THE COMPLETE LIVES OF CAMP PEOPLE

COLONIALISM, FASCISM, CONCENTRATED MODERNITY

RUDOLF MRÁZEK

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THEORY IN FORMS

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For Jan

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, forty years after the end of World War II and as "the Communism was finally defeated," the "Heidegger affair" burst into the European philosophy. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), since the 1920s widely recognized as a major and perhaps the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century, became the subject of a painful and often fratricidal debate. Heidegger's membership in the Nazi party in Hitler's time, and some of his pro-Nazi speeches from that time, had long been known. But now, a number of new documents came to light, and this at a moment when the world feverishly searched for a new identity. The "Heidegger question" became urgent as a question why a man at the pinnacle of modern thought kept silent about the camps.

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in his intervention in the debate assumed a position that I found close to what I tried to do in this book. Lyotard equaled Heidegger's silence with the spirit of the time—of our time. Instead of writing "the Jews," Lyotard wrote "the jews" with a lowercase "j." "The jews," he wrote, are both "Jews and non-Jews." "The jews," in the spirit of the time, are those "exiled from the inside."[1] One becomes "a

jew" when his or her being becomes uncomfortable to the spirit of the time, when he or she stands out, uncomfortably to the rest, as "a witness to what cannot be represented."[2]

Minorities, refugees, misery—"this servitude to that which remains unfinished"[3]—are "the jews." "The so-called avant-garde," Lyotard wrote, is "the jews"—as long as it stands firm and thus "asks unanswerable questions." Even after they are "exiled from the inside," "the jews" as a specter haunt the spirit, and here the reference is clear. Even after exiled, "the jews" haunt the culture and the civilization from which they had been exiled. "Indeed," wrote Lyotard, "it is not 'by chance' that 'the jews' have been made the object of the final solution."[4]

Both camps that inspired this book were camps for "the jews." Theresienstadt (1942–45) was a "ghetto" for the Jews with a capital "J," in the center of Europe, in the western part of Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. Boven Digoel (1927–43) was an "isolation camp" in the Dutch East Indies, in Southeast Asia, for "the so-called avant-garde," the Indonesian rebels who, in late 1926 and early 1927, attempted to overthrow the colonial order. There were non-Jews in Boven Digoel, and many of them were Muslims.

Neither Theresienstadt nor Boven Digoel was Auschwitz—they were not Auschwitz yet. In Auschwitz, all norms of a civilization as it was known, lived, and believed in for centuries had imploded. Unlike the people in Auschwitz, "the jews" of Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel were allowed to live, "privileged until further notice," in a Potemkin village, a reader might think so—but let him or her imagine!

Trial and length of imprisonment were not a part of the decision to send people to Boven Digoel and Theresienstadt. The people going to the two camps were never allowed to know the trajectory of their lives from the point of their deportation on. They did not know how and whether their "as yet" might end. In Theresienstadt, much closer, intimately close, to Auschwitz, they, often with the greatest effort, rather would not know. In their not-knowing, the camp people of Boven Digoel and Theresienstadt came closer than any other people in modern history to an awe-inspiring closure of everything—that is to say, in Europe as in Asia, closure of the modern.

The people driven to both of the camps were educated, urbanized, and "Westernized," on the whole, high above the level of the society from which they had been exiled. It was indeed because of their being so (uncomfortably) modern that they were exiled. Neither of the two camps was the *nuit et brouillard* [night and fog]. The modernity did not ebb away in the two camps. Rather, the two camps became a space of the modern crushed into sharp pieces.

Many of the pieces of the broken modern, which "for the time being" were left to the people in the camps, had been merely everyday and often negligible parts of the people's lives before the camps. In the camps, however, under a possibility of the ultimate implosion of everything, the pieces became untimely. Even trifles became potent and, indeed, the *Wunderkabinetts* of the trivial now determined the camp people's lives and the camps as operative communities. It now became vital and could become fatal—how one wore a cap, how one held a spoon, and how one played an étude by Chopin, or recalled it playing. The trivial always has a high rate of surviving existential and historical changes of modern times. Under the unprecedented pressure of the narrow space and time of the camps, the trivial, and the trivial in particular, was "frightened" into an unprecedented import and, indeed, beauty. One could hardly call it a resistance. Rather, the camps became a space of a trivial-sublime.[5]

There were never more than 2,000 internees in Boven Digoel, while as many as 140,000 internees passed through Theresienstadt. Theresienstadt lasted three and a half years, while Boven Digoel continued for fifteen.

Boven Digoel was a camp for people interned for their politics. Theresienstadt was a camp for people interned on the basis of their "race." Theresienstadt was surrounded by walls. Boven Digoel was a clearing in a jungle, at the end of the world; just one step, the people said, and you will fall out. Theresienstadt was set up in an eighteenth-century rococo town, sixty kilometers from Prague, in the middle of the orchards, a weekend destination before the war, especially when the fruit trees were in blossom.

Except for their camp-ness, the two camps had barely anything in common. A comparative study would make little sense. However, the fragments of the broken modern disturb the sense of the time, of our time, and should be studied. They made the two *cosmically* different camps into one sign, one constellation, possibly enlightening and certainly warning.

.....

Even the story of Hansel and Gretel, and even in the Grimms' most gruesome first edition, has a happy ending: the witch is punished, father and children sit around the table at home again (the bad mother has died), and everything about the little house in the forest is forgotten. Ludwig Wittgenstein thought that "something must be taught to us as foundation," but he immediately added that then "doubt gradually loses its sense."[6] When the past is bound by representation, the specter of "the jews" might not haunt us anymore.

Unlike on the way to Auschwitz, the people in these two camps were allowed to take "stuff" with them—fifty kilograms to Theresienstadt, and whatever a particular ship captain permitted to Boven Digoel. People could take their comforters to Theresienstadt, and some internees brought sewing machines to Boven Digoel. People packed the familiar, useful, and useless, in the inhuman haste, having no knowledge of what was ahead of them—under a possibility of the absolute disaster. In the very process of packing, the moment they pushed down the lid of a suitcase, they became camp people as no one in known history before them—"modern," in the meaning at the root of the word that comes from the Latin *modernus*, *modo*, which translates as "just now."

"The murder," Theodor Adorno wrote after the war (by "the murder" he meant Auschwitz, but he might as well have written "the auschwitz" with a lowercase "*a*," and he might simply write "the camps"), "the murder," he wrote, "has not happened once, sometime ago, . . . it is happening now," in the time in which we live, "where '*Immergleiche*,' the 'forever same' endlessly repeats itself."[7] As I wrote, I felt that Adorno was right, except that he stopped in the middle. As the rabbi in Isaac Bashevis Singer's story says, "Abraham Moshe, it's worse than you think."[8] I became convinced that, instead of "Immergleiche," Adorno should write "trajectory," or still better, "progress."

"When I start looking at walls," Samuel Beckett wrote in a letter, "I begin to see the writing. From which even my own is a relief."[9] Every attempt to explain the camps presents an ethical challenge, in the face of which, eventually, a historian has to fail. Writing about the camps can perhaps be justified only when it is "frightened into existence."[10] The most one can do, to say with Beckett again, is to resist "the arrogance of pity," resist subjecting the lives (and deaths) of "the jews" to "metaphysical simplification," resist "describing a tree as a bad shadow."[11]

Writing about the camps can be justified only when conceived of as a "fugitive analysis,"[12] out of breath, looking over a shoulder. In a moment of panic, one might perhaps get a little close to the camp people and the camp lives that were also (at best) on the run.

I might have met some "survivors" of a type Elias Canetti described: "The moment of survival is the moment of power. . . . The dead man lies on the ground while the survivor stands."[13] If I ever met the type, I did not notice. The survivors I met had unsteady memories and unsteady hands. Naturally. They were all late in their lives when I reached them, and life had not always been nice to them, even after the camps let them go. As we talked, I even felt the topic of my research moving toward that of the aging of memory. I be-

came aware that what I was learning was formed very much by my entering a stage of fogginess myself. "We see only what looks at us," Walter Benjamin wrote.[14]

Inevitably, I spent more of my time with the survivors' children and even grandchildren. It neither was less breathtaking or disturbing nor forced me to look less often over my shoulder. As I listened to them, the camps increasingly were being bound by representation. With an increasing anxiety and skill, the specters were being kept away, sometimes by forgetting, other times by mourning. The "études by Chopin" were still in the air, "the jews," now mostly an immortal community of dead people, were still with us. The camps were still with us, and all around us in fact. In their immensity, and this was new, they sprawled like suburbs: the memory aged in reverse, growing younger, ever more architectural, straight, permitting easy traffic.

.....

I made an effort to learn about Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel in as much detail as possible. In Prague, Theresienstadt (now again Terezín), in Jakarta, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, or Boven Digoel, I interviewed as many "camp people" as I could still find. I consulted the archive of Boven Digoel, now in Jakarta. Nazis managed to burn most of the Theresienstadt archive in the last days of the war. I went through the public libraries and was given access to some family libraries, even etuis of letters and empty envelopes with stamps often cut away for other collections.

My lifelong career of teaching and writing, mostly on Southeast Asia, as well as my experience of Prague, where I was born and spent forty-five years of my life, appeared in a new perspective as I went on writing about the camps. Always, writers, musicians, and philosophers were precious to me, as I believed they were precious to the civilization in which I lived or wished to live—Franz Kafka, Gustav Mahler, Joseph Roth, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Luc Nancy, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Mas Marco, Tan Malaka. They also appeared to me in a new and unexpected light. They often looked and spoke, and ran, as the camp people did or wished to do—including Heidegger, who became locked in silence by his philosophy as much as his fear.

In the end, this project turned out to be a history of "concentrated modernity," an unprecedented energy and ethos that emerged in the camps, and radiated out of the camps, like the wise rabbi said, changing our world.

.....

I feel deep gratitude to three anonymous readers for the press, and to the press editors for their uncommon understanding of, and patience with, the unwieldy manuscript.

I have tried my ideas of the camps on teachers and students at Michigan in Ann Arbor; Northwestern in Evanston; Berkeley in San Francisco; Columbia and New School in New York; Komunitas Utan Kayu [the Jungle Community] in Jakarta; KITLV, The Royal Institute of Anthropology, in Leiden; and Tokyo and Waseda Universities in Japan. If only the book may be as good, as gracious and helpful, as the people at these renowned places have been!

