida: Úvahy o politice holocaustu* (Praha: Argo, 2011). For a good

For example, in 2013 appeared another part of a popular in the Czech Republic book series for young people. The name of the series is *Kouzelný atlas putování časem* (The Magic Atlas of Time Travel).²² A teenage girl is the protagonist of the novel written by historian Veronika Válková, *Terezínské ghetto. Tajemný vlak do neznáma* (Ghetto Terezín. The Mysterious Train to an Unknown Place). The heroine moves back in time to Terezín of September 1944. Initially, the girl has no idea where she is, but further observations and conversations with prisoners made verify her knowledge from history lessons. Moreover, the heroine encounters authentic characters, including the editors of the Terezínian periodical “Vedem.”²³ Luckily, the girl avoids the journey with “the mysterious train” that transports prisoners from Terezín to Auschwitz. She returns to the present and checks online what happened to her new friends who did board the train. The results shock her.

This short summary probably sounds unconvincing but – despite a bit kitschy front cover and graphics²⁴ – Válková’s idea to present a really difficult historical event with adventure convention typical of the books in her series was surprisingly successful. This happened mostly due to her attention for historical fact and respect for the victims and their memories.

The authors of *Ghetto Terezín, Holokaust a dnešek* (Theresienstadt Ghetto, the Holocaust, and the Present)²⁵ suggest twelve methodical educational models that employ short films to capture the memories of the witnesses of the era. Of course, the belief about the necessity of preserving “oral history” is nothing new. The authors refer to the archive created by Steven Spielberg, USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education,²⁶ and pay attention to all attempts of transferring and explaining to younger recipients “what

and a little shocking example of Terezín’s presence also in the newest literary fiction, vide Jan Vavřík, *Návrat z pekla* (Praha: Brána, 2016). There also is the poetic description of life there by Karel Hartmann, *Terezínská epopej: to je ghetto* (Praha: Academia, 2016).

²² Other books in the series refer to much more distant (and, at the same time, easier and safer) topics, such as: Charles IV, Wenceslaus I, the Hussite Wars, the domination of Maria Theresa, the times of Ancient Rome and Egypt, and the fates of Indians, pirates, or Vikings.

²³ *Vedem* was a literary magazine edited from 1942 to 1944 in the Terezín concentration camp by a group of boys (aged from twelve to fifteen) who lived in one of the barracks (named “Home One”). Editors-in-chief were Petr Ginz and Hanuš Hachenburg, who later became characters encountered by the protagonist of Válková’s book, the teenager Bara.

²⁴ To see the front cover of the book, see “Databáze knih,” <https://www.databazeknih.cz/knihy/kouzelný-atlas-putování-casem-terezínské-ghetto-tajemný-vlak-do-neznáma-166956?c=all> (acc. 15.04.2018).

²⁵ Zuzana Jirchářová et al., eds., *Ghetto Terezín, holokaust a dnešek: metodické modely s využitím filmových svědectví pro výuku na ZŠ a SŠ* (Terezín: Památník Terezín, 2009).

²⁶ Noteworthy, Spielberg is also a real guru for Topol’s heroes, but they treat his project as a prequel of their own ideas for the medialization and transformation of Shoah’s memory.

is the Shoah.” In reference to numerous articles dedicated to museum space and transmission of tragic experiences, let us mention that the last few years saw intensifying attempts at “simulating” the “experience of death.”²⁷ What is very important in *Ghetto Terezín Holokaust a dnešek* is the awareness of the inability to simulate the experience, the recognition that all concepts (museum, educational, popularizing) aimed at creating an alternative reality or approximating the terror and atmosphere of the place, in fact, are doomed to failure. They may even offend the memory of the victims and survivors.

The discussion on the appropriateness of some methods or techniques used in historical education or museum spaces often refers to the most extreme solutions typical of video games (like playing into someone else’s role) or controversial simulations of authentic experiences, as in the case of historical reconstructions.²⁸ An extreme example of “trampling” the Holocaust decorum became the project that raised wide objection among Czech citizens at the beginning of 2017. One of Prague’s escape rooms offered a new game called “Escape from Auschwitz,” advertised with the slogan “The last shower awaits you. The only difference is that you can get out of this chamber alive!”²⁹ What was even more disturbing, the game’s creator planned (as he claimed – accidentally) the game’s premiere for the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The last shower for 390 Czech koruna met with such a large wave of criticism from ordinary recipients and members of organizations who deal with the memory of the Holocaust that the whole project was canceled. Unfortunately, it was no artistic provocation but a real commercial idea, an extreme answer to market needs, craftily hidden behind slogans about preserving and protecting memory or teaching history.

The authors of *Ghetto Terezín* employ an educational method called “side influence”³⁰ that assumes students who face the problems of the Holocaust are not mentally prepared. However, with the help of other students and teachers, they analyze the recorded memories of witnesses and various authentic materials. Above all, the students are forced to look at the past and tragic experience of the witness through the prism of the present so as to notice its universal warning.

²⁷ Vide Anna Ziębińska-Witek, “Estetyki reprezentacji śmierci w ekspozycjach historycznych,” in *Obóz – muzeum. Trauma we współczesnym wystawiennictwie*, eds. Małgorzata Fabiszak, Marcin Owiński (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 29–48.

²⁸ For instance, see one of Polish reconstructions like the death march from the camp in Stuthoff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E82YGiR7BHW> (acc. 15.04.2018).

