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Article:

Pearce, C.M. (2019) Remembering the 'unwanted' victims: initiatives to memorialize the National Socialist euthanasia program in Germany. *Holocaust Studies* , 25 (1-2). pp. 118-140. ISSN: 1750-4902

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2018.1472882>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Holocaust Studies* on 18/06/2018, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17504902.2018.1472882>.

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III.i.: Remembering the ‘Unwanted’ Victims: Initiatives to Memorialise the National Socialist Euthanasia Programme in Germany

Caroline Pearce, University of Sheffield

Between 1939 and 1945, some 200,000 patients with psychiatric illnesses or mental or physical disabilities were murdered in Germany and Austria as part of the National Socialist euthanasia programme; at least 100,000 others were killed elsewhere in occupied Europe. A further 400,000 people were forcibly sterilised between 1934 and 1945 in accordance with the 1933 ‘Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring’. Although never formally enshrined in law, Hitler’s so-called ‘mercy killing decree’ of autumn 1939 authorised doctors to terminate lives that they deemed to be ‘unworthy of life’. Between January 1940 and August 1941, the killings were planned and coordinated by a staff of over 60 in a villa at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin, which provided the codename T4 for the operation. A committee of medical experts selected the victims on the basis of the results of mandatory questionnaires filled out by the staff of clinics and psychiatric institutions. One of the criteria related to the patients’ ability to work, which confirms that the euthanasia killings were motivated by economic factors as well as the desire to eliminate ‘genetically defective’ individuals from Aryan society. The National Socialists sought to ease the financial burden posed by ‘useless eaters’ in order to free up beds to treat military casualties or to make space to house ethnic German settlers in Poland and they calculated the savings that euthanasia would bring.¹ The chilling disregard for the patients concerned was underlined by comments on the questionnaires such as ‘practically useless. A wreck, no good for anything’.²

Between January 1940 and August 1941, over 70,000 patients were gassed in six purpose-built killing centres in Germany and Austria as part of Operation T4, many fully aware of what was happening to them. The euthanasia programme was officially halted in 1941 following protests led by the Church; however it continued on a decentralised basis until the end of the war, patients dying of starvation, neglect or lethal overdose. A broad spectrum of society was implicated in the euthanasia killings, from the doctors who selected the victims to the drivers who transported them to the killing centres to the local authority officials who coordinated the delivery of urns allegedly containing the ashes of the deceased.

Medical staff freely volunteered to take part in the programme and many went on to work in the extermination camps outside Germany. Some benefitted from financial incentives: midwives, for example, were paid two Reichsmark (the equivalent of 25 euros) for every newborn or infant with certain medical conditions that they reported to the authorities.³

The euthanasia killings were an open secret in Nazi Germany and attracted little opposition. They were organised in such a way that the public could turn a blind eye and the perpetrators would not be brought to account. Through neither wanting nor having to know about the details of the crimes, relatives of the victims both facilitated and became complicit in the murders. They rarely queried the transfer of family members to facilities from which they never returned or intervened to save them and few challenged the falsified cause, date and place of the allegedly 'sudden and unexpected' deaths. Indeed, some seemed most concerned about the failure of the authorities to return valuables belonging to the deceased.⁴

After the war, criminal proceedings were launched against 23 doctors and administrators involved in the euthanasia murders during the Nuremberg Doctors Trial in 1946-47. 16 of the accused were found guilty, of whom seven were sentenced to death by hanging.⁵ However, charges related to involvement in the euthanasia programme represented just 1.9 per cent of the cases brought against Nazi criminals after 1945.⁶ In order to avoid staff shortages in the medical profession, many former Nazi doctors were let off denazification proceedings with a fine.⁷ The majority of those involved in euthanasia escaped punishment and many went on to have successful careers in the medical profession.⁸ To cite just a few examples, Horst Friedel was charged with crimes against humanity in 1947 but continued to practice as a doctor when the charges were dropped in 1958; Heinrich Heene, who had selected victims for gassing during the T4 programme, was merely fined; whilst Oskar Orth, who had implemented euthanasia measures as head of Homburg district hospital, was made an honorary citizen of the town in 1947.⁹ Sabine Hillebrecht argues that the continued presence of former Nazi doctors in the medical profession after 1945 and the use of clinics and institutions that had been operational during the euthanasia programme meant that the perpetrators felt no sense of wrongdoing and there was no recognition of the victims. She gives the example of Gerhard Kujath, who had been responsible for the deaths of 81 children from the 'special children's ward' in Wiesengrund (Berlin) but was appointed as its director in 1952.¹⁰ Some members of the medical profession continued to publicly advocate the termination of life, for example Werner Catel, one of the experts involved in child euthanasia

under National Socialism, who became Professor of Paediatrics at Kiel University after the war. In a 1964 interview he said that he supported the killing of ‘children with no mental responses’.¹¹ Doctors even continued to investigate body parts removed from euthanasia victims. For example, a collection of 150,000 brain segments was preserved and stored in the cellar of Frankfurt university clinic and used for research projects and publications.¹² It was not until 2008 that the German Society for Human Genetics acknowledged the involvement of German doctors and academics in the 1933 ‘Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring’, and only in late 2010 did the German Society for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Neurology apologise to the relatives and victims of forced sterilisation and euthanasia and establish a committee to work through its role in the euthanasia killings.¹³ The Max Planck Institute established a committee in 1999 to investigate the role of its scientists under National Socialism, having previously blocked applications from the historian Götz Aly to view the collection of brain samples, many from euthanasia victims, which had been commissioned by the scientist Julius Hallervorden between 1939 and 1945 and were stored in the Max Planck Institute for Neurological Research in Frankfurt. Research into these samples was only terminated in 1990 after the dissemination of Aly’s research findings led to protests from the US, Israel and the then German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl.¹⁴

‘Forgotten’ Victims

Those who died as a result of National Socialist euthanasia were the first victims of the Holocaust. The murders did not take place in the distant death camps in Eastern Europe but on German or Austrian soil and many families were affected: according to Aly, one in eight Germans over the age of 25 today are related to a euthanasia victim.¹⁵ What is striking is that this victim group remains largely absent from German public discourse and from the dense commemorative landscape to the victims of Nazism that has developed over the past few decades. Whilst a body of academic research does exist on euthanasia, this tends to focus on the perpetrators rather than the victims. There is scant public awareness of the crimes and the topic remains marginal in school curricula.

