

The Greatest Show on Earth: A Study of the Red Cross' Front Row Seat at the Stage of Theresienstadt

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During World War II, the concentration camp Theresienstadt in the northern section of Czechoslovakia played an integral role in the Nazis' schemes of international propaganda. The camp became a model city for the period of six hours while International Red Cross delegates visited on June 23, 1944 in order to prepare reports to be disseminated to the public addressing concerns at the inner workings of the camps behind Nazi front lines. To date, no overwhelming synthesis of the events precluding and proceeding the day period of deception labeled the Embellishment has been construed. I attempt to collect all details of the Embellishment, even its inception, in order to produce a more total understanding of life within the camp during this period and to create a setting conducive to visualization of the play itself. The paper in many ways also seeks to understand reasons for the Red Cross' positive outlook on the concentration camp despite worldwide concern and site-specific evidence to the contrary. In the second half of the paper, I examine why the Red Cross accepted the Embellishment to such a high degree, citing Red Cross justifications as well as the single report printed on the visit written by the Swiss representative Maurice Rossel. In sum, the Embellishment created a moment of suspended time that vastly impacted members of the concentration camp and the outside world, so that even today one may be shocked at the colossal undertaking of playacting which occurred in Czechoslovakia's rural plains.

Introduction

After over a year of preparation aptly labeled the period of "Embellishment," Nazi schemes created the most elaborate Potemkin village in all of history, seemingly transforming the concentration camp of Theresienstadt into a vibrant city of autonomous Jews. The finale culminated in a six-hour inspection of the camp by influential members of the international community who then used the visit to guide the world's opinion on Nazi actions behind the front lines. While accounts on the preparation and portrayal of the visit are historically documented, relatively none of the literature on the subject pieces together each minute detail of the Embellishment in a way that explains the grandiose scale of the production on all levels of society and conveys to a reader the sense of overwhelming, daily change and modification of living standards and expectations experienced by those in the camp serving as actors or props for the Embellishment's stage. I attempt to collect all details of the Embellishment, even its inception, in order to produce a more total understanding of life within the camp during this period and to create a setting conducive to visualization of the play itself.

Yet after inhaling the copious factual base for the events of the Embellishment, the question remains of how the production and prepa-

ration impacted the lives of the Jews within the camp physically, psychologically, and emotionally on both long and short term scales, and to what extent said impacts reached the various Jewish demographic populations. The story of Theresienstadt presents a unique branch of Holocaust history in that Nazis ran the camp with motives directed outward towards response of the international community instead of with motives directed explicitly inwards towards decline of the Jewish people as in every other camp. Such a distinct rationale for management of a camp created a situation in which one may ask if the operation was really an anomaly or if it was just a calculated yet unprecedented and altered manner in which the Nazis continued to fulfill their plans for the destruction of the Jewish people. As the situation confounds the Holocaust historian's known comprehension of internal camp living conditions, it also presents an opportunity to analyze the Red Cross's direct interactions with civilian detainees. The second half of my analysis examines why the Red Cross accepted the Embellishment to such a high degree, citing Red Cross justifications as well as the single printed report on the visit written by Swiss representative Maurice Rossel. Rossel's report has never been fully analyzed, though it provides a direct link to the International Red Cross and international communi-

ty's quixotically unconcerned response. Taken together, profound changes in the internal Jewish lifestyle and unexpected external consequences prove the prolonged and individual historical significance of an event that lasted less than one tick of the clock's hand in the realm of time.

Talk of a Visit: Formation of the Embellishment as an Idea

Before delving into the intricate details of the Embellishment, one may ask why such an event proved necessary on the part of the international community and on the part of the Nazis. The need for the Red Cross visit stemmed from individual countries's concerns, Red Cross confusion from previous visits, and private and national bodies' questions regarding recent rumors. First, Nazis had been considering the use of Theresienstadt as a showplace ghetto since the reports on Nazi extermination camps fueled severe international curiosity and suspicion. As Nazis advertised Theresienstadt in the international press as a "model ghetto" or even a spa resort, the camp became one of the few places of Jewish confinement openly recognized and spoken of in the international community and public dialogue. On June 28, 1943, two members of the German Red Cross performed an initial inspection of the camp, a visit, which lacked significant theatrics on the Nazis' part. This visit brought only more international concern, after the German representatives Walter Hartmann and Dieter Neuhaus expressed dismay at the malnourishment and congestion in Theresienstadt and, as one scholar puts it, "were horrified at what they saw." Of specific concern to the delegates was the living condition of the *Prominenten*, those members of the camp who had the best living arrangements of all. The granddaughter of Bismarck's financier lived in a one-room apartment with her family, and this relatively crowded lifestyle shocked the delegates. Hartmann and Neuhaus reported that prisoners were undernourished, lacked adequate medical care, and lived in overcrowded quarters. André de Pilar, an International Red Cross member of the Mixed Commission for Relief, received the concerns of Hartmann and Neuhaus and then confidentially relayed them to the International Red Cross and the World Jewish Congress. These two influential bodies increased pressure to have members of the International Red Cross visit the camp. Also in 1943, talks became more prevalent as to the humanitarian situation and need for

increased inspection of the German actions behind their own lines. Secret negotiations between Allen Welsh Dulles, United States director for the Coordinator of Information, and Count Egon Hohenlohe-Lagenburh, emissary to Himmler, ended in Dulles' suggestion that to better the position of Germany in America, Germans should take action to deal more humanely with their civilian captors. Within a few days of these talks in March, 1943, Himmler gave specific orders to increase funding and supplies to make Terezin a "model ghetto," perhaps in the interest of showing this ghetto as the humane approach towards civilians in America's public sphere. In the fall of 1943, a transport of 456 Danish Jews arrived at Theresienstadt, and immediately the Danish King Christian X began lobbying for a Danish representative to check on the welfare of this valuable Danish population. In January 1944, the Swedish government heard reports that the 10,000 Jews of Theresienstadt were to be liquidated. Though the German foreign office announced that only ten Jews had been taken to the East from Theresienstadt and that the liquidation rumor was simply foolish remarks, the publicity of the rumor increased Nazi fears of the international body's curiosity and fueled further consideration of the allowance of a Theresienstadt visit. As multiple international bodies and individual countries spread rumors of the German concentration camps and interest in Theresienstadt reached an apex, the Nazis conceded to international pressure and allowed for a formal visit. The Nazis expected to gain international credibility and security in the secrecy of their true motives and actions further east.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) sent its representative and national branch delegations into the camp with well-defined goals. The delegation sought answers to two lists of questions compiled by multiple Red Cross leaders, both sent to the director of the ICRC in Berlin, Dr. Roland Marti, on June 1, 1944. Most questions actually deal with the issue of postal aid packages. The larger umbrella group of the ICRC sent the first list of questions, and the second list of questions came from the Joint Relief Commission of the Red Cross. Although most questions were not directed to the Jews' prospects for daily life and uncertain survival in the camp, it was understood that a Committee of the International Red Cross delegate reported on the bare conditions of the camp regardless. According to one representative, delegates expected theatrical performance and they understood their mission to see past the facades. Evidence suggests that with the ques-

tions and realistic training the representatives possessed coming into the camps, they expected to perform a full and subjective analysis of the camp.

