Uncanny Homelands: Disability, Race, and the Politics of Memory

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Abstract

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This dissertation is an interdisciplinary and comparative study of German and Italian memory culture after 1945. It examines how the interaction between memorials, literature, historiography, and popular culture shapes a society’s memory and identity. I focus on two marginalized aspects of the memory of the Holocaust: the Nazi “euthanasia” program directed against the mentally ill and disabled, and the Fascist persecution of Slovenes, Croats, and Jews in and around Trieste. I couple my analysis of memorials to these atrocities with an examination of the literary and artistic representations of the traumatic events in question. My work thus expands the definition of site of memory to encompass not only the specific geographical location of a historical event but also the assemblage of cultural artefacts and discourses that accumulate around it over time. A “site” therefore denotes a physical and a cultural space that is continuously re-defined and rewritten. The two memorials I analyze, Grafeneck and the Risiera di San Sabba, bookend the Holocaust, revealing a trajectory from the systematic elimination of socially undesirable people, such as the mentally ill and disabled, to the full-scale racial purifica-
tion of the “final solution.” The lack of survivor testimony about these sites has been a major factor in their continued marginalization within the discourse on Holocaust memory, which is why it is all the more important to consider the way these events figure in other genres and other media, such as novels, short stories, poems, biographies, TV-dramas, and theatre plays. This approach allows me to shed new light on canonical works such as Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* or the TV-Series *Holocaust* and to bring into focus works that have so far not received the critical attention they deserve. Through my analysis I show how certain authors participate in a process of vicarious witnessing, lending their voice to those who were not able or permitted to speak for themselves. By bringing these underrepresented sites and memories into focus, I not only argue for a more inclusive memory culture but also reveal how the politics of commemoration continue to lead to the exclusion of persecuted minorities. Thus, my dissertation participates in the broader project within Holocaust studies of opening the discourse to de-particularized, transnational perspectives and other victim groups.
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O libri mia fatica senza soste.
Discutevo con voi, anima a spiriti,
Quando ero fremente dei miei limiti
Ed inseguivo tutte le risposte.

—Paolo Valesio

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To my parents.
The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one’s contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century’s end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.

—Eric Hobsbawm

“Papà,” Giannina asked again, “why is it that ancient tombs are not as sad as new ones?” [..]

“That’s obvious,” he answered. “People who have just died are closer to us, and so we are fonder of them. The Etruscans, after all, have been dead for a long time”—again he was telling a fairy tale—“so long it’s as if they had never lived, as if they had always been dead.”

—Giorgio Bassani

Introduction

On 19 February, 2011, the New York Times reported that efforts were underway to update the memorial at the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau for the Twenty-First Century. The memorial, conceived in the 1950s by camp survivors, has always relied exclusively on the auratic force of the original structures and the personal belongings of the victims, which were presented with very little contextual information. With the passing of time, however, the site has become less self-explanatory, as successive generations of visitors grow further and further removed from the events commemorated there. As the article’s author observes, “people increasingly see Auschwitz as
ancient history.”¹ The proposed update of the memorial is an attempt to ensure that the site retain its relevance for younger visitors, many of whose grandparents were born after the end of the war. Piotr Cywinski, the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, is quoted as saying that “the exhibition at Auschwitz no longer fulfills its role, as it used to.”

More or less eight to 10 million people go to such exhibitions around the world today, they cry, they ask why people didn’t react more at the time, why there were so few righteous, then they go home, see genocide on television and don’t move a finger. They don’t ask why they are not righteous themselves.

Cywinski hopes to address the visitors’ inability or unwillingness to relate their experience at the site to their everyday reality by introducing a more educational framework to the exhibition and the site as a whole. This overhaul comes in the wake of an unprecedented increase in the number of annual visitors over the past decade, from 450,000 in 2000 to 1.38 million last year.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the large number of visitors and the disjuncture between their understanding of Auschwitz and the Holocaust on the one hand and their perception of current world events on the other may actually be seen as directly correlative. As Auschwitz moves from being a site of mourning and commemoration to being a destination for mass tourism, the parameters for the visitors’ experience and conception of the site change. In some sense, Auschwitz is on the verge of becoming a tourist attrac-

tion like any other, albeit a dark or macabre one. As such, visitors may not feel that the horrific events which transpired there almost seven decades ago have any bearing on their own lives in the present. In response to this shift, Cywinski aims to recalibrate the site and the exhibition to promote what he terms “responsibility to the present” particularly in the large number of students and young people that visit the site every year.

Cywinski’s concerns resonate with a trend identified by numerous historians and writers in recent years regarding younger generations’ relationship to the past throughout Europe and the Western world. In the introduction to his history of the Twentieth Century, British historian Eric Hobsbawm remarks that “[m]ost young men and women at the century’s end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.”² As memories grow shorter, the sense of connectedness to a shared historical past, of a continuity between past and present—what Hobsbawm describes as an “organic” relation to the past—is being lost.

This grim diagnosis of the lost connection with the past echoes French historian Pierre Nora’s assertion that the “real environments of memory,” the milieux de mémoire, no longer exist. Instead, there are artificial, constructed lieux de mémoire—sites, in the broadest possible definition of the word, where collective memory crystallizes.³ Nora conceives of group memory as a landscape or a web of material and immaterial sites

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that gain or lose meaning depending on the changing attitudes of a society to its past. In his monumental study Les Lieux de mémoire, Nora collected 130 sites of memory (statues, monuments, emblems, graves, buildings, rituals, literary and other texts, songs, names, etc.) whose common characteristics are that they are charged with symbolic meaning, which can, however, change over time, or even vanish entirely. In a world which still contained authentic milieux de mémoire, Nora's project would be superfluous, as we would all presumably be embedded in our communal history. “The less memory is experienced from the inside,” writes Nora, “the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs” (Nora 13). The seven volumes that make up Nora’s Lieux de mémoire project constitute an archive of the disparate fragments of French national memory. More so than the implicit Eurocentrism of his approach, Nora’s reliance on the concept of the nation-state as a discrete unit is problematic with regard to the scope and applicability of his concept in other contexts. Furthermore, at no point does Nora’s project consider the place of ethnic or other minorities in this memory landscape—his is an entirely majoritarian model of national memory. Nora’s conception of national memory as a landscape or a web of material and immaterial sites that gain or lose

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meaning depending on the changing attitudes of a society to its past is a crucial point of reference for this study, but it is imperative that we recognize that the question must not only be: Where does memory reside? but also: Whose memory is it? In the broadest sense, this dissertation may be seen as an attempt to provide an answer to these fundamental questions.

Since the publication of Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*, interest in collecting and anthologizing sites of national memory has spread to other countries, including Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy, and the project has sparked an interest in producing a comprehensive catalogue of European sites of memory. Such a pan-European memory project necessarily seeks to identify common points of reference and overlaps between local, national, and transnational memory, and it is in this context that World War II and the Holocaust emerge as “foundational” events in the collective history of Europe, in that almost every individual country was involved. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, many European countries experienced a collision of memories that had so far been frozen by the political status quo. After 1989, the self-image of either victim or resister that these nations had created for themselves began to crumble as they confronted their painful memories of collaboration. Historian Dan Diner has argued that the commemoration of the Holocaust is increasingly becoming a common point of reference, as
a sort of “founding myth” of Europe.\textsuperscript{6} This idea was taken up by Aleida Assmann, who proposes “guidelines” to regulate the use of collective memory in a united Europe, and advocates international memory projects to integrate different sites of the Holocaust in a transnational topography of shared memory.\textsuperscript{7}

While the Holocaust has indeed become a matter of universal concern as more and more European countries seek to come to terms with conflicting memories of World War II, the ultimate goal of a European “sites of memory” project must nevertheless not be to establish a consensus regarding the past, smoothing out discrepancies between the memory cultures of different European countries and thereby necessarily excluding certain memories. Even assuming that we accept that a European sites of memory project should ultimately be geared towards promoting a united Europe, it is extremely doubtful that it could succeed in doing so as long as there are still unresolved disputes about the significance of individual sites within their respective nations. Thus, any productive engagement with European sites of memory calls for careful attention to local and regional, as well as national, memory. In so doing, local memories can be contextualized and integrated into a transnational framework without losing their regional specificity. In other words, instead of trying to define a single memory of World War II and the


Holocaust, each site should be allowed to contribute its own history and memory to a multi-voiced and multi-faceted memory of the Holocaust.

In Italy and Germany, Nora’s challenge of circumscribing the idiosyncratic relationship each of these countries has to its past resulted in the publication of *I luoghi della memoria* in 1997, edited by Mario Isnenghi, and *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* in 2005, edited by Etienne François and Hagen Schulze. Following closely on Nora’s model, each of these works presents a thematically organized catalogue of the historical, cultural, and political aspects of the memory culture of those two nations since unification. Both contribute to the broadening of the concept of what a site of memory is or can be by including cultural artifacts beyond geographical locations, extending the landscape of memory to encompass such things as literary works, sporting events, and culinary traditions.\(^8\) While the editors of both books emphasize the collective relevance of the sites

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\(^8\) *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* is divided into eighteen sections or themes, ranging from *Bildung* to *Zerrissenheit*, each containing several essays that illuminate different facets of this theme, forming an associative memory cluster around it. For example, the section entitled *Zerrissenheit* contains essays about the Berlin Wall and Rapallo, but also about Heinrich Heine, Nietzsche, and the so-called *Weißwurstäquator* – the cultural (and linguistic) line that divides the north from the south of Germany, especially Bavaria, where Weißwurst is a much more popular dish than in the north. Totaling 120 essays written by more than 100 authors from various scholarly backgrounds and of different nationalities, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* also illuminates Germany’s European interconnections: it includes shared sites of memory in other countries and oscillates between German and non-German perspectives. See Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (München: Beck, 2001).

*I luoghi della memoria* presents 74 sites, divided into three large sections, *Personaggi e date dell’Italia unita*, *Simboli e miti dell’Italia unita*, and *Strutture ed eventi dell’Italia unita*. Alongside articles on such topics as Italian opera and cinema, the mafia, the World Cup, Pinocchio, café culture, and the piazza, many of the articles deal with the memory of Fascism and World War II, such as the March on Rome, Mussolini, the Empire, the 1938 race laws, the Fascist youth organization Balilla, and war prisons. In contrast to the German project, all of the contributing authors in Isnenghi’s collection are Italian, and the articles deal exclusively with Italian issues. Sites which point beyond Italy’s borders are in fact con-
for their nations, they also point out that many of these sites are by no means unifying but continuously contested and competing with each other.

**Uncanny Homelands**

Building on the eclectic approach adopted by these two projects, I conceive of a site of memory as encompassing not only the specific geographical location of a historical event but also the assemblage of cultural artefacts and discourses that accumulate around a given event or memory over time. A “site” by this definition therefore denotes a physical and a cultural space that is continuously re-defined and rewritten. Thus, one of the basic principles of the sites of memory project is that it can continually be updated and expanded to include new and different sites. At the same time, however, it must be able to move beyond its apparent aim of constructing a more complete picture of national identity, as if such concepts were not inherently problematic. Indeed, by focusing on particular sites of memory, we may instead succeed in troubling the preconceived ideas of what constitutes Italian, German, etc. identity, which tend to occlude “difficult” or controversial aspects of the history of a particular group or region within or

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cerned with the conception of these sites in the Italian imaginary. Thus, Emilio Franzina’s article *L’America* traces the development of the Italian conception of the New World to the Americanization of Italian post-war society. Likewise, Enzo Collotti’s article on *I tedeschi* outlines Italian attitudes towards Germany and Austria. See Mario Isnenghi, ed., *I luoghi della memoria*, 3 vols. (Roma: Laterza, 1997). The new edition, published in 2010, is unrevised except for the addition of an article on the *faibe*, written by Fabio Todero.
between nations.

Inherent in the concept of “uncanny homelands” is precisely this troubling potential of sites of memory with regard to the self-conception and identity of individuals, groups, and nations. A site of memory may be said to be uncanny when it unexpectedly extends into the present, forcing a person or group to re-evaluate their understanding of who they are and where they come from. In essence, the problems identified by Cywinski and his fellow curators of the memorial at Auschwitz have to do with the fact that for many people today, Auschwitz is quite simply no longer uncanny. It remains a monumental and disturbing symbol of inhuman suffering. But the shocking truth which it represents is by now more readily assimilable to an accepted historical past. The fact that visitors to Auschwitz can fail to make a connection to atrocities they see on television is a factor of their distance from the events commemorated there. Beyond that, the central position occupied by Auschwitz in the public consciousness (at least in Europe and North America) as a metonymy for the Holocaust as a whole, combined with its popular conception as a unique event, transcending history, has the potential to render the Holocaust what historian Edward T. Linenthal calls a “comfortable horrible” memory, meaning that it allows people “to reassure themselves that they are engaging profound events,” while failing to engage with other events in the past or in the present which

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9 I elaborate on my use of the concept of the uncanny in relation to sites of memory in Chapter One.

10 Edward Tabor Linenthal, Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum (New
are closer to home and less easy to face or to reconcile with their sense of self. In the introduction to his recent book *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg examines the implications of the Holocaust functioning as a “screen memory” in contemporary Western society. In Freudian psychoanalysis, a screen memory (*Deckeinnerung*) serves to cover up or displace an uncomfortable or traumatic memory by means of another, unrelated memory. “Despite its apparent innocence,” Rothberg writes, “screen memory stands in or substitutes for a more disturbing or painful memory that it displaces from consciousness. [...] The mechanism of screen memory thus illustrates concretely how a kind of forgetting accompanies acts of remembrance, but this kind of forgetting is subject to recall” (13). Rothberg uses Freud’s concept to illustrate how commemoration and collective memory may productively be described as multidirectional in their operation. “Awareness of the inevitability of displacement and substitution in acts of remembrance,” he writes, “points toward the need both to acknowledge the conflicts that sub-tend memory and work toward a rearticulation of historical relatedness beyond paradigms of uniqueness” (14).

Rothberg’s conception of collective memory as multidirectional has far-reaching and productive consequences for memory studies. At the same time, however, as the above quote suggests, multidirectional memory by Rothberg’s definition functions pri-
marily between disparate memories and histories. In other words, the paradigms of uniqueness which he takes issue with are those which would disallow comparisons between the Holocaust and other acts of genocide. But what are the implications of such uniqueness paradigms for the constitution of the individual memories themselves? Rothberg argues convincingly for the need to conceive of memory as “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” and to examine “the interaction between different historical memories” (3), but we must also consider how these historical memories are not stable or clearly defined entities, but rather subject to renegotiation in their own right. As I argue, it is crucial that we recognize not only how the Holocaust may serve as a screen for the memory of other genocides and traumatic histories, but also how the established conception of the Holocaust itself as a monumental and self-contained event relieves people of the obligation to confront marginalized or repressed aspects of its history. By adopting a multidirectional approach to the memory of the Holocaust itself, this dissertation thus participates in the broader project currently underway within Holocaust and memory studies of opening up the discourse to de-particularized, transnational perspectives and other persecuted minorities.
Parallel Histories

This study focuses on two marginalized aspects of the memory of the Holocaust: the Nazi euthanasia program which targeted the mentally and physically disabled, and the Nazi-Fascist persecution of Slovenes and Croats in and around Trieste. I approach these marginal memories by means of a close site-specific analysis of two memorials, the former euthanasia killing center at Grafeneck in southern Germany, where more than 10,000 mentally and physically disabled people were gassed and cremated; and the Risiera di San Sabba memorial in Trieste, a Nazi-Fascist extermination camp, whose victims were thousands of Yugoslav partisans, Jews, and Italian anti-fascists. Historically, these two sites lie at either end of the Nazi project of racial purification, but their historical and cultural significance has been largely unacknowledged, in part because of the marginal position their victims occupy within the popular understanding of the Holocaust, but also because the privileging of survivor testimony has led to the de facto marginalization of these victims within the discipline of Holocaust and memory studies itself. In the case of the victims of Nazi euthanasia, in particular, there simply are no such testimonies, but this does not mean that representations of and responses to these events and their memory are absent from the cultural record. In order to access these memories, it is therefore necessary to look beyond a traditional definition of “site” to include fiction, biography, poetry, drama, film and television as legitimate sources of cultural memory production.
The study is divided into two parts, one for each “site,” with a chapter linking the two historically and conceptually. Each of these two case studies is a substantial contribution to scholarship on Holocaust memory in its own right; by bringing them into relation with one another, however, I reveal the concrete historical links between them as well as the parallels and divergences between these countries’ memory cultures. It was the same group of men who organized, supervised, and carried out the killing of the mentally and physically disabled in Grafeneck and the deportation and killing of Jews and Italian and Yugoslav partisans at the Risiera di San Sabba in Trieste. By determining what role these same perpetrators play in the conceptual framework of the two memorials, I am able to focus on the similarities rather than the differences between these two sites. The memory culture in each country is inextricably linked to the fear and avoidance of questions concerning the perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders. What emerges from my analysis is a picture of commemoration as a society’s gradual attempts at coming to terms with its own involvement in past atrocities.

Grafeneck and the Risiera have become sites of memory that increasingly contribute to shaping the regional but also the national memory of each country: as sites of exchange between the past and the present, but also of collision between different versions of the past, they are at once historical, remembered, and constantly changing places. At the core of my analysis of these two sites is the conception that memory is a continuous process, or even a debate, and that literature, memorials, and museums par-
ticipate in, shape, and provide the language for these processes. Thus, my project is not only concerned with questions of representation and how selected authors or memorial artists address them, but also with questions of reception—how people interact with these sites and media and how their relationship to them changes over time. The guiding questions in this general context are: When and how does local and regional memory influence national and even international memory? What is the role of literature and memorials in this interplay between regional, national, and international discourses of commemoration? Further, how may we conceive of the relationship of the different media of memory to each other as multidirectional, and what are the implications for commemoration and our understanding of the past?

A comparative approach to Italian and German memory culture via two specific case studies contributes not only to the still sparse scholarship on Italian cultural memory and memorials of World War II, but also to an understanding of the processes by which two countries with similar histories have developed fundamentally different memory cultures. In the context of “European memory” comparisons are problematic but also indispensable. To compare does not mean to equate, homogenize, or trivialize, but to assess parallels and differences. To think comparatively is not to blend but rather to illuminate difference, to contextualize and, with respect to memory, to create an awareness of the diversity of memories, to overcome polarities that prevent a recognition of the necessity to place memories in a broader historical or cultural perspective. In
a comparative study of Italy’s and Germany’s cultural memory it is important, for example, to take into consideration that both countries were late in their nation-building and thus have kept strong regional identities. After the war both countries focused on reconstruction and experienced an economic miracle, with the result that a direct and in-depth working through of the years of Fascism and National Socialism was delayed. Both also had a first-hand experience of the Cold War: while in Germany the dividing line went through the entire country, in Italy it went right through the region of Trieste (the territorial decisions on Fiume and Trieste were only finalized in 1954). In the late 1960s and 70s both countries struggled with generational conflicts and terrorism, but while the German “68’ers” investigated the role of their parents’ generation during the Third Reich, the confrontation with Fascism in Italy remained focused on institutional or political issues and did not result in a direct personal engagement with the past.¹¹

German reunification not only brought to the fore the two different memories of World War II and of two totalitarian regimes that had developed in the two German states, it also provoked debates about acknowledgment, compensation, and memorialization of the German victims of the war, the victims of the air raids and of the expulsions from the eastern regions, in addition to discussions about appropriate forms of com-

memorating the victims of Nazi crimes in a reunified Germany.\textsuperscript{12} Significantly, these public debates still largely exclude the victims of the euthanasia program, even though it was inextricably linked to the Holocaust. Although there is a large body of scholarship dealing with memorials to the victims of the Nazi regime, there is very little scholarly discourse on euthanasia memorial sites or on literary works that deal with this particular memory. By outlining the cultural and social dimensions that continue to counteract a broader public discussion of Nazi euthanasia, my study examines the interplay between silence and silencing that results in a doubly marginalized status of these victims and their memory. There are hardly any survivors to raise their voice, no generation-spanning community of memory, and the people in question are frequently physically or mentally unable to legitimize their status as victims or witnesses through testimony or narrative, let alone promote memorialization. Moreover, because they were not considered victims of racial, religious, or political persecution, the victims of Nazi euthanasia were not included in the 1953 restitution law.\textsuperscript{13} The struggle for compensation for the victims of Nazi euthanasia is an example of the divided and dividing nature of the com-


\textsuperscript{13} I discuss this matter in greater detail in Chapter 1, see pp. 55–6.
memorization of German victims of the Second World War: while most of the medical perpetrators were punished leniently or even acquitted and continued to enjoy high social status, their victims were until recently excluded from any form of juridical or social acknowledgement or financial compensation.

In Italy the question of a divided memory assumes a different character, but it has nonetheless resulted in a comparable memory debate since the end of the war. In the past two decades the image of the “good Italian” during WWII has come under siege, resulting in discussions of Italian collaboration and Italian Fascist anti-Semitism.14 Recent scholarship has emphasized that issues of racial purity also loomed large in Fascist Italy.15 Like Hitler, Mussolini implemented a series of social, scientific, and cultural policies in order to encourage the regeneration of the national body. Although Italians never engaged in the same kind of racial eugenics as Nazi Germany, the Fascist government launched campaigns for agricultural, human, and cultural bonifica (reclamation

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and improvement), especially in border regions. Trieste is the classic example of a liminal space that supposedly threatened the homogeneity of the nation: its mixed population unites many different and often conflicting memories, cultures, and traditions including Austrian, Jewish, Slovene and Croat heritages. In order to enforce Italianization, the regime implemented a violent anti-Slav and anti-Jewish campaign in Trieste and environs. The presence of Italian Fascist concentration camps in the region prior to the German occupation in 1943 has received only very limited scholarly attention, and the anti-Semitic aggression toward Trieste’s prominent Jewish population, beginning after the institution of the Fascist anti-Jewish laws in 1938, has only become the focus of historical scholarship in the past decade. Trieste was the only province of Italy with a secret police that arrested the Jews long before the Germans arrived in 1943. The allogeni (people of another kind) were forced to assimilate by renouncing their foreign names,

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languages, and traditions. During the German occupation, Trieste and its region assumed a crucial role in Nazi territorial politics. The *Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland* (OZAK), as the Nazis termed the region, became the Third Reich’s most important access point to the Mediterranean. The Risiera di San Sabba was not only the point of departure for transports to the camps in the East, it was also the only Italian death camp, equipped with a crematorium. Three to five thousand Jews, Slovenes, Croats, and Yugoslav communist partisans were killed at the Risiera and ca. 20,000 deported to extermination camps elsewhere. There is practically no scholarship that attempts to determine the degree to which the Triestine population knew about, supported, or passively watched what was going on in the camp.

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**The War on Difference**

The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust [...] is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from an otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for.

—Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*

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In his groundbreaking study *Modernity and the Holocaust*, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues strongly that it is not only misleading to consider the Holocaust as a historical aberration, but actually dangerous, since viewing this event either as the culmination of Western anti-Semitism and thus principally an episode in Jewish history, or else as an extreme case of atavism, as the expression of primordial instinctual aggression, inherent in the human species, removes the Holocaust from its socio-historical context. Instead, following the argument originally put forward by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bauman insists that it is necessary to recognize the inextricable links between the Holocaust and the condition of modernity as such: to see it as the direct result of modern industrialization and rationalization rather than antithetical to these processes. The failure to examine these links allows us to avoid questioning the underlying assumptions of modern civilization such as the cult of normality, homogeneity, and efficiency. In other words, by ascribing the Holocaust to primitive or unenlightened impulses, we ignore (willfully or not) its relevance for the society we live in today.

In order to understand the relationship between modernity and the Holocaust, it is necessary to consider the scientific and rational foundation of the large-scale eradication of people labeled ethnically, racially, or biologically inferior. Beyond the individual

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careers of the perpetrators at Grafeneck and the Risiera di San Sabba, these sites form part of a broader trajectory leading from the systematic elimination of socially undesirable people, such as the mentally and physically disabled, to the “final solution.” Behind the National Socialist and Fascist conception of the individual’s role in society lay the supposition that his or her body formed part of the collective body of the people—the *Volkskörper* in Nazi terminology. In order to improve the overall health and constitution of the State it was therefore necessary to excise “sick” or “degenerate” elements which threatened the well-being of the national body. This rationale partakes of the scientific theory of eugenics, a term first coined by the British anthropologist Francis Galton in 1883, to describe the application of genetics to demography in an effort to control the development of a nation or people and prevent the proliferation of inferior genetic material.²⁰ Hailed as an answer to the fears about the supposed degeneration of the white race, it spread quickly across northern Europe, including Germany and Italy, to the Unit-

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ed States. An international catalogue of “defective” conditions was developed (including epilepsy, feeblemindedness, deafness, blindness, schizophrenia, and alcoholism), as were tools for the quantitative evaluation of human intelligence—such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (1916)—and measures were taken to lower fertility among the so-called genetically “unfit.” This included marriage restrictions, segregation of the mentally ill, coercive sterilization and abortion, and it culminated in Nazi Germany with the extermination of all those deemed “unworthy of life.”

Illness and disability were no longer private calamities, but had suddenly become an offense against the public order; doctors, biologists, and psychiatrists became government informants employed to denounce, isolate, or do away with those branded “defective.”

In their study of the *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell propose the term “Eugenic Atlantic” to describe the “project of human exclusion based upon scientific management systems successively developed within modernity” (101) which encompassed both race and disability. Emphasizing the centrality of the eugenics movement for cultural and political debates about disability to this day, their book is an extremely productive point of departure not only for a discussion of cultural spaces of disability but also for an examination of the role disability and eugenics play in working towards a more nuanced understanding of the Holocaust. Snyder and Mitchell

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21 The term “life unworthy of life” or “Lebensunwertes Leben” was coined by the jurist Karl Binding and the psychiatrist Alfred Hoche in their eugenicist treatise *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1920), which the Nazis took as a legitimation for the euthanasia program.
identify the transatlantic eugenics movement at the beginning of the 20th century as the major site of scientific and political exchange about disability and race issues, and the idea of biological aberrancy as the root for the identification of both racialized and disabled people as “subhuman” that lead to their extermination during the Nazi period. The conception of racial difference as biological rather than cultural during the eugenics period links the “otherness” of African or Jewish people to the “otherness” of people with disabilities. Both share an identification as hereditarily and thus immutably “aberrant.”

After the war, eugenics became divorced as an exclusively medical issue from the discourse on the Holocaust. The failure to acknowledge the international hegemony of the eugenics movement and its role in the trajectory that led to the persecution and extermination of ethnic, social, and sexual minorities during the Holocaust has allowed eugenics to pass as a historical aberration. Snyder and Mitchell elaborate three key factors which contributed to this decoupling of the eugenics movement from the discourse and memory surrounding the Holocaust. Firstly, the decision at the Nuremberg trials to exclude the Nazi euthanasia program from the court’s purview reflected the “persistent ambivalence in Europe and North America about the value of disabled lives.” That is to say, the trials reinforced the “imaginary line between ‘medical intervention’ and murder” (102). Secondly, because eugenics as a mode of thinking was so widespread on either side of the Atlantic, and all governments were, to a greater or lesser extent, en-
gaged in considerations along similar lines regarding the health of the nation, it was easier to condemn the Holocaust as an aberration than to confront the obvious links to their own eugenic policies and practices.

Thirdly, Snyder and Mitchell observe that what scholarship exists on the euthanasia program has primarily been motivated by an interest in Nazi medicine, which, they argue, has overwhelmingly been “chronicled as an unprecedented aberration of the healing professions” (104), ignoring not only the scientific but also the ideological background for these practices. Moreover, as they stress, the prevailing form of historical scholarship of the euthanasia program has allowed “Germany to be effectively sealed off from its participation in international scientific premises about bodies” (ibid.). This is a very important point and one which bears pausing over, for the perception that events as they unfolded in Germany were utterly unrelated to the situation in the rest of Europe and in North America applies not only to the Allied countries, but also to Axis powers, most significantly in Italy, where, after the end of the war, it became commonplace to describe anti-Semitism, racism, and eugenic thought as German “imports,” with little or nothing to do with Fascist ideology. In actual fact, eugenics was just as popular in Italy at the beginning of the 20th Century as it was elsewhere, and played a significant role in the development of Fascism long before Hitler’s rise to power.

The transatlantic eugenics movement owed much to post-Darwinist theories of genetics and heredity, and Cesare Lombroso’s *L’uomo delinquente*, published in 1876,
loomed large in debates regarding degenerate elements in society. Even so, eugenics did not really begin to gain a foothold in Italy until after 1912.22 The Catholic Church vehemently opposed compulsory sterilization and other such interventionist practices, exemplified by the sterilization laws enacted in Indiana in 1907 and in Washington and California in 1908. As a result, eugenics in Italy initially focused exclusively on “environmental” issues such as hygiene, curing endemic illnesses, caring for children and pregnant women, correct alimentation etc.23 This changed in the mid 1920s with the intervention of Mussolini, who combined eugenicist ideas with Fascism’s project of renewing and rebuilding Italy’s cultural, political, and, above all, military strength. In his famous Speech of the Ascension in 1927, Mussolini not only urged the Italians to make more Italians—“Se si diminuisce, signori, non si fa l’Impero, si diventa una colonia!”24—but also introduced brand-new eugenics policies to purge the nation of the so-called social maladies, as examples of which he names alcoholism, industrial urbanism, yellow fever, and Bolshevism (40–1; 45). In the course of the speech he further announces the suppression of

22 Roberto Maiocchi, Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista (Scandicci: La nuova Italia, 1999): 7–79.

23 See Maiocchi, Scienza e fascismo (Roma: Carocci, 2004): 140–54. In Germany, eugenics was also primarily concerned with accentuating positive factors rather than eliminating perceived negative or harmful ones, at least until 1918. Coercive sterilization, as it was practiced in the United States, did not become a reality until 1933. Furthermore, as Henry Friedlander observes, “before World War I German eugenics focused on class and therefore race did not at first occupy a central role. [...] This attitude changed in the Weimar Republic [...] and was abandoned completely after the Nazi assumption of power.” See Henry Friedlander, The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995): 10.

all anti-Fascist newspapers and organizations, the creation of a special police force in all regions, and the installation of a special court to deal with dissidents and revolutionaries. Mussolini also expressed his concern over the decrease of the white race and its possible “submersion” by races of color. The significance of these tactics of forging together racial, eugenic, and totalitarian considerations cannot be overemphasized. The speech must be seen as a crucial moment in Fascism’s trajectory towards a totalitarian dictatorship. Subsequently, Mussolini not only radically purged his own government of figures who were not full-fledged Fascists (Bosworth Mussolini’s Italy 246), but also increased the powers of the state police, instituting widespread surveillance and control of subversive groups. New laws restricted or punished groups with autonomist tendencies, ethnic minorities, “nonproductive” members of the national collective (homosexuals, ageing bachelors, criminals, dissidents etc.), and those who were considered a danger to the population (cf. Ben-Ghiat Fascist Modernities 18–9; Gillette 35–49). A host of institutes, committees, and journals were founded in order to bring together leading euge-

25 In his preface to the Italian edition of Richard Korherr’s Geburtenrückgang (1928), Mussolini wrote: “the entire white race, the Western race, could be submerged by races of color that multiply with a rhythm unknown to our own.” Qtd. in Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945 (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001): 20. Ben-Ghiat notes that “fascist modernity did not merely imply the defeat of degenerative influences within Italy, but also the neutralization of non-white races, whose continued growth would bring about an era of ‘senseless disorder and unfathomable despair.’” See also Carl Ipsen, Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 66–7, and Gillette, Racial Theories: 43.

nicists, sociologists, and policy makers. The number of persons committed to psychiatric institutions almost doubled in the following fifteen years.

Although Italy never sought to sterilize or eliminate its “defectives” or “delinquents,” this does not mean that eugenic and racist conceptions of the health of the nation were extrinsic to Fascist ideology. Italy’s colonial endeavor in Africa heightened anxieties about the degenerative effects of blood contamination in the homeland, and resulted in segregation and miscegenation laws. In 1938, with the publication of the Manifesto of Racial Scientists and periodicals such as *La difesa della razza, Razza e civiltà*, and *Il diritto razzista*, the regime invited Italians to be “openly racist” (Ben-Ghiat *Fascist Modernities* 149). The radicalization of the Fascist regime, first with the Ethiopian War in 1935–6 and later with the institution of the anti-Jewish race laws of 1938, must be seen in relation to the fundamental adherence to eugenicist principles by Fascism from its inception.

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27 Interest in eugenics was widespread among prominent scholars and scientists in a variety of fields from biology, medicine, and psychiatry, to economics, sociology, anthropology, and theology, a large number of whom were directly involved in providing the “scientific basis of Fascism,” to quote the title of an article published by the sociologist Corrado Gini in 1927. See Corrado Gini, “The Scientific Basis of Fascism,” *Political Science Quarterly* 42.1 (1927). For more on Gini see Francesco Cassata, *Il fascismo razionale: Corrado Gini fra scienza e politica* (Roma: Carocci, 2006).


The focus on the transnational eugenics movement as a framework for the two case studies that make up this dissertation serves two distinct but related purposes. Firstly, it allows me to highlight the historical connections between Grafeneck and the Risiera di San Sabba, which, significantly, are not mentioned at either site. And this omission points to the second purpose, namely that of bridging a gap in scholarship on the parallel histories of Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany, and the post-war memory culture in these two countries. As noted above, the bracketing off of the Nazi euthanasia program from the Holocaust mirrors the more general isolation of both eugenics and the Holocaust itself as historical aberrations rather than inextricably bound up in the project of rationalization and progress in modernity. In adopting a multidirectional, comparative approach to the topic of the Holocaust and its memory in Germany and Italy, I first and foremost aim to counteract the compartmentalization that tends to govern discussions of these issues.

Returning to the notion of “uncanny homelands,” we can see how it operates on two levels in this dissertation, pertaining to different mechanisms of silencing, repression, and exclusion which have marked the memory of Fascism and Nazism from the immediate postwar period to the present day. On the one hand, the object of study may be said to be uncanny in and of itself, since eugenic thought continues to inform the cultural conception of disability in the present day—a fact which further contributes to the insidious tendency of regarding the euthanasia program as somehow “more justified”
than the persecution of the Jews. In the Italian context, the acknowledgement of the eugenic foundations of Fascism challenges received notions of Italy under Mussolini as the “lesser evil” compared to the “absolute evil” of Hitler’s Germany. As I discuss in the second half of this dissertation, the “memory war” currently being waged between the Risiera di San Sabba and the Foiba di Basovizza, serves ultimately to preserve the status quo, becoming a “screen memory” in and of itself, preventing an engagement with questions of Italian guilt and collaboration.

On the other hand, these aspects of the legacy of Fascism and the Holocaust are marginalized within academic discourse and the discipline of memory and Holocaust studies itself. By definition an interdisciplinary field, memory studies has nevertheless excluded certain discourses, and the set of practices and assumptions which it has developed have become ossified to a greater or lesser extent. The study of these under-examined and misunderstood aspects of the Holocaust and in particular of its memory and representation is therefore geared toward opening up the field to other discourses, such as for instance disability studies.

Chapter Overview
This is the first study to read memorials and literature together as dual facets of a single “site.” This new approach allows me to show how these sites fit into the broader frame-
work of the cultural production and dissemination of memory and to identify patterns that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of certain minority memories. The first half of my study provides a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the legacy of Nazi euthanasia in post-war German culture. This section presents Nazi euthanasia as a traumatic lacuna in public, scholarly, and cultural commemorative discourse, and traces the various factors that contribute to an ongoing marginalization of the topic. Chapter one, *Remembering Euthanasia: Grafeneck between the Past and the Future*, presents the first in-depth analysis of the commemoration of Nazi euthanasia ever conducted, focusing on the former killing center of Grafeneck in southern Germany and various recent commemorative events associated with it. In addition to being a memorial to the victims of Nazi euthanasia, Grafeneck is also a home for the disabled, as it had been before the war. Hence, it has had to confront a moral question other sites are not obliged to face: is it justifiable to house at this site members of a social group that was singled out and exterminated mere decades ago, while at the same time maintaining the site as a memorial to this very atrocity? My analysis of this site incorporates not only Grafeneck’s post-war history but also its present-day function. Looking at Grafeneck through this double lens, I show how its ambiguous status challenges visitors’ assumptions about what commemoration is or should be and how it invites them to consider the place of disability in contemporary society.

The difficulty of adequately commemorating the victims of Nazi euthanasia is
linked to society’s deep ambivalence toward disability and mental illness. This becomes even clearer when we consider literary representations of Nazi euthanasia and their reception. Its role in major works such as Günter Grass’s *Tin Drum* or in the TV miniseries *Holocaust* has gone almost unnoticed by critics. My second chapter, *Bridging the Silence: Towards a Literary Memory of (Nazi) Euthanasia*, brings together revealing perspectives from the fields of memory and disability studies, and touches upon the problematic of the artistic depiction of people with mental disabilities. The chapter examines the possibilities literature offers for a narration of and a testimony to the life stories of these “forgotten” victims. The Nazi euthanasia program and its victims haunt the literature of the post-war period in Germany, but this ghostly presence has gone almost entirely unnoticed by literary scholarship. In addition to Günter Grass, authors such as Heinrich Böll, Alfred Andersch, Wolfdietrich Schnurre, Christoph Hein, Christa Wolf, Hans Ulrich Dapp, Hellmut Haasis, Helga Schubert and others, have all broached the topic in one way or another in their works. In the chapter, I group these texts according to two principal narrative strategies which characterize the representation of victims of Nazi euthanasia. The first group features what I refer to as a “disabled enabler” figure—a mentally ill character whose quasi-prophetic insight helps the protagonist in critical situations. This ostensibly empowering representation is in fact highly limiting and serves ultimately only to reinforce stereotypical notions of disability. Whereas in this first group, the “disabled enablers” are both fictional and marginal to the narrative, the texts in the second group
focus on actual historical victims of the Nazi euthanasia program. In an effort to recover the life stories of these victims, the authors incorporate elements of documentary, (auto)biography, and fiction, taking on the role of a “vicarious witness,” giving voice to these silent and silenced victims. The latter model offers an alternative to the stereotypical or dehumanizing representations of disability that so often stand in the way of a genuine or appropriate commemoration of these victims. The paradox of testimony as theorized by scholars such as Shoshana Felman, hinges on the unspeakability of trauma: testimony is transmitted through the non-verbal, above all through silence, including textual gaps, ruptures, and elisions. With regard to the memory of euthanasia, however, the aestheticization as the only appropriate response to trauma is ultimately counterproductive, for we must first bridge the long-standing silence separating us from its victims.

The third chapter, *Lethal Trajectories: Perpetrators between Grafeneck and Trieste*, examines the career paths of the perpetrators who worked at Grafeneck and at the Risiera di San Sabba, in order to shed light on the historical links between the two sites and to perform a comparative analysis of scholarship on perpetrators in Germany and Italy. Under the supervision of Trieste-born SS *Obergruppenführer* Odilo Globocnik, Christian Wirth, Josef Oberhauser, Kurt Franz, and many other members of the *Aktion T4* who had begun their careers in Grafeneck, established the Risiera di San Sabba in 1943. The presence of such a highly specialized staff highlights the importance of Trieste within the trajectory of these persecutions, and the connections between the euthanasia pro-
gram and the Holocaust. Historical scholarship on perpetrators is driven not only by questions of who did what where, but also by the desire to find answers to the question of why they did what they did. In addition, I examine the role assigned to the perpetrators at the memorials themselves and ask in which ways the same perpetrators are presented, talked about, and, hence, remembered at each site respectively. By determining what role these men play in the conceptual framework of the two memorials and the respective documentary exhibitions, I draw conclusions about how the engagement with the perpetrators mirrors the taboos, fears, and repression of post-war German and Italian society.

The second half of this dissertation examines the legacy of Italian Fascism and Italy’s contested role in the Holocaust, and exposes similar mechanisms of silencing and repression regarding the Italian Fascist politics of racial purity and enforced Italianization in the border region of Trieste. Trieste embodies the tensions and contradictions that characterize Italian memory culture. Fascist racial politics, enforced Italianization, and collaboration with the Nazi occupiers are the subject of fierce debates among historians, which ultimately revolve around the question of Italian guilt and victimhood. There are two competing narratives at work in the region emphasizing either the crimes committed by the Nazi occupiers, or those committed by the Yugoslav partisans. Both thus cast the Italians as victims of external aggressors and downplay the crimes of Fascism. In Chapter four, Black Holes and Revelations: an “Italian Tragedy,” I expose these exculpa-
tory mechanisms by showing how the memory of the Risiera di San Sabba is consistently pitched against the counter-memory of the acts of violence carried out by Yugoslav partisans at the end of the war, commemorated at the nearby Foiba di Basovizza. I discuss how these rival memories continue to be instrumentalized in political and public discourse and how border anxiety and anti-Slavism inform discussions about Italian identity and national character. These two versions of Italian history are embodied in two commemorative days: the *Giorno della memoria*, which is held on January 27 each year, to coincide with the international Holocaust remembrance day, at the Risiera di San Sabba (and elsewhere in Italy); and the *Giorno del ricordo*, a more recent addition to the Italian commemorative calendar, first held on February 10, 2005, two weeks after the *Giorno della memoria*, to commemorate the victims of the foibe killings and the Istrian exodus. This event has found broad support among the center-right, who embrace its presentation of the foibe killings as the “true” “Italian tragedy” of the Twentieth Century.

Given the thoroughly politicized nature of public commemoration in Trieste, it is necessary to look beyond these official narratives in order to arrive at a more nuanced and complete picture of the space this “site of memory” occupies in post-war Italian society. The fifth chapter, *No Place Like Home: Trieste and the Language of Belonging*, thus turns to literary and artistic responses to these traumatic events. The chapter begins with a discussion of two major television productions, *Perlasca–un eroe italiano* (2002) and *Il cuore nel pozzo* (2005), both directed by Alberto Negrin for RAI and broadcast on
the occasion of the *Giorno della memoria* and the *Giorno del ricordo*, respectively. Both of these hugely successful television dramas (seen by thirteen and sixteen million viewers, respectively) center on “good,” heroic Fascists, struggling to save the lives of innocents from the ruthless and barbaric forces of the Nazi occupiers and the Yugoslav communist partisans at Italy’s north-eastern border. The chapter examines how the narrative of Italian heroism, innocence, and victimhood during the Second World War propagated and consolidated by these films contributes to the ongoing rehabilitation of Fascism in Italy today. In contrast to this simplistic and one-dimensional mainstream depiction of this period in Italian history, works by Italian and Slovene Triestine authors, poets, and playwrights such as Boris Pahor, Fulvio Tomizza, Carolus L. Cergoly, Renato Sarti, Filibert Benedetič and Miroslav Košuta offer a more multi-layered narrative of the Italian experience during the war and its aftermath. My analysis of Trieste and its memory shows how this city has historically been and continues to be a staging ground for the construction of Italian national identity.

In the introduction to the most recent edition of his play *I me ciamava per nome: 44.787*, which was performed at the Risiera di San Sabba in 1995, playwright Renato Sarti writes that the youth of today are cut off from their own history like a branch severed from a tree, and that his play is an effort to reconnect them to the past. These words are consonant with Eric Hobsbawm’s observation that the youth of today “grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they
live in.” Indeed, this echoes the opinion of many of the writers and scholars I engage with in this dissertation, including Boris Pahor, Helga Schubert, Theodor W. Adorno, and Claudio Magris. Ultimately, this dissertation is not only a study of individual sites of memory, and of novels, plays, films, and poems relating to the memory of specific atrocities; it is also a plea for a deeper awareness of the past and how it influences the present, which is indispensable for the development of a historical consciousness.

A note on translations

I have endeavored to provide translations for all quotations in languages other than English. Where available, published translations of the works in question have been used. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations are my own.
Dear Brack,

I hear there is great excitement on the Alb because of the Grafeneck Institution.

The population recognizes the gray automobile of the SS and think they know what is going on at the constantly smoking crematory. What happens there is a secret and yet is no longer one. Thus the worst feeling has arisen there, and in my opinion there remains only one thing, to discontinue the use of the institution in this place and in any event disseminate information in a clever and sensible manner by showing motion pictures on the subject of inherited and mental diseases in just that locality.

May I ask for a report as to how the difficult problem is solved?

Heil Hitler!
H.H.30

Chapter 1

Remembering Euthanasia: Grafeneck between the Past and the Future

I can’t remember exactly when I first heard about Castle Grafeneck or what happened here. As a landmark in the geography and history of the area it is almost as if the place has always been there. In high school I remember going on excursions to Grafeneck and listening to in-class presentations by students on the place and its history. I remember going to the Schlosskonzerte and listening to jazz or classical music on the castle’s terrace. I remember a party that was thrown for the residents one summer. These are pleasant memories, joyful and alive, but the memories I have of Grafeneck as I experienced

it growing up are haunted by the knowledge of what that place once was and of the terrible things that happened there just over half a century ago. The castle has long been a home for the mentally ill and disabled, but it is now also a memorial to the crimes committed there against that same group of people in 1940 when Grafeneck was used as a euthanasia killing center by the Nazis. The contiguity of past and present at Grafeneck has always puzzled me, and so in revisiting that place now after so many years, I am looking for a way to address its paradoxical status and also to understand how the place and its history have shaped the region where I grew up and that I still in many ways consider my home.

The baroque structure of Castle Grafeneck is about an hour’s drive from Stuttgart, tucked away on a lushly wooded hill in the heart of the Swabian Alb—one of the most picturesque regions in southern Germany. The drive up there is pleasant. It is the
beginning of June and the wild flowers covering the rolling hills provide a splendid accompaniment to the brilliant yellow of the rapeseed fields. It is hard to imagine that this was the same route taken by the grey buses seventy years ago as they transported people here from all over southern Germany to their death. Looking at the site today it is almost impossible to get a sense of how it looked in 1940. Apart from the castle itself, none of the structures which made up the killing complex remain. Instead, there are many new buildings related the care facility: small houses for those residents who are able to live independently in Wohngemeinschaften; the administrative building and a sports hall; barns and stables.

Castle Grafeneck has a history stretching back almost 1,000 years. The fortress that stood there in the Middle Ages was replaced around 1560 by a Renaissance-style hunting castle. For several hundred years it remained a summer residence for the Dukes of Württemberg, and in the Eighteenth Century Duke Carl Eugen expanded the castle into a luxurious Baroque summer retreat that included a chapel and even an opera theatre. After the decline of the Duchy in the Nineteenth Century the castle became a forestry office. In 1929 it was acquired by the Lutheran Samaritan Foundation and became a home for the disabled. In 1939, the National Socialist government seized the castle and turned it into the first of six institutions for the euthanasia killing program, committed to

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31 The following summary of Grafeneck’s history draws on the account provided by Thomas Stöckle, Grafeneck 1940. Die Euthanasie-Verbrechen in Südwestdeutschland (Tübingen: Silberburg, 2002).
the extermination of people with supposedly hereditary illnesses, in the interest of so-called “racial hygiene.” The first to be outfitted with a gas chamber and crematorium, Grafeneck became the point of departure for the systematic destruction of human life that led ultimately to the “final solution.” During the eleven months of its operation (18 January–13 December 1940), 10,654 people were gassed and cremated there. After it was closed down in the winter of 1940, the castle was used for the evacuation of children from cities at risk of being bombed (an operation known as the Kinderlandverschickung) and after the end of the war, since it was situated in the French occupation zone, it was used as a vacation home for French children. In 1947 it was returned to the Samarian Foundation. Today Grafeneck is a lively community that has established close ties to the region: about one hundred mentally ill and disabled people live there and many of them go to work in the surrounding towns. At the same time Grafeneck is a memorial site that receives more than 20,000 visitors each year.

Grafeneck is a place where the past is always present. While the care facility is necessarily concerned with the wellbeing of its residents in the present, the memorial serves as a constant reminder of the terrible crimes which were committed here in 1940. It is impossible to isolate one of these identities from the other: they mutually influence, challenge, and shape each other and thus the nature of the site as a whole. The overall effect of the site is less that of a multistable image in which the human eye perceives either a vase or two faces in profile, for example, but never both at once, and
more of a palimpsest where traces of one infiltrate our perception of the other. The palimpsestic structure of the experience of Grafeneck renders this site inherently uncanny, by which I mean that the omnipresence of traces of the past contributes to an unsettling of our perception or understanding of the present we inhabit. If Grafeneck is uncanny in this sense it is because it triggers (or at least has the potential to trigger) in a visitor an intense psychological reaction resulting from an inherent and irreducible ambiguity, which the mind is unable to resolve. The term uncanny becomes especially relevant when we consider its German equivalent *unheimlich*, as theorized by Sigmund Freud in his celebrated essay “Das Unheimliche” published in 1919.\(^{32}\) As Freud observes, the term *unheimlich* “is obviously the opposite of ‘heimlich’ [‘homely’], ‘heimisch’ [‘native’]—the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar” (195). Things, however, are not so simple, since, as Freud goes on to demonstrate by means of a lengthy etymological investigation,

> among its different shades of meaning the word ‘heimlich’ exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, ‘unheimlich’. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*. [...] In general we are reminded that the word ‘heimlich’ is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. (199)

reveals something about the structure of the uncanny, namely that it is “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (217).

Buried in the words heimlich and unheimlich is the word heim, meaning “home,” which is also the root of the term Heimat, which denotes a set of spatio-temporal relations between the subject and his or her surroundings. A person’s Heimat is a place where he or she feels “at home,” invested with an affective sense of belonging and rootedness. Heimat is thus a point of orientation for a person’s identity and self-conception. Certain places have the power to challenge or disrupt our conception of “home” as a coherent and familiar point of orientation, which precipitates an intense experience of the uncanny: the Heimat is suddenly rendered unheimlich. At a site of collective memory like Grafeneck, the oscillation between the familiar and the strange resulting from the return of something in the past that has been repressed or forgotten is particularly powerful. Moreover, it invites us to confront and question the underlying assumptions of our relationship to our past and our surroundings.

The traumatic past which seeps through the fabric of the present at Grafeneck is especially apt to produce an uncanny effect in the visitor because there are no physical

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33 This is a concept invoked by W.G. Sebald in his reflections on Austrian literature after World War II, specifically in relation to the collective repression of Austria’s involvement in Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust. See W.G. Sebald, Unheimliche Heimat. Essays zur österreichischen Literatur (Salzburg: Residenz, 1991).
remnants of the horrific events which transpired there. Unlike at many other memorials to the Holocaust, none of the original structures, such as a gas chamber or prison cells, are preserved, and instead the site has been completely adapted to the needs of its present-day residents. There is a small plaque and a corner stone to mark the spot where the gas chamber once stood, but the visitor is required to recreate the structure in his or her mind, thus creating a mental image which must be superimposed on the current layout of the site, often resulting in jarring juxtapositions and overlaps. At base, there are two contradictory impulses which have constituted the site as it stands today: on the one hand, the decision immediately after the end of the war to reclaim the site as a home for the disabled led to the demolition of the former killing complex at the site, presumably in the interests of shielding the residents from the constant awareness of what happened there under National Socialism. On the other hand, the later decision to convert part of the site into a memorial to the Nazi atrocities committed there was geared toward recovering and maintaining precisely this kind of historical awareness, which was seen to be in danger of disappearing. Visiting the site today, one inescapably feels the push and pull of these opposite impulses.

The site’s twofold function makes it necessary constantly to negotiate the duty to commemorate its past and the duty to care for its present-day residents. The Grafeneck Memorial Association (Verein Gedenkstätte Grafeneck) runs the memorial and the documentation center in close co-operation with the Samaritan Foundation, which runs
the care facility. The catalogue accompanying the documentary exhibition emphasizes the Gedenkstätte's multiple functions: it provides information for relatives and family members of the people who died there, as well commemorating and documenting the fate of the numerous anonymous victims, and as a center for research and education it provides an archive, a library, a permanent exhibition, tours, and seminars, which focus on fostering historical and political awareness. The Samaritan Foundation, on the other hand presents the site as a place of life, a Begegnungsstätte, where remembering the past goes hand in hand with taking responsibility for the future and initiative for the social integration of the disabled.

Although there is a large body of scholarship dealing with memorials to the victims of the Nazi regime, there is very little scholarly discourse on euthanasia memorial sites and, to my knowledge, no in-depth discussion of the specific problems posed by Grafeneck. This chapter will explore the central paradox at the heart of its dual nature.

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35 Cultural memory scholars who discuss memorials to the victims of Nazi atrocities such as James Young, Andreas Huyssen, Rudy Koshar, and Jennifer Jordan have not discussed euthanasia memorials in their works. Political historian Peter Reichel does include a very brief description of Grafeneck in his book Politik der Erinnerung, but does not address any of the issues discussed in this chapter. Sociologist Stefanie Endlich offers a comparative description of the physical structures at several euthanasia memorials, including Grafeneck, but does not consider the implications for practices of commemoration in general. See James Edward Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), Andreas Huyssen, Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), Rudy Koshar, From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990 (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000), Jennifer A. Jordan, Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), Peter Reichel, Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die Nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1999), Stefanie Endlich, ”Das Gedenken braucht einen Ort.” Formen des Gedenkens an den authentischen
in three stages: first, I will briefly outline Grafeneck’s role in the Nazi euthanasia program, before moving on to consider its post-war history and the process of memorialization. Second, I will give an account of its present-day existence as a home for the disabled and a memorial to the victims of Nazi euthanasia, and consider how the site negotiates the contradictions inherent in these two functions. Finally, I will discuss how Grafeneck connects to and participates in contemporary discussions about the memorialization of the victims of Nazi crimes, and how it relates to other sites of the memory of Nazi euthanasia such as Hadamar, Hartheim, Ravensburg, and Berlin. I analyze how Grafeneck places itself within local, regional, and national commemorative cycles and networks as part of a broader landscape of memory, and how it challenges our assumptions regarding how commemoration can and should take place. Throughout this chapter, the notion of the uncanny as the dominant mode of experiencing Grafeneck will inform and guide my analysis. It is important to note that at Grafeneck the uncanny functions on several different levels and in several different directions. First, as I already suggested, the uncanny effect produced by the site on its visitors results from the perception that the past encroaches upon the present. Second, Grafeneck’s active present disrupts the form of solemn contemplation traditionally associated with sites of memory. Visitors coming to

Grafeneck in the hopes of “soaking in” the aura of the historical site are instead confronted with the reality of a busy care facility which has not remained frozen in time. In this case the present exerts an uncanny influence on the visitor. Finally, one must take into consideration the potential uncanniness the site may hold for its present-day residents. This is unquestionably the most difficult aspect of the site, and I cannot address this satisfactorily in the present study. What little empirical research there exists on the topic is inconclusive at best. For this reason, the primary focus of my analysis will be on the visitors rather than the residents, but it is imperative to keep this question in mind when considering a site such as Grafeneck, even if it may on some level remain unanswerable.

Grafeneck’s Past

The idea of excluding or even exterminating people deemed “unfit” for society as a means of “racial hygiene” was the subject of debate in medical and anthropological literature even before 1900. These discussions became more concrete during the economic crisis after World War I when Karl Binding, a professor of law, and Alfred Hoche, a psychiatrist, both based in Freiburg, wrote a treatise advocating the destruction of “life unworthy of life,” published in 1920.36 When Hitler seized power in 1933, the problem of

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36 Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwertens Lebens, ihr Maß und ihre*
disposing of “unnütze Esser” (“useless eaters”) became central to National Socialist health, social, and race politics. In the numerous studies on the subject, we can follow the trajectory of an ideology of “healing” the body of the Volk and “cleansing” the nation by destroying “degenerate” life through its stages: from coercive sterilization to carefully administrated mass-murder under the codename *Aktion T4*. With its main office in Tiergartenstraße 4 in Berlin (hence, *Aktion T4*), the euthanasia program was a top-secret operation that began in the fall of 1939, coinciding with the outbreak of the Second World War. This timing was quite deliberate: the regime felt that the program would meet with less resistance when the public’s attention was distracted by the war.

During the preliminary phase, the leaders of the *Aktion* selected, seized, and prepared the killing centers. Grafeneck was the first one. A pseudo-legalistic apparatus was created which would aid the registration and later the systematic killing of the physically and mentally disabled. From August 1939 on, disabled toddlers were transferred to so-called children’s wards and killed there by starvation or poison. This was followed, after January 1940, by the mass-murder of institutionalized mentally ill and disabled patients in six killing centers: Brandenburg, Grafeneck, Bernburg, Hadamar, Sonnens-
tein/Pirna, and Hartheim/Linz in Austria. The fundamental criteria for deportation to Grafeneck and later to the other euthanasia killing centers were ability to work, race, and criminality: Jews and “criminals” were placed on the list automatically, whereas for all other patients, the ability to work was the determining factor; if a patient could not perform manual labor, he or she was placed on the deportation list. During the relatively short centralized phase of the euthanasia program between the fall of 1939 and the fall of 1941, about 5,000 children and more than 70,000 adults were killed. Beginning in fall of 1941, the euthanasia program entered its final, decentralized phase in which over 200,000 people were killed through lethal injection or starvation at more than one hundred institutions throughout Germany and Austria. The victims’ families received a standardized letter of “condolence” as well as a death certificate with a fabricated date and cause of death. In all, approximately 300,000 mentally and physically disabled people were murdered over the course of the entire euthanasia program.38

In preparing Grafeneck for its role as the first euthanasia killing center, the Aktion T4 relied heavily on the co-operation of the state administrations of Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria. The Stuttgart Ministry of the Interior under Jonathan Schmid was responsible the choice of Grafeneck as the ideal site for such a center in October 1939. Within weeks, Grafeneck was expropriated and all its residents moved to a different in-

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stitution in the area. In the months that followed, the entire killing complex was installed, a few hundred meters away from the castle, which was reserved for the administration and other personnel. The killing complex was composed of a barracks containing dozens of beds (which were never used), a garage for the buses, the building housing the gas chamber, disguised as shower room, and a crematorium with two ovens. The entire area was shielded from view not only by the surrounding forest but also a tall wooden fence patrolled by SS-officers with dogs. In addition, any would-be trespassers were scared away by signs that read, “Betreten wegen Seuchengefahr verboten” (Contagious area. No trespassing). Despite attempts to keep the killings a secret, the local population eventually caught on to what was going on at the killing centers. Family members sent letters of protest demanding more information, members of the clergy delivered protest sermons (most prominently Württemberg’s Lutheran Bishop Theophil Wurm) and even members of the Nazi party—such as NS-Frauenschaft Leader Else von Löwis—openly criticized the euthanasia program.39 Until very recently, it was assumed that these protests had been direction responsible for the closing of the six killing centers in 1941. In actual fact, as recent scholarship has conclusively shown, the main reason for the dis-

continuation of the centralized killings was the fact that the pre-established killing quota had been reached (See Stöckle).

The direct links between the euthanasia program as a systematic attempt to eliminate “life unworthy of life” and the “final solution,” are by now well established. For example, after 1941 most of the personnel of the euthanasia killing centers were transferred to the extermination camps in the East, where they became involved in the administration or supervised medical experiments. Horst Schumann, for instance, first served as director of Grafeneck, before becoming head of the killing center Sonnenstein, and finally being transferred to Auschwitz in 1941. An entire group of the T4 staff, among them Christian Wirth, Kurt Franz, and Willi Mentz, were sent to Lublin in 1942 to serve under SS and Police Leader Odilo Globocnik in the Aktion Reinhard. Christian Wirth, probably the most infamous among them, had a prominent career: originally a police officer in Stuttgart, he supervised the administrative procedures and the gassings at Grafeneck and Hartheim and later became Commandant at Belzec and general inspector of the Aktion Reinhard camps (Stöckle 174). After the completion of Aktion Reinhard in 1943, Wirth and other former T4 staff transferred along with Globocnik from Lublin to Trieste to fight partisans, co-ordinate the deportation of the Jews in the region, and to establish a concentration camp and killing center in the Risiera di San Sabba, a former
rice factory on the outskirts of the city.\textsuperscript{40}

The connections between Grafeneck and the Holocaust extend far beyond technological and procedural similarities. In \textit{Homo Sacer}, Giorgio Agamben emphasizes the fact that the Nazi euthanasia program was no mere preface to the Holocaust but rather its first chapter: it is impossible to detach the Nuremberg race laws from the laws on eugenics—both the victims of the concentration camps and of the euthanasia killing centers constitute what Agamben terms “bare life,” i.e. life that ceases to have any juridical value and thus becomes the site of the exertion of sovereign power. The politicization of eugenics, that is, the regime’s arrogation of the right to make a sovereign decision on whether a life is worthy or unworthy of living, together with a genetic definition of “race,” lead to a politics of exclusion and elimination whereby anyone could potentially be deemed “undesirable.”\textsuperscript{41} Agamben makes important connections between the vic-

\textsuperscript{40} See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of these perpetrators’ careers as well as an examination of the historical connections between Grafeneck and Trieste.