Moreover, the euthanasia victims do not have an equal legal status to those persecuted on the grounds of race, religion or politics. The Federal Compensation Law, dating from 1961, considers euthanasia an ‘atypical’ crime under National Socialism and those murdered under the euthanasia programme are thus not classed as Holocaust victims. Controversially,

some of the medical experts consulted when this law was drafted had been involved in the euthanasia programme or advocated forced sterilisation.¹⁶ One-off compensation payments to the children of euthanasia victims were only introduced in 1988 and were limited to those under the age of 21 at the time of their parents' death. A new law from 2011 granting small compensation payments of 291 euros per month applies only to living survivors of the euthanasia programme, a number estimated at between five and ten.¹⁷

The circumstances and emotions surrounding National Socialist euthanasia present unique challenges to remembrance and go some way to explaining why these victims have been excluded from public commemoration. Firstly, the anonymous way in which the murders took place, with victims transferred out of clinics, killed elsewhere and then cremated meant that they were robbed of their identity and easily forgotten by society. Often the only trace of their existence remains in medical records, many of which have disappeared or been destroyed. Secondly, the victims have largely been erased from familial memory. Referring to remembrance of the National Socialist past, Moller and Behrens draw the useful distinction between the 'lexicon' of official memory and the 'album' of familial memory, the contents of which often diverge considerably.¹⁸ In the case of the euthanasia victims, the family album of memories is in most cases literally blank, with photographs of the victims kept hidden and their story absent from communicative memory. Relatives of euthanasia victims have frequently only stumbled across the truth by chance or through their own research and persistence. Sigrid Falkenstein, one of the most prominent campaigners for the commemoration of euthanasia victims in Germany, discovered the history of her aunt, Anna Lehnkering, who was gassed during Operation T4, when she typed her name into the Google search engine and came across an English language website with a list of people murdered by German doctors. In a letter to her late aunt, she writes of her shock at realising that all traces of Anna's past had been erased by her family. All that her uncles could recall was that Anna had died in an 'institution' at the start of the war. No one in the family could remember visiting Anna and no one knew where she had lived or died between 1936 and her death in 1940, or where she had been buried. Her father said that the family had blamed Anna's learning disability on her being dropped by a neighbour's child as an infant, presumably to avoid any associations with hereditary illness.¹⁹

The euthanasia victims were excluded from the narrative of German suffering prominent in the early post-war period that focused for example on prisoners of war, expellees or the civilian casualties of bombing raids, as well as from the Holocaust-centred

discourse that started to emerge in the late 1960s. The silencing of their experiences is indeed akin to the way that the truth about Nazi perpetrators was glossed over within families after the war. The taboo placed on remembering euthanasia victims can be explained by a number of psychological factors. The direct relatives of the victims would not only have been traumatised by the death of their loved ones, but also faced the stigma, prejudice and propaganda associated with mental and physical illness at the time and the fear that they or their offspring would be tainted by the alleged genetic deficiencies running in the family. In addition, they may have experienced feelings of shame or guilt for not having acted to save their relatives, or for negative thoughts towards these relatives while they were alive and a feeling of relief after their death. In a survey conducted in 1920 by Ewald Meltzer, head of an institute for disabled children in Saxony, which was used by the Nazis to legitimise their euthanasia plans, parents were asked whether they would support the painless termination of their child's life if he or she were deemed incurable. 73 per cent said yes; many stating that they wanted a 'release'.²⁰ A sense of guilt may also have arisen from having supported the ideology or propaganda of the regime that murdered one's relatives, or indeed from having profited from National Socialism, for example employing forced labourers whilst also allowing family members to perish under the euthanasia programme.

Members of subsequent generations who have belatedly uncovered the truth about their murdered relatives have themselves been left traumatised, both as relatives of the victims and through their association with the 'perpetrator generation' of National Socialism. The psychiatrist Melitta Breznick, the granddaughter of a euthanasia victim, has spoken of her anger, sadness and shock at finding out the truth, but also a sense of guilt that her grandmother was not rescued, and of shame for having genetic links to her schizophrenia.²¹ There is an interesting parallel here to Germany's '1968 generation' which both confronted and repressed the reality about National Socialist atrocities that had been kept from them by their parents' generation but was uncovered as increased information became available to the public. Martin Wangh's theory describes the psychological impact of the failure of families to discuss their actions in the Third Reich: 'shame, guilt and mourning that cannot be experienced consciously by parents is always passed on to the generations of their children'.²²

The apparently callous lack of familial intervention for the euthanasia victims should be seen within the context of the time: families were financially and emotionally overburdened with the war and frequently unable to provide care for their relatives; many would also have believed the propaganda insisting that certain individuals posed an

unnecessary burden to society. Families continue to encounter the challenge of looking after disabled relatives, something which carers are often reluctant to talk about, and mental illness is rarely addressed openly. This makes commemoration of the euthanasia victims so relevant but also explains the apparent reluctance to remember them. Aly, himself the father of a disabled daughter, aptly titled his 2013 book on National Socialist euthanasia *Die Belasteten*, which translates as ‘the burdened’ or ‘the tainted’. The title is deliberately ambiguous to refer to the burden experienced by the disabled but also by their families, to the perpetrators tainted by the crimes and to societal attitudes both at the time and after 1945.

