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**Characterizing Interdisciplinarity in Historical Theatre:
Exploring Character, Empathy, and Humanity with the History Student**

By Kari-Anne Innes and Kevin Ostoyich

Setting: An apartment in the Designated Area Set up for the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai in 1943.

IDA

I work hard at The Handbag. I know it hasn't been easy for you to find work.

DANIEL

There's no need for a Jewish doctor here. I can't even manage the jobs I can find. Even going to the shop to help is difficult with this leg.

(Gestures to his left leg)

I can't do anything!

IDA

Everything changed after the Anschluss. Daniel, you've also changed. After Dachau, I can't talk to you. I don't know who you are anymore.

(IDA begins to cry)

DANIEL

I still have nightmares from the camp. There's a lot I can't tell you now. I might not ever be able to, but -

IDA

Daniel, please you don't have to talk about it. Not now.

(They both sip coffee in silence)

DANIEL

There might be jobs for a doctor's assistant here but until then, I guess I can help at the shop.

(IDA reaches for his hand)

IDA

Daniel, I need you to come to the store as soon as you can. Rebecca will take care of Eric. It's going to be busy with the performance tonight so I need your help in the store today, okay? This is not like it was in Vienna. We need to work hard to try and survive here.

DANIEL

Look at us now! I can't even provide for you, Rebecca and Eric. (Pauses.) I'll try to come to the store.

IDA

(Holds his hand)

I'm glad we made it here, but you support us in more ways than just finances. Even if you don't realize it, you do.

(DANIEL exits. IDA hangs her head to cry)

The dialogue between Ida and Daniel comes from the student-written play, *Shanghai Carousel: What Tomorrow Will Be*. Shanghai Carousel originated from the course: Historical Theatre: The Shanghai Jews. The course appears at the intersection of history, educational theatre, applied theatre, and performance studies. In this article, we set out to describe Historical Theatre's pedagogical underpinnings, present some of its results, and address the obstacles that lie before it. We believe the Historical Theatre course¹ offers an effective way to encourage students to connect with the humanity to be found in historical subjects and themselves. To date, we have taught Historical Theatre three times and believe wholeheartedly that it provides a framework for students to learn history deeply for themselves and a platform from which students can teach history to others.

Historical Theatre: Shanghai Jews is an interdisciplinary course cross-listed in history, arts and entertainment administration, and liberal studies. Co-taught by Professor of History, Dr.

¹ Historical Theatre is the name of the course rather than an approach to teaching theatre or history.

Kevin Ostoyich, and Program Director of the Arts and Entertainment Administration graduate program, Dr. Kari-Anne Innes, the course studies the little-known history of the Shanghai Jewish refugees. The student output of the course is a dramatization of research and interviews with surviving refugees, written and performed by undergraduate and graduate students. To date the course has resulted in the plays *Knocking on the Doors of History: The Shanghai Jews*; *Shanghai Carousel: What Tomorrow Will Be*; and, *The Singer of Shanghai*. The goal of Historical Theatre is to create a new type of learning experience through breaking down the barriers between disciplines. But those barriers can be quite high and mighty at a university.

The administrative barriers can make the approval of such a course difficult; being cross-listed, co-taught, and co-ed (in the sense of combining undergraduate and graduate students), the course causes headaches for assigning work-load credits and budgets. In “Being in-between: Performance Studies and Processes for Sustaining Interdisciplinarity,” Lynette Hunter observes that “[i]nterdisciplinary work does not fit the current angloamerican university model: in the way academics are trained, the way students are exposed to multidisciplinary pedagogy, the way courses can be listed or credited or the way graduate students can be supported”² but rather:

Interdisciplinarity happens when we commit to staying in the in-between, to staying in process. . . . Interdisciplinary work is necessarily concerned with what is not present or represented in existing disciplines, but felt. It attends to what discourse leaves out, the elements not only outside the rules, bending and breaking them, but those radically out *with* the rules, no doubt inflected by them but not working primarily in response to them.³

² Lynette Hunter, “Being in-between: Performance Studies and Processes for Sustaining Interdisciplinarity,” *Cogent: Arts and Humanities* 2: 1124481 (2015): 4, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2015.1124481>.

