





Abdown's story of innocence and helplessness and his endearing naiveté and simple-mindedness recalled to me the classic Italian film *Life is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*), that highlighted the noble courage and strength of innocent wonder and childlike optimism set against the bleak and horrific backdrop of the Holocaust. But despite situating itself around the terror of the Holocaust, *Framed* isn't about its horror and brutality. Much of the play's spirit is comedic, and often farcical in its depiction of the Nazi regime. The Nazi soldiers and their treatment of Jews are satirised – for example, in a comical sequence where they explain how to identify a Jew – which somewhat trivialises the odds that Abdown is up against. One exception is a chilling moment when Abdown finds himself handling a sack of his aunt's hair while helping out on a "farm" under the care of a good-natured family; this is one of the few glimpses into the brutality of the era.



One of the key questions that I mulled over through the production was: can a Singaporean play out, or write, the lived experiences of oppression and persecution faced by Jews in the Holocaust and claiming ownership of these specific social, political and cultural experiences? The performers eschew the German accent and their tonalities are decidedly Singaporean, marking and acknowledging a cultural distance. During their ensemble introduction at the beginning of the work the audience watches each actor shifting into character, being handed props and smoothening their clothes, which also conveys the play's themes of fictional constructs and the narrativity of historical accounts. During [his interview with Centre 42](#), Chong recounts being asked a similar question to mine. He answers, "everything that was going on in 1930s Germany – like xenophobia and racism – is still happening today ... I don't see it as an Asian's take on a European history. I just see it as a human take on a story of us, as humans, and that's all there is to it." *Framed* did not address concerns about xenophobia and racism, and the Holocaust serves as a vehicle to channel the play's broader philosophical themes that have little to do with "universal" human experiences of discrimination and persecution. Nevertheless, it's commendable the meticulous craft that has gone into this play, and what remains resonant is the exploration of the pliable nature of truth in political and personal histories.