\textsuperscript{41} Giorgio Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life}, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998). See also Hans-Walter Schmuhl, “Sterilisation, ‘Euthanasie’, ‘Endlösung’. Erbgesundheitspolitik unter den Bedingungen charismatischer Herrschaft,” \textit{Medizin und Gesundheitspolitik in der NS-Zeit}, ed. Norbert Frei, (München: Oldenbourg, 1991). Schmuhl notes how “the paradigm of racial hygiene conceived of ‘hereditary illness’ and ‘genetic health’ as dynamic categories, which meant that ever broader sections of society were excluded from the sphere of the ‘genetically healthy.’ This allowed the Nazis to extend the scope of their persecution of people with ‘hereditary illnesses’ almost indefinitely” (301). Roberto Esposito makes a similar point in order to show how this logic lies behind all biopolitics when he writes that “The ascription of the degenerate type to an ever vaster number of social categories—alcoholics, syphilics, homosexuals, prostitutes, the obese, even to the urban proletariat itself—reinstates the sign of this uncontrollable exchange between biological norm and juridical-political norm. What appears as the social result of a determinate biological configuration is in reality the biological representation of a prior political decision.” See Roberto Esposito, \textit{Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy} (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008): 119–20.
tims of the euthanasia program and the victims of the Holocaust. His discussion of Nazi euthanasia, however, betrays a certain hesitation when it comes to assigning the two an equal status of victimhood: the chapter on Lebensunwertes Leben situates the euthanasia program at the threshold of the transformation of Nazi biopolitics into “thanatopolitics” (Agamben Homo Sacer 142).42 The euthanasia program was, in his view, unnecessary from a eugenic as well as an economic standpoint, as its victims were “mainly children and the elderly” who were “in no condition to reproduce themselves.” Moreover, he continues,

> there is absolutely no reason to think that the program was linked to economic considerations. On the contrary, the program constituted a significant organizational burden at a time when the state apparatus was completely occupied with the war effort. (141)

In other words, from an institutional standpoint, the euthanasia program was gratuitously impractical, and as such, Hitler’s insistence on putting the program into effect “at all costs” was an exact precursor to the senseless violence of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Agamben ignores the fact that among the victims of the euthanasia program were also Jews, political dissidents, and criminals—and potentially anyone whose behavior was deemed abnormal or who did not conform to society’s norms.

> “There is no reason to doubt,” Agamben goes on to say,

that the “humanitarian” considerations that led Hitler and Himmler to elabo-

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42 On the subject of thanatopolitics and its relation to eugenics and the euthanasia program, see also Esposito, Bıos: 110–45.
rate a euthanasia program immediately after their rise to power were in good faith, just as Binding and Hoche, from their own point of view, acted in good faith in proposing the concept of “life unworthy of being lived.” (140)

It seems odd that Agamben should attribute such bona fides to a program that he himself characterizes as unnecessary and an “exercise in sovereign power” merely disguised as a solution to a “humanitarian problem” (142). In what way can the supposed “humanitarian” concerns behind the euthanasia program be construed as having been in better faith than the considerations of racial purity that led to the Holocaust, when the two were so clearly linked? If by “good faith” Agamben means that Hitler and Himmler genuinely believed that they had the nation’s best interests at heart, how is the Holocaust any different? Certainly both were given pseudo-scientific rationales, but to argue that one was somehow more justifiable than the other is questionable at best. “The name of Grafeneck,” Agamben states, “has remained sadly linked to this matter,” the matter being the transformation of the euthanasia program into “a work of mass extermination,” which happened as a result of the program being put into practice “in conditions—including the war economy and the increasing growth of concentration camps for Jews and other undesirables—that favored misuse and mistakes” (140). Although he concedes that this transformation “did not in any way depend simply on circumstance” (ibid.), his curious insistence on an implicit legitimacy, however slight, of the program is troubling and ultimately misleading.

It is precisely this line of reasoning which has meant that in spite of the inextrica-
ble links between the euthanasia program and the Holocaust, its memory continues to occupy a marginal place in contemporary public and scholarly discussions of the memory of Nazi atrocities. This is even more surprising in view of the fact that after 1941 some of the euthanasia killing centers were also used to murder thousands of Jewish prisoners and POW’s from nearby concentration camps in the so-called Aktion 14f13—a fact that has more often than not been ignored entirely.43 There are legal and cultural reasons for this silence. The punishment of the perpetrators and the rehabilitation and compensation of the victims is seen as an integral part of the public process of acknowledging and working through the crimes of the Nazi era. In the case of the perpetrators of euthanasia in both parts of Germany, however, the post-war punishment was more than lenient and all of the doctors and nurses involved were able to carry on working in their profession—even those indicted were not stripped of their medical licenses44—largely due to the widely held opinion, which Agamben appears to share, that their guilt was less easily determinable, ultimately because the euthanasia program was supposedly a medical as opposed to a genocidal matter. The widespread conviction that the measures taken


against people with disabilities during the Third Reich had been justified (or at least justifiable), or even a merciful act, effectively perpetuated the rationalization of these crimes put forward by the Nazis themselves.45

At the two Grafeneck trials held in 1948 and 1949 in Tübingen, the three doctors responsible for the killings could not be tried: two of them had been killed in the war and the third, Horst Schumann, had escaped. After having worked as a doctor in Sudan and Ghana for many years, he was finally tracked down in 1966 and indicted in the Frankfurt trial of 1970. Due to his heart condition and poor health he was released in 1972, and lived in Germany until his death over a decade later (Lifton 283–4). Thus, in 1949 only a total of ten nurses, administrators, and police officers could be charged in Tübingen, and only five of them received long-term sentences, which were commuted in 1950 into shorter sentences.46 By the 1960s all of the defendants in the Grafeneck trials were free again (Cf. Stöckle). Most of these perpetrators never acknowledged their guilt and continued to defend their actions.47

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47 See for example Klee, “Euthanasie”, Alexander Mitscherlich and Fred Mielke, eds., Medizin ohne
ment with the role played by the medical profession in the euthanasia crimes, coupled with certain patterns of thinking (as exemplified by Agamben’s relativization of the euthanasia program) hindered the establishment of a proper politics of compensation. Indeed, the outcome proved to be quite the opposite: while the perpetrators were exculpated and continued to enjoy high social status, their victims were excluded from any form of juridical or social acknowledgement or financial compensation. Furthermore, in many cases, the very doctors and nurses who had been involved in the Nazi euthanasia program and had been allowed to continue practicing medicine after the end of the war served as expert witnesses in compensation suits filed by their former victims. The more than 350,000 victims of coercive sterilization and the circa 300,000 victims of Nazi euthanasia were not legally considered victims of National Socialism because they were not considered part of this specific form of racial, religious, or political persecution.

The insistence on separating the concepts of ethnic and eugenic or social racism illustrates the paradoxical nature of this exclusive conception of victimhood. There seems to be a stubborn reluctance to acknowledge that the sterilizations or euthanasia murders were part of the “cleansing the race” ideology and that social engineering was

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at the basis of the Nazis’ exterminatory racism in both cases. Thus, the victims of eugenic racism were excluded from the 1953 Entschädigungsgesetz and did not receive compensation until the late 1980s, when the law was minimally revised after repeated petitions of the Bund der “Euthanasie”-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten. Even today the victims of coercive sterilization and euthanasia do not have the same status as the victims of racial, political, or religious persecution, and the Nazi Sterilization Law (Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses) from 1933 remains in effect to this day.49

Historians were extremely late to examine the role of the medical and psychiatric professions during the Third Reich. There seemed to be a certain insecurity among German historians as to who exactly was “responsible” for writing the history of the Nazi crimes against the mentally ill and disabled. This was countered in the 1990s by a wave of local historiography originating directly at the sites themselves. Local historians, doctors, directors, and social workers at the clinics and homes implicated in the euthanasia program began to document the history of their own institutions. There is by now a considerable body of local scholarship but it has nonetheless been slow to stimulate a broader public awareness of the topic.

The unresolved memory of Nazi euthanasia in Germany haunts contemporary debates about mercy killing or assisted suicide, eugenics, and mental illness. The word *euthanasia* is derived from the Greek for a gentle, easy death (εὖ-, good, well + θάνατος, death). In many countries it is used to describe assisted suicide in any medical context, but as a result of the term’s specific historical associations in Germany it is now used exclusively of the Nazi atrocities. In discussions about assisted suicide and mercy killing the term has been replaced by *aktive und passive Sterbehilfe*.

Moreover, a major cultural issue that prevents a coming to terms with the memory of euthanasia is certainly society’s difficult relationship to disability in general and mental illness in particular. The tendency to evaluate a human life according to its socio-economic “usefulness,” the insistence on defining mental illness as some sort of deviation from or as a threat to pre-existing norms contribute to a continuing marginalization of the disabled and an insecurity regarding interactions with them. Moreover, recent advances in biomedicine and genetic research have made it possible to identify and prevent disabilities in unborn children, and have revealed that many psychological disorders are in fact hereditary.

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51 Disability has only recently become of interest to cultural historians. In her survey on *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, Carol Poore reveals how central the notion of disability is to modern German culture. Focusing on representations of disability in film and literature from the Weimar Republic to the current administration, she acknowledges the central importance of mental disability especially in the context of Nazi euthanasia, but her focus is almost exclusively on representations of physical disability and she does not include memorials. I present a more in-depth discussion of Poore’s book in the next chapter.
Uta George astutely observes, “Die Annahme, eine Behinderung sei heute vermeidbar, verhindert eine tiefergehende Auseinandersetzung mit eigenen Vorurteilen. Wieder scheint die Wissenschaft die Lösung für ein soziales Phänomen gefunden zu haben.”\(^{52}\)

The steadfast belief held by many that disability must be “cured” rather than accommodated, tacitly affirms eugenicist notions that a disabled life is “not worth living.”

**Grafeneck Today**

The picturesque hills surrounding the baroque structure of the castle lend Grafeneck a peaceful air, but the idyllic scene does not offer a ready-made narrative of redemption. The past is always present in this idyll, and uncannily so. A tree-lined road leads from the castle to the memorial complex. In the hall of the administrative building hangs a large black and white canvas depicting the tree-lined road that leads past the residents’ houses to the memorial chapel. The artist Normann Seibold named it *Zeitzeugen*: the old trees are witnesses to the place’s history, even though nature and time have covered its traces. Seibold, who has a degree from the arts academy in Karlsruhe, is a resident of Grafeneck. His studio in the castle contains over 2,500 of his own paintings.\(^{53}\) Like him,

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\(^{52}\) George, *Kollektive Erinnerung*: 36. George is of course not alone in articulating this criticism of the normativity supported by modern science. See for example Petra Lutz, et al., eds., *Der [im-]perfekte Mensch. Metamorphosen von Normalität und Abweichung* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), and Michael Bérubé, *Life as We Know It: A Father, a Family, and an Exceptional Child* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

\(^{53}\) The *Samariterstift Grafeneck* recently co-organized an exhibition of Seibold’s works at the *Stadthaus* in
all of Grafeneck’s residents know what happened here in the past. Balancing the simultaneity of past and present, however, has not always been easy at Grafeneck: a glance at its unique history since 1945 illustrates the complicated and highly self-conscious process of commemoration at a site that was a care facility long before it became a memorial.

At Grafeneck, memorialization of the past is complemented by a confrontation with the present-day residents. The memorial and documentation center are not separate from the residents’ living quarters. Encounters between visitors and residents are inevitable: the residents approach visitors in order to chat or join a tour group. There is no clear border between the sites of the past and those of the present: the visitors have to negotiate not only what they learn about the atrocities of the past but also their possible insecurity or discomfort in the face of disability, the fact that they are made aware of the fragility of their own health and well-being, and the fact that they are, in a sense, intruding on the residents’ home and everyday life.

Grafeneck differs in this respect from other euthanasia memorial sites such as Hadamar or Hartheim. The castle (which housed the Nazi administration) is the site’s only remaining original structure, and so it is up to the visitors to reconstruct in their im-

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Ulm. Clearly, this is an important step in Grafeneck’s mission of integrating its residents in the local community, but it is nevertheless striking that the exhibition should be emphatically labeled “Outsider Art”—art that, according to the leaflet that accompanies the exhibition, exists at the margins of the established art business, created by the “mentally ill, outsiders, or the maladjusted.” “Normann Seibold. Malerei als Naturereignis,” Exhibition flyer, (Ulm: Stadthaus Ulm, 2008).
agination how it might have looked in 1940. Even though it is of course an authentic site, Grafeneck does not, and cannot, convey the aura of an unreconstructed historical reality. Visitors to authentic sites of trauma generally expect the physical space to resonate with and amplify their sense of the historical magnitude of the events which occurred there in the past. They expect to come away with a personal experience of history that far transcends the bare historical facts a documentary exhibition can provide. Borrowing from cultural theorist Aby Warburg, Aleida Assmann describes this sense of expectation brought to authentic sites of trauma as the search for a site-specific force of memory (ortsimmanente Gedächtniskraft) or even the belief in what she refers to as Antaieic magic (antäische Magie), a kind of magic power that resides in the direct contact with the site and that is grounded in its authenticity—a reference to the mythical giant Antaeus whose immense strength was dependent on maintaining contact with the ground. The visitor’s expectation of history coming to life, according to Assmann, is similar to the pilgrim’s seeking a personal connection to an event in the past. Grafeneck counters this general fixation with or even fetishization of authentic sites that has more often than not led to a conversion of sites of memory into sites of commercial history-tourism.

Visitors may take a guided tour of the entire site, but they can also explore the grounds on their own, with no prescribed route to follow. They may read about Grafeneck’s history at the exhibition but they are always firmly grounded in the present of the

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54 Assmann, Der lange Schatten: 223.
site: their experience is shaped by the unmediated encounter with its daily life as a care facility and home for the disabled. In contrast, most of the other euthanasia memorial sites are set distinctly apart from the daily routine of the psychiatric clinics there, as at Hadamar, or serve exclusively as memorials, as at Hartheim, where the visitors’ experience is structured around the preserved architectural remains of the killing complex. While each of these sites features exhibitions that introduce the visitors to past and current issues of disability, the encounter remains a mediated one and visitors can determine how much they want to engage with the topic.

The Memory of Grafeneck

Thomas Stöckle, the director of the memorial at Grafeneck, describes its history as an ongoing struggle for memory that reaches beyond the site into the surrounding region (Stöckle 56–8). In 1947 the Samaritan Foundation reclaimed the castle, and the former residents who had miraculously evaded the euthanasia program returned to their old home (presumably they had “slipped through” the Aktion T4’s net as a result of having been transferred several times to various homes). Even after everything that had happened there, the Samaritan Foundation apparently still considered Grafeneck the home of these residents and its location beneficial to their health. After the war, the Allies supervised an investigation into the details of the procedures at Grafeneck that led to the
documentation of the facts and a collection of testimonies from collaborators and eye-witnesses. While the two war crime trials in Tübingen and the conviction of some of the perpetrators received extensive media coverage, the public interest in the topic was limited and the discussion of the euthanasia crimes petered out shortly after that. If and when the subject did resurface in the years that followed, it was mostly presented in an attenuating or even revisionist light. At the same time, the Samaritan Foundation began to take credit for the fact that all of Grafeneck’s residents had escaped deportation. In this version of events, the residents’ miraculous escape was due entirely to the Foundation’s heroic resistance to the euthanasia program. The fact that the Samaritan Foundation also actively supported the Nazi regime’s coercive sterilization policy in the years before the war was conveniently forgotten. Similarly, the fact that the Samaritan Foundation received 25,000 Reichsmark in compensation for ceding Grafeneck to the Nazis, has only recently come to light.55

Commemoration began on the initiative of the Samaritan Foundation: in 1962 they erected as the first element of the memorial complex a large stone cross next to the two graves holding the 250 urns found at the site. As Dietrich Sachs, the former director of the care facility at Grafeneck, explains, there was a constant tension and negotiation between what the Samaritan Foundation thought best for the residents and what

was to be an appropriate form of commemoration for the victims. In 1965, the building that had housed the gas chamber was torn down to make room for livestock and farming equipment. At the time, the demolition met with unanimous public approval, whereas today such a move would of course provoke intense debate.\textsuperscript{56} Today the former gas chamber is marked by a cornerstone and a small sign: “Here once stood the building in which 10,654 people were gassed to death in 1940.” Erected in 2005 and reconstructed using sophisticated mapping technology, the cornerstone marks the precise location of the mass murder.\textsuperscript{57} This inscription emphasizes the humanity of the victims, refusing to stigmatize them as different. Enigmatic and shocking in its brevity, the sign indirectly asks visitors to seek further information at the documentation center. In the topography of the site, the cornerstone marks the heart of Grafeneck as a site of trauma, but it is not the heart of the memorial. In contrast to Hadamar or Hartheim, commemoration at Grafeneck is not based on the preservation of authentic structures, nor is it structured exclusively around a tailor-made memorial experience—rather, it is a dynamic process linked to the people who live and work there.

In addition, the site hosts annual memorial services, the first of which took place in October 1979, the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Nazi expropriation of the castle, organized

\textsuperscript{56} Thus a newspaper article from 1966 expresses profound relief that after 23 years, the building is finally gone. See “Nachts kamen die grauen Omnibusse,” \textit{Stuttgarter Nachrichten} 12 Nov. 1966.

\textsuperscript{57} The 2005 sign replaced an earlier sign, erected in 2003, with the somewhat vague and ominous inscription “Here stood the House of Death ‘10654’” and noting the exact geographical parameters of the building.
by a group of Lutheran priests, members of the local Lutheran youth organizations, and Grafeneck employees. More than 1,000 people took part in a memorial walk from the surrounding towns and villages to attend the service. In 1982, a memorial plaque was placed on one of the urn graves in the cemetery bearing the inscription “In memory of the victims of inhumanity—Grafeneck 1940” (Zum Gedenken an die Opfer der Unmenschlichkeit). This somewhat obliquely phrased memorial was augmented in 1985 by another plaque giving a historical description of the events.\footnote{The plaque reads: “Grafeneck ist seit 1929 ein Behindertenheim der Samariterstiftung. Dieser Friedhof wurde 1930 für das Heim angelegt. 1939 beschlagnahmten die Nationalsozialisten die Einrichtung. Die Bewohner mussten Grafeneck verlassen. Sie fanden zunächst Aufnahme im Kloster Reute bei Bad Waldsee, In der Nähe des landwirtschaftlichen Gebäudes wurde dann eine Tötungsanstalt zur Durchführung von Hitlers Euthanasie-Programm eingerichtet. Mehr als 10500 Menschen sind hier von Januar bis Dezember 1940 vergast worden. Die meisten dieser behinderten Frauen, Männer und Kinder kamen aus badischen, bayerischen und württembergischen Heimen und Anstalten. In den beiden großen Gräbern befinden sich 250 Urnen mit Asche von Ermordeten. 1941 wurde das Schloss für die Kinderlandverschickung erneut beschlagnahmt. Nach Kriegsende war es ein Erholungshiem für französische Kinder. 1947 wurde Grafeneck an die Samariterstiftung zurückgegeben. Seither dient der Friedhof seiner ursprünglichen Bestimmung. Ich weiß der Herr wird des Elenden Sache und der Armen Recht ausführen. Psalm 140.13.”} Both inscriptions are examples of a certain blindness and hesitation which was a frequent characteristic of the commemoration of Nazi crimes in the late 70s and early 80s. While the first inscription remains rather abstract and avoids specifying what happened or who was responsible for it, the second is explicit about what happened, but places the responsibility and guilt for these events on Hitler and the National Socialists exclusively, as though they had been an external occupying force—a prevalent attitude in the years after the war and even to this day. Emphasizing the continuity of Grafeneck as a Christian care facility since
1929, the 1985 plaque also expresses the simultaneity of past and present in its description of the cemetery: the cemetery is a site of memory and mourning for the victims of the euthanasia program and continues to be the place where the residents of Grafeneck are buried. Along with the first book on the euthanasia killings at Grafeneck, written by the director of the Samaritan Foundation, Karl Morlok, these two plaques marked the beginning of a slow process of public acknowledgment.59 Historian and founding member of the Arbeitskreis Gedenkstätte Grafeneck (founded in 1979) Eberhard Zacher reports that as late as 1986 he was prevented from giving a lecture on the Nazi crimes at Grafeneck, presumably, he says, because the organizers were worried that the names of local business owners who had collaborated with the Nazis would come up.60

59 The introduction explains the Samaritan Foundation’s reluctance to putting up explanatory or commemorative plaques until then as and act of consideration for the residents. See Karl Morlok, Wo bringt ihr uns hin?: “Geheime Reichssache” Grafeneck (Stuttgart: Quell, 1985).

The breakthrough in the conceptualization of the memorial came in 1989 when, under the slogan “Commemoration Needs a Place” (Das Gedenken braucht einen Ort), a memorial chapel was erected, accompanied by a small documentary exhibition in the castle. The chapel, designed by the local architect Eberhard Weinbrenner, stands in sharp contrast to the landscape that surrounds it: its eerie, skeletal structure, covered by a pentagonal roof, looms over a large granite altar with an engraved cross. The entire construction is framed by a stone wall with a large rent stone slab at its center. The stone and the chapel’s steel structure create a disturbing sensation of impending pain, danger, and rupture. However, since it has no walls, the surrounding landscape becomes part of the chapel, and the trees and lawns counter the feeling of unease. While the chapel is of course used for the annual memorial services, its openness also invites other, individual forms of commemoration. Some visitors, as Dietrich Sachs explains, interpret the split stone as a rupture in the wall of silence that surrounded the events at Grafeneck for decades after the war. Some see the chapel as a void to be filled by actions and words. The memorial itself, composed of various different elements has always embodied the process of finding words and of creating a dialogue. The stone wall, for instance, that links the different components of the site and leads visitors to the memorial book was erected by a group of local and international students from the US, Hungary, and the Gaza Strip over the course of a summer seminar entitled “The Value of Life” (Wert des Lebens). In the seminar they learned about Nazi euthanasia but also discussed issues such
as abortion, eugenics, and human rights.

While commemoration at Grafeneck began within a traditional Christian idiom—of the six former euthanasia killing centers that are now memorial sites it is the only Christian institution—the memorial complex today unites traditional religious forms of mourning and remembrance with other, non-religious ones. The entrance to the memorial complex, for instance, is marked by a stone threshold bearing the names of the institutions whose patients became victims of the Nazi euthanasia program at Grafeneck.

The growing interest of victims’ families and the general public as well as recently established contacts with archives and memorial sites all over Germany have set in motion an ongoing process of historical Aufarbeitung. Of the 10,654 victims of Grafeneck more than 8,000 have been identified and written down in the memorial book, but it
may be impossible to identify all of them. The Alphabet Garden, created by the Jewish-American artist Diane Samuels in 1998, speaks to the impossibility of a definitive conclusion to this process. It consists of 26 stone cubes, each engraved with a letter of the Roman alphabet and partly sunk into the earth in a field adjacent to the chapel, and a large stone with the inscription, “Bitte, nimm meine Buchstaben und forme daraus Gebete” (Please, take my letters and fashion them into prayers). Inspired by a Jewish tale about a man who prays reciting the letters of the alphabet asking God to form prayers from the letters, the garden engages the visitors in a meditative process of looking up the names in the book, walking around in order to find the letters to spell out those names and/or all the possible names of unknown victims. This memorial links not only the more than one hundred Jewish victims of Grafeneck with the Christian but also the known and the unknown. Depending on the season, the letters may be hidden amongst grass or flowers, leaves or snow, but the artist explicitly does not want the garden to be tended. Visitors express mixed opinions on this concept of an “ungroomed” memorial. Some complain about its untidiness, others overlook it completely, but many are inspired by it: they interpret the garden as a sort of cemetery and place candles or flowers on certain letters. In a sense, concerns about the state of the garden reflect broader concerns about the status of things (and, by implication, individuals) that do not conform to particular preconceptions and norms. The conscious decision not to keep everything ordered and regimented can likewise be seen as a statement of the acceptance of human
difference that Grafeneck stands for.

While the Alphabet Garden introduces Jewish forms of commemoration and anti-monumental discourse into the memorial complex, the 2003 local art project *10,654—art for grafeneck*—where words and writing reach their limits (*kunst für grafeneck—wo wort und schrift ans ende kommen*) also includes non-religious artistic and creative forms, in media such as visual art, music, and performance. Featuring local artists, residents of Grafeneck, and student groups, these art works, just like the Alphabet Garden, participate in a more general trend towards the impermanent and interactive, towards a type of memorial that James Young has termed the “counter-monument.” Made of materials that will change or vanish completely over time, these works provoke rather than reconcile
and raise questions instead of providing answers. One example of the transient memorials at Grafeneck is Jorunn Hamer’s sculpture *Ad Acta*, a tall spike piercing a large stack of paper that is meant to symbolize the administrative aspect of mass murder. As the paper decomposes over time, eventually only the spike will remain. Perhaps the best example is the performance piece created by local cantor Stefan Lust. Taking passages from documents, trial testimonies and letters, Lust created a text collage which was read aloud by actors to musical accompaniment. A stylized re-enactment of the trial, the performance makes the documents speak and reveals the gap between words and action. It does not offer consolation, nor does it prescribe a means of commemoration: rather, it prompts a reflection on the power and limitations of language and on the role of art in finding the difficult balance between embodiment of memory and its estrangement. There is no recording, since the memorial is only meant to exist in the moment of its performance, and it has not been performed since.

Where Stefan Lust’s performance brought the bureaucratic documents of systematic murder to life, another memorial associated with Grafeneck restores to the urban landscape the actual physical means of the victims’ deportation: the Denkmal der grauen Busse (Grey Bus Memorial). Designed in 2005 by the artists Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz for a competition held by the city of Ravensburg and the *Zentrum für Psychiatrie Weißenaup* to commemorate the deportation of more than 550 of its patients to Grafeneck, it consists of two concrete replicas of the grey buses used to deport mentally
disabled people to the Nazi euthanasia killing centers. The buses are divided in half and visitors can walk through the narrow space in the middle and read the inscription: “Wo-hin bringt ihr uns?” [Where are you taking us?], echoing the words reportedly spoken by a patient at Weißenau about to be transported to Grafeneck.\(^{61}\) These concrete buses are the same size and have the outward appearance of the original grey buses that were a familiar sight on the streets of this region in 1940, and seeing them again may trigger unpleasant memories, particularly for older generations. Yet the mimetic similarity of the grey buses is counteracted by the solidity of their concrete form as well as the central rift, which renders these imposing hulks at once opaque and permeable: although you can walk straight through the middle of the bus, the two halves on either side remain inaccessible. You cannot see through the windows, nor open the door, and going inside the bus will not provide any answers, it only confronts you with the starkly poignant question: “Where are you taking us?”

The first bus stands in the former entrance to the Weißenau clinic, the back half resting on the clinic’s property, and the front half jutting out into the city, thus emphasizing the public aspect of the memory of euthanasia: forever frozen in the moment of departure, the bus points to the fact that an entire community and an entire region silently witnessed the exclusion and deportation of so many of its members. “Für uns waren die

grauen Busse das stärkste Zeichen,” Knitz and Hoheisel explain.

Sie waren in den Dörfern und Städten bekannt gewesen. Keiner hielt sie auf, obwohl bald viele von den Todesfahrten wussten oder davon ahnten, wenn die Busse mitten durch ihre Dörfer und Städte in Richtung Grafeneck fuhren. Wir haben bewusst dieses Werkzeug der Täter als Erinnerungszeichen gewählt, weil wir denken, dass im Land der Täter vor allem auch die Tat und die Täter des fabrikmäßig durchgeführten Massenmordes erinnert werden müssen, anstatt nur die Opfer in Trauer-Denkmälen zu ehren.62 (69)

What makes this memorial so compelling is precisely the fact that it repurposes the perpetrators’ means of deportation as a means of transport for the memory of their victims.

The Grey Bus memorial thus represents a return of the repressed in the landscape. This function as a “memory transport” becomes even clearer when we consider the second bus, which instead of being rooted in one place, is constantly moving from city to city. Knitz and Hoheisel conceive of commemoration as an open-ended process, which this second bus is meant to embody. The concept of the twin buses, one stationary, one moving, not only links regional and national sites of the memory of Nazi euthanasia, but it also involves the different communities in its progress. Towns and cities can apply to host the Grey Bus memorial for a given period. The council of each town is responsible

62 “For us the grey buses were the most powerful sign. They were known in the villages and towns. Nobody stopped them even though people quickly came to know or suspect the true purpose of these buses that drove through their villages and towns on the way to Grafeneck. We deliberately chose this instrument of the perpetrators as a sign of memory because we believe that in the land of the perpetrators it is imperative that we also remember those who perpetrated the industrialized mass murder, instead of only honoring the victims at sites of mourning.” See also Klee, “Euthanasie”, Nowak, “Medizin”, and Peter Eitel, ed., Ravensburg im Dritten Reich. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Stadt (Ravensburg: Oberschwäbische Verlagsanstalt, 1997). Klee and Nowak show that as early as February 1940, one month after the beginning of the killings in Grafeneck, rumors spread among the population. Klee notes that street workers took off their hats when the grey buses passed by and that in some instances victims’ families even received two urns instead of one.
for raising the money to pay for the transportation and installation of the memorial. In this way the local community actively chooses to have this memory revisited upon their town, where it will stay until the next town has raised the money to move it again. This process can take months or even years, and there is no foreseeable end to it.

The second bus began its long journey in Ravensburg in 2007, and in January 2008 it traveled to Berlin, where it remained for a year, parked in front of the Berlin Philharmonic on the Tiergartenstraße, the street which once housed the administration of the euthanasia program, and was thus the point of origin for the *Aktion T4*. The presence of the grey bus at this location brought renewed attention to another memorial on the site, Richard Serra’s *Berlin Junction*, a steel sculpture placed there in 1987 and later re-dedicated by the city of Berlin to the memory of the victims of Nazi euthanasia. In its abstract form, this memorial has often been misinterpreted as “Kunst am Bau,” a sculp-
ture belonging to the building of the Berlin Philharmonic, and the memorial plaque on the ground at its side is easily overlooked. The Stiftung Topographie des Terrors is currently considering redesigning the site, but it is perhaps a testament to the insecurity surrounding the memorialization of Nazi euthanasia that a satisfactory solution has yet to be found there. Since January 2009, the bus has traveled to the former euthanasia killing center in Brandenburg an der Havel and to Stuttgart where it stood in front of the Ministry of the Interior, the former headquarters of the euthanasia program for Baden-Württemberg. In May 2010 it moved again, this time to Neuendettelsau, to commemorate the 1,238 patients deported from local institutions to the killing center in Pirna, which is where the bus has been stationed since June 2010. Possible future destinations include other former euthanasia killing centers in Germany and Austria, and there has even been talk of taking the memorial to Milan.

Every time the bus moves from one place to another, the concrete base is left behind as a silent reminder. Confronted with the empty concrete base, the public must re-create the memorial from memory, as it were. If a memorial is to be judged according to the reactions it provokes (in terms of dialogue or debate), its educational value, and its potential for stimulating an engagement with a particular memory, then the concept behind the moving Grey Bus is indeed compelling: like a specter of the past, it appears in places that once were connected to the Nazi euthanasia program and makes people aware of the forgotten or repressed history of their immediate surroundings. It then
moves on, leaving behind a trace that reminds people of the memorial that was once there. In the end, it is the public who must carry the memory: the responsibility of remembering the victims has been transferred from the memorial unto the public.63

Grafeneck in the Future

It was not until 2000 that the memorial at Grafeneck was able to employ a full-time historian, Thomas Stöckle. Five years later the documentation center was opened as a place for research and education. While the memorial complex focuses on the mourning and commemoration of the victims and thus gives minimal historical information, the

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63 Another artist who creates memorials that invade people’s everyday surroundings is Gunter Demnig. His *Stumbling Stones* (*Stolpersteine*), brass covered stone cubes engraved with the names of victims of Nazi persecution and the date of their death directly in front of the house where the person lived. While passersby “stumble” momentarily over these stones, present-day occupants are now constantly and uncannily reminded of these buildings’ history. In the past years, several *Stumbling Stones* for victims of Grafeneck have been placed in Stuttgart, Freiburg, Ludwigsburg, and Konstanz.
permanent exhibition at the documentation center supplies the historical context of the euthanasia crimes and also documents the history of commemoration at Grafeneck. The documentary exhibition is divided into three parts, each in a separate room. The first part briefly traces Grafeneck’s history from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century. The second, most extensive part of the exhibition illustrates with the help of original documents from the archive, photos, and quotations from eyewitness accounts the processes that led to the industrial mass-murder. Naming the perpetrators and tracing their careers during the Third Reich is a crucial component of the exhibition, as is illustrating the connections between the euthanasia program and the Holocaust.\(^{64}\) One section is devoted to acts of protest and resistance by the church, victims’ relatives, and also among members of the Nazi Party itself. Beyond these protests, the exhibition does not provide any information regarding the position of the church (Catholic and Protestant) nor of the Samaritan Foundation vis-à-vis National Socialist policies regarding coercive sterilization or the euthanasia program. This omission is due in part to the fact that much of the relevant research on this topic has only been conducted since the establishment of the documentary exhibition, but it may also reflect one of the disadvantages of Grafeneck’s dual status, since it would be reasonable to assume that the Samaritan Foundation exerts some degree of influence, directly or indirectly, on the shape and content of the memorial.

\(^{64}\) I expand on this aspect in Chapter Three.
The third part addresses the silence and repression of the post war period as well as the unsatisfactory punishment of the perpetrators. It also traces the conceptualization of the memorial site as it is today and illustrates how Grafeneck is now part of a larger regional network of sites commemorating the victims of euthanasia. While the Grey Bus Memorial is still on its long journey to Grafeneck (and it is not certain how long its journey through Germany will take, as that depends on how many stops it makes and how long each of its sojourns lasts), the buses are present in the exhibition in the form of an almost to-scale photograph from 1940 on the wall facing the exhibition.

Structured exclusively around the historical facts of the crime, the exhibition lacks a personal approach to the topic. The only story of an individual victim at the exhibition is that of Theodor K., and even that consists of only a few words. Aged 36 and diagnosed with schizophrenia, Theodor K. was a patient in the Christophshad institution, from whence he was deported to Grafeneck and killed on November 25, 1940. The photo shows a handsome young man with a sad look in his eyes, but there is no information about his life, only about his death. In most cases it is extremely difficult to find information about the victims’ lives, but in the past decade there have been increasing efforts by scholars and family members to reconstruct victim biographies with the help of personal letters and other documents. So why does the exhibition at Grafeneck not include more stories of victims? The memorial in Pirna-Sonnenstein, for example, has a Gedenkraum with the stories and pictures of 22 victims, and the documentary exhibition in Hadamar
also includes several short biographical sketches. Although the memorial at Grafeneck might easily incorporate and benefit from more such biographies, a possible reason for not doing so is the two-part structure of Grafeneck as a “living memorial” that unites the functions of a Denkmal and a Mahnmal: visitors commemorate the victims in the cemetery, the chapel, and with the memorial book and the alphabet garden, and they learn about the crimes of the perpetrators at the documentation center. But it is through the personal encounters with the present-day residents—all of whom would probably have met their death there in 1940—that visitors establish a personal connection to Grafeneck's history. Such encounters render the residents participants (willing or not) in a performative aspect of the memorial, which may prompt visitors to think about what makes life worth living and what gives someone the right to determine that one way or the other. In conversation with the past and the present of Grafeneck, visitors are confronted with questions about their tolerance of disability in others and how it relates to their own health. Thus, Grafeneck as a whole unites the two imperatives of “never forget” (the Denkmal) and “never again” (the Mahnmal).

Given the nature of the crimes and the identities of the victims commemorated at Grafeneck, it is surprising to note that there are currently no special measures being taken to accommodate visitors with disabilities, beyond whatever structural features the site already has due to its function as a care facility. The documentation center is wheelchair accessible, but the exhibition guide is not available in Braille or in simplified lan-
language. This means that the commemorative function of Grafeneck is almost entirely designed with non-disabled visitors in mind, while people with disabilities who, after all, have every reason to be particularly interested in the site and its history, are effectively excluded. The implications of this fact become all the more glaring if we consider the reaction a similar exclusionary policy would provoke at a Holocaust memorial which made it difficult or impossible for Jews and other minorities to visit or engage with the site. The failure of the memorial at Grafeneck to cater to disabled visitors reflects the more general assumption in society at large that people with disabilities lack either the desire or the capacity to participate meaningfully in historical and political education. But, as Uta George clearly illustrates in her study of the educational programs for people with learning disabilities at Hadamar, the disabled are in fact both highly invested in learning about this particular history and are able to connect it to present-day human rights issues, and their own situation in contemporary society (12).

In the spring of 2009, Oliver Wacker, a student at the teachers’ college in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart conducted interviews with residents at Grafeneck in order to get a sense of their perception of the site and its history. As he explains, he initially approached the staff at the care facility to ask whether they could nominate residents who had engaged in some way with the history of Nazi euthanasia and who would be willing and able to answer questions about their thoughts and opinions on the matter. Of the twelve residents the staff recommended, Wacker chose two to interview. The main
questions he asked were: a) which physical structures at the site do the residents associate with Nazi euthanasia? b) how do these structures and the memorial complex influence the residents’ daily lives? c) do the residents make use of the informational materials provided by the documentation center, and if so, how? Given the extremely small sample size, and the way the interviews were conducted—mostly yes or no answers to increasingly leading questions—it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from Wacker’s study with regard to the perception of life at Grafeneck held by the residents of the care facility. “Frau S.” one of the two interviewees, said that she had read the information at the documentation center and was eager to discuss these issues with her fellow residents and with visitors to the memorial. “Herr R.” told Wacker that he tended to avoid the documentation center because he found the images frightening. “Frau S.” also reported that she had difficulty separating private space from the public space of the memorial, which tended to produce feelings of anxiety. Both interviewees were conscious of the fact that they themselves would have been among the victims of the euthanasia program, and both locate the site’s past in the documentation center, particularly because of the photographs displayed there.65

In June 2009, a Gedenkstättenseminar was held at Grafeneck that included presentations by historians and scholars as well as roundtable discussions with directors of

the various euthanasia memorial sites in Germany and Austria. Besides presentations on the latest historical research on issues such as the development of biopolitics and racial hygiene in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century, the role of coercive sterilization as precursor to the euthanasia program, the persecution of people deemed “asocial” and “criminal” within the framework of the euthanasia program, and the connections between the euthanasia program and the Holocaust, the seminar also discussed issues of commemoration and memorialization. Seminar organizers Thomas Stöckle and Franka Rößner organized a joint tour of Grafeneck together with the current director of the care facility, Markus Mörike, and a workshop to address the specific issues of commemoration at the site, leading to a more general comparative discussion of various existing memorials to the victims of euthanasia, such as the Grey Bus Memorial and the recently opened memorial at the Wehnen clinic near Oldenburg, as well as what new forms of commemoration might be seen and implemented in the future.66

October 2009 marked the 70th anniversary of the expropriation of Castle Grafeneck by the Nazis. On this occasion, SWR television broadcast a documentary film about Grafeneck and Nazi euthanasia, directed by Knut Weinrich. The film tells the story of the site via the personal stories of three victims, Martin Bader, Emma Dapp, and Dieter Neumeier, narrated by their family members. This approach to the legacy of Nazi euthanasia marks a decisive shift away from the depersonalized mode which has characterized

66 The proceedings of this conference are available online at http://www.gedenkstaettenforum.de
the discourse on this period until now. With great subtlety and compassion, the film presents these victims as human beings whose right to life cannot be disputed.67

In the same month, a so-called *Spur der Erinnerung*—an 80km long “trail” or “trace” of memory in the form of a continuous line leading from Grafeneck to the Ministry of the Interior in Stuttgart—symbolically linked the site where the mass murder was planned to where it was carried out. Over the course of four days, 13–16 October, over seven thousand volunteers from the region worked together to paint the trail on roads, sidewalks, and town squares, which required over seven hundred liters of violet paint.68 The organizers chose the color as it represents not only mourning and suffering but also understanding and new beginnings (violet is the liturgical color of Lent).69 A joint initiative of the *Arbeitskreis Euthanasie*, a part of the *Initiative Stuttgarter Stolpersteine*,70 and the *AnStifter*, an intercultural group, this transient memorial was entirely dependent on the active participation of a great many groups and members of the public. Dozens of local organizations, groups, choirs, religious congregations, schools, including a number of special schools, as well as the residents of Grafeneck took part in the event. Each

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67 Grafeneck 1940. *Die Mordfabrik auf der Schwäbischen Alb* (dir. Knut Weinrich, 2009). Emma Dapp is the subject of a biography written by her grandson Hans-Ulrich Dapp, which I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.


69 See http://www.spur-der-erinnerung.de

70 This initiative was founded to bring Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* (see footnote 63 above) to Stuttgart. Several of the *Stolpersteine* placed in Stuttgart commemorate victims of Nazi Euthanasia who were murdered in Grafeneck.
group was responsible for painting one section of the line on the stretch of road leading through their hometown. In addition, there was a comprehensive accompanying program of artistic, cultural, and educational events that took place over these four days, including a two day sponsored walk involving disabled and non-disabled participants along the Spur from Grafeneck to Stuttgart, symbolically reversing the trajectory of the grey buses.  

At Grafeneck another temporary memorial was erected: a row of wooden steleae on which 10,654 violet crosses were painted, one for each victim who died there.

Because it was planned, organized, and carried out entirely by the general public (only the idea and the overall organizational

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framework is supplied by the initiators) the project challenged dominant and rigidly structured rituals of commemoration such as memorial services, moments of silence, or other such ceremonies. The public not only actively participated in the making of the memorial, and thus, the making of memory; they also entered into a dialogue with each other about what the project means to them. In a broader sense, the project thus also asked people to think about how the memorialization of events that took place more than seventy years ago should take place today. Over time, the line will fade away and leave no trace behind: the concept of the vanishing memorial is probably the most powerful symbol of the slow fade of memory with the passage of time. Thus the memorial serves to emphasize the need for a constantly renewed effort to remember. There can be no final word; other projects and activities must come after it.

Since 2005, Grafeneck has been receiving an ever-increasing number of visitors—some 20,000 last year. While this is unquestionably a positive development and shows the growing awareness and interest regarding the memory of Nazi euthanasia both locally and nationally, as well as internationally, the memorial simply cannot easily accommodate such great numbers. Firstly, since the memorial is a non-profit organization (e.V.) that receives funds from the Federal and State government but depends primarily on donations, and since it is free to visit Grafeneck, the memorial lacks sufficient funds to hire more than the current two full-time employees, and is thus forced to rely on volunteers to help receive the more than 200 tour groups that visit the site annually. Se-
condly, the memorial lacks an adequate meeting space or conference room that could accommodate groups larger about thirty people. Thirdly, if the number of annual visitors continues to grow, it will eventually begin to impinge on the everyday running of the care facility. At the moment, the memorial and care facility are able to coexist relatively easily, but it is easy to imagine a point at which the presence of so many visitors will be deemed to have a negative impact on the residents’ lives.

Grafeneck’s role as Mahnmal—i.e. the “never again” aspect—is best illustrated by the integrative work of the Samaritan Foundation. The Schlosscafé and a concert series attract people and artists from the surrounding areas, volunteers organize excursions and sports events with local teams. Most importantly, there are countless integrative facilities throughout the region that employ residents of Grafeneck. As part of a larger network, the site takes part in educating future generations about the origins of the “final solution” and about tolerance and social engagement. Instead of being one of those petrified sites of trauma that, in Aleida Assmann’s phrase, are permanently suspended between authenticity and reconstruction (Assmann Der lange Schatten 224), Grafeneck is a dynamic, living memorial that challenges preconceptions about how commemoration should take place. Unlike more monolithic monuments which represent the artistic vision of one architect or designer (e.g. Hartheim, which was completely redesigned by Herbert Friedl), Grafeneck has more of a patchwork quality, composed as it is of diverse elements by numerous contributors. One could criticize the memorial’s lack
of a unifying narrative, but on the other hand it genuinely reflects the surrounding area’s engagement with the memorial. Not to mention that an active institution such as Grafe­neck could not withstand the disruption caused by a thoroughgoing artistic overhaul. Moreover, it is precisely the patchwork effect of the memorial that enables the visitors to get a sense of the complex processes of “making memory” which are active at the site: the newer memorial structures do not replace the older ones but complement them, effectively becoming counter-monuments to the earlier ones (for example the 1985 plaque that complements the 1982 plaque in the cemetery). Thus, by documenting the distortions and omissions characteristic of the different phases of commemoration, Grafeneck quite literally embodies the history of its memorialization.

Most importantly, visitors to Grafeneck will find that the site’s lively present in­terrupts the kind of solemn contemplation of the past they might have sought there.
Through their encounters with the everyday life of the residents, visitors are not only forced to negotiate the discomfort many still feel in the presence of people with disabilities, not least when their parents and grandparents might have been tacit witnesses to (or even perpetrators of) the atrocities committed there in the past; Grafeneck also offers a different, more immediate sense of the “past in the present” than other memorial sites. The presence of the residents prompts questions about what it means to live in a place that is a constant reminder of its own cruel history. In other words, Grafeneck is a somewhat particular example of a heterotopia, to borrow a term from Michel Foucault. Most obviously, Grafeneck’s remote location and the fact that it is a psychiatric institution as well as a memorial resonate with the concept of the heterotopia. When the institution was established in 1929, the Samaritan Foundation considered its isolation beneficial to its residents. Undeniably, however, its remoteness is also in keeping with a general desire to separate or sequester the mentally disabled from the general public—an issue Foucault takes up in his book *Madness and Civilization*, which also provides a more thorough analysis of the psychiatric institution as heterotopia.72 There are also other, less obvious ways in which Grafeneck may be seen as a heterotopia. In its double function Grafeneck juxtaposes “in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”73 or irreconcilable: the past and the present, authentic and

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72 See p. 110 for a more thorough discussion of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*.

constructed, historical and social, and public and private.

But the most striking example of a heterotopia that is relevant in the context of Grafeneck is also the most commonplace: the mirror. Foucault writes:

But [the mirror] is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

Any memorial or psychiatric institution would of course fall under Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, but somehow the mirror analogy seems particularly apt for Grafeneck. The key here is the mirror image’s ability to connect the viewer “with all the space that surrounds” him or her while rendering that space simultaneously real and unreal. While this is no doubt true of such memorials as rely on the preservation of authentic structures and artefacts—on “antäische Magie” in other words—to transport the visitor to a past landscape of memory, at Grafeneck the lack of such structures coupled with its present-day function as a care facility make for an altogether more complex dynamic in the connection visitors feel to their surroundings. On the one hand they see themselves in the context of the terrible events which occurred there in the past, but on the other they also find themselves in the midst of the reality of present-day Grafeneck and its res-
idents. Superimposed in this mirror image are the past and the present of the site, and right in the middle is the visitor, who must likewise reflect on their identity in and connection to these uncanny surroundings. How is he or she linked to what went on at Grafeneck in 1940 and what is his or her stance towards what goes on there today? The mirror image presents a variety of counter-positions, past and present, to those which visitors occupy in their daily lives. The potential discomfort they experience at Grafeneck results from the momentary identification with or even occupying of these counter-positions. One could even say that Grafeneck is a hall of mirrors that presents the visitor with many different reflections of him or herself and that opens up a counter-space that, momentarily, places the visitor “over there,” on the other side of the mirror, and forces him or her to question the identity and the everyday space he or she usually inhabits, rendering it unheimlich, if only for a moment.

Grafeneck’s remote location was seen by the Samaritan Foundation as a positive contributing factor to the well-being of its residents, and by the Nazis as ideal for keeping their activities hidden from the general population. Today it means that despite efforts at integration, it is easy for inhabitants of the surrounding area to ignore or avoid Grafeneck—be it the site itself, its memory, or its present-day function in the community. Despite recent projects and events which have involved the local community in the site’s memory, such as the Spur der Erinnerung, it would be easy to criticize Grafeneck as a memorial for precisely this remoteness. Is it not part of a memorial’s duty to be prom-
inent, visible, unavoidable? On the one hand, it must be remembered that Grafeneck is more than a memorial, and the remote, idyllic setting was and is in the residents’ best interests. Indeed, at the conference in 2009, director Markus Mörike explained that there is a long waiting list for the care facility at Grafeneck, and that the remote, idyllic setting is a major factor in people’s decision to want to live there.

On the other hand, whereas Grafeneck must stay where it is, secluded or not, the Grey Bus Memorial offers a mobile counterpart that also plays with the permeability of the boundaries between past and present. Placed on a city street or a town square, it brings about a disruption of people’s familiar surroundings. And when this vehicle of memory starts moving it will cause a disturbance of a different kind: the large, heavy transport blocks the traffic on the country’s roads and highways as it slowly makes its way to its new destination. Along the way, the Grey Bus Memorial effectively reverses the polarities of the memorial experience at Grafeneck and thus the two complement each other perfectly. An imposing concrete hulk intrudes on ordinary citizens’ daily lives in a way that is hard to ignore: the past has become manifest in the present and it is very much in the way. By contrast, if and when those ordinary citizens should choose to visit Grafeneck, they themselves are the intruders in search of the past and finding instead a potentially troubling present.

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We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness.

—Michel Foucault75

Chapter 2

Bridging the Silence: Towards a Literary Memory of (Nazi) Euthanasia

It has been thirty years since the American TV series Holocaust was first shown on West German television—a highly controversial event that has come to be seen as a pivotal moment in the history of German Vergangenheitsbewältigung. In the United States, the four-part mini-series had attracted around 120 million viewers the year before, and even at that time there was heated debate as to whether it had done justice to its delicate topic. In Germany, it was criticized even before its broadcast for its alleged trivialization and commercialization of the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich. A sentimentalized, melodramatic treatment of complex historical processes, scholars and journalists agreed,

would not be able to help Germans come to terms with their recent past. Thus, the overwhelming success of the series and the totally unexpected eruption of emotional responses among its viewers baffled critics and scholars alike.

More than twenty million Germans watched the mini-series, and more than 25,000 called or wrote to the West Deutscher Rundfunk with comments and questions. These viewers were not afraid to show their emotions: they spoke of the tears they had shed, the shame and guilt they had felt, and the discussions the series had triggered.


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78 “The first three episodes left me moved and shaken [...] but after the fourth I was so overcome with despair and mourning that it was all I could do to stop myself crying uncontrollably. Suddenly I identified with that Jewish mother. [...] At that moment I knew that these terrible crimes [...] must never be forgot-
There had been attempts, before *Holocaust*, at finding fictional forms of representation which would make a larger audience aware of Nazi crimes, e.g. Max Frisch’s play *Andorra* (1961), Rolf Hochhuth’s *Stellvertreter* (1963) or Peter Weiss’s *Die Ermittlung* (1965). The estranging and formalized *Bewältigungsdramatik* of these plays, however, failed to break through the mechanisms of denial, repression, and silencing and did not mobilize the Germans.\(^79\) *Holocaust* traces the stories of the different members of the Jewish family Weiss, who are each linked to a different phase of the “final solution.” The parents are deported to the Warsaw ghetto and perish in Auschwitz, their older son Karl dies after being imprisoned first in Buchenwald, then in Theresienstadt, and their daughter Anna, traumatized after her rape at the hands of a group of Nazi officers in a dark alley, is sent to the “sanatorium” Hadamar, where she is gassed along with her fellow “patients.” The family’s only survivor is the younger son Rudi who goes into hiding and joins the Jewish resistance.

The emotional response to and identification with the personalized fate of the Weiss family is crucial for an understanding of why *Holocaust* succeeded where the abstract and rational approach of countless TV documentaries or the estranging and formalized *Bewältigungsdramatik* of the theater plays failed. In the plays, as well as the documentaries, the Jews mostly remained in the position of an abstract “other.” In *Holocaust*...
caust, by contrast, their representation as members of an assimilated family facilitated the identification of a German mass audience “with the Jews as Jews—like themselves members of a family, united by and conflicting in their emotions, their outlook, their everyday concerns” (Huyssen “Politics” 135). In other words, the representation of the Jewish “other” as essentially the same is what made the German viewers finally see the Jews as victims and mourn their death.

This upsurge of empathic identification, however, did not comprise all the victims of Nazi persecution depicted in the film. The peculiar scenes in the first part of the series depicting Anna’s death in the euthanasia killing center Hadamar were completely ignored in the discussions at the time. At most, some scholars mentioned the fact that a member of the Weiss family perishes in the euthanasia program. However, neither the significant historical errors in these scenes nor their problematic iconography received any attention. Whether the viewers picked up on the issue of Nazi euthanasia in the film is not easy to determine, but none of the letters to the WDR reproduced in various books mentions it. In what follows I would like to bring these “forgotten” scenes back into focus by looking at how exactly euthanasia is represented in Holocaust. The figure of Anna Weiss will help me illustrate the specific difficulties, ambivalences, and questions connected to the representation of Nazi euthanasia. As we shall see, the scenes from Holocaust also raise more general questions about the artistic depiction of people with mental disabilities, about issues of marginalization, stereotyping, and stigmatiza-
tion, and about the complicated intersections of aesthetics and ethics.

"Holocaust" and Euthanasia

Following her traumatic rape, Anna withdraws into herself and appears almost catatonic. Her head is tilted to the side, she doesn’t speak, just stares off into space, not recognizing anybody, plays nervously with her hair, and shields her body with her arms. Inga, her sister-in-law, takes her to a doctor who recommends having her transferred to Hadamar, which he describes to Inga as “a hospital for mental problems.” As Anna is about to be taken away by a nurse, Inga hesitates and asks the doctor: “Wait, am I doing the right thing?” His response is as brief as it is duplicitous: “These problems are best handled by professionals.”

The next shot shows Anna in a bus on the way to Hadamar. The camera immediately zooms in on her face, which is illuminated by the light coming through the window; the other passengers remain in the background as blurry and slightly disfigured silhouettes. The bus stops in front of a white, castle-like building. A sign reads: “Sanatorium Hadamar,” and the passengers disembark. Except for Anna all of them are visibly marked by illness: a man on crutches, a number of children with Down’s syndrome, and

80 The doctor’s statement can be interpreted in two different ways. Either as reassuring for Inga that Anna is going to be treated by the best specialists, which is rather unlikely, since it would mean that he doesn’t know what is going on in Hadamar, or as a hypocritical remark referring to the killers at Hadamar as professionals. The verb, “handled” evokes the Nazi euphemism “Sonderbehandlung,” special treatment, disingenuously used to describe the extermination of all “undesirables.”
several others whose behavioral ticks suggest the symptoms of some unspecified mental illness. The scene is accompanied by moaning and other pathetic noises. All of the passengers have a rectangular piece of paper attached to their clothes, presumably with their personal data and identification number. Next we see the patients as they are led into a shed in the surrounding woods, the door is closed and bolted behind them, a diesel engine is switched on. The camera follows an exhaust pipe leading from the engine into the barn. One of the doctors looks at his watch. After that the scene shifts to a close-up of a letter from Hadamar, which Anna’s mother Berta reads aloud: “it is with much regret that we must inform you of the death of your daughter, Fräulein Anna Weiss. Although we did all we could to help, [...] she refused to take nourishment and did not respond to medication and on June the third died of pneumonia and malnutrition. [...] [W]e have taken the liberty of cremating her remains and providing burial near the sanatorium.” Inga sits next to her and says: “Perhaps it’s better. We don’t know if Anna would ever have been well again.” Berta responds: “She loved everyone.” Inga begins to sob.

This scene illustrates a number of the issues raised by an unconsidered representation of Nazi euthanasia. Anna is shown in the midst of a group of people whom the audience immediately recognizes as disabled or mentally ill. Having torn off the yellow star, the sign the Nazis forced her to wear, she was raped, almost as “punishment” for this rebellious act. Now she is stigmatized again, this time as “unworthy of life,” by the
white piece of paper attached to her coat. However, she is only seemingly part of this group. Anna is an innocent victim, traumatized of the evil that has come over her, the first victim of the Weiss family, a harbinger of the coming Holocaust. When Anna’s mother and Inga receive the letter announcing her death they try in vain to find meaning in it, and they resort to the very logic the disabled people around Anna have fallen victim to: Inga expresses her helplessness saying that “perhaps it’s better.” In so doing, she essentially reiterates the supposedly “humanitarian” intention with which the Nazis justified the killing of the mentally ill and disabled. There is no doubt that *Holocaust* should be given credit for trying to include the euthanasia program in contrast to so many other contemporary representations. However, the dissonance between Anna and the other euthanasia victims quietly reinforces the notion that the euthanasia program was somehow separate from the Holocaust. The iconography of the scene makes it impossible for
the viewer to see Anna as one of the disabled deportees because it maintains the difference between Anna, whose individual story the viewers know and identify with, and the anonymous, disturbingly different disabled victims.

The separation between Anna and the other victims is already set up in an earlier scene, where in a kind of foreshadowing the viewer is prepared for what will happen to Anna. As we shall see, this scene also attempts to include the victims of euthanasia in the narrative of the Holocaust, but is problematic in a similar way. We see Anna’s older brother Karl, newly arrived at the Buchenwald concentration camp, being introduced by his fellow prisoner Weinberg to the hierarchy system of the camp. Weinberg shows him how to sew the differently colored patches on the prisoners’ uniforms and explains their meaning: a red triangle for political prisoners, pink for the homosexuals, brown for the gypsies, two yellow triangles combined to form a star for the Jews, etc. After they have gone through all the differently colored triangular patches, Karl picks up a white rectangular patch with the word “BLÖD” written in bold capital letters on it:

**KARL**: Who’s this one for?
**WEINBERG**: Idiots, morons, feebleminded.
**KARL**: What is their crime?
**WEINBERG**: Useless. You should see the guards when they start working on them. Teasing, beating.
**KARL**: *(incredulous)* Weinberg. I can’t believe this!
**WEINBERG**: Can’t you? There’s a house where they take the loonies, crazies, half-wits, cripples—gas ’em to death.
**KARL**: Gas?!
**A GUARD**: *(interrupting them, yelling)* Less talk and more work!
“What is their crime?” is the key question here, for it makes a connection between the disabled and the Jews: both groups are persecuted even though they are innocent. This is also the moment in which the word “gas” is first mentioned. Anna’s death is the implementation of Weinberg’s declaration and functions as an anticipation of the murder of the Jews. The iconography of the scene, however, is puzzling. In the dehumanizing logic of the camp, the point of the uniform patches was to mark all prisoners as deviant from the healthy Volkskörper, while the different colors symbolized at the same time a certain hierarchy among the prisoners. But the mentally ill and disabled were neither deported to Buchenwald nor to any other concentration or work camp. Moreover, there were no white or rectangular patches. What, then, is the function of this entirely invented sign? Effectively, the BLÖD patch serves to create an additional (and visible) difference between the mentally ill and disabled and the other prisoners in Buchenwald. In

Fig. 10 The “Blöd” patch

the eyes of the Nazis, all prisoners are Other, but the “cripples and morons” are even “more Other”: their sign is white and rectangular and has a word written on it. Classified by the Nazis as useless, they are gassed immediately. Even though many critics have argued convincingly that historical accuracy is not necessarily the point of Holocaust, the invention of this entirely new category of patches in Buchenwald is not only confusing but it influences the way the viewers perceive Anna’s death. The figure of Anna enables the viewers to see the mentally and physically disabled as innocent victims of persecution; however, they never reach the status of subjects in the series. They do not have a voice and function only as a framework for Anna’s tragic death. The Holocaust remains a specifically Jewish catastrophe and the viewers’ empathic identification begins and ends with its Jewish victims.