³ Hunter, 2.

The Historical Theatre course is hard to classify, it does not fit neatly in a course catalog, department, or a degree audit. Rather, interdisciplinarity draws attention to something unknown that is missing from the curriculum and sets out to explore and generate something from within, to borrow a term from theatre director Peter Brook, to fill that “empty space.” Therefore, such a course does not necessarily follow the rules, a discipline, or best practices because such things are not yet known and those that exist have not yet been able to produce what is missing, in this case, a “feeling” for history within the student. The impetus for creating this course was not to fulfill a missing requirement in the course catalog, but to fill something missing from current pedagogy that arises from the needs of the students, a need perhaps they do not even realize they have. For Hunter, performance studies provides a pedagogy for exploring and sustaining an interdisciplinarity that at once reveals a gap and produces a way of knowing for what exists between disciplines. She advocates for performance as a site of interdisciplinary studies for several pedagogical reasons: 1) its nature as both constructed (performance) and constitutive (becoming); 2) its potential for emotion or affect;⁴ 3) critical awareness in both responsiveness and engagement; and 4) collaborative work. Furthermore, as will be required by assessment committees and accrediting agencies, the results of such pedagogy are measurable and transferable in the conventional academic sense. Students’ work can be evaluated through: “preparation, research, imaginative structure, craft competence, critical abilities, self-assessment, joint assessment, group procedures.”⁵ Perhaps for these reasons, performance studies and its variants such as performance ethnography, applied theatre, theatre of the oppressed, and theatre in education are often paired with other disciplines in work on pedagogy.

⁴ Hunter means “affect” in the sense of affect studies and the “affective turn.”

⁵ Hunter, 9.

For instance, in her article “Theater of the Assessed: Drama-Based Pedagogies in the History Classroom,” Rachel Mattson draws on the work of Cecily O’Neill and Alan Lambert’s *Drama Structures: A Practical Handbook for Teachers* (1982) to develop a performance-based history pedagogy “[c]haracterized by the close analysis of primary documents and a students-as-historians approach . . . foreground[ed in] two distinct yet related ideas: (1) that history should be understood as a debate; and (2) that historical events are/were experienced from, and should be viewed through, multiple perspectives.” She adds: “Although these two ideas might not strike university-based historians as radical, provocative, or even new, in the K–12 context they absolutely are.”⁶ However, over a decade later performance as a pedagogy in undergraduate history classes *is* still seen as radical. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “How an Idiosyncratic Role Playing Game Became a Popular Teaching Tool” explains how some history departments and administrators are just now warming to the use of role-play to explore historical events and debates. Educators are beginning to realize that these active learning approaches improve engagement and the ever-important student retention in history programs.⁷

Historical Theatre, and pedagogies like it, succeed because they strive for an empathic response to humanity. The course serves as a vehicle by which students connect with history (a discipline that can often leave them feeling removed and cold). In Historical Theatre, students

⁶ Rachel Mattson, “Theater of the Assessed: Drama-Based Pedagogies in the History Classroom,” *Radical History Review*, 102 (Fall 2008): 99-110, doi:10.1215/01636545-2008-016.

⁷ Kristen Doerer, “How an Idiosyncratic Role-Playing Game Became a Popular Teaching Tool,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 22, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-an-Idiosyncratic/247190?key=Wbfg_NLWrvl8zO3cK3LyTziamkcKfMpDD_9SZM40knRKWrNISFFxhfB8jXk-UcaybUZPdGxKRDhjZDJLeGQ4QmFRb2F3RVQ2Tlc2eVA0ci1xSGFKNnRPOWRXMA&fbclid=IwAR0mAcb5CVnW24LVOXi6k-s0ACX1TIBOYU7XHxmPEYyNY5NrXfppDRxTuXk