Embellishment Preparations

The process of stabilization, as the Nazis would refer to it, began as early as 1942, over a year before the agreement on the date of June 23 for the visit. Introduction of Ghetto currency in April 1942, though perhaps intended to fool the 1943 visitors or the few German journalists and propaganda movie producers who visited the camp in 1942, stayed in circulation for the larger show of June 23, 1944. In May 1943 a Krone specially designed by two Jewish artists replaced the traditional bills, and each month a number of Kronen were deposited into a bank account held by each Jew at the bank of Jewish Autonomy. This gave an appearance of complete Jewish control of the fiscal system. On November 7, 1942, one inmate noted the opening of the coffeehouse, with rumors of musical performances and further development of a reading room. Rapidity of changes heightened with the installation of a new anti-Czech Camp Commander Burger, who replaced the commander Seidl in June of 1943. Just one month after his appointment in July of 1943, streets labeled with wooden boards displaying numbers or letters instead received plaques with normal street names such as Station Street, New Street, Park Street, Riverside Road, Town Hall Square, and Post Office Crescent. This change impacted the minds of the international community; letters sent to the camp now would be sent to relatively mundane, typical street addresses, furthering the perception of ordinary.

After formally agreeing to allow the visit by the International Red Cross and representatives of the Swedish and Danish Red Crosses, the plan for the embellishment became a formal task introduced to the Jewish Administration in December 1943 as the *Stadtverschönerung*, or city beautification. Nazis asked Dr Benjamin Murmelstein of the Council of Elders to head the new plan, giving the Jews a front spot in success of the production. Burger's still too slow transformation of the camp led to his removal in February of 1944, and with less than six months left to prepare the Austrian SS Colonel Karl Rahm took over, aided in part by SS Hauptsturmführer Hans Gunther and his brother SS Sturmbannführer Rolf Gunther. Both of these lower ranked men spoke directly with the Jewish Council, requested

reports on conditions in the camp, and ensured enough food, clothing, and shoes were available.

Rahm made it his first task to see that the Embellishment became reality. As a man whose hobbies included carpentry and tinkering with inventions, he made several technical changes, many to the carpentry shop, and he even succeeded in creating a new and better bunk. Even the washbasins in the children's housing received renovation after special inspection by Rahm. He ordered the destruction of buildings in disrepair and the installation of better plumbing. His title of camp commander became the less dictatorial title of "principal of the head office," Ghetto court became Community Court, the term Ghetto became Jewish Settlement, Ghetto guard became borough guard, and camp inspector Bergel became simply Mr. Bergel. The Transport sign over the transport office was removed, and transport numbers became identification numbers. On April 15, 1944, Daily Orders printed and distributed to the body of Jews received the more diplomatic title of "bulleting of the Jewish Administration of Theresienstadt." In anticipation of the visit, the Jewish administration posed for portraits on December 5, 1943 to be given in advance to the delegation members. On a larger, more practical scale, salutations to the Germans in uniform were now forbidden, as the play was supposed to show an autonomous village where Jews and Nazis lived with minimal stratification, and the Nazis realized that the salutes indicated inferiority. To further counter the pervasive atmosphere of obedience to authority, the Daily Bulletin of June 18, 1944 reminded all prisoners that it was forbidden to rise upon arrival of visitors or pay particular attention to them.

Rahm next set his attention to the problem of overcrowding. Transports had stopped in February 1943 so that the administration could focus more of its efforts on the Embellishment, but now that the camp had become sedentary a visible disparity appeared between area and population. Rahm ordered a transport of 7,500 people on May 12, 1944. Groups that would look displeasing in the landscape of beautification or groups without a part in the show received first priority to deport: orphans, the ill with tuberculosis in the Engineers' barracks, even dwarves. Transports of 2,500 persons each were sent out on May 15 and 16, and 18. 40% of transportees were German Jews, with war veterans accounting for one-third of this group, 20% were Austrian Jews, 33 % were Czech Jews, and 559 deportees were Dutch. When the actual visit took place,

the ghetto population was counted at 27,702, and while the delegation noticed overcrowding with this number of people it can only be imagined how much more difficult life was in September 1942 with the peak ghetto population of 53,264 people.

To stabilize the camp, Burger had ordered for the improvement of the park, renovation of the café, and removal of the three-tiered bunks from living quarters on the Red Cross route. Rahm, however, spent an entire day detailing problems of the camp and then led a conference with all the heads of the Jewish departments to inform them of the changes he planned to make and receive their opinions on improvements. The Town Square was covered with new grass and 1200 flowerbeds, sand paths and concrete benches were added, an entirely new pavilion was built along with an infant's playground with swings, a paddling pool, rocking horses, and sandboxes. Jewish labor erected dressing rooms and showers alongside the existent playing fields and filled shop windows with merchandise from confiscated luggage. All buildings on the route received cleaning, whitewashing, and better lighting. Roads were repaired, and the former Sports Hall became a community center inaugurated with a performance of music, poetry, and a speech by Dr. Marmelstein. A building that once functioned as the elderly living quarters became an auditorium, and the Sokol building, home to the chronically ill, instead became a performance hall and synagogue.

Furthermore, all members of the camp received increased food supplies and portions of timber as the date approached; Theresienstadt actually became an area of war priority so it received shipments of goods in scarce supply directly on the war front. Double daily rations began as early as December 2, 1943. Nazis lessened searches on distributed parcels and thus people had access to marmalade, condensed milk, and chocolate. Small plots of land were parceled out for a few residents to grow gardens, and beginning in May 1944 those with gardens were allowed time off of work in order to tend to the land. Gardens increased an appearance of an autonomous town capable of subsistence even during the harsh wartime.

As a village, health practices for the living and the dead would be a necessary component of any normal town. As of May 3, 1944, Colonel Rahm issued orders on how to use the dead as stage props. The central mortuary and urn repository were whitewashed, provided with wooden floorboards, adorned with flowerbeds. At the urn repository Jews planted trees and created a monument to the Jewish dead. A real hearse lined with velvet

curtains came into the ghetto shortly thereafter to play the role of corpse transportation device to the cemetery with imitation graves. Starting in 1943, death penalty hangings were carried out in the Little Fortress on the outskirts of the camp as opposed to the public sphere. Even the archway to the crematorium was inscribed with Hebrew lettering. To improve health infrastructure, Rahm invited German physicians to visit the camp on March 18, 1943 and report on their views of the medical service available. This visit brought the arrival of more medical supplies. A dentist office was set up the first time with a certified dentist in order to complete the medical infrastructure.

In June, efforts towards the Embellishment increased exponentially as less than one month of preparation remained. After the previous inspection of *Prominenten* rooms produced concern for the welfare of such important people, *Prominenten* were moved into larger rooms and given special furniture for the next inspection. To ensure the delegation took note of the fine care issued to the elderly and young, Rahm ordered the addition of crisp white sheets and pillows to the hospital along with new uniforms for the nurses. As with all shows, the stage must be defined and the order of acts must be determined. In this sense, Rahm and other camp officials had already planned a specific walking route that the visitors would take, so as to see only the renovated areas. Billets along the route were partially vacated to display less cramped living quarters, and elderly persons moved into these rooms to confirm the international community's assumption of the town as a spa resort or privileged village for the aged. These billets received new beds, tables, wardrobes, chairs, lampshades, curtains, and flowerpots. No minute detail, not even the vibrant, life-inspiring color of flowers, would be forgotten for this grand production.