.....

Nothing with the camps is "merely technical," neither naming nor spelling. Theresienstadt was called a "ghetto" as often as it was called a "Jewish settlement," a "camp," or a "concentration camp." "Ghetto" in particular was a name forced on the Jews by the Nazis, suggesting the medieval, a place where a still-living Jew might wait until the final solution. The more neutral (kind of) "camp" is used throughout the book, except where other terms are parts of a direct quote. The Czech-speaking internees called the camp Terezín, as the town had been called before it became a camp and as it is called today. The internees from the other language regions, however, generally used the German "Theresienstadt," which was also the camp's official designation. "Theresienstadt" is used in the book, except when "Terezín" appears in direct quote.

In 1972, the Indonesian government decreed a language reform, substituting "u" for "oe," "c" for "tj," "j" for "dj," and "y" between vocals for "j." Like the military, right-wing and oppressive government was unpopular and resisted, so many people, including virtually all the Boven Digoel people, kept their names with their pre-1972 spellings. This is the way their names are spelled in this book, except when the new spelling is used in direct quote. The local names are given in the new spelling for the comfort of current maps users especially.

Boven Digoel was called a "camp," an "isolation camp," and also a "concentration camp," until about 1940, when the last term was deemed by the Dutch officials to be too discredited. "Tanah Merah" was also often used, meaning "red soil," not "The Red Land" or even "The Land of the Reds," as might seem logical or even natural. "Boven Digoel" is used with few exceptions in the book, and in the old spelling, as it appears almost universally in

documents and memories. “Boven Digoel” is still today the official name of the place where the camp stood.

Some of the Theresienstadt people started to use Hebrew names after the experience of the camps: Eva became Chava; Vlasta became Nava; Jindra became Avri. The immensity of this change, like that of the others, could not be adequately conveyed, only respectfully transcribed.

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1

FASHION

Before falling asleep yesterday I had an image of drawing. . . . The two distinct pairs of lines that outlined his legs crossed and softly merged with the lines outlining his body. His pale, colored clothes lay heaped up between these lines with feeble corporeality. In astonishment at this beautiful drawing . . .

—KAFKA, *Diaries*

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ONE

Clothes

The Jews (as Hitler defined the Jews) were registered and called up to the camp. Each man, woman, and child was permitted a fifty-kilo piece of luggage and a handbag or a backpack, a carry-on. Everything was to be chosen with a care unprecedented in modern times. The things of the life before were to be squeezed into trunks, handbags, and backpacks, and into pockets, too. All the modernity (as far as the modern had developed at the time and at the moment of each Jew's life) had to be stomped, crammed in. Clothes for all seasons. Emigrant luggage, but as never before.

"One stuffs in," Mrs. Thea Höchster, going to Theresienstadt, wrote later in her camp diary, "and there is so little time. Woolens sure, but what about shoes, and comb! All is too little, and all is too much when in a wink, one has to go."[1]

The German authorities calling up the Jewish women in the Netherlands to get ready for Theresienstadt advised them to take shoes "that would stand up to country walks."[2] Never before had vestment—clothes, shoes, and hats—mattered so much. Etty Hillesum, one of the Dutch women about to go (and die), wrote in her diary on August 23, 1941, still waiting in Amsterdam,

"Yesterday afternoon when I went to buy S.'s cheese and as I walked through the beautiful South Amsterdam, I felt like an old Jewess, wrapped up tightly in a cloud. . . . I felt so warm, protected, and safe."[3]

What Ms. Hillesum meant by "cloud" was the shroud of the moment and for the season: "The first time a little boy goes to school," according to a Jewish tradition in some places, "he is carried entirely swathed in his father's *tallit* to prevent him from seeing impure things."[4]

At the camps, the manner of dress continued to evolve as it had through the centuries. However, dress became, perhaps finally, perhaps ultimately, but certainly as never before, "the most energetic of all symbols."[5] Truly modern and dynamic. "Why are you so untidy?" became an essential and often fatal question.[6]

The Jews on their way to the camps and thus to Theresienstadt, to save a space in their luggage, "wrapped themselves" (Hillesum's words) in three, even four layers of clothes, be it winter or be it summer. "Men dragged themselves with their *lumpen* of clothes,"[7] and they were "dressed 'for the road.'"[8] "The Jews always have the best clothes," was the white anti-Semitic wisdom of Europe since as soon as the Jews began to wear modern clothing.[9]

"Everything new I had, I put on myself"; Petr Ginz, a fourteen-year-old "half-Jewish" boy, recalled packing "three pairs of socks, two shirts, a sweater, two pairs of trousers, and a winter coat."[10] "I'm telling you," a man advised his friends on the night before going, "you should take your best clothes and the best underwear, so that they'll last."[11]

Theresienstadt did not have a direct rail connection in the first months of its existence.[12] It was three kilometers from the nearest train station in Bohušovice, and the Jews had to walk, "topped by heavy winter coats, carrying knapsacks on their backs and suitcases in their hands."[13] They were watched by the Czech inhabitants of a little village they were passing on their way. "A man's mind," Honoré de Balzac wrote a century before, "can be known by the manner in which he carries his walking stick."[14]

Younger women taken to Theresienstadt watched the elderly women going. Nava Shean, one of the younger ones who later became a famous actress in Israel, recalled, "Their [the older women's] clothes, expensive and old-fashioned, looked like for a masked ball on the morning after. Hats with ostrich feathers falling sideways—and umbrellas! Long fanciful umbrellas with ruffles." After a few days in the camps, she added, "Now, the umbrellas are used to drive away flies."[15]

The crucial moment was that of stomping in, squeezing, closing the lid, concentration, and this is no pun. Franz Kafka, a writer and a Prague Jew,

escaped the Nazis only because he died before they got to him; he would surely have gone to Theresienstadt. Yet, without having to go, he knew as much about the camps as anyone. In a diary entry of October 28, 1911, he described a dream he had had the night before about himself; his best friend, Max Brod; and Max's brother Otto (Otto later went to Theresienstadt and perished in Auschwitz). The three men in Kafka's dream were about to board a train: "I dreamed that Max, Otto, and I had the habit of packing our trunks only when we reached the railroad station. There we were, carrying our shirts, for example, through the main hall to our distant trunks. Although this seemed to be a general custom, it was not a good one in our case, especially since we had begun to pack only shortly before the arrival of the train. Then we were naturally excited and had hardly any hope of still catching the train, let alone getting good seats."[16]

.....

In the Dutch Indies, a camp called Boven Digoel was newly designed in 1926, in a panic, for the Indonesian rebels who had attempted a Communist revolution.

The Boven Digoel camp was as far from Europe as one could imagine, especially at the time. It was even endlessly far from Java and Sumatra, where the rebellion happened and from which most of the internees came. The camp was set up in Dutch New Guinea. The journey from Java by ship took four weeks, and the internees, if they so desired, could take their families with them. They were less restricted than the Theresienstadt people would be, but their turn came as a rule on very short notice, too, often after spending months in prison in the place where they were arrested. As they packed their stuff, they also knew next to nothing about where they were going, and they did not know at all how long they would be gone or if they would ever come back.

Like the Jews of Theresienstadt, the camp people of the Indies had to pack "for all seasons." Many were Communists and many were Muslims, and the vestments they packed became, of a sort, their *tallit*. They, too, readied their clothes to maintain their bearing. According to one of the ships' records, now in the Boven Digoel archives in Jakarta, internee Toepin's "trunk no. 8" contained "clothes and other stuff," and "trunk no. 9" "clothes, sarongs, and shawls."[17] Internee Ngalimoen, traveling on the same ship, traveled with "trunk no. 12: clothes and other personal items."[18]

Krarup Nielsen was a Danish journalist and travel-adventure writer who somehow managed to convince the Dutch authorities to let him travel with

the first ship that took the Boven Digoel internees to the camp. The people he went with endured the four weeks on the sea, squeezed in—stomped in—the airless, hot, and often widely swaying hold of the ship, or on the open deck, sundeck it might be called, exposed to tropical heat and rains. Nielsen described the internees as they reached the camp, and mainly through their clothes

> They embark from the ship. More than half of the men are clothed the European way, and certainly in what they suppose are city clothes. They have slack, felt, or straw hats on, some wear black silk bonnets as Muslims now do, and I could see many wearing Western shoes. As a whole, they make a contrast with the dull-brownish-yellow fatigues of the Dutch soldiers who watch over the embankment. The internees walk down on the plank from the ship. In the boat that will take them from the ship to shore, they are seated next to each other, each holding a small trunk or a briefcase on his lap; some even have an umbrella stuck under their arm. The guards lean on the ship railing and gaze down at the scene in silence.[19]

Even to a seasoned journalist and adventure writer this was clearly a significant story, and there was much of the camp already in it.

The description stuck. Still after seven years, by which time the camp was already well established, another author, Dr. Schoonheyt, a medical officer assigned to Boven Digoel, recalled the same scene as it evidently reached him through the chain of memory. Again, but even more so, the internees presented themselves and were seen "dressed to the nines." Through the years, they became more of camp people, and their clothes, in the doctor's description, more significant. The internee's "cloud and shroud" became more garish. Dr. Schoonheyt's description even betrays some of the unease of the observer. "They were clothed impeccably European," Dr. Schoonheyt amplified what Krarup Nielsen wrote:

> They flashed socks with shouting stripes, neat half-shoes, and their hats were definitely knock-out and worn as conspicuously as possible. Of course, the briefcases, the penholders, and the razor-sharp pencils in the breast pockets of their jackets were impossible to overlook; they were no doubt indispensable to the camp. The penholders especially made a glaring presence as the Communists put their feet on the land to engage in a battle with the primeval forest.[20]

Neither Theresienstadt nor Boven Digoel was Auschwitz or any of the other Nazi camps of death, and neither was the Devil's Island of Cayenne,

the notorious penal colony of the French colonial empire. The Jews in Theresienstadt and the Communists in Boven Digoel, for one thing, could keep and wear the clothes they managed to bring in with them. Through the camps' existence, the clothes in the camp remained as precious as when packed, and gained even more value with the years in the camps. With each passing day in the camp, the clothes became a little more of a fashion and of the season, more concentrated, more sublime, more than normally insistent on keeping and heightening form, in spite of everything adverse to it, and because of everything, more of a cloud and shroud—in exposing nakedness.