search for humanity not only in the history but also within themselves. In our interaction with students over the years, we have observed that generalization and statistics can impede close historical understanding. Generalization and statistics are two mainstays of academic research, but they often obscure the humanity of history. Statistics do not simply form a barrier to historical understanding. Philosopher J.D. Trout notes that statistics can impede empathy more generally. With respect to the psychological underpinnings of helping victims, for example, Trout writes, “Abstract concepts, such as a statistical victim, are difficult for people to warm up to. We seem to care that our efforts help *particular* victims.”⁸ We argue that humanity and empathy are to be found in the realm of nuances and particularity. Historical Theatre attempts to breach the fortress of statistics and generalization by setting value on listening and intimacy. The hope is that by listening to individual stories, students develop an appreciation for the historical agency of ordinary people who happened to live through extraordinary circumstances. With respect to Holocaust Studies, this approach replicates that of Judith Miller in her book *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust*. Students are challenged to penetrate such incomprehensible numbers as 6,000,000 deaths, which tend to obscure humanity, and instead contemplate the Holocaust as a collection of individual stories (one, by one, by one...)⁹ With respect to scholarship specifically on the subject of the Shanghai Jewish refugees, this method has been utilized to great effect by Vera Schwarcz in her *In the Crook of the Rock – Jewish Refuge in a World Gone Mad: The Chaya Leah Walkin Story*. In this work, Schwarcz acknowledges the challenge that faces all historians of trying to bridge “the gap between those who knew the

⁸ J.D. Trout, *The Empathy Gap: Building Bridges to the Good Life and the Good Society* (New York: Viking, 2009), 43.

⁹ Judith Miller, *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

trauma of war firsthand and the rest of us.”¹⁰ Schwarcz likens Chaya Leah Walkin’s agency to the dove in the Song of Songs (*Shir Ha’Shirim*), whose voice lies within the “hiding place of the steep” (i.e., hiding beneath the generalizations that have emerged regarding the history of the Shanghai Jewish refugees in recent decades). Ultimately, by listening to Chaya Leah, Schwarcz realized that the text of Song of Songs itself could help her to uncover Chaya Leah’s voice and agency and embrace the humanity and meaning of her life story.

We wish for students to listen and engage in a historical conversation like that between Vera Schwarcz and Chaya Leah Walkin. Listening and conversation may seem simple, but as Sherry Turkle has argued, both listening and conversation seem to be in ever diminishing supply. Turkle points to technology as the main culprit. Phones—those conversation-killing devices that young people have become addicted to—are setting up a major barrier to empathy. She says that, “It’s time to put technology in its place and reclaim conversation.”¹¹ In Historical Theatre we utilize tools from the theatre world in order to help students put their phones down and actively write and engage in conversations. By exploring these conversations, students can start to empathize with historical situations. The conversation of IDA and DANIEL that opened the piece has an authenticity that is borne from the historical documents. The Handbag was a real high-end leather goods store run by the Shanghai Jewish refugees Walter and Grete Kisch. The strains of the refugee experience ultimately were too much for their marriage and they divorced shortly after moving to Australia after the war. The students sought to empathize with the frustrations of Walter and Grete by infusing the dialogue between IDA and DANIEL with the

¹⁰ Vera Schwarcz, *In the Crook of the Rock – Jewish Refuge in a World Gone Mad: The Chaya Leah Walkin Story* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press: Boston, 2018), 289.

¹¹ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 25.

thoughts and memories of their own lives. For instance, the actress who created the role of IDA had herself observed these marital dynamics in her grandparents, Guatemalan refugees. Through their memories and imaginations they could find a connection to the historical plight of Walter and Grete Kisch. Quite literally (or perhaps better said, “historically”), the students are reclaiming conversation.¹²