The problematic scenes in Holocaust as well as the silence surrounding Nazi euthanasia in the critical discourse about the series prompt crucial questions regarding its artistic representation as well as its reception. How can the largely stereotypical and stigmatizing representations of disabled and mentally ill people be avoided? And how does one achieve a degree of identification with the victims of euthanasia that is not based on an objectifying type of pity? I am referring here primarily to the “pitying gaze” provoked in the viewer by representations such as the one in Holocaust. This historically, culturally, and emotionally coded gaze may comprise a disparagement: the pitied person is perceived in a way that deprives her of her personality, for the disability becomes the
defining aspect of this person. At this point it is helpful to take a closer look at the distinction between compassion and pity, described by Hannah Arendt in her book *On Revolution*.\(^{81}\) There, Arendt defines compassion as an intense identification with, or even a vicarious experience of another person’s suffering. Based on the idea that the other’s suffering might actually befall oneself, compassion is correlative to the desire to see the other’s suffering remedied. Pity on the other hand, has a generalizing and depersonalizing quality, for it is evoked in the face of mass suffering, to which one remains distant. In this collective sense, pity prevents identification, since it is unlikely that one actually might find oneself in a comparable situation. This abstraction results in a certain asymmetry and distance between oneself and those pitied.\(^{82}\) In other words, while compassion is based on similarity, pity creates difference.

In the context of disability, however, we have to consider an additional layer of the difference pity creates, which is connected with psychological taboos: we fear or repress the thought of possibly being disabled ourselves one day (be it through an accident or illness). Since disability is associated with definitiveness, which is to say, it is deemed to be incurable and permanent, the thought of “this could be me” becomes a highly uncomfortable and problematic admission. One could go so far as to say that pity

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\(^{81}\) There is of course a large body of work devoted to precisely these questions within a theological context, but it would take us too far from the matter at hand to provide even a cursory analysis of the different problems associated with the terms “compassion” and “pity” in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

here actually serves as a barrier between oneself and the disabled. In the context of the memory of Nazi euthanasia the distancing effect of pity becomes most pronounced. As the example of Holocaust illustrates, the victims of euthanasia appear as different from all those persecuted because they are coded as victims of their disability in the first place (they seem to have no story and are exclusively defined through their otherness).

A number of misconceptions additionally obstruct the memory of Nazi euthanasia and counter a broad reception of and a constructive engagement with the topic. The most important of these is the misapprehension that the euthanasia program was actually based on scientific considerations. As a result, it has not only been separated from the discourse on the Holocaust, but its victims have also never been granted equal status among those persecuted by the Nazis. As cultural historian Wulf Kansteiner emphasizes, marginalized groups can only contribute to the national memory “if they command the means to express their visions and if their vision meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations.”

While one could probably speak of a “group memory” when referring, for example, to homosexuals or Sinti and Roma as victims of Nazi persecutions, it is highly problematic to speak of a “group memory” in the case of the diverse victims of Nazi euthanasia: the experience and self-identification of someone

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83 As discussed in the previous chapter, Giorgio Agamben, for example, makes a strong case for including the euthanasia program in discussions of the Holocaust, but nevertheless insists setting it apart as an operation based on medical considerations. Cf. Agamben, Homo Sacer: 126–44.

who is deaf or blind, for instance, is vastly different to that of someone who is paralyzed or of someone born with Down’s syndrome, etc. There are hardly any survivors of or witnesses to the euthanasia program who could raise their voices and bear witness and there is no generation-spanning community or group dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the memory of all the disabled victims of the Holocaust. “The cultural archive,” as psychologist Dorothee Roer phrases it, “still does not offer the victims of coercive sterilization and ‘euthanasia’ a language appropriate for their memories, no images and shared meanings [...] which would allow them to inscribe themselves into cultural memory” (’Erinnern’ 194). The memory of Nazi euthanasia is, as it were, haunted by the present, by the fact that disability is still stigmatized. Thus, the most important question must be who carries the memory of euthanasia? How can we reconstruct the victims’ stories if often the only documents remaining are the files of the perpetrators? Finally, how can we arrive at a representation of euthanasia that makes view-

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86 One such group dedicated to the memory of Nazi euthanasia and coercive sterilization is the Bund der “Euthanasie”-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten, founded in 1987, a group that assists victims and family members of victims in administrative and legal matters. Its influence, however, is extremely limited.
ers or readers aware of the tendency to avoid confronting our fears and biases concerning disability, a representation that encourages ethical responsibility? Compassion, Arendt writes, does not necessarily lead to political or social action and is thus ultimately politically ineffective (On Revolution 86). Nonetheless, it entails the ability to genuinely understand another’s suffering. With respect to the issue at stake here this means that representations of Nazi euthanasia have to accomplish three things at once in order to encourage an appropriate and constructive engagement with this particular memory: they have to portray the victims as human beings and not as stereotypes, attribute them equal status as victims of Nazi persecution, while at the same time paying attention to their specific situation.

In this chapter I focus on the possibilities different literary discourses and genres open up for approaches to these questions. Given the lack of cultural studies on the memory of euthanasia (the absence of critical commentary on euthanasia in Holocaust is only one example of this) one might expect to find that euthanasia is ignored by filmmakers, writers or other artists. While it is true that compared to the profusion of images of physical disability in film and literature, mental disability, mental illness, and Nazi euthanasia lead a marginal existence, it is nonetheless striking how many representations of it and allusions to it one finds, once attuned to the topic, not least in well-known literary texts. Thus, in addition to the questions about representation just mentioned, the fact that the topic’s presence in some of the major works of post-World War II litera-
ture has been largely ignored points us to a host of questions related to the problem of reception. If there are depictions of disability in film and literature, why do we usually, as the historian and disability scholar Paul Longmore formulates it, “screen them out of our consciousness even as we absorb [them]?” What are the mechanisms, psychological, social, or cultural, which prevent us from seeing images of disability? How we perceive these images has of course to do with our own anxieties about the possibility of disablement, but in the case of the German viewers of *Holocaust*, it also had to do with feelings of guilt, with repression or rationalization of all the crimes committed during the Third Reich in the name of the German people, including those committed against the disabled. These same phenomena have to be taken into account in this study of literary depictions of euthanasia after 1945.

This chapter examines a variety of literary approaches, ranging from autobiography, family memoir, reconstructed biography or *Lebenslauf*, to fictionalized biography and narrative fiction. I also include selected examples from regional literature, because I believe that such a study has to cover all literary forms and registers, and moreover the discrepancies and convergences between the national and the local can be enlightening with regard to the circulation of the memory of Nazi euthanasia. Overwhelmingly, engagements with this memory have originated at the local level, focusing on individual

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stories and institutions, and there is still no truly national memory of Nazi euthanasia to speak of. There are various possible ways of grouping these texts. A genre-specific organization can only provide a rough framework for my analysis, since some of the most interesting texts I analyze purposefully break down rigid genre distinctions. These hybrid texts illustrate the ways in which the particular nature of the memory of euthanasia challenges the conventions of memory narratives and enables the authors to participate in the ongoing literary and scholarly debates on proper forms of speaking for the victims. Overall, I have adopted a chronological trajectory that encompasses the entire time span from the immediate post-War period to the numerous contemporary engagements with the topic. On this very general level one can speak of a rough correlation between the chronology and the peripheral versus the central role played by the topic of euthanasia in the texts. In the earlier texts, i.e. those written before 1990, the topic is treated as part of a host of issues connected to the problematic memory of the Nazi period and as a social-critical element that enables authors to illustrate continuities between the Third Reich and post-war society. As we shall see, the disabled characters in the earlier, fictional texts all fulfill a particular function within the structure of the plot, but are, with few exceptions, still mostly relegated to the margins of the narrative. In contrast, the topic moves from periphery to center in the texts written in the 1990s and after 2000. The authors are now increasingly concerned with recovering individual victims’ biographies and with finding appropriate ways of mourning and commemoration.
Within this broader framework one can distinguish between two different representational approaches to the topic of euthanasia. The first approach is fictional and casts the disabled or mentally ill characters as seers, mystics, or sages. Authors such as Heinrich Böll, Wolfdietrich Schnurre, Christoph Hein, and Günter Grass create disabled characters who suffer exclusion and persecution because of their disability or mental illness, but whose very “otherness” endows them with special gifts that allow them to see through other people’s manipulations, presage future dangers, or function as critical commentators on the events in the narrative. This type of empowering narrative, mostly to be found in the earlier texts in which the topic of euthanasia plays a peripheral role, presents the disabled characters as different versions of the figure of what I am calling the “disabled enabler”—a fictional character at the margin of the narrative who helps the protagonist in critical situations or who supplies the readers with additional knowledge. While at first glance the figure of the disabled enabler may constitute an empowering representation of disability and mental illness, we will see that it is in fact highly limiting and serves ultimately to reinforce stereotypical notions of mental disability.

The second approach focuses on issues of commemoration and on recovering actual victims’ life stories. By mixing the genres of documentary, (auto)biography, and fiction, authors create hybrid texts composed of documents, letters, diaries, and personal or family narrative. The authors, some of them family members of victims, take on the role of a vicarious witness, giving voice to these silent and silenced victims of Nazi perse-
cution and atrocity, and exploring the generational transmission of silence about these atrocities. I analyze texts by Alfred Döblin, Hans-Ulrich Dapp, Helga Schubert, and Hellmut Haasis, and place them also in relation to the recent boom of generational and family literature in Germany.

Bridging the Silence: A Dialogue between Disciplines

The study of the cultural memory of euthanasia is situated at the intersection of two critical discourses which have so far only marginally addressed the topic: memory studies on the one hand and disability studies on the other. One explanation for the striking absence of the topic from both discourses is their mutual disregard for the closely related issue of the eugenics movement. Very few memory scholars have addressed the fact that the euthanasia program and the Holocaust are both essentially based on the idea of “incurable biological deviation” that was attributed to people from different races as well as to the disabled, and thus the two have so far been treated as connected but separate phenomena. As a result of this separation, the historical Aufarbeitung as well as the commemoration of euthanasia in Germany is still mostly left to medical historians or those working within the framework of euthanasia memorial sites and museums. Disability in Germany, it seems, is still considered to be a medical rather than a minority or a commemorative issue, and it does not fit easily into a cultural memory discourse that
is grounded on concepts such as witnessing and testimony.

Eugenics has likewise escaped the notice of most scholars working within the growing field of disability studies, which seeks to address critical issues in the representation of disability in cultural artefacts and to explore how these issues shape the actual situation of people with disabilities living in contemporary society.\(^8\) Approaches range from exposing negative cultural stereotypes, promoting positive representations of disability, and examining their potential for social criticism, to a discussion of the possibility of disability occupying an empowering, transgressive space in society. Nevertheless, current trends in disability studies revolve almost exclusively around physical rather than mental disability. This means that the history and legacy of eugenic thought in the West, including the Nazi euthanasia program and its victims, are “off the radar” as far as most disability scholars are concerned. In their book, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell attempt to account for this fact. By revealing the strong links between the eugenics movement and prevailing prejudices towards disability and the restrictive conception of what constitutes “normal” in contemporary society, they argue that disability studies as a field cannot afford to ignore these historical factors.

which have shaped cultural attitudes toward its object of study. This is a view they share with Lennard J. Davis, whose *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, also emphasizes the role of eugenics in defining the scientific and cultural concept of the “norm” and the “normal.” The most direct engagement within the field of disability studies with the representational issues connected to eugenics and euthanasia is to be found in Carol Poore’s 2007 study *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*. Poore’s survey presents a rich analysis of Nazi representational practices during the Third Reich, and examines the continuities and changes in post-war representations of disability as well as in society itself.89

There are of course a significant number of studies by cultural and literary historians on representations of madness and mental illness.90 Among those that deal specifically with 20th century German literary representations of mental illness, one can isolate two main points of focus: firstly, German modernist and especially expressionist writers’ representations of madness, and secondly, the literature of the 1970s, which saw a revival of the modernist interest in pathological topics and ways of expression, in psycho-

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90 Sander L. Gilman, for example, traces the mutually constitutive relation between literature and society when it comes to seeing and representing mental illness in literature, opera, and film. Shoshana Felman examines how certain French writers reclaim the discourse of the madman in order to give expression to what science and culture have excluded. See Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) and Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness. (literature/philosophy/psychoanalysis)* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987)
logical disorders and mental illness. The work of Thomas Anz exemplifies this approach. At one end of his critical spectrum one finds expressionist literature and its relation to madness and the pathological, and at the other the psychopathographies of the 70s and 80s. All of these studies are primarily concerned with formulating a poetics of madness, but while they deal with a wide range of representations, they do not touch upon the specific issues raised by Nazi euthanasia and its memory.

No discussion of cultural studies on madness would be complete without mentioning the work of Michel Foucault. His *Madness and Civilization* is a history of society’s conception of madness as it manifests itself in the structures that are designed to confine the insane. Foucault describes the history of madness as an act of division in society that cut off the weak, ill, or deviant and that resulted in their silencing, in a refusal to acknowledge their voice. Deprived of their own history because of their supposed inability to legitimize themselves through narrative, the mentally ill have instead become the objects of master narratives such as psychiatry.\(^\text{92}\)

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\(^{92}\) In this context it is important to note that the publication of Foucault’s book coincides with the publication of texts of the international anti-psychiatry movement. Written by psychiatrists and sociologists, these texts not only criticize the claims and practices of psychiatry but also the concept of mental illness as an organic or biogenetic disease. The authors believe mental illness to be a socially and culturally constructed category of deviation, based on traditional concepts of what is healthy and what is unhealthy, normal and abnormal. In *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Thomas Szasz argues for example that the medical concept of mental illness is used to legitimize the control of people whose behavior deviates from the societal norm. Similarly, R.D. Laing, Erving Goffman and Franco Basaglia theorize an anthropological and
Put somewhat provocatively, Foucault describes various forms of social euthanasia (in the sense of radical exclusion, objectification, and silencing) up to the 20th Century. It is important that the houses of confinement Foucault describes are not only designed for the insane but also for social outsiders, beggars, vagrants, the unemployed, and the poor. However, even though he traces the history of these mechanisms of exclusion and silencing, he does not discuss their most extreme and radical form. His historical trajectory ends with Freud and does not take into account the developments in the context of the eugenics movement that led to the National Socialist murder of the mentally ill and of others who did not fit within their conception of a healthy Volkskörper.93

Foucault not only quotes a wide range of literary references to the topic of mad-

93 Foucault does briefly allude to the killing of the mentally ill in one of his lectures at the Collège de France in 1976, where he makes an argument not unlike Mitchell and Snyder’s. Drawing a connection between the killing of the mentally ill and racism, Foucault theorizes both as extreme transformations of what he calls the “old discourse of the race struggle.” In both the Nazi and the Soviet States it is the “sick, the deviant, the madman” who becomes the enemy. In the Nazi State the theme of biological racism was recast and converted so that it functioned within a prophetic type of discourse: “In the Nazi period, State racism would be accompanied by a whole set of elements and connotations such as, for example, the struggle of the Germanic race which had, temporarily, been enslaved by European powers, the Slavs, the Treaty of Versailles, and so on.” Michel Foucault, Society Must be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76, trans. David Macey, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003): 82–3.
ness and emphasizes the dialectical relation between cultural representations of madness and the actual situation of the insane. He also proposes art as a possible way for madness to reach a certain legitimization: “By the madness that interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself” (Foucault *Madness* 288). Through the work of art, which gives a voice to a discourse of madness, “the world is made aware of its guilt” (ibid.) of silencing these discourses. It is the artists, after all, who are the first to detect and address a culture’s voids and silences. Foucault’s project itself can be seen as a literary endeavor that gives voice to the silenced subject of madness (cf. Felman 35–57).

Foucault’s history of madness as a history of silencing is helpful for a discussion of the possible reasons for the silence surrounding euthanasia and its memory today. The “action that divides madness,” according to Foucault, is motivated by fear: because we see the mentally ill and disabled as embodiments of what could potentially happen to any one of us—be it through accident, illness, or other circumstances—we separate them from us, or, as Foucault formulates it, we cut off the dialogue that once existed with madness (Foucault *Madness* ix). He exposes this mechanism of repression by juxtaposing the rational structures of marginalization that have been preserved with their irrational origins that have been forgotten. With respect to the memory of euthanasia one could infer that an engagement with the topic is hindered by a double taboo: on the one
hand the repression of the disquieting or “mad” aspects in ourselves results in an avoidance of the topic of mental disability in general, and on the other hand the fear of a confrontation with thought processes that are similar to those of the perpetrators from 1940 results in an avoidance of the topic of euthanasia in particular.

The Sacrifice of the Sage: Disabled Enabler Figures from Böll to Hein

Daniel and Adam

In the aftermath of the war, the sober narrative style and condensed format of the short story or fragment provided an effective tool to address the immediate past and to formulate a social criticism of the present in the form of a nutshell-version of the larger historical context. Through the prism of snapshot-like individual experiences, writers such as Heinrich Böll and Wolfdietrich Schnurre addressed the memory of the Nazi past, including the topic of Nazi euthanasia. Each wrote a short story in which they introduce characters who are psychiatric patients and who fall victim to the euthanasia program. In both stories, the disabled characters function as catalysts for the inner struggles of the protagonists. In Böll’s 1955 story “Daniel, der Gerechte,” the protagonist’s (typically Böllian) struggle is caused by his sense of discrepancy between society’s supposed values and the injustice of the world. Daniel is a man approaching middle age and a school principal. His wife asks him to help the child of a relative, Uli, to pass the entrance ex-
amination to his school. This brings back the memory of his own entrance exam thirty
years previously, which he failed because he could not write the assigned exam essay
with the topic “Ein merkwürdiges Erlebnis” (“A remarkable event”), Daniel had prepared
to write about a visit to his uncle Thomas, a patient in a psychiatric institution, whose
only form of communication was the repeated utterance of the phrase: “Wenn es nur
Gerechtigkeit auf dieser Welt gäbe.” During the exam, however, he suddenly found it
impossible to write about his uncle:

Thomas war plötzlich sehr nahe, zu nahe, als dass er über ihn einen Aufsatz
hätte schreiben können; er schrieb die Überschrift hin: “Ein merkwürdiges
Erlebnis”, darunter schrieb er: “Wenn es nur Gerächtigkeit auf der Welt gäbe”
– und er schrieb in Gerechtigkeit statt des zweiten e ein ä, weil er sich dumpf
daran erinnerte, dass alle Worte einen Stamm haben, und es schien ihm, als
sei der Stamm von Gerechtigkeit Rache.94

By misquoting Thomas, Daniel equates justice with retribution, or rather he sees retribu-
tion as being the foundation of justice. His false etymology reveals the hypocrisy he la-
ments—it raises the question of how valid justice as a concept is if injustice goes un-
avenged. His “Freudian slip,” so to speak, brings out the true issue; it is a linguistic ma-
manifestation of Thomas (the madman)’s, truth. During the Nazi period it finally becomes
clear to him that “Gerechtigkeit” is nothing but an empty phrase. His only refuge is with

94 “Thomas was suddenly very close, too close for him to have been able to write an essay about him; he
wrote the title: “A remarkable event,” and below it he wrote: “If only there were some justice [Gerächtig-
keit] in the world”—and instead of the second “e” in “Gerechtigkeit” he put an “ä,” dimly remembering
that all words have an etymological root, and it seemed to him that the root of justice must be revenge
1955, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006): 378. The story first appeared in the Mai-Illustrierte des Deut-
schen Gewerkschaftsbundes in 1955.
Thomas in the psychiatric institution:

Es blieb noch die Möglichkeit, Onkel Thomas in der Anstalt zu besuchen, auf einem der grüngestreiften Stühle zu sitzen, Zigaretten zu rauchen und Thomas zuzuhören, der auf eine Litanei zu antworten schien, die nur er allein hörte: lauschend saß Thomas da – aber er lauschte nicht auf das, was die Besucher ihm erzählten – er lauschte dem Klagegesang eines verborgenen Chores, der in den Kulissen der Welt versteckt eine Litanei herunterbetete, auf die es nur eine Antwort gab, Thomas’ Antwort: »Wenn es nur Gerechtigkeit auf dieser Welt gäbe«.95 (373)

Thomas, labeled as mad and locked away, is an extreme version of the alienated Daniel. His repetitive phrase proves prophetic, not only regarding his own fate as a victim of the euthanasia program, but also regarding the shortcomings of post-war society. Taken together, the failed exam and Thomas’ death mark the two poles of what Daniel perceives as his tragic fate, but what might also be described as moral failure. Daniel is the protagonist in the tragedy, which Thomas and the invisible (Greek) chorus comment on from offstage. Daniel sees another possible version of himself in Wierzok, one of the boys waiting to take the exam at his school. His escapist wish of returning to his childhood self also betrays a longing for an alternative youth, a youth not marked by alienation. Haunted by what his best friend lucidly pinpoints as Daniel’s ressentiment, a feeling of hatred resulting from his un-avenged personal failures, Daniel is caught in a paralyzing cycle of repetition: the more he talks about justice, the less he is taken seriously (he is

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95 “He could still go to visit uncle Thomas at the asylum, sit on one of the green striped chairs, smoke cigarettes and listen to Thomas, who seemed to by responding to a litany that he alone could hear: Thomas sat there listening—but he wasn’t listening to what his visitors were saying—he was listening to the lament of a hidden chorus standing in the wings of the world reciting a litany to which there was only one answer, Thomas’s answer: ‘If only there were some justice in this world’.”
given the nickname in the story’s title), and the less he is actually able to implement it in practice.\(^{96}\) The reader can infer that Daniel got through the Nazi period by keeping a low profile and looking the other way, along with the rest of the petty bourgeoisie. At the end of the story, despite Daniel’s somewhat feeble attempts at finding a way out of his paralysis,\(^{97}\) it is clear that he will continue to be caught between his childhood self and Thomas.

The psychiatric patient Thomas assumes the role of a tragic prophet of the ultimate loss of justice in the world, a prophet whose death seems inevitable, while the boy Wierzok becomes the bearer of hope onto whom Daniel projects his wish for a different or alternative past. The reader would be justified in hearing in Onkel Thomas’s name a faint echo of the eponymous hero of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In it, Uncle Tom is a tragic redeemer figure, sacrificed as he exposes the injustice of slavery. He serves as savior (of his fellow slaves, but also of the white girl Eva, whom he saves from drowning) and as moral inspiration of several white characters in the book. But, like Böll’s Thomas, Uncle Tom’s fate is to remain excluded from the society he strove to enlighten and die a martyr. Both are marginalized figures who are endowed


\(^{97}\) Manfred Durzak offers an alternative reading of the story’s ending that leaves unclear whether Daniel actually helps Wierzok or not to pass the exam. In his analysis, Durzak refers to Thomas as a tragic figure for whom the world has lost all meaning, and who confirms Daniels’ alienation, but does not go beyond this statement. Manfred Durzak, *Die Kunst der Kurzgeschichte. Zur Theorie und Geschichte der deutschen Kurzgeschichte* (München: Fink, 1989): 219-25.
with an emblematic or symbolic power, but who remain limited in that they cannot transcend their status as outcasts.

In order to pursue this conception of positively inflected marginalization, let us now turn our attention to Wolfdietrich Schnurre’s 1958 short story “Freundschaft mit Adam.”98 Schnurre portrays the tragic friendship between the boy Bruno and Adam, a Jewish psychiatric patient in the 1930s. As is the case with all of the texts under discussion in this section, it is deliberately left unclear what exactly is “wrong” with Adam, all we know is that he does not speak or interact with other people. His father rescued him from the SA and brought him to the institution, erroneously believing he would be safe there. As a doubly marginalized figure similar to Anna in Holocaust, Adam, Jewish and disabled, becomes a redeemer figure for Bruno. Through him, Bruno comes into contact with his humanity in the midst of the overwhelming inhumanity of the Third Reich. Schnurre traces Bruno’s transformation from someone who carelessly takes advantage of the disabled patients in the Jewish institution in his neighborhood to someone who almost sacrifices himself for the friendship with one of them. At the beginning of the story, Bruno and the other boys in the neighborhood pretend to make friends with the patients in order to trick them into throwing gifts from their relatives out the window to the street below where the boys are waiting. This changes when the patients are no

longer allowed to go outside the institution or to be in contact with people from the neighborhood. Only Bruno still comes to linger outside the institution, despite the fact that his father, a party member, has forbidden it. Bruno takes an interest in Adam, who after a while begins to throw things down into the street for Bruno: a construction set and small alarm clocks his father, a watchmaker, brings for Adam to put together, in an effort to foster his interest in the profession. Bruno realizes that Adam doesn’t like these gifts, nor does he know what to do with them: “das sah doch jeder, dass Adam für so einen Beruf nicht gemacht war. Er war auch sonst nicht für diese Welt gemacht.”

Even though Adam is a grown man, everyone, including Bruno, treats him as if he were a child. Separated from each other by the insurmountable walls of the institution (and the metaphorical walls of Nazi regulations), Bruno and Adam’s only avenue of exchange is the window of Adam’s room. The first real encounter between the two happens when Adam’s father finds out that Bruno “steals” Adam’s gifts and asks Bruno to return them. Believing that he is the only one who really understands what Adam wants, Bruno gives him a dead mouse that he caught that day. The encounter confirms the mysterious bond Bruno feels between them:

Ihm war, als wäre er in ein uralt vertrautes, nur lang vergessenes Zuhause zu-

99 “it was plainly obvious to everyone that Adam wasn’t suited to that type of work. In general he wasn’t suited to this world.”
100 This has led Ian Roberts, one of the few critics to deal with this short story, mistakenly to assume that Adam is in fact a boy just like Bruno. See Ian Roberts, “Eine Rechnung, die nicht aufgeht.” Identity and Ideology in the Fiction of Wolfdietrich Schnurre. (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1997): 58-60.
rückgekehrt. Adam war ihm nicht fremd, er war sein Bruder. Bruno hatte ihn verlassen, ja; aber Adam hatte auf ihn gewartet; dort stand er. [...] Von diesem Tage an fand Bruno sich zu Hause und in der Schule nicht mehr zurecht; Adams Zimmer war die Mitte der Welt, Bruno sah nicht ein, warum er sich da noch an ihrem Rand aufhalten sollte.101 (153–154)

From his very first meeting with Adam, Bruno is left profoundly changed: he realizes that he does not belong to a world that condones the cruel treatment of the Jews and disabled, and he feels alienated from his own family—especially since his father is about to join the SA. In this passage, the latent association with the Biblical Adam and the Garden of Eden becomes evident. Adam’s room becomes a site of innocence before the Fall, and the walls separating Bruno from Adam now take on the additional significance of the barrier separating the outside world from the Earthly Paradise. (Etymologically, the word paradise comes from Persian and means “walled enclosure”: pairi- “around” + diz “to make, form (a wall)). What Bruno longs to return to is an un-differentiated world where denominations such as Christian, Jew, “normal,” and “disabled” are superseded by a pure humanity.

Bruno’s next visit to Adam is to bring him the perfect gift (a green ball), but it turns out to be also the day all the patients are to be deported from the institution to the killing center. This crucial scene is composed in the style of a cinema montage, con-

101 “He felt as though he had returned home to a place he had known long ago but forgotten. Adam wasn’t a stranger to him, he was his brother. Bruno had abandoned him, yes: but Adam had waited for him; and there he stood. [...] From that day on, Bruno no longer felt comfortable at home or at school; Adam’s room was the center of the world, Bruno didn’t see why he should stay at its margins.”
trasting the loud arrival of the SS (divided up into synecdochal images of motors howling, brakes shrieking, boots trampling, and glass shattering) with the silence around Bruno, who is so engrossed in his interaction with Adam that it is almost as if he has turned deaf-mute himself. When the Nazis force open the door to take Adam away, Bruno and Adam hold on to each other so tightly that they end up being put on the truck together. On its way through town, the convoy of trucks is stopped by the police, who come to Bruno’s rescue. But he doesn’t want to be separated from Adam and the two cling to each other even more. Torn away from Adam by two policemen, Bruno falls down from the truck. The last glimpse he gets of Adam is the truck vanishing in the distance “über einer schwarz qualmenden Auspuffgaswolke” [above a black billowing cloud of smoke from the exhaust] (161) a grim intimation of the fate that awaits him once the trucks reach their destination.

This dramatic ending literally throws Bruno back into his own world—transformed and redeemed—while his redeemer is taken away and sacrificed. One could argue that the friendship with Adam has turned Bruno from an ignorant and callous child into an opponent of the regime. Adam is, just as Böll’s Onkel Thomas, a mystical figure, a type of idiot savant, whose savantism is obvious only to the story’s protagonist and helps him to know his true self. The use of the figure of the idiot savant as a redeeming or enabling character has been theorized by disability scholars, especially in the context of representations of autism in films. Stuart Murray, Anthony Baker, Merope
Pavlides, and others have examined how characters with this particular developmental disability are included in movies typically not as active participants or protagonists, but as “the other” against which protagonists measure their own sense of selfhood, and to which the viewers’ position remains one of distant observation, not identification.\(^\text{102}\)

These autistic characters are either cast as children or as childlike, harmless, and innocent grown-ups, who depend on others as care givers and thus become vulnerable. Very often, they are endowed with savant skills or special powers, such as an almost superhuman mathematical ability, or supernatural healing powers. In some representations, the helpless disabled character is then endangered in one way or the other, in order for the protagonist to save him or bond with him, and to learn important lessons about love, tolerance, and acceptance. In these exploitative and reductive portrayals of autistic characters their status as viable plot device hinges exclusively on their savant skills or special powers; otherwise they seem to have no agency, no potential for development, and no meaningful function in society.\(^\text{103}\)


\(^{103}\) As is more generally the tendency among scholars writing on representations of disability, the scholars quoted here are mainly concerned with revealing the ways in which these cinematic depictions of autism fail to represent accurately the reality of autism, as if, as Michael Bérubé writes, fictional characters “could be read simply as representations of real people.” See Michael Bérubé, “Disability and Narrative,”
Let me return at this point to the concept of the seemingly empowering portrayal of racially marginalized characters mentioned in the context of Böll’s Thomas and Uncle Tom. As a disabled Jew, Schnurre’s Adam is a doubly “othered” figure, and as such, Adam could be read not only as a typical savant figure but also as a specifically German version of the figure known as the “magic negro” in American post-World War II culture. The term, primarily used by black critics to denounce the simplistic and stereotypical ways in which majority writers and directors attempt to portray minorities “positively.”104 The “magic negro” is a black character who has special insights or powers and appears in the narrative seemingly out of nowhere in order to help the white protagonist realize his own faults and overcome them. This magical or mystical figure is also “in some way outwardly or inwardly disabled, either by discrimination, disability or social constraint.”105 Even though the magic negro is endowed with special powers, he nonetheless remains a pawn in almost all his manifestations, a stereotypical enabler figure and a social outcast, at the service of the white protagonist, with no idiosyncratic characteristics of his or her

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Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom can be read as a literary prototype of the “magic negro”: he is portrayed as an exceptional character who reassures white characters rather than confirms their fear of black violence. I do not by any means intend to equate blackness with disability. Rather, I would like to draw attention to a particular pattern in the depiction of “outsider” figures by “insider” writers, whereby ostensibly positive and empowering depictions in fact rely on deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes. “Disabled enabler” is the term I have coined to describe the corresponding figure in literary depictions of disability, whose primary function is to “redeem” or somehow “educate” the able-bodied or able-minded protagonists.\footnote{107}

Returning now to Böll’s and Schnurre’s disabled characters, it is striking how extremely vague and stereotypical they remain. Böll does not give us a physical description of Onkel Thomas, whose only characteristic is his absentminded listening and responding to voices only he can hear. All we know about Adam is that he has a beard, that his gaze is “nirgends zu Ende” (149), and that he has insight into the “Wesenlose” (154). Schnurre’s portrayal of the mental institution borders on the gothic: the porter has a gar-

\footnote{106 Other literary examples of “magic negro” characters are to be found in Mark Twain’s \textit{Huckleberry Finn} and Frederick Douglass’s \textit{The Heroic Slave}, as well as in a large number of Stephen King’s novels and short stories and film adaptations thereof (e.g. \textit{The Shining}, \textit{The Shawshank Redemption}, \textit{The Green Mile}, etc.). See also Thomas Cripps, \textit{Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era} (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), which presents actor Sidney Poitier as a paradigmatic “magic negro” figure.}

\footnote{107 One of the most famous incarnations of a “disabled enabler” figure is Dustin Hoffmann’s character in \textit{Rain Man} (dir. Barry Levinson, 1988).}
lic braid hanging at the door of his office, as if to ward off the occupants’ evil spirits, and the doctors are threatening demigods in blinding white robes. In the eyes of the other characters, Adam is little more than an animal: locked up in a padded cell with the furniture nailed to the floor, he is either in a state of catatonia, or he is a raving madman (thus he flies into a rage when the doctors take away the dead mouse, Bruno’s first gift to Adam). Only Bruno is able to “tame” Adam and only he can see his unique abilities.

Moving from the short stories to the novels of the 1950s, the figure of the “disabled enabler” expands and takes on new variations. Alfred Andersch, Christoph Hein, and Günter Grass present different and more complex versions of “disabled enabler” figures—in that some of them are endowed with dangerous or destructive, rather than purely prophetic but harmless powers.

**Waiting for the Water**

In contrast to Schnurre’s portrayal of an entire town quietly condoning the deportation of the Jewish asylum inmates, Alfred Andersch’s image of Nazi-German small-town life is a fantasy community of good Germans joined in common opposition to the Nazis, who are “die Anderen” and come from out of town. Published in 1957, *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* presents the coming-to-consciousness of five characters: the disillusioned communist Gregor, the despairing fisherman Knudsen, also a communist, the Jewish girl Judith, pastor Helander, and an adolescent boy. They eventually unite in the rescue of the
“Klosterschüler,” a wooden statue in danger of being confiscated by the Nazis as “entar-tete Kunst,” and each of them decides to flee or resist the Nazi regime in one way or another. Most analyses of the novel focus on the inner struggles of its main characters and the role of the wooden statue as catalyst for the action.108 While some of these analyses discuss disability in the figure of pastor Helander, who lost his leg at Verdun, I want to draw attention to two disabled characters in the book who have been largely overlooked: Judith Levin’s paraplegic mother and fisherman Knudsen’s mentally ill wife Bertha. Mrs. Levin and Bertha are parallel figures within the narrative: they are persecuted by the Nazis as “Lebensunwertes Leben,” their disability is a “hindrance” to their escape, and they both have “special” insights, which the other characters lack.

Even though Mrs. Levin has tried repeatedly to convince her daughter to get out of the country while she still can, Judith refuses to leave her paralyzed mother behind. Before ultimately killing herself to allow her daughter to flee, Mrs. Levin announces that there will be war and they will all die: “Sie werden ihren Krieg machen, Kind, glaub mir! Er ist ganz nah, ich kann ihn schon fühlen. Und sie werden uns alle sterben lassen in die-

sem Krieg.” ¹⁰⁹ Judith resolves to honor her mother’s memory and try to find a way to escape Germany via Rerik, the small town on the Baltic coast, which her mother had always remembered fondly as an idyllic vacation spot. Mrs. Levin’s sense of future dangers proves prophetic, and her tragic suicide saves Judith’s life. This scene between the disabled mother and her daughter is one of two concrete references to the Holocaust in the entire book.

The only other explicit hint at the Nazis’ mass murder in the novel is with respect to Knudsen’s mentally ill wife Bertha, who is in danger of falling victim to the euthanasia program. Presented repeatedly as a child-like and harmless figure—“blond and gentle [sanft], a pretty young woman of forty”; “amiable and gentle, a good wife” (13/14)—Bertha has only one little “quirk,” as her husband calls it: she compulsively repeats the same joke. The joke concerns a group of mad people who jump into an empty outdoor swimming pool during the winter. When a passerby remarks to them that there is no water in the pool, they, rubbing their bruises, reply that they are practicing for the summer. Bertha tells this joke compulsively, everywhere and all the time, and the people in town have gotten used to it. Still, Knudsen is afraid to leave Bertha alone for too long, fearing that the “Others” will take her away:

Wenn ich nicht aufpasse, dachte er, werden sie dich zu den Irren bringen,

¹⁰⁹ Alfred Andersch, Sansibar oder der letzte Grund (Zürich: Diogenes, 1993): 19. “They’ll have their war, child, believe me. It’s quite close, I can feel it already. And they’ll see to it that we all die in this war.” Flight to Afar, trans. Michael Bullock (New Milford: Toby Press, 2004): 20.
obwohl du gar nicht irre bist. [...] Vor einem Jahr war einer von den Andere zu Knudsen gekommen und hatte gesagt: Ihre Frau ist geistesgestört, wir müssen sie in eine Anstalt bringen. Mit der Hilfe von Doktor Frerking hatte Knudsen es verhindert, dass sie ihm die Frau wegnahmen. Er wusste, was sie mit den Geisteskranken machten, die sie erst einmal in den Anstalten hatten, und es hing an Bertha. Wenn er mit dem Kutter draußen auf See war, hatte er immer Angst, bei der Rückkehr Bertha nicht mehr vorzufinden. Übrigens hatte er den Eindruck gehabt, dass sie ihn mit der Drohung, Bertha in eine Anstalt zu bringen, erpressen wollten. Sie wollten, dass er sich ruhig verhielte. Sie gebrauchten die arme Bertha als Waffe gegen die Partei.110 (14)

Knudsen’s fear for Bertha’s life is the reason he wants to leave the communist party, and it is also the reason why at first he cannot bring himself to rescue the wooden statue. He is certain that the “Others” will arrest him and deport Bertha if he takes the statue to Sweden. But Bertha’s role is much more complex. She is an integral part in the novel’s utopian image of heroic solidarity. Bertha is not “othered” in Sansibar; if anything, she is made to look harmless and helpless, just as the paralyzed Mrs. Levin and the naïve Judith. She is part of the group of good Germans who are pitted against “die Anderen,” and it is only them who think she is disabled and needs to be locked away. Moreover, we are told that Bertha’s “quirk” first appeared only a few years previously (“Es lag ein paar Jahre zurück, dass sie begonnen hatte, diesen Witz von den Irren, die ins leere

110 “If I don’t look out, thought Knudsen, they’ll put you among the lunatics too, although you’re not mad. [...] A year ago, however, one of the Others had come and said: ‘Your wife is out of her mind, we shall have to put her in an asylum.’ With Dr. Frerking’s help Knudsen had prevented them from taking away his wife. He knew what they did with the insane once they had them inside an asylum, and he was attached to Bertha. When he was out at sea with the smack, he was always afraid he wouldn’t find Bertha there when he returned. Moreover, he had the impression that they intended to blackmail him with the threat of putting Bertha in an asylum. They wanted to make him keep quiet. They were using poor Bertha as a weapon against the Party.” (14–5)
Schwimmbecken sprangen, zu erzählen” (14)), which situates the onset of her “madness” at around the time of the Nazis’ rise to power. Her joke can thus be read as a metaphor of Andersch’s small-town Germans waiting for liberation from Nazi rule. Water is a powerful metaphor of salvation in the book and the major avenue of escape to freedom from Rerik—be it to Sweden or to Zanzibar. Bertha’s joke implies that, since not everyone can escape from Germany, the Germans have to wait for the Nazi-“winter” to be over and for the water to come back to where they are. Refusing to accept the status quo (the fact that the Nazis have drained the water from the pool), they suffer the scrapes and bruises in the hope that the inevitable summer will bring water and liberation. Repeating her joke like a refrain, insisting that people listen to it, Bertha performs the function of the chorus in a Greek tragedy: she comments on the situation, suggests action, gives insight. Just as Onkel Thomas who, seemingly listening to the Greek chorus, repeatedly calls for justice in Böll’s story, Bertha reminds people with her joke to keep struggling, even though they might have some bruises to show for it.

**Christoph Hein’s Marlene**

In many ways, Christoph Hein’s 1985 novel *Horns Ende* can be seen as a rewriting, with different focus and more temporal layers, of Andersch’s novel. *Horns Ende* reflects on

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111 “It was a few years ago that she started telling this joke about the lunatics who dived into the empty swimming pool.” (14)
similar issues such as responsibility, resistance, and the capacity for empathy, but it is mainly concerned with pointing out the lack thereof in the Nazi period as well as the Communist GDR. The novel also adds a meditation on issues of memory and forgetting, storytelling and historiography.¹¹² Set in the early 1980s, the different narrators of Horns Ende reconstruct the events of the summer of 1957 in the fictitious GDR town Bad Guldenberg, which culminate in the suicide of the historian Horn, who is being persecuted by the Communist regime because of his allegedly subversive speeches. A third temporal level is the Nazi regime whose persecutions of “undesirables” are put in direct connection with the Communist purges of dissidents in the 1950s. Just as in Andersch’s novel, the story is multi-perspectival—it encompasses the witness accounts of five townspeople, among them Marlene, a young woman who is supposedly mentally ill. While not a central character, Marlene has her own very idiosyncratic narrative voice, and, as a more independent version of Andersch’s Bertha, she assumes the role of a commentator on the town and its people. The five different witness accounts not only reveal the subjective nature of memory and the problems of accurately documenting the past, but also expose the townspeople as a bunch of informers who still exclude and ostracize those who are different.

The characters of Horn and Marlene embody the link between the Nazi past and

¹¹² For in-depth analyses of Hein’s concept of history see, among others, David W. Robinson, Deconstructing East Germany: Christoph Hein’s Literature of Dissent (Columbia: Camden House, 1999), and Phillip S. McKnight, Understanding Christoph Hein (Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1995)
the Communist present: the town’s collective marginalization of Horn and the people’s silence about his suicide are mirrored by their denunciation of Marlene and their silence about her mother’s murder in the euthanasia program at the hands of the Nazis. Marlene’s parents had hidden her from the Nazi officials. When she was denounced by someone from the town, Marlene’s mother sacrificed herself and was instead deported and killed. Once the townspeople discover that Marlene is still alive, they are speechless:

Wie ein Hagelschlag, eisig und vernichtend, traf diese Nachricht unsere kleine Stadt. Die Erleichterung, die nach der Denunziation und dem vermeintlichen Transport der Kranken in die Anstalt zu bemerken war, schlug nun um in stummes Entsetzen. [...] Obgleich viele in der Stadt die Wahrheit wussten, wagte es keiner, sie laut auszusprechen. [...] die schlechten Kriegsnachrichten, die vorrückenden Russen und die nächtlichen Bombardements deutscher Städte durch englische Flugzeuge ließen es denen, die etwas gehört oder gesehen hatten, wohl ratsam erscheinen, keine zweite Denunziation zu wagen.113

We can infer that the townspeople would have reported Marlene a second time, had not the end of the war put an end also to the “cleansing” (McKnight 65). After the war, Marlene’s mother’s name is inscribed on the empty gravestone and becomes a powerful reminder of the town’s repressed guilt. Marlene assumes not only the role of the “othered” outsider but also the uncanny role of the one who returned from the dead.

113 “The news came down on our little down like a hailstorm, icy and destructive. The palpable relief after the denunciation and the supposed transport of the sick to the asylum now turned to silent horror. [...] Even though many in the town knew the truth, no one dared to say it out loud. [...] the bad news of the war effort, the advance of the Russian forces and the nightly bombardment of German cities by English aircraft made it seem highly advisable to those who had seen or heard anything not to risk a second denunciation.” Christoph Hein, Horns Ende (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1985): 182–3
“Als habe sich seit dem Ende des Krieges nichts geändert,” [as if nothing had changed since the end of the war] (185) Marlene and her father live in complete isolation, their only friends being the similarly “othered” gypsies who come to the town every summer.

The narrative alignment of Horn, the Gohl family, and the gypsies further underlines the continuities in the exclusion of outsiders. The gypsies are linked to Marlene not only because they also represent a group that was persecuted under the Nazi regime, but also because they continue to be treated as outsiders. Only the gypsies seem to perceive Marlene’s status as “seer.”114 Marlene plans to marry the gypsy Carlos. This marriage, fantasy or not, becomes impossible when Marlene is raped by a drunkard from the town, an act that further symbolizes the continuing mistreatment of disabled people. The supposed order and integrity of the town and its people is called into question by the mere presence of Marlene and the gypsies.115

Like Bertha, Marlene is presented as a childlike, innocent, and harmless victim.

114 “Die Verrückten [sind] für die Zigeuner heilige Leute.” [For the gypsies, the mad are sacred people] (180)

115 The gypsies bring “unbegreifliche Ferne, Fremdheit und unverständliche, gutturale Schreie” [unfathomable distance, foreignness and incomprehensible, guttural screams] that disturb the “unveränderbare, wohlbühnten Ablauf der Zeit” [unchangeable, sheltered passage of time] (10) in the town. The friendship between Marlene’s father and the gypsies is perceived by the townspeople as a betrayal and “das anfängliche Bedauern seines schweren Schicksals und ein gewisses Verständnis für das einsiedlerische Leben des alten Malers wichen bald der Verärgerung über sein unzugängliches Wesen und einer offenen Missbilligung seiner rätselhaften Beziehung zu den Zigeunern” [the initial sympathy for his hard fate and a certain understanding for the old painter’s hermitic life quickly gave way to irritation at his unapproachable nature and overt disapproval of his mysterious relationship to the gypsies] (184). For a more in-depth analysis of the gypsies in the novel see Heinz-Peter Preuß, “Hoffnung im Zerfall. Das Negative und das Andere in Horns Ende,” Chronist ohne Botschaft, Christoph Hein. Ein Arbeitsbuch. Materialien, Auskünfte, Bibliographie, ed. Klaus Hammer, (Berlin: Aufbau, 1992), and Bärbel Lücke, Christoph Hein, “Horns Ende”: Interpretation (München: Oldenbourg, 1994): 94-7.
But in contrast to all the other disabled figures in the texts analyzed thus far, who are limited to repeating their single sentence or joke, Marlene is endowed with an independent narrative voice. While she provides no additional insight into the mystery of Horn’s death, her role is to question the people’s perception of what and who is “normal” in the town, and of reality in general. The concepts of remembering and forgetting seem alien to her, since she lives in a perpetual simultaneity [Gleichzeitigkeit]. This sense of temporal simultaneity and unity goes hand in hand with a mythical relationship to nature and language. Marlene symbolizes lost innocence and humanity. With her clairvoyant dreams, Marlene is a version of the mythological seer Cassandra: “Meine Träume sind die Schatten, die im voraus auf die Erde fallen und mir die Dinge ankünden. Die guten und die schlechten,” [my dreams are the shadows that fall on the earth ahead of time and announce the arrival of things. The good and the bad] (45), and, like Cassandra, nobody believes her, the people cast her as a madwoman and in the end she is brutally raped.116 Her quasi-mythical language lacks the rational and abstract conceptions of the “normal” people in the novel, and as such, her account seems to come closer to the truth than any other:

Die Leute sagen, ich sei verrückt. Das ist lustig, Mama. Meine Träume haben mir gesagt, dass sie verrückt sind und nicht ich. Sie haben mir gesagt, dass ich sehe und weiß, was die anderen nicht sehen können und nicht wissen. Darum sind sie wütend und lachen über mich und sagen, dass ich verrückt sei. Ein-

116 See also Lücke, Horns Ende: 82-90.
mal, so sagen meine Träume, werden diese Leute sehen, was ich sehe.117 (47).

As much as this passage suggests Marlene’s potential role as a redeemer or enabler figure, she ultimately fails even to save herself, because her world does not present an alternative to or a way out of the oppressing reality. Her rape, which she describes as “Hochzeit,” aligning the act of getting married with the act of having sexual intercourse, makes this painfully clear, since it is the moment that also shatters her naïve relationship to language:


Critics have tended to find the character of Marlene weak and problematic. Heinz-Peter Preußer goes so far as to find her plainly implausible: if she is supposed to be a disabled person, his criticism implies, why then is she able to express herself in complex and grammatically correct sentences?119 Her language, it seems, does not fit any preconcep-

117 “People say I’m crazy. That’s funny, mama. My dreams told me that they’re the crazy ones, not me. They told me that I see and know what the others can’t see and don’t know. That’s why they are angry and laugh at me and say that I’m crazy. One day, so my dreams say, these people will see what I see.”

118 “I can’t marry [Carlos] because I’m already married. [...] Oh, mama, why did you lie to me? Why did you tell me it was wonderful? It wasn’t wonderful, mama. I thought I would die. [...] Why can’t you tell the truth, but instead have to lie and say that it’s wonderful? Or does wonderful mean terrible for you crazy people? Have you also made the words crazy?”

119 Preußer writes: “Marlene artikuliert mit dem emphatischen Impetus der kindlich Verrückten, der einsichtig Beschränkten, den Anspruch auf Wahrhaftigkeit gerade vor sich selbst, aber sie äußert ihn in einer grundsätzlichen Diskursivität, die durch das Naive ihrer Rede nur unwesentlich in Frage gestellt wird. [...]
tions of disability. It is significant that at the precise moment in which a supposedly disabled character is endowed with narrative agency it should spark a critical discussion regarding the appropriate or realistic representation of mental disability. Just as in Andersch’s novel, it is the townspeople, the “Anderen,” who assume Marlene is disabled, while it never becomes clear what exactly Marlene’s disability is. Further, it seems puzzling that critics would assume that any mental disability has to be total and thus deny mentally disabled people the possibility of expressing themselves in a meaningful way.

Thus, in the remainder of this section, it is necessary to expand our focus in order to encompass questions of reception. While the disabled characters in Böll, Schnurre, and Andersch play a marginal role and hence have received scant critical attention, they now take center stage, become protagonists and narrators. Whereas critics have long been accustomed to unreliable narrators, they seem to have trouble accepting a narrator who is mentally disabled, deeming it unrealistic for such a character to be capable of coherent narration. Hein is in no way concerned with an accurate definition of Marlene’s

Die Sprache der Marlene ist so unstimmig wie keine andere in Horns Ende. Sie äußert sich nicht nur in komplexen, grammatisch stimmigen Sätzen, sondern kann sich sogar im Konjunktiv verwundern [!] . Das eingeschränkte Bewusstsein wird nicht noch in seiner Sprachlichkeit reflektiert” [With the emphatic impetus of the childishly insane, of someone with limited rational capabilities, Marlene articulates the demand for truthfulness, but she does so by means of a fundamental discursivity that is only marginally questioned by the naïveté of her speech ... Marlene’s voice is the most jarring in all of Horns Ende. Not only does she speak in complex, grammatically correct sentences, but she is even able to express wonder in the subjunctive. Her limited consciousness is not reflected linguistically] (138, emphasis added). Preußer’s wholesale denial of linguistic prowess to the mentally disabled, regardless of the severity or extent of their supposed condition, reflects an extremely narrow conception of disability: it was precisely this sort of un-nuanced thinking that Hein exposes as a point of continuity between the Nazi period and post-war Germany.
illness. Rather, he illustrates how disability and “otherness” are inscribed onto her by the townspeople. Hence, in questioning Marlene’s ability to use complex language and syntax, critics such as Preußer in effect uncritically buy into the “othering” gesture of the majority. Through the figure of Marlene, Hein raises questions about what exactly has changed since the Nazi period if people like Horn and Marlene are just as ostracized, not necessarily by a totalitarian state, but by the townspeople themselves. The carnivalesque behavior of the gypsies, or Marlene’s fairy-tale life have no place in the rationalized and alienated lives of Bad Guldenberg’s petty bourgeoisie. In this sense, Marlene actually lives an a-historical synchronicity of the diachronic: she is still the dreaded “other.”

Thus, while Andersch creates a Wunschbiographie, as Ruth Klüger has called it, where Germans become courageous resisters and the Nazis are “die Anderen,” Hein presents us with a glum counter-narrative to the supposedly anti-Fascist ideology of the GDR and the illusion of a “zero hour”: a new beginning in 1945.

**Oskar and Schugger Leo**

Of the novels that address the memory of the Third Reich and euthanasia, Günter Grass’s *Die Blechtrommel* is certainly the most unusual. The novel’s famous beginning testifies to Grass’ radically different approach to the topic. The sentence “Zugegeben: ich

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bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt” suggests that we are about to read the story, the autobiography even, of an alleged madman. *Die Blechtrommel* constitutes the most innovative move towards representing disability in all the works discussed in this chapter in that it assumes the narrative point of view of a potential victim of the euthanasia program: the dwarfish, crippled, and allegedly insane Oskar Mazerath. From the very beginning, Oskar’s self-description suggests that he is a type of seer, or rather a “hearer,” with magical powers: “Ich gehörte zu den hellhörigen Säuglingen, deren geistige Entwicklung schon bei der Geburt abgeschlossen ist und sich fortan nur noch bestätigen muss” (52). The adverb “zugegeben” in the novel’s first sentence establishes a dichotomy between how Oskar perceives himself and how the other people see him. Casting doubt on his own madness, Oskar sets out to present to the reader the madness of the “normal” people, his parents and neighbors, the representatives of the petty bourgeoisie who populate the novel. Everything told in the novel, Oskar’s opening statement suggests, “must be considered suspect.”

This initial ambiguity about Oskar’s madness and his guilt, about his status as a victim of or a participant in the events in the book, pervades both temporal levels in the

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122 “I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is complete at birth and thereafter simply confirmed.” (35)

novel. During the Nazi period, Oskar is in danger of falling victim to the Nazi euthanasia program (as a supposedly mentally retarded, dwarfish cripple with an unsteady, wandering lifestyle, a dubious family background, and a criminal record, he unites all the different groups of victims), but he also commits several minor crimes and profits from the Nazis as their entertainer on the Western front. His role in the deaths of his mother and his two fathers remains ambiguous. After the war, he tries in vain to assimilate by yet again performing for a society that still treats him as an outcast, and in the end he is locked up as a murderer. Despite Oskar’s remark that he is happy to have reached a place of refuge in the psychiatric clinic, his institutionalization has to be read as a bitterly ironic diagnosis of the continuing marginalization of disabled people in the post-war years: what the Nazis failed to do, has been finally achieved by the Federal Republic.

Linguistically, the ambiguity between victim and perpetrator is mirrored in Oskar’s switching back and forth between first and third person narrative, often even within the same sentence, as if he were giving expression to (or mimicking) a schizophrenic state of mind, casting himself as subject and object of the events in his own story. The narrative itself is also punctured by seemingly mad ravings, where Oskar’s narrative force carries him away into a visionary frenzy of words, such as for example in the chapter “Glaube Hoffnung Liebe” [Faith Hope Love], which ends in a vision of Santa Claus as the “Gasmann,” or the mysteriously recurring image of the “Schwarze Köchin.”

That Oskar is indeed in danger of falling victim to the “Sonderbehandlung” of the
euthanasia program is hinted at during his first encounter with the dwarf Bebra, when Bebra warns Oskar that “Unsereins muss vorspielen und die Handlung bestimmen, sonst wird unsereins von jenen da behandelt. Und jene da spielen uns allzu gerne übel mit!” (144).124 This scene is only one of many instances in which Grass presents his disabled characters as seeing through, undermining, or mocking Nazi euphemisms. The vague threat against Oskar becomes explicit when an official from the Ministry of Public Health asks Oskar’s father Alfred to consign Oskar to an institution. Maria, his stepmother, is not at all opposed to the idea of getting rid of Oskar. Echoing the Nazis’ pro-euthanasia rhetoric, she slyly casts Oskar as helpless “life unworthy of life” explaining to Alfred that Oskar “weiß nich zu leben und weiß nich zu sterben!” (474). Alfred refuses, remembering the promise he gave to Agnes on her deathbed: “Das geht doch nich. Man kann doch den eigenen Sohn nich. Selbst wenn er zehnmal und alle Ärzte dasselbe sagen. Die schreiben das einfach so hin. Die haben wohl keine Kinder” (474).125 Maria has shown her true colors, as a bourgeois opportunist, and he has visions of her abandoning him at a euthanasia center. He is safe, however, until his stunt with the “Stäuberbande” has even Alfred convinced that Oskar is better institutionalized. Alfred signs the letter but it is never delivered: Danzig is surrounded by the Russian army and the war is over.

124 “We have to perform and direct the action, otherwise our kind will be manipulated by those who do. And they’ll all too happily pull a fast one on us.” (102)

125 “don’t know how to live or how to die!” (343) “I just can’t do it. Not my own son. Even if he goes ten times and the doctors all say the same. They just jot those things down. Probably don’t have any kids of their own.” (342)
Among the vast number of studies on the Blechtrommel, Peter Arnds’s book Representation, Subversion, and Eugenics in Günter Grass’s “The Tin Drum” is so far the only one to deal extensively with the novel’s critical representation of Nazi body politics and their persecution of non-Jewish minorities, as well as the continuing marginalization of some of these minorities in the Federal Republic.126 Focusing mainly on the figure of Oskar as a conglomeration of different literary and folk culture traditions, Arnds demonstrates how Grass unites elements of the fairy tale, the carnivalesque, and the grotesque to create a subversive image of the Nazis’ persecution of “asocials,” the disabled, criminals, and dissidents. Departing from Mikhail Bakhtin’s seminal Rabelais and His World, Arnds determines three main representational approaches in the novel, all of which are united in the figure of Oskar: the dwarf fairy tale, used to represent the persecution of the physically disabled; various carnival figures such as the trickster, the fool, and the harlequin to represent the persecution of the mentally disabled; and the picaresque

novel to represent the persecution of thieves, vagabonds and other social outsiders.\footnote{Arnds writes that the “dichotomy of the Classical versus the grotesque modus vivendi, if applied to Nazi Germany, corresponds to the clash between Nazi eugenics and all forms of so-called a-socials: the physically and mentally disabled, vagrants, criminals, and those considered lazy (arbeitsscheu).” Arnds, \textit{Representation}: 6.} Grass, according to Arnds, offers a grotesque counter-culture not only to the Nazis’ ideology of health, discipline, and subordination, but also to post-war rationalism and restoration by reveling in the “unconventional body, the unconventional mind, insanity at the individual level but also at the level of the family, as well as the vagrant lifestyle as an act of becoming rather than the closed, static lifestyle of the bourgeoisie with its teleology of \textit{Bildung}” (Arnds 6).

Rather than dwelling on Oskar or on the other two dwarf characters Bebra and Signora Roswitha Raguna, who function as variations on the theme of the magical enabler figure we found in Böll and Schnurre, I want to shed light on the underexplored character of Schugger Leo and his reincarnation in the Federal Republic as Sabber Willem. Schugger Leo (his name is an abbreviation of “meschugge,” crazy) is homeless (he seems to live in the cemetery), and thus also a potential victim of Nazi euthanasia. Like Bertha in Andersch’s novel, Leo is connected to and comments on crucial moments in the plot. Schugger Leo is “eine stadtbekannte Person,” presented as a babbling and drooling madman, who, clad in a dirty and wrinkled black suit with a top-hat, comes to funerals in order to greet the mourners and earn a few coins by saying his condolences. Similar to
Bertha, Schugger Leo’s madness is a result of outer circumstances. According to the talk of the town, Leo went mad while he was training to become a preacher at the seminary, where “eines sonnigen Tages die Welt, die Sakramente, die Konfessionen, Himmel und Hölle, Leben und Tod [ihn] so vollkommen verrückt hatten, dass Leos Weltbild fortan zwar verrückt, aber dennoch vollendet glänzte” (214). The wordplay on “verrückt” (meaning both crazy and displaced) implies that Leo’s view of the world is not necessarily crazy but just different. And indeed, Leo has insights that none of the other characters have, not even Oskar.