Philip Mechanicus was a Dutch Jewish journalist who wrote a diary in the transit camp of Westerbork waiting for transport either to Theresienstadt or to Auschwitz: "One of my neighbors has brought a wardrobe fit for a world tour; it hides three bedsteads. Three or four suits and a few coats hang neatly on coat hangers from the bar of the topmost bed, just as if they were in a wardrobe. When I climb into my bed and get down from it one of the suits or coats always falls to the floor."[21]

When internee Djaidin, alias Mardjoen, died in Boven Digoel, the authorities of the camp recorded what he left behind: "One rattan trunk (old) containing one neck scarf, one red hat (old), three head scarfs, one sarong (black), one sarong (of Pekalongan style), one batik headdress, two woman's jackets, one man's jacket with buttons (old), one chintz undershirt (old), one white cotton undershirt (old), one long batik undershirt (old), one napkin (torn), one handkerchief white, one belt (new)."[22] When internee Soewita, alias Soeparman, died in Boven Digoel, he left behind "two open jackets (no buttons), three pairs of pajamas trousers, one pair of shorts, one pair of white trousers, two shirts, one neck scarf, one sarong, two handkerchiefs."[23]

The Boven Digoel authorities recruited some internees for a special camp police, Rust en Orde Bewaarders, ROB [Calm and Order Guards]. It was the duty of the ROB agents to walk through the camp three times a day, and in a special police book record everything significant. On Sunday, May 23, 1937, at 10:15 in the morning, ROB agent Zainoeddin, for instance, wrote down a list of items reported as stolen from an internee: "One dressy shirt, one ordinary shirt, two sport socks, two pairs of shorts (one with stripes, one black)."[24]

In Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Jerusalem, I saw a photograph of a Theresienstadt street from the time of the camp. There is clearly visible a sign, like those used on shops in Central Europe through the 1920s and 1930s, *Herrenbekleidung* [Gent's Clothes].[25] This particular sign might have been a fake installed specifically for a visit of a high official on inspection—a Potemkin village site. But the internees were buying clothes in

Theresienstadt, and there were Herrenbekleidung stores and ladies clothes, too, and also shop windows. Only, one could never pass by the clothes shop windows in the camp as one might a store in the outside before.

"Nobody walks here in clogs," wrote an elderly Dutch Jewish internee, Gabriel Italie, in his Theresienstadt diary on September 7, 1944.[26] On December 22, 1944, Italie noted, "On the ninth of this month . . . I 'bought' a set of suit and a pair of working shoes. The suit is not new, of course, but is quite decent."[27] Pavel Weiner, a thirteen-year-old boy from Prague, wrote in his Theresienstadt diary, "*Sunday, January 14, 1945* . . . We stand in line in the freezing weather to get some gloves. We have to stand outside, and I don't care for it a bit. I bang at the door and it is a miracle that I don't get into a fight with the saleswoman. My mother is angry at me for my poor behavior."[28] Philipp Manes, an older Theresienstadt internee, wrote in his diary, "A distribution site was opened in the fall of 1943. One can get there mainly the clothes left by the deceased. . . . From time to time there is also stuff available from confiscations or from the shops on the outside that was bought and brought into the camp by the SS."[29]

The best clothes of those left by the dead were being sent to "the needy" in Germany. Nevertheless, "the rest remained in the camp."[30] The "distribution centers," and the "clothing stores" in the camp (a special camp currency was issued for the purpose), like the trunks packed by the people as they were leaving for the camps, were concentrated modern. They could bring as never before the thrilling experience of luck: "When one was lucky to lay his hand on an ordinary working-man overall, he considered himself one who hit the bank."[31]

There was a clothing market in Boven Digoel as well, which, like the one in Theresienstadt, was exclusive by its being of a camp. *Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, a white-colonial daily, published an article about Boven Digoel on January 15, 1931, reporting, "All clothes in the camp are exceedingly expensive."[32] As in Theresienstadt, what had been brought in was cared about at the greatest cost, and what might be left behind by the dead could be put up for sale. The items left behind after the death of Mohamad Saleh, alias Marip, were sold on credit on October 16, 1937: "One can buy (or get on credit): one jacket (khaki-drill) for *f* [florin] 0.50; . . . one jacket (white) for *f*0.80; one jacket (*tricot*) for *f*0.80; three shirts (short sleeves) for *f*0.70; one jacket (for home) for *f*0.30; two sarongs for *f*1.76; one night cap for *f*0.50."[33]

Clothes might be sent to the camps by a relative or a friend, with some restrictions, and stuff could even be mail-ordered to Boven Digoel. *Keng Po,* a Chinese newspaper in the Indies, published "A Letter from Boven Digoel"

in its issue of October 4, 1927, in which internee Kartoatmodjo is quoted "asking his family to send him a pair of shorts."[34] Few internees could afford better. Soetan Sjahrir, who came to Boven Digoel in the eighth year of its existence and stayed there just for a year (after 1945 he became the first prime minister of the independent Indonesia), wrote from the camp to his wife who lived in Holland,

> Mieske, I need underwear. . . . And a pair of pajamas. I have only two sets now, and both are completely worn out. Besides, they are too coarse. I have not many more clothes left on the whole, just one pair of green cotton trousers and another pair of trousers of some sort, rather ancient. I could well use some of the white suits of Tjammie [Sjahrir's brother Sjahsam, living in Holland at the time]. But, to tell you the truth, not really, because most of the time I stay in the house, and then only in pajamas.[35]

In the tropical Indies camp, in the middle of the humid and hot New Guinea jungle, each piece of modern, which meant Western, fashion was sublime, and flagrantly so. A pair of shoes and a jacket was a statement much louder than it ever could have been in modern Europe and modern colony. In the camp, the stakes were higher and the efforts more strenuous. Internee Mohamad Sanoesi sent a mail order to "Shoes Magazine, The New York Company, Weltevreden, Batavia, Java," and to "Shop Singapore, Soerabaja, Java." Internee Mas Soewigno even ordered some pieces of clothing from "Bros. Gerzens Mode" and "Magazine De Bijenkorp, Amsterdam."[36] Internee Kadimin ordered a pair of shoes from "Hen Son Than Shoemaker in Sigli, Aceh, North Sumatra."[37]

There were tailors in Boven Digoel; some of them had practiced their craft before, but few learned it in the camp. Putting patches on trousers, everyday repairing jackets, skirts, blouses, or underwear could easily be made by the internees themselves. Tailors were for custom-made clothes. Internee Partoredjo was registered in the camp as "gentlemen's tailor."[38] Internee Ibing "used to be an agent propagandist for the Communist Party" and "used his tailor shop as a hotbed for agitation."[39] Now he was listed as "working as a tailor." Internee Roejani is on record as a "tailor from Serang, Banten, Java."[40] "Uncle Prawito," Mr. Trikoyo, who was a boy in Boven Digoel at the time, told me, "worked in the camp as a specialist in clothes." "Men's tailor, I mean," Trikoyo added.[41]

There were shoemakers in Boven Digoel, repairing as well as sewing up new shoes for the authorities as well as the internees. Under the date September 11, 1936, at eight o'clock in the morning, a Boven Digoel ROB police

book records that agent Sanoesi "left the ROB station to bring the repaired shoes to *toean wedana* [camp's district chief]."[42]

There were sarongs, a traditional garment, a piece of cloth wrapped around the lower body, worn by both women and men; no tailor needed. But a significant and certainly striking number of the camp inhabitants, male and female, wore the modern "on the go and in the know."[43] The daughter of the first Dutch chief civilian administrator of the camp, Mrs. Ottow, recalled in an interview long after Boven Digoel how she "herself came often to the camp and gave the women advice on their sewing." She also gave the internees' wives, mothers, and daughters sewing patterns and fashion magazine cuttings. "They could," Mrs. Ottow added, "order what stuff they needed, sewing matter and even sewing machines themselves."[44]

Some rebels sent to Boven Digoel managed to pack a sewing machine and sewing matter on the ship as they went to the camp; others, as Mrs. Otto suggested, mail-ordered a machine with the spare parts and thread. The list of what the internees were able to take on the ship and what they sent for reads like an avant-garde poem: "Lamp, shoes, and a sewing machine."[45]

Mr. Trikoyo, who was brought as a baby to Boven Digoel and who was eighty when I spoke with him, recalled his first set of clothes ever, *celana monyet*, a children's playsuit, trousers and shirt in one piece. His mother, he said, had made it out of fabric cut from a discarded mattress—"*on a sewing machine*," he added with an emphasis.[46] Mrs. Sumono Widayasih, a friend of Trikoyo in Boven Digoel, told me fifty years after her camp experience: "My mother spent most of the evenings under an oil lamp, sewing skirts and blouses for my older sister, Darsini, and for me. At first, she had to do everything by hand. But then we had a sewing machine, and I still can see it, she made a dress for me. Complete, poplin, white, collar embroidered with a blue thread."[47] I tried to be clever and, recalling my own childhood and my mother at the foot-pedaled machine, said "Singer." "No!" she cried back: "Puff!"