How does one begin such a journey toward agency, humanity, and meaning with students who may be new to both history and theatre?¹³ Interviews. In the very first session of the course, students break into pairs and are asked to interview each other. Meanwhile, the students are introduced to the concepts of diachronic and synchronic history. We use the analogies provided by Norman J. Wilson as expressed in his *History in Crisis?: Recent Directions in Historiography*. Wilson likens diachronic history to that of looking through a photo album of a person’s life, and synchronic history to that of looking at a collage of photos and other items depicting recent events which are fixed on the wall of a roommate’s side of a dorm room.¹⁴ (We have found these analogies to be very effective with college students.) Having been introduced to the two concepts, students are challenged to present either a diachronic or synchronic treatment of their partner’s life to the rest of the class. After listening to the presentations, the students

¹² For depictions of the lives of Walter and Grete Kisch see Kevin Ostoyich, “Records of Shanghai: One Man’s Quest to Validate the Memories of a Family’s Refugee Past” (<https://www.aicgs.org/2017/10/records-of-shanghai/>); Kevin Ostoyich, “Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht” (<https://www.aicgs.org/2018/11/mothers-remembering-three-women-on-the-80th-anniversary-of-kristallnacht/>); and “A Doctor’s Mission: The Life and Work of Ernst Kisch” (<https://www.aicgs.org/2019/01/a-doctors-mission-the-life-and-work-of-ernst-kisch/>).

¹³ Most of the students we have encountered in Historical Theatre have had no experience in theatre. Although the students have encountered history in their K-12 education, it is fair to say that none of them have approached history using our methodology.

¹⁴ Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis?: Recent Directions in Historiography* (Third Edition, Boston, MA: Pearson, 2014), 15.

discuss which were diachronically structured and which were synchronically structured. Each student was then asked the extent to which the presentation captured the essence of their life story. They also were then challenged to think about what documents, material objects, and potential interviewees would help their partner compose an even more accurate description of their life story. This exercise launches students into the main journey of Historical Theatre because it challenges students to listen to others and themselves and to start contemplating how historians use various sources in order to try to capture the essence or humanity of their historical subjects. As the semester unfolds, students listen to oral testimonies, examine material objects, read historical documents, and constantly discuss historical structure and meaning.

The pedagogy of Historical Theatre depends on deep intellectual and emotional engagement in the study of history and human character, and the rudimentary skills of public presentation through performance. Students effectively take a history course and a performance course simultaneously. Students learn in-depth about one historical event and explore the perspective of one, or at the most two, characters within a fully staged play. When considering the most appropriate methodology for introducing performance to the history student, performance studies seemed the most appropriate. As a discipline, performance studies has long-since recognized performance as research, and provides an appropriate mix of both research and performance. Dwight Conquergood developed the practice of performance-ethnography in his work in the 1980s, while actress-playwright Anna Deavere Smith introduced the form into the popular imagination in the 1990s with her one-person performances of *Fires in the Mirror* and

Twilight: Los Angeles. Scholars, ethnographers, and performers are standard in introductory performance studies courses.¹⁵

Conquergood's "moral map" for performing other's stories complements the goal of Historical Theatre to enable the students' search for humanity not only in the historical subject, but within themselves as well.¹⁶ Conquergood insists that performances be a dialogue between the actor and the subject. The ethnographer must balance her/his identification with the subject with her/his sense of difference, as well as her/his commitment to the subject with her/his sense of detachment. Imbalanced stances fall into one of four quadrants: custodian's rip-off (identification with detachment), enthusiast's infatuation (identification and commitment), curator's exhibition (commitment with difference), and skeptic's cop-out (difference and detachment). Conquergood proposes a move toward the center with a full understanding of one's identification and difference from the subject and the proper amount of subjective commitment and objective detachment from the subject. The result is a dialogical performance, or "genuine conversation."

For non-actor students in a history classroom, initial performance anxiety often locates students in the "skeptics cop-out" quadrant of Conquergood's model. Students understandably feel as if they cannot identify with Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust. Likewise, they are

¹⁵ Julie-Ann Scott, William Bolduc, and Frank Trimble, "Co-Creating *Crippling*: A Performance Ethnographic Research Project as Undergraduate Pedagogy," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*. 11, no. 4 (October 2015): 1-23. Scott's class is one example of ethnographic performance studies used as a pedagogy for undergraduate studies. Hers also provides another example of a co-taught course. The projects differ, however, in that the collaborators in *Crippling* were from the same department, one familiar with theatre and performance. Historical Theatre, on the other hand, involves the collaboration of different departments and students unfamiliar with performance pedagogies.