Cultural activities of the ghetto became centrally displayed and augmented as modes of freedom and independent thought. The former hospital turned into a Boys' School with the addition of paper tests, black-boards, and a painted sign that read "Boys School, closed during holidays." A library was necessary for a town of such a grand size to further the education of both young and old. The previously small library moved to a larger building and 60,000 additional books were shelved. Nazis encouraged the past-time of soccer, so that in the summer of 1943 a league was set up with two adult divisions and a children's division. Anyone could cheer on teams or play in a game once work for the day was completed. Musical

instruments and theatrical costumes arrived and were allowed for use upon arrival. Even as early as April, one Jewish theatre director Schaecter received permission to perform the well-liked opera *Brundibar* for the camp with a complete orchestra instead of just one piano accompaniment. Performances by the town band, lectures, concerts, theater, cabaret, sports, and music at the café could be heard or seen daily as early as months before the delegation's arrival. Signposts decorated by professional artists pointed towards different areas and read "to the baths, to the cafes, to the library." A hut in the middle of Magdeburg barracks was constructed to be the mess hall for the delegation's lunch break. Here, all of the benches, tables, silverware, and even the waitresses in immaculate white aprons and caps were brand new, as there had never been a job such as this offered in the camp.

As a chief reason for the visit was the examination of the Danish Jews' welfare, these Jews received even more special attention and props for the play. The Danish quarters on the designated route were refurnished, and some houses on the route were evacuated and refilled with the Danish Jews to give them a conspicuous part in the play. On the contrary, seventy Danes who knew confidential or threatening information regarding Nazi actions were ordered by the Council of Elders (*Judenrat*) the day before the show to find residence in inconspicuous locations for the duration of the visit. One Danish woman with two children was transferred out of the camp for the day because her husband had worked on a secret counterfeiting project at Bergen-Belsen of which she knew. Other emaciated prisoners or cripples were to be kept in unvisited barracks and off of the main path, while those actors to be displayed to the delegation received nicer clothes, coats, and for the women, even high-heeled shoes.

As the date approached, the Germans embodied the slogan "Bliss and Comfort" in assuring a perfect execution of their plan. Jewish administration offices were inspected repeatedly, each inspection leading to the arrival of some new piece of furniture or the removal of some visually unappealing. In these offices, Germans took careful care to destroy any documents relating to transports or deportations. One violinist requested permission to live with his wife and was granted such a request on March 15, 1944, as the Nazis showed continued ability to bend towards the benefits of the Jews to complete the Embellishment. On May 9, 1944, barbed wire fences were forbidden, and four days before the visit on

June 19, 1944, lambs were introduced into the city to give the perfect addition to a small town of laborers. Jewish women used their hairbrushes and toothbrushes to clean the streets and sidewalks that the delegation would pass through, and these immaculate settings were then roped off to save their sparkle. In May, the SS allowed the Jewish Rescue Committee of Budapest to send \$10,000 and a note to the Jews of Theresienstadt, and while the money did not reach the Jews the note did and the Jewish administration was forced to write a note back thanking the committee and commenting on the wonderful and fulfilling life in the ghetto. Finally, Nazis curtailed package distribution until the day of the visit, so that the delegation saw just how much care and attention the Jews received from the outside world.

To complete the preparation, Jewish actors practiced their lines diligently. The Jewish administration rehearsed with the children on what to say when the delegation approached the playground, telling them to call Rahm "Uncle Rahm" and address him with the lines "Not sardines again, Uncle Rahm" implying their satiety for the healthy, protein-rich food, or "When are you going to play with us again, Uncle Rahm?" Children in groups of thirty were taken from their barracks to an unknown room a few times in the days preceding the visit to practice an act with toys. A member of the Jewish administration instructed the children on how to line up in pairs while entering the room. Each child received instructions on how to sit, stand, or smile; administrators even thought about how many children would be appropriate to fill a playroom. The Jewish elder Eppstein, the only Jew to be a member of the tour, stayed up for a significant portion of the evening in his office with his secretary practicing responses to possible questions and rehearsing his scripted answers. His initial speech glossed over any unpleasantness the international community could have ever thought of, and such stories required careful memorization.

June 23, 1944: The Embellishment's Grand Finale

To fully understand the implications of the Embellishment, we must see what transpired on the day of the show and ask how all of the changes we know to have shaped the lives of those inside the camp now changed the lives of those outside of the camp through the Red Cross reports. The visit began at 11:00 AM with the arrival of two

limousines carrying Frans Hvass of the Danish Foreign Office, Dr. E Juel-Henningsen, an administrator from the Danish Ministry of Health, and Maurice Rossel, a Swiss man representing the International Red Cross Berlin Office. Sweden, once so adamant as to the inspection, declined to send a delegate citing the observance of a national Swedish holiday. The men first entered the former Victoria Hotel, now home to the German staff, and from there drove to the Jewish Headquarters, passing through a courtyard and taking note of the café in the central square. Upon arrival the three delegates met the Jewish Elder Eppstein, beautifully adorned in a frock coat and cylinder hat, and started the limousine tour, accompanied by six SS officials, Colonel Rahm, Eberhard von Thadden of the German foreign ministry, Rolf Gunther and Ernst Mohs of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), and Dr. Heidenkamp, a member of the German Red Cross.

All aspects of the Embellishment came out in full force for the mere six hours that the delegation visited. As one inmate so clearly put it, "Time was standing still. It was not a regular normal day because the majority of people were locked, nobody could get out only those who were rehearsed were able to do the performance". The delegation saw the final touches of a long time transformation, including all of the backdrops, props, costumes, and actors described in the preceding section, while the Jews who gave them the entertainment made time freeze for a day. Eppstein gave his falsified welcome speech in his beautiful clothing, making the ghetto population 7,000 persons larger than in reality to make up for the deportations, and skewing the ratio of elderly to make the over-60 category significantly higher than actual to conform to the belief in the ghetto as a spa resort. He changed the Council of Elders number to 66 to make the administration appear more horizontal in decision-making and more diplomatic, and he talked of the ghetto exporting valuable silk to the Reich through a silkworm experiment that really was failing and was soon stopped. Then the delegation headed off to visit the bank, where the manager smoked a cigar and offered them cigarettes, although he had just finished three months in jail for smoking. The tour continued to the band pavilion where, on cue, Shaechter began rehearsing the Verdi Requiem with the orchestra and children began to perform the finale of the opera Brundibar. Next, the delegation visited the laundry on Baker Street, *Prominenten* apartments, the ground floor of a barracks, and a hospital ward,

where they saw clean white sheets with sick persons who were actually quite healthy lying in between the covers. The actual sick had been vacated from the hospital and cast in a section of the camp far from the eyes of the delegation.

