

# Virtual Traumascape: The Commemoration of Nazi ‘Children’s Euthanasia’ Online and On Site

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**Abstract:** An integral part of the German National Socialist ‘bio-political developmental dictatorship’ programme, ‘euthanasia’ involved the murder of over 300,000 physically or mentally disabled persons in National Socialist Germany and its occupied territories, including children in ‘special children’s wards’ (*Kinderfachabteilungen*). Using the concept of traumascape as past trauma embodied at a site and brought into the present through commemoration, this article analyses the emergence of virtual traumascape created by local memory agents who use new digital media as a means to represent these crimes and commemorate the victims of ‘special children’s wards’ in Germany, Austria, Poland, and the Czech Republic. This article shows that virtual traumascape have contributed to a diverse landscape of memory concerning the murder of disabled children and youths described in five case studies. It also briefly discusses their impact on national memory regimes and the future of commemoration.

**Keywords:** euthanasia, commemoration, traumascape, national memory, Nazi Germany, holocaust

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Euthanasia, the Greek term that denotes ‘good death’, during the rule of National Socialism in Germany was a euphemism for the systematic mass murder of the disabled, with more than 300,000 victims. It was a core element of Nazism’s ‘bio-political developmental dictatorship’ (Schmuhl 2008), that is, a dictatorship eager to shape its current state and direct its future development via bio-politics. Nazi bio-politics targeted the disabled because of their alleged lack of societal contributions and the professed need to direct limited resources to putatively ‘productive’ social elements. Among the members of the German medical profession who adopted and proffered this view were reform psychiatrists (see Aly 1994; Baader 2001) who developed new treatments and believed in the power of medicine to alleviate social problems through innovative therapies. Healing and killing were two sides of the same coin. Physicians became ‘racial warriors’ who healed the ‘body of the people’ by rooting out

disability and sickness and other forms of what they considered irreparable deficiencies by screening the population for them. Making the expected prospect of illness, disability, social deviance, age and lack of economic utility the object of a quasi-prophylactic ‘exercise in the rational management of society’ (Bauman 2000, 72), ‘euthanasia’ had several components. It consisted of the ‘T4’ gassing program in 1940-41 of mostly adult hospitalised patients in psychiatric facilities, including a ‘special action’ against psychiatrically ill Jewish patients. It also involved the murder of psychiatric patients in Poland and other territories occupied by Germany and its allies, and extermination of others who were perceived as having become unproductive or disruptive, such as sick inmates in concentration camps (‘action 14f13’). Moreover, it comprised ‘decentralised’ or ‘wild’ ‘euthanasia’ of the old, sick and frail in hospitals after the T4 program had been stopped (Friedlander 1995; Kaminsky 2008; Süß 2000).

The program also included ‘children’s euthanasia’. Put in place in 1939, the program aspired, in the words of a medical observer at Nuremberg doctor’s trial, to operate in a ‘more goal-oriented, orderly, and “scientific” manner than these other measures’ (Platen-Hallermund 1948, 45). Based on the mandatory reporting of malformations and disabilities among infants to health authorities, ‘children’s euthanasia’ constituted a hallmark in history: for the first time a modern industrial nation was systematically commandeering its medical-scientific apparatus to screen out members of society based on their putative lack of ability to contribute to society. About 30 ‘special children’s wards’ [*Kinderfachabteilungen*] were established: about 20 of them in Germany, and the rest in Poland, Austria and the Czech Republic (using current borders; see Figure 1). Children were killed by the injection of drugs, neglect, withholding of treatment or starvation. Physicians subjected some of them to gruesome medical experiments. These experiments reflected the view that medical advances were disabled children’s only potential ‘benefit’ to society as a whole (Beddies and Schmiedebach 2004).

Historians have only recently come to understand the full extent and magnitude of these crimes, and correspondingly commemoration is by and large still a recent phenomenon. Among the former gassing facilities for psychiatric patients, the first memorial opened in 1983 at Hadamar, and the last one to emerge as a full-scale memorial, located in Brandenburg/Havel, is currently still under construction (Gehring-Münzel 2007). For ‘children’s euthanasia’, the first comprehensive study establishing the precise locations of the killing sites was published in the year 2000 (Benzenhöfer 2000). Together with the publication of a few memoirs and novels depicting the fate of victims and survivors (e.g., Kaufmann 2007; Hermann 2009), it helped prompt the emergence of commemoration at some of the sites (Kaelber 2009). Yet, compared with the burgeoning field of studies on the memory of the Holocaust (see, e.g. Stier 2003; Young 1994), scholarship on the commemoration of ‘euthanasia’ crimes and public memory of the crimes is almost non-existent.

This article provides one of the first studies on the topic. Commensurate with much of the recent literature in the field of public memory (Erll and Nünning 2008; Olick and Robbins 1998; Zerubavel 1996), the study is based on the presupposition that commemoration is culture bound. In the context of the commemoration of these Nazi crimes, the cultures that frame how, where and when the past events are remembered and their victims commemorated designate national and regional ‘memory regimes’ (Langenbacher 2003). Different parts of Europe have profiles that are distinct from one another (Trobst 2005), as one might

expect; however, commemoration is also intensely local. That is, whether the past is remembered at all, and to what extent, is an issue related not only to germinating effects of culture but also to the activities of site-specific ‘memory makers’ (Kansteiner 2006, 12) and ‘memory agents’ (Britton 2007; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002) whose function it is to mobilise and engage an audience in order to restore some of the memory of the victims, and with it of the historical events as well.

In the interplay of national and regional memory regimes and local memory agents, sites of ‘children’s euthanasia’ are no ordinary places. Rather, they constitute ‘traumascape’. Here Maria Tumarkin’s term denotes physical locations where, as she puts it, ‘the past is never quite over. Years, decades after the event, the past is still unfinished business’ (2005, 12). She goes on to note that ‘because trauma is not contained in an event as such but in the way this event is experienced, traumascape become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces, where events are experienced and re-experienced across time’. As she contends, ‘it is through these places that the past, whether buried or laid bare for all to see, continues to inhabit and refashion the present’ (Tumarkin 2005, 12). Traumascape is thus conceived as the outcome of the confluence of an embodied site, past trauma, larger socio-cultural setting conducive to commemoration, the activities of memory agents and makers to engage with events at a trauma site and commemorate their victims, and – often afforded marginal status in memory studies (see Kansteiner 2006, ch. 2) – an audience or respondents with which their activities resonate.

Yet on the Kuhnian path of ‘normal science’ explorations of traumascape have so far focused on physical locations per se, and embodied travel to them, while little attention has been paid to ‘virtual traumascape’. The concept of virtual traumascape pertains to a technologically mediated appropriation of sites of trauma, especially in places that have been physically obliterated (Foote 2003, 24-27). Appropriation takes on three principal forms (see Kaelber 2007; cf. Helland 2000). The first type of appropriation – commemoration online – relies on Internet sites that fulfill a supplementary function to the main activities of commemoration at the physical site of trauma. With this type, traumascape is simply extended online. For example, visitors of a memorial might go online to find information about the place, how to get there, and so forth, but the information provided virtually is not intended to replace embodied visits to the trauma site. The second type of commemoration – online commemoration – provides a forum to engage with the past trauma and thus virtually reconstitutes traumascape. For example, a forum may include personal reflections, a guest book and photo-tours. Online commemoration can facilitate communication among the visitors and engage them in or provide them with a wider range of activities and experiences than might be possible onsite. In contrast to the previous two forms, the third type – virtual commemoration – tends to be constructed primarily by electronic media in virtual space itself. A prime example is a media representation of an embodied trauma site (for example, through pictures, documents, stories, etc.) that no longer exists or is increasingly difficult to access in situ.<sup>1</sup> Compared to commemoration onsite, specific advantages of virtual commemoration lie in its low cost, ease, low access barriers, flexibility, adaptability and potential to reach a very large