¹⁶ Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 65-80.

skeptical of the acting process and remain detached from taking on the role of the subject. Of the five students enrolled in 2018, three admitted that they would not have registered for the course if they had known it would result in a public performance. For Conquergood, the skeptic's cop-out is the most "morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue . . . shut[ting] down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt."¹⁷ However, for non-theatre students, the resistance rests more in the fear of memorization and public speaking than moral reprehension. For example, a pre-med student remembered hyperventilating and her knees buckling while presenting at an undergraduate research symposium. Another student, who had been struck by lightning, worried that her affected memory would prevent her from memorizing lines. An older adult had similar worries about the effect of age on her abilities, and international students feared that their oral skills in English would be an embarrassment. These worries, which threatened to prevent students from committing to material in the course, itself reveals a gap in higher education that interdisciplinary courses with performance can help fill with respect to public presentation skills. To put aside student anxieties for a time, the pedagogy of the course begins with strengthening the students' commitment to the historical subject.

To move students toward a dialogical stance, it was necessary to endow them with a moral imperative and commitment to tell the refugees' stories. Reading Conquergood along with the personal histories and narratives of surviving Jewish refugees, the moral imperative of the project helped to overcome personal insecurities. Visits with surviving refugees and telephone interviews eased the student-actors into a dialogic conversation with their subjects. Conquergood writes, "One does not have to delay in entering the conversation until self and other become old

¹⁷ Conquergood, 74.

friends. Indeed, as the metaphor makes clear, one cannot begin a friendship without building a conversation. Dialogical performance is the means as much as the end of honest intercultural understanding.”¹⁸ Kevin Ostoyich helped encourage students on their pathways to Conquergood’s “genuine conversation” by increasingly immersing the students in oral testimonies, either through written form in Steve Hochstadt’s *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich*, or through viewing interviews he himself had conducted with former Shanghai Jewish refugees.¹⁹ Furthermore, the students were introduced to historical documents (e.g. passports, letters, etc.) and material objects pertaining to the Shanghai refugees held in Valparaiso University Archives and Special Collections. Again, in pursuit of Conquergood’s “genuine conversation,” Judith Miller’s “one, by one, by one” or Vera Schwarcz’s “dove in the steep,” students did not passively view the items behind plexiglass, but actively *touch*ed them. Just as they had been challenged to piece together the life stories of their partners in the beginning of the course, now students were challenged to put together the documents, material objects, and interview testimonies to form a rough historical narrative of the person’s life. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of *touch*. Although touching goes against archival norms, we have observed that nothing replicates the physical act of students touching items from the past. One must consider—in this age of the smartphone—how infrequently students genuinely engage with the material world of both past and present. Through such active engagement with the documents of the past, students eventually found the courage to enter into the performative dimension of the project.

¹⁸ Steve Hochstadt, *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2012).

¹⁹ Steve Hochstadt, *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2012).

Once the foundation of dialogic conversation was set, the process moved into the dramaturgical phase. Moving from history proper to theatre history, students read and studied German playwright Bertolt Brecht's *lehrstuck*. Short plays such as *The Jewish Wife* and *The Intruder*, contemporaneous to the beginnings of WWII, helped students draw connections between the lived experiences of the refugees and the depiction of the Jewish experience on the stage. Brecht's epic style allowed students to retain the objective stance necessary for critical reflection. Brecht's "On Chinese Acting" introduced students to the influence eastern culture had on western forms and connected the western dramaturgy of Brecht to the historical location of Shanghai, China, and to the sensibilities of our Chinese international students participating in the course.