While details of this visit may seem extensive, much discrepancy and questions still emerge as to the specific details of the visit. For example, some sources make mention that the tours never entered the hospital or the home for aged people but simply passed the outer façade, while others describe the scenes the delegation saw inside the buildings. While the fact that the delegation passed by these buildings and the fact that inside the buildings the healthy posed as the sick are both true of themselves, the combination of the delegation looking inside the buildings remains in question. It is simply important to recognize that the inside of the ward was furnished for the play, proving the importance of every possible detail that the delegation could witness whether intended so or not.

To end the tour, the delegation visited the allotment gardens, the post office, the café, where they enjoyed a meal brought out by the waitresses clad in stark white aprons and caps, a pharmacy, and the cookhouse in the Kavalirka barracks. One of the SS men accompanying the trip told of additional stops along the way to the central swimming pool, the butcher shop, the fire department, and the steam kitchens. At one point on the tour the group stopped to speak with Dr. Erich Springer, the Surgical Director, who no doubt had his lines scripted to the tee. At the courthouse, a mock trial of petty theft ended in the SS telling the Council of Elders to pardon the criminal, giving the SS a sense of benevolence and justice. The last stop was the children's pavilion, where the innocence of children playing with toys stayed as a final image in the minds of the wooed international inspectors.

As the delegation advanced, men gave signals to the various Jewish actors and actresses to commence their roles. On cue, young women with rakes over their shoulders sang and laughed as they walked off to work, loads of parcels that had been backed up for the week were distributed to very happy inmates, bakers with white gloves began unloading loaves of bread, a young man scored a goal on the soccer field and the crowd erupted in applause, men vigorously engaged in a chess tournament, and the finale of Brundibar commenced. So coordinated were the plans that the conductor of Brundibar recalled a series of three signals which each meant a stage in the approach of the delegation, each

signal building until the third and final cue to actually begin the music. One orderly dropped a penny in the jukebox for it to play on cue as the delegation advanced, giving the entire camp an air of music and uplifting sound at nearly all times through the use of instruments and song.

Finally, the delegation left the premises of Theresienstadt at 7:00 PM after inspecting the camp for five hours and forty minutes, returning to true normalcy. Rahm felt the visit went so well that he rewarded all of the Jews with a day and a half off of work. Most changes were kept up at least through the summer as a propaganda film was produced, although props that were immediately removed such as the artistic signs, the playground, and the toys all had to be carted off by the Jewish labor.

Internal Consequences of the Embellishment

After over a year of preparation for a less than six-hour inspection, what did such a production mean to the Jews and to the delegation that was to be taken in by such extravagant play-acting? For the Jews, the Embellishment produced a more favorable lifestyle for prisoners than they could have hoped for in other locations given their assumed capture and detainment by the Nazis. Removal of restrictions on cultural activities such as music, lectures, concerts, and performances several months prior to the visit allowed at least some members of the camp to continue activities for which they were passionate and to bring joy through performance to their audience. Access to musical instruments, a vast library of knowledge, and for some even the opportunity to tend to a garden offered facets of life found outside the camp that gave more of a sense of hope and humanity to those inmates dying from the cruel treatment by the Nazis. Certainly increased food rations and looser parcel restrictions allowed for more optimism and less starvation, a physical change that ameliorated the psychological burden of existence simultaneously. For the rehearsals with children and their disfavor for sardines, the Jewish Council used different children each rehearsal to ensure the most children received such a valuable and precious commodity. Some family members even got to live together when they would not have otherwise, furthering privileges unknown to most concentration camps. Surely the soccer leagues brought a temporary lapse in normal camp activities while players

could enter a world of competition and harmless fun, forgetting their physical states and striving to score one goal or defend one player. Each individual piece of normal life that free citizens take for granted became an extra asset from which to derive strength in such a dreary and inhumane environment. The signposts, artistic decorations, lack of barbed wire, and flowers all brought at least some aesthetic level of bliss to the psychological needs of camp inmates. Even such privileges as the coffeehouse, an area for conversation, relaxation, and hydration from coffee or an herb and turnip tea, seem almost to have been accepted as a necessary and guaranteed part of the lifestyle in the camp as early as September of 1943, when one prisoner remarks, "A coffee house, with empty tables. Each man may linger two hours. Melodies- but one can order only tea or coffee."

On some level even the Jewish Administration, while already powerful, became imbued with better and more legitimate powers even when the farce only intended to endow them with insubstantial powers of appearance. The Jewish council became an activist with the freedom to voice their opinions on what to change, giving them speech without fear of reprisal for wrongdoings uttered or criticism of current SS policy. Forced to work together with the SS to move the Danes to separate living quarters, release daily bulletins, and rehearse scenes for the production, the Jewish Council became valued for their ability to perform tasks similar to those of the SS command, thus they were valued for points of their humanity instead of their unique specialties that separated them from the human level.

Prisoner memoirs and diaries record their thoughts with pleasure in such changes albeit with an undertone of cautiousness and apprehension at the extent to which such changes would last. As one prisoner said, "it may be crazy, but it is a blessing while it lasts." Another prisoner commented on the hope that the Embellishment gave to everyone in eradicating hunger and starvation in the camp, as increased food supplies had been prevalent throughout the ordeal. For the better or worse, a possible revolt in the initial planning stages by an escaped Theresienstadt firefighter who had been sent to Auschwitz yet returned to Theresienstadt to help his fire brigade came to a halt, as the men and women of Theresienstadt saw the Red Cross as the organization to take responsibility for their security. Most changes that impacted the Jews in their minds for the better came during the Embellishment and possibly during the day of the show, when excess

privileges such as dolls for the children were given out. On the day of the show due to such privileges, one inmate wrote that the Jews were “laughing, content with their fate.” Some changes remained permanent or stayed throughout the summer such as the library, the beautification with flowers and grass, the allotment gardens, the more comfortable beds, the theatrical and musical equipment, and the concert or community hall. Still, the most hardship and hurt from the Embellishment came after the commission left, as the strong hopes of the inmates hit the barrier of reality.

An argument on the improvements during the period of the Embellishment cannot encompass the lives of all sixty to one hundred thousand inmates at the camp for the duration of the production and preparation. Some inmates had no knowledge of the visit until a day or two before June 23, and even then the reasons for the visit were unclear or unknown. Most of the changes that produced improvement and subsequent hurts of the heart and spirit came to specified groups of Theresienstadt society, most of which may be discerned through descriptions of the changes. Danish Jews, *Prominenten*, members of the Jewish or Elderly Council, and more skilled workers received the brunt of the changes, along with anyone transported to their death at Auschwitz, unaware that those transports came only as another tool to shape the camp into a village. That leaves the bulk of elderly inmates, children, and possibly less skilled or well-connected adults who had very different things to say about the Embellishment. These groups knew little to nothing about the show, especially if they had no part to play on June 23. Children, unless recipients of information and items of sustenance from an older sibling, parent, or relative, generally remained unaware of the impending visit and consequently gave little importance to subtle changes being made in the realm of adults. One inmate, a young teen at the time of the visit, remembered feeling no special emotional ties or hopes pinned to the visit, for her it was just another event. She had no time to attach hope to a visit of which she had no knowledge, and again had no reason to attach despair to a passed visit of which she did not know the purpose. Children could not receive packages or even move around the camp unattended, much less sit at the coffeehouse or watch one of the daily performances. Some children even had to return to their workplaces the day after the visit, forgoing the day and a half respite that brought some measure of repose to adults in the camp. This group of inmates and a

few others, though not anomalies in any respect, remain outside the walls of judgment or consideration in reference to the Embellishment, for they existed solely as props in the Nazi play, rather than actors. Props had no intellectual attachment to the Embellishment and altered their routines for one day out of four years, actors reciprocated knowledge of the Embellishment through thought and deed, playing a more central role in the show and living with the title of actor for many more days than those with the title of prop.