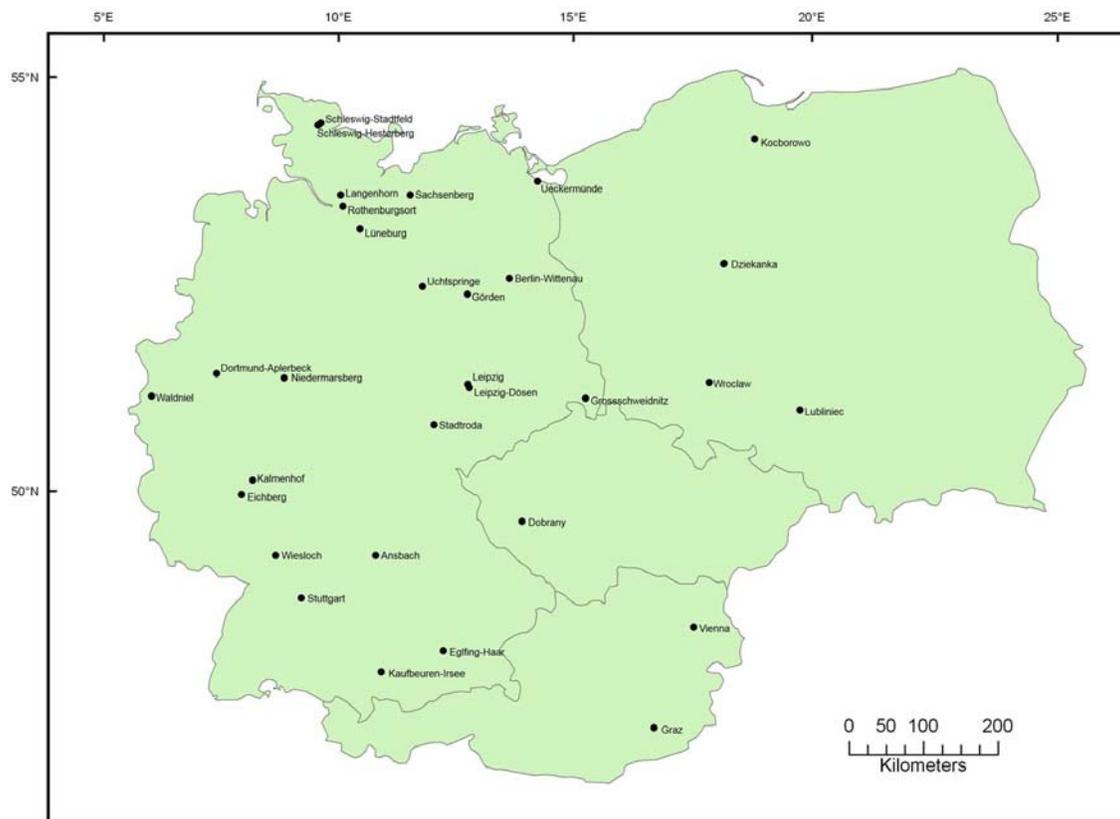
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<sup>1</sup> For a case study of Auschwitz and its crematoria and gas chambers, see Kaelber 2007.

audience beyond geographical borders, as well as in creating novel forms of community (Greser 1998; Roberts 2004; Veale 2004).

Thematising virtual traumascapes in the context of the commemoration of Nazi ‘children’s euthanasia’ online and onsite, this article addresses the confluence of ‘memory regimes’ and ‘memory agents’ in shaping commemoration about the past events and their victims. It describes and analyses virtual traumascapes, or ways in which trauma is (re)presented online and inscribed in Internet sites and exhibitions, by presenting several case studies of the history and current extent of commemoration. The article also discusses current limits to virtual commemoration and possible developments in the near future.

**Figure 1.** Map of the locations of about 30 ‘special children’s wards’ in the territories of Germany, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic (current boundaries).



Source: Lutz Kaelber<sup>2</sup>

### Memory Regimes, Memory Agents and Commemoration

Countries have come to terms with the ways their past was affected by Nazi policies and politics differently (Lepsius 1993; Trobst 2005). The countries of the former Eastern Bloc shared a basic blueprint for their memory regime in this regard. In accordance with Marxist

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Beverley Wemple, Dept. of Geography, University of Vermont, for preparing the basic elements of this map.

ideology, National Socialism and fascism were seen as different manifestations of international monopoly capitalism, and therefore National Socialism was only one aspect of a more universal phenomenon, the dictatorship of capital.

For East Germany this interpretation of the past led to the view that, since the republic embraced socialism and rejected capitalism, it had ipso facto broken with fascism as well (see Art 2006; Frei 2006; Knigge and Frei 2002). The country saw itself as rising out of a culture of socialist/communist resistance fighters. Victims of National Socialism were neither remembered nor celebrated unless they had belonged to this group, and the state itself dictated the contents of commemoration and orchestrated its means. ‘Euthanasia’ victims were not remembered much until the end of the German Democratic Republic, especially since the East German state, it later turned out, had provided cover for some Nazi ‘euthanasia’ physicians. Being in a profession that was in high demand, these physicians had since embraced socialism and been celebrated in public for their achievements for socialist medicine. The disclosure of their past would have been embarrassing for the state and its government (Leide 2007).

This situation began to change in the mid-to-late 1980s, as local initiatives—typically informal working groups of staff and local historians in and around care facilities—served as memory agents to challenge the hegemonic memory regime. Still an operating psychiatric hospital, the former T4 gassing facility Bernburg opened its first small exhibition in 1985. Two sites of former ‘special children’s wards’ followed suit by establishing memorials to the victims of ‘euthanasia’ in 1990 and 1991 (in Grossschweidnitz and Ueckermünde; see Kaelber 2009; Topp 2008), even though these memorials did not specifically address children.

**Figure 2.** ‘Euthanasia’ memorial in Grossschweidnitz created by sculptor Detlef Herrmann.



Source: <http://www.dh-bildhauer.de/aussen/gross/plast3.php> (accessed 5 November 2010).

Many more memorials have followed, but before the Internet and the ability to present information online in new digital media, finding the geographical location of the ‘special children’s wards’ presented a difficult geographical challenge, as did locating information (sometimes contained in a medical dissertation confined to a single library).

Five known ‘special children’s wards’ are located within the current borders of Poland and the Czech Republic. Similar to East Germany, state-controlled memory regimes under

communism viewed Nazi crimes as specific manifestation of the broader evil of Western monopoly capitalism, although differences did exist in the way these countries officially represented their past. Both Poland and Czechoslovakia emphasised the martyrdom of the nation, with a strong religious component in Poland, but in the hierarchy of victims of National Socialism, 'euthanasia' victims were either not acknowledged at all, or subsumed under the larger category of citizen victimhood. The fall of the communism led this practice to change, but change has been gradual and slow.

In contrast to these formerly communist countries, Austria, by and large, viewed itself as a 'country of victims' by externalising the Nazi past. Politically, post-World-War II Austria founded itself on the myth of having been the first victim of Nazi, i.e. German, aggression. In fact, after a brief period of anti-fascism after 1945, Austria rapidly integrated former Nazis, and their activities, and Austria's involvement in Nazi crimes, became a taboo topic. Austria's memory regime continued to function this way well until the Waldheim affair in the 1980s and only began to change significantly in the second part of the 1990s (Art 2006; Neugebauer 2000). Pressure from the outside increased on Austria to acknowledge its involvement in the Holocaust. The governing Social-Democratic party began to come to terms with its own past in dealing with the revelation that a prominent party member turned out to have been one of the worst perpetrators of 'euthanasia' crimes. The party also needed to differentiate itself from the political Right and its apologetic view of the Nazi past. An important catalyst in this transition to a less apologetic memory regime was the story of Heinrich Gross, whose involvement as a core 'children's euthanasia' murderer at the notorious facility of 'Am Spiegelgrund' in Vienna, where over 800 children died, became public in the 1990s.