Students also read Tang Yating's article "Reconstructing the Vanished Musical Life of the Shanghai Diaspora: A Report" in order to learn of the rich cultural life of the Shanghai Jews, which included a wide range of musical arts from opera to Yiddish folk songs to cabaret transplanted from Europe to Shanghai's "Little Vienna."²⁰ Students soon realized that the arts had a much larger role than providing entertainment for the refugees, but were the cultural glue that held refugees together and preserved their emotional and spiritual well-being in exile. The introduction of songs and cultural life was intentional, not only for the genuine historical importance of Shanghai Jewish cultural life, but also to help students grasp the *sensual* nature of history. Historical Theatre encourages students to try to capture the sound, touch, and even the smell of history. In doing so we challenge students to capture a level of intimacy with respect to history that is often entirely lacking in textbooks and other treatments that tend to stay on the

²⁰ Tang Yating, "Reconstructing the Vanished Musical Life of the Shanghai Diaspora: A Report," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no.1 (January 2004):101-118.

level of generalizations. The eminent historian of American colonial history, Bernard Bailyn, addressed the lacunae with respect to matters of everyday life that must have been of great interest to individuals in the past but have often eluded the attention of academics, for example, “Did clothing itch?” He says the answer to this question could not have been trivial to those working in the fields in the Chesapeake region in the seventeenth century, but academics tend to overlook such things.²¹ We have found that by challenging students to put history on the stage, they become much more aware of such matters of historical intimacy. In preparing *Shanghai Carousel: What Tomorrow Will Be*, for example, students went to great lengths to find out which brands of cigarettes were most desirable within the Shanghai Jewish community, in order to make their depiction of a Skat card game more historically accurate.

In 2016, students incorporated the Yiddish lullaby “Raisins and Almonds” from Abraham Goldfaden’s operetta *Shulamis* into their play *Knocking on the Doors of History: The Shanghai Jews*. Different ghettos during WWII had their own versions of the song to reflect their specific community’s experiences. When the former Shanghai Jewish refugee, Ralph Cohn, met with the students for lunch after having read the script, he told them how much their inclusion of “Raisins and Almonds” captured the essence of his historical experience. In 2018, Kevin Ostoyich uncovered a collection of popular songs specific to the Shanghai Jews while conducting research at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. These Shanghai lyrics were transposed and included in the production *Shanghai Carousel: What Tomorrow Will Be*.

The actual writing of the play drew from another set of pedagogies, theatre in education (TIE) and applied theatre. TIE has its “roots in Bertolt Brecht’s *lehrstuck* and Worker’s Theatre,

²¹ Bernard Bailyn, *On the Teaching and Writing of History: Responses to a Series of Questions* Edited by Edward Connery Lathem (University Press of New England: Hanover, NH, 1994), 52.

as well as progressive education movements such as John Dewey's ideas of participatory, democratic, and arts-based education."²² TIE works on the premise that the process of theatre is a way of learning and knowing. According to Anthony Jackson, "The aim [of TIE] is to provide an experience . . . that will be immensely absorbing, challenging, often provocative, and an unrivalled stimulus for further investigation of the chosen subject in and out of school."²³ Like TIE, devising an original script was central to the Historical Theatre course and performers were considered both actors and educators in their relationship to the audience.²⁴ However, unlike TIE, the audience did not play an active role in the performance and the performance was not part of a larger educational program for the audience. In this sense, Historical Theatre fits the broader domain of applied theatre, or theatre used for purposes other than arts and entertainment. However, for both student-actor and audience, Historical Theatre met David Pammenter's definition of TIE as "a people-centered, 'theatre *as* education' pedagogy."²⁵ Each performance was followed by a thorough Question and Answer session, in which audience members were able to learn more about the history and the students' reflections on and relationship with the history.

²² Charles M. Adams Jr., "TIE and Critical Pedagogy," in *Learning through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*, eds. Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 287.

²³ Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, "Introduction." in *Learning through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*. eds. Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

²⁴ Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, "Part II: Ways of Working Introduction," in *Learning through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*, eds. Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013): 81-82.

²⁵ David Pammenter, "Theatre as Education and a Resource for Hope: Reflections on the Devising of Participatory Theatre" in *Learning through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education*, eds. Anthony Jackson and Chris Vine, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013): 101.