Dietrich Allers, former manager of the T4 headquarters and a successful lawyer after the war, stated that he and his colleagues had had no sense that they were doing anything wrong at the time, an attitude indicative of ingrained prejudices towards mental or physical disability.²³ As Ute Hoffmann writes, the sick and disabled did not experience the end of the war as a caesura comparable to the liberation of prisoners from the concentration camps; they were neither released from their condition nor spared future prejudice.²⁴ The victims of euthanasia can thus be said to be doubly stigmatised: excluded during the Third Reich and marginalised in the post-war period. The lack of commemoration is indicative of frequently negative attitudes towards psychiatric illness and disability, which block an open and constructive confrontation with this aspect of the National Socialist past. Moreover, there is an awkwardness surrounding the cultural representation of disability. Ato Quayson refers to an ‘aesthetic nervousness’, which skirts around issues, confirms or even deepens prejudices, and presents disabled people as stereotypes defined by their condition.²⁵ The coded or unfamiliar language used in relation to this victim group, from the term ‘euthanasia’ to the reference to ‘T4’, has a distancing effect. In Germany, the tendency is further exemplified by the practice of not giving the names of euthanasia victims in full according to German data protection laws so they are listed, for example, as ‘Claus P.’ or ‘Maria F.’ This robs victims of an identity, upholds the sense of stigma and precludes the individualised or empathetic commemoration afforded to the victims of racial or political persecution. The justification routinely given by archives is that they wish to avoid adverse consequences for relatives, although interestingly the majority of respondents to an open letter from Götz Aly published in the *Berliner Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Rundschau* newspapers in 2012 stated that they thought names should be given in full.²⁶ The perceived need to ‘protect’ families underlines the ongoing stigma attached to disability and poses a barrier to the pedagogical aim of

‘learning from the past’. It also stands at odds with the policy of inclusion, which is actively promoted by the German government.²⁷

Sabine Hillebrecht encountered such obstacles after founding a ‘history laboratory’ project with young people in Berlin-Reinickendorf to research the biographies of children murdered in the Wiesengrund psychiatric hospital under the National Socialist euthanasia programme. The aim was to produce a ‘wall of memory’ featuring biographical information gathered from Berlin’s regional archive, but the archive later withdrew its permission for the use of this information and additionally insisted that surnames be blanked out on any materials produced to avoid stigmatising family members and to protect those with the same surname from being wrongly associated with those killed.²⁸ Similarly, an initiative to list the names of the victims of forced sterilisation in Neustadt (Schleswig-Holstein) on a plaque has been blocked by both the regional archive and the local authorities, which have stated that families may feel ashamed about the revelations regarding their family history or tainted by the associations with mental illness.²⁹ Hillebrecht makes the accurate though sobering observation that the desire to avoid being stigmatised has to be taken seriously in today’s performance-driven society, especially as it is now easier than ever to access information about people’s private lives.³⁰

Commemoration of Euthanasia Victims in Germany

Despite the low levels of public awareness and commemoration, a number of plaques to the euthanasia victims were commissioned in the decades following the war – the earliest at the former killing centre in Hadamar (Austria) in 1953. Increased research into the topic since unification has provided the impetus for additional efforts to commemorate euthanasia victims in recent years. There are now memorial sites at the six former killing centres in Germany and Austria. There are also exhibitions, memorials and plaques at a number of clinics formerly involved in the euthanasia programme, many of which still operate as medical institutions. The Karl-Bonhoeffer psychiatric clinic in Berlin, for example, opened Germany’s first permanent exhibition on euthanasia and forced sterilisation under National Socialism in 1988.³¹ The hospital at Berlin-Buch, formerly the main transit point for euthanasia victims from Berlin, inaugurated a sculpture in its grounds in 2013 with historical information in German and English. The positioning of memorials at sites that still care for psychiatric patients is a brave acknowledgement of past crimes but not without practical

challenges: David Mitchell reports that patients under treatment for drug addiction sometimes wander into the exhibition at the clinic in Bernburg when their appointments are delayed or postponed.³² The memorialisation of euthanasia victims presents additional specific challenges. Archived biographical information requires careful interpretation but is, as Hillebrecht rightly points out, a valuable resource in shedding light on National Socialist propaganda or pseudo-scientific theory (the medical or genetic classification of the victims and explanations of their condition) and the concealment of the crimes (faked death certificates), but also in indicating the personality traits of the individuals concerned (reports on their behaviour) and of course in providing a visual record. However, the common practice of anonymising victims' names or withholding permission to publish information makes it more difficult to use biographies within exhibitions. Added to this is the sheer inaccessibility of records in many cases: researchers setting up the euthanasia memorial site at Brandenburg/Havel, which opened in 2012, were unable to identify ten per cent of the victims of this former killing centre.³³

Hillebrecht states that only two per cent of the *Stolpersteine* memorials in Germany (see also Chapter II.vi) are dedicated to euthanasia victims, which exemplifies the absence of these victims from popular commemoration, whether due to disinterest, reluctance or a lack of awareness. The historical significance of some sites connected with National Socialist euthanasia remains unacknowledged. At Waldniel/Hostert near Mönchengladbach, the disused former grounds of a 'special children's ward' where 100 patients died under the euthanasia programme have been used for paintballing and as a film location for the police series *Alarm für Cobra 11* as well as to display campaign posters for the far right; a small-scale citizens' initiative to commemorate the victims has so far been unsuccessful.³⁴