West Germany had a different memory regime still. In the years following World War II, West Germany's dealing with its Nazi past would soon be overshadowed by its attempt to rebuild the economy and the political Cold War against communism. During that time, West Germany's leadership could and would not deny German responsibility for the Holocaust and other crimes. Yet on the popular level, people rejected what they perceived as outsiders' attribution of a collective guilt, and they also tended to locate the roots of Nazi evil in the personalities of the Nazi leadership. Many Germans thus came to see themselves as victims of war, whereas the direct victims of Nazism remained 'the other' (i.e. Jews or 'alien' populations in Eastern Europe), to whose tribulations they could not relate. Only in the late 1970s did this picture change significantly (see, e.g., Moeller 2001; Reichel 2007), when younger generations, mostly from the left, questioned the old guard and a popular television event 'Holocaust' brought attention to the Holocaust in a way that historians' accounts had not done.<sup>3</sup> In the next decade there were several memory conflicts over how Germany should come to terms with its past – normalising the past by relativising the status of the Holocaust in German history, or embracing a 'culture of contrition' (Art 2006; Olick 2003), and it was the second option that gained the upper hand. The culture of contrition was reflected in the emergence of numerous initiatives to investigate and commemorate 'euthanasia' crimes in the 1980s, though not without encountering obstinacy and outright resistance. Since then, the culture of contrition has expressed itself in two principal ways: ritualisation, as a politically

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<sup>3</sup> 'Holocaust' was an American miniseries (produced for NBC; director: Marvin J. Chomsky; producer: Robert Berger) that aired on all West German regional television channels in January 1979.

‘safe’ way of dealing with Nazi crimes; and grass-roots, multi-level efforts by local memory agents to commemorate the past (Olick 2003).

In all these countries, before the emergence of virtual traumascapes, the commemoration of ‘children’s euthanasia’ crimes and their victims typically occurred only in the geographical vicinity of the crime, if it occurred at all. Outside academic circles it was sometimes difficult to find historical information about victims and events, and participation in acts of commemoration often remained a local affair. The arrival of new digital technologies allowed people from afar access to information about local events that were previously only reported in local newspapers, if they were reported at all. Memorials now often offer online information on their location and contact details. For some of these people, information provided online may be their first exposure to the topic of Nazi ‘euthanasia’.

The following case studies depict the impact of new digital media on commemoration of ‘children’s euthanasia’. They address memory agents’ creation of virtual traumascapes and their impact. In Austria, virtual trauma has contributed to a shift in a country’s memory regime itself; in East Germany, it helped civic organisations construct a memory regime that was markedly different from the one that prevailed in the past; in West Germany, it has created forms of commemoration that complement those onsite and expand their scope; and in Poland and the Czech Republic, commemoration is beginning to overcome a reluctance of state agencies and hospitals to furnish information relevant to the memory of the past.

The analysis in this article draws on my comprehensive overview of commemoration of ‘children’s euthanasia’ elsewhere (Kaelber 2009). For each site, I identified individuals who had written local histories or were otherwise familiar with commemoration onsite due to their involvement in local affairs. Online searches using common search engines resulted in the identification of web sites on which the histories of the sites and/or commemoration at them are described. I contacted these local memory agents by phone, post and email. I also visited each site in person at least once and took pictures of monuments and other physical objects, as well as notes of the agents’ accounts of present and past commemoration and their involvement in it. During the onsite visits, I also gathered materials (such as local publications) that were difficult or impossible to obtain otherwise.

### **Virtual Traumascapes: Case Studies**

#### *West Germany: Waldniel*

Arguably the first onsite commemoration in West Germany that focused on the murder of children under the ‘euthanasia’ program occurred in Waldniel, a care facility that was a branch of a larger hospital nearby. Commemoration at Waldniel has been unusual in three ways: it began earlier than commemoration elsewhere; the local memory agents who initiated processes of commemoration were community members who acted as private citizens; and the documentation of these events is available in great detail via a website. Public interest in the place and commemoration changed by leaps and bounds after a web site was created about them in 2006.

Even though in 1948 a court established that almost 100 children had died at Waldniel and considered at least 30 of them to have been murdered, the process of forgetting the past

soon began. Between the end of World War II and the early 1990s the facility was used as a British military hospital and school, but it appears that the school's directorship was not keen on informing students about the events at the facility during the Nazi period. Onsite, a Christian cross was erected in 1962 at the facility's cemetery with a dedication that was typical of the period because it did not mention patients or the crimes against them. When the cross was relocated to a different location, new text was added to the sides of the cross in 1982. It provided the first reference to 'euthanasia crimes', even though it used the opaque term 'the innocently murdered'.

In 1985 the history of the site began to be rediscovered when a citizen of Waldniel saw a reference to Waldniel in an exhibition on 'euthanasia' crimes in Cologne, one of the very first West German exhibitions on the subject matter. A citizens' petition to commemorate the victims led to the establishment of a memorial on the cemetery grounds, placed in the care of a students from a local school guided by their teacher, Peter Zöhren. His inquiries as well as research by his students and group of citizens at a nearby clinic resulted in the publication of a detailed account in 1988 entitled 'Next to us: A Different World'. A bronze display was placed next to the entry door of the cemetery. It alludes to the children who were murdered in the 'special children's ward', and other patients of the facility who were murdered in the Waldniel facility, as well as to those who were transferred to other facilities from there. In the cemetery itself, a memorial stone is located with the simple inscription 'To the Innocent Victims'.

**Figure 3.** Bronze display at the Waldniel memorial.



Source: Photograph by Lutz Kaelber.

Waldniel's traumascapescape became virtual with the establishment of a privately operated web site about its history maintained by Peter Zöhren in 2006. The home page includes information about how to find the memorial and has a tabbed interface linking to different sections. Different sections address the facility's history, the memorial's emergence since the 1960s, an archive with reports about commemorative and other events since the late 1980s, overviews of current events and relevant literature, as well as a photo gallery. Each section includes a detailed narrative, which as a whole is centered on the 'euthanasia murders' and the commemoration of its victims. The related web site of the hospital of which Waldniel was a branch provides additional information in a section on the Nazi murder of patients at Waldniel.

**Figure 4.** Screen capture of the home page of the Waldniel-Hostert site, with a prominent link to 'Nazi Children's Euthanasia'.

**waldniel-hostert**

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## Hundert Jahre Hostert!

**Franziskaner - Nazi-Kindereuthanasie - Kent-School - Gedenkstätte**

 Auf unserer Website wollen wir Sie informieren über die wechselvolle Geschichte der Anstalt Waldniel-Hostert, vom St. Josefsheim der Franziskaner über die Nazi-Euthanasie in der Kinderfachabteilung, die britische Kent-School bis hin zur heutigen Gedenkstätte für die Opfer.

Im November 2006 erwarb der Nettetaler Geschäftsmann Elmar Janssen in einer Zwangsversteigerung das Areal. Seit Mitte 2007 bietet er es zum Kauf an. Weitere Informationen [hier](#).

Wenn Sie Fragen oder Anregungen haben, schreiben Sie uns an [kontakt@waldniel-hostert.de](mailto:kontakt@waldniel-hostert.de). Wir werden versuchen, Ihnen umgehend zu antworten.

Das Redaktionsteam

**Impressum**

Das Redaktionsteam ist bemüht, die Webseiten inhaltlich richtig anzubieten. Fehler sind jedoch nicht völlig auszuschließen. Das Redaktionsteam übernimmt keine Haftung für die inhaltliche Richtigkeit der eingestellten Informationen. Die verwendeten Grafiken und Bilder, die Sammlung sowie einzelnen Beiträge sind urheberrechtlich geschützt. Alle Rechte, auch die der fotomechanischen Wiedergabe, der Vervielfältigung und der Verbreitung mittels besonderer Verfahren (zum Beispiel Datenverarbeitung, Datenträger und Datennetze), auch teilweise, behält sich das Redaktionsteam vor. Verantwortlich: Peter Zöhren, Hehler 230, D-41366 Schwalmtal.

**Zur Gedenkstätte**

Waldniel-Hostert liegt in Schwalmtal ganz in Nähe der Autobahn A52. Kommen Sie aus Richtung M'gladbach, nehmen Sie die Ausfahrt Nr. 5 Schwalmtal-Hostert. Fahren Sie nach rechts auf die Landstraße L371 und biegen dann die zweite Straße rechts, Eschenrath, ein. Folgen Sie der Ausschilderung "Gedenkstätte".