For each iteration of the course, students devised the script by deciding the general plot and scenes were assigned to individual playwrights. For *Shanghai Carousel*, the loose plot was to tell the story of a family's journey through their many homes during WWII: their family home in Vienna; a ship to Shanghai; a performer's apartment in Kobe, Japan; an apartment in the French Concession; and a room in the Designated Area of Hongkou. Interviews inspired characters in the play. Through conversations with surviving refugees, students negotiated the content of the performance and even decided to frame *Shanghai Carousel* with actual refugees' statements about their motivations for telling their stories:

At Rise: After the audience has been seated, a group of five Shanghai Jewish refugee survivors [played by student-actors] enter the space as if they are looking at the museum exhibits. They reflect on how things are not as they remember. Their memories take the audience into the play.

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #1

Among survivors there will be different perspectives and feelings that won't be reconciled--but shouldn't be because these are their emotions--there is no debating it.²⁶

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #2

²⁶ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Harry Katz that the students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

Be aware of your own history and the history of your country. People who allow it to be repeated don't know their history.²⁷

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #3

“Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel”--King Lear.²⁸

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #4

“I don't want to be forced to be a tragic actor in this because I don't see myself in that way.”²⁹

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #5

“No one said, ‘Here enjoy!’ I had to make myself enjoy.”³⁰

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #3

Everywhere we've seen sufferings, but we've been in good shape.³¹

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #2

²⁷ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Rudy Nothenberg that the students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

²⁸ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Eric Kisch that the students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

²⁹ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Rudy Nothenberg that the students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

³⁰ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Gunter Hauer that the students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

³¹ This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Bert Reiner that students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

“I’m apprehensive about storytellers. . . . I hope that my story at least gives people food for thought, but I don’t think so.”³²

These opening lines remind the students and audience how the historical subjects want to be remembered, both their skepticism and optimism about the project, and where they find meaning (or do not) in their experiences. Having the refugees’ statements frame the play was a conscious attempt to acknowledge the human agency of the refugees and was thus, for us as instructors, an important part of the course’s ethics and a “people-centered” methodology.

Once scenes were drafted, Kari-Anne Innes, in the role of professor as dramaturg edited the scenes together into a cohesive whole that could be cast from students in the course. An additional scene, set in the White Horse Inn, based on an actual Shanghai café frequented by refugees and named after the opera and Austrian café, was written to provide a public place for characters to meet and interact. Music from the opera and the songs and lyrics recovered in Kevin Ostoyich’s research provided accompaniment for scene changes as the “carousel” moved to a new scene. Metaphorically, the carousel represented the refugees’ cycle of displacement by the war and the cycle of displacement that refugees continue to experience today. As one student put it during the final examination/reflection period, “Sometimes you get off the carousel, but the carousel keeps going.” Taking place during the 2019 refugee crisis at the U.S. Southern border, associations between the experiences and politics of the Jewish refugees and Central American and Mexican refugees were not lost on the students or the refugee survivors and became a point of frequent reflection.

³² This quotation was taken from an interview conducted by Kevin Ostoyich of Peter Engler that students listened to in the Historical Theatre course.

The pedagogy of the course, however, would not be complete without equipping students with basic performance skills, for which they were the most apprehensive. Anna Deavere Smith's idea of "acting as incorporation" and "the word becomes you" drove the performance pedagogy. As Richard Schechner observes, Smith's acting technique requires meeting the performed subject and "incorporating" them, or "open[ing] oneself up thoroughly and deeply to another being." The performance becomes an act of doubling, "the simultaneous presence of performer and performed."³³ Smith has a saying that she learned from her grandfather, "if you say a word often enough it becomes you."³⁴ Through listening, empathy, incorporation, and repetition, Smith becomes the character. However, if the goal of the course is, as it is for Smith, "to speak together across race, history, theory, and differences," telling students to just keep watching refugee videos and repeating their lines, is not enough direction.³⁵

In addition to the theory of incorporation, students completed a Stanislavski analysis of their character through textual analysis, historical and cultural contextual analysis, and their characters' relationships, objectives, and motivations for each line, scene, and the whole play. After completing the analysis, students met with the director to explore the arc of their character throughout the play.