²⁹ For more information, see for example Barbora Němcová, “Zkuste přežít Osvětim, láká autor únikové hry. Silné kafe a neúcta k obětem, reagují lidé,” *Aktualně.cz*, 26.01.2017, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/posledni-sprcha-firma-laka-na-unikovou-hru-z-tabora-v-osveti/r~5184ed20e3b411e6bb11002590604f2e/?redirected=1523812269> (acc. 15.04.2018).

³⁰ Zuzana Jirchářová et al., eds., op. cit., 10.

The authors of the 2012–2014 publication that resulted from the cooperation between historians and history teachers (who took part in the project *History Education of the Twenty-First Century*) propose a similar solution.³¹ In their opinion, there occurred important changes in thinking during the last few years: individual memory became a specific historical source while the border between memory and history was definitively blurred. Interest in historical matters also increased thanks to the popularity of mass media, such formats as “docu-reality shows,” numerous historical movie productions, series, and multi-media projects; for example, the audiovisual *Memory of Nations* or “Terezińska štafeta” (Tereziinian Relay Race) began in 2010.³² The projects draw attention to technical and aesthetic changes in memory and the process of displacing natural with artificial memory. Of course, another issue is the co-existence of extremely diverse narratives, some of which receive substantive political or official support (also financially) while other emerge from bottom-up initiatives of individuals or private institutions.

A difference between the “official” and alternative memory (or anti-memory), their ambiguous assessment and typical forms of historical communication, also partly surface in Topol’s story. The division of Terezín is noteworthy: there is the “Monument” in the center from which all delegations and official trips from all over the world begin, and there is a bit hippie, self-proclaimed, attractive commune Comenium to which initially come mainly bunk-seekers who seek relief and explanation of own trauma. Topol’s “Comenium Commune”³³ functions as an alternative to official memory represented by the false, old-fashioned, artificial Monument.³⁴ The Comenium Commune draws attention to the problem that all authors of history courses and museum expositions pose today: the challenge

³¹ The project resulted in a very interesting publication by Hana Havlůjová, Jaroslav Najbert et al., *Paměť a projektové vyučování v dějepise* (Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2014).

³² For more information about this idea born among the students from one of the Prague junior high schools, see <http://www.terezinskastafeta.cz/> and <https://www.facebook.com/TerezinskaStafeta> (acc. 15.05.2018).

³³ Topol’s protagonists remind about the teacher of nations, Jan Amos Komenský: “By then we were already calling ourselves Comenium. Lea, who had come up with our name, thought we should offer instruction in the history of horror, as well as therapy for it, including dance. We agreed, since she had come to us from Holland, the country where Comenius has resided after his merciless expulsion from Bohemia. The Happy Workshops were Sara’s idea” (Jáchym Topol, *The Devil’s Workshop*, 48).

³⁴ Sławoj Tanaś the author of the only monograph on the issue of “dark tourism” in Poland so far, notes that contemporary methods of honoring and commemorating memory spaces leave the idea of classic monuments, which are unstable, impermanent, and can easily be removed from public space. However, Topol’s monument does not fit these considerations: it seems unbreakable, indestructible, everlasting. Sławoj Tanaś, *Tanatoturystyka. Od przestrzeni śmierci do przestrzeni turystycznej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2013), 130.

of “difficult expositions” that carry hard and overwhelming content. Official memory symbolized by fictional Monument is, on the one hand, unattractive, boring, and impossible to remember due to outdated methods like vitrines and posters with historical facts and dates. On the other hand, these official ways of commemoration in Topol’s vision are also oppressive, do not even try to understand the modern, emotional, and highly commercial project of revitalizing Terezín. Easily associated with the establishment, the supporters of the Monument are willing to destroy the city.

Perhaps the conclusion from the observation of the rivalry between these two spaces and strategies of remembering is trivial: there is no good way to transfer the experience and preserve memory, especially the memory of dramatic events and terrifying places. Instead, there only remains a constant balancing on the fine line of decorum and searching for the most suitable form that considers the most extreme solutions.

“The victims of the Holocaust left. There is no one else to go to school to share their memories with the students,”³⁵ that is the vision of the future by Ruth Bondyová. The questions remain: How far is the utopian vision of Terezín Camp’s revitalization to actual reality? How long until the coming of institutionalized or commercialized memory that – despite noble intentions – will drown the voice of witnesses? How distant are we from the reality, in which blind desire to preserve endangered memory becomes a substitute for learning from historical failures?

* * *

Today’s Terezín memorial does not resemble the space of *The Devil’s Workshop*. One could even venture so far as to remark that the present Terezín museum does not meet the trends among contemporary tourists or the cognitive abilities of a younger audience. During the communist period, hardly anyone remembered that Terezín was the place of execution of the Jewish people. The museum was established only in 1991 and, in fact, only the last few years saw the creation of educational projects that recognize the dictates of modernity while fully respecting the memory of the Holocaust victims.

A rather obvious belief that such places of remembrance deserve special attention and caution in formulating historical, artistic, or literary messages must be adjusted to social and psychological generational changes. Historical spaces now depend not only on the dictate of ideological memory – be it institutional, official, educational, or nation-building – but also on the pressure of contemporary popular and attractive methods. “The Holocaust industry” has different faces and dimensions. It resides somewhere between Topol’s Comenium

³⁵ Cf. Milan Hes, op. cit., 281.

Commune, the proven method of learning through play, and the slightly sinister official Monument. However, first of all, “the Holocaust industry” still balances on a very thin border of adequacy. This very thin border may truly confound us when we witness the small restaurant in the former soldier canteen in Terezín, which offers breakfasts and lunches for tired groups of tourists, right in front of the main gate with the infamous inscription “Arbeit macht frei.”

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