[Landkarte \(pdf-Datei\)](#)

**Vorankündigung:**  
20.04.2010 [Info-Wand im Rathaus](#)

**Aktuelles in Archiv 2**

[27.01.2010 Gedenkstunde](#)  
[22.01.2010 Filmaufnahmen](#)  
[17.11.2009 Kinderfachabteilungen](#)  
[08.11.2009 Lobberich](#)  
[18.04.2009 Führung](#)

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Source: <http://www.waldniel-hostert.de/> (accessed 15 April 2010).

The web site's development into a virtual traumascapescape has several dimensions and engendered important consequences. While the web site does not intend to provide experiences similar to those that arise from participating in traditional forms of commemoration of past trauma embedded in religious and secular rituals onsite (such as Germany's official day of commemorating Nazism's victims or, in this Catholic region, the Feast of Corpus Christi),

for virtual visitors it provides a complement to onsite commemoration. In contrast to commemorative events at Waldniel and in its vicinity, in which predominantly local and regional inhabitants participate, virtual commemoration faces no spatial barriers. The abundance of information online arguably allows for a deeper cognitive engagement with Nazi 'euthanasia' crimes and its victims than is possible from the information one can glean from looking at Waldniel's physical memorial objects and monuments. Electronically mediated commemoration also provides a way of virtually accessing the site of the crime itself, which is, unlike the cemetery, where the memorial is located, in private hands and in such a dilapidated condition that physical access is dangerous but also illegal.

According to the website's webmaster, inquiries from third parties have sharply increased since the creation of a virtual memorial in 2006. Prior to that year, those who were interested in Waldniel's history (such as victims' relatives) might have never found information about past trauma at Waldniel, especially since core publications were confined to a few specialised historical books and Peter Zöhren's booklet has never been available for purchase through national bookstores and remained scarce in libraries. Even finding out about the identity of Peter Zöhren and obtaining his mailing address or telephone number might not have been easy. By contrast, with the use of a few keywords such as 'Waldniel' and 'Euthanasie' (the German term for 'euthanasia') and a search engine, such information becomes readily available. Given the advances in translation engines, it is accessible even to non-German speaking audiences. The number of visits to the website in 2009 was over 50,000, while the number of those who visited onsite, while difficult to estimate, was certainly a small fraction of that. Finally, the virtual traumascapes accommodate contributions from visitors and allows for the inclusion of victim-centered elements of commemoration without equivalent at the facility itself. For example, recently the Waldniel web site has added a brief portrait of one of the child victims, with a photo of 'Elschen'. Furnished by a relative of the victim, the photo shows Elschen not as a victim but a vivacious young child, playing in a bathtub outdoors.

**Figure 5.** Picture of a child victim portrayed on Waldniel memorial's web site, 'Elschen'.



Source: [http://www.waldniel-hostert.de/Web\\_Galerie/original/Hostert\\_1013.html](http://www.waldniel-hostert.de/Web_Galerie/original/Hostert_1013.html) (accessed 15 April 2010).

*East Germany: Leipzig and Leipzig-Dösen*

In contrast to West Germany, East Germany's psychiatric facilities remained mostly inaccessible to the public until almost the end of the republic in 1989, and even detailed maps were difficult to get. The 'euthanasia' survivor Elvira Manthey<sup>4</sup> reports about the difficulties she had even to identify Uchtspringe as the location of the hospital that housed her and to get access to further information (Manthey 1993). With the end of the East German republic, such barriers have been removed, and the changes in the memory regime in the former communist state have been remarkable. The Internet has played an important role in bringing about or furthering such changes.

To demonstrate this point, my analysis turns to Leipzig and Leipzig-Dösen, the locations of two special children's wards, where hundreds of children died. Core perpetrators of the crimes continued to work there after World War II and received cover from East German authorities, even after officials in the Ministry of State Security found material to implicate them in the crimes. The status of suspended knowledge about 'children's euthanasia' continued until the mid-to-late 1990s, when an exhibition was created at the clinic in Leipzig-Dösen and a physician, Christiane Roick, wrote her dissertation on medical crimes there during National Socialism. Still, the dissertation remained unpublished, and the exhibition was scuttled when the Leipzig-Dösen clinic closed for good.

<sup>4</sup> Facing the gas chamber at the T4 facility Brandenburg/Havel, Manthey was allowed to turn around and then placed in two facilities that had 'special children's wards', Görden and Uchtspringe, both located in former East Germany.

At the time, the current municipal coordinator of psychiatric services in Leipzig, Thomas Seyde, advocated for a public commemoration of the victims of 'euthanasia' crimes in the city. In 1998 a number of urns had been found at a municipal cemetery with the remnants of 35 T4 victims who had been patients at Leipzig-Dösen. In 2000 the Leipzig city council passed a resolution to establish a memorial book with the names of all victims of the tyranny of National Socialism. From here on, the city has presented and archived information relevant to the memory of 'children's euthanasia' on the Internet portal of the city of Leipzig and its municipal councils, offices and agencies, including the exact location of the memorials, the administrative process leading to their realisation, and current and planned activities relevant to commemoration on the city administration's and its agencies' web pages.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2001 the city information portal reported on the creation of a memorial for a Jewish victim of 'children's euthanasia' at the old Jewish cemetery. The report publicly identified the first 'children's euthanasia' victim by name - Ruth Kirschbaum. The report prompted a discussion of the matter resulting in the city council policy in 2006 providing support for commemoration of victims, further research, and supplying the public with information. When students and teachers in area schools created an exhibition on the subject entitled '505: Children's Euthanasia-Crimes in Leipzig',<sup>6</sup> the city produced a detailed guide for students and teachers and displayed both online. The city also provided information about a municipal council's decision to support the establishment of a memorial for child and adult victims of 'euthanasia' in 2008, located in former cemetery (now a park) where at least 70 adult and child 'euthanasia' victims from Leipzig were buried.

**Figure 6.** Screen capture of information portal of the City of Leipzig, with information regarding 'a memorial place for the victims of children's euthanasia', including pictures of the planned memorial and its location.

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<sup>5</sup> My analysis did not reveal the existence of such extensive information portals set up by municipal governments at other locations of 'children's euthanasia', and it is perhaps no coincidence that such a portal is found for Leipzig, one of the hotbeds of citizen dissidence in the late East German republic. Open access to public information appears to be a core aspect of civic culture in the region.

<sup>6</sup> 505 denotes the estimated number of victims in Leipzig-Dösen alone; it has since been revised to almost 600.

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### Ein Gedenkort für die Opfer von Kindereuthanasieverbrechen

(26.01.2010)

Im **Friedenspark** soll ein Gedenkort für die Opfer der Kindereuthanasieverbrechen entstehen. Diese soll gleichzeitig zentraler Gedenkort für die Leipziger Euthanasieverbrechen sein. Dafür sprach sich Oberbürgermeister Burkhard Jung in seiner Dienstberatung auf Vorschlag von Bürgermeister Thomas Fabian aus.

Allein in der Kindertötungseinrichtung der Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Leipzig-Dösen sind für den Zeitraum zwischen Oktober 1940 und Dezember 1943 insgesamt 551 Tötungen belegt. Die Mehrzahl der Opfer wurde auf kommunalen Friedhöfen beerdigt. Die größte Gruppe davon, mit etwa 100 Grabstätten, befindet sich auf dem für das Gedenken vorgesehenen Areal, dem ehemaligen Neuen Johannisfriedhof, dem heutigen Friedenspark.

„Der Gedenkort soll vorrangig mit Pflanzen gestaltet werden und damit ein lebendiges Gedenken versinnbildlichen“, erläutert Bürgermeister Thomas Fabian. Gesäumt von zwei Hecken schlingelt sich ein Weg, dessen Ende man nicht sieht, durch ein dichtes Gräserfeld. Zu Beginn des Weges wird eine Schriftplatte auf das Denkmal und die Opfer verweisen.

Der Bau des Gedenkortes soll bis zum 30. Oktober 2010 fertig gestellt werden – in Erinnerung an die Ermordung des ersten Kindes in Leipzig-Dösen im Oktober 1940.