We first encounter Schugger Leo at the funeral of Oskar’s mother Agnes, where he announces: “Nun ist sie schon dort, wo alles so billig ist. Habt ihr den Herrn gesehen? Habemus ad Dominum. Er ging vorbei und hatte es eilig. Amen” (215). His line “Have you seen the Lord?” repeated to everyone at every opportunity, becomes his catch phrase, similar to Bertha’s joke or Onkel Thomas’ plea for justice, and it assumes more and more importance in the course of the narration. Next, Leo appears as a prophet of doom at Herbert Truczinski’s funeral in the chapter “Glaube Hoffnung Liebe,” where he identifies storm trooper Meyn as bringer of future calamity not only for the Jew Markus but also for people like himself: “Nur der SA-Mann durfte den weißen Handschuh Leos

128 “one sunny day, while he was still at the seminary, the world, the sacraments, the confessions, heaven and hell, life and death, had driven him so mad that from then on Leo’s worldview, though mad [verrückt], was radiant with perfection.” (152)

129 “Now she’s where everything’s cheap. Did you see the Lord? Habemus ad Dominum. He passed by in a hurry. Amen.” (153)
nicht fassen, weil Leo den SA-Mann erkannte, fürchtete, und ihm laut schreiend den Handschuh und das Beileid entzog” (255). “Glaube Hoffnung Liebe” is a key chapter in the novel, not only because it satirically exposes the Nazis’ hypocrisy, but also because it shows how the Holocaust was possible “not in spite of but because of the ordinary man in the street” and that it involved “little or no disruption of the existing system of values” (O’Neill 24). While the people in Oskar’s neighborhood seem to close their eyes to what is happening to the Jews and other “undesirables,” they sue Meyn when they discover that he mistreated and killed his four cats. Even though he “distinguishes” himself through exceptionally courageous behavior against Jews during the Kristallnacht, Meyn is expelled from the SA “wegen unmenschlicher Tierquälerei” [for inhuman cruelty to animals] (259/185). Musing on the image of Santa Claus as the “Gasmann,” Oskar reflects on the danger that the new “state religion,” as he calls it, has in store also for “gnomhafte Blechtrommler.” The mystical connection between Oskar and Schugger Leo becomes more explicit when Leo finds out where the Nazis shot and buried Oskar’s uncle Jan and the other men who were captured defending the post office during the

130 “Only the SA man could not grasp his white glove, for Leo saw what he was and with a loud cry of fear withdrew both sympathy and the glove.” (183)

131 Oskar recognizes remnants and continuities of the people’s eagerness to exclude people who do not fit in either in the Federal Republic, which can still be a potentially dangerous place for Oskar: “Und als dann Schluss war, machten sie schnell einen hoffnungsvollen Anfang daraus; [...] Ich aber, ich weiß nicht. Ich weiß zum Beispiel nicht, wer sich heute unter den Bärten der Weihnachtsmänner versteckt, weiß nicht, was Knecht Ruprecht im Sack hat, weiß nicht, wie man die Gashähne zudreht und abdrosselt” [And when the end came, they quickly turned it to a hopeful beginning; ... As for me, I just don’t know. I don’t know, for example, who hides behind Santa Claus beards today, don’t know what Ruprecht his helper has in his sack, don’t know how to wring the necks of gas cocks, nor how to choke them off] (263/188).
invasion of Danzig. Leo leads Oskar to the spot where he found an empty bullet casing and the Skat playing card, which Jan had on him when he was taken prisoner by the Nazis. Because of Leo, Oskar is able to tell his grandmother where Jan is buried so that the family can mourn him. As proof, he gives her the playing card and the bullet casing. Leo’s last and most extraordinary appearance is at Alfred Mazerath’s funeral at the end of the war. We realize that Leo’s question “Have you seen the Lord?” is by no means rhetorical: it refers to Oskar. Leo has long recognized his “Lord” in Oskar, who likes to compare himself to Jesus. Thus, it is not surprising that Leo is the only one who recognizes Oskar’s beginning growth and joyfully proclaims: “‘Der Herr, der Herr!’ schrie er und schüttelte den Wellensittich im Käfig. ‘Nu seht den Herrn, wie er wächst, nu seht, wie er wächst!’” [“The Lord, the Lord!” he cried and shook the budgie in its cage. “Look at the Lord, how He is growing, look at Him grow!”] (535/388). At this, he seems to have fulfilled his mission as tragic commentator, and he runs off, followed by gunshots from the Russians.

Oskar’s narrative is deliberately vague at this point, leaving it open whether Schugger Leo is in fact killed or not, and, ghostlike, he returns in post-war Düsseldorf, where Oskar, now a stonemason’s apprentice, sees him in the cemetery. Now called Sabber Willem, the reincarnation of Schugger Leo remains enigmatically silent for the rest of the novel. In the Federal Republic, it seems, there is no place for people like Schugger Leo, and Oskar likewise drifts more and more into isolation. The people’s ambiguous relationship to figures like Leo and Oskar has not changed, a fact that becomes
clearer and clearer the more Oskar tries to adapt to the consumer-driven, achievement- and performance-oriented post-war society: nobody takes him seriously and they prefer to either emphasize his otherness or ignore him altogether. For example, Oskar takes the nurse Gertrud out dancing and she abandons him in the bar, too ashamed of being seen with him in public. Another example is Oskar’s employment as a model at the Kunstakademie. To Oskar’s horror, the students exaggerate the grotesque elements of his body, make his hump enormous, and portray him as “strähnigen Zigeuner” [a scraggly-haired gypsy], yet again an outsider, a grotesque figure who, according to Professor Kuchen, represents “den Wahnsinn unseres Jahrhunderts” [the madness of our century] (607/442; cf. Arnds 66–7). Thus, at the end of Blechtrommel, Oskar’s situation presents itself as glum: it is left open whether he will actually ever be acquitted and released from the institution. And if he is, his options are extremely limited. As if Oskar were finally giving in to madness, or putting on a last and definitive act of feigning madness, the novel ends in an associative maelstrom of fearful memories and images from which the “Schwarze Köchin” emerges as the most powerful and frightening. A popular figure from a children’s song and a recurring image throughout the entire novel, the “Schwarze Köchin” becomes an emblem of societal “othering” and ostracism.  

132 Walter Jahnke identifies the “Schwarze Köchin” as a structuring principle in the book and reads her as a master-image for all of Oskar’s fears. He does not, however, identify her as a figure of “othering,” whereas the purpose of the children’s game is, of course, to generate outcasts. Walter Jahnke and Klaus Lindemann, Günter Grass: Die Blechtrommel. Acht Kapitel zur Erschließung des Romans (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993).
Like Bebra and Roswitha, Schugger Leo is another example of the disabled enabler figure who helps Oskar with his special insight. But in Die Blechtrommel, the relationship between the protagonist and the “disabled enabler” is different from all the other texts because the protagonist-narrator is himself also marginalized and disabled. Oskar feels true kinship with Bebra, Roswitha, and Schugger Leo because he identifies with their way of seeing the world from the margins, so to speak, but at the same time he is not as radically marginalized as they are. Oskar’s constant oscillation between his different incarnations as victim and participant, lonely outsider and diabolic megalomaniac makes it impossible to put any definitive label on him. A glance at the contemporary criticism of the novel illustrates the difficulty of approaching a figure such as Oskar, especially in the restorative climate of the 1950s.

Upon its publication, Die Blechtrommel caused a scandal on the literary scene in Germany. Among the more than 40 contemporary reviews collected by Franz Josef Görtz, most attacked the book because of its provocative blasphemy and pornography. Interestingly, many of these critics resorted to using medical terminology in order to put forth their criticism—terminology that is uncannily reminiscent of Nazi “hygienic” language. Peter Hornung, writing for the Deutsche Tagespost calls it an “epileptische Kapriole” [epileptic extravaganza] (qtd. in Görtz 50) and a “Rebellion des Schwachsinns” [rebellion of imbecility] (52). The FAZ’s Günter Blöker impugns Grass’s “vollbewusst herbeigeführten Kretinismus” [deliberately induced cretinism] because it portrays the Third
Reich “ohne auch nur einmal die Höhe eines erhabenen Schreckens zu erreichen, wo das Geschehen, bei aller schändlichen Komik, ins Tragische umschlägt und damit sinnvoll würde. Sinnvoll, das hieße: wo es kathartische Wirkung erreichte” (74). The most shocking echo of Nazi “cleansing” politics comes from a certain Dr. med. H. Müller-Eckhard, writing for the Kölnische Rundschau. He reads the novel as a psychiatric therapy session and warns against giving this dangerous book to “Menschen mit unverdorbenem Geschmack,” [Individuals with unspoiled taste] because it “verherrlicht das Weltbild eines an Leib und Seele verkrüppelten Gnom” [glorifies the worldview of a mentally and physically crippled midget] (98). He concludes: “Nach dem Lesen der Blechtrommel überkommt einen das Verlangen nach sehr viel heißem Wasser und nach guter Seife” [After reading the Tin Drum one is overcome with a desire for lots of hot water and some good soap] (99).

Only very few reviewers pick up on the fact that Oskar is a potential victim of Nazi euthanasia: Jost Nolte writes in Die Welt that Oskar “entgeht der Spritze, die Hitlers Ärzte für ihn, den Gnom, bereithalten” [dodges the syringe that Hitler’s doctors have ready for him, the midget] (48); and on the Süddeutscher Rundfunk, Hans Magnus Enzensberger recognizes that: “Oskar soll abgespritzt werden als unnützer Fresser” [Oskar is to be lethally injected as a useless eater] (64). Enzensberger is also one of the few crit-

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133 “without even for a moment attaining the heights of sublime terror whereby these events, notwithstanding the outrageous comedy, might become tragic and thus meaningful. Meaningful, i.e. achieving a cathartic effect.”
ics who seems to appreciate Grass’s deliberate choice not to portray the Nazis as somehow sublime in their evil: “[Grass’] Blindheit gegen alles Ideologische feit ihn vor einer Versuchung, der so viele Schriftsteller erliegen, der nämlich, die Nazis zu dämonisieren. Grass stellt sie in ihrer wahren Aura dar, die nichts Luziferisches hat: in der Aura des Miefs” (66).^{134} The negative criticism of the *Blechtrommel* within literary circles mirrors to an astonishing degree the continuing mechanisms of marginalization and exclusion of everything that is not “normal” from post-war society at large. In the work- and achievement-obsessed Federal Republic, people with disabilities were still viewed in terms of deviance and deficiency. As Elizabeth Hamilton puts it, the goals of postwar rehabilitation parallel the ideals of National Socialism: “the suppression of deviant behavior; education toward orderliness, cleanliness, and discipline; and the measurement of a person’s perceived usefulness to the larger society” had all remained intact (Hamilton “Social Welfare” 228–9). Thus, by attacking the novel for its very otherness, the negative criticisms perform a kind of literary ostracism that turns the novel into a “disabled text,” so to speak, and implies that the *Blechtrommel* is better locked away so that innocent, healthy readers will not be “contaminated” by it.

As we have seen from this first section, the issue of Nazi euthanasia does feature in the fictional texts discussed so far, but on the whole it occupies a marginal space. The

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^{134} “[Grass’s] blindness to all ideology saves him from the temptation to which so many authors succumb, namely to demonize the Nazis. Grass represents them in their true aura which has nothing Satanic about it: it’s more like a fug.”
recurring figure of the “disabled enabler” can be read as a symptom of the authors’ inability or refusal to address the issue of euthanasia explicitly. Even though the “disabled enabler” undergoes a development from a one-dimensional, marginal, and mostly silent plot device towards more complex and central characters such as Hein’s Marlene or Grass’s Oskar, all of these characters remain essentially limited in that they ultimately cannot break through their social marginalization. Oskar and Marlene are the “other” that articulates itself, but they remain the “other.”

Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding the precise fate of these characters speaks to a more general reluctance or inability to articulate the facts of Nazi atrocities. Böll’s Onkel Thomas is just gone from one day to the other, we know that he was murdered, but how and by whom we can only infer from the very vague context. Schnurre’s story, while very explicit on the discriminations and cruel circumstances of the deportations of the Jewish psychiatric patients during the Third Reich, leaves the reader with the image of the trucks driving away to an unknown destination. In Andersch’s text, there is never a concrete notion of what will happen to any of the characters if they are caught by the “Anderen.” Even Hein and Grass remain vague when it comes to describing what exactly the euthanasia program was. Although it is fair to say that the authors are not primarily concerned with depicting the persecution of the disabled, it is striking that what depictions there are should be so ambiguous or even plainly inaccurate. It is clear that in all of these texts (including Holocaust) the disabled characters are merely plot
devices. The texts discussed in the next section, however, are more actively invested in helping us to remember euthanasia and its victims.

**Bridging the Silence, Part Two: Vicarious Witnessing**

In this section we move from exclusively fictional narratives to a more hybrid set of texts. These texts recover the biographies and family stories of individual victims, but they also reflect on the mechanisms of silencing and marginalization that still counteract the commemoration of euthanasia today. Among these we can distinguish three principal approaches. Firstly, documentary or historical studies, mostly written by historians or medical historians, that reconstruct victims’ biographies from medical files and examine the involvement of various institutions in the euthanasia program. Secondly, family-memoirs written by descendants of victims that reflect on the relationship of the different family members to the victim and the way the family deals with the memory of euthanasia. And finally, memoirs or fictional biographies, written by authors who have no familial connection to the subject matter. Writing about the victims of euthanasia poses a major problem to authors and scholars alike: unless there are personal letters that have survived or family members who are still alive and willing to talk about their relatives, the only source of information on the victims’ lives that has remained is their clinical file. These often cruelly disparaging documents are a highly problematic source.
While they say very little about the victims’ personalities and give only rudimentary information about their family background, the files do provide important insight into the patients’ lives in the institution, how they were treated, and who came to visit them. Some of the files reproduce in great detail the tests administered by doctors and psychiatrists in order to assess the patients’ mental capacity. In their portrayal of disabled people as objects or even dangerous mutants, to be tested according to their usefulness as workers, these Nazi doctor files illustrate what Primo Levi describes as the “Pannwitz gaze:” the Nazis’ dehumanizing gaze that met all “undesirables” and that divided them into useful and useless objects. People with disabilities were the first group that was met with this eliminatory and exterminatory gaze.

As we shall see, the authors have found different ways to address this phenome-

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135 Dr. Pannwitz was the chief of the chemical department at Auschwitz, where Levi interviewed for a job. He writes: “quello sguardo non corse fra due uomini; e se io sapessi spiegare a fondo la natura di quello sguardo, scambiato come attraverso la parete di vetro di un acquario tra due esseri che abitano mezzi diversi, avrei anche spiegato l’essenza della grande follia della terza Germania. Quello che tutti noi dei tedeschi pensavamo e dicevamo si percepi in quel momento in modo immediato. Il cervello che sovrintendeva a quegli occhi azzurri e a quelle mani coltivate diceva: ‘Questo qualcosa davanti a me appartiene a un genere che è ovviamente opportune sopprimere. Nel caso particolare, occorre prima accertarsi che non contenga qualche elemento utilizzabile.’ E nel mio capo, come semi in una zucca vuota: ‘Gli occhi azzurri e i capelli biondi sono essenzialmente malvagi. Nessuna comunicazione possibile.[…]” Primo Levi, Opere, ed. Marco Belpoliti, 2 vols. (Torino: Einaudi, 1997): 1:101–2. “[…]that look was not one between two men; and if I had known how completely to explain the nature of that look, which came as if across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the third Germany. One felt in that moment, in an immediate manner, what we all thought and said of the Germans. The brain which governed those blue eyes and those manicured hands said: ‘This something in front of me belongs to a species which it is obviously opportune to suppress. In this particular case, one has to first make sure that it does not contain some utilisable element. And in my head, like a seed in an empty pumpkin: ‘Blue eyes and fair hair are essentially wicked. No communication possible.[…]” If This Is a Man, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987): 111–2.
non of the Pannwitz gaze and its remnants in contemporary society. They have also found imaginative ways of dealing with the extremely limited amount of information on the victims: where the historical and medical accounts remain silent, they resort to filling in some of the gaps with imagined details and alternative stories. Another common characteristic of those diverse memory texts is their shuttling back and forth between different genres and discourses, from the artistic to the biographical, from the medical to the historical to the psychological, in search of an appropriate language of commemoration.

The first group includes relatively recent collections of reconstructed victim biographies, such as Lebensunwert—Zerstörte Leben. Zwangssterilisation und “Euthanasie,” edited by Margret Hamm (2005), and “Das Vergessen der Vernichtung ist Teil der Vernichtung selbst.” Lebensgeschichten von Opfern der nationalsozialistischen “Euthanasie,” edited by Petra Fuchs, Maike Rotzoll, et al. (2007). These and similar volumes would merit closer analysis, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. In this section I will therefore limit myself to a discussion of a few selected examples from the second and third group, the biographies, memoirs, and family stories. I begin with Alfred

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Döblin’s 1946 short story “Die Fahrt ins Blaue,” a text that prefigures some of the key issues addressed in the more recent memory texts. This is followed by a discussion of a family narrative, Hans Ulrich Dapp’s reconstructed story of his grandmother Emma who was killed in Grafeneck. As examples of biographies written by professional writers I discuss Helga Schubert’s Die Welt da drinnen, an account based on the files of 179 patients of the Schwerin psychiatric clinic. The section ends with an analysis of Hellmut Haasis’s astonishing book Heisel Rein der gscheite Narr from 2008, a collection of Swabian anecdotes and prank stories written by Reinhold Häußler, alias Heisel Rein, who was deported to Grafeneck in 1940. The book’s framework consists of a documentation of Häußler’s deportation and a narrative of the discovery of the manuscripts after his death. Haasis presents the book as a novel, a modern rewriting of the Till Eulenspiegel story.

My analyses in this section focus on problems of representation, mainly because the reception of the texts presented here has been limited at best. Most of these texts are published by very small and obscure presses and thus have basically no marketing. Dapp’s book is out of print; a few remaining copies are available at the Grafeneck memorial or through online second hand booksellers. Even Helga Schubert, a relatively well-known author, especially for Die Judasfrauen, has not received much attention for her latest book Die Welt da drinnen. Alfred Döblin’s short story, first published posthumously in 2005, has found its way into several historical and documentary accounts of
Nazi euthanasia, but has, to my knowledge, not been analyzed from a literary point of view.

**Into the Blue**

Alfred Döblin's short story “Die Fahrt ins Blaue,” written in 1946, is one of the earliest literary texts to give a detailed account of Nazi euthanasia.\(^{137}\) A mixture of testimony and fiction, it illustrates the difficulty of categorizing most of the texts presented in this chapter. Döblin's text is set up as an eyewitness account, bolstered by historical facts, given by a Berlin doctor who tells about the deportations from his institution during the euthanasia program. While it is possible that the story is based on an actual encounter in the immediate post-war period between Döblin, who was himself a doctor, and a former colleague of his, the text is framed in a manner that highlights its literariness, and it contains imagined scenes. The seemingly innocuous title, suggesting a day trip to an unknown destination, is an ironic play on Nazi euphemisms: on the day of their deportations the patients of the mental institutions were told that they were to embark on a surprise “Fahrt ins Blaue.” Invoking the precepts of the classic novella form, the narrator claims to be relating a true and in some aspects also new (novel) story, the details of which he has learned through a conversation: “Vor einigen Wochen, bei einer Reise ins

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Land, habe ich eine Geschichte gehört, die ich im großen Ganzen schon kannte, aber die durch ihre Einzelheiten mich berührte, als wäre sie neu” (193). At the same time, however, the opening can also be read as a setting in which testimony (and in this case, a confession of guilt) takes place. The narrator is approached by a man, a physician and acquaintance, who seems to have an urgent desire to communicate something to him: “ich merkte, er wollte sich das, was er erzählte, von der Seele reden” [I sensed that he wanted to get this story off his chest] (ibid.). The man finally reveals his institution’s and his own involvement in the euthanasia program. In just a few words, the narrator presents to the reader the administrative procedures of deportation and murder as witnessed by his colleague. He presents these procedures from the point of view of the doctors and nurses: first they don’t know why they have to fill in the questionnaires and lists and later, once they realize their purpose, they are afraid to speak up. The only Nazi in the institution seems to be the director; otherwise the Nazis are presented as a somewhat ominous outside threat which invades the institution in the form of bus drivers, guards, and higher ranking Nazi doctors. This image of the Nazis as force from the outside is underlined by the repeated use of the impersonal pronoun: “Man verlangte etwas Furchtbares vom Pflegepersonal. Man wünschte, dass alle zum Abtransport be-

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138 “A few weeks ago while taking a trip to the countryside, I heard a story that I already knew by and large but which moved me in its particulars, as if it were new.”
stimmten Kranken ihren Namen auf der Haut trügen” (196).139 The narrative perspective suddenly changes when the narrator shifts his focus from the personnel to the patients themselves who embark on the deadly “Fahrt ins Blaue.”

Sehen Sie die Frau, die man aus der Tür auf das Trottoir schiebt. Sie hält den Kopf schief und macht einen spitzen Mund, einen zerdrückten, uralten Hut auf den grauen wirren Haaren. Die Positur, die sie sofort eingenommen hat, einen Arm fest am Leib, den anderen horizontal gekrümmt vor sich in Augenhöhe, gefällt ihr. Man muss sie Schritt für Schritt vorwärts schieben, die Stufen zum Auto heraufheben. [...]

This is no longer part of the exchange between doctor and narrator. It is almost as if the narrator, moved by the humanity of these innocent victims, takes over the doctor’s narration and fills in the gaps. The imperative “sehen Sie” is a deictic gesture to the readers that forces them to “witness” the things that are now being described in great detail, things that happened in every institution all over Germany. While the doctors and nurses who put the patients on the bus have become part of the impersonal “man,” the focus

139 “Something terrible was demanded of the staff. All patients who were to be sent away were required to have their names tattooed onto their skin.”

140 “Look at the woman who is being pushed out the door onto the sidewalk. She’s cocking her head and pursing her lips, a battered old hat on her wild grey hair. She likes the posture she immediately adopted, one arm wrapped around her, the other bent in front of her face at eye-level. She has to be pushed forward step by step, and carried up the steps of the bus. [...] All those people who have been walking the halls or sitting on the floor of the institutions for years, staring into space, sometimes singing, sometimes screaming, crying, whimpering—and sometimes smashing the windows in rage. So the human form is disfigured—and yet it is still human. We clutch our chests.”
shifts now towards the victims. Unlike in *Holocaust*, where the euthanasia victims are, except for Anna, portrayed as an indistinct mass of disfigured faces and grotesque bodies, and the euthanasia program is presented as a crude practice run for the mass killings in the death camps, the narrative in Döblin’s text is full of empathy and asserts the humanity of the victims even though they are marked by disability. “Wir fassen uns an die Brust” performs this emotional response for the readers. This is the first and only instance of the pronoun “wir” in the story. It is an inclusionary gesture towards the reader that nonetheless leaves the distinction between the “wir” and the “man” intact.

In *Holocaust*, the gassing at Hadamar with its wooden shed and the diesel engine is portrayed as some sort of makeshift fore-runner to the more elaborate machinery of mass death in Auschwitz. Döblin’s account emphasizes the fact that all the elements of the gasings at Auschwitz were already in place in the euthanasia program. While in *Holocaust*, the only testimony to Anna’s death is the letter with the false date and cause of death, Döblin’s narrator takes on the role of a fictional (or, as I argue, “vicarious”) witness when he imagines the patients’ last minutes in the gas chamber:

“Duschen” rauschen.\textsuperscript{141} (196–7)

After this imagined sound of the “showers,” the narration returns to the detached mode of the doctor’s protocol. In an attempt at justifying his actions he relates an instant where he questioned one of the Nazi doctors’ actions and is told that it is all happening on direct order of the Führer. He adds: “Da konnte ich nichts sagen; ich war auf ihn ver¬eidigt” [What could I say? I had sworn allegiance to him.] (197). The novella’s turning point comes at the very end, when the narrator takes his leave at the train station. The doctor, perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate his own humanity, confesses that he himself has a mentally disabled son, whom he hid from the Nazis. However, this little detail makes it even more shocking that he would have continued filling out lists and standing by as people were deported. The narration thus ends with the doctor compromising himself, an act to which the narrator responds with silence, not with consolation or ab¬solution: “Seine Lippen bebten. Ich vermochte nichts zu sagen. Er griff nach meiner Hand” [His lips trembled. I couldn’t say anything. He reached out for my hand.] (198). The text closes with an open plea for compassion.

By portraying the Nazis as an impersonal outside force and by having the doctor justify himself as being bound by oath to the Führer, Döblin’s text reflects the immediate

\textsuperscript{141} “The patients are alone. One of them stands up and begins walking in her stereotypical circles. Another whispers and rants against something invisible. Then there’s a rushing sound. It seems the showers are running. One of the patients sitting on the bench slumps, her head falls forward and her body follows through, flopping onto the stone slabs with a dull thud. The one who was walking in circles looks up, her knees buckle, and she falls in a heap on the floor. On the bench the patients lean over, slip, two at a time or individually, and fall over each other. The ‘showers’ keep running.”
post-war tendency of blaming a few for the deeds of many. But, even though Döblin keeps up the dichotomy between “us” and “them” (reminiscent of Andersch’s “die Einen” versus “die Anderen”), he complicates this dichotomy by introducing the figure of the Mitläufer doctor. In this, his text can be read as a reflection of what Hannah Arendt would later describe as the banality of evil. It also illustrates the medical profession’s hesitation after the end of the war self-reflectively to address issues of responsibility and guilt for the crimes committed in its name. There was not a lot of interest among German doctors to investigate what exactly happened during the euthanasia program—in most cases the investigations took place on the initiative of the occupying forces. One of the reasons for this avoidance was the concern that a public investigation of the role doctors played in the crimes of the Third Reich would cause lasting damage to the reputation of the medical profession. Döblin’s peculiar position as a writer, doctor, and psychiatrist must be taken into account here.\textsuperscript{142} It seems as if he were reflecting on the possibility that, had he remained in Germany and been able to keep working in the medical profession, he might have been confronted with a similar situation to the one he describes in his story. Döblin fled from the Nazis in 1933, at first to Paris and then, following the German invasion of France, to Los Angeles, but there is no doubt that by the time

\textsuperscript{142} Incidentally, Döblin finished his dissertation on memory disorders in patients with Korsakoff’s psychosis in 1905 under the direction of Alfred Hoche in Freiburg, who went on to co-write the seminal treatise \textit{Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens} together with Karl Binding, which was published in 1920 and provided a key scientific legitimization of the Nazi euthanasia program.
he wrote “Fahrt ins Blaue,” he knew about the Nazi atrocities in great detail, having been a reporter at the first Nuremberg trial for the French occupying forces. Much of his writing of the time is concerned with making the German people aware of the crimes committed in the name of the German people. In 1946, Döblin published, under the pseudonym Hans Fiedeler, his report from Nuremberg entitled *Der Nürnberger Lehrprozeß*. His hopes of educating the German public were, however, dashed. Embittered by the restorative tendencies in post-war German society, Döblin returned to Paris in the early 1950s. While he officially went into exile again, he nonetheless spent time in Germany because of his increasingly poor health. He was hospitalized for several months in Freiburg, and in 1957, shortly before his death, he was transferred to the psychiatric clinic in Emmendingen, one of the institutions from which hundreds of patients had been deported to the nearby killing center of Grafeneck during the Third Reich. He died there alone and forgotten, and it was not until Günter Grass rediscovered him that Döblin’s literary reputation was restored.143

Döblin’s prose in this story is stripped of all unnecessary description. Adopting an almost journalistic or documentary style, he gives his readers a glimpse of the complex mechanisms of persecution. Even though the real perpetrators remain too abstract and the nurses in the institution are presented as mere tools in the scheme of destruction,

Döblin’s portrayal of the doctor is more nuanced and critical. By casting him as a typical bystander and reluctant participant, Döblin raises questions about the role *Mitläufer* played in the Nazi atrocities, and what could have been done to resist or to save people. Döblin’s account begins where all the literary texts discussed in the previous section left off, the moment of deportation, and it takes the readers to the killing center and into the gas chamber. His description of the victims’ death is deliberately unsentimental, striving instead for a detached realism. The prevailing impression is that of a passive observer, but there are moments in which the humanity of the victims affects the narrator and causes him to depart from his purely objective account. The death scene illustrates the cruel inhumanity of the euthanasia program, emphasizing that death in the gas chamber was by no means peaceful, and that most of the victims were aware of what was happening. Since the historical documents do not describe this moment of death in detail, Döblin imagines it. This remarkable move towards representing death in the gas chamber marks the point where documentary, memoir and fiction meet in all the texts of this section. It is also the moment in which the author assumes the role of a vicarious witness, testifying to the reader in place of the victims, who can no longer speak for themselves.

Before I provide further examples of the different types of vicarious witnessing in these texts, let me return briefly to Primo Levi in order to elaborate on what he describes as the problem of true testimony. In *I sommersi e i salvati*, Levi establishes a hie-
rarchy of witnessing: there are the true witnesses who cannot testify for themselves because they did not survive the concentration camps, and then there are those who survived, like Levi himself, and who are able to give a voice to those who cannot speak any more.\textsuperscript{144} However, there is a third group of witnesses, namely those who would not be able to speak for themselves even if they had survived. Levi introduces this group of witnesses in \textit{La Tregua}, when he describes his encounter with a disabled boy in the days immediately following the liberation of Auschwitz. The boy is paralyzed and unable to speak, and the other prisoners call him Hurbinke, ostensibly a translation of the inarticulate sounds he utters. In the child’s anguished gaze Levi sees “a stare both savage and human, even mature, a judgment, which none of us could support, so heavy was it with force and anguish” (Levi If \textit{This Is a Man} 197).\textsuperscript{145} Levi feels obligated to give voice to this child’s inarticulate testimony:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{144}]Levi writes: “non siamo noi, i superstiti, i testimoni veri. [...] Noi toccati dalla sorte abbiamo cercato, con maggiore o minore sapienza, di raccontare non solo il nostro destino, ma anche quello degli altri, dei sommersi appunto; ma è stato un discorso ‘per conto di terzi’, il racconto di cose viste da vicino, non sperimentate in proprio. La demolizione condotta a termine, l’opera computa, non l’ha raccontata nessuno, come nessuno è mai tornato a raccontare la sua morte. [...] Settimane e mesi prima di spegnersi, avevano già perduto la virtù di osservare, ricordare, commisurare ed esprimersi. Parliamo noi in loro vece, per delega.” Levi, \textit{Opere}: 2:1055–6. “We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. [...] we who were favored by fate tried, with more or less wisdom, to recount not only our fate but also that of the others, indeed of the drowned; but this was a discourse ‘on behalf of third parties,’ the story of things seen at close hand, not experienced personally. The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe his own death. [...] Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves. We speak in their stead, by proxy.” \textit{The Drowned and the Saved}, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Vintage-Random, 1989): 83–4.
\item[\textsuperscript{145}]The original reads: “uno sguardo selvaggio e umano ad un tempo, anzi maturo e giudice, che nessuno fra noi sapeva sostenere, tanto era carico di forza e di pena.” Opere: 1:215.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Hurbinek, who was three years old and perhaps had been born in Auschwitz and had never seen a tree, Hurbinek, who had fought like a man, to the last breath, to gain his entry into the world of men, from which a bestial power had excluded him; Hurbinek the nameless, whose tiny forearm—even his—bore the tattoo of Auschwitz; Hurbinek died in the first days of March 1945, free but not redeemed. Nothing remains of him: he bears witness through these words of mine. (198)\textsuperscript{146}

This is precisely the kind of witnessing I aim to conceptualize here. Levi testifies for those whose voice was silenced in the gas chamber and for those who, like Hurbinek, never had a voice to begin with. One could argue that Levi situates himself in the middle of these two poles of silence, one pre-linguistic (Hurbinek) and the other “post”-linguistic (the “true” witnesses who perished in the gas chamber). Since both types of immediate testimony are beyond the boundaries of iterability, it is the mediated testimony of the vicarious witness that endows them with a voice.\textsuperscript{147} In other words, Levi bridges the silence that is on either side of language and lets the voiceless speak through him. In this

\textsuperscript{146} Italian original: “Hurbinek, che aveva tre anni e forse era nato in Auschwitz e non aveva mai visto un albero; Hurbinek, che aveva combattuto come un uomo, fino all’ultimo respiro, per conquistarsi l’entrata nel mondo degli uomini, da cui una potenza bestiale lo aveva bandito; Hurbinek, il senza-nome, il cui minuscolo avambraccio era pure stato segnato col tatuaggio di Auschwitz; Hurbinek morì ai primi giorni del marzo 1945, libero ma non redento. Nulla resta di lui: egli testimonia attraverso queste mie parole.” Ibid., 1:216.

\textsuperscript{147} Giorgio Agamben offers a different reading of this passage, focusing on the indecipherable word (massklo or matisklo) which Hurbinek repeatedly utters, and extrapolating from it a theory of testimony as “the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness” in that “language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness. The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance—that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness.” In this way, the Hurbinek episode becomes a key to understanding the metaphysics of testimony in general; as I aim to argue here, however, the specifically vicarious nature of Primo Levi’s testimony for Hurbinek offers a way to overcome the silence which has surrounded the memory of Nazi euthanasia. See Giorgio Agamben, \textit{Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive}, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone, 2002): 37–9.
reading, Hurbinek becomes emblematic of the specific kind of voicelessness that characterizes the memory of euthanasia. There are no survivors who can bear witness for themselves or for others and so any testimony in their stead must be reconstructed from documents and, where the documents remain silent, it must be imagined. Unlike Hurbinek, the victims of euthanasia did not have someone like Levi, who, immediately after the end of the war, raised his voice to speak in their stead. For decades, their stories were forgotten and their murder repressed. Many of these life stories will never be recovered. The vicarious testimonies in this section are thus several decades removed from the actual event and the writers who reconstruct these life stories from documents and letters belong to the second or third post-war generation. Often these writers have to work with an extremely limited amount of historical information, which makes answering even the simplest factual questions extremely difficult. Other questions concerning the events leading to their institutionalization, and the last days and minutes of their lives, are almost impossible to answer and in many cases left to the writers’ imagination entirely.

Several critics have sought to describe this phenomenon of authors witnessing on behalf of others. Geoffrey Hartman, for example, refers to the authors of such works as “witnesses by adoption.” Froma Zeitlin, meanwhile, elaborates on vicarious wit-

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nessing, identifying a number of key traits which characterize texts of this type. Along with their urgent search for links with the past, these authors also exhibit a profound awareness of their own belatedness with regard to the events to which they now seek to witness. This results in a high degree of self-reflexivity, and a foregrounding of their own role as “a mediating figure who dramatizes the work of recollection and, by so doing, emphasizes the process of reconstructing the past as filtered through the consciousness and complicity of a belated witness in the fusion of then and now.”

In some ways, vicarious witnessing may be regarded as related to what Marianne Hirsch has termed postmemory, which she describes as a space of remembrance, identification, and projection, that can serve as a model of an “ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted other.” Hirsch draws on Kaja Silverman’s concept of heteropathic recollection, a process of “identification-at-a-distance,” which resists a complete appropriation of the other, but nonetheless partly aligns it with the self. Hirsch is careful to emphasize that postmemory “is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission.” In other words, postmemory has little to do with an individual’s lived experience, and more to do with the circulation of memory in contemporary society, as


it is continually transmitted, received, remediated, and represented. Hirsch makes a further distinction between “familial” and “affiliative” postmemory in order to account for the different directionalities of identification between parents and children (familial) and children and their contemporaries (affiliative). “Affiliative postmemory would thus be the result of the contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appro priable, available, and indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission” (“Generation” 114–5). Particularly given its emphasis on mediation and self-reflexivity, vicarious witnessing clearly participates in this organic web of transmission, involving non-family members in the lives of victims of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, vicarious witnessing cannot be circumscribed by the models of vertical and horizontal transmission governing affiliative postmemory, as they rely on a generational and/or familial relationship between the “owners” of the original memory and those who partake of this memory at a certain remove. Thus, while vicarious wit-

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152 As such, it is comparable to Ann Rigney’s conception of “vicarious recollection,” which is based on the observation that “to the extent that cultural memory is the product of representations and not of direct experience, it is by definition a matter of vicarious recollection. The role of texts and other media and hence the degree of vicariousness obviously increases as the events recollected recede further in time. This suggests that it makes more sense to take mediated, vicarious recollection as our model for collective memory rather than stick to some ideal form of face-to-face communication in which participants are deemed to share experience in some direct, unmediated way.” In Rigney’s use, “vicarious” is essentially synonymous with “mediated” and thus refers to the entire edifice of cultural memory as dependent upon “public communication and [...] the circulation of memories in mediated form.” By contrast, “vicarious witnessing” as I conceive of it, refers to a specific mode of engaging with a past belonging to someone else. See Ann Rigney, “Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory,” Journal of European Studies 35.1 (2005): 15–6.
nessing may be seen as a version or aspect of postmemory, there is an important distinction to be made with regard to the specific relationship between the author and the victim. Even though postmemory makes room for non-familial participation in or engagement with these memories, it is always predicated on a generational structure of transmission. While this is clearly relevant to Hans-Ulrich Dapp’s biography of his grandmother Emma, authors like Helga Schubert or Hellmut G. Haasis have no direct connection to the people whose lives they narrate. The state of vicariousness thus describes a specifically “elective” relationship, which is not predetermined through familial or generational ties. Moreover, since there were no survivors of the Nazi euthanasia program, the memory of Nazi euthanasia is of a different character than the memory of the concentration camps. Everything we know about the Nazi euthanasia program comes to us from official documents and historical research as well as the testimony of the perpetrators.

Vicarious witnessing may thus also be regarded as a response to Shoshana Felman’s notion of the Holocaust as a “crisis of witnessing.”154 Starting with the idea of the

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153 The same is true for Andreas Huyssen’s concept of “mimetic approximation” which he describes in his essay on Art Spiegelman’s Maus. “[T]he complexity of the narration” he writes, “results from the desire of the second generation to learn about the parents’ past, of which they are always, willingly or not, already a part: it is a project of mimetically approximating historical and personal trauma […]. The survivors’ son’s life stands in a mimetic affinity to his parents’ trauma long before he ever embarks on his interviews with his father.” (Huyssen, Present Pasts 126–7).

unspeakability of trauma, Felman theorizes the paradox of testimony as its being transmitted essentially through the non-verbal: through silence most importantly, and through the gaps, ruptures, and elisions in a text. Specifically with regard to the memory of euthanasia, however, it is not enough to insist that adequate representation is ultimately impossible and that silence is thus the only appropriate response. The memory of Nazi euthanasia does not occupy a powerful enough position in the collective consciousness for such silences to be poignant and meaningful. On the contrary, the long silence surrounding euthanasia and separating us from its victims is precisely what has to be overcome; it has to be bridged by words in order for commemoration to take place. It is in this context that the need for vicarious witnessing as a means of approaching and representing the memory of Nazi euthanasia becomes especially urgent, and, concomitantly, the role of artistic and even fictional interpretations of these events assumes even greater importance. The vicarious witnesses in this section are not appointed by fate as Levi was. Rather, they adopt the distant memory of these forgotten victims and they make it their mission not only to recover these lost lives and expose past crimes, but also to involve their readers in an ongoing process of commemoration and to confront them with questions of ethical responsibility towards the disabled. Maybe this position of distance to the actual event is exactly what allows these writers to bridge the silence, to fill in some of the gaps.
Finding Emma

Let me begin my discussion of Hans-Ulrich Dapp’s family story with a brief glimpse at an earlier family novel, written in the 1970s by Christa Wolf. The narrator in Wolf’s fictional autobiography *Kindheitsmuster* describes how, during her childhood in the Third Reich, certain key terms, *Glitzerworte* [glitter words], made the eyes of the grown-ups gleam. For the child, Nelly, these key words of Nazi ideology exude an uncanny fascination, because she senses that they are bound up in the simultaneity of speech and silence, and charged with a mixture of guilt and concealment. “Unnormal, unrein, artfremd,” and “Anlage” are some of these glitter words, and the explanations Nelly gets from the grown-ups make these terms seem harmless and mysterious at the same time. For example, her parents explain that “Anlage” means that Nelly, a healthy girl, should not be allowed to marry a severely disabled boy like Heini, the neighbor’s son. While this seems perfectly logical to Nelly, she develops a fear of being abnormal: “Nicht normal sein ist das Schlimmste überhaupt.”\(^{155}\) Another example is Nelly’s strange encounter with Tante Jette, a resident in a psychiatric institution, who appears one day at a family dinner. Because she puts butter *and* lard on a piece of bread that she prepares for Nelly, Jette is reviled by the other women in the family: “da sehe man wieder, dass es keinen Zweck habe, sie könne sich einfach nicht zusammennehmen” [You see, it’s hopeless, she just

can’t pull herself together] (230/196). Nelly, who finds aunt Jette fascinating, is the only one who demonstrates solidarity: she proclaims that the bread is delicious. This incident turns out to be the first and last time Nelly meets her unknown aunt, for Jette dies in the euthanasia program. Nelly knows instinctively that “Mit Tante Jette’s Tod stimmte etwas nicht,” (232)156 since nobody seems to want to talk about it. But Nelly does not ask; she seems to have acquired a filter that helps her avoid uncomfortable situations and thoughts. Wolf’s novel illustrates how, during the Third Reich, the child’s individual perception is shaped by learned and uncritically accepted external patterns of perception and behavior that construct meanings from binaries such as pure versus impure and normal versus abnormal. But more importantly, she exposes the large extent to which everyday language was permeated with Nazi Glitzerworte, and how widespread and multi-layered the acceptance and internalization of these words was.

While Wolf thus illustrates how the majority of people during the Third Reich consciously or unconsciously contributed to Nazi cleansing politics through linguistic and social practices of discrimination, Hans-Ulrich Dapp shows how the shift in moral perspective after the end of the war was only superficial, resulting in a repression rather than a working through of the Nazi past. Some of Wolf’s Glitzerworte are still being used.

156 “...there was more to Aunt Dottie’s death than met the eye” (197). In Molinaro and Rapport’s translation, Tante Jette is known as Aunt Dottie (“short for Dorothea”), presumably to provide English-speaking readers with a more familiar nickname, but, intentionally or not, by echoing the word “dotty” it also suggests the reason that she is “on leave” at the psychiatric institution.
During a family hike to the Weinsberg castle in 1967, around his 18th birthday, Dapp heard about his grandmother Emma for the first time. When the psychiatric institution Weißenhof comes in view, his mother tells him that his grandmother lived there and explains that Emma “sei aus Überzüchtung ihrer Familie schizophren gewesen, habe als Pfarrerswitwe noch ein uneheliches Kind bekommen und sei dann von den Nazis vergast worden. Und darum sei es so wichtig, dass weiterhin frisches Erbgut in die Familie käme.” In these few phrases Dapp’s mother describes her mother-in-law’s life and its cruel end, a shocking statement not only because it reproduces National Socialist terminology and ideology without any critical reflection, but also because it sounds rationalized and rehearsed: it shows no interest in Emma as a human being.

More than 20 years later, on the occasion of Emma’s 100th birthday and the 50th anniversary of her death, Dapp, begins investigating the details of his grandmother’s life and her death. Emma Zeller grew up in Stuttgart as the youngest daughter of a strictly Pietist Swabian family that was very proud of their lineage that could be traced back as far as 1538. She was married to Eugen Dapp, a Lutheran pastor, in 1912. After losing one of her sons and her husband during the great flu pandemic of 1918, she remained a widow with three small children and struggled hard to feed her family in the dire years af-

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157 “had been schizophrenic due to overbreeding in her family, had had a child out of wedlock after the death of the parish priest, her husband, and had finally been gassed by the Nazis. That’s why it was so important to keep bringing new hereditary material into the family.” Hans-Ulrich Dapp, Emma Z. Ein Opfer der Euthanasie (Stuttgart: Quell, 1990): 7.
ter World War I. Her family judged her a “sloppy” housekeeper and mother. Her illegitimate pregnancy in 1928, ten years after her husband’s death, caused a family scandal—her sister and father decided to take the “necessary” steps. Emma was placed under tutelage and locked up in various homes and institutions, her children came to live with their aunt. The family explained Emma’s “disgraceful misbehavior” as caused by a hereditary mental condition: because her parents had been cousins and Karl, her brother, had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, she was suspected of being afflicted with a similar hereditary mental weakness. Emma spent the remaining years of her life in the psychiatric institution Weißenhof in Weinsberg whence she was deported on June 4, 1940.

While collecting the details of Emma’s life proves relatively easy—Dapp is able to glean a significant amount of information from family letters, diaries, and photos, all of which he incorporates into his own narrative—her death remains a mystery. The documents show that she left Weißenhof on June 4, but Emma’s death note, her belongings and papers are returned to the family from the killing center Pirna/Sonnenstein in Saxony, three weeks later. The official version was that Emma died of heart failure on June 21. What exactly happened between Emma’s boarding the bus at Weißenhof and the arrival of the official death note? Dapp exposes a gaping hole in his grandmother’s story: not only is there no body to bury and mourn (the urns the families received were filled randomly), there is also no way of knowing what exactly happened during her final
hours. Based on the historical records, Dapp partly reconstructs Emma’s last journey, which actually took her to the nearby killing center of Grafeneck, not to Pirna. Where the documents remain silent, he fills in the gaps with his imagination. Here is how he imagines Emma’s last hours at Grafeneck:


It is remarkable how in this section Dapp’s tone and narrative perspective shift from that of family chronicler to imagined witness. But he does not use the word “imagine,” nor

158 “Before the yearned-for meal, it seems another examination is in order. [...] Like the others, Emma is questioned for about a minute. Naked, or wearing an undershirt at most, she stands before the men. [Director Ernst] Baumhardt scans her paperwork and her medical records from Weinsberg. He asks whether she worked, and she lists her designated tasks. She responds to questioning, he concludes. But the information she supplies is not sufficient grounds for him to send her back to Weinsberg. [...] He now only needs to find a halfway plausible cause of death. Does he notice Emma’s pallor and exhaustion? ‘Chronic valvular heart defect with beginning cardiac insufficiency’ is the diagnosis which is later offered in the letter of condolence. Certainly the doctor did not listen to her heart again. [...] Someone inspects her mouth. Has she got any gold teeth? If yes, that means she gets an extra cross on her back, so they can be removed before cremation. Finally she is photographed. [...] They’re not allowed to get dressed, first they have to take a shower. The women are hungry; hopefully the shower will be over soon.”
does he use the conditional mood; instead he offers us his version of what happened in the gas chamber as his personal truth:


Auch Emma, meine Großmutter, ist tot.

This scene is reminiscent of Döblin’s description in that it is similarly clinical and matter-of-fact, but nevertheless more dramatic. It is as if Dapp were gazing through the observation window and forcing the reader to take on the role of the visitor who gazes with him. Writing out the details of Emma’s death is a work of belated mourning. But it is also more than that. Emma’s grandson becomes a chronicler and writer in order to testify for Emma; to reconstruct her life and the circumstances that led to her death in order to write against the family’s silence and prejudice concerning Emma. One could say that by

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159 “Outside Dr. Baumhardt himself opens the valves on the carbon monoxide bottles. [...] Through the window in the door he can observe its effect, and sometimes he even lets curious visitors have a look. Inside it can no longer escape notice that gas is pouring in instead of water, even though it is almost odorless. By this point, panic has broken out among the women. All possible reactions are seen at once: some scream and banging on the door—others clinging to a neighbor or attempt to climb the walls—others throw up or pray. Only one thing is absent: the promised all-but-unnoticeable drifting off. At most that is the case with those who were given injections ahead of time to sedate them. But before long even the others go limp and collapse, and at last all signs of life are gone. Emma, my grandmother, is also dead.”
recovering and adopting his grandmother’s story and re-inscribing it into his own life story, Dapp is creating a space of third-generation *postmemory*. His journey takes him to all the places of Emma’s life, even to Grafeneck, and it affects him physically: “Es war aufwühlend, dem Leben Emmas nachzugehen. [...] Ich bin krank geworden unterwegs, aber auch wieder gesund. Es war richtig so. Das Finden und Trauern ermöglichte auch das Loslassen” (120).160

Throughout the book, Dapp engages in a conversation with his dead grandmother. When the sources remain silent, he addresses Emma directly, asking her whether she knew what was going on, whether she tried to resist or escape. Did she love the unknown man with whom she had her fourth child? How long did she know him? Who was he? How did she deal with the fact that she never saw her youngest child, Ruth, again? The only assistance in this one-sided conversation are the very few family photographs that have remained of Emma. These images show a serious and often sad looking woman who is visibly uncomfortable in the midst of her own family. Dapp finds only one photo of Emma in which she shows something resembling a smile: a photo from the late 1930s when she was already in Weinsberg, helping with the grape-harvest. The photo shows her sitting in between the vines, probably during lunch break, with a group of men and women. She is wearing an apron and a headscarf to protect her from the sun,

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160 “It was upsetting to try to understand the details of Emma’s life. [...] Along the way I fell ill, but then I got better. It was right that way. Finding her and mourning her also allowed me to let go.”
and she is coyly smiling at the camera. Remarkably, Emma looks at peace with herself, and happy.

By asking not only how this could have happened but also why it happened and who was responsible, Dapp investigates the role Emma’s family played in these events. Who determined that Emma was mentally ill? What were her symptoms? Dapp is unable to find any concrete information about how her illness or weakness exactly manifested itself; her letters, the only documents in her own hand, show no sign of illness. The only plausible reason for her deportation from Weinsberg, Dapp concludes, must have been the fact that she was a long-term patient, since she had been in the institution for 12 years. Amongst all these various insecurities, one question emerges as the most pressing: could Emma have been saved? Did Emma’s sister Helene, a celibate deaconess, fulfill her own desire to be a mother by raising Emma’s children and declaring her sister “unfit” for raising them herself? Helene’s meticulous diary gives insight into Emma’s world: a strictly Pietist family in which aberrant behavior was considered “abnormal” or even “sick.” However, none of Emma’s medical documents is clear regarding Emma’s correct diagnosis, at times the doctors wrote simply “psychopathy,” which is not a hereditary illness, and at others “hereditary feeblemindedness.” It seems that while the doctors were unsure regarding Emma’s diagnosis, the family had already determined that her behavior was reason enough to institutionalize her permanently. Dapp writes:

Das Familienbewußtsein der Zellers tendiert wohl dazu, Erbfaktoren im Gu-

The book documents its author’s shocking realization that his own family could maybe have saved Emma by bringing her home or having her transferred—they saved her brother Karl by transferring him to a different home a few weeks after Emma’s death.

The ambivalence toward Emma that was in line with Nazi ideology on the one hand and the underestimation of the concrete danger that was looming on the other hand sealed Emma’s fate. One of Helene’s letters demonstrates this ambivalence towards her sister:

Even though she is distraught about Emma’s murder (she does not doubt it was murder), Helene justifies her own actions by insisting that Emma was “krank, immer ein schwieriger Charakter.” Echoing Nazi terminology, she writes that Emma’s death was “eine Erlösung” (107). Dapp’s book is one of very few texts to investigate not only the ostracism of a “deviant” family member by actions and decisions that ultimately proved to have fatal

161 “In the Zellers’ sense of themselves as a family, a great deal of importance was no doubt placed on positive and negative hereditary factors. The fact of belonging to a clan rich in traditions became the norm, perhaps even the oppressive set of expectations of the children. [...] and so individual idiosyncrasies may quickly be diagnosed as ‘hereditary illnesses.’ Just how much rivalry, how much sexual anxiety and envy can lie behind such a diagnosis, becomes terribly clear if you consider Emma’s life. And when this familial tendency toward pride and worry for their lineage meets a State ideology of race, blood and soil, degeneration, eugenics and euthanasia, then the ‘defective’ ones must fear for their lives.”
consequences, but also the ongoing prejudices in the family that prevent commemoration.\footnote{Another noteworthy example is Barbara Degen’s 2005 family memoir and documentary \textit{Leuchtende Irrsterne. Das Branitzer Totenbuch}. Degen, a lawyer, tells the story of her long lasting search for information about the fate of her grandfather. Eventually, she finds out that he was deported in 1941 from the Branitz psychiatric institution in Upper Silesia to an institution in Waldheim/Saxony, where he was killed a few days later. In the course of her research, Degen discovers that her grandfather was of mixed Polish and Jewish origin, a fact that served only to reinforce the silence surrounding his fate. She finds out that the Branitz institution was also used as a military hospital from 1941 onwards, and that not only the mentally ill or disabled patients were murdered there but also mortally wounded or ill soldiers. Her book combines the personal story with the results of her research in Branitz: it includes long lists with names of victims and deportees, and gives us glimpses of the patients’ lives as reconstructed from their files. The victims’ stories, reconstructed and imagined by the author, take center stage. At times, when the documents and research do not seem to yield enough information or reach their limits, Degen adds poems into the text that open up an additional, emotional and intuitive perspective. These poems, but also the combination of personal and documentary material, allow Degen to attempt a “Zusammendenken der getrennten Ebenen,” as she puts it, of family history and national history. The poems also provide room for her meditation on society’s assumptions of “normality” and illness, an issue on which she reflects also with respect to the mental illness of her own daughter. Barbara Degen, \textit{Leuchtende Irrsterne – das Branitzer Totenbuch. “Euthanasie” in einer katholischen Anstalt} (Frankfurt am Main: VAS, 2005): 24}

In its montage-like incorporation of various media and discourses in the form of documents, family photos, poems, and letters, Dapp’s book can be placed within the recently renewed trend of German family novels. In these novels, a new generation of authors embarks on an identity search by exploring the points of intersection between their own family story and larger historical events. Similar to writers such as Stefan Wackwitz, Monika Maron, or Marcel Beyer, Dapp’s hybrid text blurs the distinctions between documentary and fiction. The narrator presents himself as researcher, chronicler, interpreter of, and witness to events that happened even before he was born. Dapp’s retrospective anamnesis and analysis of his family’s behavior towards Emma is an at-
tempt at understanding the existential entanglement between individual, family, and national history. By exposing his family’s role in Emma’s death, Dapp formulates an indictment against his family, and against a society that continues to ostracize those who are different and in their eyes deficient. Memory scholar Aleida Assmann has termed this type of historiography written through the prism of the family narrative “psychohistory.” She writes: “Entscheidend bei der generationenübergreifenden Erinnerungsarbeit ist nicht nur die historische Arbeit der Spurensicherung und das Re-Imaginieren, sondern auch die Verwandlung der Familiengeschichte in eine literarische Gestalt, in einen Roman, der sie weiter- und umschreibt und ihr damit Zukunft zurückgibt. Erinnern und Imaginieren von Vergangenem werden so zu einer Intervention im Zeichen der Zukunft und der nächsten Generation.”

The Life and Opinions of a Swabian Eulenspiegel

From accounts written by family members of victims we now move to those written by professional writers. Within this group, the story of the Swabian “trickster and village fool” Heisel Rein, his real name was Reinhold Häußler, is unique because it contains au-

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163 “Transgenerational memory work depends not only on collecting historical evidence and re-imagining, but also on transforming the family history into literature, into a novel in which it is rewritten and expanded and thus re-endowed with a future. Remembering and imagining the past thus becomes an intervention for the future and for the next generation.” Aleida Assmann, Geschichte im Gedächtnis. Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung (München: Beck, 2007): 94-5.
tobiographical material and jest stories written by Häußler himself. The book is divided into two parts; the first half consists of edited versions of Häußler’s stories, in the style of the Medieval Schwänke (episodic prank or trickster stories), written in dialect. The other half contains brief narrative vignettes documenting the historical events that lead to Rein’s arrest, his institutionalization at the Weissenau clinic in Ravensburg, and his murder in Grafeneck in May 1940. Both parts contain historical photographs of the towns of Betzingen, Reutlingen, and the grey buses. The book as a whole is a modern version of the Medieval Volksbuch, a folkbook collection of episodic jests or trickster stories and tales of exemplary behavior (or misbehavior); and it is modeled in particular on the famous tales of Till Eulenspiegel. In the preface to his biography, Swabian historian Hellmut G. Haasis explains how he came into possession of Häußler’s manuscripts. Years after his death, when Häußler’s house in the Swabian village of Betzingen was being torn down, the workers discovered a stack of dirty papers. They saved them, and one day the stack appeared on Haasis’s doorstep. While Haasis knew some of the orally transmitted stories of Heisel Rein that still circulated among the older residents of Betzingen, he was surprised to find that many of the tales in the manuscript had an anti-authoritarian, later stories even anti-Nazi, background. Not everybody in the village, Haasis reasons, seemed comfortable with the political aspects of these stories. Obviously many preferred to

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think of Rein in hindsight as a “gscheiter Narr,” a wise fool (or, if you prefer, idiot savant), ultimately harmless, and thus, the political coloring of his stories got entirely lost in the oral transmission.

The book contains very little actual biographical information about Rein. He was born in Betzingen in 1878. An outsider from the start, he refused to fit into the village society or contribute to it: he never had a steady job, was discharged from the army after only a few weeks, liked to drink and to tell stories. Haasis presents Rein as a Medieval trickster figure, a Swabian Eulenspiegel—and indeed Rein’s autobiographical jest stories follow a very similar pattern to Eulenspiegel’s picaresque adventures. Similarly to Eulenspiegel, Rein plays tricks mainly on the village authorities, such as the priest, the policeman, or the mayor, but he does not spare the baker, the gardener, or the peasants either. Almost all of Rein’s jests are based on the discrepancy between his own and the other people’s use of language: Rein insists on taking common figures of speech literally, which results in misunderstandings and comic situations. By ridiculing their misleading and dishonest use of language, Rein exposes the seemingly decent and reputable villagers as hypocrites.

Not all the people in the village laugh about Rein’s tricks, especially not those who become victims of his pranks. For most of the villagers he is a lazy fool and a drunkard, and his tricks only reinforce his status as an outsider to the village community. When the Nazis assume power, Rein knows he is in danger. This is the moment in which
he begins to write down his stories, which he calls his legacy. He writes:

Als man neulich am Rathäusle die Fahnen wechselte und krumme Kreuze auf knallrote Tüchern kamen, pfiff mich der Reutlinger Ortssuppenleiter an, er werde mich in ein Lager für Arbeitsscheue stecken. Ich sei ein Asozialer, reif für einen Sträflingskittel. [...] Für den Fall, dass ich mal nicht mehr bin, schreib ich auf, was ich weiß. Das ist mein Erbe für den Flecken. [...] Vielleicht denkt man später an mich mit mehr Nachsicht. Hätt es mehr solche Spaßvögel gegeben wie mich und weniger Marschierer und Soldaten, vieles wär nicht so schlimm gekommen.165 (68)

Subsequently, he lets no opportunity pass by to ridicule the new authorities. He openly and repeatedly mocks the Hitler salute (“Und gleich müssen wir noch einen hEILEN, der’s nötig hat. Wird aus mir noch ein Doktor?” [And now we have to hEAL another needy soul. Looks like I’ll be a doctor soon.] (70) or “So hau schdôht gau s Wasser en dr Schdadt, wann’s a halbs Jôhr soicht.” [Soon the water will be up to here if it keeps pissing it down for another six months.] (84)), the self-importance of the Nazis (“Der Humor ist ausgewandert, seit man den rechten Arm lupfen muss” [Humor left the country once we had to start raising our right arm.] (83)), and even the silencing of dissidents (“Die Linke will nie was lernen. Wir sind alle eine Volksgemeinschaft. Gemault wird nicht. Erst im Ferienlager Dachau darf gemeckert werden, dort sind alle Ziegen versammelt” [The left will never learn. We are all one Volksgemeinschaft. Stop your yammering. Save your

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165 “The other day they were changing the flags at the town hall and putting up crooked crosses on bright red sheets, and the local Soup Commander yelled at me saying that he would send me to a camp for the work-shy. He said I was asocial, ripe for a prisoner’s uniform. [...] Since I might not be around much longer, I am writing down what I know. This is my legacy to the village. [...] Maybe later people will remember me more fondly. If there had been more jokers like me and fewer goose-steppers and soldiers, a lot of things wouldn’t have turned out so badly.”
bleating for the Dachau holiday camp. That’s where all the goats are herded.] (85)).