There are further practical obstacles to the commemoration of euthanasia victims in Germany. Many of the sites formerly involved in the programme are in fairly remote locations, which makes it harder to attract visitors. The memorial site at the former National Socialist doctors' training school in the village of Alt-Rehse (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), for example, is only accessible by car or via an infrequent bus route. The development of this memorial site has been accompanied by disputes over alternative plans for the beautiful 25 hectare parkland site, for example to build housing or a holiday park.³⁵ This raises another challenge to memorialisation. Many former euthanasia sites are in locations which rely on tourism and are understandably reluctant to directly address a negative history. The memorialisation concept implemented in Pirna (Saxony) is particularly striking for this

reason.³⁶ Pirna is a picturesque town on the banks of the River Elbe, renowned for its Baroque and Renaissance architecture and for its links with the artist Canaletto, who produced a famed series of paintings of the town in the 18th century. Its hilltop fortress, Sonnenstein, housed a psychiatric clinic which served as one of the six National Socialist euthanasia killing centres: 13,720 people were murdered here between June 1940 and August 1941, along with prisoners from Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz no longer strong enough to work as forced labourers. The significance of the site was ignored during the GDR period, though a small plaque was put up in 1973 with a vague reference to the victims. Following unification, public discussions took place with a view to establishing a memorial site, which opened in 2000. However, the town has gone further than this. In 2005, the Saxony Memorials Site Foundation implemented a memorial concept that makes the dark legacy of the euthanasia murders an integral feature of the town's identity. The Berlin artist Heike Ponwitz designed the memorial 'Past is Present', which consists of a series of 16 small glass panels, each featuring a reproduction of one of Canaletto's paintings of the town showing the fortress. Superimposed over the image are words associated with National Socialist euthanasia such as 'Gnadentod' (mercy killing), 'Sammeltransport' (deportation) or 'Rassenhygiene' (racial hygiene). The panels lead from the station through the old town to the fortress and memorial site. The final panels are mounted on a path next to a wall with a door in it, through which the ashes of cremated euthanasia victims used to be tipped into the river. Visitors can now enter the memorial site through a space in this wall. The 'Past is Present' memorial features in one of the walking tours advertised by the tourist office and is accompanied by a website in several languages.³⁷

This bold and innovative attempt to address the legacy of the euthanasia crimes in Pirna is one example of a number of interesting approaches to the memorialisation of National Socialist euthanasia in recent years, which indicate future commemorative trends. These initiatives are deliberately inclusive, featuring facilities such as subtitles and information in easy read format. The following sections will address three contrasting examples: the national memorial to the euthanasia victims in Berlin, the website gedenkort-T4.eu and the youth competition 'andersartig gedenken'.

The National Memorial and Information Point for the Victims of National Socialist "Euthanasia" Killings

In November 2011, the German government voted to establish a memorial and information point to the victims of the National Socialist euthanasia murders at the site of the former T4 headquarters in Berlin.³⁸ This memorial adds to those dedicated to the Jewish, homosexual and Sinti and Roma victims of National Socialism in the capital (inaugurated in 2005, 2008 and 2012 respectively). Built on land formerly occupied by the T4 villa, this is the only one of these national memorials located directly at the historical site where crimes were coordinated. The memorial is in the so-called Culture Forum in the west of the city, established in the 1960s as a counter to the Museum Island in East Berlin and housing institutions such as the Berlin Philharmonic concert hall, the New National Gallery and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. The foyer of the Philharmonic overlaps with the foundations of the T4 villa, which had been badly damaged by air raids in 1944 and was pulled down in the 1950s. However, symptomatic of the tendency to erase or cover over architectural traces of National Socialism in the early post-war decades, the Culture Forum made no reference to the historical site. As with other significant memorials in the capital, the impetus for the memorial to the victims of National Socialist euthanasia has primarily come from small-scale citizens' initiatives over the past three decades. In 1987, one such initiative parked the 'Mobile Museum', a double-decker bus containing an exhibition on euthanasia, on the site. The following year, the Berlin senate acquired the steel sculpture 'Berlin Junction' by the American artist Richard Serra and placed it in front of the Berlin Philharmonic as a memorial to the euthanasia victims. However, the unlabelled piece, originally designed for a Berlin art exhibition, is generally seen as an abstract sculpture belonging to the concert hall and does little to focus attention on the victims of euthanasia. Following criticism of this token gesture towards remembrance, in 1989 a bronze plaque dedicated to the victims of euthanasia was set into the ground, with the inscription 'There were many victims but few of the perpetrators were brought to justice'. However, the plaque is easy to miss, not only as it is on ground level but also as it is located in a busy parking bay for buses and taxis. A number of more recent initiatives have tried to emphasise the forgotten significance of the site. In 2007, an information panel was put up inside a bus shelter and a round table was established to discuss plans for a memorial. Between January 2008 and January 2009 the Memorial of the Grey Buses designed by the artists Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz was displayed on the site. This touring memorial is in the shape of the vehicles that transported euthanasia victims to their deaths and features the inscription 'where are you taking us?' A small exhibition on National Socialist euthanasia was displayed in 2013 as part of the capital's thematic year Diversity Destroyed, which recalled the 80th anniversary of Hitler's appointment as

Chancellor. However, the overall impression of the site is one of general neglect: the wreaths laid as part of the 2012 Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration were, for example, left to rot for several weeks.³⁹ During a visit to a Berlin school in 2012, Sigrid Falkenstein established that neither staff, pupils nor the local TV crew filming a piece on Holocaust Memorial Day had even heard of the memorial in the Culture Forum.⁴⁰ The national memorial has heightened the significance of the site, but it has come much later and is on a decidedly smaller scale than memorials to other victim groups: the final budget allocated by the government was around 610,000 euros, a sum dwarfed by the 27.6 million spent on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and less than a third of that spent on the memorial to the murdered Sinti and Roma.

The Berlin senate launched a competition to design the memorial in March 2012. It was only open to professional architects and attracted just one entry from outside Germany, possibly because the tender was only available in German. The tender outlined the common – and problematic – objective of fusing aesthetics and information, which raises the question of what is expected of such a memorial and what can actually be achieved. It stipulated that the memorial must emphasise the historical significance of the site and provide information about its development, the perpetrators and victims of euthanasia and the implementation of the euthanasia programme, as well as pointing to existing initiatives and memorial sites in Germany and other countries. In addition, entrants were required to use a ‘contemporary artistic form’ to produce a ‘dignified site of memory’⁴¹. The fact that the Culture Forum is a conservation area posed a further challenge: the tender specified that the design should not spoil or disturb the overall spatial impression of the site.⁴² The Berlin senate shortlisted 28 designs from 92 entries, including some radical or experimental approaches, for example the proposal to remove six of the concrete blocks from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe to symbolise the six euthanasia killing centres, or the second-placed entry, a robot that would write ‘I love you’ on the ground once a day.