Die Baukosten belaufen sich auf 35.000 Euro. Davon sollen 15.000 Euro über Spenden, 10.000 Euro über Fördermittel und 10.000 Euro als Eigenanteil der Stadt Leipzig bereitgestellt werden. Die Verwaltungsvorlage soll voraussichtlich in der März-Ratsversammlung votiert werden.

**Hinweis:** Das Modell des Gedenkortes wird ab 9. Februar im **Stadtbüro**, Katharinenstraße 2, ausgestellt.

Suche

Häufig gesucht

- ▀ ARGE
- ▀ Bürgerämter
- ▀ Jugendamt
- ▀ Standesamt
- ▀ Stadtbibliothek

Leipzig für

- ▀ Ausländer/Migranten
- ▀ Frauen
- ▀ Kinder + Familie
- ▀ Menschen mit Behinderung
- ▀ Menschen gleichgeschlechtlicher Lebensweise
- ▀ Senioren

Lebenslagen

- ▀ Freizeit + Sport
- ▀ Geburt
- ▀ Gesundheit
- ▀ Heirat
- ▀ Sicherheit + Ordnung
- ▀ Sterbefall
- ▀ Umzug

Bürgerservice

- ▀ Amtertermine online
- ▀ Behördenwegweiser
- ▀ Bürgerbeteiligung + Stadtbüro
- ▀ Ratsinformationssystem (eRIS)
- ▀ Formulare
- ▀ Notfall
- ▀ Politik + Verwaltung
- ▀ Stellenausschreibungen der Stadt Leipzig





Thomas Seyde (Psychiatriekoordinator im Gesundheitsamt) und Schüler der Sächsischen Lehmbaugruppe haben im Projekt „Youth Start“ das Modell für den Gedenkort im Friedenspark erarbeitet

Source: <http://www.leipzig.de/de/buerger/newsarchiv/2010/16211.shtml> (accessed 15 August 2010)

**Figure 7.** From the documentation (PDF file, p. 29) for the exhibition ‘505: Children’s Euthanasia’ online: ‘The Short Live of Little Peter’.

## Das kurze Leben des kleinen Peter



Peter mit anderthalb Jahren.  
Quelle: Privat

**Peter kam am 25. Juli 1937** in Reichenbach (Vogtland) körperlich und geistig behindert zur Welt. Er wird zunächst zeitweise in der Leipziger Universitätskinderklinik medizinisch betreut, wohnt aber zu Hause. Als er 1941 gerade in der Universitätskinderklinik behandelt wird, teilt der Amtsarzt von Reichenbach der Mutter mit: Peter würde nach Dösen in die Anstalt kommen. Falls sie nicht einverstanden sei, würde das Kind trotzdem verlegt. Und sie erführe nicht wohin. Zu der Zeit ist der Vater im Krieg.

Peter im Sommer 1939  
mit Vater und Schwester.  
Quelle: Privat

Source: [http://www.leipzig.de/imperia/md/content/51\\_jugendamt/fachstelle/kindereuthanasie\\_in\\_leipzig.pdf](http://www.leipzig.de/imperia/md/content/51_jugendamt/fachstelle/kindereuthanasie_in_leipzig.pdf) (accessed 10 January 2010).

**Figure 8.** From the documentation (PDF file, p. 45) for the exhibition ‘505: Children’s Euthanasia’ online: ‘Peggy Pollakowski’

**Peggy Pollakowski**

Harriette-Baltischmidt-Schule Leipzig



„Wir haben die Gedenkstätte für die Ermordeten der Tötungsanstalt Bernburg besucht. Dort wurde mir klar: Ich würde heute nicht mehr leben. Ich habe eine körperliche Beeinträchtigung.“

Source: [http://www.leipzig.de/imperia/md/content/51\\_jugendamt/fachstelle/kindereuthanasie\\_in\\_leipzig.pdf](http://www.leipzig.de/imperia/md/content/51_jugendamt/fachstelle/kindereuthanasie_in_leipzig.pdf) (accessed 10 January 2010).

Of particular importance for the constitution of a virtual traumascap is the exhibition ‘505: Children’s Euthanasia’, which is no longer shown onsite but is available in full online as a PDF file. It depicts the history of eugenics and social Darwinism in Germany, the ‘children’s euthanasia’ program and its locations in Leipzig, as well as portraits of victims (see Figure 7 ‘The Short Life of Little Peter’; it provides a brief biography of a child victim, including the compulsory nature of his transfer to the ‘special children’s ward’ in Leipzig-Dösen). The document, which is intended for a general public and includes many visual materials, also addresses the status of persons with disabilities in society today. Students in local high schools contributed to its creation, as did various other municipal institutions and groups. It is complemented by a guide published by the city of Leipzig for students and teachers in secondary education.

The exhibition document concludes with statements written by students involved in the project. One of them quite poignantly states that after she visited the T4 memorial at Bernburg she recognised that ‘[if I had been born then,] I’d no longer be alive, for I have a physical disability’ (see Figure 8). While the identification of a person today with the victim status at a very different time in the past seems problematic, it signifies a step toward removing the stigma of disability that still exists in Germany (and elsewhere) today. Decisions to portray victims prominently in the exhibition document and to identify them by name as in the case of Ruth Kirschbaum and the 2008 memorial to the children and adult victims onsite afford a more salient status of ‘euthanasia’ victims in the discourse of ‘Germans as victims’, in which they have remained marginal so far (Hamm 2006). The exhibition and other related documents, as well as the multitude of publications concerning administrative decisions, council

activities, and the actions of city agencies and civic groups and individuals on the city's information portals<sup>7</sup> constitute a virtual traumascape with deep roots in the local community.

*Austria: Am Spiegelgrund/Vienna*

'Am Spiegelgrund' is the name of a psychiatric facility in Vienna. Unlike other commemoration sites which originally existed onsite and were later followed by online counterparts, here both the onsite exhibition and the online one opened around the same time in 2002. The exhibitions reflect on one of most horrific sites of 'children's euthanasia' murders and a long-time failure to acknowledge the past, let alone to come terms with it.

'Am Spiegelgrund' is indelibly linked to the history of Dr. Heinrich Gross. Gross was involved in the murder of some of 800 children who died in the 'special children's ward' there yet became of Austria's most renowned forensic psychiatrists after World War II, being active well into the 1980s. Since then, his involvement in 'euthanasia' has come to light, including his use of specimens from victims in his post-war scientific publications and the storage of these specimens in a collection of jars in a basement at the Spiegelgrund. When press coverage of his indictment in the late 1990s, his alleged inability to stand trial in 2001, and the subsequent burial of the remains of the children in 2002 made the case notorious throughout Austria, several forms of commemoration emerged. In 2003 a memorial comprised of 772 lighted stelae was erected on the clinic premises, one stela for each victim known at the time. The year before one an onsite exhibition opened on Nazi medical crimes in Vienna on a floor of one of the pavilions. Since this exhibition was considered provisional at the time and its funding small and uncertain, a portion of the available funds was expended on the concomitant creation of an online exhibition in the same year. Curated by the renowned research institute Documentation Archive of Austrian Resistance in Vienna,<sup>8</sup> both exhibitions were revised on 2008.

The content of the online exhibition mirrors the one onsite. Nineteen sections address the history of Nazi medical crimes in a broad context, ranging from the treatment of people with mental illnesses during the Industrialisation to current bio-medical issues. These sections correspond to the panels of the onsite exhibition. The onsite exhibition also presents material artifacts, including glass containers in which Gross kept specimens of his victims (see Figure 9), something that the online exhibition can only do via photographic reproductions. Yet the online exhibition goes beyond the onsite in other regards. It provides easy navigation through an overview section, while the onsite exhibition is set up so that visitors move through them in a time-linear fashion. Online, a full text search function is available, whereas onsite visitors looking for specific information would have to read through the entire text. The text materials online are slightly more current than onsite, as the webmaster can easily implement small changes. Unique features of the online exhibition include links to other exhibitions, an online library, a chronology of important events, a 'book of the dead' consisting of pictures of some of the children taken before they were murdered, and a searchable database of their

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<sup>7</sup> I have documented such materials on my webpage on the 'special children's ward' Leipzig (<http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/children/leipzig/leipzig.html>).