Students' analyses revealed success in meeting the objective that "students search for humanity not only in the history but within themselves as well." When asked to reflect on what they learned about themselves as a result of playing their roles, students wrote: "I learned that in

³³ Richard Schechner, "Anna Deavere Smith: Acting as Incorporation" in *The Sourcebook of African American Performance: Plays, People, Movements*, ed. Annmarie Bean (New York: Routledge, 1999): 265-266.

³⁴ Carol Martin, "The Word Becomes You: An Interview with Anna Deavere Smith" in *The Sourcebook of African American Performance: Plays, People, Movements*. ed. Annmarie Bean (New York: Routledge, 1999): 263.

³⁵ Martin, 263.

those moments when you must make the most difficult decisions, one often experiences a series of emotions that include anger and fear and disappointment. Somehow, one must muster the strength to do what one must particularly when one has to protect one's children"; and, "Ida [a refugee mother] resonates to an immigrant family [like mine] —six kids from Guatemala and women being the head of household. I remember fights like [those of] Ida and Daniel and having to take the child out of the room. [The marriage was] [n]ot really a relationship anymore." Reflective comments such as these evince the convergence of the understanding of history, self, and humanity.

Last, but not least, technical skills were introduced into rehearsals during the final four weeks of the course. Each class and rehearsal began using Evangeline Machlin's *Speech for the Stage* breathing, projection, diction, and gesture exercises.³⁶ Games were played from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* and Viola Spolin's *Theatre Games for the Classroom*. Deadlines for memorization were scheduled and appeared on the syllabus. Because there was no other homework, six hours of rehearsal time were added outside of the three hours of class time. It may seem odd that formal acting preparation was incorporated after a formal study of history, performance theory, theatre history and dramaturgy when there was so much anxiety about performing. However, students needed a firm historical and theoretical foundation from which to build confidence to overcome their fears about performance. The goal of the course was not to create a new generation of performers, but to enable them to confidently embody and communicate the history of the characters to an audience. In the end, students commented, "The play part was the easiest part;" "I didn't think we'd do such a good job;" "I'm proud of myself;" and, "It's not like textbook memorization; not memorization for memorization's sake. But

³⁶ Evangeline Machlin, *Speech for the Stage* (New York, Routledge, 1980).

through memorization to understand in a different way than you do in just memorization. Connection and memorization.”³⁷ The students left the course not only not fearing public speaking and presentation, but with a better understanding of what it means to commit something to memory, to “learn by heart.”

Reflecting on the overall course and process, students discovered “how to use storytelling and performing in other contexts—public presentation” and to “find new things in performance, details” commenting “there is a tangible difference between [being an] actor and audience.” As for historical content, a student from China commented, “I learned so much—[I knew] people had been to China, lived and worked there, [but I] didn’t know that happened.” Another student concluded that this was “a multilevel learning experience—reading, writing, acting, meta; a different way of learning.”³⁸

This is Historical Theatre, a pedagogy for students of the present to connect with the past. We offer it as a best practice for learning that humanity is to be found within historical subjects and ourselves. We hope that others will take up the model. Whether or not they do, we do not know. But, as with the ending of Shanghai Carousel, we will only know tomorrow:

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #5

“What’s passed is past, and it will never again return.”

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #2

“Going out and making a greater joy that should be our concern.”

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #1

“Living well among all in peace we praise.”

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #4

“With honor and pride, our heads we will raise.”

REFUGEE SURVIVOR #3

³⁷ Final Exam Reflection Notes.

³⁸ Final Exam Reflection Notes

“Soon our lives will be restored with glee.”

ALL

“And it will be revealed what tomorrow will be.”³⁹

³⁹ The students concluded the play with the lyrics written by an anonymous member of the Shanghai Jewish Refugee community. The song was translated by Kevin Ostoyich. The original is located in the Harpuder Family Papers (Accession Number: 2010:240.1) of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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