The winning design, announced in November 2012, is by the architect Ursula Willms, who also designed the Topography of Terror documentation centre in Berlin, in conjunction with the concept artist Nikolaus Kolisius and the landscape architect Heinz W. Hallmann.⁴³ Inaugurated on 2 September 2014, the memorial consists of a 24 metre long and 2.60 metre high blue glass wall set into a dark grey, gently sloping concrete surface over an area covering 775 square metres. On one side of the glass is a 40 metre long bench and on the other a low concrete wall with an outdoor exhibition produced by a team of historians from

the German Research Society, headed by the Institute for History and Medical Ethics at Munich's Technical University. The exhibition contains eleven sections on the history and implementation of National Socialist euthanasia, including information on the T4 programme, the selection of victims, mass murder in the gas chambers, perpetrators, accomplices and those who profited from the crimes, reactions from families and society, the euthanasia crimes in the context of the Holocaust and war of annihilation, and confrontation with the crimes after 1945. It also touches on the under-researched topic of euthanasia in occupied Eastern Europe. The site offers a fully inclusive approach to commemoration with full disabled access and text in easy read format. This approach was effectively illustrated at the ceremony marking the start of construction in July 2013, which featured a performance by Thikwa, a theatre ensemble with disabled and able-bodied performers.

According to Willms's design concept, the memorial is abstract in form, and yet it also incorporates consciously symbolic elements.⁴⁴ The blue glass wall symbolises a link between visitors to the memorial and people who died under the National Socialist euthanasia programme but live on through commemoration: 'they face us, are between us, among us'.⁴⁵ The colour and upward orientation of the glass represent 'a place of hope, where we can encounter people who are different and recognise the similarities that we share'.⁴⁶ By contrast, the dark ground surface stands for the crimes, the

eternal "negative imprint" that National Socialist euthanasia has left on the history of our society. We stand on this surface, on this "historical legacy", with the responsibility to never let it happen again. This is a place that recalls what happened, that recalls exclusion.⁴⁷

The two elements are effectively fused: when visitors look up from the information panels they can see themselves reflected in the glass. For Stefanie Endlich, this serves to emphasise the links between past and present.⁴⁸ However, as with any memorial, it is uncertain whether these intended interpretative or reflective elements are understood in the same way by the average visitor, most of whom will form an aesthetic judgement independently of the design criteria. The fusing of past and present is in any case problematic in associating visitors with a history with which they may not be familiar

The jury praised Willms' design for fitting naturally and unobtrusively into the urban environment and for providing a clear symbol without false pathos. It maintained that the glass wall would encourage visitors to question the links between past and present, victims

and perpetrators and the ground and the sky, the latter hinting at religious symbolism.⁴⁹ This ‘fragile space’, as Willms describes it, is intended to stand out so that people will be encouraged to approach it, and it is clearly visible from the adjacent busy road, also at night when it is illuminated.⁵⁰ Endlich describes the glass wall as attractive, even chic, and with a visual appeal that provides an effective bridge to the factual information which is integral to the site. However, the memorial blends so effectively into the redesigned Culture Forum that passers-by may fail to appreciate the symbolism or intention or to draw the associations anticipated by the jury. It is interesting that the jury chose this abstract design rather than one of the many entries that provided direct representations of the T4 building. Berlin’s culture senator, André Schmitz, referred to a ‘world class memorial’ that was the final element in the ensemble of national memorial sites in Berlin, whilst the government resolution stated that the new memorial would ‘upgrade’ the existing commemorative features in the Culture Forum.⁵¹ Both opinions suggest an architectural rather than remembrance-driven objective or the aim of accommodating rather than accentuating the historical significance of the site as part of the architectural regeneration of the Culture Forum. It is notable that the lively public discussions on the future of the Culture Forum in 2014 paid no attention to the former T4 building.⁵² The official start of construction of the memorial in July 2013 and the inauguration itself in September that year received scant attention in the German or international media. Reports on the memorial were factual rather than critically engaging with the design. This could be explained by an ‘aesthetic nervousness’ towards the topic or the fact that unlike projects such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe the development of this memorial was not accompanied by a high-profile, international debate or lobbying campaign.

Virtual Memorial and Information Place NS-“Euthanasia” (www.gedenkort-t4.eu)

Endlich states that the artistic concept behind the national Memorial and Information Point to the Victims of National Socialist ‘Euthanasia’ Killings serves primarily as a medium to present the informative elements of the memorial.⁵³ The size and budget of the memorial mean that it can only give an overview of National Socialist euthanasia, although an accompanying website and catalogue are currently in production. During the planning stages, critics from the left wing, victims groups and other memorial sites deemed the memorial superfluous in the saturated commemorative landscape of Berlin and drafted an open letter

stating their preference for a dedicated information centre.⁵⁴ To address the gap in knowledge on National Socialist euthanasia, the website www.gedenkort-t4.eu was launched in November 2011 as a virtual memorial and information centre and to accompany the development of the national memorial: smartphone users can access the website directly from the memorial. Funded partly by the EU's Europe for Citizens programme, the website provides an interactive, inclusive and communicative approach to remembrance, inviting people of all ages, nationalities and educational abilities to contribute their thoughts and research. With content in German, English, Polish and Hungarian, the website has sections on the past (the history of the euthanasia killings and biographies of victims), the present (ongoing debates on euthanasia and eugenics, current memorial sites, a forum for relatives of the victims and interviews) and the future (information on the national memorial). One simple but effective feature is the changing sequence of photographs of people with disabilities from the National Socialist period, which can be clicked on to access their biographies. Along with a regularly updated blog, the site also maintains a lively presence on Facebook and Twitter and receives hits from all over the world. Examples of blog posts include information on historical research, a film on euthanasia and a call to boycott a prize ceremony for the Australian bio-ethics expert Peter Singer, who has advocated the legalisation of euthanasia of newborns with disabilities.⁵⁵