When he sees the neighboring town all adorned with Nazi flags, he diagnoses its inhabitants with a mysterious illness: “Ich glaub, die ganze Stadt hätt a Kröøgat. Ogsonde Gsichter. […] wia a Narrahaus” [I think the whole town is sick. Unhealthy faces … like a madhouse] (83). The dialect here functions additionally as a subversive element because it posits the idiosyncratic, “natural” local language against the rational language of the Nazis. While in the past, Rein’s pranks would attract a large crowd in the street and market place, the people, many of whom have known Rein for years, threaten him, try to silence him, or turn away. In the end, he is reported and arrested. Nobody opposes his arrest.

The second part of the book, which relates Rein’s murder in Grafeneck, is written in the same narrative and episodic style as the jest stories, including dialogues in Swabian dialect, but it switches the narrative perspective and presents us the events from the point of view of the perpetrators. Maintaining a sense of ironic distance, the author lets the Nazi doctors and administrators explain their own mechanisms of persecution and expose themselves as perpetrators. Haasis tells the story of the deportation twice, from the point of view of the “angel of history,” (undoubtedly an allusion to Benjamin’s famous description of Klee’s painting) who accompanies the grey buses on their way to Grafeneck, and from the point of view of the bus driver. The administrative and ideological background behind the Aktion T4 is presented through an imagined dialogue be-
tween Eugen Stähle, the Nazi director of the Württemberg ministry of health, and the directors of the regional psychiatric institutions. The murderous proceedings at Grafeneck are told through the perspective of Dr. Horst Schumann, the director of the killing center. The second part ends with the image of Heisel Rein throwing a written message out of the window of the moving bus onto the street. This image of the secret message brings us back to his stories, discovered by coincidence in his abandoned house. Even though the Nazis succeeded in silencing him, his unique voice has survived, like a message in a bottle, and he speaks to us directly in through stories.

In these stories, Rein not only creates his own legacy, his own memory text, he also mythologizes his own status as outsider, as village fool, which enables him to play tricks on everybody without ever being held accountable for them. By casting Rein as a modern Eulenspiegel, Haasis places Rein’s stories within the literary tradition of the folk books and jest stories. In this, the story of Heisel Rein resonates strongly with the story of Oskar Matzerath. Rein is a real-life Oskar, a counter figure not only to the village society composed of petty bourgeoisie and peasants, Nazi party members and Mitläufer, but also to the contemporary consumer-driven and performance-oriented society. Like Grass, Haasis rejects pathos and instead builds on the tension inherent in the dichotomy between Rein’s lively and subversive trickster stories and the Nazis’ rationalizations and ideological jargon. Rein’s story unites the subversive and carnivalesque aspects of Grass’s novel with the elements of a document-based memory text.
In There/Out Here

A powerful and provocative intervention on behalf of future generations is also Helga Schubert’s book *Die Welt da drinnen*.\(^{166}\) Published in 2003, the book is based on the files of 179 patients of the Schwerin mental clinic who were murdered in the killing center Bernburg in 1941. These files had been locked up in the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* in the GDR until 1990, when they were brought to the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin, and were made accessible. Schubert reconstructs the lives of the victims and juxtaposes their life stories with those of the doctors and nurses—the book’s title thus refers to the imagined inner life of the patients as well as those who took care of them and sent them to their death. These victim and perpetrator biographies serve as backdrop for her discussion of current issues of mercy killing, prenatal diagnostics, and eugenics, and how the topic of Nazi euthanasia finds its way into these discussions. Into this complex collage of recovered biographies and present issues, Schubert embeds a biographical narrative of her own struggles of researching the writing of the book. On a meta-literary level, she relates the difficulties she had deciding which stories to tell, learning how to decipher the files, and being haunted by these victims. And on a biographical level, she talks about her work as a psychotherapist in the GDR before becoming a writer. She illustrates the complicated and fragmented relationship between the past and the present, between

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her own biography and the biographies of the victims, by breaking up the book’s chronology: she switches back and forth between the years of 1941 (Euthanasia program), 1946 (trial against the nurses), 1951 (trial against the doctors) and 1999 (the time of her writing the book). The only chronological sequences are the victims’ biographies. The juxtaposition of the cruel and deprecating medical and legal discourse of the documents with the emotional and compassionate narrative of the biographies creates a sense of almost uncanny incongruity in the book. Shuttling back and forth between commemorative, legal, medical and ethical issues Schubert presents the memory of euthanasia as a permanent irresolution. This irresolution becomes most poignant in the juxtaposition of the inevitable death of each patient with the mild sentence or acquittal of each of the perpetrators during the trials.

Schubert’s book has several beginnings, corresponding to its different temporal levels. Snapshots of the trials alternate with meta-literary reflections about the title and the motto of the book. Which title makes it seem too literary? Which too documentary? This halting and highly self-conscious narrative style communicates the author’s difficulty in finding an appropriate narrative format for the memory of euthanasia and her awareness of her participation in several discourses at once. With the help of the medical files, Schubert re-constructs and re-imagines several victim biographies, focusing especially on the stories of four women to whom she seems to feel a strong personal connection. For example, the file of Alwine, who calls herself “die Perlkönigin” [the pearl
queen], captures her. One day, Alwine brings in a dead bird from the garden and wants it fried for dinner. The doctor seems to have found this incident bizarre or pathological enough to note it in the file. This incident prompts the author to wonder whether the bird could have been a nightingale, and she re-tells Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy-tale of the emperor of China, who captures a nightingale because its beautiful song brings tears to his eyes. He bans the nightingale from his empire when he is given a mechanical nightingale that performs much more promptly and long-lastingly than the real one. However, on his deathbed, the emperor realizes that the mechanical bird cannot substitute the real one: the real nightingale returns, and its song drives death away and saves his life. The nightingale promises to return voluntarily and sing for him, if he will not lock it up in a cage anymore. Re-reading the fairy-tale, Schubert discovers in a footnote that the Danish word for nightingale, “nattergal,” contains the word “gal,” meaning “mad.” Musing on the intrinsic connection between singing and madness that the word for nightingale thus creates, Schubert writes: “eine Nachtigall wird sie nur mit dem Verrückten in sich” [she only becomes a nightingale with the madness inside her] (25–6). Andersen’s fairy-tale resonates with Alwine’s and the other victims’ stories in many ways. It is a metaphor of the victory of nature over culture, of the Romantic ideal of the irrational, embodied in the real bird and its song, which is to be preferred over the cold, enlightened rationalism represented by the mechanical bird. It pits mercy, respect, and humanity against control, standardization, and conformity. And it is a statement on the
transformational power of art.\(^{167}\) Into this part-documentary, part-fictional framework, Schubert places Alwine’s biography. She narrates how Alwine came to the institution in 1917, when she was 31 years old, because she had hallucinations, believed she was a princess or a queen, and that the whole world was after her. In the beginning, the meticulously kept medical records give extensive information about Alwine’s condition; they exactly reproduce her manner of speaking in riddles, and her behavior during manic phases. Thus, with the help of the files, Schubert is able to create a very vivid and colorful image of Alwine: reconstructing the conversations with the doctors, she lets Alwine come to life, gives her a voice. In the files of the 1930’s, the author is able to trace the deterioration of Alwine’s health and of her surroundings, documented in the ever colder and shorter file entries. In the end, the Nazi doctors did not even use her name anymore when describing her condition: “sehr laut und erregt, tobt, nicht ansprechbar, untätig, zerfahren. Es gab kein Subjekt mehr im Satz für Alwine, die Perlönigin” [very loud and excited, rages, unresponsive, inert, absentminded. Alwine the pearl queen’s sentences no longer had a subject] (43).

One year after she brings in the dead bird from the garden, in August 1941, she is deported to Bernburg and gassed the same day. Schubert’s description of the deporta-

\(^{167}\) The connection between music and madness has a long and well-documented tradition in Western literature and philosophy, especially of the Romantic period. Most recently, John T. Hamilton has theorized this connection in German and French Romantic literature in: John T. Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008).
tion in the buses is, just as Döblin’s or Dapp’s, entirely fictional. However, she describes the deportation from the point of view of the perpetrators, which heightens the contrast to the colorful and empathetic life stories of the victims. “Vielleicht war es so” she begins the account: “heute macht ihr einen Ausflug mit dem Bus. [...] Wohin wird nicht verraten, eine Fahrt ins Blaue” [Maybe it went like this: today you’re going on an excursion on the bus... It’s a secret where you’re going, a trip into the blue] (45). Instead of imagining the patients’ death in the gas chamber, the author describes her own visit to Bernburg, now a memorial. Schubert relates her difficulty, at this authentic site of atrocity, to comprehend its ordinariness: “so alltäglich und normal kann es einfach nicht gewesen sein. [...] Es muss doch einen Unterschied geben zum Möglichen, einen Schutz. Sonst könnte ja jeder in einen solchen Bus geraten, mitten im Sommer, dann kann ja jeder Begleiterin sein oder Fahrer, Kranke, Ärztin oder Pfleger” (80–1)\(^\text{168}\).

Schubert’s hybrid and very personal narrative style achieves a complication of the topic, a multiplying of layers and perspectives, and a greater immediacy and accessibility. She forces the readers to think about limit situations: What makes a life worth living and how can someone decide whether someone else is “unworthy” of living? She lists various examples from current cases of coercive sterilization and mercy killing in various countries. She even goes to Amsterdam to talk to the chairman of one of the or-

\(^\text{168}\) “It simply can’t have been so ordinary and everyday. [...] There has to be a dividing line between what’s possible and what isn’t, some kind of protection. Otherwise we could all find ourselves on a bus like that, in the middle of summer; we could all be a supervisor or a driver, a patient, a doctor or a nurse.”
ganizations that advocate and support mercy killing and assisted suicide. However, the most striking example is the last chapter, called “Einfühlung in die Gewährung des Gnaden-todes” [roughly: “Putting yourself in the place of a mercy killer”] which documents the author’s visit to a Berlin high school class. Instead of just reading from her book she hands the students Hitler’s infamous 1939 decree that authorized the mercy killing of the “incurably ill” and asks them to imagine themselves as Nazi health administrators and discuss the necessary procedures. The students are perplexed, some amused, some disturbed. At first, they seem reluctant even to try to make sense of the complex and evasive formulation of the Geheimerlass (Secret Decree):

Reichsleiter Bouhler und Dr. med. Brandt sind unter Verantwortung beauftragt, die Befugnisse namentlich zu bestimmender Ärzte so zu erweitern, dass nach menschlichem Ermessen unheilbar Kranken bei kritischster Beurteilung ihres Krankheitszustandes der Gnaden- tod gewährt werden kann.\textsuperscript{169}

(218)

Does this mean that Hitler basically delegated the responsibility to someone else, as if he did not want to be bothered with it any more, one student asks. I just wouldn’t go along with this, another student says. Schubert reminds him that it is too late to resist now, since he already is a Nazi administrator, that he is acting on orders of the Führer and that his only alternative may be to go to the Eastern Front as a soldier. A few students begin to come up with plans. Others keep refusing to be forced to think along the

\textsuperscript{169} “Reichsleiter Bouhler and Dr. med. Brandt are authorized to expand the powers of certain doctors still to be named, to allow patients whose condition is deemed incurable following a thorough evaluation of their health to be granted mercy-death.”
lines of the perpetrators, preferring to identify with the victims. They discuss how much room for resistance there might have been. The students are obviously uncomfortable with thinking of themselves as perpetrators: “Wer leben darf, bestimmen wir. Das ist ein gefährliches Gefühl, ich möchte darüber jetzt nicht mehr nachdenken, man gerät in einen richtigen Sog. Das war 1939. Es gibt keinen Anlass, heute über Selektionskriterien nachzudenken,” says one student. They seem to prefer to talk about the victims, and about disability and incurable illness in general. How does one determine when a person is incurable? How ill would one have to be to want to die? Schubert writes: “Da ging es plötzlich auch um den Grad der Behinderung, um die Frage, wie viel Hilflosigkeit man bei sich selbst noch akzeptieren würde, also nicht darum, wie viel man beim anderen an Behinderung akzeptieren würde” (227). Then Schubert reads one of the victim biographies to the students, the story of Henriet, who, after suffering encephalitis at age nine, was extremely lethargic and could not work, as a result of which she was permanently institutionalized and later killed by the Nazis. “Die war ja überhaupt nicht verrückt, die war ja nur krank” [But she wasn’t mad at all, she was just sick], says a student, surprised.

By reproducing the students’ discussions and struggles in her last chapter, Schu-
bert provides an illustration of the different factors that counteract or complicate the memory of euthanasia: the persistent erratic belief that the euthanasia program was indeed based on humanitarian objectives and a concomitant failure to interrogate these objectives; the similarly persistent cultural construction of disability in terms of deficiency and disqualification; the resistance to see the connections and continuities between past and present mechanisms of exclusion; and, finally, the reluctance to engage personally with the issue of disability and the readiness to disqualify someone else by declaring them “mad.” Schubert writes: “Das Für-verrückt-Erklären eines anderen Menschen geschieht aus Angst vor dem eigenen Verwirrenden, Unbekannten, Unkonventionellen, Schöpferischen, Fremden” [Pronouncing another human being insane is the result of our fear of the confusing, unknown, unconventional, creative, strange within ourselves] (124).

_Die Welt da drinnen_ is an example of a memory text that provocatively engages with the different aspects of the memory of euthanasia and thus creates for the reader an idea of its complexity and its contemporary relevance. Schubert commemorates individual victims by reconstructing their stories. Her portrayal of these victims is without pathos, nor does it elicit a distancing and reifying sense of pity. Whenever possible, she lets the silenced speak for themselves, through their letters, conversations, and actions. But while making us acquainted with a few of these victims, she never loses sight of the fact that there are so many victims who cannot be known and whose stories cannot be
reconstructed. Engaging the readers in an identificatory and commemorative process for Schubert also entails raising critical questions about our own stance towards disability today. Assuming the responsibility of remembering euthanasia is accompanied by a process of self-questioning, and, as she shows in her last chapter, of seeing yourself as a victim and a perpetrator. By demonstrating how the topic of euthanasia finds its way into contemporary political, cultural, but also personal issues, the book creates a similar notion of “past in the present” as the memorial at Grafeneck. Just as visitors there are confronted with both, the site’s murderous past and the possibly uncomfortable present of the care facility, readers of Schubert’s book are asked to confront and question the biases and prejudices that shape our day-to-day interactions.
We must remember that these faithful followers, among them the diligent executors of inhuman orders, were not born torturers, were not (with a few exceptions) monsters: they were ordinary men. Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions...

—Primo Levi\textsuperscript{172}

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. [...] [T]his normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied—as had been said at Nuremberg over and over again by the defendants and their counsels—that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact hostis generis humani, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.

—Hannah Arendt\textsuperscript{173}

\section*{Chapter 3}

\textbf{Lethal Trajectories: Perpetrators between Grafeneck and Trieste}

His dark, piercing eyes peer out from under thick eyebrows. Beneath his broad nose, a dark moustache worn in a style similar to the \textit{Führer}. The oval dome of his bald head occupies a good two-thirds of the photograph. He is wearing a white shirt and a diagonally

\textsuperscript{172} Levi, \textit{If This Is a Man}: 396. “Bisogna ricordare che questi fedeli, e fra questi anche i diligenzi esecutori di ordini disumani, non erano aguzzini nati, non erano (salve poche eccezioni) dei mostri: erano uomini qualunque. I mostri esistono ma sono troppo pochi per essere veramente pericolosi, sono più pericolosi gli uomini comuni, i funzionari pronti a credere e ad obbedire senza discutere.” \textit{Opere}: 1:198.

striped tie, and pinned to the chest of his dark single-breasted suit are an Iron Cross and below that a Nazi swastika. His face, although stern, is otherwise unremarkable. The photo, taken indoors, has the appearance of an official portrait, possibly for an ID or personal file of some sort. What more can we glean from this photograph? A veteran of the First World War, a member of the Nazi party; beyond these tokens of identity, we can only speculate as to who this man was and what he did.

Another photograph, taken at a different time, in a different place, shows what appears to be the same man. This time, it is not a portrait but a snapshot taken outdoors, cropped and enlarged. He is wearing an SS uniform and a field cap bearing the skull and crossbones insignia. The patch on his collar indicates his rank of Sturmbannführer. Unlike in the first photo, he is wearing glasses and also has a pair of binoculars around his neck. Perhaps it is a trick of
the light, or an effect of the military uniform, but his somewhat grim expression on the portrait seems almost fierce in this snapshot. His Iron Cross is pinned to his left breast pocket and below it hangs a War Merit Cross (*Kriegsverdienstkreuz*). These photos are each on display at the documentary exhibition of a memorial site. The former at Grafe-neck, and the latter at the Risiera di San Sabba in Trieste. Both photographs mark crucial moments in the career of a Nazi perpetrator: the man is Christian Wirth, organizer and supervisor of Nazi killing camps in Germany, Poland, and Italy.

The first was probably taken in the late 1930s in Stuttgart when Wirth’s Nazi career was just taking off, whereas the second one shows him at its peak at Belzec in the early 1940s. Only a few years lie between these photos, and yet these pictures seem to be of two different people. While the first is a standard, formal portrait, presumably taken in a studio, of a serious and maybe slightly self-important looking man, the second image presents a military man at work. His entire appearance seems to have been transformed and radicalized; even the somewhat discreet swastika pin from the portrait has morphed into the ostentatious display of SS insignia all over his upper body. Most importantly, he shows off the key attributes of war, but also of supervision and control: his uniform and his binoculars.

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174 The exact dates and circumstances in which both photographs were taken are unknown. The first is catalogued in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart. It is likely that it belonged to Christian Wirth’s personal file, or that it was an ID photo. The second photograph is probably archived in the Ghetto Fighters’ House Photo Archive in the Western Galilee, Israel.
The two photographs are part of the documentary exhibitions at the sites of Wirth’s first and last assignment, and at each site, they are part of a series of perpetrator photos placed at strategic points in the exhibitions and contrasted with photos of their victims. Upon closer inspection, one notices a similar difference between static and dynamic display for all of the perpetrator photos at the two sites. The Grafeneck exhibition displays pictures of five main perpetrators: *Aktion T4* masterminds Philipp Bouhler and Dr. Karl Brandt, Reich leader Heinrich Himmler, the medical director of Grafeneck Dr. Horst Schumann, and Christian Wirth. All of them are shown in the same portrait format, some frontal, some in profile. Focusing exclusively on their faces, these pictures are intent on displaying the exact physical features of these men. At the Risiera di San Sabba by contrast, most of the perpetrator photos are “action shots,” group photos, or close-ups cropped from larger photos. They depict men in uniforms standing or walking, saluting or talking to each other. Their faces are sometimes hard to discern, since some are wearing peaked caps (*Schirmmützen*) with visors that cover their eyes—one has to consult the legend on the side in order to establish their identity. There are only two images of Italian Fascists on view at the Risiera exhibition, one of Mussolini standing next to Hitler, and a grainy group photo of Galeazzo Ciano and other members of the Fascist élite.

What impression do we as visitors get of these men at either site? At Grafeneck, we are urged to contemplate their faces in close-up. We see five individuals with unremarkable, ordinary faces, indistinguishable, beyond some period details, from the man on the
street outside. At the Risiera, these same men are barely recognizable; in fact, they all look alike in their uniforms and their stereotypical poses. Even though there is considerable space dedicated to these men in the overall conception of the exhibition (their photos take up four panels), the focus seems to be less on them as individuals but on their symbolic function as members of the SS, as Nazis, as perpetrators.

On the basis of this seemingly minor difference in the way these same perpetrators are presented at these two sites, I would like to ask to what extent it reflects the underlying assumptions of each. What role do these men and their pictures play not only in the conceptual framework but also the pedagogical mission of the two memorials? What model for understanding this role do these two exhibitions present? And how does the engagement with the perpetrators mirror the taboos, fears, and preoccupations of post-war German and Italian society? The general public seems to be boundlessly fascinated with Nazi perpetrators, a fact which is often exploited in sensationalized documentaries, feature films, and biographies. Memorial sites must find a way of presenting the perpetrators in such a way that the visitors are able to gain an understanding of who they were, but at the same time they are forced to “walk a tightrope between two unsatisfactory extremes: demonizing the perpetrators as the embodiment of absolute evil, on the one hand, and, on the other, insisting on the existence of the ‘little Nazi’
in all of us.”175 Any engagement with the question of the perpetrators must take place between these two extremes, but even here it is necessary to distinguish between understanding and justifying the actions of these men and women. Essentially, we must ask ourselves whether it is true that tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner? Certainly, one firmly established school of thought holds that perpetrators have nothing to teach us about the Holocaust. Saul Friedländer, for example, argues that although “we should be dealing with this epoch and these events as with any other epoch and events, considering them from all possible angles, suggesting all possible hypotheses and linkages,” this cannot be the case for the Holocaust: “No one of sound mind would wish to interpret the events from Hitler’s viewpoint.”176 He goes on to suggest that “we are possibly facing an exceptional situation that calls for the fusion of moral and cognitive categories in the course of historical analysis as such” (70). In response to this assessment, historian Inga Clendinnen writes that “[t]his conclusion—indeed Friedländer’s whole discussion—places us squarely in a conceptual field inhabited by words like ‘evil’, which are of no use whatsoever when it comes to teasing out why people act as they do, and are likely to lead us to the impasse in which Friedländer finds himself.”177 Clendinnen and Zeitlin sub-


scribe to the opposite view, which sees this “impasse” as nothing but the result of a determination to remove the Holocaust from history—a move which renders historical scrutiny of this event and its perpetrators not only futile but morally suspect. Rather than accepting this “impasse” as insurmountable, these scholars emphasize the need and value in studying the perpetrators, in an effort to understand their background, their motivations, and their worldview. Central to this endeavor is the assertion that understanding does not necessarily connote identification, nor does it imply justifying or excusing the actions of others. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, the pedagogical mission of memorial sites requires a conscious and critical engagement with the perpetrators as well as the victims of the atrocities commemorated there.

The histories of Grafeneck and the Risiera di San Sabba are linked through the men who worked there, a fact which is acknowledged by neither exhibition explicitly. It was the same group of men who organized, supervised, and carried out the killing of the mentally ill and disabled in Grafeneck in 1940 and the deportation and killing of Jews and partisans in Trieste in 1943. For an understanding of the structural, organizational, and ideological connections between the two sites, and of their role in the larger context of the Holocaust, it is necessary to give a detailed account of these men’s backgrounds, their careers, their actions, and their role in the larger system of persecution and mass
murder.\textsuperscript{178} In the second part of the chapter, a general overview of the different historiographical approaches, their achievements and elisions or blind spots, and how these are reflected more generally in post-war society, will supply the theoretical tools for my analysis of the engagement with the perpetrators at Grafeneck and at the Risiera in particular. Besides looking at the ways in which the exhibitions frame and represent the perpetrators, I am interested in how these exhibitions are informed by and reflect different phases in post-war historiographical engagement with them. While the Risiera exhibition was opened in its first version as early as April 1982 (and then revised and re-opened in April 1998), the Grafeneck exhibition in its present, most detailed form was created in October 2005. Finally, I will examine how the specific function assigned to the perpetrators at memorial sites can lead us to more general observations about what a critical engagement with perpetrators at sites of memory can do in terms of historical and civic education. There is, to my knowledge, no comprehensive study of the engagement with perpetrators at sites of memory, neither of their representation and framing, nor of the possible ways of approaching them pedagogically.\textsuperscript{179} Even though Ge-


\textsuperscript{179} Among the few works that deal with the role and presentation of perpetrators at selected sites of memory are: Herbert Diercks, ed., \textit{Entgrenzte Gewalt. Täterinnen und Täter im Nationalsozialismus} (Bremen: Temmen, 2002): 37, Sonja Klenk, \textit{Gedenkstättenpädagogik an den Orten nationalsozialistischen Unrechts in der Region Freiburg-Offenburg} (Berlin: LIT, 2006), Thomasz Kranz, “NS-Täter als Thema der
denkstättenpädagogik has become a field in its own right with an ever-growing number of publications each year, the focus is mainly on methodological issues connected with historical and political education, on the role of the victims within the pedagogical work at such sites, and, most recently, on visitor behavior.\textsuperscript{180}

**From Grafeneck to Trieste**

How did Christian Wirth come to be the man whose picture is displayed at these two sites of memory? The documentary exhibitions do not provide any detailed background information on him. Nor are there many in-depth studies about Wirth’s life, his character, and his career. In spite of his prominent role in the Holocaust, we actually know fairly little about this man. Piecing together the information from historical studies, court statements, and published interviews, I will now trace Wirth’s path from Southern Germany to North-Eastern Italy to reveal the story that links the two photos and the two sites.

Christian Wirth was born on November 24, 1885 in the protestant Swabian village Oberbalzheim near Ulm.\textsuperscript{181} His father was a cooper. Of seventeen siblings, only six survived childhood. He went to school until he was sixteen, then worked as a Sawyer, joined the Württemberg army as an infantryman, and, in 1910, the police. He moved to Stuttgart, got married, and began a meteoric career in the local police force. By 1913 he had already been made Detective Inspector in the Kriminalpolizei (Kripo). His career in the military was just as successful: during World War I, he distinguished himself not only through his courage on the western front, but also as an organizer of supply transports, as an expert in timber construction—which was extremely helpful in the trenches—and through his success in combating corruption within the military as a member of the military police. After the end of the war he resumed his post at the Kripo in Stuttgart. Unlike many others, the war did not leave Wirth uprooted and unemployed; he had a secure job and his career was still blossoming. Around that time he began sympathizing with right-wing extremists, and as early as 1922, became a member of the NSDAP. In 1933, he joined the SA.

Wirth was the leading figure in the consolidation (*Gleichschaltung*) and transformation of the Württemberg police department into an NS-organization, and, naturally, he also held leading positions not only within the Württemberg police but also in the Stuttgart *Sicherheitsdienst*. In 1939, he was promoted to the rank of SS-*Obersturmführer* and made Chief Inspector, even though he had never received any formal police training or taken any examinations. It seems that among the now Nazified Stuttgart police, formal requirements were less important than efficiency, loyalty, and—above all—connections: an evaluation from 1938 presents him as having a “flawless character,” as well as being “intellectually astute and flexible, very energetic, very persistent,” and even outside of his own commissariat, he was called upon to solve especially difficult cases (Rieß 242).

When the Württemberg Ministry of the Interior began transforming Grafeneck into a euthanasia killing center, they chose Wirth as organizer and supervisor of the process. Thus, he was sent to Brandenburg in January 1940 to witness the first gassing of mentally ill patients, a test and demonstration of how the euthanasia program was to be put into practice. At Grafeneck he supervised the administration and the killing personnel, ensured the gassings were carried out smoothly and efficiently, and oversaw the issuing of the false death certificates. Clearly, the historical records cannot give us insight into Wirth’s decision-making process or provide any hints as to whether his transition from fighting corruption and crime in Stuttgart to supervising a killing center was as
smooth as the seamless chronology suggests, but the fact that he did not request to be released from the assignment and instead carried it out so conscientiously and with such efficiency suggests that he was not merely following orders, but that he was truly devoted to the cause.

At Grafeneck, he met some of the men (all of them in the SS) who were to work with him for the next five years and follow him not only to the killing camps in Poland but also to his final assignment in Trieste. All told, there were about fifteen men who worked with Wirth at Grafeneck (and a total of more than forty who worked in other T4 killing centers) and who then accompanied him to the other killing camps.\(^\text{182}\) All of these men had astonishingly successful careers, considering that most of them were unskilled workers or simple craftsmen.\(^\text{183}\) Among them, Josef “Sepp” Oberhauser, known as “Wirth’s shadow” by his colleagues, plays a significant role. He rose through the ranks more quickly than any of the former Grafeneck officers. Born in Munich in 1915, he was

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\(^\text{183}\) To name but a few: Kurt Franz (cook at Grafeneck, Hartheim, Sonnenstein, and Brandenburg, as well as in the KdF, guard in Belzec, deputy of Treblinka’s commander Franz Stangl, see De Mildt, *Name of the People*: 258–9; Friedlander, *Origins*: 239; Willi Mentz, (in charge of the livestock and gardening at Grafeneck and Hadamar, assigned to perform serial executions at Treblinka, see De Mildt, *Name of the People*: 261–2 and Friedlander, *Origins*: 238; August Miete (farmer and “burner” at Grafeneck and Hadamar, supervisor of the shooting of old and sick prisoners in the Lazarett in Treblinka, cf. De Mildt, *Name of the People*: 260-1 and Friedlander, *Origins*: 242; Karl Frenzel (“burner” at Grafeneck, Bernburg, and Hadamar, supervisor of the killing process at Sobibor, see De Mildt, *Name of the People*: 281–2 and Friedlander, *Origins*: 241; and Werner Dubois (bus driver and “burner” at Grafeneck, Brandenburg, Hadamar, and Bernburg, supervisor of Jewish work units at Belzec and Sobibor, see De Mildt, *Name of the People*: 290 and Friedlander, *Origins*: 241–2.
among the youngest recruits for the SS Totenkopfstandarte. In 1939 he participated in the military campaign against Poland, at the end of which he was promoted to SS-Oberscharführer (De Mildt 213). Subsequently, Oberhauser came to Grafeneck, where he worked as a “corpse-burner’, the lowliest position in the camp hierarchy. He carried out this same profession at Brandenburg and Bernburg. As we will see, Oberhauser’s and Wirth’s careers were closely intertwined, for in the East, Oberhauser became Wirth’s protégé.

Once everything was “running smoothly” at Grafeneck, Wirth was promoted to be the main Inspector, something like a crisis manager, for all six killing centers. Among the staff he gained a reputation for being exceptionally ruthless in his support for the killing program and in his enforcement of the rules. The image among his colleagues of Wirth as an arch villain becomes increasingly pronounced as his career accelerates. Oberhauser, for example, described him in the following terms in 1962:

His most defining characteristics were an iron toughness, unquestioning obedience, belief in the Führer, absolute callousness and ruthlessness. He distinguished himself through these characteristics even during the euthanasia program which is when I met him; but it wasn’t till he moved on to the annihilation of the Jews that he was truly in his element. (Rieß 247)

Franz Stangl, who had first met Wirth during T4 at Hartheim, describes him in an interview in 1971:

Wirth was a gross and florid man. My heart sank when I met him. He stayed at Hartheim for several days that time, and came back often. Whenever he was there, he addressed us daily at lunch. And here it was again, this awful
verbal crudity: when he spoke about the necessity for this euthanasia operation, he wasn’t speaking in humane and scientific terms, the way Dr. Werner had described it to me. He laughed. He spoke of “doing away with useless mouths” and said that “sentimental slobber” about such people made him “puke.”

Looking at statements such as these, given by fellow perpetrators, one has to keep in mind that most of them were given as testimonies in court, where his former colleagues were eager to emphasize their own ordinariness by casting Wirth, who was long dead by then, in the darkest possible light. Similarly, Stangl seems eager to distance himself from German “brutes” like Wirth by emphasizing how things in Austria had been different, more “civilized,” before the “Piefkes” arrived and “all one heard was the gutter language of the barracks” (Sereny 39).

In any case, however, Wirth’s actions speak for themselves. By August 1941, circa 70,000 mentally ill and disabled people had been killed and the centralized phase of the euthanasia program ended. Subsequently, Wirth was transferred to Lublin, to work under SS and Police Leader Odilo Globocnik (a Trieste-born Austrian SS officer and Gauleiter of Vienna) and help him build and administrate the so-called Aktion Reinhard camps in Poland. Oberhauser joined Wirth at Belzec in December of 1941. Wirth seemed to have held Oberhauser in some esteem and gotten along with him very well, for he made him his liaison officer with Globocnik, an important position and a significant step up in

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Oberhauser’s career. In the following years, Wirth assembled most of the staff from the former euthanasia killing centers to work at Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. He also hired the mason Erwin Lambert, who had supervised the construction of gas chambers and crematoria for most of the T4 killing centers, to continue his work in Treblinka, Sobibor, and later in Trieste (Friedlander Origins 214–5, De Mildt 292). When Wirth was made Inspector of all three Aktion Reinhard camps, he saw to it that Oberhauser received a promotion as well (De Mildt 277). Aktion Reinhard ended in the fall of 1943. By then, approximately two million Jews had been killed.

After the conclusion of Aktion Reinhard, the Kanzlei des Führers sent Wirth and his men to Trieste in the newly annexed Adriatisches Küstenland to serve again under Globocnik, newly appointed Police Leader of the Küstenland and Dalmatia. With them came a large group of Ukrainians who had worked as guards and killers in the Aktion Reinhard camps. The Sonderabteilung Einsatz R (for Reinhard) was divided into three departments, to be stationed in Trieste, Fiume, and Udine. Their tasks were fighting the Italian and Yugoslav partisans, rounding up and deporting Jews and confiscating their belongings, establishing a concentration camp/killing center in Trieste, and building a line of fortifications against the Allied forces. The killing assignment was a continuation and combination of the euthanasia program and Aktion Reinhard in three different respects. Firstly, the perpetrators did not build the new killing camp, but rather established it in a former rice-husking factory located in the San Sabba district. It proved to be a per-
fect set-up for a killing camp, since it already had the necessary infrastructure in place. Lambert equipped it with prison cells and a crematorium, and in the year and a half of the war that remained, between 3,000 and 5,000 people were killed and cremated there. Several trains carrying ca. 20,000 Jews, partisans, and hostages from the region and from occupied Yugoslavia departed from the Risiera to Auschwitz. Secondly, among those killed and deported were also the Jewish residents of several nursing homes, as well as all the Jewish patients from hospitals and psychiatric institutions in Trieste, Fiume, Gorizia, and Venice. Thus, the Risiera’s victims comprised all three of the main groups persecuted by the Nazis. Thirdly, because it was situated in Trieste’s industrial area and within earshot of the local population, attempts were made, superficially at least, to conceal the goings-on at the Risiera. In order to do this, the perpetrators combined the two different procedures utilized in the euthanasia program and *Aktion Reinhard*. Those arrested were brought to the Risiera in trucks, cars, or in one of the grey omnibuses with painted windows that had been used to deport patients from men-

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185 It is extremely difficult to determine exactly how many were killed at the Risiera and how many were deported from there. The ca. 20,000 identity cards found in the rubble of the Risiera suggest the high number of deportees. See also Ferruccio Fölkel and Frediano Sessi, *La Risiera di San Sabba* (Milano: BUR, 2001): 44–6; Albin Bubnić, et al., *Dallo squadrismo fascista alle stragi della Risiera (con il resoconto del processo)*, ed. Associazione Nazionale Ex-Deportati (Trieste: ANED, 1978); Galliano Fogar, “L’occupazione nazista del Litorale Adriatico e lo sterminio della Risiera,” *San Sabba: Istruttoria e processo per il Lager della Risiera*, ed. Adolfo Scalpelli, vol. 1, (Milano: ANED, 1988): 82–5.

Institutions to T4 killing centers (Klee *Was sie taten* 57; Fölkel and Sessi 54). The killings took place at night. Individual executions were camouflaged by loud music, barking dogs, and idling engines to drown out the sounds of the pistol shots, blows, and screams of the victims. For the mass killings the perpetrators used gas vans, hidden away in the garage, to kill several dozens by exhaust fumes channeled into the van (Fogar “L'occupazione” 70; Fölkel and Sessi 37). The corpses were cremated and the ash and bone remains were loaded onto boats and disposed of in the Adriatic (Fölkel and Sessi 46–8).

**The End of the War**

In 1944, while the deportation of the region’s Jews was proceeding according to plan, the fight against the partisans, whose attacks were increasing daily, proved ever more dangerous. Franz Stangl, who had been with Wirth and his men since they both worked together at Hartheim in Austria, told his interviewer that he and his fellow SS officers suspected that their superiors were looking for ways to get rid of them because they had seen and done things that should never become known: “we were an embarrassment to the brass: they wanted to find ways and means to ‘incinerate’ us. So we were assigned the most dangerous jobs—anything to do with anti-partisan combat in that part of the world was very perilous” (Sereny 261). In Wirth’s case, this proved successful. He was
killed on the 26\textsuperscript{th} of May 1944 when his car was ambushed by a group of Yugoslav partisans.\textsuperscript{187} It was only logical that Oberhauser be promoted to the position of commandant of the Risiera after Wirth’s death. Dietrich Allers took over the command of the whole \textit{Sonderabteilung} (Fogar “L’occupazione” 23). In contrast to their supervisor, most of Wirth’s men survived the end of the war. Some were interned by the Allies for a short time but not recognized as war criminals, some went into hiding, whilst others, such as Lambert, did not even bother to change their names or professions and continued to live normal, bourgeois lives (cf. Klee \textit{Was sie taten}). There was no extended investigation into the \textit{Aktion Reinhard} complex until 1959, when inquiries began under the direction of the \textit{Zentrale Stelle zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen}. Even though these investigations led to the identification of ca. 120 men who had worked at the \textit{Aktion Reinhard} camps, only twenty-six of them were ultimately put on trial (De Mildt Chapter 3). “Oven-builder” Lambert, for example, who had settled in Stuttgart with his wife (a nurse from Hartheim) and opened a successful tile business (Klee \textit{Was sie taten} 16), appeared in court twice, but was only sentenced to a total of seven years in prison. The court could not prove that Lambert had played a role in the actual design of the gas chambers, but only that he had “built” them (De Mildt 267).

Since these trials focused exclusively on the crimes committed in the camps in

\textsuperscript{187} The exact circumstances of Wirth’s death remain somewhat unclear. Some sources suggest that Wirth may have been shot by one of his own men, possibly even on orders from Berlin, but this is purely speculative. See \textit{Risiera}: 114-5.
Poland, most of the defendants were never tried for their involvement in the euthanasia program. Beginning with the Nuremberg Tribunal, the euthanasia crimes were traditionally disputed in separate trials. The majority of those prosecuted in these later euthanasia trials, conducted in West Germany as well as in the GDR, had been the medical staff, i.e. the doctors and nurses, and for the most part they received extremely mild sentences (three to seven years) or even acquittals (cf. Klee *Was sie taten*). The non-medical personnel, those who actually supervised and carried out the killings, such as Wirth and his men, were in most cases not prosecuted during these euthanasia trials. The exception is Josef Oberhauser, who was a defendant in the 1947 euthanasia trial in Magdeburg and was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Amnestied in 1956, he returned to Munich and worked as a waiter until he was put on trial again in 1964, this time for his involvement in *Aktion Reinhard*. The only defendant in the Belzec trial in Munich, Oberhauser was sentenced to only four and a half years in prison as an accessory to mass murder. The court considered it “fair” to mitigate the punishment, since Oberhauser had already served time in connection with his Magdeburg sentence. Thus, even though the crimes were not deemed to be connected, the punishments seemed to be (cf. De Mildt). After serving his sentence, Oberhauser resumed his old job as a waiter and lived in Munich until 1976, when a court in Trieste put him on trial for his involvement in the killings at the Risiera di San Sabba. The 1966 Sobibor trial at the regional court in Hagen had been the impulse for the Triestines to begin a legal investigation of their own. The Ger-
man court’s request for access to documents and survivor testimonies collected by the Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli e Venezia Giulia and the Associazione nazionale ex deportati politici led to demands by these organizations for a trial in Trieste. The German court sent lawyers to Trieste to examine documents and interview witnesses. Some of the witnesses also travelled to Germany to testify in court (Fölkel and Sessi 185–7; Bubnić et al. 149). In return, the Germans provided testimonies and other documents for the trial in Trieste. However, none of the six accused were actually present at the trial in Trieste. In fact, except for Oberhauser all of them were already dead: Christian Wirth had been killed in 1944, Gottlieb Hering had died in 1945, Franz Stangl had died in prison in 1971, and Dietrich Allers had died a year before the trial. Oberhauser did not find it necessary to prepare a defense and he refused to appear at his trial in Trieste. The court was obliged to use the testimonies Oberhauser and the other defendants had given during the German trials, second-hand, so to speak. He did prepare a deposition with the German government in which he stated that he had not been aware at the time that there were cremating ovens in the Risiera which were used to burn the bodies of partisans and Jews. Although the Triestine court sen-

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188 For a discussion of the impact of the trial see pp. 305–309.
tenced him in absentia to life imprisonment, Oberhauser went on serving beer in Munich until his death in 1979. He was tried three times for his role in three different but related persecutions, which makes Oberhauser the only T4 employee whose involvement in the mass killings of this organization—euthanasia, Aktion Reinhard, and the assignment in Italy—ever became the object of court proceedings (De Mildt 256; 277–9).

The stories of Wirth and Oberhauser illustrate not only the interconnections between these different persecutory complexes, their perpetrators and their victims. They also reveal something these men had in common, despite their very different backgrounds and age groups: their opportunism. Once they had proven their efficiency, ingenuity, and trustworthiness in the euthanasia program, they went on to pursue illustrious careers in the killing centers in the east and in Trieste. Especially Aktion Reinhard was a career-booster that promised near-limitless possibilities for unsupervised action, and absolute power over life and death (Friedlander Origins 245). The transition from “mercy killing” to the “final solution” seems to have been a small one for Wirth, Oberhauser, and the others. As Oberhauser’s post-war trial history illustrates, there is a rift between the seamless careers in killing and the post-war juridical prosecution of these men and their actions. The ongoing conceptual separation between the murder of the mentally ill and disabled and the murder of the Jews is grounded in part in the fact that post-war prosecutors focused on each site of crime and each group of victims separately. Even though each of these trials placed the defendants in a certain place at a certain time, it
seems that, ultimately, their role in the bigger picture remained a mystery.

**Perpetrators in Post-War Germany**

The history of perpetrator scholarship in Germany can be described as a long and tortuous process of shifting the focus away from the Nazi élite: it is through the biographies of individual men and women at all levels of the National Socialist State that we are able to see connections and establish continuities. As Theodor Adorno writes in his essay “Education after Auschwitz”:

> What is necessary is what I once in this respect called the turn to the subject. One must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by awakening a general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again.\(^{191}\)

Adorno places great emphasis on the critical engagement with perpetrators within the broader project of education after Auschwitz. Perpetrator scholarship in Germany has been a response to the same impulses. I will return to the question of education later in this chapter.

In his useful survey of post-war scholarship on perpetrators, Gerhard Paul describes the different approaches to Nazi perpetrators since 1945.\(^ {192}\) He shows that up

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\(^{192}\) Paul focuses exclusively on perpetrator scholarship conducted in West Germany. The situation in the
until the early 1990s the engagement with the perpetrators was characterized essentially by different strategies of avoidance and repression by which scholars actually helped create a distance between the Nazi villains and German society as a whole. The first of these approaches Paul calls exterritorialization, criminalization, and demonization, and it was predominant in scholarship in the immediate post-war up until the early 1960s. Scholars isolated the perpetrators as members of the Nazi élite and the SS, which led to an auto-exculpation of large sections of German society:

Die [...] aus der deutschen Gesellschaft hinausinterpretierte SS wurde als Hort des Abnormen diabolisiert, der nur über pathologische Kriterien zu er­schließen war. Die verbleibenden Täter erschienen als Kriminelle, als Dämo­nen oder Desperados, mit denen die deutsche Gesellschaft nichts gemein zu haben schien. Ein bipolares Täterprofil entstand, das die Täter der Shoah [...] aus der deutschen Gesellschaft ausgrenzte.193

Another approach, predominant between the 1960s and the 1990s, is only seemingly less one-dimensional. Paul calls it depersonalization and abstraction, and it casts the Nazis as emotionless bureaucrats or blindly obedient executors of Hitler’s will. Both approaches, according to Paul, subscribe to a rather amorphous idea of the perpetrators

GDR was of course entirely different after the end of the War, but he does not address this issue and while there are numerous scholarly discussions of legal proceedings against Nazis in the GDR after the war, there is to my knowledge no comparable overview of the historiographical engagement with perpetrators in East Germany currently available.

193 “The SS, which had been ‘interpreted out’ of German society, was demonized as a site of abnormality, which could only be understood via pathological criteria. The remaining perpetrators were presented as criminals, demons or desperados who appeared to have nothing in common with German society. What emerged was a bipolar profile of the perpetrators of the Shoah, which separated them off from the rest of German society.” Gerhard Paul, ed., Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche? (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002): 17.
and their actions, which again enabled the Germans to distance themselves from the perpetrators: “Die Shoah wurde zum Automatismus ohne Menschen, vor allem ohne Täter, angetrieben von abstrakten, gesichtslosen Strukturen und Institutionen” [The Shoah became an automatic machine without people, in particular without perpetrators, fueled by abstract, faceless structures and institutions] (Paul Täter 20). The image of the perpetrators as Schreibtischäter became a commonplace.194

The 1990s saw a fundamental shift within the discourse on Nazi perpetrators. The dissolution of ideological and nationalistic myths in many European countries at the end of the Cold War brought new groups and types of perpetrators into focus. Archival material in the former Eastern Bloc became accessible and a new generation of historians who were no longer subject to the old mechanisms of auto-exculpation replaced the old, abstract, and sterile debates with a new interest in the concrete, regional, and individual crimes and criminals. Public discussions about books such as Christopher Browning’s Ordinary Men (1992), and Daniel Goldhagen’s controversial Hitler’s Willing

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194 The period from the late 1960s to the late 1980s must also be seen in light of the debates concerning “intentionalism” and “functionalism” with regard to the Holocaust and its origin. The former refers to the view that the Holocaust was the result of a clearly defined plan laid out by Adolf Hitler, whereas historians of the latter school maintain that the Holocaust arose as part of the functioning and internal dynamic of the National Socialist State. In his detailed survey of post-war historiography on the Holocaust and National Socialism, Ian Kershaw has outlined the background and implication of these debates for the interpretation of the Holocaust. See Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation (London: Arnold, 2000). The terms themselves were first coined in 1981 by the historian Timothy W. Mason, “Intention and Explanation. A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” Der “Führerstaat”, Mythos und Realität: Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981).
Executioners (1996), and the traveling exhibition Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944 (on view from 1995 until 1999, then again in a revised version from 2001 till 2004) further presented impulses for a new perpetrator discourse at the center of which stood ordinary Germans as human beings and as actors (often on their own initiative) of persecution and extermination (37–42). Paul calls this shift concretization and differentiation: the Nazis lost their comfortably distant image of alienness and became people who were very close to home. In the past decade historiography on perpetrators has been moving towards a heterogeneous and differentiated analysis and an increasingly close-up description not only of their actions but also of their generational and environmental conditioning, career development, and worldview. Scholars zoom in on the so-called Direktätäter (or tatnahe Täter), the rank and file Nazis, those men and women who actually carried out the killings, as well as on non-German collaborators in the occupied zones (50–60). As Paul points out, this new type of perpetrator scholarship is not satisfied with facile references to ideology, racism, authoritarian character, unleashed death-drive, or barbarism as explanations for mass murder. Rather than focusing on the center of power, it looks at the substructure, finding new groups of perpetrators, the “average” man and woman involved in Nazi crimes. By analyzing the relationship between intention, disposition, social practice, and the situational dynamics of violence, recent studies counter the traditionally exculpatory interpretation according to which the perpetrators were merely following orders from above. On the contrary, this re-
search shows that they have to be seen as independent protagonists who contributed their own dynamics and initiative to the system of extermination.\(^{195}\)

**Perpetrators in Post-War Italy**

While *Täterforschung* has become an established and ever-growing sub-field within scholarship on the Holocaust in Germany, one cannot speak of a similarly clear-cut and defined body of scholarship on perpetrators in Italy. Firstly, it must be noted that the situation in Italy is not strictly analogous to the one in Germany, for there are actually two different sets of perpetrators to deal with: Italian Fascist activists and collaborators on the one hand and the German occupiers on the other. While the latter have received a considerable amount of attention, especially since the late 1990s,\(^{196}\) there has been no systematic approach to the former, for various historical and political reasons. After the

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wave of bloody anti-fascist purges and legal prosecutions in the immediate aftermath of the war, Italians seemed to have reached a consensus that Fascism was a lamentable but now concluded phase.\textsuperscript{197} This, however, was only the tip of the iceberg, and no thoroughgoing institutional de-Fascistization ever took place. Instead, historians as well as politicians preferred to focus on the “good Italians,” on the resistance movement, and on the “evil Germans.”

For the majority of Italians, the experience of the brutal German occupation from 1943–45 completely overshadowed the preceding years of Fascist rule, which lead to a relativization of the Italian dictatorship as a “lesser evil” and in turn linked the violence of the last years of Fascism to the “absolute evil” of the Nazis. More than anything else it was the raids and reprisals that contributed to a lasting image among Italians of the Germans as the true perpetrators. The tendency, in post-war historiographical and popular representations, to conduct broad comparisons between Italian Fascism and German Nazism presented Italy as a victim of “Nazifascism,” and it allowed for a disengagement of the Italian people not only from the discourse of power during Fascism, but also from responsibility for its crimes. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat and others have demonstrated, this particular tradition of comparison through negation (based on what Italians did not do) re-

\textsuperscript{197} In his study on the post-war prosecution of Fascists in Italy, Hans Woller sums this up as follows: “Italy went ‘cold turkey’ \textit{[hat sich einer Roßkur unterworfen]}, after which it declared itself fully recovered, and categorically refused any kind of after treatment.” Hans Woller, \textit{Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien 1943 bis 1948} (München: Oldenbourg, 1996): 405.
results in a minimization of Fascist violence, persecution, and mass murder—and, I would add, it also resulted in a “forgetting” of Italian perpetrators.198

Furthermore, the image of the Germans as cruel and heartless also has a tradition that goes further back than the Nazi years. As Enzo Collotti shows in his contribution to the massive book project *I luoghi della memoria*, “i tedeschi” are a site of memory with traditionally negative connotations. Collotti characterizes Italians’ relationship to the Germans as a constant oscillation between attraction and repulsion stretching back as far as the Risorgimento. Quoting a line from the Garibaldi anthem, “bastone Tedesco, l’Italia non doma,” and other patriotic poems from the late Nineteenth-Century, Collotti shows how the term *tedesco* was used to describe both Austrians and Germans as a constant threat from the North. Especially the experience of the two world wars solidified the conception of the *tedeschi* as the arch enemy.199 In addition, two widely-held beliefs about Italians (both inside and outside Italy) have aided this “outsourcing” of evil: a) that Italians are traditionally good, humane, and cultured people, and b) that Italians are unreliable, cowardly, inefficient, and corrupt. Surely, Italians could never have be-

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come Mussolini’s willing executioners. These two stereotypes shaped historiographical discourse about Italian Fascism in Italy and abroad until the late 1990s. The scholarship on the Duce himself is a case in point, since he was cast alternately as a “vain, blundering boaster without ideals or aims,” or as a revolutionary led astray by the Nazis. The implications of such exculpatory discourse have been far-reaching, especially as regards the historiographical engagement with Italian perpetrators. First of all, there was never an “Italian Nuremberg”—the post-war Italian government simply refused to extradite war criminals to Albania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Libya, and delayed trials indefinitely. A large number of high-ranking military officers, responsible for the most brutal reprisals and massacres in the occupied territories and the colonies, had sided with the Allies in 1943, immediately after the overthrow of Mussolini. Marshal Pietro Badoglio, appointed prime minister in 1943, for example, was one of the major war criminals.

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200 See for example Del Boca, Italiani: 13–55.

203 The term “Italian Nuremberg” has two meanings in scholarly discourse in Italy. While, along with Brunello Mantelli, Lutz Klinkhammer, or Filippo Focardi, I am referring to trials against Italian war criminals and the lack thereof, others use the term to describe trials against Nazis who committed crimes in Italy during the German occupation, which likewise never took place. See for example Michele Battini, The Missing Italian Nuremberg: Cultural Amnesia and Postwar Politics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The fact that the two interpretations are irreconcilable further illustrates my point and it certainly deserves more attention and space than this study allows.
criminals on the UNWCC’s official list. When he signed the armistice with the Allied forces in September 1943, the charges against him were dropped, never to be taken up again.\footnote{Brunello Mantelli, “Die Italiener auf dem Balkan 1941–1943,” Europäische Sozialgeschichte. Festschrift für Wolfgang Schieder eds. Christof Dipper, et al., (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000).} In the years following the war, everything possible was done to prevent Italian war crimes from coming to international attention and they were erased from official and popular memory in Italy as well. As historian Lutz Klinkhammer shows, Italians even renounced the prosecution of German war criminals in order to avoid the boomerang effect of an international debate about Italian war crimes.\footnote{Lutz Klinkhammer, “Die Ahndung von deutschen Kriegsverbrechen in Italien nach 1945,” Parallele Geschichte? Italien und Deutschland 1945–2000, eds. Gian Enrico Rusconi and Hans Woller, (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006), Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer, “The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes: the Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948),” Journal of Modern Italian Studies 9.3 (2004), Enzo Colotti and Lutz Klinkhammer, Il fascismo e l’Italia in guerra: una conversazione fra storia e storiografia (Roma: Ediesse, 1996), and Kerstin von Lingen, “Giorni di Gloria: Wiedergeburt der italienischen Nation in der Resistenza,” Kriegserfahrung und nationale Identität in Europa nach 1945, ed. Kerstin von Lingen, (München: Schöningh, 2009).} Italy’s complicity in the deportation of the Jews was downplayed and the racial laws were presented as a mere imitation of Nazi policy (Ben-Ghiat “Lesser Evil?” 141). Cold War politics supported this self-absolving image of Italy as an otherwise good country led astray by criminals and the Nazi occupier.

Up to the late 1990s, the notion of the perpetrator in Italian public discourse had been almost exclusively associated with the Nazi occupier, and the stories of Italian war criminals remained a carefully-guarded secret.\footnote{In fact, there seems to be no standard word in Italian to describe perpetrators. Scholars use terms such as “gattopardi” (wolves) or “schiavi di notte” (slaves of the night).} The following two examples illustrate
the extent of this silence. After the war, Giovanni Ravalli, a lieutenant in the Italian army, was accused of crimes against humanity during the Italian occupation in Greece. The Italian government threatened to withhold reparations if he was not released, and as a result he never went on trial. Instead he went on to become an esteemed police prefect and political adviser. When his astonishing post-war reputation was challenged by a book on Italian war crimes by the American historian Michael Palumbo in 1992, Ravalli threatened to sue, backed up by influential friends and supporters, and the book never saw the light of day.207 Another telling example is the odyssey of the BBC documentary *Fascist Legacy* on Italian war crimes in Ethiopia and Yugoslavia. It was broadcast only once, in Britain in 1989, and it met with the immediate protest of the Italian ambassador to London. Even though the Italian public television station RAI did purchase the documentary, it has been gathering dust on their shelves ever since. Only excerpts were aired in 2003, on La7’s late night history program *Altra Storia*, hosted by Sergio Luzzatto (cf. Di Sante *Italiani senza onore* 10).


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(1975–90), and “La morte della patria” (1990 to the present). The first phase describes the enshrinement of the resistance movement as the “expression of the anti-Fascism of all Italians” (151). It was during this period that 25 April came to be celebrated as the day of Italian liberation and “the day of our Second Risorgimento.” As Fogu observes, “with the dehistoricized reference to a ‘second’ risorgimento, the new Italy officially founded itself on the rejection of the fascist claim to have fulfilled the Risorgimento, as well as on the obliteration of the period of national history (1860–1945) between the first and second risorgimentos” (ibid.). In this period, the image of Italy under Fascism as a nation of partisans and resisters became cemented in the public consciousness. The name of the second phase, La Rivoluzione mancata, refers to the allegation by the student movement in the 60s and early 70s that the partisan resistance “missed” its chance to carry through a true revolution in the wake of Fascism. At the same time, the established notion of the partisans as martyrs came under fire as the violence perpetrated by the partisans, as well as their role in provoking the terrible reprisals carried out by the Nazi occupiers against the civilian population re-entered public consciousness.

Both of these phases are characterized by a monumentalization of the two years of Nazi occupation (1943–45)—the so-called biennio—which resulted in the marginaliza-

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tion of the fascist ventennio, the twenty years of Fascist rule. Fogu writes:

The double image of Fascism as a parenthesis in Italian history and an external virus that had penetrated its healthy historical body—famously elaborated by the liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce—sustained and legitimized both public amnesia regarding the ventennio and the historicization of the biennio as the true face of Italian national identity. (149)

From 1975 onward, the period from 1943–45 came to be understood as a civil war between rivaling factions within Italy, rather than simply as partisan resistance to the Nazi occupation. This phase coincides with the rise to prominence of television as a medium for conveying historical awareness. The image of the Fascist ventennio presented on television was, for many Italians, the first mainstream encounter with this period. “Yet, unlike in Germany,” Fogu notes, “this approach did not offer a critical tool for the study of bystanders and perpetrators.”

In the hands of the Italian mass media everyday history was used to highlight the private and the anecdotal over the political face of Fascism. As a result, overall mass-media production in the 1980s tended to successfully “normalize” Fascism under the apolitical trope of come eravamo (the way we were), thereby undermining the antifascist paradigm which had allowed the process of memorialization-historicization of the war years to hide the black ventennio below the glorious carpet of the red biennio. (159)

In other words, even though this development served to bring “the black ventennio” back into the public consciousness, thus debunking the myth that everyone had been in the antifascist resistance, this occurred by means of a general agreement that Fascism “wasn’t so bad after all.” The final phase Fogu identifies, “La morte della patria” (“the death of the fatherland”) represents the final nail in the coffin of the “parenthesis” the-
ory of Fascism. The “death of the fatherland” refers to the realization that the fall of Fascism and the abandonment of the State by the king and the government in 1943 constituted a national trauma which was subsequently repressed, in part through the myth that the Italian people had never identified with Fascism in the first place.

It is clear from all of this that it would be impossible simply to apply Paul’s phases of *Täterforschung* to Italy, where the situation was far more complex. Nevertheless, it would be possible to align the first two phases in Fogu’s analysis very broadly with Paul’s first phase, in which the perpetrators were exterritorialized. This is true not only of the exclusive focus on the Nazi occupation, which quite literally deferred the responsibility for violence and aggression onto the Germans, but it also applies to Croce’s parenthesis theory, which, as Fogu mentions, treated Fascism as a viral infection. Furthermore, the scholarship on Italian war crimes that was conducted outside Italy was not acknowledged or translated; as the example of Palumbo’s book shows, it was in some cases even actively prevented from ever reaching the attention of the general public.