The second journalist allowed into Boven Digoel, a year after Krarup Nielsen, was a reporter for *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, Dr. Marcus van Blankenstein. He was of a liberal persuasion, and after visiting Boven Digoel wrote a series of sensational articles in Dutch and Indies papers painting a scathing picture of the camp. Yet fashion was very much part of his story. "To be a tailor in Boven Digoel," he wrote, "is not a bad profession to have. If just out of habit, the internees like to walk around smartly dressed."[48] On special occasions, when a ship bringing a new group of internees was announced, all internees would put on their very best—not sarong or batik but

hats and shoes, white trousers, jackets, shirts, *hagelwitte*, van Blankenstein might have said, "white-as-snow," "all-white," modern-colonial.[49]

The police books of Boven Digoel, the voluminous records of the ROB police-internee agents walking through the camps and reporting on the life, often, entry after entry, read like fashion notes. An internee is described as "clothed completely in the new,"[50] another as wearing "his best," and yet another as "clothed neatly today."[51] On May 1, as could be expected, on the day of the international proletariat, an ROB agent saw the camp at its fashion-wise best. The internees were reported as "truly clothed," "sharp," and, naturally, "with a red tie."[52]

It could not have been otherwise, if only because of the eagerness of the packing. If there were to be flâneurs anywhere in the modern world, it had to be in the camp. Mrs. Widayasih let me read the handwritten memoirs of her girlhood in the camp. One of the particularly memorable figures in the camp and in her memoirs was internee Thomas Najoan. He became famous, truly mythical, by trying to escape three times; twice he was brought back, and the third time he disappeared in the jungle. As Mrs. Widayasih recalled him, "Uncle Najoan was small and stocky. His walk was energetic and you would meet him everywhere in the camp. His clothes were always perfect, all-white, even shoes were white; white shorts, white shirt, with long sleeves, a pith helmet, and a walking stick. And how he ended! His corpse, they say, was found floating in the river!"[53]

As known and as important in the camp as Najoan was Aliarcham, the ex-chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party, the man perhaps most responsible for the party decision to rise in rebellion. A fellow internee and writer Mas Marco Kartodikromo described Aliarcham in the camp as "wearing a yellow jacket open at the neck, black shirt with a flower design, sarong, and a batik scarf."[54] ("Jacket open at the neck" signaled that it was not a traditional Javanese jacket nor a Dutch officials' jacket; both buttoned up to the chin.)

The people interned in Boven Digoel had grown up in a fast-developing colony of the early twentieth century, at the edge of the modern. Now, on the ship, in the camp, and in the middle of the jungle, they moved as on a catwalk. The native people of the forest, the Papuans Kaja-Kaja, as the Catholic missionaries called them, meaning "friends," were the first to appear to the camp people as the internees traveled up the Digoel River. Appropriately to the newcomers from the other world, they appeared originary, as "naked figures."[55] As the camp was settling down, the Kaja-Kaja came closer day by day, and then even "visited" the camp. In the process, some clothes were

"put on them." The doctor who was quoted above making "funny" comments about the rebels' attire as they embarked from the ship, took and published at least one "equally funny" photograph of a young Papua woman, in just a thigh-short grass skirt, and wrote a caption under the photograph, "A dashing prima ballerina on the settlement."[56]

Other times, Kaja-Kaja were seen in their boats on the river: "Three of the rowers in the long proa were naked and the fourth wore a pajama jacket with wide stripes, a present evidently from someone in the camp."[57] Western norms were being proved and progress measured in the camp by the savages' dishabille. "One Kaja-Kaja makes rounds in the camp wearing a blue soldier's kepi and a very tired pair of flannels. Another one appears in a corset that he must have been given by a camp soldier's wife."[58]

For the internees, as Mrs. Widayasih wrote in her memoirs, the clothes of the Papuans were "still traditional."[59] Mrs. Zakaria, another girl of Boven Digoel, told me much later about "her" Papuan. Her father, an internee, hired the young man to help the family around the house and to watch over his little daughter. "He followed me everywhere," Mrs. Zakaria recalled. "He kept an eye on me. . . . Sometimes, however, the desire to visit his people back in the forest was too much for him. He asked my mother for permission, and then he took off the shirt and the shorts we had given him—you know," Mrs. Zakaria pointed to her lap and blushed a little. "He left the shorts and shirt with us and ran home naked as he was. When he came back, he put the shirt and the shorts on again."[60] As the time of the camps went on, the clothes brought from home, like the people wearing them, were becoming tired but also more camplike. In Theresienstadt, Ruth Bondy, a former internee and major Israeli writer after the war, recalled the clothes becoming "too big because we all lost weight."[61] Like the people, the clothes became more pathetic with each day, that is, their pathos more concentrated and more profound. People and clothes, looking for cloud and shroud, became "more elegant." The life acquired a radically more powerful fashion appeal. A "Persian lamb coat and a string of pearls" that before the war only some affluent Jewesses wore on special occasions in Prague, Vienna, Berlin, or Amsterdam, were now remembered in the camp, became "typical wear," "a must" for every woman, in camp dreams.[62]

The camps, in all their misery, became the sites of a heightened sense of fashion. "Daddy gave me his best shirts and a thick jacket, his ski boots, and all sorts of things," Petr Ginz wrote in his diary about leaving for Theresienstadt.[63] He was forced to the camp as a *Mischling* [mixed-blood Jew]. His father, who was not a Jew, did not have to go according to the law of the moment.

Another Mischling, Peter Demetz, who later became a prominent Germanist in the United States and the editor of Walter Benjamin's *Reflections*, also did not have to go in the first roundups. But his Jewish mother did. After many years, Professor Demetz recalled his (final) parting with his mother, again as a moment of fashion. Before the war, he wrote, his mother regularly spent her winter holidays in Semmering, an upper-middle-class Austrian hill resort near Vienna: "A group of elegant ladies often went for healthy walks up the Pinkenkogel, an unheroic hill near the hotel, and my mother would don firm shoes and woolen stockings for the occasion. I noted eight years later that she put on the same shoes and stockings when she had to join her transport to the ghetto of Theresienstadt."[64]

It should be emphasized again that neither Boven Digoel nor Theresienstadt were camps of the Auschwitz type. One can train oneself to see nuances. In Theresienstadt, the SS authorities wished the camp to be a "passable," to use a fashion word. The first SS commandant of Theresienstadt issued a special order on July 23, 1942: "It is forbidden to dress in mourning garb."[65] To use a fashion phrase, "black was out."

In 1944, two years into the camp's existence, a delegation of the International Red Cross was allowed to "inspect" the camp. Dr. Maurice Rossel of the delegation wrote a report to the Geneva Red Cross headquarters: "The people we met on the streets were dressed correctly [*korrekt gekleidet*]. There were elegant women to be seen on the street who wore silk stockings, hats, shawls, and modish handbags. Young people were generally well clothed, too, and we even met 'zazou' [zoot-suit] types."[66]

Dr. Rossel might have been duped; the camp was made ready for his visit. But many of the Theresienstadt diaries and the postwar memories of those who survived do give a picture not much different from Dr. Rossel's, uncomfortably so.

Mrs. Käthe Goldschmidt, a German Jewish ex-internee of Theresienstadt, recalled the style of wear and the manners of wearing one reads about in Dr. Rossel's shocking report, as a part of the camp's everyday—at the moment of inspection or not. In a letter to a relative written in the first days after the camp liberation, she describes a friend of hers, Mr. Hugo Friedmann. It happened in the last months of the camp, just hours before Hugo Friedmann was taken on transport to Auschwitz (and to his death). "He wore a long black leather coat," Mrs. Goldschmidt wrote, "and a striking hat. He looked so smart. Oh, my god! His shorts were still at the tailor and he had no time to collect them. I even do not know if the tailor is still alive."[67]

Another Theresienstadt prisoner, Ab Caransa, an elderly man who was taken to Theresienstadt from the Netherlands in 1944, recalled his first impressions of the camp. They were, as manner of dress goes, not too different from those of Dr. Rossel: "It was a splendid summer day," Mr. Caransa wrote about his passing through a gate into the Theresienstadt camp. "We saw Jews wearing shorts and shirts with an open neck. It just could not be so serious here!"[68] Another internee, Dr. Saron, recalled "many young men and women in impeccable clothes and of the best of manners."[69]

A Czech Jew and Communist (so he might have gone to Boven Digoel had he been born in the Indies instead of Czechoslovakia), Josef Taussig, in his late twenties, wrote several short stories while in Theresienstadt. Some of them (unlike him) survived and are available in the Jewish Museum in Prague. In one of them, a young man walks through the camp: "All the girls who are passing by! Their skin is either tanned or white like milk. Some are slender and tall, others are fleshy. Some wear glasses and have a look of an intellectual, the eyes of others are romantically clouded. Some walk around in stylish overalls others in chic suits." "Was macht der Herr Vater? [How is your father doing?]," Taussig's young hero is asked when stopped "by a little elderly man in a blue ski cap."[70]

Mr. Manes, who came to the camp from Berlin, and was much older than Taussig, wrote in his Theresienstadt diary, "The women walk around in slacks. The young men and women, both, wear shorts of a kind that makes one think of swimming trunks, except that these here are even shorter." "It is a summer day," Mr. Manes wrote, "and women do not wear stockings. On the whole, they prefer bright colors and light materials, cheerful scarves, and flowing blouses."[71]

It is often assumed that fashion, as a frivolous matter, and as a matter of ornament, disappears in times of need. The camps show, however, that, in times of need, manner of dress becomes ever more important, that the aspiration to hold on to humanity and to avoid death is linked to a special investment in fashion and not at all to its demise. The camps, dramatically, yet with profound historical significance, became the catwalks of the world.

An advance team of George S. Patton's victorious Third Army reached Theresienstadt in the first days after it had been liberated in May 1945. One of the three soldiers on the team happened to be a Jew, a recent emigrant to America. He looked for his mother, who did not escape with him and who, there was some faint hope, might even be in Theresienstadt. I did not learn from the documents whether he found his mother. But I have the team's re-

port to the army headquarters, and it appears that the soldiers could hardly believe their eyes.

The camp to all intents and purposes was still closed to the outside world when the US team arrived. The people were not allowed to leave because there had been an outbreak of spotted typhus in the camp in the last days of the war. The soldiers reported meeting "walking skeletons" in Theresienstadt. These were the prisoners who, as the German fronts collapsed and the Red Army pushed in, began to be moved in panic and disorder away from the Red Army and from Auschwitz and the other truly horrific camps in the east to Theresienstadt. These new arrivals probably brought the epidemic to Theresienstadt. "This is one kind of population you find here," the US soldier wrote about the half-dead new arrivals, "and then you have the best dressed women and men running around . . . as if in a summer resort. No women without lipstick, the men wear the best tailored suits, nice patterned ties, etc."[72]

Fashion, Gilles Lipovetsky wrote, is "dressing modern democracy" and at the same time "cascades of 'little nothings,'" of infinitely fine "variations in an understood sequence."[73] Walter Benjamin, long before Lipovetsky, perhaps not yet having the camps fully on his mind but already deep into the time of the camps and as if he knew the camps, wrote that "fashion mocks death."[74]

"Fashion," Benjamin wrote, "has opened the business of dialectical exchange between . . . carnal pleasure and the corpse. . . . Fashion was never anything other than the parody of the motley cadaver, provocation of death . . . bitter colloquy with decay."[75] Roland Barthes, in his own study of fashion, spoke of "neomania," a phenomenon of unproductive change, "which probably appeared in our civilization with the birth of capitalism."[76] Benjamin might rather call it necromania: "Every fashion," he wrote, "stands in opposition to the organic. Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, fashion defends the rights of the corpse."[77]

Neither Boven Digoel nor Theresienstadt, again, were death camps. They were "toward death." Fashion in these two camps was deadly frivolous. Honoré de Balzac's not yet fully articulated flâneurish truth of the nineteenth century in the camps became a full-fledged and uncompromising truth of the twentieth century: *"A rip is a misfortune, a stain is a vice,"* Balzac wrote.[78] To the people of fashion, Balzac wrote too, "cruelty is the most natural."[79] A century after Balzac, and already knowing intimately well about the camps, Georges Perec held to the same unshakable truth: "Fashion," he wrote, "is entirely on the side of violence."[80]

The uniform is the truth of fashion. Nothing can make "the cascade of little nothings" into a matter of power more truly than the uniform. The uniform is the form of dress most fashionable, most flâneurish, most trivial, most ranking and ordering, and closest to cruelty, violence, and death. In the camps, the uniform became what, across a couple of modern centuries, fashion had increasingly been aspiring to be.