This website is a direct expression of the societal commitment to remembrance encouraged in Germany's national memorial site concept that was adopted after unification.⁵⁶ Its inclusive approach means that remembrance of the victims of National Socialist euthanasia is not centred on Berlin or Germany but given international significance. The site, for example, enabled virtual attendance at a commemorative ceremony in 2012 and at a conference on National Socialist euthanasia in 2013, and it produced a Google map on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2015 and 2016 with links to remembrance ceremonies for victims of euthanasia and forced sterilisation.⁵⁷ As a 'virtual memorial' this site is constantly evolving, thereby echoing the importance attached by James Young to the dialogic nature of memorialisation: once a memorial is set in stone this dialogue often ceases.⁵⁸

“andersartig gedenken”

The final example combines aspects of the two approaches mentioned so far and focuses on responses to the National Socialist euthanasia programme from young Germans, who are

frequently called upon to preserve remembrance of the National Socialist past, despite the fact that this is so distant from their own experience. Launched in 2012, the national competition ‘andersartig gedenken’, which can be translated both as ‘remember differently’ and ‘remember difference’, invited German secondary school pupils aged 15-19 to design their own memorial for the victims of National Socialist euthanasia. Entrants were asked to consider three questions: firstly, how to facilitate remembrance of this topic; secondly, what form of remembrance most strikes a chord with young people; and thirdly what type of remembrance is most suitable to the topic. They were encouraged to display ‘a new understanding of the term “memorial” and create a contemporary, young form of memory’ and asked to describe the motivation and thought processes behind their designs.⁵⁹

The 159 entries submitted presented a broad spectrum of perspectives on remembrance. Overall, they shunned conventional memorial forms, although as Endlich points out, many evoked familiar or conventional cultural representations of the Holocaust with dark, cube-like structures evocative of gas chambers.⁶⁰ In addition, they made frequent use of multimedia, attempted to demonstrate links between past and present and sought to individualise the victims. The winning entry, ‘Against Forgetting’, came from a school in the western German state of Hessen. It consists of a photo collage of 36 people holding up chalk boards, on which they have written the terms that came to mind when asked about euthanasia (for example ‘vile medical research’, ‘necessary’, ‘Operation T4’, ‘gruesome’, ‘responsibility’ or ‘let people be people’).⁶¹ The jury praised the project as presenting a communicative, reflective and individualised approach to remembrance. The development of the project was as revealing of attitudes to the topic as the terms proposed – the pupils had approached passers-by in their town; some did not want to be photographed or make comment, others had never heard of euthanasia.

The second prize was awarded to the design ‘Pars par Toto’ from a school in Dortmund. It features a mirrored cube, the mirrors representing how the truth about euthanasia was camouflaged under National Socialism. The interior features a large jigsaw puzzle with photos of people on the pieces. Some of the pieces have been removed and put on plinths featuring monitors showing people with disabilities in everyday situations today. This design symbolises how the euthanasia victims were simply removed from National Socialist society and interweaves this with an effective message about the need to reflect on inclusion in contemporary society.

The third prize went to a play entitled 'Not only the Jews were persecuted' and written by pupils at the same school in Hessen as the prize-winning group. The play deals with an epileptic SS officer whose wife wants to report his condition to the authorities. He goes into hiding with his daughter and a Jewish family but is discovered and later murdered. The play has been designed as a series of clips to be shown on You Tube. This entry in particular demonstrates that for young people memorialisation does not have to mean a fixed material structure and is perhaps most effective and accessible if shaped by media they are familiar with (see also Chapter III.iii on the use of Instagram at Auschwitz). This sentiment was demonstrated by one of the other competition entries, which consisted of a flash mob of able-bodied and disabled dancers.

Two further entries received a special mention. The first, 'Remembrance in Marl', is a good example of active engagement with memory in the local community. Students organised a series of activities such as releasing balloons with information cards about euthanasia victims, writing an article in a local newspaper and painting an electricity cable box as a memorial. The second addresses the European relevance of the history of National Socialist euthanasia and the tendency to integrate teaching on the Nazi past with human rights education. Entitled 'Cross out euthanasia', it resulted from a human rights project run in conjugation between a school in Lippstadt and one in Latvia. The model shows disabled and able-bodied people, with the wire symbolising barriers to the disabled and the string the fact that everyone has the same rights. The figures are placed on leaves taken from a memorial site in Latvia, which connects past and present.

Although the impetus for the national memorial to the victims of National Socialist euthanasia came from citizens' initiatives, its development essentially took a top-down approach with an architect deciding on form and symbolism and a team of academics preparing the exhibition. By contrast, 'andersartig gedenken' gave young people the chance to shape the memorialisation process themselves and required them to learn about, reflect on and engage with the past, thereby provoking a more active response than if they were presented with a completed museum or exhibition or taught facts via text books. The competition encouraged them not only to present their own interpretations of history but also to consider broader concepts related to the present such as the meaning of 'life unworthy of life', and to recognise their own possible prejudices.

Conclusion

The original website of ‘andersartig gedenken’ features the apt statement from Aleida Assmann: ‘The future of memory depends on its capacity to evolve’.⁶² The entries to the competition demonstrated how younger generations can transform or adapt conventional notions of memorialisation. As evidence of the success and relevance of the project, in 2016 a new competition, andersartig-gedenken-on-stage, was launched, with entrants to produce an original piece of theatre addressing the biography of a euthanasia victim.⁶³

The relevance and challenge of the commemoration of the victims of National Socialist euthanasia lie in the questions it poses regarding attitudes to disability and mental illness, conditions that can affect any one of us: according to the Federal Government, 18.1 million Germans, or 20 per cent of the population, have some form of physical or mental incapacity.⁶⁴ Remembrance of the victims of euthanasia is bound up with ongoing political, cultural and societal issues and choices, for example approaches to inclusion or assisted dying. Some critics warn of overzealous links between past and present and yet this aspect of National Socialist history necessarily requires critical reflection on both the development of the mindset that classed people as ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’ of life, and on one’s own possible prejudices or unease with disability and mental illness in the present. Added to this is the sobering reminder that perpetrators can come from all walks of society including, as in this case, members of a trusted professional elite.