<sup>8</sup> My main sources of information are communications with Herwig Czech, the current site's webmaster and chief exhibition curator.

names, date of birth, date of admission to the clinic, and date of death. Online visitors with a visual disability would be able to use a screen-reader or magnify the texts, whereas no such assistance (for example, by providing text materials in Braille) is given onsite. There is also no ‘crowding’ in the online exhibition, as can happen onsite when a larger group visits. The most significant difference is perhaps the fact the entire exhibition and all additional materials are available online in the English translation (see Figure 10), which as of summer 2010 still was not the case for the exhibition onsite. Initially, the latter had also limited opening hours, and its location was not even included in maps of the clinic’s premises.

The onsite exhibition currently has about 5,000 visitors a year. In comparison, in the 12 months preceding September 2010, the online exhibition had over 60,000 visits and close to 300,000 page visits. It ranks among the largest and most detailed online exhibitions on the subject matter currently in existence anywhere.

**Figure 9.** Photograph of the onsite exhibition on Nazi medical crimes, including the ‘special children’s ward’, in Vienna.



Source: Photography by Lutz Kaelber.

**Figure 10.** Screen capture of the online exhibition on Nazi medical crimes, including the ‘special children’s ward

[topics](#) [deutsch](#) [exhibition](#) [links](#) [imprint](#)



### The Long Shadow of Nazi Psychiatry:

The case of Dr Heinrich Gross

In recent years, the case of Dr. Heinrich Gross, who had carried out medical killings and had later become a psychiatrist and court expert, has been unique in highlighting the way Austria has been dealing with the crimes of National Socialism.

In 1948, Gross was indicted by the People's Court of Vienna for his part in the killing of children at Spiegelgrund. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment at first instance; however, the verdict was revoked by the Supreme Court because of a formal defect and the trial eventually came to a standstill. Gross embarked on a second career, in which he benefited from his membership in the *"Bund Sozialistischer Akademiker"* (BSA, Association of Socialist Academics): he trained as a specialist in the Neurological Hospital at Rosenhügel (Vienna), then returned to Steinhof where he rose to the rank of *Primarius* (head physician). He began with the medical examinations of the carefully preserved brains of Spiegelgrund victims already in 1953. For a period of 25 years he used this research as a basis for extensive publications in the field of neuropathology, partly collaborating with prominent colleagues. In 1968, Gross received his own Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research into Malformations of the Nervous System, where he continued to systematically exploit the brain specimens that had been preserved from the Nazi period. Parts of the specimen collection were stored





<< 17 >> [chronology](#) [book of the dead](#) [library](#)

Source: [http://www.gedenkstaettesteinhof.at/en/Topic/The\\_Long\\_Shadow\\_of\\_Nazi\\_Psychiatry](http://www.gedenkstaettesteinhof.at/en/Topic/The_Long_Shadow_of_Nazi_Psychiatry) (accessed 1 September 2010).

### *The Czech Republic (Dobransy) and Poland (Dziekanka)*

Historians (Simůnek and Schulze 2008; Simůnek 2010) have demonstrated that the involvement of the psychiatric facility in Dobransy (near Plzen in the Czech Republic) in ‘euthanasia’ crimes; yet the hospital administration denies the existence of these crimes and their victims, including those who died in the ‘special children’s ward, to this day.

While the text on clinic’s web site (Psychiatrická léčebna Dobransy, <http://www.pldobransy.cz/>) is silent on this topic, the erasure of the memory of the past events and its victims is not complete. One web site in particular has begun to evoke such memory. For parts of the Czech Republic, over the last few years a Czech-Austrian-German research group has begun to analyse the role of hospitals as stations of origin and transit locales for patients taken to a ‘T4’ murder facility.

Figure 11. Screen capture of the project web page on Dobrany

Die nationalsozialistische 'Euthanasie' und ihre Opfer auf dem Gebiet der heutigen Tschechischen Republik 1939-1945  
ein österreichisch-deutsch-tschechisches Forschungsprojekt als Beitrag zur Aufarbeitung der gemeinsamen Geschichte

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## Heil- und Pflegeanstalten

### Die Gau-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geisteskranke in Wiesengrund (Dobřany)

Beschreibung der Anstalt (1912)

Die Anstalt wurde in den Jahren 1876 bis 1881 vom Landesausschusse des Königreiches Böhmen auf einer leichten Anhöhe nahe Dobřan, zwei Eisenbahnstationen von Pilsen entfernt im Pavillonsystem mit einem Kostenaufwande von 4 000 000 K. erbaut und am 13. April 1880 mit 200 Kranken eröffnet. Mit Recht konnte dieselbe noch im Jahre 1899 in Lährs 'Heil- und Pflegeanstalten für Psychisch-Kranke' als die schönste, zweckmässigste und grösste in Oesterreich bezeichnet werden.

Sie besteht aus:

1. der Heilanstalt für Kranke, die besondere Pflege und Aufsicht bedürfen, sowohl auf der Männer-, als auch auf der Frauenseite durch gedeckte Gänge mit dem Administrationsgebäude, und mit der Anstaltsküche und Kirche verbunden.
2. Die Pflegeanstalt besteht auf der Männerseite aus an der Peripherie angeschlossenen 3 Pavillons, auf der Frauenseite aus 4 Pavillons. Zur Pflegeanstalt sind auch die als Kolonie I bis VI bezeichneten Gebäude zu zählen, von denen Kolonie III bis VI im Jahre 1891 für etwa 200 meist arbeitende Kranke erbaut wurden. Sämtliche 22 Krankengebäude sind von mit Weissdornhecken begrenzten Gärten umgeben, mit Ausnahme der Gebäude für Unruhige, woselbst der Garten von einer Mauer umgeben ist. Die im I. Stocke dieses Gebäudes für verbrecherische Irre bestimmte Abteilung unterscheidet sich nur durch die vor den Fenstern angebrachten starken Gitter.

An Epilepsie leidende Kranke sind grösstenteils in einem Pavillon vereinigt, ebenso an Tuberkulose leidende Kranke in abgesonderten Sälen der somatischen Abteilung untergebracht. Ein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen der Heil- und Pflegeanstalt besteht, bis auf die Krankenaufnahme, bei der hochgradigen Ueberfüllung nicht mehr.

Pavillon für ruhige Männer.

Source: <http://projekt-sudetenland-protectorat.nickol-design.de/dobran.htm> (accessed 5 March 2010).

The group presents its information on the project web site, including a web page on Dobrany, written mostly in German, but also in Czech and English. Given that the hospital administration has not granted researchers access to patient records, references to 'euthanasia' crimes are rather general, as the web site presently provides an overview of the history of the facility and its condition during World War II. However, the information on the web site may provide a starting point for commemoration in future years.

Similar to the administration of this clinic, directors of Polish clinics have not generally put much information about Nazi crimes at their facilities online, although Polish historians have begun to fill the void.<sup>9</sup> Victims' relatives have also in a few cases published the results of their inquiries about the fate of the relatives online. One location of a 'special children's ward' where this has happened due to the personal initiative of a relative of a victim is Dzie-

<sup>9</sup>One example is the web site of the Tiergartenstrasse 4 Organisation, operated by the Polish historian Artur Hojan (<http://www.tiergartenstrasse4.org>).

kanka near Gniezno in Poland. During German occupation, the hospital then called Tiegenhof, housed one of the four special children's wards on what is Polish territory today. The scale and scope of the murders there was vast, as children and thousands of other patients were murdered by means of gassing in vans, starvation and injections, and Dzienkanka became a large-scale 'wild euthanasia' killing facility similar to Grossschweidnitz and Meseritz-Obrawalde. Historical accounts of the clinic mention the involvement of children and youths parenthetically, if at all, in the context of Nazi murders of patients. Onsite, a small plaque exists, placed on a chapel's outer wall in 1948, which refers to the hospital patients murdered during the occupation. The web site of the clinic has a short history section, which addresses 'euthanasia' crimes between 1939 and 1945, with over 3,600 victims, in a general way.