The guards and the people of authority in Boven Digoel and Theresienstadt wore uniforms. The SS officers in Theresienstadt, famously, notoriously, and ostentatiously dressed themselves up in the sharpest manner: a black jacket, an image of skull and bones on each button, spit-and-shined black boots, a white shirt, and a black tie: "I see them advancing," Winston Churchill memorably said at the beginning of the war, "the Nazi war machine, with its clanking, heel-clicking, dandified."[81] "There's nothing more powerful than a uniform," Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in *Demons*. "After that," he added, "the second most powerful force is, of course, sentimentality."[82] The first SS commandant of Theresienstadt, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Siegfried Seidl, as internee Zdeněk Lederer recalled after the war, "was always immaculately dressed, kept hounds, and spoke in *staccato* sentences."[83]

It was hot and humid in Boven Digoel throughout the year, and everything in the camp soon got soaked and crumpled—including uniforms. Still, all the guards in the camp, and the civilian authorities, too, neatly and assertively as possible, wore uniforms: cascades of significance, from the top down. The Moluccan and Ambonese "native" lower-rank soldiers and guards wore uniforms that were not exactly tip-top but were still uniforms. The Dutch, the white middle- and high-ranking officers, both military and civilian, "set the tone," made the whole system of fashion and power work—no rip, no stain, no misfortune.

To prove the system, there had to be less and decidedly even less sophisticated uniforms, on the brink of what might become, speaking like a fashion magazine, *impossible* or even *passé.* There were, in both camps, uniforms, subuniforms, and sub-subuniforms.

In Theresienstadt, to make their job easier and for matters of appearance, the SS administration of the camp set up a twelve-man Jewish so-called Council of the Elders. It was made up of selected, distinguished, and willing, or not able to resist, internees. On special occasions, the head of the Council of the Elders wore a uniform, or a sort of uniform. One such occa-

sion was when the Red Cross delegation visited the camp in 1944. The head of the council at the time, Dr. Edelstein, welcomed the team ceremoniously, on the main square of the camp, and he wore a uniform. Historian and ex-internee of the camp Hans Günther Adler described the scene. The SS commandant of the camp at the time, SS-Obersturmführer Karl Rahm, "a few days before gave a punch to the Elder, and the man, as he stepped forward to welcome the guests, still had a blue stain over his eye. Nevertheless, he wore an elegant tails and a half-top hat, like a true mayor."[84]

In Boven Digoel, likewise, a "self-governing authority" was put together by the Dutch authorities from among the internees. These people, distinguished, forced or willing, as well as in Theresienstadt, wore a kind of uniform. Or, certainly, they were expected to. When a Dutch high official reported on one of his inspection visits to the camp, writing to the still higher authorities, he complained, "In spite of the clear horn signal my ship gave, which had to make everybody in the camp aware of my arrival, and which gave enough time for everybody to get ready, a *wedana* failed to put on his official uniform [*ambachtskostuum*]."[85]

Camps were the high point of uniform fashion. At the moment of the camps in modern history, perhaps ultimately, life and death on one side, and keeping up appearances, being smart on the other side, became one. Mr. Boedisoetjitro, one of the top leaders of the rebellion, because he was still thought to enjoy respect among the internees, was appointed by the Dutch administrator to head the Boven Digoel "self-governing authority," a kind of Council of the Elders in Theresienstadt. A fellow internee wrote about Boedisoetjitro then, "in the service," as he was seen walking through the camp: "We recognized him by a white jacket, white trousers, complete, with the *lars* jungle boots and tropical helmet."[86]

In both camps, the internees selected to serve in the auxiliary camp police wore uniforms. A Dutch official wrote on another visit to Boven Digoel and his encounter with the ROB corps (and one can hear a chuckle), "They are attired in the most extraordinary way, sort of a *cowboy uniform*."[87] Still, old photographs show the ROB agents in striking all white. In Theresienstadt, the Jews' police, the *Ghettowache*, deep below the SS men and even the Czech gendarmes, also wore uniforms. And, an internee also recalled, they were given uniforms that were "deliberately ridiculous."[88] In another Theresienstadt description, the uniform included "a cap like that the tram-conductors used to wear before the war, but with three yellow stripes. On the chest the policemen had a metal plaque with the agent's number and letters 'G' and 'W' for *Ghettowache*."[89]

The uniforms were there, ranking the camp, from the moment one first stepped into it. Some uniforms might seem to make matters ambiguous, but everyone knew the essential meaning. At the train station, as the people arrived at Bohušovice, and before they embarked on their march toward Theresienstadt, one of the new arrivals recalled, "We were greeted by a group of well-dressed youth. They all had leather jackets and they strutted around like the SS people. We did not know whether they were Jews or whether they were not Jews."[90]

As this was fashion, there were incessant modifications made to the uniforms—slight, trivial, and frivolous but always designed to make a uniform more of a uniform. On Thursday, August 3, 1944, Pavel Weiner, a boy in Theresienstadt, wrote, "The *Ghettowache* have now changed their uniforms."[91] Mr. Philipp Manes wrote, "*Ghettowache* now got a new uniform again, new blouse, gray-green, and jacket with pockets—an elegant piece of clothing."[92] In one of the few photographs from the camp that survived, of another of the camp Jewish-staffed and authorities-approved corps, the firefighter brigade, a firefighter stands next to a fire engine. He wears a firefighter uniform, a dark jacket buttoned to the neck, with a visible Jewish star on the chest.[93]

Fashion might envelop people and by its tactility bring a sense of suppleness. A man as concerned with the sublime as Martin Heidegger could logically also write, "Being can reveal itself through touch."[94] During one of the parades that the Theresienstadt Jewish police performed regularly in the main square of the camp, the head of the Council of the Elders at the time, Jakob Edelstein, commanded the corps. He was known to have been a traveling salesman in textiles in one of his former lives. Now, as the parade was at its best, Jacob Edelstein—was it a joke or a gesture of a philosopher?—"went over to one of the policemen, all of whom were wearing new gray uniforms made of old dyed bed sheets, fingered the material like a textile merchant does and said: 'Very nice, very nice.'"[95]

TWO

Beauty Spots

The Mosaic law forbids tattoos.[1] According to the covenant, nothing can be "inscribed in the flesh."[2] Blushes, birthmarks, stigmata, or indeed tattoos have always been considered much more than just "marks that slide along."[3] They always more or less "inscribe and excribe the body."[4] Like a vestment, they always more than just covered the body, and now, in the time of the camps, they became more of a cloud and a shroud. Like clothes, skin has always been a matter of fashion; in the camps it became ultimately so.

Neither Boven Digoel nor Theresienstadt were Auschwitz. Neither in Boven Digoel nor in Theresienstadt were the bodies of the victims tattooed Auschwitz-style, and even less were internees burned—on the arms, chests, cheeks, and foreheads—as Dostoyevsky described in the Tsarist camp of just before his time.[5] In Boven Digoel and in Theresienstadt the internees were allowed to keep their own clothes; and their skin, too, baring accidents, was left intact.

Still, fashion in Boven Digoel and in Theresienstadt reached unprecedentedly close to the skin, so close that a skin might feel like clothes and clothes like a skin. There is a most excellent Prussian officer in one of

Hermann Broch's novels of the early twentieth century: "He could almost have wished that the uniform was a direct emanation of his skin."[6] The camp people might or might not have wished for this, but their sense of wearing clothes and wearing their skin now reached as high on the scale of sensing.

In both Theresienstadt and Boven Digoel, people went through "harsh stripping—checking for lice," "searching one's clothes, for scabies, for sharp things, for golden ornaments, and precious stones."[7] Yet there was, neither in Boven Digoel nor in Theresienstadt, the Auschwitz-like "shaving off of all one's hair, . . . face and body."[8]

There were, according to Hans Günther Adler's history of Theresienstadt, "nine hairstyle salons" in the camp, plus a number of "barbers" and one evidently more exclusive "women's hair studio."[9] In the previously quoted short story by Josef Taussig, the young man on his walk through the camp "stopped at a large group of people in front of a barber's shop display window."[10] In Boven Digoel, too, there were, if not hair salons, then certainly barbers, for the authorities as well as the internees and by the internees. In the lists of the newly arriving internees one finds, for instance, "thirty years old barber, formerly the chairman of a local Communist section," and "internee Kartomidjojo, the barber."[11]

The internees who were barbers in their former lives were allowed to take their tools to Boven Digoel; they just had to deposit them with the ship's captain for the length of the journey. This is why we know about them. In the case of internee Kartomidjojo, his etui contained "one straight razor, sixteen safety razors, one razor holder, one razor strop, one badger shaving brush, and one hand mirror."[12]

As was the case with the tailors, some Boven Digoel internees learned the barber trade in the camp. Thus, there were several barbershops in Boven Digoel, of a tropical kind—sometimes just a couple of chairs or just a cleared space at the side of the road, and there were barbers going from house to house, serving internees as well as the Ambon and Moluccans guards and Dutch officials. Camp police watched and reported on them, too.

> SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 1940. MORNING: 10:47 . . . Soeganda is at the house of internees Gaos and Soeleman; also Ngadiman is there, getting a haircut.[13]

> FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 1935 . . . AFTERNOON: . . . 3:55. Karsosoemarto, barber, passes by the police station. He carries his tools and says he is on the way to the administration section. Agent Soedirman inquires further and Karsosoemarto says that he is going to do a haircut at the Lieutenant's house.[14]

"Our heads," Dostoyevsky wrote about his early modern Tsarist Russia camp, "were shaved in different ways; some of us had half the head shaven lengthwise, others across."[15] The Boven Digoel women were described by Krarup Nielsen as "wearing their hair in a very attractive traditional style." "Most of the men in the camp," wrote the Dane, "walk around with hairstyles irreproachably European."[16]

Initially, the SS commander of Theresienstadt issued a haircut order for men to "wear their hair no longer than three millimeters" and for women to wear a *Herrenschnitt* [men's haircut].[17] The order, according to the internees themselves, was never really enforced, and eventually it was to all intents and purposes forgotten.[18] Nevertheless, the internees might accept the order and its vacillation, lightly or not, the stronger ones with a wink, like a true fashion change or like another case of Etty Hillesum's shroud. For a modern man in Europe of the time just before the camps, through the 1930s, very short hair was a fashion, and *Herrenschnitt* was a Josephine Baker rage. They might feel as if they were locked in a fashion world, and so they were, in the camp more than in the outside before.

"There is hardly another article of dress," Walter Benjamin noticed at the time just before the camps, "that can give expression to such divergent erotic tendencies, and that has so much latitude to disguise them, as a woman's hat."[19] And nowhere did hats, female and male, caps and scarves, close to flesh, skin, and hair, and of erotic tendencies, appear to matter more than in the camps. Jiří Bruml wrote for a magazine of and by the Jewish boys in Theresienstadt about the importance of hats and caps in the camp. Women's hats were not exactly the young Bruml's cup of tea, but about the male hats and caps he wrote as an expert, "A high-peak cap with a badge and two yellow stripes indicates that its owner is a ghetto cop. We know who is a firefighter from his hunters' cap. Do you meet a man in a white cap? If the man is fat, he is a cook. If he is not fat, he is a corpse bearer."[20]

SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Günther (internee and later historian Adler hated to use his name in full because it so closely resonated with the SS man's), one of the high-level officers in Berlin supervising Theresienstadt, was rumored among the internees to deeply engage himself and "ask to see several possible proposed models of a police cap."[21] When internee Philipp Manes saw the approved new police cap, he recorded the event in his camp diary with excitement: "Now the men are given to wear blue-and-white stripes as bordering of their caps. Finally. *Blue and white . . . Shalom! Shalom!*"[22]

Gabriel Italie, an elderly man like Mr. Manes, one of the practicing Jews in the camp (far from all Jews interned in the camp were practicing or

orthodox), wrote on October 12, 1944, "I failed to bring my hat to Theresienstadt and so I had to manage with the ancient cap from Westerbork. Mercifully, after some weeks, a junior rabbi in the camp Ernst Lieben let me to have a nice soft black hat of his. So now, I have something to wear on Shabbat and on Yom Tov."[23] Two months later, on December 12, 1944, Mr. Italie wrote in his diary, "Today is the second day of Hanukkah. . . . I am going to get a new hat: Let's go shopping!"[24]

Honoré de Balzac, the nineteenth-century expert on elegance, in his imaginary *My Journey from Paris to Java*, told a strange story about hats as heads and indeed souls. "I got to know the priest of the crocodiles and had the perilous honor of seeing these horrible creatures," Balzac spoke through the mouth of his hero-traveler about Javanese crocodiles. "There are vague similarities between the stupid cruelty of their faces and that of revolutionaries; their overlapping carapaces, their dirty yellow bellies are the very image of insurrectional clothing—they lacked only the red bonnet to make them a symbol of 1793."[25]

The rebels, not the Balzac crocodiles, French, not Balzac Javanese, sang a hat song during the next Paris revolution after the one that Balzac talked about: "Hats off before the cap! On your knees before the workman!"[26] Those in power as well as those powerless, in France, in the Indies, as in Germany, knew well the significance of this frivolous piece of clothing, not just of female hats. One of the very first laws that helped to establish the new Nazi order in occupied Europe was a prohibition in 1940 against "selling hats to Jews—men or boys."[27] In Theresienstadt the Jews were allowed to wear their caps, hats, and scarves if they managed to get some in the camp. The rule, particularly sublime and cruel in when and where it was applied.

In Boven Digoel, the internees wore hats rather than caps—straw hats, soft felt hats, even Borsalino hats were mentioned.[28] There was at least one professional hat maker in Boven Digoel, a "thirty-year-old, born in Solo," Central Java, learning his trade before and practicing it in the camp.[29]

The *helmhoed*, a tropical or pith helmet, also a part of the military's "real" uniform since the early twentieth century, was the epitome of modern colonial. Among the progressive Indonesians it was considered a "new style." Substituting sometimes for the hat, the helmhoed became the chic wear of the camp. Often the helmet figures on the list of internees' belongings, even those who clearly had not much else to be listed.[30]

By hats, caps, scarves, and helmets, as never before, a person and his place among other persons in the camp was recognized. Without a hat, a cap, a scarf, or a helmet, or with a hat, a cap, or a scarf worn incorrectly or

on the wrong occasion, for the wrong season, in the camp, one became, to use a German expression that came into wide use at the time, *entwürdigen* [deprived of dignity][31]—something like clothless. A *Grüßflicht* [an order to give a greeting] was issued in Theresienstadt very early on, on December 21, 1942. According to it, "every one of the camp population, when encountered by an SS officer, a Czech gendarme, or anyone of authority in uniform" (the subuniforms of Jews were not included), "must give a greeting. Jews marching to work in columns must take off their caps. Every man must take his head cover off, every woman must curtsy."[32]

The two men of authority who took Josef K. to his execution in Kafka's *The Trial*, a novel written twenty years before Theresienstadt, are described as wearing "frock coats . . . with top hats that were apparently irremovable."[33] Peachum, the paragon of capitalist high modernity in Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, "always keeps his hat on, since he expects the roof to fall in at any moment."[34] Walter Benjamin described Charlie Chaplin, a citizen of the same epoch as the camp people, as one who "looks to men's fashion. He does this in order to take the master caste at its word. His cane is the rod around which the parasite creeps (the vagabond is no less a parasite than the gent), and his bowler hat, which no longer sits so securely on his head, betrays the fact that the rule of the bourgeoisie is tottering."[35]

There were fashion faces in the camps, under the hats and caps and in the scarves, of an unprecedentedly concentrated multitude of shapes and colors. In Theresienstadt, they were faces of the peoples brought from Central and Western Europe, Czech lands and Moravia, Austria, Germany, Holland and Denmark, and much less but also "from as far as Biska in Balkans," "from "the East," from Poland up to the Soviet borders, "packed in a hurry." "From a white Negress," Bernhard Kold wrote in his Theresienstadt camp diary, "through the people with Gypsy, Hungarian, Slovenian, and Rumanian-Italian blood to blond people, some almost white-blond, and also a few albinos, from the slender and tall West-European ladies—From a Mongolian-Russian face to . . . a strikingly elegant woman face with lipstick and with hair dyed."[36]

Boven Digoel was no less varied. Most of the internees in this camp had come from the western parts of the huge Indonesian-Malay archipelago, from the islands of Java and Sumatra, where the real and only fighting of the rebellion of 1926 and 1927 took place. But there were also Madurese packed in, Borneans, Menadonese, Ambonese, Timorese, Chinese, Dutch-Indonesians, and, of course, the people on the camp staff, whose faces were "white."

In both camps, fashion-wise, there were faces differing in a cascade of little nothings, faces as models for the season, as well as faces "*definitely*

passé." In Theresienstadt, there was, most flagrantly ("loudly"), a "Jewish face." In Boven Digoel, also a sign of the time, there was a "Communist face." Browsing the illustrated magazines of the time, German as well as Dutch, one could easily find them both. There was also easily to be found, in the magazines of the Netherlands and Dutch Indies, a "Boven Digoel face," and it was thus named in the captions.

Krarup Nielsen closely observed the faces of the internees already on the ship to Boven Digoel: "There were the most various types among them," he wrote. "Some look at you unfriendly with a gross and arrogant face. Others look so decent and peaceful that they make one wonder how they ever got here."[37] The "Boven Digoel face" was a face to put on. "Those brutal mugs," the Boven Digoel camp doctor wrote about ten years after the journalist.[38] In the camp doctor's memoirs, there is a photograph of a Boven Digoel internee with a caption that reads, "*The Sumatran Communist Mohamed Jatim*. During the rebellion of 1926 he attempted to throw a bomb at an official. The bomb exploded in his hand and Jatim lost right eye, his right hand was shattered, and he suffered deep wounds on his left arm and chest."[39] As an aside: Jatim looks at me from the photograph, and I can see a beautiful face.