Some orders of the Embellishment produced more misery than possibly would have been inflicted on the Jews had such an event not occurred. According to statistics on illness, the extra work needed from the Jews to construct buildings or to decorate for the Embellishment caused a proportional hike in disease affliction, culminating in the first half of 1944. In the early years of the camp coffeehouses, offices, and stores were erected with the intention of creating a Potemkin village for the first visits of German Red Cross members in 1943, and these stores then remained and underwent further renovation for the Embellishment, at a cost to the amount of living space for the residents of the overcrowded ghetto. Loss of housing to provide more space for Embellishment stores created more cramped living conditions that no doubt fostered greater susceptibility to illness. Transports directly caused by the need to reduce overcrowding for the visit sent thousands immediately to their deaths, and history may never tell us what their fate would have been had the Embellishment not occurred. However, we may assume that transports may have continued to the same if not a worse degree barring the advancement of the Embellishment due to the fact that transports had become routine in the camp until February of 1943 when they were stopped for a brief period of time only to focus manpower and bureaucratic direction on the Embellishment, and this initial halt of transports only came as a result of the Embellishment. One inmate, Edith Ornstein, aptly labeled the whole ordeal “Insane preparations, insane humbug.” Indeed, the stress caused by constant upheaval and tension from living in a state where the rules of compliance and rules of obedience changed daily must have been difficult for most Jews to handle.

Especially once the commission left, hopes that had sustained the Jews in their efforts to conceal the truth for the greater good of their society and the possibilities of survival were dashed by a decrease in privileges, causing severe emotional and psychological pain for those who

had spent over a year preparing for a six hour show which, as we will soon see, produced little wake in the sea of the international community. After two days of rest as reward following the commission, Rahm reduced food portions to below pre-Embellishment levels for two weeks. Jews were again plunged in a fight for their lives, seeing that the commission brought no great change, and the cry rang out “Nie wieder Kommission!” (never again commissions).” A piqued despair and anger available only to those who hold such fragile dreams and expectations for an extended amount of time ran through the camp. Despair coupled with a loss of comprehension for personal motives or past compliance erupted into internal disorder. Eppstein died at the hands of the SS no more than three months after his great acting. The Jewish administrators of blocks L417 and L318 were fired by the Jewish Council, presumably for their predominant roles in the Embellishment or possibly out of desires to erase leaders of the Embellishment from positions of internal power.

While the degree to which the hopeful and ameliorating aspects to the Embellishment outweighed or failed to outweigh the increased pain and physical hardship of the Jews of Theresienstadt may never fully be agreed upon, it seems that the time the Jews held lives centered on hope and expectation of improvement lasted for a longer duration of each individual’s stay than the times of heightened suffering. Moreover, had some Jews understood the benefits were temporary as one report suggests, the severity of post-Embellishment suffering may not have been to such a high degree. Nazi actions are so well defined by terror and pain that this incredible story of change in the positive direction sits uniquely in the mind, forcing one to grapple with the words of normal life and happiness even when these terms still in no way correctly identify life in a concentration camp. The relative status of lives under the Embellishment as compared to life in other work camps or other eras of Theresienstadt’s operation must be recognized to validate the terms which are the only ones in English that come close enough to express the Embellishment’s incredible events. Asserting improvements during the time of the Embellishment in no way rescinds the horrors and pain that were so prominent of feature in all Nazi camps, pains that must not be overlooked. Such a backdrop, at the verge of a human’s capacity for comprehension, must remain at the edges of one’s thoughts when making sense of the Embellishment and its effects. While the Nazis commis-

sioned the Embellishment only to give the façade of normalcy and contented small town living, their actions came with the unexpected result of helping a significant amount of imprisoned Jews.

External Consequences of the Embellishment and the Rossel Report

On the other side of the scale, an examination of how the visit affected the international body gives the play broader historical significance. The international body’s opinions were influenced primarily through the Red Cross reports of the two Danish representatives and the Swiss representative of the International Commission of the Red Cross, the only man to write up a formal fifteen page report. Though none of the oral or written reports were ever published publicly, they did circulate through the ranks of the Red Cross and the World Jewish Congress, as well as through the Nazi hierarchy after the Nazis somehow received a copy of the Swiss report.

Questionable signs arose throughout the visit that may have given a clue as to life at the camp behind the façade of the show. These small clues were the clues specifically noted in the reports of the Danes and Dr. Rosssel, proving that at some level the men thought about the impact such idiosyncrasies had on the camp. Danish representatives talked with the Danish prisoners and when asked how long the Danes had lived in such beautiful quarters the prisoner replied, “Since yesterday.” When the representatives asked for the camp’s mortality statistics, Rahm completely ignored the request. Dr. Henningsen of the Danish Ministry of Health asked to see the maternity ward, and Eppstein simply said it was not part of the tour, the reason being the lack of its existence. Dr. Rosssel asked Eppstein on the rare occasion of their speech without the presence of Nazi guards what Eppstein thought would happen to the camp and Eppstein replied that he “saw no way out.” The employee of the post office could not give any explanation as to why shipments and communication with the outside world were so poor, and the Swiss representative repeatedly uses the word *surpeuplement*, or overcrowding, to describe the town. At the pharmacy the pharmacist produced only a quizzical look upon the request by Rossel to see a shipment of medical supplies sent by the IRC (International Red Cross), as the SS had confiscated the package

before it reached the pharmacy. The Danish representatives in their reports noted a “psychological pressure” hanging over the inmates, and they took note of the continued surveillance of the journey by multiple SS guards, or, as they put it, the Nazi’s “discreet supervision.” One of the goals had been a definitive classification of the camp as a transit station of end camp, but despite verbal affirmation of the former by inmates, the Danes still remained skeptical. As Hvass commented on the attitude of the Jews, “whether of not their positive attitude persists depends on whether the population regard their stay in Theresienstadt as permanent.” Lack of a definitive answer on this question brings the possibility that the delegation had mixed feelings on some of what they were told, for Eppstein specifically noted that the camp was an end station.

Still, the favorable praise that the camp received grossly outweighed the minute signs of doubt that historians pinpoint to discredit the success of the Nazi policies or to attempt to find less credulousness on the part of the international community. The Danish representatives wrote, in a report titled “Jewish Paradise on Earth,” of their amazement at the success of the Jewish administration in improving the living situation in the camp and dispelled any belief in the false rumors that many Theresienstadt Jews would be forced to do heavy labor. While Hvass and Henningsen both spoke very favorably of the camp, Hvass suggested their reports be portrayed more modestly so that food and medical supplies could continue to be delivered to the camp, although the reports pleased the Nazi’s wishes in any case. Most all of the points recorded by the Danes were falsities fed to them by the scripted lines of Eppstein: the allowance of pregnancy or contraceptive use, the lack of undernourishment pervasive throughout the camp, the value of Ghetto money which was worth more than Czech crowns, and the lack of epidemics, fleas, bugs, and lice. Amazingly, the Danes reported death rates of only five to ten people each day in the camp.