In 2009 Edward Wieand, a nephew of one of the victims (Erna Kronshage—she was 21 at the time of her death),<sup>10</sup> began creating a (still expanding) network of web pages across various media platforms. His home page guides the visitor through a menu system to several web sites by the same author, including a memorial blog for the victim, a time line of her life, a YouTube video and running slideshows about her life and death, several web pages with documents about the victims and perpetrators of the 'euthanasia' program, links to movies about the victims and propaganda materials created by the perpetrators, a guestbook, pedagogical materials for students of the topic, and a web page with newspaper reports about the web page. A song with reflective lyrics begins to play as the page loads.

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<sup>10</sup> Erna Kronshage did not die in the 'special children's ward', but her and those children's treatment and death probably differed very little. Severely distressed by an aerial attack, she was committed to a psychiatric facility, she underwent compulsory sterilisation, and was finally sent to Tiegenhof, where she died of starvation and drug poisoning at the age of 21. Information on her life was obtained from the website and through personal communication with Edward Wieand in 2010).

**Figure 12.** Screen capture of Edward Wieand's web page explaining the reasoning behind the memorial blog, with the basic menu system on the left.



The screenshot shows the homepage of 'sinedi-art' with a navigation menu on the left and a main content area on the right. The menu items include: eddywieand-SINEDi - Der Name, "SINEDI-MEDIA": Die 7 Blogs, Gedenkblog Erna Kronshage, Warum ein Gedenkblog?, Zeitschiene Erna Kronshage, YOUTUBE-VIDEO Erna Kronshage, FLYER zum Gedenkblog, SLIDESHOWS Erna Kronshage, Das Andenken bewahren, Unterrichtshilfen NS-"Euthanasie", Pressespiegel, Gedenken NS-Morde (Filme), DOKU: Schizophrenie-Symptome, DOKU: Schock-Therapien - Filme, DOKU Dr. Karl Brandt, DOKU: Dr. Hermann Paul Nitsche, DOKU Dr. Victor Ratka, DOKU: Phasen NS-"Euthanasie", DOKU: 30.000 Opfer-Namen, DOKU: Binding/Hoche 1920/1922, DOKU: Gemeingefährlichkeit, DOKU: Ernst Klee -, DOKU: Das Vergessen..., 2007, DOKU: Widerstand in den Kirchen, DOKU: NS-"Euthanasie"-Filme, Kontakt, and Gästebuch.

The main content area features a header with a photo of Edward Wieand and the text 'sinedi-art homepage' and 'blogs of history | curiosity | art culture | photographic genealogy'. Below this is a photo of two men in a room, followed by the text 'dokumentation: <http://erna-k-gedenkblog.blogspot.com>'. A small memorial card for 'ERNA KRONSHAGE' (12.12.1922 - 20.2.1944) is shown with the quote 'Mein Lachen ist Weinen!'. The text 'Warum ein GEDENKBLOG ???' is followed by the heading 'Spurensuche - der Sache nachgehen ...' and a photo of a memorial site. The main text explains the author's motivation for the memorial blog.

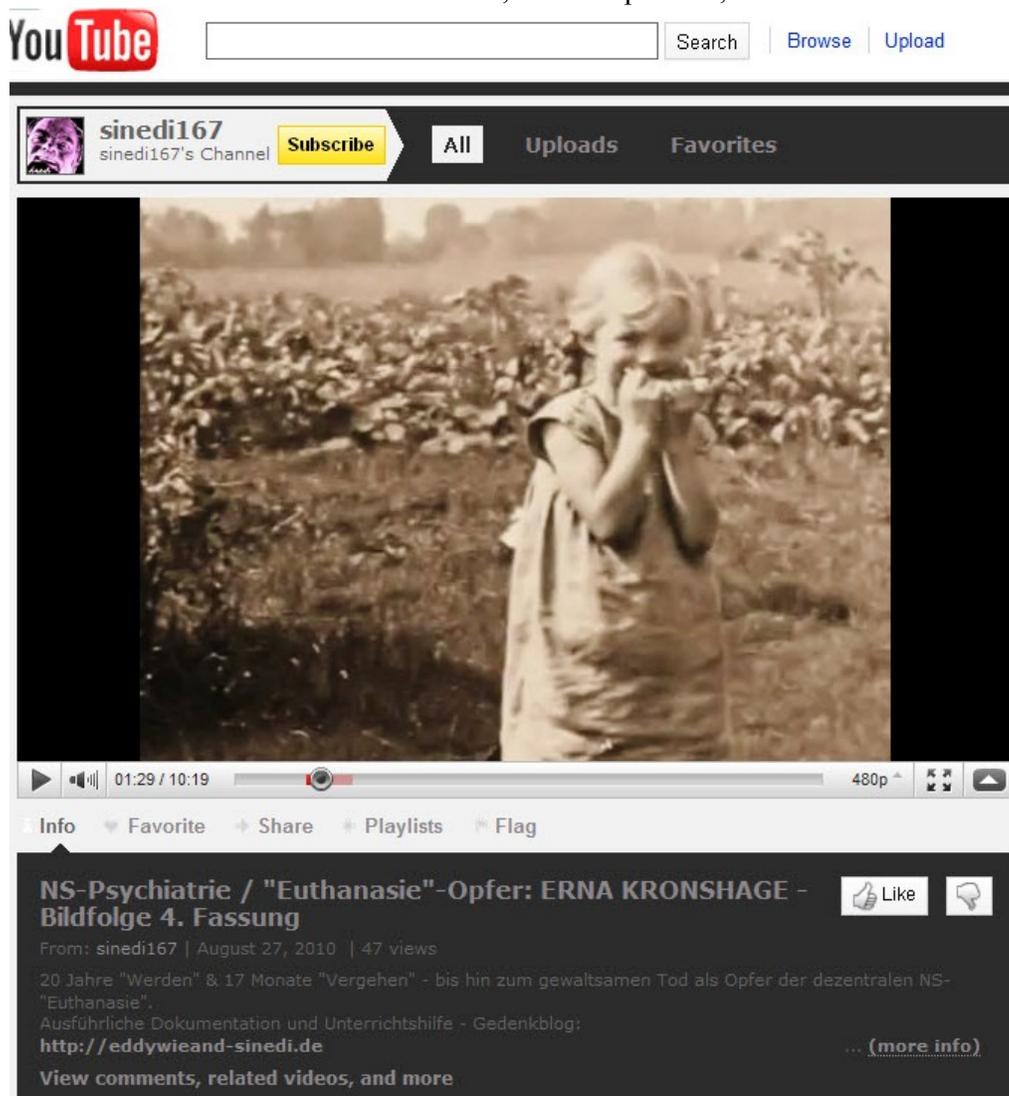
Seit vielen Jahren beschäftige ich mich mit der Aufarbeitung der Opferbiographie meiner Tante.

Erst jetzt mit Hilfe von Internet und Mailverkehr kommt man rasch an die benötigten Informationen, die gerne früher auch von Familie, Ämtern und Institutionen "vertuscht" wurden.

Als ehemaliger Heimleiter und Sozialpädagogischer Fachdienst im Ruhestand bin ich auch "beruflich" an diesem Schicksal interessiert, denn die in der Sozialarbeit tätigen Menschen stehen ja quasi in der "Rechtsnachfolge" der mit den Geschehnissen damals zumeist zwangsweise "verstrickten" Mitarbeiter in Psychiatrie und Verwaltung unter der Nazi-Herrschaft.

Source: <http://eddywieand-sinedi.de/warum-ein-gedenkblog/> (accessed 31 August 2010).

**Figure 13.** Screen capture of Edward Wieand's YouTube video, entitled 'NS-Psychiatry / 'Euthanasia'-Victims: ERNA KRONSHAGE, series of pictures, 4<sup>th</sup> rendition'.



Source: <http://www.youtube.com/user/sinedi167#p/u/0/Qdg6Bc3cZp4> (accessed 31 August 2010).