Face in the camps was a thing to wear and thus a thing to point at and to show. Another internee with his face marked—and marking—is remembered by Mr. Trikoyo. "During a skirmish in the 1926 uprising," Mr. Trikoyo recalled, "Uncle Zainal Abidin's face was badly wounded. It was cut open by a sword of a Dutch soldier. Uncle Abidin used to show his face to us children in the camp. The scars, he told us, were brought about by colonialism."[40]

In Theresienstadt, the predictable, ready-to-wear, was "the Jewish face," a *Stockjude* face.[41] It was put on people and in the fashion of the camp people put it on themselves as well. The Stockjude face of Moses, "with earlocks and a crooked nose," became the face put on *Ghettokronen* [Ghetto crowns], the banknotes issued at a moment as the camp currency. This face inevitably became the most "popular" graphic of Theresienstadt in the time of camp.[42] This was how it was clearly intended by the SS rulers of the camp, and the Jews understood it instantly: "The Kohn's face it was called," a Theresienstadt internee wrote.[43] The bills were technically very well produced, and they were designed by a young Jewish painter and poet, Theresienstadt internee Peter Kien. Like real money, they were printed on paper with a watermark.[44]

There were many things in which the camps brought about a culmination. Like a jacket, a hat, or a skin, one was now expected, to try at least, to put a nose on or to take it off. Possibly the most generally well-liked person

in the Theresienstadt camp was Freddy Hirsch, a German Jew in his twenties. He was an excellent gymnast, an enthusiast, and a great organizer. He was thought of and was remembered by the other internees most affectionately, and was sometimes called, as we read in the camp memoirs, as almost perfect, "Apollo with a Jewish nose."[45]

In a "Jewish survivor report" on Theresienstadt written in March 1946, Mr. Jacobson, an ex-internee, recalled, "One could see many young people in the camp, fine strapping youth with good physiques. Hardly anyone among them would have fitted in the physiognomic scheme of Streicher's *Stürmer*."[46] *Stürmer* was a virulently anti-Semitic Nazi paper with crude caricatures describing the Jewish physiognomy in particular (the rest, the bodies, would come logically) as—passé. Otto Bernstein, another internee, wrote about the Theresienstadt Jews that they "were, and I say it in these words, 'a beautiful race' [*schöne Rasse*]." They could be, Bernstein wrote, "mistaken for the Germanic [*germanisch*] people."[47]

Mr. Manes (who did not survive) wrote in his camp diary about the Theresienstadt children, "They are the most beautiful children—I would not find ten among hundreds of an explicitly Jewish type."[48]

True to the power of the little cascade of nothings, color and even a shade of color mattered in the camps, as before and more than ever before. Through the centuries, the Jews were seen as dark or even black and sometimes yellow "like of the Mongolian East." The "natives" in the Indies, of course, were "natives" because they were "dark." One may hear people in Indonesia still today say that their child is "beautiful like an Arab," meaning of light complexion (and, for instance, of a narrow-at-root and straight nose). Some may talk about "an ancestor with blue eyes."[49]

Face wearing in Europe became increasingly significant as the time of the camps approached. Siegfried Kracauer, a contemporary of Benjamin, wrote about Germany of the 1920s, "With the huge supply of labor, a certain physical 'selection' inevitably occurs." Kracauer visited an employment agency in Berlin. An official in the place explained to him, "We have to do things the same way as the Americans do. The man must have a friendly face." Kracauer asked what "friendly" meant. Was it "pleasant—saucy or pretty?" "Not exactly pretty," the official said. "What's far more crucial is—oh, you know, a morally pink complexion."[50] (Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the Nazi camps, a few years after Kracauer had written this, gave a speech in which he expressed his worries about the character of the members of the SS. In the speech, Himmler insisted on the importance of "desirable faces."[51] He could have said "pink.")

As history was coming close to the moment of the camps, fashion raged. Peter Demetz wrote about the increasing attraction of makeup in Prague, after it was occupied by the Nazi forces and as many people were getting ready for the camps. Czech women in Prague, Demetz wrote, began to put especially bright tones of rouge on their lips and faces, "like the young women in French and American movies, in symbolic opposition."[52] Opposition against the Germans, that is. "Only rarely," Demetz added, a German woman—and there was an increasing number of them in Prague, arriving with the German armies—could be seen walking around with "rebellious traces of rouge on her lips."[53]

In Theresienstadt, the SS command repeatedly issued prohibitions against using makeup and cosmetics. However, judging just from how repeatedly the prohibitions were being issued, there evidently had to be equally frequent disregard of the orders.[54] "Rumors have it," Gonda Redlich wrote in his camp diary in July 1943, "that SS man Burger is going to prohibit lipstick for the women again."[55] "Many women," wrote Adler, "put makeup on, they were quite insistent on cosmetics and they could not care less about what the SS thought."[56]

"I saw skeletons walking around on sticks," the American soldier quoted in the previous chapter as being surprised about how nicely some people were dressed in the camp, added, among other confusing things he saw, "No woman without lipstick."[57] Theresienstadt might even have brought to his mind a dictionary rare definition of the word "camp," "*camp* (of manner): heavily made up."

Charles Baudelaire, a dandy and a prophet of the modern, in his nineteenth-century *In Praise of Cosmetics* proclaimed perfume to be a "symptom of the taste for the ideal."[58] One hundred years later, Rem Koolhaas, a Dutch architect and in many ways Baudelaire's heir, found one of the main characteristics of the space we live in now to be the fact of the space being filled with "more and more insistent perfumes."[59] Koolhaas called this space a "Junkspace" but he might have called it a postcamp space or even a camp space.

There were "more and more insistent perfumes" in Boven Digoel, too. According to a "shopping list" among the papers of the camp government commissary, "Internee Darmoprawiro [bought] two cans of coffee for *f*0.90, one bottle of vinegar for *f*0.40, 1¼ pounds of mung beans for *f*0.90, and one flacon of eau de cologne for *f*0.75."[60] In a popular Indies novel about Boven Digoel published in Batavia at the time, a young heroine is just about to be deported with her Communist father to the camp. She is described as "made up, with the powders and the creams, and there is a smell of eau de

cologne around her." In addition, "she smokes a cigarette and she does not care in the least about that the people are watching."[61]

.....

Other fashion accessories made their rarely seen presence in the camps—the *spécialité*, the novelties, the trivialities worn on clothes, close to the skin or even on the naked skin. They could almost make clothes into skin and skin into clothes. The fashion accessories were the hit in the camps, as dandy as hardly ever before, even if often by virtue of their scarcity—"ribbons, diadems, beauty marks," the "ever-new creations of bow and frill," the "*bandeaux* in women's hair," the "*chignons*."

There were several—few and the more so exclusive and desirable—*Galanterieladen*, thread-and-needle shops, in Theresienstadt, which, if one was lucky and came at the right moment, might offer "thimbles, ribbons, pieces of lace, . . . brooches, chains, and colorful frippery."[62] There were golden ornaments, precious stones, and trinkets in the camp, of radically increased significance in their presence or absence, "strings of pearls" that the Jewish women left or imagined they had left behind when sent to the camp, which could not be squeezed into the trunk or sewed into a coat as they packed.[63] No jewels, gems, or gold could be brought into the camp except wedding rings; it was the SS rule.[64] Still, there were women wandering about the camp wearing "the most beautiful necklaces, rings, and bracelets."[65]

An elderly lady, a former diva of the Berlin Opera, was fondly remembered after the war as appearing in the camp with a "veil on her face and a feather boa around her neck."[66] Could it be, I wonder as I write this book about two camps, that this was one of the boas made of the feathers of birds of paradise, indeed the most exquisite kind and style of boa at the time of the lady's best years? Dutch New Guinea, particularly the area along the Digoel River, where the camp was to be built thirty years later, was one of the very few spots of the world where the birds of paradise were found and "harvested."

Jewels, gold, and silver, as well as fake doubles, precious and "precious" stuff, were packed and brought by the Communist internees all the way to Boven Digoel. Lists of the items collected from the internees for safekeeping by the captain of the HMS *Jawa* to Boven Digoel in January 1927 included:

Soetaslekan: one golden watch, one golden chain, one wallet.
Nawai: one golden ring.
Soekindar: two golden rings, one knife . . .

Kadarisman: two golden rings, one knife, one post stamp in value of f1.50 (dirty).

Padmosoesastro: one watch that plays a melody, one golden chain, two golden rings . . .

Soendoro: one watch with a chain and charivari.

Djoefri: one wallet, two stones . . .

Hartadi, alias Koesmo: one nickel watch with a chain, and one pack of nails.[67]

One very special "specialty" in both camps, a particular "manifestation of preciosity,"[68] were armbands and patches. A power as well as a fashion statement, these armbands and patches were of carefully selected shapes and sizes and of carefully selected materials and colors; they were attached, buttoned or sewed on, or pinned to, the clothes, or they might be hung around the neck. They were a *novelty* in the camp, but not new. Only in the camps, suddenly and radically, they became so profound, a must to have.

"At the arrival to Theresienstadt," Jehuda Bacon, a boy at the time, recalled later, "a completely new and foreign world had been unveiled before me. Sometimes, we children found the scene actually comical, . . . so many people with armbands."[69] Mr. Manes, who was charged in the camp with organizing a Jewish Orientation Section of the Jewish police, as if responding to the boy Bacon's impressions, wrote in his own diary, "We simply have to wear armbands, otherwise we would not appear to be official persons at all."[70] "Armbands," Adler wrote, "were a camp fashion . . . the police yellow . . . the order orientation service blue . . . blind and disabled people yellow with black points."[71]

"Everything was very well organized," Kafka wrote in his *Nature Theatre of Oklahoma*, again, as if knowing it was coming. Karl, the hero of the novel, is not a Jew, at least it is stated nowhere in the novel. At a gathering point from which the people are to be taken to the wonderful Theater of Oklahoma, he is asked about his race and profession. At a loss, he gives his identity (logically?) as "Negro" and "technical worker." To his amazement, when a while later he was "met by a servant who put an armband around his arm," when he "lifted his arm to see what was on the band, it was, quite rightly, 'Negro, the technical worker.'"[72]

In the spring of 1935, Benjamin noticed, "Something new appeared in women's fashions, medium-sized embossed metal plaquettes which were worn on jumpers or overcoats and which displayed the initial letters of the bearer's first name."[73] The novelty, Benjamin thought, "profited from the

vogue for badges, which had arisen among men in the wake of the patriotic leagues."[74] At the moment of Benjamin's writing, the novelty was already getting ahead of itself, to where it would weight most heavily, in the camps. This was in Berlin, and roughly at the time when Benjamin noticed the plaquettes. A Jewish woman, an emigrant to the US, recalled the scene decades later, "I was beginning to look a little bit like a woman and was walking on a Berlin street, when an SS man approached me and asked me if he could accompany me home. It was winter time, and I had to open my coat in order to hold up a small gold Star of David I had begun to wear on a little chain around my neck."[75]

In a copy of the magazine *Vedem* [We Are in the Lead], which a group of boys in Theresienstadt wrote for themselves, an article appeared in September 1943, already deep in the time of the camps. There was a watercolor by one of the boys of a Jewish policeman in the camp. "A ghetto cop is of the male sex," the caption read. "He has a patch of cloth with a letter 'W' [like *Wache*, "Watch"] and a number stuck to the shoulder on his coat. He has the same letter and number inscribed on a badge that shines on his chest."[76] Josef Taussig similarly described "a strange figure" appearing before the hero of his short story. "The man wears a heavy winter coat across which there is a wide ordinance belt. Above all and distinguishing the figure from all others, swings a copper medal. The man has a face of a valiant soldier—a Theresienstadt policeman."[77]

There were medals, patches, and pendants in Theresienstadt, in all sizes and models and worn in all manner of ways. There were several Jews in the camp who had fought for Wilhelmian Germany or Habsburg Austria in World War I, and had received medals for their service. There were some, even, who had received the most coveted German award, "Iron Cross." Yet "it was forbidden to the Jews to wear any medal or order from the time before the camps."[78] Of course! But these medals had to be the more powerful, and present, in their status of not being permitted to be worn.