One important consequence of the Danish reports was the stance of the Danish Red Cross on subsequent visits. Assured of the safety of the Danish Jews in Theresienstadt due to the glowing reports of Hvass and Henningsen, the Danish Red Cross stopped pressuring the German government for a visit to another labor camp such as Birkenau, where it had been looking to visit for a few months. Once Himmler got word of the Danish change of heart, the plan to gas the family camp at Birkenau went straight into action. Addition-

ally, the Danish reports prompted an article on the positive conditions of the camp in the Danish Press Service and helped spread more favorable thoughts on Nazi policy and less worry on the Jews’ condition among members of the Danish government and Red Cross. Despite the pro-Nazi consequences, one must remember that at this time Denmark was under Nazi control. Thus, public opinion assumed a bias towards Nazi policy in any of the few mediums of international media circulated from Denmark no matter the truth. For this reason, Maurice Rossel’s report would be the truly decisive factor on the public’s opinion and actions, as he was a Swiss man representing the nonpartisan International Red Cross.

Maurice Rossel was a young Swiss man who enlisted in the ICRC at the age of twenty-five in 1942 to escape the dreary life of border patrol as a Swiss Army officer. His job was officially to visit POW camps, although he took one trip into Auschwitz without authorization on behalf of the ICRC in order to see the camp commandant and ask for increased leniency for parcel distribution and the funneling of aid to prisoners. He respected himself and his bravery to a high degree as he remembers that he was on his own in the civilian camps; the ICRC had warned him that it was not their liability should he get captured. Finally, in interviews conducted many years after the fact, Rossel expressed his opposition to the Nazis’ racial segregation, saying that it was anathema to the Swiss way of thinking and horrible in itself even without the knowledge of the mass exterminations, of which he claims not to have known at the time of the inspection. A short background into the personality of this key inspector helps set the tone for his approach to the visit and possible conscious or unconscious reasons for his actions.

Rossel finished his fifteen-page report in early July, and the level of praise that he gave the camp administrators and setup remains confounding. He made two separate remarks on the fact that only twelve SS men oversaw the town, and that the Germans only occupied one building in the town. His emphasis on Jewish autonomy and self-sufficiency comes through indirectly in such points. Unlike his companions who took a more cautious stance on classifying the camp after just one six-hour visit, Rossel blatantly stated that the camp was an “*Endlager*,” or final destination. Rossel included most of the changes instituted for the Embellishment in his report, along with answers to the nineteen original guideline questions embedded in sections divided by topic heading, but it is important to note some specific

points that he mentioned while excluding others. On the subject of food, Rossel wrote that he saw no one suffering from undernourishment and went farther in saying that provisions absent from the camp the general population lacked as well such as eggs, cheese, and butter. His extra sentence on the exterior wartime conditions placed the ghetto in an acceptable wartime context. Rossel went so far as to say that the ghetto even procured foods unobtainable in Prague. His report included the uniformed waitresses at one's service in the canteen as well as the fashionable stockings, suits, hats, scarves, and modern bags worn by men and women in the streets, attracting readers' attention only to material manifestations of wealth without an equal statement of less elegant clothing worn by other noticed social classes.

According to the report, shoes in disrepair were taken to factories in Bata occasionally for mending and dirty clothes could be hand washed or washed at a communal Laundromat at a weight of up to four kilograms each time. These small points create little need for attention in the average reader's mind geared towards the general state of living in camps. Thus, Rossel's addition of a paragraph on these points, a relatively large amount of space in a fifteen page report on a topic of such wide scope, sharpened the encouraging aspects of the camp in a parachute effect. When a parachute is raised, as long as the ends are held down the middle may be left loose to rise and fall in its natural and expected progression. A reader of Rossel's report finds the ends of the parachute tied down in normalcy, those minute points on laundry and shoe repair that do not make up the bulk of judgment for a human's living conditions. By extension then, the reader gravitates towards letting the bulk of daily life in the camps be assumed to flow with such normality as the corners of society that received such attention in Rossel's report, fueling a populace that fails to question the report or the major bulk of living conditions.

One third of a paragraph, a fairly lengthy sentence, mentioned the option for members of the Jewish council to have a domestic servant, again drawing attention to a point of living by increased means, higher even than an average civilian's life outside of the camp, reinforcing lack of necessity for concern. Everyone had a job not from necessity but because it allowed people to become interested in something and prove themselves useful; the elderly or those who found little enjoyment in work performed jobs only two hours a day. (The Danish report directly contrasted this and said that everyone worked eight hours a day,

in reality everyone worked at least ten hours a day). To a reader, such a non-demanding lifestyle requiring less work than the average civilian must have seemed non-meritorious for any intervention or immediate aid. The report spent almost an entire page describing the banking system and the Ghetto money's inflation, both of which meant nothing as the bank was not put into actual use, and the final paragraph of the economics portion went so far as to say that injured or sick aged people received special monetary conditions, and the wounded of World War I received additional pensions and allocations. Comments on the distribution of parcels described in general terms the grand number of packages received but specifically cited only sardines from Portugal as arriving in heavy supply. Rossel not only reported the sewers, water, disinfectants, sinks, and showers were well installed and numerous; he gave even higher complements to the showers in the children's barracks, calling them "particularly remarkable." Commenting on surgical instruments, Rossel again used very impressed terms, saying that, "there are certainly few populations who are as well watched over as that of Theresienstadt." Rossel's individual comments on the theater described it as a very spacious building, with well-made backdrops and sufficiently rich decorations. One sentence summed up the amount of information Rossel obtained or sought to obtain on the issue of religion: "Religious services are celebrated regularly and without any hindrance." Education of the young was arranged using the most modern teaching methods. Rossel prefaced the section on the courts with a line that the trial they attended looked like that of a normal town and his next paragraph reported that all 120 cases seen at the court were those of theft, none of morality or crime. In conclusion, Rossel called Theresienstadt a vibrant town, and he expected something much worse after the difficulties overcome to gain permission to visit the camp. His use of "our" and "we," referring to himself and the two Danes, furthered the validity and unity of his proposals, even though the Danes had not seen his report before it was released. An overall high level of praise and attention to non-life threatening details as well as details of a higher standard of living than the non-interned civilian biased the document that should have remained an impartial nonpartisan report.

A Closer Look At The Implications and Explanations of the Rossel Report

While the details of Rossel's report may be interesting, the prime reason to give his report a close look is to see how his words shaped opinions of neutral nations and subsequent Red Cross actions. The ICRC refused to pass Rossel's report and disseminate it to other Red Cross bodies or neutral nations, possibly because of contradictions found within the report and known information acquired elsewhere. The ICRC also did not want to take a definitive stance on the camp after only one visit. National governments did not have direct, public access to an original copy of the report, so consideration of the report's influence on neutral nations remains to a select few. The absence of harsh language denouncing the camp may have made those nations with access to a copy reconsider the lack of validity of popular rumors. As Rossel actually failed to obtain information on one of the central goals of the trip, to answer the question of the possibility of sending parcels through Theresienstadt to camps farther east, the International Red Cross continued to request visits to other camps to fulfill parcel distribution. Rossel missed another goal of the trip, to determine the status of the camp with regards to a final or temporary destination, as the head of the Special Aid Division immediately asked Rossel why the population of the camp given to him at the show was 30,000 less than the figures known to the Red Cross. Rumors of a transport of these 30,000 people to Auschwitz had been circulating, so that the International Red Cross dismissed Rossel's assertion of Theresienstadt as an *Endlager*. For those who did read Rossel's report though, his glowing praise gave credibility to the Nazis from a rather important and respected source.