The national memorial in Berlin is an important acknowledgement of the need to include the ‘forgotten’ victims of National Socialist euthanasia in Holocaust commemoration. During the ceremony marking the start of construction, Dilek Kolat, Berlin’s senator for integration, emphasised the memorial’s relevance in the present when she warned of the dangers of modern medicine’s attempts to create the perfect human being.⁶⁵ At the opening ceremony in September 2014, the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, referred to the ideology of the Nazis in the context of current debates on euthanasia and assisted dying, warning that legalising assisted euthanasia would set a dangerous precedent. She called for remembrance as a means of learning from the past:

‘T4’ [...] should be an eternal warning [...] against making exceptions to the fundamental duty of the state to protect every individual’s right to life [...] as much as it is understandable to want to release a sick person from their suffering, [assisted dying has] intolerable consequences for the humanity of a society. If assisted dying is

permitted, there is the expectation that people will request it in the desire to avoid posing a burden to others through their own helplessness. This alters family relationships, affects our readiness to show solidarity with the weak and the sick and is not without consequences for the system of values and the character of a society!⁶⁶

Echoing the sentiment in this speech, the then mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, insisted that a society was itself only ‘worthy of life’ if it demonstrated compassion for others.⁶⁷

In 2013, the then Federal Commissioner for Culture, Minister Bernd Neumann, maintained that the national memorial would be a sign against hatred, ignorance and cold-heartedness and for tolerance, empathy and respect for life. Likewise, at the opening ceremony Grütters maintained that it would teach people to oppose inhumane ideologies that exclude certain individuals and inform them of significant contemporary debates.⁶⁸ It is extremely doubtful whether a single, static memorial can achieve all of these aims. It is rather the accompanying debate and public engagement through initiatives such as those described here that can provide a deeper reflection on National Socialist euthanasia and the value of life. In turn, such initiatives have the capacity to shape more inclusive and forward-looking methods of commemoration that may have a permanent impact on attempts to foster tolerance and inclusion in society. A final example illustrates just how important these initiatives are. In 2012 a law was passed to grant compensation to children and young adults who had been abused in children’s homes in Germany in the period 1945-79. By 2014, 120 million euros had been paid out to the able-bodied victims of abuse. However, the approximately 10,000 mentally or physically handicapped victims are yet to receive any compensation.⁶⁹

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Notes

- ¹ In the essay ‘Extermination of life not worth living’ Hitler’s doctor, Theo Morell, estimated that the elimination of 5,000 ‘idiots’ would equate to an overall saving of 10 million Reichsmarks per year. See Jähner, ‘Ermorden, Platz schaffen’.
- ² Rede von Kulturstatsministerin Prof. Monika Grütters zur Eröffnung des Gedenk- und Informationsortes für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen “Euthanasie”-Morde.
- ³ See Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 109; Tomic, “Ich wäre so gern heimgekommen”.
- ⁴ Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 76.
- ⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, ‘The Doctors Trial’.
- ⁶ Westermann, ‘Der Umgang mit der NS-“Euthanasie” in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’.
- ⁷ Tomic, “Ich wäre so gern heimgekommen”.
- ⁸ On the post-war careers of those in the medical profession see, for example, Frei, *Karrieren im Zwielicht*; Klee, *Was sie taten – was sie wurden*; and Halter, ‘Die NS-Mörder sind noch unter uns NS-Ärzte’.
- ⁹ Tomic, “Ich wäre so gern heimgekommen”.
- ¹⁰ Hillebrecht, ‘Das schwierige Erinnern an Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Patientenmorde’.
- ¹¹ ‘Aus Menschlichkeit töten? Spiegel Gespräch mit Professor Dr. Werner Catel über Kinder Euthanasie’.
- ¹² See Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 124-26.
- ¹³ See *Der Standard*, ‘Deutsche Humangenetiker räumen “schwere Schuld” an Nazi-Euthanasie ein’ and *Der Standard*, ‘Warum haben wir sie nicht retten können?’
- ¹⁴ Widmann, ‘Das Schweigen der Wissenschaft’.
- ¹⁵ Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 15.
- ¹⁶ See ‘Kleine Anfrage: Entschädigungsleistungen für “Euthanasie”-Geschädigte’.
- ¹⁷ See Westermann, ‘Der Umgang mit der NS-“Euthanasie” in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’ and ‘Kleine Anfrage: Entschädigungsleistungen für “Euthanasie”-Geschädigte’.
- ¹⁸ Behrens and Moller, “‘Opa war kein Nazi’ und die Folgen’, 18-29.
- ¹⁹ Sigrid Falkenstein, ‘Zum Gedenken an Anna Lehnkering’; Adelheid Müller-Lissner, ‘Als Ärzte mordeten’.
- ²⁰ See Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 28-33.
- ²¹ ‘Warum haben wir sie nicht retten können?’
- ²² **Wangh, ‘The Working-Through of the Nazi Experience’, 51.** On the way that guilt, trauma and repression have been passed from one generation to the next see, for example, Pearce, *Contemporary Germany and the Nazi Legacy*.
- ²³ See Holler, ‘Dietrich Allers: Geschäftsführer der “T4” Zentraldienststelle’; and GedenkortT4 (@t4eu), “...damals alle der Meinung, kein Unrecht zu tun”.
- ²⁴ Hoffmann, ‘Aspekte der gesellschaftlichen Aufarbeitung der NS-“Euthanasie”’, cited in Westermann, Kühl and Ohnhäuser, *NS-“Euthanasie” und Erinnerung*, 68.
- ²⁵ Cited in Knittel, ‘NS-Euthanasie im Fernsehfilm “Holocaust”’.
- ²⁶ See Aly, *Die Belasteten*, 10-14. One recent exception to the restriction on giving the full names of euthanasia victims is at the memorial site in the former euthanasia killing centre in Brandenburg/Havel, which opened in

2012. This memorial site contains a memorial book with the full names of over 8,000 euthanasia victims, although the information can only be accessed at the memorial site. See Ley, 'Neuer Gedenkort für eine "vergessene" Opfergruppe'.