Since the turn of the millennium, a growing number of studies cover a range of hitherto under-examined issues, for example Italian colonialism, crimes committed in the occupied territories, and the persecution and deportation of Italian Jews. These studies emphasize the important continuities between the treatment of the Slovenes and colonial racism in Africa on the one hand, and the subsequent emergence of anti-Jewish
racism in Italy on the other.209 Historian Angelo Del Boca for example reconstructs the different stages and crimes of Italian Colonialism and shows that colonialism and racism were part and parcel of the Italian national consciousness.210 His book *Italiani, brava gente?* illustrates how the myth of the “good Italian” has enabled Italians to repress and minimize the crimes committed in the name of Italian Fascism and colonialism.211 Del Boca argues that this collective auto-exculpation glosses over the dark aspects of modern Italian history, beginning with the “guerra al brigantaggio,” the brutal suppression of those who fought against the unification of Italy in the 1860s, and the almost forgotten Italian contribution to the bloody suppression of the Boxer rebellion in China in 1900. According to Del Boca, the Italians were cruel and uncompromising colonizers and ethnic cleansers who were certainly on par with other nations involved in colonialism and the war (Del Boca *Italiani* 294). He supports this thesis by providing detailed descriptions, enriched with eyewitness accounts, of the crimes committed in Africa and in Yugoslavia, which included massacres of civilians to mass deportations to concentration camps as

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211 Historian David Bidussa was one of the first scholars to examine this issue in his groundbreaking *Il mito del bravo italiano* (1994). Claudio Fogu likewise observes that “the lasting image of Italians as brava gente has been the result of active efforts to purge Fascism of ‘perpetrator’ traits” (150).
well as the use of mustard gas in Ethiopia. Quoting letters by generals Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Rodolfo Graziani, Pietro Badoglio, Mario Roatta, Mario Robotti, and others as well as letters written by ordinary soldiers, Del Boca reveals the enthusiastic support for and broad participation in these genocidal operations on all levels of the military.\footnote{Del Boca, \textit{Italiani}: 229–54. It is important to point out that Del Boca does not ignore the violence and crimes committed by Italian partisans between 1943 and 1945 and after the end of the war, but rather presents them as part of his argument. (See chapter 12 “La resa dei conti”).}

Beside this important documentation of Italian war crimes, historians have begun to look more closely at individuals who played a role in fascist politics, science, law, and propaganda. A number of detailed biographical studies on Corrado Gini, Julius Evola, Nicola Pende, Giovanni Preziosi, Sabato Visco and many others, most of them published in the past decade, present the beginning of a long-overdue \textit{Täterforschung}—analogous to the second phase identified by Paul—that sheds light, for example, on the widespread participation of intellectuals and scientists in the racial campaign.\footnote{Among others, see Giorgio Israel, “Redeemed Intellectuals and Italian Jews,” \textit{Telos} 139 (2007); Sarfatti, ed., \textit{Repubblica}; Cassata, \textit{Fascismo razionale} and \textit{A destra del fascismo. Profilo politico di Julius Evola} (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003) as well as Germinario, \textit{Razza del sangue}.} Furthermore, Giorgio Fabre opens a new perspective on the Duce himself by demonstrating, through a close reading of his records, that Mussolini began developing and articulating a racist ideology as early as the 1920s.\footnote{Fabre, \textit{Mussolini razzista}.} Finally, historians such as Mimmo Franzinelli have begun to document not only the Fascist secret police (OVRA), but also the role played by the ca. 20,000 Italian SS, by autonomous Fascist battalions or special police units such as...
those headed by Gaetano Collotti, Pietro Koch, or Mario Carità, and by “ordinary” civilians, policemen, and local government administrators.215

The Two Exhibitions

A closer look at the exhibitions at Grafeneck and the Risiera will provide an illustration of these two different scholarly traditions and attitudes towards the perpetrators in addition to exploring how the representation of the perpetrators at each site is informed by different phases or currents in perpetrator scholarship in each country. But first we must clarify more generally what the function of perpetrators at sites of memory is. Within the framework created by the dual imperatives of “Never forget” and “Never again” that shape the pedagogical work at sites of memory, the engagement with the perpetrators has three main objectives. Firstly, knowing about individual perpetrators, their motivations and mentalities, helps understand the historical background and the role each of them played within the larger historical processes presented at sites of memory. Secondly, an emphasis on the ordinariness of these men and women (either by displaying their

photos, or by recounting their careers and backgrounds) counters the presumption that the perpetrators were monsters or lunatics who did not have much in common with the rest of German and Italian society. And thirdly, an illustration of the decision-making process behind these perpetrators’ careers critically addresses the still prevalent assumption that they were just following orders. The machinery of extermination could only work because each of them made the decision to participate, or at least, not to refuse their assignments. A critical discussion of the perpetrators that furthermore integrates them into the local narrative also opens up the possibility of engaging with other groups, such as “bystanders”: members of the local community, who, although not directly implicated in what happened, nonetheless passively condoned or even facilitated the atrocities at these sites. As historian Bert Pampel summarizes, a shift to the perspective of the perpetrators may provide answers to the question of “Why?” that cannot be answered solely from the perspective of the victims. Such a shift may also illustrate continuities between the past and the present: “An engagement with the perpetrators reveals structural conditions (hierarchies, functional division of labor, the failure of institutional safeguards) and subjective dispositions (conformity, ideological indoctrination), that are present not only within dictatorial regimes.”²¹⁶ Besides these obviously crucial historical, ethical, and educational aspects there is also a meta-historical dimension to

the engagement with perpetrators: more than anything it is through the way sites of memory deal with the perpetrators that we can trace the history of memory of the Holocaust.

**Grafeneck**

Grafeneck is a case in point in this context, for its history of memory is preserved in the physical structures at the site as well as thematized in the documentary exhibition, and it is always linked to both victims and perpetrators. Chapter One provided a detailed analysis of the different memorial structures at Grafeneck, focusing mainly on the commemoration of the victims. Let me now briefly revisit the memorial and the exhibition with special focus on the presentation of the perpetrators. The two memorial plaques at the cemetery can be taken as illustrations of the different phases described by Paul in his survey of post-war scholarship on perpetrators. The phrasing of the first plaque at Grafeneck, “In memory of the victims of inhumanity—Grafeneck 1940” (Zum Gedenken an die Opfer der Unmenschlichkeit), expresses the post-war avoidance and repression Paul has termed exterritorialization. In its vagueness it is reminiscent of the Neue Wache in Berlin, which was officially rededicated to the “victims of war and tyranny” (Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft) and which has been criticized for its lack of specificity and possible conflation of the victims of National Socialism with the victims of other wars, conflicts, or dictatorships. The second plaque, added in 1985, is much more specific about what
happened and who the victims were, but it presents the perpetrators as if they had been foreigners:

Grafeneck ist seit 1929 ein Behindertenheim der Samariterstiftung. Dieser Friedhof wurde 1930 für das Heim angelegt. 1939 beschlagnahmten die Nationalsozialisten die Einrichtung. [...] In der Nähe des landwirtschaftlichen Gebäudes wurde dann eine Tötungsanstalt zur Durchführung von Hitlers Euthanasie-Programm eingerichtet. Mehr als 10500 Menschen sind hier von Januar bis Dezember 1940 vergast worden [...].

The text not only presents Hitler as the mastermind behind the euthanasia program, (which is simply incorrect) but it also casts the National Socialists as an occupying force that came over Grafeneck seemingly out of nowhere. The passive voice contributes to the sense of the perpetrators as a distant concept rather than ordinary men of flesh and blood. This second plaque, then, can be aligned neatly with Paul’s second phase, depersonalization and abstraction. The move towards a more differentiated engagement with various groups of perpetrators and an examination of the structural and organizational processes and connections between these different groups that constituted the “machinery” of persecution and extermination came in the mid-1990s, when a full-time historian was hired at Grafeneck to conduct systematic research on the site’s history and create an comprehensive documentary exhibition. Since 2005, such an exhibition is available to visitors, and it focuses not only on the concept of Lebensunwertes Leben, the

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217 Since 1929, Grafeneck has been a home for the disabled under the auspices of the Samaritan Foundation. This cemetery was established here in 1930. In 1939, the National Socialists seized the institution. [...] A killing center was set up near the farm building where Hitler’s euthanasia program carried out. More than 10,500 people were gassed to death here between January and December 1940.”
structure and processes of the Aktion T4, but also on the connections between the euthanasia program and the Holocaust.

The photos of the perpetrators are placed at crucial points in the documentary exhibition, which is conceived as a circuit that leads through three rooms, narrating the history of Grafeneck before, during, and after the Third Reich. The part dedicated to Grafeneck's history in 1940 constitutes the core of the exhibition and fills the largest of the three rooms. Tall vertical panels in black and white along the walls display the photos, documents, and explanatory texts. The first of these panels already zooms in on the perpetrators: without having seen their faces yet, we learn about their careers. The panel describes the connections between Nazi-euthanasia and the Holocaust, and emphasizes that it was the same men who worked at Grafeneck and later at Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor. The following panels supply the background information about the euthanasia program, about the concepts of "unworthy life" and "mercy killing," and detail the organization and planning of the euthanasia program. Here we find the photos of the T4 masterminds Philip Bouhler and Karl Brandt with a brief description of their functions next to Hitler's secret decree authorizing the killings. The photos of the perpetrators are then contrasted with those of victims, dissenters, and resisters. A larger than life-size portrait photo of Theodor K., one of Grafeneck's victims, is located prominently at the back wall, followed by the photos of Else von Löwis and the protestant Bishop Theophil Wurm, both of whom wrote protest letters to the Nazi government. The last two panels
return to the perpetrators, describe the conclusion of the euthanasia program and give a more detailed overview of their careers after they had left Grafeneck. Two more photos are displayed here: the portraits of medical director Horst Schumann and of Christian Wirth. Above them the last sentence reads: “Nur ein kleiner Teil der Täter wird nach dem Krieg vor Gericht gestellt und bestraft. Die meisten kehren in die Gesellschaft zurück, aus der sie gekommen sind” [After the end of the war, only a small portion of perpetrators are put on trial and punished. Most of them return to their lives in society]. Effectively the transition to the issues of post-war prosecution and commemoration in the next room, this statement can be interpreted not only as a critical remark on post-war Germany (in the next room we learn that, except for Brandt, none of Grafeneck’s perpetrators were punished adequately for their crimes), but also as a statement on the Nazi perpetrators as coming from all parts of a society that essentially remained the same after 1945. In this, the exhibition is a corrective to the two older memorial plaques on the cemetery: even though the focus is on the structural and organizational aspects of the euthanasia program, the individual people behind these organizations and institutions often come out in the reproduced documents, with their signature, their formulations, and of course their photographs.

While the large photo of Theodor K. clearly constitutes the focal point of the exhibition (not only does the visitor’s gaze immediately gravitate towards it, he is also the only one whose biography is reconstructed), the much smaller portrait photos of the
perpetrators frame the exhibition. We learn about the role these men played in the larger structure of persecution and mass murder, but there is no private information about them except for their dates of birth and death. They are presented to us as people who committed a crime. Because there is no private information about them, we are urged to assume a critical, not an empathetic position. Looking at these “ordinary men,” we are denied the comfort of thinking of them as monsters or psychopaths, whose evil is visible in their faces and bearing, and with whom we have nothing in common.

The Risiera di San Sabba

In the overall structure of the documentary exhibition at the Risiera, created by the historian Elio Apih in 1982 and revised and expanded in 1998, the Nazi perpetrators play an important role. Displayed on fifty panels in one large room, the exhibition narrates the story of Trieste and the Risiera by means of a large number of archival documents (maps, photos, flyers, newspaper clippings, letters, tables, drawings, and lists). These visual materials take up most of the space on the panels, while the explanatory texts on the left margins are kept to a minimum. With the exception of a few maps, there are mostly low-quality black-and-white reproductions, often culled from various history books, as indicated by the legends. Most of the photos are blurry or grainy, some over-exposed, others too dark to see properly. The text for each panel consists of a few sentences on the historical background and captions for the visual displays, and they are
presented in six languages, Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, English, German, and French. Apih’s account of the events that preceded the Risiera focuses on two main issues: the German interest in the city and its region as a “strategic position” in the Adriatic and the “problem of the Slovenes and Croats” (Apih *Guida* 66). Panels one to ten trace the rise of Fascism in the region, the violent and repressive measures against the Slav population, the rapprochement between Mussolini and Hitler, and the early origins of the two local resistance movements, the pro-Italian anti-Fascist resistance and the pro-Communist, pro-Yugoslav resistance, called the Liberation Front. These panels contain only a few group photos, one of Mussolini and Hitler, one of Stalin and Ribbentrop (all unnamed), and one of the Italian Fascist élite. Fascism is generally portrayed as inept and corrupt, especially with respect to Trieste’s fledgling economy. The focus then shifts to Nazi Germany, and the following three panels outline the developments leading up to the establishment of Nazi concentration camps in Germany and Poland. Panels fourteen to seventeen bring the focus back to the region by relating the Fascist occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941. The description of the occupation and the repressive measures taken by the Italians is kept to a minimum and the panels contain no photos or names of those who carried out these measures.

The overwhelming majority of panels in the exhibition (19–35) are dedicated to the Nazi occupation of Trieste and its region and the establishing of the killing camp in the Risiera in 1943. This section presents most of the photographs, and most of them
are of the German occupiers. Four panels display the leaders of *Einsatz R* in various poses and situations, with the captions repeating their names several times: Odilo Globocnik, Franz Stangl, Erwin Lambert, Friedrich Rainer, Dietrich Allers, Josef Oberhauser, Otto Stadie—and of course Christian Wirth. The exhibition continues with more information on the different resistance movements in the region and their largely conflicting political interests and ideas about the Italo-Yugoslav border. It concludes with the liberation of Trieste and the trial against Allers and Oberhauser.

The perspective in the Risiera exhibition is clearly a victims’ perspective: the region and the city are presented as victims of German aggression. But this narrative of victimhood remains very abstract, since at no point in the exhibition do we actually learn the names of victims who died at the Risiera, nor do we find out what exactly happened to them once they were brought here or how many of them actually died here. Likewise, the perpetrators remain a completely abstract and one-dimensional entity within the exhibition. A precise characterization of their careers and motivations is avoided. The thirteen panels (36–49) at the end of the exhibition are dedicated to the resistance movement and the important role it played in the liberation of Venezia Giulia. The post-war development of the site is only briefly alluded to in the last panel of the exhibition, dedicated mostly to the trial against the only Risiera perpetrator brought to trial in Trieste. There is no explanation of the processes that led to the site’s preservation or of the processes by which it was turned into a memorial. Because it relies exclusively on visual
and documentary material and provides minimal historical background information and political context, it is often difficult to make sense of the exhibition as a coherent narrative. Visually and thematically, it centers on the German occupation during the years between 1943 and 1945 and the resistance movement. The connections between Fascism and Nazism before 1943 are not explained in great detail, and the Fascist anti-Jewish measures during the time before the German occupation are left out entirely. Furthermore, apart from Mussolini and a few of his ministers, all the Italians and Yugoslavs displayed remain anonymous. As I lay out in more detail in Chapter 4, the way in which the exhibition is framed suggests that the German occupation in 1943 was the logical consequence of a continuing German imperialist interest in the region, stretching back to pre-World War I times. It was the Germans who brought anti-Semitism, exploitation, terror and unspeakable violence upon the region. And it was the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) who fought the Nazis and who liberated the city at the end of the war, a day before the Yugoslav liberation army. Regarding the Nazi perpetrators, we only learn that they came from Poland where they had organized the murder of the Jews. There is no information about what their function was in the Risiera or in the occupied city. Displayed in this historical vacuum and with their faces often partially obscured, the Nazi perpetrators seem like apparitions: transplanted, out of place, alien. Their presentation without any context renders them into abstract icons of Nazi evil. The fact that there are basically no photos of Italian Fascists or war criminals allows for an avoidance of ques-
tions of collaboration, Fascist crimes in the region, racism, and anti-Semitism before and after 1943.

**Education after Auschwitz**

The term “site of memory” (Gedenkstätte/Ort der Erinnerung, luogo della memoria) describes at once a place and an action. Not only does it point to the fact that the atrocities happened “here, in this place,” it also emphasizes that the “action of commemoration” takes place here as well. Furthermore, sites of memory always have a retrospective and a prospective dimension. In order to prevent the recurrence of what happened there, the education of future generations is one of the main goals at sites of memory. Although it does not specifically refer to the education work being done at memorial sites, Adorno’s essay “Education after Auschwitz” has become the unofficial manifesto for Gedenkstättenpädagogik: “The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again” [Die Forderung, dass Auschwitz nicht noch einmal sei, ist die allererste an Erziehung] (Adorno 19). However, while Adorno repeatedly emphasizes the importance of in-depth knowledge and awareness—historical, as well as sociological and psychological—of Nazi perpetrators and the society they came from, sites of memory have been slow or even reluctant to incorporate the more recent historical scholarship on perpetra-
tors more actively—and interactively—into their exhibitions and educational work.\textsuperscript{218} It seems that the role of perpetrators at the sites of their crimes remains a vexed issue.

The permanent exhibitions at Grafeneck and the Risiera are perfect examples of this. Grafeneck’s mission statement outlines three main components to the work that takes place at the site: a) documenting, preserving, and informing visitors of the specific history of the site and its role in the broader historical and political context; b) commemorating the victims, telling their stories and creating an awareness of the injustice done to them; and c) learning for the future, encouraging visitors to reflect on their own values and prejudices, on human rights and civic duty. By contrast, the Risiera’s self-conception is quite different to that of the memorial at Grafeneck, as the following passage illustrates:

\begin{quote}
la Risiera è un luogo sacro, le ceneri delle vittime sono una reliquia sacra il mezzo attraverso il quale sia realizzata la ierofania. [...] La Risiera diventa in questo modo una grande tomba comune, ed il culto di questa rinnova il lutto nel tempo.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{219}“the Risiera is a sacred place, the ashes of the victims are a sacred relic, the means by which the sacred will reveal itself. [...] The Risiera thus becomes an enormous communal tomb, and its worship renews mourning in time.” Massimo Mucci, \textit{La Risiera di San Sabba. Un’architettura per la memoria} (Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 1999): 25.
A symbolically or even religiously charged space that is exclusively dedicated to the victims, the Risiera is first and foremost a site of mourning. As I describe in greater detail in Chapter 4, great emphasis is placed on the educative and transformative power of the architectural remains (the prison cells or the footprint of the crematorium), and the objects displayed (e.g. the personal items of victims, letters, drawings, a club with which prisoners were routinely beaten). The documentary exhibition functions as an additional aid to comprehension. Neither of these two conceptualizations leaves much room for the perpetrators. While historical background information and the commemoration of the victims are obviously crucial components of memory work (*Erinnerungsarbeit*) at sites of memory, I argue that without a nuanced, critical engagement with the perpetrators, “learning for the future” is at best superficial and at worst entirely lacking. As the example of the Risiera exhibition shows, an exclusive focus on the victims’ perspective in combination with a selective image of the past encourages an “out-sourcing” of responsibility and hence an avoidance of self-reflection. At Grafeneck, the perpetrators are shown to have been ordinary men. But they are still presented as icons in their static portrait poses, reminiscent of Hannah Arendt’s description of Adolf Eichmann as framed by the glass windows of his booth at the trial in Jerusalem, a lesson in the “banality of evil.” It is precisely at this point that education at sites of memory must begin, not end.

As much as Arendt (as well as the medical experts and everyone else in the courtroom) tries to find signs of pathology, criminality, extraordinariness in Eichmann, in the end she
is forced to conclude that nothing about him can give an answer to why he did what he
did. What “banality of evil” describes more than anything is the irreducible gap between
the man and his actions. And it is exactly this tension that makes the problem of the
perpetrators relevant, inexhaustible, and necessary: no matter how much information
we accumulate on these men, we will not be able to find a satisfactory or universal ex-
planation for their actions. The “question” of the perpetrators is informed by its perma-
nent irresolubility. Presenting the perpetrators as ordinary men and women is only the
first step. Looking at individual biographies allows for differentiation: it shows that most
of them cannot be put into pre-conceived categories such as “monster” or “psycho-
path.” Individual stories also prompt questions about individual responsibility for the
crimes committed during Italian Fascism and the Third Reich. Tracing the post-war ca-
reers of the perpetrators leads to a critical reflection of post-war society and its willing-
ness to remain silent about the perpetrators in its midst.

“The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is auton-
omy [...]: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating” (Adorno
23). The successful U.S. history project “Facing History and Ourselves,” with its core work
concerning the Holocaust and Human Behavior is an educational approach that has tak-
en Adorno literally.220 This resource book presents an array of readings and activities

220 Margot Stern Strom, Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior (Brookline: Facing
History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1994). In addition to its publications, Facing History is a con-
exploring discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. The readings are bracketed by two general chapters called “The Individual and Society” and “Choosing to Participate,” which thematize issues such as identity, membership, stereotyping, and responsibility, and illustrate different ways in which history can be relevant for today. The core chapters provide the historical background, organized according to different topics and groups, for example “Conformity and Obedience,” or “Bystanders and Rescuers.” The chapter entitled “The Holocaust” features a brief segment from Gitta Sereny’s interview with Franz Stangl in prison during his trial in 1971 and questions for discussion, for example: “How did Stangl view his role in the death camps? How much power did he think he had?” Encouraged by such questions, students engage with the perpetrators on an entirely different, yet critical level: they are led to think about what can be learned from these perpetrators.221 The idea that anything could be learned from people such as

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221 In Germany a comparable educational project called “Konfrontationen,” based loosely on “Facing History and Ourselves,” was developed by the Fritz Bauer Institute in 1996. Six booklets called “Bausteine für die pädagogische Annäherung an Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust” contain historical documents and resources relating to every-day life under the Third Reich and to the groups of people persecuted by the Nazis (booklets 3-5). Accounts of the victims are combined with historical information about the perpetrators. Similarly to “Facing History,” the engagement with the past is firmly rooted in the present. The first two booklets, “Identität” und “Gruppe” thematize contemporary issues, such as identity, decision-making, group mechanisms, and tolerance of others and of other perspectives. Like the American Project, “Konfrontationen” emphasizes the role of the individual in the shaping of history and the importance of looking at something from different perspectives. However, the engagement with the history of the Holocaust ends with the deportations; the authors claim that the details of mass murder cannot be adequately addressed in the classroom. See “Konfrontationen,” Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust, Fritz Bauer
Eichmann or Stangl may seem unsettling, but perhaps a certain degree of unsettlement is exactly what is required in order to shake visitors out of a distancing, even complacent idea about the past. As historian Volkhard Knigge states, educational work at sites of memory should aim at a “deliberate and careful self-disconcertment, which should give way to responsibility.” As we move further and further away in time from the Holocaust, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make it relevant to future generations. It is not surprising that schoolchildren faced with a static shrine to unknown victims of a faceless inscrutable aggressor fail to see the relevance to their own lives. It is time to engage with the question of the perpetrators in a meaningful way. By investigating the forces and mechanisms that undermined democracy in Germany and Italy, visitors may discover that many of those forces still threaten our own society today.

**Coda: Rest in Peace?**

It seems that no matter how deep one buries the perpetrators, they just won’t go away.

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Institut, accessed 22 Jan. 2011. In Italy, the relatively recent project “Scuola e Shoah” (developed by the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione in the years following the first Giorni della memoria in 2001) provides a web portal with links and events connected to commemorative events for teachers. The Ministry also organizes an annual national competition for school classes entitled “I giovani ricordano la Shoah,” for which school classes submit artistic projects that engage with the history and commemoration of the Holocaust. This contest specifically encourages students to engage with the local history of Fascism in their respective areas, to collect historical sources and testimonies, visit local archives, and read literary accounts of the past. See MIUR, “Scuola e shoah,” *Archivio dell’area Istruzione*, Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, accessed 22 Jan. 2011.

Christian Wirth, for example, has made numerous ghostly re-appearances since his death in 1944, when he was buried with full military honors in the German military cemetery in Opicina near Trieste. In the late 1980s, in the context of debates concerning the centralized German military cemetery in Costermano, near Lake Garda in Italy, Wirth was once again in the public eye. This cemetery was established in 1955–67 in order to consolidate the remains of almost 22,000 German soldiers whose graves were scattered all over Italy and to create a central site of mourning and commemoration. Among the soldiers buried there are three SS-officers, all of them members of T4, Aktion Reinhard and Einsatz R: Franz Reichleitner (second commandant at Sobibor), Gottfried Schwarz (deputy commandant at Belzec)—and Christian Wirth. His remains were transferred to Costermano in 1959. It also emerged that thirty-one other SS officers and several hundred lower-ranking members of the SS are buried at Costermano cemetery as well, including members of the Waffen-SS responsible for the massacre of Italian civilians. In addition, the cemetery contains the graves of a number of German deserters who had tried to work with Italian partisans and were subsequently executed.223 Thus Germans

who come to Costermano every year on memorial day to honor and commemorate the fallen soldiers, also, albeit unknowingly, honor and commemorate those who organized and carried out mass murder. Every summer, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (German War Graves Commission) organizes “workcamps” [sic] all over Germany and abroad, employing German teenagers to maintain the graves of German soldiers, including, of course, the grave of Christian Wirth.

In 1988, the German Consul General to Milan, Manfred Steinkühler, caused a stir, when he refused to attend the annual commemorative ceremony at the cemetery unless the remains of Wirth and his two co-perpetrators were removed and their names erased from the gravestones, memorial book, and the cemetery records. The Volksbund refused to comply with any of these demands, insisting on the internationally warranted “fortdauerndes Ruherecht” [right of permanent repose] for all fallen soldiers since World War I; on the role of war graves as a powerful “Aufruf zu Verständigung und Frieden” [plea for peace and understanding]; and on the fact that these men died in service to their country (Stehle “In ewiger Ruhe”). Despite Steinkühler’s repeated petitions to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nothing was done. The debates continued all through the following year. The Italian authorities were quick to express their solidarity with Steinkühler and also requested that the corpses be removed. In November 1989, the commemorative ceremony was cancelled, in 1990, Steinkühler refused again to attend. In 1991, Steinkühler took early retirement, a last act of protest which likewise
yielded no result. Fallen soldiers, dissenters, and mass murderers were still lumped together without explanation or differentiation of any sort. Yielding to pressure from various Italian and German interest groups, the Volksbund finally installed a commemorative plaque in 1992 and erased the names of the three main perpetrators from the memorial books. The plaque reads: “Wir gedenken in Trauer der Opfer von Krieg, Unrecht und Verfolgung. Sie mahnen uns zu Frieden und Freundschaft zwischen den Völkern” [We mourn the victims of war, injustice, and persecution. They exhort us to pursue peace and friendship among peoples] (Stehle “Die Mörder”). Formulated in the vaguest possible way, the plaque does nothing to explain the specific situation at Costermano or to acknowledge who was buried there. In fact, it only leads to even more confusion because it seems to suggest that victims of Nazi persecution might be buried there as well. Similar to the dedication at the Neue Wache in Berlin, this plaque gives the impression that all those who died were equally victims.

When it became clear that the remains of Wirth & Co. would stay at Costermano, one German–Italian interest group, “Für die Erinnerung in Costermano,” suggested a counter-plaque be installed in 2003 that would offer a more differentiated picture of the historical facts and of who was (and was not) meant to be commemorated:

Auf diesem Friedhof sind einige Verantwortliche der Judenvernichtung in Europa und der Tötung von Schwachen und Kranken beerdigt. Wir gedenken ihrer Opfer. Wir gedenken auch der Männer, Frauen und Kinder, die in Italien von den deutschen Besatzern ermordet wurden, und der hunderttausende italienischer Soldaten, die unter unmenschlichen Bedingungen in Deutsch-
This suggestion was not taken into consideration and to this day no such plaque or inscription has been installed. It took three more years for the *Volksbund* to respond to the debates and criticism and put up signs with explanatory texts at the entrance to the cemetery describing the historical context of the German occupation in Italy and providing more detailed information about who is buried at the cemetery:


Die hier liegenden Toten mahnen uns zu Frieden und Versöhnung. Auch die Schuldigen, die hier begraben sind, mögen ihre letzte Ruhe finden, obwohl sie unaussprechliches Leid über viele Menschen und ihre Familien gebracht haben. Ihre Verbrechen sind uns jedoch zugleich Aufforderung, aus der Geschichte zu lernen und auch unter schwierigen Umständen stets für die

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224 “In this cemetery, some of those responsible for the murder of the Jews in Europe and that of the weak and ill are buried. We commemorate their victims. We also commemorate the men, women, and children who were murdered by the German forces in Italy, and the hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers who were forced to work under inhuman conditions and died in concentration camps in Germany. In this cemetery there are also German soldiers who objected to the national socialist war. They were shot as traitors or deserters by the Wehrmacht. Some of them fought with the partisans. We will keep their memory alive with gratitude.” Matthias Brieger, “Wenn Steine reden könnten...” *La Resistenza. Beträge zu Faschismus, deutscher Besatzung und dem Widerstand in Italien* 3 (2006): 72–3.
Achtung der Menschenrechte und -würde einzutreten.  

These words, as much as they struggle for precision and to make the best of an impossible situation, only thinly veil the utter perplexity as to what to do with these perpetrators who stubbornly refuse to “die.” Placed at the cemetery’s entrance, the words do not disturb the eternal rest of those buried there. The cemetery’s rhetoric of honor is unperturbed. With expressions such as “Totenehrung,” “Ehrenmal,” “Ehrenhalle,” and “Ehrenbuch,” it continues to foster a selective memory that erases the historical context and the differences between those buried there. Christian Wirth’s grave is still there. The inscription reads: “Christian Wirth 1885–1944.” On the Volksbund’s website, two “workcamps” are advertized at Costermano for summer 2010. The “workcamps,” it says, encourage young people to do the following:


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225 “Even though more than sixty years have passed since the capitulation of the German Reich on 8 May 1945, the events which unfolded on the battlefields in Italy have not yet been adequately investigated. It is possible that among the 22,000 soldiers buried here, some were involved in war crimes in Italy. It has been ascertained, however, that a number of SS-functionaries buried here were actively involved in the murder of the Jewish population of occupied Poland and Italy—above all Christian Wirth, inspector of the extermination camps. These men were detailed to supervise the persecution of Jews and partisans in north-eastern Italy and in Istria.

The dead buried here exhort us to peace and reconciliation. Even the guilty who are buried here must find peace even though they caused unspeakable suffering for many people and their families. Yet, their crimes also urge us to learn from history and always to intervene on behalf of human rights and dignity, even in the face of adversity.” See Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, “Costermano,” accessed March 18, 2010.

226 “Ask critical questions, follow the traces of history, work through your impressions and think about
One wonders whether the students will be informed about the public debates about the memory presented at Costermano. Will they be told the story of Christian Wirth? Will they be encouraged to contemplate the paradox of this site? The debates surrounding Costermano Cemetery can certainly serve to illustrate one of the major issues of German memory culture: what is to be done with Nazi perpetrators, alive or dead?

Those who called for the exhumation of Wirth & Co. may have been placated by the inscriptions put up at the entrance of the cemetery. Does that mean that the perpetrators will rest in peace, eternally? Not according to Thomas Harlan’s recent novel *Heldenfriedhof*, which brings Wirth & Co. back to haunt the Germans who were more than ready to amnesty Nazi perpetrators, re-integrate them into society, and get on with life. In the novel, the cemetery is transplanted to Trieste, and its custodian discovers one day that Wirth’s remains have vanished: his grave is empty. Instead, he finds the fresh corpses of fifteen members of Wirth’s unit sitting or lying in newly dug open graves. A day earlier, the Triestine newspaper had begun to print installments of a novel entitled *Heldenfriedhof*, which predicted exactly these events. The author is one Enrico Cosulich, whose research has revealed that Christian Wirth and his unit were sent from Poland to Trieste in order to install a concentration camp in a former rice-husking facto-

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ry. A thorough analysis of Harlan’s novel would take us too far from the matter at hand, so for now I will note only the deliberate irony of its title. “Heldenfriedhof” encapsulates the latent contradictions and hypocrisies of the term itself: Here our heroes rest in peace. Costermano Cemetery is itself a powerful metaphor for the way perpetrators continue to haunt the commemorative landscape. The question of what to do with the perpetrators is not simply a bothersome obstacle to the commemoration of the “glorious dead”: it is part and parcel of any serious effort to come to terms with the legacy of fascism.
Ci si trova in un “collage” in cui niente si è trasferito nel passato e nessuna ferita si è rimarginata nel tempo, in cui tutto è presente, aperto e acerbo, in cui tutto coesiste ed è contiguo: impero asburgico, fascismo e Quarantacinque, nostalgia imperialregie, nazionalismo e indipendentismo, patrioti italiani dai cognomi slavi e viceversa, corrucchiati sloveni e liberalnazionali ossessionati dai sei fusi orari del mondo slavo che inizia alle porte della città, memorie dell’esodo istriano e insofferenza per le sue vittime, la caparbia sapienza della Mitteleuropa ebraica, la ritrosa intelligenza slovena e quella epica e tranquilla del Friuli, culto dell’italianità che rimprovera all’Italia di non essere la vera Italia e di non capire l’amore triestino per l’Italia e finisce per non volerne più sapere degli italiani.

—Claudio Magris, “I luoghi della scrittura: Trieste”

Chapter 4

Black Holes and Revelations: an “Italian Tragedy”

Days of Memory and Forgetting

February 10, 2005 marked the first celebration of the Giorno del ricordo. Officially dedicated to the “memory of the Italian tragedy,” it commemorates the “exodus” from Istria,
Fiume, and Dalmatia, and the “victims of the foibe.”\textsuperscript{229} This so-called Italian tragedy refers to mass killings carried out by Yugoslav partisans in 1943 and 1945 in the region of Venezia-Giulia, an area that is today divided between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. The bodies of the victims, including Italian civilians, were disposed of in deep, cavernous pits, called foibe, in the mountains of the region.\textsuperscript{230} Some accounts claim that many of the victims were thrown in alive. Neither historians nor the public have come to a consensus about the “truth” of the foibe: on the contrary, they are the subject of ongoing heated debates and have been instrumentalized for various ideological and political aims in the process. While the historical sources estimate the number of victims to be between 1,500 and 2,000, the numbers circulating in public discourse range between 10,000 and 30,000.\textsuperscript{231} In addition to the foibe, the Giorno del ricordo also commemorates the emigration, prompted by continuing intimidation, of the Italian population in Istria in the


\textsuperscript{230} The word foiba (pl. foibe) was originally a term used only by geologists to describe deep natural sinkholes formed by water erosion. In 1943 the Fascist press popularized the term in reference to these killings, which have been known collectively as le foibe since then. See Marta Verginella, “Geschichte und Gedächtnis. Die Foibe in der Praxis der Aushandlung der Grenzen zwischen Italien und Slowenien,” trans. Klaus Neundlinger, Das Unheimliche in der Geschichte. Die Foibe. Beiträge zur Psychopathologie historischer Rezeption, eds. Luisa Accati and Renate Cogoy, (Berlin: Trafo, 2007): 56–7.

decade after 1945. Between 200,000 and 350,000 people migrated from Istria and Dalmatia, which had become part of Yugoslavia, to Trieste and other Italian cities. In this context, the law also instituted the Museo della Civiltà Istriana Fiumiana Dalmata in Trieste (inaugurated in September 2009 and funded by the state, the local governments, and the various associations of the Istrian, Fiumian, and Dalmatian refugees) and the Archivio Museo Storico di Fiume in Rome. On two evenings before the first Giorno del ricordo in 2005, the national television station RAI aired the two-part melodrama Il cuore nel pozzo, which tells the story of a fictional Istrian-Italian family who suffer violence and expulsion at the hands of Yugoslav partisans. More than 16 million Italians watched the melodrama and the next day thousands attended the commemorative ceremonies in Trieste, Rome, Turin, and other Italian cities. In subsequent years, the media and television coverage has increased so that in the run-up to February 10, a large number of documentaries, interviews, and debates are aired on national and private television and radio. In addition, the Giorno del ricordo is preceded by exhibition openings, book launches, lectures, processions and the placement of commemorative wreaths. Much of the attention has been focused on Trieste, since the main foibe memorial at Basovizza is situated in its immediate vicinity. The commemorative activities at the Foiba di Basovizza and in Trieste on February 10 include torchlight and flag processions, prayers and religious services, speeches by government officials and other local dignitaries, readings of

232 For more information on the film and its significance for Italian memory culture see pp. 348–359.
survivor testimonies, visits to the Museo della Civiltà Istriana Fiumiana Dalmata, the inauguration of historical exhibitions, and the dedication of commemorative plaques. In 2006, the Foiba di Basovizza memorial underwent a significant artistic and architectural overhaul and since then has been attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year.\textsuperscript{233} Thus, within a few years, the \textit{foibe} killings and the “exodus” have moved from the margins to the very center of Italian cultural memory. In 2008, a monument to the victims of the \textit{foibe} was inaugurated in Rome, and in 2010, a special exhibition opened at the Italian Chamber of Deputies, inaugurated by Gianfranco Fini.

Just a few kilometers away from Basovizza and only two weeks before the \textit{Giorno del ricordo}, on January 27, a seemingly similar commemorative activity takes place every year at the Risiera di San Sabba, to commemorate the \textit{Giorno della memoria}, otherwise known as Holocaust Memorial Day. Instituted in 2001, it commemorates not only the “extermination of the Jewish people, the racial laws, Italy’s persecution of its Jewish citizens,” but also “Italians who underwent deportation, imprisonment and death,” i.e. political and military prisoners deported to Nazi concentration camps.\textsuperscript{234} By comparison,

\textsuperscript{233} According to the homepage of the Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia, the number of visitors to the Foiba di Basovizza between January and May 2010 reached almost 70,000, which is twice as many as visited the site during the same period the previous year. Cf. “Giorno del ricordo,” Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia, accessed 21 Jan. 2011.

\textsuperscript{234} The two articles of law n211, instituted on July 20, 2000, read: ¶1. “La Repubblica italiana riconosce il giorno 27 gennaio, data dell’abbattimento dei cancelli di Auschwitz, ‘Giorno della Memoria’, al fine di ricordare la Shoah (sterminio del popolo ebraico), le leggi razziali, la persecuzione italiana dei cittadini ebrei, gli italiani che hanno subito la deportazione, la prigionia, la morte, nonché coloro che, anche in campi e schieramenti diversi, si sono opposti al progetto di sterminio, ed a rischio della propria vita hanno salvato
the first *Giorno della memoria* in 2001 was a relatively discreet affair. Far from being a mass media event, the majority of commemorative activities were directed towards schoolchildren or involved those who had been active within the field of Holocaust memory and education. Since then, it has grown into almost a full week of commemorative activities leading up to the 27th of January, including exhibition openings, book launches, processions and the placement of commemorative wreaths, lectures, local oral history projects, art competitions in schools, educative trips to sites of memory in Italy, Germany, and Poland. Three memorial museums have been planned in Ferrara, Milan, and Rome, but their construction has been delayed, not least owing to civilian protests, and none of them has been completed yet.\(^{235}\) At the Risiera, one of the main me-

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\(^{235}\) In Ferrara, the inauguration of the Museo Nazionale dell’Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah (MEIS) near the former Jewish ghetto is projected for 2011, but the design contest for the building is still under way. In Rome, the plans for the Museo della Shoah, to be built on the grounds of Villa Torlonia, once Mussolini’s residence and today a public park, have been ready since 2006 and its inauguration was planned for 2008. The construction has been repeatedly delayed, however, due to public debates about the design, about the financing, as well as protests among the residents of the area who are against the building taking up most of the park. The fact that the museum is to be located on the site of Mussolini’s former residence appears not to have been the object of any protests. The museum is now set to open in 2013. Bureaucratic issues seem likewise to have delayed the completion of the Memoriale della Shoah at the central train station in Milan, which was the point of departure for trains to Auschwitz. The plans for the memorial
morials to the Holocaust in Italy, the annual commemoration ceremony includes speeches by government officials and representatives of survivor organizations, religious ceremonies, the reading of survivor testimonies, the inauguration of art and documentary exhibitions, concerts, and film screenings. On first glance, then, these two memorial days seem almost identical. The chronological proximity of the *Giorno della memoria* (January 27) and the *Giorno del ricordo* (February 10), as well as the fact that they have similar names and similar commemorative ceremonies seem confusing, and there is reason to assume that this resemblance is quite deliberate. Indeed, as we will see, the geographical and temporal proximity of these two commemorative projects is not historically organic but rather motivated entirely by memory-political concerns and the conscious attempt to shift the framework of national memory toward a specifically Italian narrative of innocence and victimhood.

Created on the model of the *Giorno della memoria*, the *Giorno del ricordo* presents the Italians who died in the foibe as victims of genocidal persecution, as evinced by the slogan “Infoibati, perché italiani.”²³⁶ In this context, it has become common to refer to the victims of the foibe as “martyrs” and many Italian towns including Trieste now have a “Via Martiri delle Foibe.” The term not only emphasizes the inno-

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²³⁶ The verb *infoibare* means literally to “throw s.o. into a foiba.” The slogan may thus be loosely translated as: “Killed in the foibe for being Italian.”
cience of the victims but also the deliberate religious connotations in the commemorative discourse that presents the foibe as sacred shrines to the victimhood of Italians and the Yugoslavs as godless barbarians. This narrative of Italian innocence is reinforced in popular representations, such as the memoirs written by Istrian emigrants, or images such as the one on the poster of the 2010 Giorno del ricordo, depicting a little girl holding a suitcase: a prime example of how those who wish to keep the memory of the foibe alive tap into the familiar iconography of the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust in order to align the victims of the foibe with those of the Nazis.237 Furthermore, the out-

237 At the exhibition “Gli italiani dell’esodo: testimonianze di immagini e oggetti,” inaugurated by Fini in 2010, large-scale family photographs of Istrian exiles line the walls of the exhibition space. In the center of the room, cordoned off is a disorderly assortment of objects emblematic of these people’s flight: suitcases, china and silverware, framed portraits, a bicycle, several chairs, and a teddy-bear sitting on a stroller. These aural objects bring to mind similar representations of the victims of the Holocaust. The Italian Chamber of Deputies has posted a video on its YouTube channel of Fini’s inauguration speech, interspersed with archive images and video of the Istrian exodus as well as shots of the exhibition. Camera dei
line of Italy in the background of the poster, which shows the formerly Italian territories (which now belong to Slovenia and Croatia) in red, underlines the territorial claim that is always a subtext to these commemorative activities. Such a presentation of local history as one of Italian national victimhood blots out the historical events that preceded them, namely the persecution of Slovenes and Croats under Italian Fascism. Furthermore, the narrative presented plays down the fact that Italian partisans as well as German troops used the foibe to dispose of enemies and that the remains of German soldiers were also found there. It further disregards the fact that several thousand Slovenes and Croats, who were equally threatened because they did not approve of the new Yugoslav government, emigrated from Istria as well.

The Giorno della memoria carries with it a different, yet related set of problems. Even though the phrasing of the law explicitly invites the commemoration and discussion of Italian anti-Semitism between 1938 and 1943, as well as the collaboration with the Nazi occupiers after 1943, the emphasis during the commemorative events on January 27 is exclusively on Hitler’s crimes and on the deportations and persecutions that occurred during the German occupation. Furthermore, the fact that the discourse of the commemorative ceremonies lump together Jews, Italian forced laborers, partisans, and soldiers under the term “deportees” not only eradicates the differences between the victims of racial and political persecution, it also contributes to the prevailing displace-

ment of responsibility onto the Nazis. Television channels show films in which Jews are hidden and rescued by “good” Italians, for example Perlasca — un eroe italiano, was aired on RAI television on January 28 and 29, 2002, on the occasion of the second Giorno della memoria. It tells the story of the Fascist Giorgio Perlasca who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews. Almost 13 million Italians watched the film and Perlasca has become the epitome of the good Fascist.  

The poster and flyer for the 2010 Giorno della memoria shows the Risiera di San Sabba, often presented as “the only Nazi death camp on Italian soil.”  

But how did these two seemingly identical national memorial days with such strikingly similar names and structure come into exis-

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239 See my discussion of the law that instituted the Risiera as National Monument on page 297.
tence? What is their historical context, and what are their political and cultural implications? To understand the significance of their resemblance, we have to go back to the end of World War II and consider its aftermath; we have to understand the struggle regarding the national identity of Trieste and its region. Two competing memories resulted from this struggle, which despite not being mutually exclusive nevertheless seek continually to undermine each other’s relevance in the public sphere, while at the same time marginalizing the significance of twenty years of Fascism. As we will see, there is a call-and-response mechanism, almost a reflex, which kicks in whenever there is a public discussion about the memory of World War II, the German occupation, and the resistance, and which paralyzes not only the formation of a nuanced historiography, but also a real coming to terms with the past in the region. As anthropologist Pamela Ballinger writes, “the ritual performances of identity in Trieste enacted at the Risiera and foibe sites make a claim for suffering and victimhood as exclusive.”

240 Pamela Ballinger, “Exhumed Histories: Trieste and the Politics of (Exclusive) Victimhood,” Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies 6.2 (2004): 146. Ballinger’s article was written before the institution of the Giorno del ricordo and the renovation of the Foiba di Basovizza, but it gives a thorough analysis of the political and historical debates surrounding these two sites in the 1990s. Along with the earlier article and the monograph which I cite in this chapter, this article draws on the field work that Ballinger carried out in Trieste and Istria in 1995–96. Her primary focus is the community of Istrián exiles in Trieste and the Italian minority in Istria, and she provides a detailed, critical account of the oral history of the foibe killings and the exile from Istria. Although she does discuss the Risiera, the site itself is not central to her argument, but it is nevertheless important to note that her discussion of the Risiera is curiously at odds with other historical accounts and with the version of events presented at the Risiera’s documentary exhibition, in that she emphasizes only the Slovene minority’s claim to the Risiera as a site of Slovene victimhood, in contradistinction to the Foiba di Basovizza’s status as a site of Italian mourning. In so doing, she presents the “binomio Risiera-foibe” along exclusively ethnic lines. As we will see, such a binary structure is only one facet of this rivalry.
As a basis for my analysis of the two memorial sites, I trace the genesis of the “binomio Risiera-foibe” (Fogar “L’occupazione” 114) and explain how, at strategic points in the history of the Risiera’s memory, the foibe have been and continue to be invoked as a counter-memory. With the institution of the Giorno del ricordo, the Risiera vs. foibe competition has been taken to a new level, with problematic results. The Risiera used to be the most frequented site in Trieste with more than 100,000 visitors a year, but in the past two years, the Foiba di Basovizza has had considerably more visitors than the Risiera, even though the two memorials are in such close geographic proximity to each other that it is possible to visit both of them in a single day, even within a few hours. I would like to explore the implications of this geographic proximity. What conception of local and national history and memory do the visitors get from a visit to the Risiera or to Basovizza respectively, and what conception results from a combined visit? What is the narrative each of these sites presents and what is left out? How, if at all, does each site discuss the other? The Risiera and the foibe are both part of the same historical narrative that has linked them together inextricably. That does not mean, however, that they can be aligned and their historical specificities and contexts ignored. In order to illustrate the problems of such a direct alignment, I will refer to a third site of memory in Trieste, the Parco della rimembranza in the city center, in which trees and inscribed stones indiscriminately commemorate the victims of both World Wars, of Nazi persecution, and of the foibe killings. A seemingly democratic site, the Parco della rimembranza does not
reveal its own story to its visitors. It was, in fact, created by the Fascists in 1925 and since then more and more commemorative stones have been added, constructing a narrative of Italian victimhood in which not only all the victims but also the perpetrators, who are the German and Yugoslav occupiers, are equal.

This is the first comparative study of these three memorial sites. By illustrating how their history and memory is intertwined, I aim to show why considering these sites in isolation, as has been the case up until now (insofar as they have been considered at all), is not enough if one hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the historical, cultural, and political forces at work here. At the center of this chapter lies an in-depth analysis of the memorial complex, the documentary exhibition, and the commemorative activities at the Risiera di San Sabba. Besides giving a brief description of the crimes committed at this site during the war, I also trace its postwar history and describe the processes that led to the creation of the site as it presents itself to us today. Following this analysis, I present a comparison with the Foiba di Basovizza, its history and development into a memorial. As we shall see, each of these memorials is primarily concerned with presenting a particular version of the events during and after World War II which blots out the version presented at the competing memorial. Instead of cooperating to provide a more comprehensive picture of the regional history, they instead treat their version as definitive. At the end of this chapter, I consider how an approach to these “memory wars” based on Michael Rothberg’s conception of multidirectional memory might offer a way
out of the current impasse. The need to look beyond the zero-sum logic (to use Roth-berg’s phrase) of these memorials’ version of history becomes even more pressing in light of the fact that they both marginalize the broader context for the events they commemorate, namely the Fascist politics of Italianization prior to and during the German occupation of Italy, as well as the Cold War tensions after the end of the war. These “memory wars” thus serve ultimately only to divert attention away from Italy’s role in the Second World War and the Holocaust—the prevailing “competition” between these two sites of memory thus masks the fact that both present versions of history with significant strategic gaps. In order to understand not only the events at the Risiera and at Basovizza but also why they are being deliberately de-contextualized, it is necessary to know the larger historical framework. Before turning my attention to these sites of memory, therefore, a brief overview of the historical events between 1919 and 1945 is in order.

**Fascism in Venezia Giulia**

Il problema delle minoranze allogene è irrisolubile.

—Benito Mussolini

The interwar history of the region of Venezia Giulia illustrates how Fascism invoked the
image of a Communist “Slav” threat to the nation in order to justify its politics of “Italianization,” which was nothing but the radical elimination of all political and cultural difference. With the establishment of Italian sovereignty over the Venezia Giulia region in 1918, Italy had incorporated a territory which was home to a large number of Slovenes and Croats. The population of the Istrs peninsula, for example, was ca. 42% Italian and 58% Slovene and Croat (Cogoy 14). Even though in 1918 the Italian military command had promised the Slovenes and Croats in the region that “L’Italia, la grande nazione della libertà [...] vi lascerà l’uso della vostra lingua e la nazionalità delle vostre scuole, assai di più che non abbia concesso a voi l’Austria,” they were nonetheless seen as an alien or even antagonistic group, as allogeni—“allogeneous”: of a different nature or kind (Bubnić et al. 9). Increasingly, the “Slavs” in the border region came to be portrayed as a problem requiring a solution: namely assimilation and forced Italianization.

241 As used by the Fascists, “Slav” is essentially synonymous with “Communist” and thus denotes a unified hostile “other” against which Italy must defend herself. Buried in this term is also the connotation of the Slavic races’ subservient status under the Roman Empire—in fact, the etymology of the word “slave” goes back to “Slav”—and hence it re-asserts Fascist Italy’s expansionist ambitions and the need for Italy to rise and dominate this inferior neighbor. Even today one finds the term being used in a similar way, as in the television drama Il cuore nel pozzo (2005).

242 My account of the events during the Fascist ventennio in Venezia Giulia draws on the very nuanced and thoroughly documented work of historians Glenda Sluga, Elio Apih, Renate Cogoy, and Marta Verginella, and on the publications of the Associazione Nazionale Ex-Deportati, and the Istituto Regionale per la Storia del movimento di Liberazione del Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IRSML).

243 For a comprehensive historical overview of the relationship between Italians and Slovenes in Trieste and its region before 1918 see Marina Cattaruzza, “Slovenes and Italians in Trieste, 1850–1914,” Ethnic Identity in Urban Europe, ed. Max Engman, (New York: New York UP, 1991). The article provides a useful summary, including graphs and maps, of the position of the Slovene minority during the Habsburg Monarchy, especially of their increasing urbanization and the assertion of their ethnic identity, which, Cattaruzza argues, was the seed for the ethnic conflicts to come.
Such preoccupations about the political and cultural homogeneity of the region resulted in an eager embrace of Fascism in 1919 and an especially oppressive presence of the Fascist Action Squads. As early as 1920, there was a series of attacks, and after the Fascist regime was officially in power, these were followed by a politics of “denationalization,” whose ultimate aim was the total erasure of Slav culture, deemed inferior and barbaric. The Triestine fascio was among the first to be founded, only a few days after the one in Milan in April 1919. The first armed action squads were put together in Trieste in May 1920, and concrete acts of violence soon followed: in July 1920, the Fascists burned down the Narodni Dom, the Slovene cultural center, and the adjacent Hotel Balkan in Trieste. The destruction of the Narodni Dom was the beginning of the systematic destruction of all Slovene and Croat cultural circles and institutions in the region (theaters, libraries, banks, music halls, sports circles, and other organizations), over 400 in all.

By 1924 all foreign-language newspapers were required by law to publish in Italian and all Slovene and Croat schools were either closed or Italianized. Not only was it forbidden for Slovene and Croat speakers to receive instruction in their mother tongue, they were also prohibited from using it in public. Speaking Slovene or Croat was severely punished, often with physical violence.\textsuperscript{244} All Slavic names had to be changed to Italian

\textsuperscript{244} A prominent example is the death, in 1936, of composer and choir director Alojz Bratuz, who, after having conducted his choir to sing Slovene Christmas songs in the village of Piedimonte (Podgora), was forced to drink motor oil and died as a result. The Slovene Triestine author Boris Pahor has written a series of short stories based on this and other episodes of Fascist violence connected to the use of Slovene in public, which I will discuss in the next chapter. See also, among others, Angelo Ara, “Scuola e minoranze
ones. Even gravestones were to be Italianized. Fascist police raided houses for foreign language literature. Slovene property was expropriated and the residents resettled. The Slovene daily newspaper Edinost suffered seven bomb attacks until it was finally closed down in 1929. It was forbidden also to import newspapers from Yugoslavia, causing those who did not speak Italian to be entirely isolated. Even the priests in church were forced to speak only in Italian or Latin. The systematic exclusion of Slovenes and Croats from public life caused between 50,000 and 100,000 to emigrate to Yugoslavia or other countries. The 1926 Leggi di pubblica sicurezza were enforced particularly harshly on Slovenes and Croats, who were required to carry an identity card with fingerprints and subject to spontaneous arrests and worse. This constituted a discrimination that was not only humiliating and terrorizing but which also had serious consequences for their everyday lives, since those who held such cards were treated as suspects, a danger to the security of the state. The lists of politically suspect persons comprised almost the entire Slovene and Croat population in Venezia Giulia—more than half a million people (Bubnić et al. 52–5).

According to Lavo Cermelj, 70,000 went to different parts of Yugoslavia, 5,000 to other European countries, and 30,000 to Latin America. See Lavo Cermelj, Sloveni e croati in Italia tra le due guerre (Trieste: Editoriale Stampia Triestina, 1974). These numbers have since been questioned by scholars such as Aleksej Kalc, “L'emigrazione slovena e croata,” Friuli e Venezia Giulia. Storia del ’900, ed. IRSML, (Gorizia: IRSML-LEG, 1996) and Piero Purini, “L'emigrazione non italiana dalla Venezia Giulia dopo la prima guerra mondiale,” Qualestoria 28.1 (2000).
The intensification of Fascist terror led to an intensification of resistance activity, which in turn led to more aggressive efforts by the regime. Between 1927 and 1932 the Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello stato sentenced a proportionally high number of Slovene and Croat “terrorists” to a total of more than 1,000 years in prison. Out of 47 death sentences, 36 were pronounced against Slovenes and Croats, of which 26 were actually carried out (Bubnić et al. 60; Verginella Il confine).

The policies against the minorities in Venezia Giulia (as well as in other border regions such as Alto Adige) were an important component of the Fascist strategy of nation-building. Italian culture was presented as a great unifying power, for which the allo-geni, once assimilated, did not present a problem. However, when these allo-geni resisted assimilation, they were persecuted and treated as enemies of the state. While the idea of political and cultural assimilability indeed suggests a “spiritual” conception of race rather than a biological one (the “Slavs” were regarded as backward and coarse, easily shaped and refined by Italian civilization), one should not assume that there was no biological component to Italian racism. As discussed in more detail in the introduction, images of the “Slavs” as a “criminal infection,” a “festerung sore,” an “ulcer,” were always invoked when, in the 1930s, Slovenes and Croats intensified their resistance.247

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The discrepancy between the repeated insistence on a spiritual conception of race in Fascist discourse and the persecution based on biological considerations that took place in reality becomes more pronounced after the proclamation of the racial laws in 1938. As the setting for this proclamation Mussolini chose Trieste, which at the time had a Jewish population of between 6,000 and 6,500. Even though the Jews in Italy were largely assimilated, they became the focus of a campaign “to educate the Italian population in a biological understanding of Italian national identity” (Sluga “Italian National Identity” 178). The racial laws banned mixed marriages and excluded Jews from public life, just as the Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza had excluded Slovenes and Croats more than ten years earlier. Fascist journals such as La Difesa della Razza called upon Italians to be vigilant of the purity of the race and, for example, not mix with Jews or people of other, “inferior” races such as Africans. The massive anti-Slav campaigns in Trieste and its region had accustomed the population to such propaganda. In fact, anti-Slav and anti-Semitic propaganda was often combined. For example, the major Triestine newspaper Il Piccolo publicized measures to be taken against the Jews and at the same time encouraged the population to act against the “Slavs,” presenting both as anti-Fascist and Communist enemies who were inferior even to the “most obscure tribes of central Africa” (Bubnić et al. 77). In order to suppress the growing liberation movement more effective-

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ly, between 1941 and 1943, the regime intensified supervision and oppression in the region. Fascist action squads and the newly created *Ispettorato Speciale per la Pubblica Sicurezza per la Venezia Giulia* arrested thousands of suspected “Slavs” and Jews and interned them in concentration camps, for example in Gonars near Udine or on the island of Arbe. With the beginning of the war, Fascist plans to invade the Balkan peninsula began to take shape, but it was not until the spring of 1941 that Italian troops, alongside the Wehrmacht, occupied Yugoslavia and created the new Italian provinces of Lubiana, Fiume, and Dalmatia. In order to control the newly annexed territories, Mussolini had to send about half of his troops, or about 650,000 men (Mattioli 106).

The Balkans represented an important opportunity for Italians to gain new *spazio vitale*. In order to make the territory available to Italians, entire villages were burned to the ground and the inhabitants, including women and children, shot or imprisoned in internment camps. Mass deportation began in 1942. In the province of Lubiana alone ca. 10% of the population was deported (Rodogno; Del Boca *Italiani* 241). The conditions in these camps were terrible; the mortality rate was high because of deliberate malnutrition and the complete lack of hygiene or sanitation. More than 50 such camps existed in greater Italy in the years between 1940 and 1943, some of them were created especially for undesired minorities such as Jews, “Gypsies,” and “Slavs” (Mattioli 107). Exactly how many were killed or starved to death during the Italian occupation is still subject to debate among historians, but the lowest estimate is around 250,000 (Mantelli 58). To com-
bat the growing Yugoslav partisan movement, the Fascists took the harshest measures, well-proven during the colonial wars. The infamous order issued by General Mario Roatta instructing his troops to treat partisans not according to the maxim “dente per dente” (a tooth for a tooth) but rather “testa per dente” (a head for a tooth) is only one example of the brutality of the Fascist campaign (cf. Del Boca Italiani). Fascist propaganda presented the occupation of Yugoslavia as an act of generosity: the “Slav” lands were being liberated and the glorious Roman civilization was being brought to these barbaric lands. Il Piccolo wrote: “la creazione della nuova provincia di Lubiana e delle provincie dalmatiche solleverà i vinti alla dignità di cittadini italiani” [the creation of the new province of Lubiana and the new Dalmatian provinces will elevate the vanquished to the dignity of Italian citizens] (Bubnić et al. 79).

After the collapse of the Fascist regime on September 8, 1943, the majority of the Italian troops retreated from the occupied territories. In the ensuing power vacuum, the Yugoslav partisans attempted to take over the Istrian peninsula and killed several hundred soldiers, presumed Fascists, and civilians, but also Slovene and Croat collaborators with the Fascist regime and threw the corpses into the foibe. These massacres are now known under the name of Foibe istriane.\footnote{Cogoy, Einführung, 16, Mattioli, Viva: 108. See also Raoul Pupo, Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l’esilio (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005) and Raoul Pupo and Roberto Spazzali, Foibe (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).} After the Germans had occupied the region of Venezia Giulia, it became part of the Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland,
governed directly by the Reich. The goal of such an annexation was the slow Germanization of the region. Gauleiter Friedrich Rainer estimated that the region was mainly non-Italian: by his reckoning there were only ca. 250,000 Italians as opposed to ca. 450,000 Slovenes, 250,000 Croats, and a racially diverse group of 550,000 “Friulians.” Basically, he concluded, the region had been racially “ruined” by Italian mismanagement (Bubnić et al. 90; Fogar “L’occupazione” 5). With such statements in mind, it does not seem all that surprising that the Aktion Reinhard staff, highly specialized in the elimination of enemies to the Volkskörper, were sent to Trieste. The official justification for sending this group of extermination specialists was that they were needed to combat the growing Yugoslav partisan movement. But the other important assignment for the Einsatzkommando Reinhard was the deportation or elimination of Jews in Venezia Giulia and the occupied territories. The importance of the broad network of local collaborators and informers for the success of the Nazis, as discussed at a later point in this chapter, cannot be overstated.