Although the ICRC itself did not promote a mass publication of Rossel's report, he sent a copy of it along with photographs to the German foreign office, which took it upon itself to make the information widely known. The office sent the pictures to the Swedish embassy and held a press conference for journalists to ask questions regarding Rossel's report, which turned into a story released internationally ultimately denying the gassing of Jews in Poland based on the conditions of Theresienstadt, a camp in Czechoslovakia. In all, the report as well as those of the Danes caused great changes in international policy for the most part in the reverse direction from what should

have been a continued and increased effort to aid the Jews' conditions in all concentration camps.

After World War II the Red Cross came out with several documents justifying their response or lack thereof to civilian detainees during the war. We may begin to understand Rossel's credulity in part from broader International Red Cross justification, and in part from Rossel's own justifications. After the war, the International Red Cross first made the claim that it knew the full extent of the sham it witnessed in Theresienstadt, yet it did all that it intended simply by making an appearance in the east to show the Jews and the Nazis the outsiders' support of the inmates. The International Red Cross has also claimed that it could only do so much for the civilian detainees since they were not under the protection of a treaty similar to the 1929 Geneva Convention for the protection of prisoners of war. Therefore, legally and in accordance with wartime protocol, all of the Jews and others in concentration camps were under the jurisdiction of the Nazis. Had the International Committee for the Red Cross attempted to make demands to the belligerent nation, it assumed that it would have "jeopardized all the work which, as a rule, it was able to perform satisfactorily for prisoners of war." By the organization's comprehension of their bylaws, "Every protest is a judgment." Thus, any denunciation of the Nazi party would have strayed from their neutral intentions.

This justification may support Rossel's inevitable inexperience or lack of appropriate response to the situation he found himself in, as members of the Red Cross were not trained to enter civilian camps nor had their been much precedent set by the time of the Theresienstadt show. It may also attempt to justify reasons why further scrutiny and prying into the lives behind the curtain at the camp did not take place or why more vocal demands to clear up inconsistencies in reports and rumors were not undertaken; the Red Cross did not want to act too offensively and risk denial of access to the prisoners of war. Aiding a civilian detainee's life took more risk and planning than aiding a POW's life, and the Red Cross feared it would simply be using extra time and effort to replace one helped life with another, sacrificing its consignments with POWs to help a different population. Such fears held little weight with the case of the Embellishment, for the Red Cross had been granted the visit without incurring loss to its privileges with the POWs, and in 1944, the beginning of the Germans' downfall, it was in a position to at least make formal requests without

penalty. Further, Rossel had already smuggled himself into Auschwitz for a visit with the camp commandant there, and he had several POW visits to experience him in the proper inspection techniques. The fact that he solely represented the International Red Cross on such a key visit points to the organization's faith in his work.

Perhaps another reason the delegation did not know what to expect or how to exert pressure to find the truth was due to the lack of coordination between the International Red Cross and the more localized Czechoslovak section of the Red Cross. This body functioned spatially closer to activities of Theresienstadt and was in a position to reach out to its national community for help deciphering the Embellishment or daily workings inside the camp. However, the Czechoslovak Red Cross set very little time or effort to the plight of civilians as compared to its work with POWs, and the only information it had in its archives related to Theresienstadt were the names of 1,500 deportees who had signed a receipt for a relief package in 1944. Silence reigned between the Czechoslovak Red Cross and the Czechoslovak people, and the Czech Red Cross and the International Red Cross, guarding shut a pathway to communication that may have produced valuable information to aid the delegation's ability to critically analyze the show.

Absent from books of defense published by the Red Cross is the idea that a visit to Theresienstadt was not one of the highest priorities. Before the visit of 1944, the International Red Cross had canceled several potential visits for various reasons. Other neutral nations could have sent delegations had they wished along with the Danish, yet no country asked for this and even the Swedes declined their invitation. The justification that little could actually be done for the civilians does not hold sway for the mere act of repeatedly requesting to visit shows some determination to make a report on the camp, at least to know some of the truth of the Jewish German relationship behind the front lines. While the visit was requested, arrangements were not urgently made, and the Red Cross's lack of commitment to the inspection of Theresienstadt gave the Germans more time to concoct their model village while lessening the insistence on meticulousness for Rossel's investigation. The ICRC may have developed its less persistent, more cautious attitude on civilian detainee camps through a response to influence global silence at the time. Indifference on the part of the Allies, key forces with power and economic means of control especially in the later years, certainly shaped the reluctance

of the Red Cross to focus its efforts on an issue far from the worry of those who could actually take forceful steps in wartime to curb the abuses. Lack of support from overseas Jewish populations enhanced a turn towards more solvable problems. Most Jewish populations outside of Europe took a resigned attitude on camps no matter how much they knew of the atrocious conditions, civilians thought only by ending the war could Nazi power over the European Jews halt. All of these points help explain, at least partially, why the ICRC tried to help Theresienstadt in the small manner that it did and why Rossel and the Danes entered the camp with their respective mindsets.

Thirty-five years after the visit, Rossel gave an interview with Claude Lanzmann in which he tried to explain his feelings and actions during the Embellishment's final act. He begins by humbling himself to a young twenty-seven year old "naïve village simpleton who knew nothing". His inexperience and lack of education to acquire critical skills of analysis may have made him more susceptible to being drawn into the Nazi's play or less able to formulate the correct types of questions to find the answers he sought. He had, however, experience as a POW inspector and he later testifies that he knew something was amiss in the camp. Rossel goes on to say that his mindset of camps accepted the inevitability of POW deaths, and his job to enter camps was not to stop their death but to make sure they were treated correctly. Abstracting this mindset to his work in the civilian camps, one may suspect that he was not looking for signs of death but only signs of healthy or fair life, as he had done at all previous camps, and had he looked for signs of death his mindset from other camps may have hindered him from feeling a severe sense of alarm. Again, the fact that this camp was not a POW camp but an altogether different place with a different set of guidelines, a fact that most everyone could comprehend, weakens the paralleled mindset of anyone entering a civilian camp from previous encounters in POW camps.