²⁷ See, for example, Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für die Belangen behinderter Menschen, 'Was ist Inklusion?' and 'Inklusionslandkarte'.

²⁸ Hillebrecht, 'Das schwierige Erinnern an Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Patientenmorde'.

²⁹ Parzer, 'Gedenkinitiative und Archiv: Keine Partner in Schleswig-Holstein?'

³⁰ Hillebrecht, 'Das schwierige Erinnern an Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Patientenmorde'.

³¹ For further information, see <http://www.totgeschwiegen.org>.

³² Mitchell, 'Decentralized Locations, Digital Humanities'.

³³ Hillebrecht, 'Das schwierige Erinnern an Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Patientenmorde'.

³⁴ See, for example, Parzer, 'Appell: Ein würdiges Gedenken an die Kinder – "Euthanasie" in Waldniel'.

³⁵ See for example, Nordkurier, 'Gutspark Alt-Rehse: Millionengeschacher um frühere Nazi-Hochburg' and 'Das Zerren um den Gutspark geht weiter'; and S. Voss, 'Wellness und Wiedergutmachung'.

³⁶ For details of the history of Pirna Sonnenstein and the town's memorial concept, see Endlich, "'Vergangenheit ist Gegenwart"'.

³⁷ See TouristService Pirna, 'Entdecken Sie den Sonnenstein selbst' and 'Vergangenheit ist Gegenwart'.

³⁸ See Deutscher Bundestag, 'Gedenkort für die Opfer der NS-"Euthanasie"-Morde', Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht' and Deutscher Bundestag, 'Gedenkort für die Opfer der NS-"Euthanasie"-Morde', Antrag der Fraktionen. For information on the tender and design competition, see Berliner Senat, 'Gestaltungswettbewerb'. On the history of the site and the memorial, see Endlich, 'Erinnerung im Stadtraum'.

³⁹ See Parzer, 'Noch einmal Tiergartenstraße 13 in Berlin' and Parzer, 'Gedenksuren'.

⁴⁰ Rede von Sigrid Falkenstein auf der Gedenkveranstaltung.

⁴¹ Berliner Senat, 'Gestaltungswettbewerb'.

⁴² See Parzer, 'Wettbewerb zum Denkmal in der Tiergartenstraße 4'.

⁴³ For information on the design and inauguration of the memorial, see Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, 'Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde' and Endlich, 'Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der Nationalistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde'.

⁴⁴ See Endlich, 'Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der Nationalistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde'.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Senatskanzlei für kulturelle Angelegenheiten, 'Gestaltungswettbewerb entschieden'.

⁵⁰ Cited in Endlich, 'Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der Nationalistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde'; also Ursula Willms (interview with).

⁵¹ See evangelisch.de, 'Berliner Senat verteidigt Planungen für Euthanasie Gedenkort'; and Deutscher Bundestag, 'Gedenkort für die Opfer der NS-"Euthanasie"-Morde', Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht'.

⁵² Endlich, 'Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der Nationalistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde'.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See *Gedenkstättenforum*, 'Plädoyer für Aufwertung des Denkmals für Opfer der "Euthanasie"-Morde' and *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 'Neues Denkmal für Opfer der "Euthanasie"'.

⁵⁵ The blog is accessible at <http://blog.gedenkort-t4.eu/>.

⁵⁶ See Deutscher Bundestag, *Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption der Bundes*. The memorial site concept acknowledged the importance and challenge of adequately remembering the victims of both Nazism and Communism in the post-unification period. This involved the redevelopment of memorial sites in the GDR, which had been used to legitimise the anti-fascist ideology of the state, and the establishment of new memorials at historic sites in the former east, including the euthanasia killing centre at Pirna Sonnenstein. The concept emphasised the importance of German memorial sites for preserving remembrance and pointed out their European and international significance.

⁵⁷ See Parzer, 'Offene Landkarte des Gedenkens an NS-"Euthanasie" am 27.1.2015'.

⁵⁸ See Young, *The Texture of Memory*, ix-xi.

⁵⁹ The content of the original website (<http://www.andersartig-gedenken.de>) has since been replaced with details of a new competition, running in 2016. Information on the 2013 competition can be accessed at <http://www.gedenkort-t4.eu/de/zukunft/andersartig-gedenken>.

⁶⁰ See Przibilla, "'AndersARTig gedenken" aus der Sicht der Professorin'.

⁶¹ Images and descriptions of this and 19 other entries can be viewed at <http://www.gedenkort-t4.eu/en/node/1500#einsendungen>.

⁶² <http://www.andersartig-gedenken.de>

⁶³ <http://www.andersartig-gedenken.de>

⁶⁴ Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für die Belangen behinderter Menschen, 'Was ist Inklusion?'

⁶⁵ Rede der Berliner Senatorin Kolat zur Veranstaltung anlässlich des Bauauftaktes des Gedenk- und Informationsorts für die Opfer der Nationalistischen "Euthanasie" Morde.

⁶⁶ Rede von Kulturstaatsministerin Prof. Monika Grütters zur Eröffnung des Gedenk- und Informationsortes für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde.

⁶⁷ Rede des Regierenden Bürgermeisters von Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, zur Einweihung des Gedenk- und Informationsortes für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Euthanasie-Morde in der Tiergartenstraße 4.

⁶⁸ Rede des Staatsministers für Kultur und Medien anlässlich des Baubeginns für den Gedenk- und Informationsort für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde; Rede von Kulturstaatsministerin Prof. Monika Grütters zur Eröffnung des Gedenk- und Informationsortes für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen "Euthanasie"-Morde.

⁶⁹ 'moma-Reporter: Keine Entschädigung für behinderte Heimkinder?'; Öchsner, 'Ehemalige Heimkinder warten auf ihr Geld'.