On May 1, 1945 the Yugoslav liberation army arrived in Trieste. Yugoslav rule lasted little more than a month—British and American Allied forces took over the city at the end of May—but it was imprinted indelibly as “the forty days of terror” into the collective memory of Triestines. Aided by a number of Italian Communist partisans, Tito’s men deported and interned Italian soldiers in POW camps near Ljubljana and arrested and killed several thousand presumed Fascists, Nazi collaborators, and civilians, but also
those Italians and Slovenes whom they suspected of resisting the integration of Trieste into the Yugoslav state. These events are commonly referred to as the Foibe del ’45, even though most of those killed were never thrown into the sinkholes but were summarily executed or died in prison (Pupo 99; Cernigoi). The exact number of victims is impossible to determine since most of the corpses could not be exhumed and there is very little documentary material. In 1945, Venezia Giulia was divided into Zone A (Trieste and Gorizia, under Allied administration) and Zone B (Capodistria and surroundings, under Yugoslav administration). The Free Territory of Trieste was created as a buffer state between the two zones, but it remained a provisional solution. In 1954, the Free Territory was dissolved and the city and Zone A were given to Italy. With a few adjustments of the border that incorporated several villages from the Free Territory, Zone B became part of Yugoslavia. Only the Treaty of Osimo in 1975, however, made this division official. In the years between 1945 and 1956 the Italian population in Istria and Dalmatia was subject to intimidation, discrimination and threats by the Yugoslavs, which resulted in the emigration of ca. 200,000–350,000 Italians, as well as anti-communist Slovenes and Croats. The terminology used in popular discourse and historiography to describe these mass migrations varies from “political refuge,” or “forced exile” to “exodus,” and “voluntary emigration” (Verginella “Geschichte und Gedächtnis” 35).²⁵₀

²⁵₀ Pamela Ballinger presents a thorough analysis of the historical background of the mass emigration of Italian Istrians as well as of the different ways the memory of these events has been interpreted and in-
To this day, it is not only the number of victims of the *foibe* killings that is subject to heated debates, but especially also the Yugoslavs’ motivations. Are the violent acts carried out by the Yugoslavs in May and June 1945 to be seen as a state-ordered, systematic destruction of political opposition, as more or less spontaneous retaliation, or as “de-fascistization”? Right-wing newspaper columnists and writers describe the *foibe* as genocide, ethnic cleansing, or even an “olocausto giuliano.” Some historians and journalists tend towards less polemical but essentially similar interpretations. For Giampaolo Valdevit, for example, the *foibe* killings were the attempts at the physical elimination of the enemy, and thus a violence that was comparable to Fascism and National Socialism. Raoul Pupo interprets the Yugoslav acts of violence as “epurazione preventiva” [pre-emptive purges], that is, as a facet of the civil war in the region and thus pertinent to the consolidation of the Communist regime (Pupo 100). The historian Nevenka Troha or the journalist Claudia Cernigoi on the other hand consider the killings as reprisals for the persecution suffered during Nazifascism. During the first three decades after the war, neither the Christian Democrat government nor the Communists were keen on instrumentalized since then. See Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile. Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

251 This comparison is popular also among neo-fascist politicians and was first made by Padre Flaminio Flaminio Rocchi, *L'esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiiumani ed dalmati* (Rome: Difesa Adriatica, 1998). For similar, more recent accounts see Luigi Papo, *L'Istria e le sue foibe. Storia e tragedia senza la parola fine* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 1999) and the numerous publications on the *foibe* and the *esodo* by Marco Pirina and Giorgio Rustia.


vestigating the Risiera or the foibe crimes, since both would have been accompanied by calls for a trial against Italian war criminals. The memory of the foibe was nourished mainly in local right-wing and post-Fascist circles. This changed in the early 1990s when the foibe killings and the debates surrounding the precise number of victims became a national issue. Two main factors contributed to this revived interest. Firstly, the war in Yugoslavia was seen as a vindication of the claim that Italians in Istria and Trieste had been victims of a similar type of ethnic cleansing to what was going on in Yugoslavia at the time. And secondly, the electoral victory of Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party together with the Alleanza Nazionale in 1994 marked the beginning of a more general shift in the political discourse about Fascism and the past. The was a growing campaign to establish the foibe as the “Italian Holocaust”; an act of genocide perpetrated against Italians, which had been suppressed by the Italian Left.\(^\text{254}\) It is significant that the debates concerning the number of victims coincided with the opening of archives in the former Yugoslav states, which would have made a more detailed examination possible. To this day, however, no official list of victims and missing persons has been compiled (Verginella “Geschichte und Gedächtnis” 70). It seems that the center of the debates about the foibe is neither the question of how to arrive at a more nuanced historical reconstruction nor an effort to gain certainty about the number of victims. Rather, the

over-inflated numbers of foibe victims in circulation—almost ten times that of the Risiera—are part of a campaign to establish the foibe as the more important site of memory, the true “Italian tragedy.”

**The Risiera di San Sabba**

The Risiera, which as the name suggests was originally a rice-husking factory that was in operation from 1913 to 1929, is a complex of several brick buildings in the San Sabba district, the industrial area at the outskirts of Trieste, circa five kilometers from the city center. Once at the heart of Trieste's booming industrial district, it now reveals the city’s steady decline after the fall of the Habsburg Empire, the neglect and mismanagement during the interwar years and under Fascism, and the post-war insecurity about the city’s belonging to Italy or to Yugoslavia, all of which led to its slow economic marginalization. For first-time visitors, it is difficult to find the Risiera memorial, which is situated amidst a disorienting labyrinth of intersecting city highways, construction sites and large factory buildings as well as the nearby soccer stadium. Right next to the Risiera is a large Lidl supermarket, the German supermarket chain. For lack of a parking lot of its own, Risiera visitors must use the supermarket's parking lot, which is built on part of the grounds of the former rice factory, most of which was torn down in the years after the war because of its ruinous state. Thus, the Risiera that presents itself as a memorial to
the visitors today is only a small fraction of the building complex the Nazis used as a concentration camp. With the concrete walls framing the entrance and the main courtyard, the Risiera does not stand out in this desolate landscape and is easily overlooked if one does not know what to look for. All in all, it is hard to imagine a place more different, in physical presence and in spirit, to the green country idyll of Castle Grafeneck.

The entrance on Via Palatucci\textsuperscript{255} is a long and narrow passageway framed by tall concrete walls. At the end of this imposing, almost overwhelming corridor, the visitor steps through an archway into a larger, walled-in courtyard framed by tall concrete walls on the north and west sides and by three of the Risiera’s original buildings on the south and east sides. The only colors are grey and brick-red, the glassless windows are gaping holes. At the far end of the open space a tall, needle-like sculpture made up of black iron girders pierces the sky. On the ground one notices a rectangular indentation paved with dimly reflecting metal plates and a long narrow path, also paved in metal, that leads straight up to the iron sculpture. This metal imprint outlines the crematorium, the smoke channel, and the base of the chimney, which the Nazis dynamited before abandoning the site on April 29, 1945. On the spot where the chimney stood, the black smoke, symbolized by the wrought iron of the sculpture, rises eternally into the sky. The outline of the side of the crematorium is still visible on the front of the main building—a

\textsuperscript{255} This address in slightly ironic in itself. Giovanni Palatucci is hailed as an “Italian Schindler” who saved the lives of thousands of Jews in his capacity as a police officer in Fiume. As I discuss in the following chapter, the veracity of these heroic acts is disputed. See pp. 340–343.
pale, ghostly silhouette that stands out against the red brick wall. In what looks like a
door in the wall is a white stone slab with the inscription “ashes of the victims” in four
languages: Italian, Slovene, Croat, and Hebrew. Behind the stone is an urn containing the
ashes and bone remains found in 1945 among the rubble of the blasted crematorium.
Apart from the iron sculpture, the metal imprint, and the wreaths, the courtyard is emp-
try, which reinforces the austerity of the place. On a day with few visitors, the space is
completely quiet, even the noise of the traffic outside is not audible in the courtyard.
Turning towards the left, three doors lead into three brick buildings: the first is a com-
pletely dark and small room, called the “Cella della Morte,” (Death Cell) in which those
marked for execution and cremation were locked up. Right next to it is the building
whose upper floors were used as a dormitory and shoe- and dress-making shop and
whose ground floor room contains 17 cells, 1.2 meters wide, 2 meters deep and 2 me-
ters high and with 2 bunk beds, and used for the detention of up to six prisoners each. Imprisoned in these cells were mainly partisans and political prisoners, but also Jews destined for torture and execution in the coming weeks. The third building housed large rooms in which Jews, hostages, and prisoners of war were held for longer periods of time before being deported to concentration camps in Poland or Germany. Today called the “Sala delle Croci” (Hall of Crosses), the four storey building has been gutted entirely exposing the black wooden beams that support the roof. The effect is indeed one of many cross-shaped structures towering above the ground in several layers. Display cases set in the wall and lit from behind contain personal objects stolen from Triestine Jews by Nazi troops and which include watches, eyeglasses, combs, a ring, a cigarette-holder and silverware. In a small case is also a glass containing earth from Jerusalem. On a sign it says “Alcuni oggetti razzati dai nazisti dalle case degli Ebrei triestini” (Articles taken by the Nazis from Jewish houses in Trieste). These objects were donated in 2000 by the Jewish Community.

In the main building, which contained the kitchen, offices, and dormitories for the SS and the guards, level with the ground floor is the “Civico Museo della Risiera” (Risiera Civic Museum), a small permanent exhibition with photographs, documents, drawings and letters sent from the Risiera to family members of prisoners, and objects found in the rubble of the camp, such as a mace used for executions. There is a shrine with a prisoners’ uniform from a German concentration camp and an urn with ashes from
Auschwitz. Besides the permanent exhibition there is a small art exhibition of paintings, by a Triestine survivor, depicting concentration camp prisoners. The room is crowded with display windows, glass cases and panels, and it is so dark that the photocopied documents and signs are hard to read. When groups of visitors come, the room is also used as a media room: there is a row of chairs in front of two television sets. Upon request, visitors can watch a documentary film about the Risiera.256

In the right-hand corner of the courtyard another archway leads to a second, much smaller courtyard. On the walls a somewhat strange conglomeration of comme-

Fig. 16 A map of the Risiera memorial.


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256 I discuss this film in more detail on p. 314.
morative plaques recalls different victim groups or individual victims. For example, a large black marble plate with a red triangle in the middle reads: “Contro tutte le discriminazioni. Il circolo arcobaleno arcigay arcilesbica di Trieste ricorda le vittime omosessuali del Nazifascismo. 27 Gennaio 2004.” Adjacent to it several small white plaques in Italian and Slovene remember the “Martiri indimenticati della Risiera” [unforgotten martyrs of the Risiera], the “Figli della Venezia Giulia, perenni assertori degli ideali di patria e di liberta” [Sons of Venezia Giulia, undying champions of the ideals of country and liberty] who fell victim to the “inumana ferocia Nazista” [inhuman savagery of the Nazis]. The “Women of Trieste” honor the mothers, wives, and daughters of Trieste who died for the freedom of others. Below, the Jewish community and the Association of Italian Jewish Women have placed their own plaques. On the opposite wall, next to more commemorative plaques is a large white stone slab bearing a poem written in 1955 by Triestine poet Ketty Daneo, whose brother was imprisoned and killed in the Risiera. 

The building at the end of this corridor is the former garage that housed the gas-vans. Inside is another black iron sculpture, its shape reminiscent of the smoke sculpture outside, with emaciated naked bodies wrapped in barbed wire, their arms reaching skyward. The room also contains the documentary exhibition, created by the Triestine historian Elio Apih in 1982 and rearranged and expanded in 1998. Almost exclusively cont-

257 “Against all discrimination. The “Circolo arcobaleno arcigay arcilesbica di Trieste” [Trieste’s largest LGBT organization] remembers the homosexual victims of Nazi-Fascism. 27 January 2004.”

258 See page 405 for a discussion of this and other poems by Daneo.
sisting of low-quality reproductions of photos, newspaper clippings, and other documents, its fifty panels roughly sketch the historical context of the Risiera, the rise of Fascism and Nazism, the Holocaust, the German occupation, and the resistance movement. Fascism, the visitor learns, spread quickly over the region, and its aim was to destroy Slovene and Croat organizations and Italianize them. The regime is presented as oppressive but ultimately somewhat inept or inconsistent; it ruined Trieste’s economy and was unable to solve the minority problem in the region. Anti-Semitism was imported from Germany: “La rapida affermazione della Germania nazista sembra favorire certi interessi balcanici del regno d’Italia e vi promuove l’antisemitismo” [the rapid affirmation of Nazi Germany appears to favor certain Balkan interests of the Italian regime and promotes anti-Semitism there] (Apih Guida 80). Unlike Fascism, Nazism is presented as a mass movement based on a broad popular consensus in Germany, and as an efficient and merciless machinery of death that spread all over Europe and in the end also over Venezia Giulia. As discussed in the previous chapter, much space is dedicated to the photos of the Nazi perpetrators and their crimes. Just as much space is reserved for the resistance movement, which was well-organized in the region. But there is no mention of Triestine collaboration or involvement with the Nazis, except for a few photos of “formazioni militari ausiliarie di vario tipo e di varie nazionalità [...] impiegate in operazioni di ordine pubblico e di attività anti-partigiane” [auxiliary military formations of various kinds and nationalities ... active in maintaining public order and in anti-partisan operations] (106).
Apih’s account emphasizes the role of the resistance movement, more specifically of the pro-Italian, anti-Fascist resistance (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale or CLN) which acted independently of the Communist, pro-Yugoslav resistance in the liberation of Trieste. While according to most historical accounts Trieste was liberated by the Yugoslav army on May 1, 1945, Apih’s exhibition suggests that it was the uprising against the Nazis on April 30, led by the CLN, that did it. The text reads:

A Trieste i partigiani del Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale insorgono il 30 aprile; le truppe jugoslave del IX Corpus entrano in città il 1° maggio e il giorno dopo la divisione neozelandese del generale Freyberg.259 (150)

It neglects to mention that the Yugoslav army had already almost reached the outskirts of the city on April 30th (Fogar “L’occupazione” 91; Pupo 87–98). By emphasizing the role of the CLN in the city’s liberation, a hierarchy is established that posits the CLN as the

259 In Trieste the partisans of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale rise up on 30 April; the Yugoslav troops of the 9th corps enter the city on 1 May and the following day the New Zealand division under the command of General Freyberg arrive.
“real” liberation force, and thus implicitly gives a justification of why Trieste should indeed be under Italian and not Yugoslavian rule.\textsuperscript{260} Moreover, “liberation” here refers to the victory over the German occupiers and not the overthrow of Fascism. The various commemorative plaques outside seem to corroborate this narrative: the partisans and Jews murdered in or deported from the Risiera are presented indiscriminately as heroes of the liberation, as martyrs who died for the freedom of Italy, regardless of the different motives for their persecution. Both the documentary exhibition and the post-war history of the Risiera reveal a narrative of Italian sovereignty not only over the city, but also over the memory of the war and the German occupation.

**The Risiera in the Past**

But what exactly happened at the Risiera in the eighteen months of its operation? Who were the victims, where did they come from? To an uninformed visitor, the memorial itself and the documentary exhibition give very little information about the victims, about the everyday goings-on at the Risiera. There is exactly one panel in the documentary exhibition that explains the different functions of the Risiera:

A Trieste vengono inviati i membri dell’organizzazione che ha eseguito in Polonia il genocidio degli Ebrei. Al loro comando è il generale delle SS Odilo Globocnik, nativo di Trieste. Si deve all’iniziativa e all’esperienza di queste persone l’installazione di un forno crematorio nella Risiera di San Sabba. L’edificio fu attrezzato come Polizeihäftlager e servì come luogo di prigione, di inquisizione, di trasferimento ai campi in Germania – specie per gli Ebrei – e come base di partenza per operazioni antipartigiane.261 (Apih Guida 120)

Nowhere does it say how many were killed, nor how exactly the killing took place. A photograph of an iron-tipped mace found in the rubble, an all but unreadable copy of a list of names from a Slovene newspaper, and a photo of the arrest of Franz Stangl in Brazil are presented on another panel as evidence concerning the events at San Sabba (126). Nowhere is there a precise account of these events. The crematorium, we learn, was ordered from an unnamed company in Trieste; the company, it is emphasized, was not aware of the purpose of the oven. But who helped the Nazis run the camp? Who

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261 Members of the organization that carried out the genocide of the Jews in Poland are sent to Trieste. At their head is SS leader Odilo Globocnik, a native of Trieste. Owing to the initiative and experience of these individuals a crematorium is installed at the Risiera di San Sabba. The structure was converted into a Polizeihäftlager and served as a site for the detainment and interrogation of prisoners, some of whom were then transferred to camps in Germany—especially the Jews—and as a base of operations for the anti-partisan program.
helped them administrate the entire region? Who translated for them? Who identified the Jews and partisans for them? None of these questions are answered or even raised. There is also no information about the post-war history of the site. What has been done to preserve the site and its history? How did it become a memorial? What are the main stages in the process of commemoration at this site and what are the main events? Apart from a brief summary of the Risiera trial in Trieste in 1976, the visitor learns nothing about the struggle for memorialization. For an answer to these and other questions, we must turn to the historiography concerning the Risiera, Trieste, and its surrounding region.

Immediately after the armistice between Italy and the Allied forces had been made public, German troops were ordered to occupy the provinces of Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, Pola, Fiume, and Lubiana. Separated from the rest of occupied Italy, the entire area was placed under the direct administration of the Reich, represented by Carinthian Gauleiter Friedrich Rainer, and dubbed Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland, (OZAK). By putting Austrians in charge of the region, the Nazis intended to invoke the times of the Habsburg empire in order to gain the support of those who were nostalgic for the old Trieste. Indeed, large sections if not the majority of the Italian population in the region considered the Germans a “lesser evil” and a sort of protection from the ever grow-
ing Communist Yugoslav liberation movement (Matta “Realtà e memoria” 588). The Nazis set up a network of police and anti-partisan combat units that was operating under the direct supervision of the SS and of Police Leader Odilo Globocnik. Rapes, beatings, and shootings were widespread and commonplace, and prisoners were hanged publicly in Trieste and the surrounding villages. Historical sources suggest that the Nazis could count on a broad network of collaborators on all levels of the police and the administration, as well as from all social strata among the population. Most of the information about Jews and anti-Fascists in the region had already been compiled by the Fascists, the repressive apparatus was already in place, and the administration and police were promptly at the service of the Nazis. The Ispettorato Speciale di Pubblica Sicurezza per la Venezia Giulia, a Fascist special police force instituted in 1942 and led by Giuseppe Gueli, had compiled lists of local anti-Fascists, partisans, and Jews. Torture chambers, prison cells, and a large network of informants were at the Nazis’ disposal.

Without the collaboration of the Triestine administration, the police, the press, and other civil services, as well as the general population, OZAK could never have been

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262 For an extensive discussion of the administrative and political aspects of the OZAK, see Enzo Collotti, Il Litorale Adriatico nel nuovo ordine europeo 1943-45 (Milano: Vangelista, 1974).

263 Historian Galliano Fogar estimates that there were many hundreds of Italians who were employed by the Nazis in Venezia Giulia to assist with anti-partisan combat and persecutions of Jews, among them also Italian, Slovene and Croat partisans who had crossed over to the Fascists. An exact number of collaborators does not exist, since there has never been any systematic research on this topic and the temporal distance has made it impossible to assess correctly the degree of collaboration and the motivations behind it (Fogar, “L’occupazione”: 31-58; see also Collotti, Litorale Adriatico: 21-2).
established so quickly and efficiently. A large number of Triestines, including so-called Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans living outside the Reich) but also Italians, Slovenes, and Croats, worked for the Nazis as interpreters, drivers, informants, secretaries, telephone operators, and administrators. The industrial elite in Trieste did not hesitate to collaborate with the Germans, keen on gaining access to new markets in the Reich. The press, above all Il Piccolo, was quick to issue praise and publish propaganda. Many of the local Fascists who had been the leading agents of the persecution of Slovenes and Croats during the ventennio, saw the solution of the “Slav” question as the most valid reason to collaborate with the Nazis. Alongside this more explicit collaborationism there was also the tacit consensus among the bourgeoisie in particular and the public in general that the Germans would guarantee their safety from the Yugoslav threat (Fogar “L’occupazione” 54).

In October 1943, the Einsatzkommando Reinhard established the Polizeihäftlager Risiera di San Sabba, which was used as barracks for SS and the Ukrainian guards they had brought with them, as a prison and extermination camp for partisans, political prisoners, and Jews, as a labor camp, a transit camp for deportees to Poland or Germany, and as a depot for seized goods. The former rice husking factory had all the necessary infrastructure in place: there were train tracks that led from the Risiera to the port and the main station, and the rice drying facility was connected via a smoke channel to the chimney. Only the oven had to be custom built to complete the crematorium. The Jews,
partisans, and anti-Fascists imprisoned in the Risiera came from all over Venezia Giulia, Gorizia, Fiume, Lubiana, and Dalmatia, but also from Venice and Udine. The Jews were taken directly from their homes; either because their names and addresses were given to the Nazis by the police, or because they had been reported by dutiful neighbors or informants such as Mauro Grün (a.k.a. Grini), a Triestine Jew who helped arrest hundreds of Jews in Trieste, Venice, and Milan. Grini earned 7,000 lire for each Jew he helped arrest (Fölkel and Sessi 116).

A considerable number of Jews were also taken from hospitals, psychiatric institutions, or retirement homes in Trieste, Fiume, Venice, and other towns (Lallo and Toresini 33–61; cf. Norcio and Toresini). After 1938, the Fascist authorities had made lists of the Jewish patients, and so the Nazis merely sent letters to the directors of the clinic to inquire whether “the above person’s current state of health is compatible with incarceration,” or whether the physical conditions of these patients “would prohibit their transport to a Concentration Camp” (Lallo and Toresini 36–7). Significantly, the euphemistic language used during the Aktion T4 in Germany (such as “transferred to unknown location”) was abandoned completely in this case. A group of SS, headed by Franz Stangl and the Jewish informant Grini, came to the hospitals in order to identify and arrest the patients. They were divided into two groups: the first group consisted of long-term patients who had been institutionalized even before the racial campaigns began, the second group had been admitted only a few months before the deportation, obviously in
an attempt to hide them and rescue them from deportation. The medical files of these patients, some of which were preserved, testify to the fear among the Jews in occupied Italy, which expressed itself in symptoms of paranoia, insomnia, and depression (Norcio and Toresini 68–9). This is a chapter of the German occupation which has been almost entirely overlooked by historians. It represents a direct link to the euthanasia program in Germany, although it should be noted that only the Jewish patients were rounded up and deported.

Historians Silva Bon Gherardi and Liliana Picciotto Fargion have shown that, even though the Risiera was mainly a transit camp for the Jewish prisoners, some of them were killed there, for example those who were too old or ill to be deported, or to fill “vacancies” in the crematorium. All the Jews were forced to work: they worked as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, cleaners; they took care of the horses and the cars, and replenished the wood supply for the oven. Among the prisoners was also the famous Triestine writer Giani Stuparich, who had been under siege for his anti-Fascist stance and was arrested when it became known that his mother was Jewish and had converted to Catholicism. He, his mother, and his wife were released a few days after their arrest, following the successful intervention of bishop Antonio Santin. In most cases, however, there was no such intervention. Santin claimed in an interview that he had no knowledge of

264 Concerning the role of Bishop Santin in this matter see Sergio Galimberti, La Chiesa, Santin e gli ebrei a Trieste (Trieste: MGS, 2001). Stuparich himself never wrote about his imprisonment in the Risiera; see p. 403 below.
what was happening at the Risiera (Fölkel and Sessi 146). There were ca. 22 deportation convoys that left Trieste between October 1943 and November 1944. Almost all the Jews still living in Venezia Giulia, more than 1,200 from Trieste alone, were deported (Bon Gherardi 221; Picciotto Fargion 55–60).

In the spring of 1944, the crematorium oven was installed in the rice drying facility. Historians disagree about the exact date on which the crematorium was first put into operation. Some early sources indicate that the first cremation took place in June, whereas testimonies collected at the Risiera trial in Trieste in 1976 suggest that the oven was used as early as April 3, when a group of 72 partisans and hostages who had been shot at the nearby village of Villa Opicina were cremated.265 There were mass killings (gassings in specially equipped vehicles) and individual executions (where victims were either shot or beaten to death with a mace), the screams and sounds of which the Nazis tried to drown out by revving the engines of their trucks, making dogs bark, and playing loud music. However, given the modest proportions of the Risiera, the executions, torture, interrogations, and cremations all occurred within very few square meters, mostly in the main courtyard. The prisoners were not able to see anything, since the executions took place mainly at night and they were forbidden to go near the windows, but they would have been able to hear everything that was going on. As previously indicated, it is im-

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265 Among the earlier accounts, see Carlo Schifferer, “La Risiera,” Trieste. Rivista politica della regione 44 (1961), and Fölkel and Sessi, Risiera: 36; for the later ones see Fogar, “L’occupazione”: 82.
possible to know the exact number of victims and deportees. Most accounts estimate the number of victims at between 3,000 and 5,000 and the number of deportees at about 10,000 to 20,000; this means that ca. 95% of those imprisoned in the Risiera were killed either right there or in Auschwitz, Dachau, and Buchenwald (Fökel and Sessi 46). The majority of those killed were Yugoslav partisans and civilians who were suspected of collaboration with the partisans, captured in the Slovene and Croatian villages around Trieste, in Istria, and Fiume—hence, the majority the Risiera’s victims belonged to what the Nazis deemed “inferior races.”

During its eighteen months of operation, it was impossible to keep the events at the Risiera a secret. Situated in a busy industrial area with factories, refineries, repositories, and working-class housing, it was well within city limits, and thus the news of the goings-on in the Risiera gradually spread, mainly among the area’s residents who saw and smelled the smoke, among factory workers who witnessed SS men emptying bags of ashes and bone into the ocean, and among the Yugoslav resistance movement, who clandestinely distributed an article in 1944 describing the Nazifascist atrocities at the Risiera (Fogar “L’occupazione” 87). Furthermore, even though the Nazis dynamited the crematorium during the night of April 29, they did not manage to destroy all evidence of the mass killings.
The Risiera after 1945

Immediately after the defeat of the Germans, the Yugoslav army began collecting evidence at the Risiera. They found, for example, ca. 20,000 ID cards in one of the small cells. However, the Yugoslavs retreated only a month after they had occupied Trieste, and the city was taken over by the Allies, who instituted the Governo Militare Alleato (GMA) on June 12, 1945. The main political aim during the nine years of Allied administration was normalization, but this normalization was heavily influenced by the political climate of the nascent Cold War. This meant that despite the evidence collected at the Risiera and despite repeated reports from the Triestine police, from family members of victims, and from the partisan organizations, the GMA showed no interest in investigating the crimes of the Risiera. Instead, it demonstrated indulgence towards ex-Nazis and Fascists. Konrad Geng, for example, a member of the Einsatzkommando Reinhard and part of the staff at the Risiera, settled in Trieste, married an Italian woman and lived happily ever after, first as a GMA employee, then as the owner of a campsite near Opicina.\(^{266}\) The richly documented volume *Nazionalismo e neofascismo nella lotta politica alla confine orientale 1945–1975*, published in 1977 by the IRSML, illustrates how during the GMA, Fascist crimes and collaborationism were minimized and the legitimacy of anti-

\(^{266}\) Geng was later hired by the German foreign ministry in Bonn and sent to Milan as a staff member of the Consul General. When his involvement in the crimes at the Risiera was discovered, he was interrogated and temporarily arrested, but released soon after and transferred by the German foreign ministry to work at the German consulate in Nancy, in north-eastern France (“L’occupazione”: 100-2).
Fascist resistance was systematically undermined (IRSML *Nazionalismo*). While there were trials against Fascist collaborators, the sentences were extraordinarily lenient and more than half of the trials ended in acquittals. None of these trials involved collaborators who had worked at or for the Risiera. Even such infamous collaborators as Triestine prefect Bruno Coceani and *podestà* Cesare Pagnini were acquitted. These collaborators defended themselves by arguing that they had acted out of love for their fatherland and in order to protect Italy from “Slav” Bolshevism. In subsequent years, Pagnini and Gaetano Collotti, head of the Fascist Ispettorato Speciale, were even awarded the *Medaglia al valore per meriti patriottici* (Vetter 167–81).

While a legal investigation of the crimes at the Risiera became more and more unlikely, it was not long before its memory was used for political purposes, as the following example illustrates:267 In December 1945, workers found ashes and human remains among the rubble of the crematorium. The Consiglio di Liberazione di Trieste, an organization created by the Yugoslav administration during their occupation of the city, claimed the ashes and, in the Communist newspaper *Il Lavoratore*, announced that a public ceremony would be held during which the ashes would be buried at the Colle di San Giusto in Trieste. The GMA prohibited the ceremony, arguing that it excluded the CLN, the Liberal Party, the Democrazia Cristiana, and others. When the Consiglio went ahead with the ceremony without permission, the police intervened, and a dispute

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267 For an extensive discussion of this and other incidents see Fogar “L’occupazione” 92–7.
erupted during which the urn was ripped from the hands of the police by the angry mob. A war of words ensued in the pages of Il Lavoratore and the CLN’s La Voce Libera about who had more victims to mourn and who had the right to commemorate them. In the course of this battle, the Risiera was made into an icon of the Communist resistance, and all of those who were not sympathetic to this Communist narrative were automatically lumped in with the Fascists. An article from December 14, 1945, published in Il Lavoratore states this in no uncertain terms:

A rendere onore ai nostri morti dobbiamo essere noi che con essi lottammo e soffrimmo, non coloro che collaborarono con i nostri aguzzini. I pochi vostri [caduti] e i molti nostri che sono veramente martiri della libertà, sono patrimonio comune del popolo e tutti devono rispettarli.268

The Communist resistance’s attempt to monopolize the memory of the Risiera is merely the first example of a continuous battle over the legitimate ownership of the Risiera’s memory in a divided city. As historian Galliano Fogar writes,

all’orgoglio e alla commozione per i caduti in una lotta durissima affiorarono [...] esigenze, polemiche e condizionamenti politici legati alle posizioni assunte dagli opposti schieramenti sul problema dell’appartenenza statale della città e della regione, della scelta per la soluzione jugoslava o italiana [...] Chi era per la soluzione italiana veniva automaticamente qualificato come fascista, collaborazionista [...]. Insomma ogni spazio di confronto dialettico, di lotta politica civile, veniva inesorabilmente chiuso o era oramai, in quel 1945, sul punto di chiudersi.269 (Fogar “L’occupazione” 96)

268 “We who fought and suffered with our fallen should be the ones to honor them, not those who collaborated with our persecutors. The few of yours and the many of our fallen comrades who truly are martyrs of liberty belong to the people and everyone should respect them.” Qtd. in Marco Coslovich, “Il processo della Risiera di S. Sabba: una fonte per la storia,” Quaestoria 27.2 (1999): 220.

269 “along with the pride and emotion for the fallen, there emerged [...] various demands, polemics and
In the years following this incident, the GMA did nothing to alleviate these tensions or to initiate a legal investigation. The Risiera was more or less forgotten over the more pressing “questione di Trieste,” the issue of whether or not Trieste was to be returned to Italy. In the 1950s, the Risiera was used as a refugee camp for Istrian Italians, thousands of whom came to Trieste, either as a first stage of their exile or because they wanted to stay there permanently. The irony of hundreds of Italians now being crowded into the same spaces that only a few years before had been occupied by Jewish and partisan prisoners illustrates the nonchalant attitude of the authorities toward this space and their reluctance or inability to accommodate such large numbers of refugees. Although it is impossible to prove, the re-purposing of the Risiera would have destroyed any remaining evidence of the Nazi crimes. Everything points to a deliberate collective suppression of the crimes committed at the Risiera during the Nazi occupation: people mostly wanted to forget and move on. One indication of this is the extreme difficulty Bruno Piazza’s son and sister had in finding a publisher for Piazza’s memoir about his experience at the Risiera and in Auschwitz, Perché gli altri dimenticano. Piazza wrote the book in 1946, shortly before his death, but it took ten years to find a publisher. Similar to Primo Levi’s Se questo è un uomo, the book received very little public attention at the}

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political influences that were linked to the positions adopted by the different sides in the matter of the national affiliation of the city and the surrounding region, of the choice of the Yugoslav or the Italian solution [...]. Those in favor of the Italian solution were automatically labeled as Fascists and collaborators [...]. In short, every space for a dialectical confrontation, for civil, political debate, was relentlessly closed off or was, by then in 1945, already at the point of closing.”
time. In 1953, Galliano Fogar, Ercole Miani and other intellectuals who had been members of the pro-Italian CLN resistance founded an association that was concerned with the preservation of the legacy and history of the pro-Italian resistance in the region and with detaching it from the pro-Yugoslav resistance. The association became the *Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione italiano nella Venezia Giulia* (IRSML) in 1982, and has since become the most comprehensive collection of materials pertaining to the resistance and to post-war regional history in Trieste. On the initiative of historians from or associated with the IRSML, a historiography about the Risiera began to take shape in the 1960s. Carlo Schifferer, Elio Apih, and Enzo Collotti published a series of books and articles about Venezia Giulia, the German occupation, and the Risiera.\(^{270}\) Immediately after the war, the Risiera had been considered almost exclusively a site of memory for the Communists and the Left. This changed in 1965, when, after repeated appeals by the IRSML, the Risiera was declared a National Monument by Italian president Giuseppe Saragat: the first step towards a public acknowledgment of the crimes committed there and its memory. This declaration was also the beginning of a process of re-framing the Risiera as a site of memory for the pro-Italian anti-Communist resistance.

Even today, a copy of the presidential decree is preserved in a glass case in the exhibition and translations of it are printed in the small guide booklet visitors can pur-

chase at the memorial. It is worth quoting the decree in its entirety because it reveals the selective approach to the recent past that in many ways is still in practice today:

Il presidente della Repubblica

Veduta la legge 1° giugno 1939, n. 1089, sulla tutela delle cose di interesse artistico o storico;

Veduto il regio decreto 30 gennaio 1913, n. 363, che approva il regolamento per la esecuzione delle leggi relative alle antichità e belle arti;

Considerata la opportunità che la Risiera di San Sabha in Trieste, — unico esempio di Lager nazista in Italia — sia conservata ed affidata al rispetto della Nazione per il suo rilevante interesse, sotto il profilo storico-politico;

Sulla proposta del Ministro Segretario di Stato per la pubblica istruzione;

Decreta:

La Risiera di San Sabha in Trieste è dichiarata un monumento nazionale.271

Two things in particular stand out in the decree. Firstly, the reason given for why the Risiera is worth preserving as a national monument is that it is “the only example of a Nazi concentration camp in Italy.”272 This ignores the fact that there were several Nazi concentration camps in Italy between 1943 and 1945, e.g. the one in Bolzano-Gries, as well as more than 40 other concentration camps that had been established much earlier by the Fascists and then taken over by the Nazis, such as Fossoli near Carpi or Arbe in Istria.

271 “The President of the Republic, in accordance with Law No.1089 of 1st June 1939 regarding the protection of items of artistic or historical interest; In accordance with Royal Decree No. 363 of 30th January 1913 approving the rules for the implementation of laws regarding antiquities and fine arts; Considering that the Risiera di San Sabha, Trieste—the only example of a Nazi concentration camp in Italy—should be conserved and entrusted to the Italian nation by virtue of its great historical and political interest; At the proposal of the Secretary of State for Education; Decrees that the Risiera di San Sabha is hereby declared a National Monument.” Source: www.retecivica.trieste.it/triestecultura/new/musei/risiera_san_sabba, accessed 10 Mar. 2011.

272 The formulation “unico esempio” is admittedly potentially ambiguous, as the lack of a definite article means that it would technically be possible to read it as “a unique example” rather than “the only example,” but as the official translation (see above) on the Risiera’s website makes clear, “only” is certainly the most obvious interpretation. Cf. Galluccio, Lager in Italia: 136–54.
Secondly, it seems somewhat bewildering that the decree is not only based on a law from 1913 concerning “antique objects and the fine arts,” but also on a Fascist law from 1939, regarding the conservation and protection of “objects of artistic or historical interest.” In erroneously insisting on the Risiera’s uniqueness, the law tacitly affirms the commonly held notion that the persecution of the Italian Jews and of anti-Fascists was carried out exclusively by the Nazis, and that the Risiera needs to be preserved as a memorial to the victimhood of the Italian people. It further seems to suggest that Fascist concentration camps are not worth preserving. Indeed, to my knowledge, not a single Fascist concentration camp site has received national monument status.

In 1966 the *Comune di Trieste* invited architects to submit designs for the newly declared Risiera memorial.273 The organizers chose their three favorite submissions and invited them to participate in a second round. The winner was announced in February 1969, it was the Triestine architect Romano Boico. Involved in the decision were the resistance organizations and the Comunità Ebraica. In accordance with Boico’s plan, the imprint of the crematorium and the chimney, the four central brick buildings that had housed the prisoners and the guards, as well as the garage were deemed “untouchable”—that is, they were to be conserved in a state as close to the original as possible. All the other buildings, most of them in disrepair, were torn down. Around the central cour-

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273 My brief overview of the creation of the Risiera memorial draws on the extensive analysis provided by Mucci, *Architettura.*
tyard and the smaller courtyard, Boico erected the 11m tall concrete walls that frame the Risiera. The courtyard was paved with sandstone slabs, and the imprint of the crematorium with steel. The ashes of the victims, recovered in 1945, were to be placed in the wall of the crematorium behind a grave stone. Boico conceived the walled-in courtyard as “una basilica laica a cielo aperto” [an open-air secular basilica] (Mucci 49). Moreover, the former garage was to be converted to a non-denominational chapel for the performance of Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish religious rites. Boico framed the entrance to the memorial with concrete walls, also 11m tall, 45m long, forming a narrow passageway a mere three meters wide. A disquieting and slowly darkening tunnel, the elongated entrance is conceived as a path that initiates the visitor, who passes from the streets of today’s industrial area to the spaces of the past. It is the only way in or out of the Risiera, and the black frame of a large open steel gate at its end suggests that, once it closes, there is no way out. The most important aspect of Boico’s original design was the complete “silence” in the memorial: there was not to be a single explanatory sign. The architectural space and the authentic structures were to speak entirely for themselves. Thus, Boico’s conceptualization of the Risiera as memorial rests on two aspects: on the transformative power of the authentic structures of confinement, torture, and mass murder, and on the placement of the recovered ashes as a sacred relic at the heart of the space. Even though most of the victims’ ashes had been disposed of in the sea, the Risiera was to be understood as a mass grave, a site of supreme sacrifice, and of
mourning.

This narrative of sacrifice was taken up by the press and by the speakers on the day of the memorial’s inauguration on April 24, 1975, a day before the thirtieth anniversary of the liberation of Italy. *Il Piccolo* wrote in emotional terms about the thousands of people from all parts of Italy who “intend to undertake pilgrimages on this occasion to the Risiera in order to pay homage to the martyrdom of the victims of Nazism which took place here in one of the darkest times in the history of this region.”

In his inauguration speech, the mayor of Trieste, Marcello Spaccini, declared: “this place is sacred [...] here thousands of men made the supreme sacrifice to safeguard the universal values of mankind” (Mucci 23). Italian president Giovanni Leone similarly emphasized that these victims were the founding fathers of the Italian Republic, which was born of their sacrifice. These speeches exclude any non-partisan victims of the Risiera in favor of inscribing it in a narrative of national sacrifice and redemption. The differences between racial and political persecution are erased, and it is suggested that the murders in the Risiera, including the murder of the Jews, served some greater purpose, namely, the liberation of Italy from the Nazi occupier. The fact that women and children were also among the Risiera’s victims is completely ignored. Furthermore, the role played by Communist partisans is suppressed. The architectural conception of the Risiera as a shrine lends itself to

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such readings of the dead on the one hand as fallen soldiers, whose glorification as war heroes is reminiscent of World War I memorials, and on the other as martyrs, whose remains become sacred relics. Re-conceived as a de-politicized, inter-faith site of mourning, the Risiera no longer belonged to the Communists. However, the complete lack of historical context and specificity, left the site open to re-politicization by the Italian resistance who appropriated the site for their narrative of anti-Communist and anti-Fascist liberation and sacrifice.275

The inauguration of the Risiera memorial inevitably also provided right-wing polemicists with an opportunity to bring the foibe back into public debate. When it was announced that the president would be attending the inauguration ceremony at the Risiera, there were calls in the media for him also to visit the Foiba di Basovizza, which he then did. Il Piccolo reported these two visits side by side on the same page—almost as a visual manifestation of the call-and-response mechanism I mentioned above (Viola 39). Until 1977, Il Piccolo was owned by Chino Alessi, the son of Rino Alessi, who had owned the newspaper during Fascism, and it maintained a conservative, right-wing, nationalist

275 Re-appropriations of sites of memory along political lines are of course not limited to the Risiera di San Sabba. The history of the memorial at Buchenwald, for example, tells a similar story. Located in what became the German Democratic Republic after the war, the site was initially designed to commemorate the heroic Communist struggle against Fascism, embodied in the figure of Ernst Thälmann. The historical exhibition made little or no mention of the non-Communist prisoners at the camp (Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Sinti and Romani), or of other relevant historical details such as the Hitler-Stalin pact or the fact that the Soviet forces used the abandoned structure as a “special camp.” Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was decided that the site and historical exhibition should be completely redesigned to emend these gaps. For more information on the site, see: http://www.buchenwald.de/ and also Young, Texture of Memory: 73–9.
stance. With a circulation of ca. 50,000—compared to the Christian Democratic Meridiano di Trieste’s 7,000—Il Piccolo was by far the largest local news daily in Trieste at the time and the main opinion-maker on the issue of the Risiera after the war (Viola 162).

The Risiera memorial would not remain the way Boico had conceived it for long. It soon became clear that the complexity of the story of the Risiera and of the memorial itself, which privileged silence over historical context, called for some kind of support for the visitors. Thus, measures were taken to provide the necessary explanations, against Boico’s wishes. In 1982, Elio Apih’s documentary exhibition was put up in the former garage, the space which Boico had reserved for quiet contemplation and religious rites. The exhibition, first mounted on moveable metal lattice screens in the middle of the room, later more permanently on the walls, completely changes the space. Its 50 panels, covered with many photographs, distract all the attention from the space itself, and the concrete altar and steel sculpture now seem out of place.

Then, in the 1990s, signs in several languages were put up throughout the memorial. The signs, however, do not quite fulfill their intended explanatory function since they provide no context and often consist of only a single word. Some of them explain the function of the buildings during the time the Nazis used them, such as “Cella della morte” (Death Cell) and “Celle” (Cells). Others, however, point towards the function of the buildings within the memorial complex, such as “Civico Museo della Risiera” (Risiera Civic Museum) and the “Sala delle commemorazioni” (Commemoration Room). The sign
“Sala delle Croci” (Hall of Crosses) neither explains what the Nazis used the building for, nor does it point to the building’s commemorative function. There is no indication of the origin of this name, but it probably derives from Boico’s design, which stripped the building of all the inner walls and ceilings in order to lay bare its cross beams. The Triestine Jewish community reacted strongly to the sign, claiming that its obvious Christian resonance marginalized the Jews who had been imprisoned in that very building prior to their deportation. As a result, the Jewish community was allotted a space in this room in which to exhibit personal objects that had belonged to Triestine Jews and had been confiscated by the Nazis. Since 2000, these objects have been on display in small glass shrines set in the north wall.  

In 2003, a glass vessel containing earth from Jerusalem was placed in a small glass case next to these objects. In return, the museum in Yad Vashem received earth from the Risiera and a stone from the building in which the Jews had been imprisoned (Monumento Nazionale 7). At the same time, the Risiera’s museum exhibition was expanded to include objects such as an urn containing ashes from Auschwitz and a prisoners’ uniform from an unspecified German concentration camp. The presence of these objects re-asserts the link between the Risiera and the broader history of the Holocaust. But they nevertheless diffuse the focus of the exhibition and can potentially cause uncertainty because they have no direct link to the site itself. For

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example, it is not made clear to the visitor that the prisoners in the Risiera were not forced to wear uniforms such as the one on display. Whilst some items in this exhibition serve as evidence of the crimes of the Risiera, such as, for example, the mace used to beat prisoners to death, these additional items serve a purely emblematic function. As a result, it is unclear whether the exhibition is about the Risiera or about the Holocaust.

These various additions and modifications have resulted in a kind of patchwork-character, but one that is completely different to the kind I described earlier with respect to the Grafeneck memorial. At Grafeneck the patchwork effect results from the fact that there is no overall memorial design and that each new addition stands as an art work of its own.277 At the Risiera, the effect is caused by the different stories which the additions and alterations tell about the site, but the resulting patchwork effect is politically rather than artistically motivated: the different additions to the Risiera memorial illustrate the continuous negotiations during which the different interest groups are assigned a certain amount of space. The different memorial plaques in the small courtyard are no doubt the best example of the effect I am describing. Arranged like patches next to each other on the grey concrete surface, they each commemorate a different group of victims—the

277 At Grafeneck, most of the additions to the memorial complex are independent art works, which do not attempt to add any information or context. Furthermore, there are no original objects exhibited at Grafeneck, such as personal items, torture instruments, or articles of clothing. No such items were found at Grafeneck, and the exhibition deliberately avoids displaying original artifacts, including documents and photographs. Even the reproductions of documents and the photos of perpetrators or victims are deliberately cropped, blown up, or shown only in part. This is to avoid any possible fetishization of objects pertaining to the crimes.
Triestine women, the Jewish victims, the partisans, etc, and each of them demarcates and labels the space, adding on to the others. These multiple voices serve as supplements to the narrative of the site’s history presented elsewhere, revealing the incomplete and insufficient nature of that narrative, but without the necessary context the visitor is ultimately left disoriented and confused by these disparate utterances instead of gleaning from them a more complete picture of the site’s history and significance.

The Risiera Trial

In 1965, at the same time as the Risiera was declared national monument, a series of trials were opened in West Germany against the members of the Einsatzkommando Reinhard, regarding their crimes in Poland. In the course of the investigation, the crimes of the Risiera were discussed and the German court contacted several Triestine survivor organizations as well as the local court to request information and to interview witnesses. Thus, the Triestine court was more or less forced to open an investigation of its own. The political climate in the region was still extremely tense, and it took ten more years and many legal hurdles before the trial could begin in 1976.\textsuperscript{278} The trial opened only a few months year after the controversial Treaty of Osimo was signed, making Ita-

\textsuperscript{278} For extensive and detailed analyses of the investigation, the legal and political problems concerning the trial, and accounts of the trial in general see Coslovich, “Processo”; Fogar, “L’occupazione”: 106-18; Scalpelli, ed., San Sabha; Zidar, “Squadismo”; Sergio Kostoris, La Risiera di Trieste. Un crimine comune non militare (Rome: Barulli, 1974) and Contro Joseph Oberhauser. Processo al nazismo per i crimini della Risiera di Trieste (Trieste: CLUET, 1978).
ly’s loss of Istria official. The question of the border was solved but the political controversies continued. As Fogar clearly shows, the trial gave rise to heated public debates, especially among those Triestines who did not want to revisit a past that could potentially incriminate large parts of the population. The fact that Istria was now lost to Yugoslavia also fuelled the fears of the “Communist threat” on both sides of the border. *Il Piccolo* published letters written by outraged citizens who demanded a trial about the foibe massacres. In these letters, the foibe were used as leverage against the crimes of the Risiera, relativizing its 5,000 victims with the overblown number of 20–30,000 infoibati, and thus presenting Communism as far worse than Nazism—and Fascism.279

The trial, led by judge Sergio Serbo, was a farce. Serbo refused to follow the guidelines for crimes against humanity established by the Nuremberg trials. Instead he separated the crimes against the Jews and other “innocent victims” from those against Yugoslav partisans engaged in the fight against the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) and the German occupiers, whom were called the “non-innocent victims.” Only the crimes against the Jews and individual acts of violence unrelated to military orders were prosecuted, whereas all the “non-innocent” victims were to be seen as implicated in “attività militari o politiche perseguibili dalle leggi di guerra” [military or political activities punishable by the laws of war] and thus excluded from the proceedings (Fogar

279 Fogar, “L’occupazione”: 113-4. Besides these polemics and debates in the press, Fogar also lists several bomb attacks carried out by Fascists against Communist, Slovene, and workers’ organizations.
“L’occupazione” 115). Furthermore, there was no investigation into local collaboration. Even though a large amount of documentary material was collected, lists of victims, survivors, and perpetrators were compiled (among them, for example, a list of 122 Italian SS who had worked at the Risiera) and 210 witnesses, among them many survivors, testified to the atrocities, the Italians, Slovenes, and Croats who had helped to keep the Risiera up and running were not discussed. According to judge Serbo, the RSI had nothing to do with the persecutions and deportations in Venezia Giulia; the acts of violence that did involve Italians had been random and infrequent and had been carried out only by the lowest level of the police force or other organizations. The responsibility of Fascism, and the violent oppression of the Slovene and Croat population during the Fascist ventennio was never mentioned. In the end, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Risiera’s second Kommandant, Josef Oberhauser, was the only perpetrator to be prosecuted. The exclusion of the majority of the Risiera’s victims meant that the Risiera was treated merely as a transit camp for the Jews who were killed elsewhere. The role of the Italian resistance movement in the fight against the Fascists and the Nazis was minimized. Furthermore, a distinct anti-Slav and anti-Communist tone emerged from the trial. Judge Serbo himself argued that the violence during the German occupation was aggravated by the actions of the Yugoslav liberation movement, thus suggesting that the partisans were responsible for the fierce reprisals and the killing of civilians. The magistrate, Domenico Maltese, openly made the connection to the foibe massacres, when he pre-
presented the “non-innocent” Yugoslav partisans as complicit in crimes against Italians, adding that shortly after the end of the Nazi occupation, “la città sarebbe stata ancora una volta, e in modo non meno esecrando, tragicamente insanguinata” (Zidar 177; Sluga “Risiera” 407). Even though the trial brought the crimes committed at the Risiera to the public’s attention, a reflection on the Fascist past and the broader context of these crimes never took place. Enzo Collotti writes:

> Trieste, la città, ha isolato il processo, si è rifiutata di fare quella riflessione su se stessa, sul proprio passato e quindi inevitabile anche sul proprio presente e sul proprio futuro, che era indissociabilmente legata a un processo come quello della Risiera.\(^{280}\)

In the end, the trial had not only failed to give a complete picture of the story of the Risiera and its context, its judges had also given in to the anti-“Slav” and anti-Communist reflex and aligned the *foibe* with the Risiera. Along the same lines, the local press had focused almost exclusively on the Nazis, portraying them as a “band of desperados,” “barbarians,” or “degenerates,” had not given any historical background information about the German occupation or the war, and instead had given a lot of room to letters or commentaries on the necessity of a trial regarding the crimes committed at the *foibe* (Viola 55–105). In the months and years following the trial, public debates about the necessity of a *foibe* trial as well as the desired elevation of the Foiba di Basovizza to the sta-

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\(^{280}\) “Trieste, the city, isolated the trial, refused to reflect on itself, on its own past, and thus inevitably also on its own present and future, which was inextricably linked to a trial such as that of the Risiera.” Enzo Collotti, “La sentenza giudicata,” *San Sabba. Istruttoria e processo per il lager della Risiera*, ed. Adolfo Scalpelli, (Trieste: ANED-Edizioni Lint, 1988): 230.
tus of a National Monument flared up at regular intervals (110–14).

**Visiting the Risiera Today**

After the trial was over and the memorial had been officially inaugurated, another extended period of silence about the Risiera followed. It seems as if the city had a great desire for closure after the long and divisive decade during which the trial had been prepared and the memorial had been built. Two major historical works about the Risiera were published in the decade after the trial—Ferruccio Fölkel's *La Risiera di San Sabba. L'holocausto dimenticato* in 1979 and the volume *San Sabba. Istruttoria e processo per il Lager della Risiera* in 1988. However, the decades after the trial also mark the beginning of a series of negationist publications about the Risiera by authors such as Pier Arrigo Carnier, Carlo Mattogno, and, more recently, Arrigo Petacco and Luigi Papo.281

After its completion, the Risiera memorial was incorporated into the administrative system of the Musei Civici of the city of Trieste. This meant not only that the Risiera

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281 Carnier argues that there were no mass killings at the Risiera and that the crematorium was installed only in order to burn the corpses of prisoners who had died a natural death, whereas Mattogno presents the Risiera as a lie cooked up by the Jewish propaganda machine. He focuses on finding errors in Ferruccio Fölkel's study on the Risiera. In his slightly more nuanced book, Papo illustrates how the historical sources contradict each other in many respects and uses these insecurities to undermine the sources. Pier Arrigo Carnier, *Lo sterminio mancato. La dominazione nazista nel Veneto orientale 1943–1945* (Milano: Mursia, 1982) See also Carlo Mattogno, *La Risiera di San Sabba. Un falso grossolano* (Monfalcone: Sentinella d'Italia, 1985); Arrigo Petacco, *L'esodo: la tragedia negata degli italiani d'Istria, Dalmazia e Venezia Giulia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999); Luigi Papo, *La Risiera di San Sabba di Trieste* (Roma: Settimo sigillo, 2009). On the issue of revisionism see also Tristano Matta, “La Risiera tra revisionismo e relativizzazioni,” *Capire la Risiera. A Trieste un Lager italiano nel sistema nazista*, eds. Tristano Matta and Sergio Zucca, (Trieste: Civici Musei di Storia ed Arte, 1996).
was one museum among many others the city had to administrate and finance, but also that it did not have a special curator. Boico, the architect, died in 1985. The Risiera Commissione, founded in 1968 for the memorial design competition and consisting of several historians and the presidents of the various Italian partisan, Jewish, and survivor organizations, has a merely consultative function. In 1986, historian Galliano Fogar wrote a polemical article in the IRSML’s history journal Qualestoria, entitled “La Risiera-sepolcro. Breve storia di un lungo abbandono,” in which he brought forth two main complaints, both of which had to do with the fact that the memorial did not have enough funding. Since the Risiera was conceived of as a site of mourning and a grave, there were no entry fees for the visitors. Thus, money was relatively limited and the Risiera depended on funds from the city, the region, the state, and on donations. Besides criticizing the lack of funding for the training of tour guides, Fogar addressed the structural problems at the Risiera itself, for example the lack of a large enough conference room to accommodate groups of visitors or scholars, the absence of a heating system at the Risiera to make the offices and the small meeting room usable during the winter, the fact that there were no microphones, nor an efficient way to distribute and re-print the exhibition catalogue and booklet. The Risiera, Fogar claimed, was leading a marginal existence in Trieste, not only geographically, but also on an administrative and a cultural level, not to speak of its educative role as a memorial. The local population more or less ignored the Risiera, he continued, except for April 25, when a small crowd of people
would come to the commemorative events and celebrations on Liberation Day. Fogar wrote:

La Risiera [...] è rimasta fino ad oggi un luogo esclusivamente riservato ai sempre più stanchi e ripetitivi riti celebrativi ufficiali che vi si svolgono una o due volte all’anno con l’immancabile schieramento di autorità pronuncianti discorsi che, tolte rare eccezioni, brillano spesso per retorico spreco di universalì principî (libertà, giustizia, pace terrestre e celeste ecc.) che calano come una pioggia uggiosa sui presentì, sui superstiti, sui parenti delle vittime. Seppelliti ancora una volta i morti, esauriti i riti d’obbligo, tutto poi torna allo “squallore” di sempre. La Risiera deve essere lasciata ai morti, tenuta fuori dalla storia reale, dalle vicende complesse e tragiche che produssero il Lager: una Risiera-sepolcro.282

What has changed since? In the 1990’s, the space of the memorial was opened to cultural events that were supposed to encourage the Triestines to come to the Risiera. Art and documentary exhibitions were displayed, and musical or theatrical performances were organized, for example the opera Brundibár, composed by the Bohemian musician Hans Krása, who was killed at Auschwitz, and a scenic reading of I me ciamava per nome: 44.787, a play about the deportation of Italian Jews, based on historical materials and testimonies, and produced by Triestine director Renato Sarti.283 These events succeeded

282 “The Risiera [...] to this day is a place reserved exclusively for the ever more tired and repetitive official ceremonies carried out there once or twice a year with the inevitable selection of authorities intoning speeches which, with a few rare exceptions, are often full of rhetorical uses of universal principles (liberty, justice, peace on earth and in heaven, etc.) that fall like a dull rain on those present, on the survivors and relatives of the victims. Once more the dead are laid to rest, and once the obligatory rites have been carried out, everything returns to the usual ‘squalor.’ The Risiera should be left to the dead, kept separate from the real history, from the complicated and tragic events which produced the camp: a Risiera tomb.” Galliano Fogar, “La Risiera-sepolcro. Breve storia di un lungo abbandono,” Quaestoria 14.3 (1986): 107–8.

283 Sarti’s play, staged on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the liberation in July 1995, was a great success and seen by more than four thousand people. Consisting of historical, documentary, and testimony material in Italian, Slovene, Croat and Hebrew, it provides not only a comprehensive introduction to the
temporarily in attracting more local visitors. As I discuss in the next chapter, Sarti’s play addresses questions of collaboration and Italian guilt, but otherwise these events focused almost exclusively on Auschwitz and the Holocaust in Germany.

In addition, a few general improvements were made between 1993 and 1995, for example a multilingual booklet to accompany the exhibition, which gives historical context information as well as basic explanations of the memorial complex, or the multilingual educational film La Risiera di San Sabba, which is screened upon request. For the first time, the Risiera memorial was listed in guide books distributed by the Triestine tourist information, and signs were put up in the city center which guide drivers from outside the city to the site. During the 1990s, the number of visitors reached a new high of up to 50,000 per year (Matta “Luogo della memoria” 516–7). A firm selling household goods caused a scandal in 1994, when they organized group excursions to the Risiera that were used for the promotion of their linens. Nonetheless, among the local population, the Risiera was still considered a site that was ultimately extraneous to the city’s everyday life. In May 2004, the moderate daily Trieste Oggi published a survey it had conducted among Triestine high-school children, asking them about the Risiera memorial and museum. Only five per cent had visited the memorial, and most of the children did not even know what the Risiera was (Viola 142).

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[142] crimes of Fascism and Nazism in the region, but also the personal stories of several of the Risiera’s victims. I discuss the play in more detail in chapter five.
Over the past decade, things seem to have changed. Today, the Risiera has more than 100,000 visitors a year, 50–60% of whom are school groups. They come mostly from Northern Italy (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia Romagna), but there are groups from other regions, who usually come on a four to five day trip with several teachers, stay in Trieste and visit other historical sites, including, of course, the Foiba di Basovizza. Thus, most of the Risiera’s visitors are between 12 and 18 years old. Among the remaining 40% are groups of adults (seniors, parish groups, etc.), families, and individual visitors, most of whom come to the commemorative ceremonies on January 27 and on April 25. Francesco Fait, one of the Risiera’s historians, explains that in the months of April and May, the memorial provides free guided tours for school classes (during the other months a tour costs €2.70 per student), as a result of which most of the groups come in these two months, and the guides at the Risiera cannot accommodate all the students.\footnote{The historically trained Risiera guides, Francesco Fait told me, are not the only guides who give tours in the memorial. Often, school teachers lead the classes by themselves, or tourist guides include the Risiera as one item on their list of cultural and historical sites. The problems with such guides, Fait explained, are that they are not necessarily able to give a nuanced picture of the events at the Risiera and are not in a position to answer detailed questions. (Personal interview, 25 May 2010).} The tours with the Risiera’s historians take one hour. At the beginning, the guide quickly assesses the level of historical knowledge of the group and then gives a brief introduction to the site and its history. Because the space itself does not easily tell its story, the guides explain what the Risiera used to look like, what it was used for before the Nazis came, and what the Nazis used it for. Usually, there is not
enough time in an hour-long tour to discuss the historical background at length or to go through the long documentary exhibition, which has remained unchanged since the update in 1998.

The multilingual documentary film is shown upon request, but many classes do not have enough time for the 26 minute long screening, nor is there enough space to seat more than 20 people in front of the TV screens. Directed by Gianfranco Rados and Piero Pieri in 1994 and awarded a national prize for video productions, La Risiera di San Sabba was advised by the local historians Elio Apih, Marco Coslovich, and Giampaolo Valdevit. Along the lines of the documentary exhibition, the film focuses on the Nazi persecution of the Jews and gives minimal explanation of the historical background of Nazism and anti-Semitism, and basically no information on Italian Fascism and the pre-1943 history of the region. The film begins with an ominous tracking shot through the Risiera memorial, explaining that this place has witnessed the worst crimes. It then switches immediately to original footage of Nazi rallies, Hitler, and the concentration camps in Germany and Poland, followed by a long section that illustrates the rapid spreading of the Nazi ideology in Germany. After about six minutes, the film shifts its focus to Italy and Trieste with the following remark: “after the disastrous adventurism of Mussolini, Italy withdrew from the war, and German troops moved in.”