Two justifications that Rossel profusely speaks of yet does not explicitly state deal with his attitude towards the Jews. Rossel in some ways combines a mindset of partial anti-Semitism, most likely obtained through cultural spheres and realms of experience, with a shift in blame for belief in the play from himself to the Jews. These ideas overlap because Rossel's reasons to shift the blame correlate well with his perception of the Jews as a group worthy to take the blame. Rossel says, "there were big shots, you got the feeling the

camp was stocked with Jews who were rich...I felt these people, though they lacked the stature of the Rothschilds, were powerful enough and had spent enough to be in that camp.” Rossel’s initial acceptance of the need for Jews to be in some camp and his attitude that these people could protect themselves did not make him look favorably upon assistance to this select group of people. He had heard stories of such affluent people obtaining exit visas signed by Himmler or making cash payments to Portugal to save themselves, and this camp then became another method of survival through payment. As a man without significant wealth, he seemed to look down on such proud people with assets above and beyond his means, as he says these were, “Jews who thought of themselves as *Prominenten*, that was a favorite word of them.” Rossel’s attitude, slightly more critical than apathetic, allowed him to transfer the situation from that of him not noticing problems to that of the Jews not telling him the problems. Rossel’s speech repeated a central idea that he was “used to being winked at to draw attention to something, it happened often, here nothing of the sort, their docility and passivity made [him] profoundly uneasy.” Here Rossel completely turned the tables to make the job of accurate reporting on the status of concentration camps that of the victims and not the visitors, an egocentric attitude that only too well explains his report on the surface observations of the Theresienstadt stage.

The gaps Rossel left in defense of his actions may be summed up by the idea of selective recognition without consequential consideration. Much of Rossel’s report includes his own positive statements that actually embellish the Embellishment, and each time Rossel goes into specific detail only on the more upscale sides of life he forgets to mention the lower class of what he deemed the normal society. Examples such as the list of fancier clothes without reference to clothes of the bourgeoisie class, even though he says he saw people dressed in all types of clothes as would be seen on a normal small town’s street, come to mind. In instances where the bottom of the ladder was not shown, as must have been the case in most situations such as the packages where Rossel only remarks on the preponderance of the Portuguese sardine delicacy, his inspector’s intuition never kicks in to ask the question of where the packages for the less endowed were. After years of inspections of POW camps, where similar package deliveries came to a majority of the prisoners, it is hard to believe that Rossel could not have thought through the subject fully should he

have consciously felt the moral responsibility to do so. His selective recognition of minute details considered truthful for ambiguous reasons proves Rossel to be somewhat of an amateur inspector. Rossel validated the acceptable and even abundant supply of medical facilities and care because the doctors were “specialists,” and he accepted the unlimited receipt of packages by the sight of so many Jews holding boxes, without thinking of the contradiction between this sight and the known fact that postal relations with the outside world were deplorable. Even within the span of two paragraphs, Rossel goes from writing of the normalcy of the town’s judicial system to writing of the lack of moral or criminal court cases, a very non-normal occurrence for any town or city.

His selective recognition as well as his failure to consider what points he could have been glossing over that would have changed the international opinion in a profound way make his fantastic report a product of his learned and held beliefs, modes of critical thought, and writing style. Rossel asserted multiple times that no Jews in the entire camp tried to tell him the truth, yet reports from other inmates or historians conflict with this blunt and overarching assumption. To make the report more balanced and impartial, Rossel at least could have included his suspicions or uncomfortable feelings from the oddly perfect situation in his report to allow the reader or interpreter to step out of Rossel’s camp where he left little room for doubt or questioning. Dr. Murrelstein claimed to have used voice inflections to offset the lies he uttered and discount them, while the doctor of the hospital ward added the word *Lo*, Hebrew for no, after each lie he said in support of the wonderful hospital. Although both of these seem ridiculously subtle to the point of getting lost in translation from one Jew to one Swiss gentile unfamiliar with nuances of Judaic culture, Rossel was looking for only simple “winks,” and these seem just like the small types of offsets from the norm that would allow him to press further for the truth, should he have noticed them or taken an interest in noticing them. The same may be said of Eppstein’s blunt response that he “saw no way out.” Rossel’s self-defense alone does not completely support his failure to question the Embellishment’s grand finale.

The Embellishment's Lessons Learned

After juxtaposing three international representatives' five hour and forty minutes inspection of Theresienstadt with the year and a half buildup, teardown, and emotional rollercoaster its Embellishment created, only astonishment comes to mind as a reaction. The Embellishment and its grand finale brought an incalculable array of changes to the culture of Theresienstadt, and though not everyone felt the wave of upheaval those who did felt increased hardship or persecution to a lesser extent than increased opportunity and possibility. Changes made in the cultural, dietary, health, and residential realms of the *Prominenten*, the Jewish Council, and most working adults all gave emotional and physical improvements over the course of months prior to the Embellishment, the day of the show, and for weeks afterwards. That said, groups such as the elderly, ill, or children saw little prosperity and may have combated a worse fate. Mixed reactions inside the camp paralleled those outside the camp. For so many reasons that still cannot fully illuminate the situation, a more favorable Red Cross report made the headlines and the conversation circles of Europe, setting the Red Cross and other neutral bodies' courses for the rest of the war towards more restrained or subdued protest or insistence on clarification as to the Germans' secrets. Representative Rossel's impressive tone of his published report directly impacted the worldview of the Nazi camps to the detriment of the concern for Jews, and an analysis of his motivation for such a report and the larger consequences of it still rests in the preliminary stages. A comprehensive understanding of the step-by-step preparations and production of the Embellishment reveals an anomaly in the Jews' favor at Theresienstadt, with the ambivalent position of the IRC and the individual inspectors' personal beliefs and indoctrinated biases overshadowing the possibility of delving behind the Nazis' curtained stage.

Appendix A

List 1: From the ICRC

1. How does the post office work at Theresienstadt: can one locate people whose specific addresses are unknown?
2. Is there a functioning Jewish administration that deals with emergency relief and aid efforts?
3. Does such organization inspect relief pack-

ages and can it guarantee that the packages are distributed impartially and fairly?

4. Try to see if individual packages to specific people arrive well. We have reason to believe that the residents of Theresienstadt may only send a certain quantity of letters each month and if this is the case, what is this limit?
5. Why were individual packages of money turned away?
6. What are the relief needs and what are the types of medicines and living necessities that internees would like to receive?
7. Can investigations concerning Jews thought to be at Theresienstadt be performed and by whom?
8. Study the establishment of a future inspection system for collective aid packages that will expedite the process.
9. We were told that surplus packages addressed to Theresienstadt could be forwarded to work camps in Upper Silesia. Is this a possibility and how would this work?
10. What is an estimate of the Jewish population at Theresienstadt and the population divided by nationality?
11. Are there other camps around Theresienstadt?
12. Can you arrange for new arrivals to Theresienstadt to hasten their announcement of arrival to their parents in Switzerland? (International Committee of the Red Cross, Documents Concernant Theresienstadt, Annexe 16, Schwartzenburg)

Appendix B

List 2: From the Joint Relief Commission

1. It was reported to us that sufficient supplies of medicines were available. If this is so, it would not be necessary for further shipments.
2. Is there a need for medicine or a hospital at the present time?
3. How and by whom are medical shipments distributed?
4. How is hygiene and the authority overseeing this department?
5. May similar statement regarding use and authority be made for conditions in the warehouses?
6. Previously medical parcels to individuals were considered the control of the SS, may single petitions now be made there?
7. Does the nourishment situation have an influence on the occurring illness? Can diabet-

ics keep a certain restricted diet? (International Committee of the Red Cross, Documents Concernant Theresienstadt, Annexe 17, Das Vereinigte Hilfswerk vom Internationalen Roten Kreuz)

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