Many medals in the camp were powerful in their presence. "A chase after the titles in the camp grew into an orgy," Emil Utitz wrote about Theresienstadt after the war. Easily he might say "rage." Utitz was Kafka's schoolmate as a young man, then he taught at the university in Prague, and then spent more than three years in the camp: "A little medal, and even an usher armband on the sleeve," he wrote about the camp, "became a goal to be desired."[79]

As it has always been in the matters of fashion, shame was an important part of the camps. To signify authority (or subauthority in this case), the Boven Digoel selected willing internees who entered the camp ROB police

corps, and who got plaquettes and patches, quite fancy ones, in fact, to distinguish them but also to help them feel less degraded in the eyes of their comrades who did not join. "So that they were not embarrassed as they were walking on duty through the camp," an internee remembered, "they got uniforms with cockades pinned on their chests, a blue disk with the letters *ROB* in white."[80]

Why try to explain everything? In Theresienstadt, among the last belongings of an elderly Jewish woman who died alone in the camp, they found a pendant on the woman's dead body, under the blouse, on her skin. Gonda Redlich, a fellow internee, wrote in his diary on June 24, 1943, without a comment, "They found a swastika."[81]

Georg Simmel argued (namely for Germany, in the early twentieth century) that it is hardness and deadness, the "nature of stone and metal," that makes adornment precious and powerful.[82]

Fancy penholders and superbly sharpened pencils in the breast pockets were worn close to heart as the Boven Digoel internees disembarked for the camp. Little books in hard cardboard red covers, Communist Party membership cards, in the breast pockets, too, were carried by the internees all the way to Boven Digoel with an equal sense of significance. The Dutch guards strip-searching the internees on arrival, as wrote Dr. Schoonheyt, found the cards on the body of almost every one of the internees.[83]

"Accessories make the spring," Roland Barthes in his *The Fashion System* quoted repeatedly from a haute couture magazine.[84] Adornments make the spring—and all the seasons, and the world in change, and the people—by cliché, through clichés into the real. A man who survived the Theresienstadt camp, and Auschwitz, too, told Elena Makarova, in Jerusalem, after the war: "You know, in Theresienstadt there was an epidemic of making medallions and inserting photos of your loved ones. For quite obvious reasons, I and Zdenka [his wife] had medallions, too. I managed to carry mine through Auschwitz, and through all the camps. I remember hiding my medallion in a boot, under my underwear—but how could I keep it, if I had to be naked for all selections? Well, I must have found a way, if it's here, at home."[85]

Chains—tiny chains made of gold or less precious metal, watch chains showing from the vest pocket, were a fashion in the 1930s as in the decades before. Delicate thin chains, short or long, were worn over the neck or as a bracelet with miniature charms. Big chains and shackles were something else, but not completely; they were still stone-hard and stone-dead, they too were worn close to the skin, so close, sometimes, wrote Dostoyevsky, that "they rubbed the skin into sores."[86] Chains became ornaments, the small

and the big. They were accessories concentrating people into their symbolism, and hardening the traces of the people's desire. They made the chained people into who they were.

In Theresienstadt, the big chains were rarely worn. But they were present, heavy on people's minds in their possibility. Putting a Jew in chains in Theresienstadt was rather rare a punishment, applied only "when a Jew did something wrong." Then he or she was taken to the basement of the local Gestapo office on the main square of the camp, to be chained, invisible, but for all the others to know.

The big chains were not the everyday in Boven Digoel, either. As in Theresienstadt, they were a possibility, for special occasions. When an internee attempted to escape from Boven Digoel, for instance, and was caught and brought back, or sometimes on the ship during a transport to the camp, one was made to wear the chain. Internee Marsudi, who went to Boven Digoel on the ship *Rumphius*, recalled that, in his case, five men were chained by one long chain. When any one of the five needed to go to the toilet, all five had to go.[87]

Only in the camps, and so late in the history, with the sense of the grave irony implied, it becomes possible to see the chains, big and small, as a fashion. They fitted the season and defined the people, humiliated them one moment and the other built their dignity, shamed them and made them shine. Like all items of fashion, in the final analysis, they were a commodity. They appeared in various models, responded to demand, light or heavy, long or short, state of the art or used. They could also be mail-ordered. There were "American models of chains." The military commander of Tandjong Priuk harbor in Batavia recorded, "The commanding officer of the government steamer WEGA on the way to Boven Digoel confirms with his signature below that he received from the harbor commissar of the police for transport to Boven Digoel twenty-five pairs of American handcuffs."[88]

Eventually everything was absorbed into and constrained within the chains, as it should in a perfect accessory—novelty, cruelty, flair, and also mourning. When Fyodor Dostoyevky, one of the pre-Theresienstadt and pre–Boven Digoel camp people, died in Saint Petersburg in 1881, the students of the city insisted, in a gesture that became prophetic with hindsight (but they were not permitted in the end), on carrying "his chains" behind the coffin.[89]

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One accessory was missing in Boven Digoel. It was exclusively European, truly a *spécialité.* Like medallions and penholders, it was also to be worn

close to the heart, but its hardness was in spirit, not in the stuff it was made from. The Jewish star was a patch, a piece of cloth, that most radically and completely was supposed to make a person wearing it into what the patch was supposed to signify. By the way of the camps, too, it was also supposed to make Europe what the patch signified, and the world, as it was and as it is. "It felt as if we were being branded," Eva Benda recalled about going to Theresienstadt with a star, "and in a way we were."[90]

The star, again, was not wholly a novelty. It was, in fact, older than modernity itself, yet, again, it did not become fully modern until the time of the camps. Honoré de Balzac, the French nineteenth-century fashion expert (among other things), wrote of a man on a Paris street shouting at another man, "Do you have a yellow wheel by way of decoration on your surcot?" Balzac records this exchange in his *Treatise on Elegant Living*. "Move on, outcast of Christianity!—Jew, go back to your hole at curfew or be punished by a fine."[91]

Even before Balzac, multiple decrees, all of them fashion decrees in their core and execution, codified the Jews and the European order. Some required "Jews to wear badges or conspicuous garments, such as special headgear or footwear," others prohibited the Jews "from wearing certain fabrics or colors."[92] In some locations and times, "earrings were imposed on Jewish women, suggesting an association with prostitutes."[93] In the time of the camps, to make the idea ultimately pure and ultimately powerful, the cut, the color, and the manner of wearing the thing got finally settled.

The marking of the Jews by the Nazis was first proposed by the SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich on November 12, 1938. It is recorded that as Heydrich tabled his proposal, Hermann Göring, a fellow Nazi who was known as Nazi business conscious and who was also notorious as a Nazi dandy, exclaimed excitedly, "A uniform?" But Heydrich did not plan for wind being taken from his sails, and retorted, "An insignia."[94]

The decree as eventually issued, first on September 1, 1941, for Germany, ordered "Jews six years or over to appear in public only when wearing the Jewish star." The star had to be "as large as the palm of a hand." Its color had to be black, the background yellow, and for the center of the star the decree prescribed the black inscription "*Jude*." The Jews were "to sew the star tightly on their clothing, left on the chest."[95]

People, wrote Philip Roth, an Austrian Jewish writer and journalist, "with a bit of yellow material were tagged as Jews."[96] In most cases, the stars were ready-made. In Germany itself, they were manufactured and distributed by Geitel and Co., the Berlin Flag Factory.[97] They were a commodity. In

Prague, one paid "one Czechoslovak crown for one star made of fine prewar material." For the poor Jews, the stars were distributed free.[98]

Custom-made stars were possible. It was permitted to cut one's own star, and some, wrote Imre Kertész, "gave the matter an innovative twist . . . they have the material stretched over some cardboard base, so that way, of course, it looked more attractive, plus the arms of the stars weren't cut in such a ludicrously clumsy fashion as some of the homemade ones that were to be seen.[99] Ruth Bondy recalled, "Good Jewish housewives sat and padded the stars with black cloth to make them sturdier, and then carefully sewed them onto coats and jackets using a meticulous blind stich."[100] "One afternoon," a Jewish girl living in Amsterdam at the time and getting ready for the camp, too, later remembered: "Papa comes home and all of us stand around the table looking at sheets of yellow cloth. The cloth has stars with black borders and black letters in the center. They are made to look a little like Hebrew but they don't at all, really. They say '*Jood*' [the Dutch for "Jew"]. Papa says, 'Well, they aren't too awful.' No one answers him."[101]

The young Jews in Europe, in despair no doubt, but also with all the energy of the time, unprecedented energy, made the star into a "rage" of their own. Their generation grew up on the American Western films and cowboy lore, and so now, as they had to wear the star, they began to call each other "Sheriff."[102] In Paris, the centers for the distribution of Jewish stars began to be called "*Place de l'Etoile*."[103]

Peter Demetz recalled his mother in Prague, getting ready for Theresienstadt (and death): "Mother took needle and thread, which she handled so well, and sewed the stars to two blouses and a dress, as the decree required. Immediately the star made it impossible for her to move freely through the city, since all parks, gardens, and many streets were forbidden to Jews."[104] Yet Mrs. Demetz insisted on keeping on her walks through Prague, and how I understand her! Peter remembered the way his mother did it. She grabbed, so he wrote, her "elegant handbag, square, black, and shiny, a little Hollywoodish à la Claudette Colbert," and she got out on the streets, holding the Colbert bag close to her heart, where the star was.[105]

As the time of the camps approached, the world increasingly became a part of the camps, and, increasingly, everything became a matter of fashion. Etty Hillesum waited for her transport to the camp at the same time as Mrs. Demetz. In her diary, Hillesum described the day the decree had been announced that the Jews in Amsterdam had also to wear the star: "You can really tell, what the history books will leave out. That man in Beethovenstraat this afternoon won't get a mention in them."