The different web pages and media linked to the homepage appear to share the same basic information, for which the memorial blog is the focal element in terms of its depth and scope. The memorial blog contains 24 sections chronicling the victim's life and providing background information, each section presented in a central column with up to 1,000 words and multiple visual documents. The time line of the victim's life remains a stationary element at the top of each section, as does a column to the right side of the section's text with links to other media (video, literature, slideshow, etc.). At the bottom, there is a field for leaving commentary. Given the blog's short existence, the fact that quite a few newspapers have run

stories on it and the guestbook, added in the summer of 2010, already contains a few entries, seems noteworthy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The guestbook and the press review are in separate sections and linked from the homepage (<http://eddywieand-sinedi.de/pressespiegel/>; <http://eddywieand-sinedi.de/g%C3%A4stebuch/>). Since their inception, the memorial blog has gotten over 10,000 hits from over 70 countries, and the YouTube video has been viewed over 4,000 times (personal communication by Edward Wieand to the author, 8 November 2010).

Figure 14. Screen capture of 'memorial blog' for Erna Kronshage, a victim of 'euthanasia' at Dziekanka (shown here side-by-side for display purposes).<sup>12</sup>



Source: <http://erna-k-gedenkblog.blogspot.com/> (accessed 31 August 2010).

<sup>12</sup> The author received express permission by Edward Wienand to display the contents of the webpage in this manner.

### **The Future of (Transnational) Virtual Commemoration**

Employing the concept of virtual traumascapes, this article has focused on the role new digital media play in representing 'euthanasia' crimes in Nazi 'special children's wards' and commemorating their victims in Germany, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic. The diverse landscape of memory concerning the murder of disabled children and youths described in five case studies has been created, at least in part, with the help of new digital media. Moreover, while virtual traumascapes remain embedded in larger national memory regimes, there are also strong indications that memory agents using new digital media have begun to transcend the confines of these regimes.

In Waldniel, located in a Western part of Germany in which Catholicism is still an important element of the public sphere, a tradition of performing public commemorative activities began in the context of a West German memory culture that came to life in the 1980s. Both religious and secular forms of commemoration continue to this day onsite, and they allow the local community to retain the memory of the 'euthanasia' crimes of the past. Yet only after a citizen with deep roots in the local community created a web site could relevant information about these crimes be easily accessed from outside the region. The web site's detailed accounts of the crimes committed and their perpetrators reflect the activity of local memory agents and seem compatible with the larger 'culture of contrition' in western parts of Germany. The active and ongoing commemoration online has recently been expanded to include victims, whose life stories can now be told.

Waldniel's virtual traumascapes has thus played a role in *creating* a memory of victims by linking their personal life stories to institutional histories (of the facilities) and historical contexts (of medical perpetrators and their crimes), a pattern evident in most cases presented in this article. To create such a memory for the victims of the 'special children's wards' at Leipzig and Leipzig-Dösen, an online information portal operated by the city government of Leipzig serves as a hub to report on commemorative activities that contribute to a diverse and vibrant memory culture. By openly sharing information, participants in these mnemonic practices, including those in decision-making positions in public employment, appear to be cognisant of the 'ghosts of the past', namely the sharply different memory regime under the state socialist government that exercised a tight control over information and addressed the victims of Nazi rule in a highly selective manner. While the virtual traumascapes at Waldniel remains loosely tied to the memory regime characteristic of Western Germany, the one for Leipzig appears to reflect a sharp and deliberate break from the former one in eastern Germany. Under conditions in which the embodied traumascapes is no longer accessible or the actual location of the original children's ward cannot be ascertained, memory agents in Leipzig and the communities in which they are embedded have not only helped create several monuments to the victims onsite, but reconstructed the life and the suffering of the victims, and thus created a memory of them online (as well as in book; see Lahm et al. 2008). The depth and detail of information about the victims available online goes far beyond what is available in situ.

Compared to West and even East Germany, Austria's coming to terms with the Nazi period came historically late but has manifested itself quite intensely in some respect over the

last ten years. The exhibition at the Spiegelgrund, and the concomitant exhibition online, is not only an expression of the gradual change in Austria's memory regime, but has arguably itself made a significant imprint on it through its deconstruction of the flawed self-image of Austria as the 'first victim of National Socialism'. The data on visitors of the online and on-site exhibitions support the conclusion that online exhibition, with its arguably much wider and larger audience, played perhaps as much part in this process as did the onsite one, although the role of physical artifacts onsite in commemoration should not be discarded. The online exhibition goes beyond the onsite one in terms of the depth of its content and recency of information. Moreover, through its inclusion of a memory book about the murdered children, the online exhibition contains a much stronger element of the commemoration of victims.<sup>13</sup> In Eastern European countries directly victimised by Nazi occupation, the emergence of virtual traumasces and challenges to the memory regimes of the past face more obstacles. For example, in Poland the numbers of native victims, particularly Jews, far exceeded the numbers of largely German victims of 'children's euthanasia', and to a somewhat lesser extent the same consideration applies to losses in the Czech population. Even hospitals that housed 'special children's wards' do not address this part of their history much or at all. The reason for this omission may also lie with status concerns in their medical leadership, namely that a too-detailed thematisation of the horrors of the past would not only point to Nazi perpetrators of medical crimes but also shine a general negative light on the role of psychiatric and other medical experts in them. The reticence of clinic directors in this regard even in places where the perpetrators among medical personnel were not natives or not even of the same nationality as the local staff remains palpable in many places to this day. Whether local memory agents, to whom commemoration on the Internet should not provide much of a financial or technical obstacle, will change that remains to be seen. In the few cases where this has already happened, the online presentation is a refreshing contrast to prevailing institutional practices.<sup>14</sup> In regard to 'special children's wards', for Dobransy in the Czech republic a web site established by a tri-nation research initiative is beginning to make public the results of emerging scholarship and thus create what might eventually develop into a virtual traumasce; and for Dziekanka, the reconstruction of a German victim's life's story online through a variety of different media online by a German relative has no equivalent in Polish.

Overall, there is certainly enough evidence to conclude that older or prevailing national memory regimes retain some influence on virtual traumasces, but this influence is already tenuous in some cases. Virtual traumasces have already become indispensable for those not familiar with the particulars of local topographies and memory landscapes, and they may become instrumental in the initiation and facilitation of transnational commemorative processes. Recent technological breakthroughs such as the availability of fairly accurate online translation software, particularly Google Translate, extend their potential audience greatly, and creators of virtual traumasces may increasingly have such international audiences in mind when presenting online materials (cf. Greser 1998). To the extent that virtual trau-

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough, a Spiegelgrund survivor recently declined to accept an honorary merit by the City of Vienna precisely because he thought that the onsite exhibition does not stress the children and their suffering enough.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the information in footnote 11.

mascapes on ‘children’s euthanasia’ transcend national memory regimes—which some have begun to do—their development seems consistent with notion of a globalisation of memory centered on Holocaust-related trauma and its recognition as a moral universal (Alexander 2002; Levy and Sznajder 2006).

The cases studies in this article also hint at the limitations of virtual traumascapes as they are presently realised. Findings of recent studies on the use of digital media at museums and memorials (Hein 2009; Hoskins 2003; Meyer 2009; Reading 2003) are confirmed in so far as none of the sites come close to exhausting the technological capabilities for the representation of the past events and for the facilitation of interactive exchange. The latter is curtailed, as web operators seem hesitant to establish forums where communication is both asynchronous and users are allowed to communicate with other users or even post comments or questions. Inquiries with several operators of similar web sites yielded the following main reasons for such a lack: technological and budget constraints, the inability to monitor entries on a continuous basis, and the fear of discriminatory and prejudiced remarks by a visitor leading to bad publicity and possible legal liability of the operator. In this regard, only the web site about a victim at Dziekanka provides for such a forum in the form of a guest book and fields for commentary. This is also the only site that includes significant elements of online commemoration through personal reflection and streaming video and audio. The omission of such types of audiovisuals on most websites is surprising, especially since recorded testimonials exist in which witnesses and observers of the crimes against children describe their experiences. Some witnesses, particularly for the Spiegelgrund, have continued to tell their stories to audiences to this day, but many are frail or deceased by now, and the time when such witnesses were able to do so will soon have passed.

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