Trieste, the narrator explains, was “an environment more amenable” to the ideology of the Nazis

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285 All quotations from La Risiera di San Sabba (dirs. Gianfranco Rados and Piero Pieri, 1994).
than elsewhere. A brief description of the Fascist race laws ("which aped their German counterpart") is given, and photos are shown of the destruction of the Triestine synagogue in 1941. This is followed by interviews with Apih and three Risiera survivors, who describe the atrocious conditions and what they saw and heard during their imprisonment. A long sequence about the Nazi perpetrators and original footage from Auschwitz is shown to illustrate what happened to the Jewish prisoners after their deportation from Trieste. There are two sentences in the film about local collaboration:

The Risiera was [...] within city limits. And rumors spread as to what went on there. From this it can be deduced that the Nazis enjoyed a wide band of support and silence in Trieste, in some ways an accomplice. They were backed by organs of the repressive Fascist organizations [...] and by a wide network of informers who vied with the Nazis in terms of atrocities.

Apih narrates the events at the end of the war in slightly different terms than the documentary exhibition. He explains that the national Italian resistance, worried by Yugoslav annexation plans, found themselves in a difficult situation, which accounts for the wait-and-see-politics adopted in Trieste. Interestingly, there is no mention any more of the Triestine uprising conducted by the CLN that liberated the city before the Yugoslavs came; instead, he argues that the CLN waited and hoped for the Allies to arrive first. The film ends with a brief overview of the Risiera trial (without mentioning its shortcomings) and a warning about the slow and "uncertain march towards democracy. To be aware of this is therefore the real basis from which to look to a future of greater and more solid democratization."
No connection is made in the film between the crimes of the past and the problems in today’s society. It remains unclear what relevance the events at the Risiera can have for our lives today. The post-war history of the Risiera is left out entirely, as is a reflection on the struggles and difficulties connected to the Risiera’s memory. This complete lack of self-reflection is also a problem of the memorial itself, not only of the film. The site is successful in eliciting an empathetic response in the visitors, but in-depth pedagogical work or following-up does not take place there, for several reasons. Firstly, a longer stay at the memorial is not possible, since there is no room for any kind of workshop or seminar; secondly, there is no library which would provide impulses for further reading, and thirdly, the site itself and its educative materials such as the exhibition and the film, do not give visitors any points of departure for a reflection on discrimination, racism, and civic engagement. Without a guide or a teacher who prepares the visitors and knows how to make connections between the past and today, the Risiera’s relevance for today is lost on the visitors.

Civic education also seems of little interest during the two memorial days at the Risiera. January 27 and April 25 still have essentially the same ceremony, during which there are speeches by state and local government officials as well as by representatives of the various partisan and survivor organizations, the celebration of religious rites, and
the inauguration of a new art exhibition.286 The only way the younger generations and students are included is via the readings from diaries or testimonies of survivors at the end of the ceremony.287 Everything is focused only on these two days, Fait says, and all the events happen at the same time, and so the people have to choose where to go and what to see. In general, the ceremony on April 25 is the better attended, for the simple reason that Trieste in January is extremely cold, and given the lack of an indoor venue, not many people brave the elements to come to the Giorno della memoria.

Unlike Germany, Italy has no official network of sites of memory. Thus, the Risiera does not cooperate with other sites of memory in Italy or abroad. There are loose contacts to and exchanges with a few sites. For example, in 2004–2005, the Risiera hosted the exhibition “From the Ashes of Sobibor.” Three mobile versions of the Risiera’s documentary exhibition travel to different sites or museums in Italy and abroad.

The problems Fogar addressed in his article in 1986 have not really gone away. State and city funding for the Risiera has been cut repeatedly. There is still no heating system and there are still no microphones, the multilingual booklet has been out of print

286 Only recently, the ceremony has become bilingual. In 2003, a simultaneous translation of the mayor’s speech into Slovene was approved after furious protests by the right-wing Triestine Alleanza Nazionale who oppose bilingualism in the city. For a discussion of the controversy see Elisa Briante, “Memoria collettiva e olocausto. La Risiera di S. Sabba,” 2003.

287 As already mentioned in the previous chapter, a nationwide art competition called “I giovani incontrano la Shoah” was introduced in recent years in connection with the Giorno della memoria which encourages students to engage with the topic creatively. However, the student’s projects are generally not included in the ceremony at the Risiera.
for a while, and the few cultural events for the local community have not become a staple in the city’s social calendar. Historian Tristano Matta explains that to a large degree, this has to do with the political changes of the centre-right government with regard to cultural politics in general and sites of memory in particular. In Trieste, the last three assessori della cultura, who are in charge of the museums, were members of the now dissolved post-Fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano, which explains why less money was set aside for the Risiera and more went towards the Foiba di Basovizza memorial.288 The Risiera was intended to be an active memorial, a center for education, cultural events, exhibitions, conferences, and research. But in order to be such a site, it would have to give up its status as a shrine to the heroes of the liberation movement. It would need to create a space for educational activities. A conference room or two which are big enough to accommodate larger groups, a library, etc. In short, not only the content but also the infrastructure needs improvement. The documentary exhibition would have to be updated to present a more nuanced narrative that discerns between the different types of persecution in the region before, during, and after the German occupation. Most importantly, however, the exhibition would have to include a level of self-reflection, perhaps an overview of the post-war struggles for memory and commemoration, perhaps a discussion of the role authentic sites of memory play in today’s society.

288 Tristano Matta (personal interview, 16 June 2010).
The Foiba di Basovizza

About a five minute drive from Trieste, up on the carso and in the midst of scenic hiking paths, lies the Foiba di Basovizza, the central site of commemoration for all the victims of the foibe killings in the region between 1943 and 1945. Unlike most of the other foibe, which are natural sinkholes created by water erosion, the one at Basovizza is actually the shaft of an abandoned coal mine, more than 250 meters deep, excavated between 1901 and 1908. Thus, in the case of Basovizza, the term foiba is actually misleading, and historians prefer to use the term pozzo (pit, well, or mine shaft). As various historical records and testimonies indicate, the mine shaft was used for the disposal of all kinds of refuse in the years after it was abandoned, and in the early 1940s it was also used to dispose of the bodies of adversaries by the Fascists and Nazis (Cernigoi 165–6). None of this is mentioned in the documentary exhibition at the memorial, which begins its narrative in 1945, with the last days of the war, when Basovizza was at the center of the combat between the Yugoslav liberation army and the Germans, who were retreating from Trieste.289 After the end of the battle, the locals cleaned up the bodies, horse carcasses, and ammunition by throwing everything into the shaft. What exactly happened during the brief Yugoslav occupation of Trieste and its surroundings is entirely unclear to this day. The exhibition cites a number of newspaper reports to support its claim that, be-

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sides German and Italian soldiers, hundreds of civilians were executed at the site in early May and that their bodies were disposed of in the mine shaft. In the months after the end of the war, several attempts were made by the Allied and Italian information services to exhume and count the bodies and collect information about the executions, but to no avail. In this context, several “secret” reports, newspaper articles, and eyewitness accounts are mentioned, but no precise information on the actual number of victims is given. Large reproductions of photographs of corpses and coffins serve to illustrate the exhumation attempts, but, upon a closer look at the captions, they all turn out to be victims from other foibe and not from the mine shaft at Basovizza.

The next section of the exhibition is concerned with the commemoration and memorialization at the site. In May 1959, the Italian war graves commission (Commissariato generale onoranze ai caduti in guerra) authorized the mine shaft to be covered
with a removable concrete slab to prevent further garbage disposal but to allow possible excavations. In November of the same year, a memorial service was held during which the Bishop of Trieste, Antonio Santin, read a prayer that he had written for the victims of the *foibe*. In the months that followed, a stone plaque with a large cross and a passage from Santin’s prayer engraved was placed next to the shaft. Next to the prayer, another stone marker was erected displaying a cross-section of the shaft with a hypothetical layering of its contents: detritus and cannons from WWI on the bottom, then a layer of ammunition from the battles in 1945, then “ca. 500 cubic meters” of corpses, and finally a layer of various objects disposed of there in the decade after the end of WWII. Over the years, more and more stone markers have been added to the site. After repeated appeals from the various Istrian and Dalmatian exile organizations and the Italian nationalist Lega Nazionale, Basovizza was first pronounced “Monument of National Interest” in 1980 and then National Monument in 1992. Since then, the site has undergone a major re-vamping by the architect Ennio Cervi and the artist Livio Schiozzi. A documentation center with the exhibition was built in the right-hand corner near the entrance, and

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290 Cernigoi points out that the inscription on the stone was changed several times. According to the inscription in 1996, the shaft was 500 meters deep, with “300 m³ di infoibati.” In 1997, however, the shaft was suddenly only 256 meters deep with “500 m³ di infoibati.” This latter inscription is still there today. Claudia Cernigoi, *Operazione “Foibe” tra storia e mito* (Udine: Kappa, 2005): 206.

291 The very short decree does not contain an explanation of what the Foiba di Basovizza is or why it is of national relevance: “Con decreto del presidente della Repubblica 11 settembre 1992, su proposta del ministro per i beni culturali e ambientali, la Foiba di Basovizza, in Trieste, è stata dichiarata monumento nazionale.” (Parlato, et al., *Foiba di Basovizza*: 25)
the concrete slab covering the shaft was clothed with a metal sheath, next to which a steel sculpture with a large cross on the top meant to echo the crane structures used for the exploration of the *foibe*.

The largest portion of the exhibition (seven panels) is dedicated to the historical context of the events, and it begins in 1943 with the first series of *foibe* killings in Istria. During its attempt to annex Istria, the Yugoslav liberation army killed “exponents of the Fascist regime and the Fascist party, representatives of the Italian State, company directors, and, more generally, the most representative figures of the Italian communities.” The acts of violence carried out by the Yugoslavs are described as characteristic of a “pre-modern” type of violence: the burning down of buildings and villages, lynchings, rapes, and *infoi-
bamento. The historical narrative continues with the race between the Yugoslav army and the Allies to liberate Trieste in the spring of 1945. An entire panel is dedicated to the Trieste uprising on April 30, 1945: isolated from the CLN in the rest of northern Italy and unable to unite with the communist partisans because of their pro-Yugoslav stance, the Triestine CLN decided to free the city without help and thus be able to claim it for Italy. They occupied the city’s major public buildings, including the town hall, but had to give way to the Yugoslavs the next day. The emphasis on the role of the CLN is an interesting point of intersection between the two exhibitions at Basovizza and at the Risiera. The narratives at both sites depend on a de-legitimization of the Yugoslav liberation movement: at Basovizza in order to cast the Yugoslavs as cruel occupiers, and at the Risiera, to keep up the narrative of heroic sacrifice that gives birth to the new Italy. At Basovizza, a long description of the deportations and executions that occurred during the forty days of Yugoslav rule in Trieste presents the Yugoslav army as on par with the Nazis: a process of violent purging began, during which all those who were “enemies of the people,” tens of thousands of Italians, were killed or deported on “death marches” to the “concentration camps” near Ljubljana (Parlato et al. 44–51).

The penultimate panel returns to the important question of how many were killed. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, the narrative continues, evidence was found in Slovene territory of more than 2,000 “cavities or mass graves used to hide tens of thousands of victims of Tito’s violent seizure of power in 1945” (60). The dis-
course on the foibe almost exclusively revolves around the number of victims because on it depends not only the historical relevance of the killings (and, of course, the genocide theory), but also the degree of attention in the media and the public. The journalist Claudia Cernigoi is among those who have questioned the number of victims reported at Basovizza. In her recent book, Operazione “Foibe” tra storia e mito, she calls into question whether the Foiba di Basovizza was ever the site of mass executions. Quoting extensively from newspaper articles and reports between 1945 and 1995, she illustrates how the number of victims reported has grown exponentially from eighteen to more than 3,000, even though a complete excavation of the shaft never took place (Cernigoi 190).

The doubts and insecurities about the victims of Basovizza raise questions about the memorial: Why choose a site which is not a “true” foiba as the central site of commemoration of all the foibe killings? With its many different memorial stones, all essentially commemorating the same group of victims, and with the prayers written for the
occasion, the photos depicting other sites, the memorial at Basovizza is a site of constructed memory that has been created around a mine shaft that may in fact not contain any bodies at all. It seems as if its proximity to Trieste was a determining factor in the decision, since the documentary exhibition makes explicit reference to the Risiera in its last panel. On this panel, which zooms out of the narrow historical focus of the years between 1943 and 1945 to provide the larger historical context, the pre-WWII history of the region is presented as one of repeated occupation and constant battle between the Italians and the Slovenes and Croats in the region, followed by the violent Nazi occupation, of which the Risiera is the most prominent example: “following the armistice of 8 September 1943 and the first persecutions of Italians in Istria, the German occupation of the Julian March gave rise to [ha prodotto] the Risiera di San Sabba” (Parlato et al. 65). Putting the “persecutions” of the Istrian Italians side by side with the Risiera, the narrative presents these two different events as two sides of the same coin. In this sweeping overview, the region becomes a “laboratory” of 20th century history, of contrasti nazionali intrecciatì a conflitti sociali; guerre di massa; effetti imprevisti della dissoluzione degli imperi plurinazionali; affermarsi di regimi antidemocratici impegnati ad imporre le loro pretese totalitarie su di una società locale profondamente divisa; scatenamento delle persecuzioni razziali e creazione dell’ “universo concentrazionario”; trasferimenti forzati di popolazione capaci di modificare irreversibilmente la configurazione nazionale di un territorio; persecuzioni religiose in nome dell’ateismo di stato; conflittualità est-ovest lungo una delle frontiere della Guerra fredda. Una sintesi, insomma, delle grandi tragedie del secolo scorso.292 (65–67)

292 “[...] complex national and social conflicts; mass warfare; unforeseen effects of the dissolution of multi-
On the surface, all of these statements are indisputable. But what emerges from them is a narrative of an Italian population that has had to endure a series of occupations by external forces, including—depending on how one interprets the “regimi antidemocratici”—the Fascists themselves. The litany of 20th century tragedies—two World Wars, the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, the rise of totalitarianism, the Holocaust, the Istrian exodus, Communism and the Cold War—which have befallen the region and into which the foibe are inscribed, implicitly places them all on the same level. And it is here that the ever-growing number of victims buried in the foibe begins to assert itself. In order to qualify as the “Italian tragedy,” its victims must rival those of the other tragedies in number; particularly, of course, those of the Risiera, Basovizza’s direct competitor. We may never know how many died in the foibe. In fact, this does not appear to be a priority at Basovizza. Beyond the possible danger of unexploded ordinance among the detritus, there may also be concern that a real archeological excavation of these sites would confirm the low estimates that some historians have put forward. In any case, Basovizza is not so much about the past as about the present. On a deeper level, the grand historical sweep of the exhibition’s final panel paints a picture of Trieste as the staging ground of Italian national identity, a process which the memorial itself is engaged in.

national empires; the rise of anti-democratic regimes intent on imposing their totalitarian demands on a deeply divided local society; the unleashing of racial persecutions and the creation of the ‘universe of the concentration camp’; deportations that irreversibly changed the national make-up of the region; religious persecution in the name of state atheism; East–West conflicts along one of the fronts of the Cold War. A synthesis, in short, of the great tragedies of the past century.”
Trieste's role in the Cold War is crucial to understanding how its memory has developed. The Allied Military Government took pains to present their occupation as a liberation that had been prepared from within by the partisan movement. Liberated from Fascism and Nazism, the goal in the nascent Cold War was to protect Italy from Communism. The perceived Communist threat was especially pressing in Trieste, a city whose nationality hung in the balance for almost a decade after the end of the war. The Allied administration tried to create a climate in which the seeds of anti-Communist and thus also anti-Yugoslav sentiment could grow. This meant not prosecuting war criminals and collaborators to the full extent. After a perfunctory de-fascistization everyone who was not a Communist was aligned with the partisans. A process akin to the German Vergangenheitsbewältigung, of coming to terms with the Fascist past, was significantly delayed and limited to certain academic circles. The narrative of a victimized country that liberated itself became the founding myth of the new republic, and both the Risiera and
the Foiba di Basovizza exemplify this conception of history through their disavowal of Fascist crimes. But the rivalry between them reveals how Italian history and identity are still being re-negotiated and re-asserted. Which of these monuments should represent the Italian tragedy? And what was the Italian tragedy? The two commemorative days discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the *Giorno della memoria* and the *Giorno del ricordo*, are in their own way, attempts to answer this question. The *Giorno della memoria* is an international event dedicated to the victims of the Shoah and in Italy it commemorates the tragedy of the Jews who were deported by the Nazis and those Italians who were imprisoned for helping the Jews. The *Giorno del ricordo* on the other hand commemorates the “tragedia degli italiani,” the tragedy that befell Italians for the simple reason that they were Italian. Echoing not only the name of the earlier commemorative day, the rhetoric of the *Giorno del ricordo* also appropriates its vocabulary in order to cast the *foibe* killings as an act of attempted genocide. Furthermore, as the journalist Paolo Rumiz observed on the occasion of the 2009 *Giorno del ricordo*, Italy is “the only European country that has two whole days dedicated to memory. And we are also the only country that makes use of them not to ask forgiveness but rather to demand apologies from others.”

Trieste plays a key role in this struggle over the legitimate Italian tragedy: the Risiera was the Germans’ fault and the *foibe* that of the Yugoslavs. In simply

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reaffirming the guilt of the others, the two commemorative days run the risk of becoming empty celebrations of auto-exculpation.

The Parco della Rimembranza

High up on the Colle di San Giusto in Trieste’s historic center, a similarly sweeping view of the city’s history presents itself like an open book to the visitor. Past the ruins of a Roman amphitheater, a path leads me up the steep hill to the remains of a Roman temple next to the medieval church of San Giusto and to the adjoining medieval castle. The view of the city down below and the Triestine gulf is breathtaking. Now, in May, everything is green and blooming, the sun is shining, and small groups of tourists are strolling around and looking at the Roman ruins and visiting the church and castle. A few stand in front of an oversized bronze sculpture that commemorates the fallen of World War I. Erected in 1934, the neo-classicist sculpture shows four naked warriors carrying a wounded comrade. The sheer size of the shining bronze figures creates a striking contrast to the remains of the Roman forum and temple adjacent to it. A path leads away from the Monumento ai caduti to the Parco della rimembranza on the western side of the hill. The path is lined by many different memorial stones from the post-WWII-period, commemorating the city’s sapper squad, the fallen of the guardia civica, including a stone placed by the war orphans’ association, among many others. The seemingly ran-
dom collection of commemorative stones continues in the Parco della rimembranza: scattered in the grass and under the trees all over the park and along the paths are countless stones, most of them rough-hewn limestone rocks, with names and dates inscribed on them in red letters. Some of the stones honor Italian soldiers killed in the First World War, but most commemorate those killed in the Second. Many have plastic flowers or laurel wreaths placed on or next to them. A considerable number of these stones commemorate Italian anti-fascists who were killed in German concentration camps such as Dachau or Mauthausen, and a few name the Risiera as place of death. Others read simply: “Fucilato dai tedeschi” [shot by the Germans] or “Disperso in mare” [lost at sea].

The park has the aura of a cemetery, a place where the families of those who died in combat, in concentration camps, or were lost at sea, can go to mourn their loved ones. The peaceful atmosphere is reinforced by the lack of explanatory signs: the stones speak for themselves.

At the center of the park there is an oval clearing with a long, curved stone bench along one side. On the other side, there is a bronze sculpture of three female figures, their arms raised in a gesture of mourning. Behind them stands a large, rectangular stone slab, with the inscription: “Ai martiri delle foibe.” Several large laurel wreaths have been placed here, which by now, in mid-May, are withered and dry. One of the wreaths bears a ribbon that reads: “L’unione degli Istriani e la Lega Nazionale ai martiri delle Foibe e alle vittime della pulizia etnica.” The path leading away from this clearing in either
direction toward the park’s exits is called the Viale Martiri delle Foibe.

The Parco della rimembranza is a Fascist creation. It was inaugurated on May 24th, 1925 to honor the fallen soldiers of the Great War, and as part of the Fascist redesign of Trieste’s city center. The area of the park and its surroundings used to be the Jewish Ghetto, which was razed in the 1920s, to make way for the new grandiose plans for the city center. During the demolition of the ghetto, the ruins of the Roman amphitheater were uncovered; they were excavated and celebrated as important proof of Trieste’s Roman and Italian heritage. Further up the Via del Monte was the old Jewish cemetery, established in 1446, which was likewise removed to make room for the Parco della rimembranza. Thousands took part in a procession that led from Piazza San Giovanni to the top of the Colle di San Giusto to inaugurate the Parco. Each fallen soldier was commemorated with a tree and a stone, and each tree was planted by a schoolchild. The
idea of planting commemorative trees was received enthusiastically by the public. Il Piccolo praised the idea of consigning the memory of the fallen to living trees rather than to cold marble stones. The first tree was dedicated to Guglielmo Oberdan, the Triestine irredentist who was executed after a failed attempt to assassinate Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph in 1882. A martyr for the Italian unification, Oberdan’s memory was cultivated during Fascism. In 1938, a large marble fountain, in the shape of an obelisk, was placed at the other end of the park, at the top of the steps leading back into town, in honor of Mussolini’s visit to the city, on which occasion he also proclaimed the Fascist race laws.

After the end of the war, the park continued to grow. Memorial stones are now scattered all over the West side of the hill, all the way up to the castle and the Monumento ai caduti. The hill and the park are ideal spots for tourists to enjoy the view of to visit the castle and the cathedral. Walking through this landscape is like walking through one hundred years of Triestine history—even more if you count the medieval castle and the Roman ruins. But this is a constructed history, presenting a continuity of Italian identity from the Romans to the present day, leaving out the Jewish and Slavic aspects of the region’s history, as well as the five hundred years of Austrian rule. What is more, the monument to the victims of the foibe which was placed at the center of the park in 2000, breaks with the otherwise uniform design of the memorial stones in the park and creates the impression of a Triestine history that culminates in the events of 1943/45. In this new context, the lack of explanatory signs suddenly becomes problematic, since the
relation of the foibe killings to the other tragedies recounted here is no longer self-explanatory. The distortion caused by the foibe monument should not blind us to the fact that the version of Triestine history embodied by the Colle di S. Giusto is already partial and selective. History is never self-explanatory.

In 2006, a group of historians connected to the IRSML published a slim volume entitled Un percorso tra le violenze del novecento nella provincia di Trieste. It is a historical guide book for students (and interested visitors) in Italian and Slovene to the main sites of Fascist, Nazi, and Communist violence in Trieste and its surroundings. The book seeks to overcome the divisive and simplistic positions presented by those who instrumentalize sites of memory for their political purposes. The chosen sites illustrate the different types of violence that have occurred in the past one hundred years in Venezia Giulia: racial, political, cultural persecution. Beginning in WWI and ending with the Istrian exodus, the book presents eleven sites: three sites of Fascist violence (the fire at the Narodni Dom, the execution of four Slovene partisans after one of the show trials of the Tribunale speciale, and the destruction of the Triestine Synagogue); three sites of Nazi-fascist violence (Via Ghega, the site of a public hanging of 51 prisoners as reprisal for a partisan attack, the Risiera di San Sabba, and the Slovene villages of Caresana and Malchina, raided and incinerated first by Fascist squads and then by the Nazis); and four sites of Yugoslav violence (the Foiba di Basovizza, Via Imbriani, where four Triestines were killed during a demonstration against the Yugoslav occupiers, the refugee camp at
Padriciano which housed thousands of Istrian émigrés in the years between 1948–1976, and Piazza Sant’ Antonio Nuovo and Piazza Unità d’Italia, where six where killed after demonstrations against the separation of Istria from Italy in 1953). Each chapter contains photos, maps, directions for visitors, and suggestions for further reading, in addition to a description of the site and its history, which carefully inserts it in its historical context. Thus, the book may function as a supplement to the documentary exhibitions at the Rissa and at Basovizza, as well as providing much-needed information regarding those sites which lack any documentary component, such as the Narodni Dom, which today houses the faculty of foreign languages of the University of Trieste and where only a small commemorative plaque on the outside serves as a reminder of the events which took place there in 1920.

No other guidebook for Trieste and its region has ever included all these sites of memory. Even though these diverse sites are presented in the same book, the differences between them are not erased and in general simplifications are avoided. The aim of the book is to foster an understanding of the diversity of the region’s history and promote an appreciation of the context in which it has to be placed: “Al fondo della vita civile e della crescita democratica di una comunità stiano proprio il riconoscimento e il rispetto delle diverse memorie.”\textsuperscript{294} The competitive reflex which underlies the “binomio

\textsuperscript{294} “At the foundation of the civil life and democratic growth of a community there must lie the recognition of and respect for different memories.” IRSML, \textit{Un percorso tra le violenze del novecento nella}
Risiera–foibe” effectively blocks any such respectful recognition of diverse memories from taking place, fueled as it is by the constant clamoring for public attention and legitimization. Furthermore, these two memorials are in direct competition for State funding, a fact which inescapably lends their rivalry far-reaching political and ideological implications. I have been unable to obtain any data regarding the use of the IRSML’s Percorso in Triestine schools, but it is not available for purchase at either the Risiera di San Sabba or at the Foiba di Basovizza. Nevertheless, this book presents a first important step towards providing for this region what Michael Rothberg has recently referred to as “multidirectional memory,” which resists the conception of commemoration as a zero-sum game and instead presents a model of “collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites” (11). As I have attempted to show in this chapter, a multidirectional approach is absolutely essential for any kind of thorough understanding of the collective memory of Trieste and the surrounding region.

provincia di Trieste (Trieste Adriatica, 2006): 12.
Soltanto la poesia può dire ciò che non si riesce a definire in modo esplicito, raccontare le contraddizioni inconciliabili senza pretendere di risolverle, dando loro in tal modo sostanza e facendone una ragione di vita, trasformare l’incertezza della propria identità in un viaggio alla ricerca della medesima e cioè nell’identità più vera. Trieste diviene una città di scrittori, grandi, mediocri o falliti, perché i contrasti che elidono e paralizzano la sua storia inducono a credere che solo scrivendo, esprimendo questo stallo, si possa dare consistenza alla propria persona. [...] [Trieste] è [...] un arcipelago più che un crogolo, in cui le diverse componenti si sono guardate con diffidenza e odio e culturalmente ignorate, in cui la frontiera è stata più barriera che ponte.

—Claudio Magris, “Un mito al quadrato”295

Chapter 5

No Place Like Home: Trieste and the Language of Belonging

Saints and Sinners: The Holocaust on Italian Television

The official narrative of Italian victimhood as described with respect to the Risiera di San Sabba and the Foiba di Basovizza memorials finds a powerful expression also in another

295 “Only poetry can say that which cannot be defined explicitly, recount the irreconcilable contradictions without seeking to resolve them, thus giving them substance and transforming them into a reason for living. Only poetry can make the uncertainty of our own identity into a journey to find it, that is to say make it into a more real identity. Trieste becomes a city of writers, great, mediocre, or failed writers, because the contrasts that cancel out and paralyze its history lead one to believe that it is only through writing, by expressing this impasse, that one can lend solidity to one’s own person. [...] [Trieste] is [...] an archipelago more than a crucible, whose various constituent parts have always regarded each other with suspicion and hatred and ignored each other’s culture, in which the border has always been more of a barrier than a bridge.” Claudio Magris, “Un mito al quadrato,” Il Friuli-Venezia Giulia, eds. Roberto Finzi, et al., vol. 2, (Turin: Einaudi, 2002): 1395–6.
medium, that of television. As historian Claudio Fogu states, from the late 1970s onwards, television became a “primary agent for the consolidation and transformation of the historical imaginary of the postwar generations of Italians” (157). Particularly important in this context is the genre of the fiction, a type of television miniseries with fictional characters whose plot is based on historical events. As shown already with respect to Holocaust, the television miniseries is a very effective way of bringing historical content to a mass audience. Causing the viewers to identify with certain characters, it enables an emotional rather than a rational access to the historical events shown, which makes historical accuracy less important. The most striking example of such a fiction, Il cuore nel pozzo, directed by Alberto Negrin and broadcast in 2005, serves to illustrate the process by which popular representations are used to rearrange the framework of national memory in Italy. As early as April 2002, the Alleanza Nazionale member Maurizio Gasparri, who was the minister of communications at the time, announced in an interview with La Stampa that there were plans for a fiction about the foibe. Rather than a documentary, Gasparri was envisioning a fictional story that would secure the sympathy of the viewers: “Se facciamo un documentario, magari con la riesumazione delle ossa, provochiamo soltanto ripulsa. Penso che sarebbe più efficace una fiction che raccontasse la storia di una di quelle povere famiglie. Sono grandi tragedie. Come quella dell’Olocausto o di Anna Frank.”²⁹⁶ Although this has typically been taken as a reference to the Holo-

²⁹⁶ “If we make a documentary, showing the exhumation of the bones, for example, we will just provoke
caust as such, it is more likely that Gasparri is in fact referring to the American television miniseries *Holocaust*, and the fictional story of the Weiss family in Nazi-Germany. As we saw in chapter 2, the secret of *Holocaust*'s success with German audiences was its appeal to the hearts rather than to the minds of its viewers. Gasparri clearly saw the potential in producing a comparable melodrama in order to present the Italians as victims of a tragedy on par with the Holocaust.

*Olocausto*, as the miniseries was known in Italy, was broadcast on the Italian national television network *RAIUNO* in eight parts during the months of May and June 1979. While the series received a good deal of attention in the press, its impact on Italian audiences was comparatively weaker and it did not set in motion an ongoing process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Against the background of the dominant post-war narrative that Italy had been a victim in the Second World War and had nothing to do with the Holocaust, the series only served to reinforce the stereotype of the “bad German” versus the “good Italian.” After all, many Italians had hidden Jews, who in Italy had one of the highest survival rates in Europe. Furthermore, the circa 8,000 deported Italian Jews were only a fraction of the tens of thousands of political deportees and the more than 600,000 deported Italian soldiers. Thus, the Italians were not as shocked by what they
disgust. I think it would be more effective to make a TV drama that told the story of one of those poor families. These are great tragedies. Like that of Holocaust or Anne Frank.” Fabio Martini, “Il ministro delle comunicazioni: deciderà il CDA, esprimo solo il mio pensiero di telespettatore,” *La Stampa*, 18. April 2002. Qtd. in Verginella, “Geschichte und Gedächtnis”: 44 and Mattioli, *Viva*: 110.
saw in *Olocausto*: they themselves had suffered Nazi atrocities. The Holocaust was seen merely as one of the many crimes the Nazis had committed, and the Italian Jewish victims had been subsumed into a narrative of Italian victimhood. Furthermore, thanks to the partisan movement and to anti-Fascism, the consensus was that Italy had faced and come to terms with its past immediately after the end of the war, and that Italian society was more politicized and historically educated than German society. Finally, anti-Semitism and racism had always been seen as alien to Catholic Italy.

As a result of this, the debates surrounding *Olocausto* revolved almost exclusively around the question of whether it was justifiable to “trivialize” the Holocaust and “Americanize” it as a TV melodrama in the style of Hollywood films. Besides debating the flaws of *Olocausto*, many intellectuals were more interested in monitoring and analyzing the German debates on the miniseries than examining its reception in Italy.²⁹⁷ Thus, as historian Emiliano Perra observes, the significance of the Italian reception of *Olocausto* “lies less in the themes actually discussed than in the sensitive subjects carefully left out of the debate”—namely questions of complicity, collaboration, anti-Semitism, and racism in Fascist Italy.²⁹⁸ Among the few who did touch upon issues of Italian collaboration

²⁹⁷ See for example Enzo Collotti, “‘Holocaust’ – il privato e la storia,” *Italia contemporanea* 31.137 (1979), which touches upon the differences in the way the series was shown and received in Germany and in Italy, but remains ultimately focused on the German case.

²⁹⁸ Perra’s article is one of very few scholarly discussions about the reception of the series in Italy. It offers an overview of the press coverage after the broadcast and a discussion of the influence the contemporary political situation—the violence of the late 1970s in Italy, the elections in June 1979, and the conflict in the Middle East—had on the way Italians perceived *Olocausto*. Cf. Emiliano Perra, “Narratives of
was the Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi. In his introduction to the special issue of the Radiocorriere Tv that accompanied the broadcast of Olocausto, Levi writes: “Sarà bene ricordare a chi non sa, ed a chi preferisce dimenticare, che l'olocausto si è esteso anche all’Italia [...]. I rastrellamenti avvenivano per ordine dei tedeschi occupanti, ma spesso venivano eseguiti dalla polizia e dalle milizie fasciste, e non sempre malvolentieri, poiché per ogni ebreo catturato veniva corrisposto un premio in denaro. Perché tacere?”

But this question went unheard; Olocausto made it too easy for Italian viewers to think of the Holocaust as something that had happened elsewhere.

In the 1990s, the major commercial success of Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List (1993) and Roberto Benigni’s La vita è bella (1997) revived interest in stories about the Holocaust; particularly in stories involving escape and rescue. Italian television was quick to capitalize on this new wave of interest, producing a number of two-part miniseries, based on historical figures and events, such as 18,000 giorni fa (1993) and Senza confini (2001). The latter was directed by Fabrizio “Senza confini” and aired on RAIUNO on two consecutive evenings in September 2001. It tells the story of Giovanni Palatucci, the “Italian Schindler,” who, in his capacity as Chief of Police in Fiume, allegedly saved the innocents and victims.

Innocence and Victimhood: The Reception of the Miniseries Holocaust in Italy,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 22.3 (2008): 412. See also Perra’s Conflicts of Memory. The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present (Oxford: Lang, 2010).

299 “We will do well to remind those who don’t know and those who prefer to forget that the Holocaust also happened in Italy [...]. The searches may have been ordered by the German occupiers, but quite often they were carried out by the police and the fascist militias, and not always reluctantly since there was a cash reward for each Jew captured. So why remain silent?” Levi, Opere: 1:1279.
lives of five thousand Jews between 1938 and 1944. He is credited with hiding Jews in the countryside, providing false passports and launching a refugee ship to Palestine. He is further credited with saving many Jews by sending them to a displaced persons camp in Campagna, where his uncle, a bishop, was supposedly able to use his influence to save them. Palatucci was arrested by the Nazis and deported to Dachau, where he died in January 1945, shortly before the camp’s liberation. The miniseries, starring southern heart-throb Sebastiano Somma, was a resounding success, paving the way for further productions in a similar vein.

At the time, Palatucci had already been the subject of several biographies, documentaries, and newspaper articles as well as official tributes by the State of Israel, the Catholic Church, the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities, not to mention the Italian Police, who were instrumental in promoting his beatification, which has been officially underway since 2005. Almost every Italian city has a street or a school named after Palatucci, whose reputation as a heroic or even saintly figure has been challenged by historians, most recently by Marco Coslovich in his book Giovanni Palatucci. Una giusta memoria (2008). Coslovich argues that the rediscovery of Palatucci more than sixty years after the end of the war served a very specific purpose, namely that of bolstering the myth of Italiani, brava gente. According to Coslovich, the mythologization of Palatucci has little to do with the historical facts—on the contrary, it serves only to obscure the uncertainties pertaining to the actual historical persona of Giovanni Palatucci. Evidence
of his heroism is overwhelmingly anecdotal, and there is little to no support to be found in the actual historical sources and documentary material pertaining to Palatucci’s actions. Coslovich details precisely how restricted Palatucci’s power within the Fascist police was, especially after the arrival of the Germans, and concludes that it was basically impossible for him to have been able to perform acts on the scale later attributed to him. Furthermore, Coslovich illustrates how the number of Jews Palatucci is reported by the media to have saved has grown exponentially over the past several decades. Coslovich concludes that Palatucci’s arrest by the Nazis in fact probably had more to do with his involvement in corruption and his alleged collusion with the Allies than with any heroic actions of the sort he has later become famous for. Ultimately, the story of the Fascist policeman whose strong Catholic faith led him to disobey his orders to arrest and deport the Jews, was a useful distraction not only from the important role played by the Fascist police in helping the Nazi occupiers, but also from Pope Pius XII and the Catholic Church’s ambivalent stance toward the Holocaust.300

Regardless of how many Jews Palatucci actually saved, however, his role in the public consciousness and the contemporary media landscape is that of a redeemer of the Italian people. The fact that he was a staunch Fascist is not perceived as relevant to his story, and this both reinforces and results from the perception that Fascism was

harmless in comparison with Nazism and that it was not inherently anti-Semitic in nature. This aspect of the Palatucci case is probably the most important, since it marks a significant departure from former rescue stories, which were generally associated with anti-Fascism and the resistance. The normalization of Fascism in the media via this particular kind of Holocaust rescue narrative plays a strategic role in recent attempts at constructing a shared Italian identity that goes beyond the ideological divides of Fascism versus anti-Fascism, but which at the same time salvages the self-acquitting myth of the “good Italian.” The power of the “Palatucci effect” becomes even clearer when we consider the record-breaking success of the miniseries *Perlasca – un eroe italiano*, broadcast the following year.  

An unprecedented number of viewers—circa thirteen million—tuned in to watch *Perlasca* when it aired on RAIUNO on 28 and 29 January, 2002, to coincide with the second *Giorno della Memoria*. Directed by Alberto Negrin, well-known for his historically themed television productions, *Perlasca* centers on the heroic deeds of the Italian Fascist Giorgio Perlasca, who worked as a businessman in Budapest in the early 1940s and saved the lives of more than 5,000 Hungarian Jews through a series of resourceful ruses and subterfuges. Negrin’s film is based partly on Perlasca’s own memoir, *L’impostore* (1997) and in part on Enrico Deaglio’s biography of Perlasca, *La banalità del bene* (1991), but entirely jettisons the complex historical background, such as the power dynamic be-

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tween the Hungarian Fascist Arrow Cross Party and the Nazis, and the position of Spain and Italy vis-à-vis the other Fascist powers, even though the plot essentially hinges on this precarious political situation and the climate of international Fascist in-fighting at the time. Viewers unfamiliar with this period in the history of the Second World War receive little to no cues that might help them make sense of it. Clearly, the emphasis lies elsewhere. The near-complete decontextualization of these events is further exacerbated by the fact that, like all Italian films, all the film’s dialogue is exclusively in Italian, and no attempt is made to indicate how the characters were able to communicate. On the one hand, the dubbing serves further to obscure the distinction between the Nazis and the Arrow Cross men, and on the other it leaves open the question of how Perlasca was able to pass himself off convincingly as the Spanish ambassador or a Hungarian aristocrat. Evidently, the point of the story is not to give an accurate picture of the political wrangling and turbulent last months of the war; rather the screenplay, by Stefano Rulli and Sandro Petraglia, opts for a straightforward Holocaust rescue narrative which relies on familiar clichés and generic conventions and topoi. The film thus relies on its audience’s preconceived ideas and their familiarity with this genre. The evil German SS commander Bleiber, for example, is nothing but a stereotypical Nazi villain, always clad in a black leather trench-coat, who, following a minor massacre in the street, lights a cigarette by striking a match on the boot of one of the murdered Jews. Bleiber also sees through Perlasca’s ruse and repeatedly threatens to expose him, but ultimately remains
a distant menace who lets others—in this case the Arrow Cross men—do the dirty work for him.

Like Olocausto, Perlasca’s story invites emotional identification rather than critical reflection. In order to propel forward Perlasca’s ever more audacious schemes, Ne-grin adds a group of Jewish characters who are saved by Perlasca and who provide the main source of compassionate identification for the viewers. The emotional impact is heightened by the focus on the plight of the Jewish children and on Perlasca’s interactions with them. In numerous scenes, Perlasca is shown to have the unique ability to put the children at ease, encourage them to play, and elicit smiles even from the most traumatized of them. In general, Perlasca is portrayed as a sort of universal genius, never despairing, immediately acting and reacting. Not only is he the only one who can make the terrified children smile, he is also the only one who can fix a broken-down car, bribe the Arrow Cross men, and provide food for the hungry Jews at the safe house. In contrast to the resourceful and proactive Perlasca, the Jewish men are depicted as utterly helpless, impotent, and hindered by their faith. It is only though Perlasca’s intervention that they come to understand that they need not be resigned to their fate.

Unlike in the case of Palatucci, Perlasca’s story is well-documented. In 1987, a group of Hungarian survivors tracked him down in Padua, where he lived until his death in 1992, and collected survivor testimony in order to support his nomination as one of the Righteous among the Nations in Israel. But there were a number of other factors
that contributed to the film’s overwhelming success. Firstly, it was a big-budget international production starring Luca Zingaretti, famous in Italy for his role as Commissario Montalbano in the highly popular television series of the same name.\footnote{Cf. Millicent Marcus, \textit{Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz} (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007): 125–39.} Secondly, unlike \textit{Olocausto} two decades before, \textit{Perlasca} was preceded by a number of high-profile media events such as interviews, book launches, and exhibitions all geared towards casting Perlasca as a key figure in Italian collective memory. And thirdly, \textit{Perlasca} is structured entirely around the simplistic binary of absolute evil (Nazism and to a lesser extent the Hungarian Fascists) versus absolute good (Perlasca, his helpers, the Jews). As Emiliano Perra notes in his excellent article on the reception of \textit{Perlasca}, the fact that absolute good is represented in the figure of a conniving, masquerading Italian (and thus turning the negative stereotype about Italians into a sign of humanitarianism and benevolence) who also happens to be a Fascist, is crucial to an understanding of the impact of the miniseries: the subtitle, \textit{un eroe italiano}, played directly into the collective “Wunschvorstellung” about the Holocaust: Italians, including Fascists, were able to save as many Jews as they did precisely because of their contempt for authority. Perlasca’s story thus “became a viable all-encompassing source of national identity based on Italian ‘kindness’ in moral terms.”\footnote{Emiliano Perra, “Legitimizing Fascism Through the Holocaust? The Reception of the Miniseries Perlasca: un eroe italiano in Italy,” \textit{Memory Studies} 3.2 (2010): 103. See also Anna Bravo, “Social Perception of the Shoah in Italy,” \textit{The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity}, eds. Bernard D. Cooperman and}
Furthermore, as Perra notes, the figure of Perlasca was appropriated by the right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale as a kind of figurehead and legitimization in its attempts at distancing right-wing politics from anti-Semitism and reconciling the Italian right with the State of Israel and the Italian Jewish communities. Perra concludes his analysis with a quotation from another article about Perlasca, written by the right-wing intellectual Marcello Veneziani, in which the author calls for Italians to stop berating themselves over the Jews who died in the Holocaust and instead focus on the much higher number of victims of the Communist foibe massacres.

Since the broadcast of Perlasca, there has

Fig. 24  Perlasca—un eroe italiano

DVD cover of the film showing Zingaretti in the role of Perlasca. The DVD was available for purchase along with an issue of the weekly listings magazine TV sorrisi e canzoni.

Image source: http://copertinedvd.org

Barbara Garvin, (Bethesda: UP of Maryland, 2000). Aram Mattioli also discusses the miniseries in his book Viva Mussolini!, together with other RAI productions such as La fuga degli innocenti (Leone Pompucchi, dir. 2004), loosely based on a true story of forty Jewish orphans who with the help of courageous Italian escaped persecution by the Nazis in 1941. Mattioli also mentions the 2007 film Hotel Meina (Carlo Lizzani, dir.), which revolves around a massacre of a group of Greek Jews perpetrated by an SS detachment near the Lago Maggiore during the Nazi occupation. See Mattioli 60–6; 91–2.
been an ever increasing number of Fascist rescue-stories presented in the media. As Per- ra rightly observes, such an extremely selective memorialization of the Holocaust ultimately serves to re-legitimize fascism. Since the film presents Perlasca’s enthusiastic embrace of fascism, including his participation in the invasion of Ethiopia and Italy’s war against Republican Spain, as entirely unproblematic, “what truly defines Italians’ innocence and guilt is their approach to the Holocaust, [...] and [thus] all differences between fascism and anti-fascism are automatically erased” (105).

Manufactured History: Il cuore nel pozzo

It is against this background that we now turn our attention to Il cuore nel pozzo, the foibe TV-movie advocated by telecommunications minister Gasparri in 2002. Here, the mystificatory and highly selective use of the past in these popular representations becomes even more troubling. Broadcast on the occasion of the first Giorno del ricordo in February 2005, the film set a new record in TV ratings, bringing the ‘tragedy of the Italians’ at the North-Eastern border, the foibe killings and the exodus from Istria and Dalmatia, to more than 16 million Italian viewers. Il cuore is set in Istria in 1945, in the period following the retreat of the Wehrmacht and the arrival of the Yugoslav partisans, who aim to claim the territory. We watch as the partisans systematically round up all the Italians, including women and children, and throw them into a foiba. As a narrative
framework for these killings, the filmmakers introduce Novak, a Yugoslav partisan commandant, whose desperate search for an illegitimate son he has by Giulia, a local Italian woman, leads him to employ increasingly ruthless methods to save his son from the foibe. The boy manages to escape Novak repeatedly with the help of a ragtag group of characters: a bourgeois Italian couple; Walter, a member of the Italian resistance; Ettore, an Italian soldier, and his Slovenian fiancée Anja; and Don Bruno, an Italian priest who runs an orphanage on the edge of town. Novak’s son is one of a number of orphans the group is attempting to save from the Yugoslavs. One by one, Novak has those who help the children escape killed until only Ettore and Anja are left. In a dramatic showdown, Ettore kills Novak and they join the enormous mass of refu-

Fig. 25  Il cuore nel pozzo

DVD cover of part one of the film featuring a montage of the main characters. From left: Beppe Fiorello as Ettore, Antonia Liskova as Anja, Dragan Bjelogrlić as Novak, and Leo Gullotta as Don Bruno. The DVD was available for purchase along with an issue of the weekly listings magazine TV sorrisi e canzoni.

Image source: http://copertinedvd.org
gees from Istria and Dalmatia who make their way to the harbor, where a ship awaits them to take them to Italy.\textsuperscript{304} Once more structured around the simplistic dichotomy of good versus evil, the series portrays the titini (the Tito-partisans) as a gang of thugs and criminals driven solely by their hatred of the Italians, and the Italians as innocent victims who are persecuted and driven out of their home only because the “Slavs” want their land. Negrin does not hesitate to employ the familiar iconography of Holocaust cinema: the Yugoslav partisans are endowed with the attributes commonly associated with representations of Nazis (uniforms and leather boots, German Shepherds, large trucks on which men, women, and children are separately deported, and large ammunition depots). In contrast, the few Italian soldiers we see at the end of the film are shown as a dispersed and poorly clad group, led by Ettore, the “good Italian,” who is opposed to violence and only uses it to defend himself and those he loves. The only figure who does not fit into this division is Anja, the Slovene woman who sides with the Italians and who pays a high price for the “betrayal” of her compatriots: she is raped by one of Novak’s men.\textsuperscript{305}

As in Negrin’s previous film, the historical context—the Fascist persecution of Slovenes and Croats, and the German occupation of the region—is almost entirely ab-

\textsuperscript{304} For extensive plot summaries and excellent analyses of the miniseries see Verginella, “Geschichte und Gedächtnis” and Silvia Zetto Cassano, “I cuori e la frontiera: rappresentazione dell’esodo nel cinema,” \textit{Qualestoria} 33.2 (2005).

\textsuperscript{305} For more on the role of Anja see Verginella, “Geschichte und Gedächtnis”: 51–2.
sent. Only in the beginning do we get a glimpse of a few German soldiers who then quickly retreat. There is not a single Italian Fascist in the entire film, and likewise are there no Slovene or Croat inhabitants in the village, leaving viewers with the impression that Istria was exclusively inhabited by anti-Fascist Italians. The *titini* are presented as stereotypically “Balkan,” unshaven and with dark complexions, whereas the historical records indicate that the units led by Tito in 1945 included Italians, Solvenes, Croats, and Greeks.\(^{306}\) This historical vacuum is seemingly justified by the fact that the film relates a personal story that is seen through the eyes of the eight year old Francesco, whose parents die in a *foiba* at the hands of Novak’s men. The few bits of historical information the film provides are through Walter, the only Italian partisan in the film, who is a member of the CLN, the organization opposed to the Yugoslav resistance. There are two crucial exchanges between Walter and Novak which give insight into Novak’s motivations and on the political and ethnic background to the conflict. In the first of these, Walter tries to argue with Novak to save Giulia, who has allowed Novak to catch her in order to help Ettore and the orphans escape:

**Walter:** Con quale diritto stai massacrando dei civili? Quello che stai facendo non c’entra nulla con questa guerra!  
**Novak:** Credi ancora a queste storie?  
[Novak’s men laugh] Sei proprio un illuso, Walter, un illuso!  
**Walter:** Devi fermarti! E devi farlo subito, Novak!  
**Novak:** Non hai capito? Ovunque arriverà il nostro esercito l’Italia non esiste-—

rà più. Perché questa terra è nostra, non è Italia, e l’avete sempre saputo!

Walter: È un massacro! Questa non è una guerra, questo è un massacro di civili innocenti! PERCHÉ??

Novak: Perché? Per pareggiare i conti, amico mio, e purtroppo per voi ne avete ancora un bel po’ da pagare. Io ho tutto il tempo. È a voi che ne rimane poco.

Walter: Novak tu sei un pazzo!

Novak: Credi? Forse hai ragione. E allora non ti stupire per quello che mi vedrai ancora fare.307

This exchange reveals the broader expansionist and genocidal ambitions of the ‘Slav’ aggressor that threaten the Italian nation. This becomes even clearer in the next exchange, which takes place at the edge of a foiba where a group of prisoners is about to be executed:

Walter: Fermali, Novak! Non potete fare questo, fermali! Sono solo dei civili, cosa c’entrano?

Novak: Quando i fascisti ci trattavano come schiavi, voi civili, che cos’avete fatto? Avete mai mosso un dito per aiutarci? Avete impedito che accadesse?

Walter: Ma per questo tu massacci degli innocenti? Non farlo, ti prego, non farlo! Il loro sangue non servirà a lavare il vostro.

Novak: Invece sì. Io non conosco nessun altro modo.

Walter: Ascoltami, Novak! Noi dobbiamo cercare di porre fine alle vendette. Dobbiamo imparare a vivere in pace e per questo abbiamo lottato! È il nostro dovere.

Novak: Davvero, speri di fermare la guerra con le chiacchiere? Per vinceralà...

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307 Walter: “What right do you have to massacre civilians? What you’re doing has nothing to do with this war!” Novak: “You still believe in those fairy tales? [Novak’s men laugh] You’re a real dreamer, Walter, a dreamer!” Walter: “You have to stop! And you have to do it right now, Novak!” Novak: “Don’t you understand? Wherever our army arrives, Italy will cease to exist. Because this is our land, it’s not Italy, and you’ve always known it!” Walter: “This is a massacre! This isn’t war, this is a massacre of innocent civilians! WHY??” Novak: “Why? To settle the score, my friend, and I’m afraid you’ve still got a lot to pay for. I have all the time in the world. It’s you who are running out.” Walter: “Novak you’re insane!” Novak: “You think? Maybe you’re right. So don’t be surprised at what you’re about to see me do.” My translation. Il cuore nel pozzo (dir. Alberto Negrin, 2005).
non dobbiamo avere pietà di nessuno!

[Novak's men shoot the prisoners and throw them into the *foiba*]

Novak: Capisci ora? Lo senti quanto mi odi? Quanto vuoi la mia morte? È lo stesso odio che provo io in ogni momento. [...] Siamo fatti tutti così!

Walter: Assassino!308

Walter urges Novak to see that his reprisals are disproportionate and misguided. As a member of the resistance, Walter feels that with the routing of the Fascists he and Novak should be on the same side, since they are both anti-Fascists. Now that the war has ended, they should all be able to live peacefully. Walter sees the conflict in political terms, whereas for Novak it is an ethnic question. While Walter clings to the distinction between Fascists and Italians, for Novak the civilian population is complicit in the crimes of Fascism; all Italians are responsible for the oppression of his people. Thus, the indiscriminate massacre of Italian women and children is not an aberration as Walter sees it, but rather central to what Novak and the *titini* are trying to achieve, namely the total de-Italianization of the region: “wherever our army arrives,” says Novak, “Italy will cease to exist.”

The scenes in which the Yugoslav partisans round up Italian men, women and

308 Walter: “Stop them, Novak! You can’t do this, stop them! They’re just civilians, what have they got to do with this?” Novak: “When the Fascists treated us like slaves, you civilians, what did you do? Did you ever lift a finger to help us? Did you prevent it from happening?” Walter: “And for this you’re massacring innocent people? Don’t do it, I beg you, don’t do it! Their blood won’t wash away yours.” Novak: “You’re wrong. I don’t know any other way.” Walter: “Listen to me, Novak! We have to try to put an end to these acts of vengeance. We have to learn how to live together in peace, that’s what we’ve been fighting for! It’s our duty.” Novak: “Do you really think you can stop the war with idle chatter? In order to win we can’t have pity on anyone! [Novak’s men shoot the prisoners and throw them into the foiba] Do you get it now? Do you feel how much you hate me? How badly you want me dead? That’s the same hatred I feel all the time. [...] We’re all the same!” Walter: “Murderer!” Cf. also Zetto Cassano, “I cuori”: 19, where she discusses this scene.
children in broad daylight contradict historical sources and many eye-witness testimonies, which assert that the arrests happened at night and with the help of lists that rarely included women and never children. In the light of Novak’s ethnic conception of the conflict, it is clear that the film seeks to associate his methods with the techniques of repression and persecution employed by the Fascists and Nazis. This results not only in an inversion of the perpetrator-victim dichotomy, but also presents the foibe killings as a genocide of the entire Italian population of this region prompted by the “Slav” hatred of the Italian race. It is surely no coincidence that the mother of Novak’s son is named Giulia: her rape at his hands thus symbolizing the “Slavic rape” of the entire region of Venezia Giulia (Verginella “Geschichte und Gedächtnis” 53). Like for the Jews in Nazi-Germany, the film suggests, the only alternative to a certain and cruel death in the foibe is for all the Italians to flee.

The final scene thus shows a seemingly endless stream of refugees, in rags and with suitcases and bundles, moving towards the harbor, where a ship awaits them. This scene brings the film’s problematic relation to historical accuracy into sharp focus: As we watch the slow procession of refugees down to the shore, the perspective suddenly shifts to a view from below, shot in grainy black and white. These images, reminiscent of the countless newsreels and documentary films about World War II and the Holocaust, give the impression that we are now seeing archival footage of this exodus. It is only after a few minutes, as we see the faces of Ettore and Anja among the refugees, that we
realize that the scene is still part of the film’s fiction. Moreover, despite its claim to documentary status, the mass exodus presented in this final scene could never actually have taken place in this way. The emigration from Istria, which lasted more than 10 years, is here distilled into a single scene, suggesting that all these people left their homes at the exact same time, on foot, taking almost nothing with them (cf. Zetto Cassano 111). It is this spurious claim to historical authenticity that renders Il cuore nel pozzo a far more insidious cultural artifact than Holocaust. Although the Weiss family in the latter is purely fictional, the historical backdrop and chronology of events which propel their story are authentic, and it is precisely this sort of legitimacy that Il cuore is aiming for. By embedding this pseudo-documentary footage in the end, however, it oversteps a boundary, revealing its aspirations to actual historical authenticity. This device is a common feature of films that are “based on a true story,” which at the end point beyond the internal logic of the narrative and toward an actual historical referent. But in this case, this gesture is empty and false. For viewers familiar with the historical details, this final scene will highlight the artificiality of what comes before it, but for the majority of viewers who are not familiar with the history of the foibe and the exodus, it serves to imbue the preceding fiction with an air of authenticity.

Let us return to the statement by Gasparri from April 2002. Following the success of Perlasca in January of the same year, Gasparri suggests that a TV movie about the foibe would be more “effective” than a documentary on the subject, which, in his words,
might alienate viewers. If the ultimate goal is to establish the foibe as the Italian tragedy, then the fiction is “effective” because it invites the viewer to identify with the characters, and is thus able to provoke sympathy for the victims of the foibe and the Istrian exiles. The fiction’s status as a popular genre that is not subject to the same standards as a documentary is a further advantage in this regard, since it can pass certain historical inaccuracies off as artistic license. Thus, the two phases of foibe killings from 1943 and 1945 are condensed into one image, as is the exodus of the Istrians and Dalmatians. The film’s incorporation of this final documentary element, however, complicates the relationship between history and fiction. It both highlights the tension between fiction and documentary and at the same time attempts to elide it by seemingly substituting the actual historical events with this fictional account. The aim of Il cuore is not, as it would have its audience believe, an attempt at recovering a “forgotten and repressed” memory, but rather at creating a uniform memory at the center of which lies the suffering of the Italians to the exclusion of the suffering of the Slovenes and Croats.309

This manipulative and largely exculpatory popular narrative that feeds on the stereotypes of the “good Fascist” and the “evil Nazi/Yugoslav” and that presents a one-

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309 Historian Marta Verginella relates the constructed memory at work in Il cuore to Paul Ricœur’s concept of “excess of memory,” which allows victims to attribute the tragedies of the recent past to coercion or malevolence on the part of others, thus confirming their own innocence. “The gap in knowledge for which each individual would have to make up for,” Verginella writes, “is thus completely filled up with his or her own nation’s memory, while the others’ memory sinks into oblivion. This makes it much easier to divide the us completely from the them and to posit a community of the oppressed against a community of oppressors.” Verginella, “Geschichte und Gedächtnis”: 43.
dimensional account of history has been challenged by a number of authors from Trieste. These writers present the “other” history of the region, the history that is ignored or suppressed in accounts such as *Il cuore nel pozzo*: the persecution of the Slovenes and Croats during Fascism and during the German occupation. Among the most prominent is the Slovene Triestine writer Boris Pahor. His book *Trg Oberdan* (*Piazza Oberdan*, 2006) reads like a response to *Il cuore nel pozzo* and the politics of memory of the Italian right. In fact, at one point Pahor alludes to the film and comments on the difficulty of engaging meaningfully with the past in a political climate in which constructed histories such as *Il cuore* are produced with government support:

Es ist nicht möglich, einen Zusammenhang mit der Vergangenheit herzustellen [*povezovati se z nekdanjostjo*], wo man in Kürze einen konstruierten Film des italienischen Fernsehens ausstrahlen wird, der auch von einem Teil des Parlaments unterstützt wird, in dem von massenhaften Verhaftungen der Bevölkerung durch Partisanen, von brutalen Verladungen von Kindern auf Lastwagen [...] die Rede ist.310

Television dramas about the past such as *Perlasca* and *Il cuore* turn local history into a national spectacle that privileges one memory over another, and are instrumental in shaping a communal identity based on a shared narrative of heroism and victimhood in the face of an external aggressor. In other words, what these narratives are ultimately

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310 “It is impossible to establish a connection with the past when Italian television is about to broadcast a fictional film, supported by a portion of parliament, which shows mass-arrests of the civilian population by the partisans and children being brutally loaded onto trucks.” Boris Pahor, *Piazza Oberdan*, trans. Reginald Vospernik (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 2009): 50. The book was published in 2006, but since Pahor is referring to the film as being shown in Italian television soon, he probably wrote this part of the book in 2005. All quotations are from the German translation. At the time of writing, the book had not yet been published in Italian. This is significant in itself, and I will return to this point later.
engaged in is the negation of complexity. This is especially problematic in a multi-ethnic and historically multi-layered border region such as Venezia Giulia. In this climate, moreover, where the version of history with which people are presented on a daily basis is manufactured and sensationalist, a more authentic relationship with or connection to the past becomes impossible. Pahor’s emphasis on continuity must be seen in the light of the dominant mode of Italian post-war memory culture, which has been one of discontinuity: the bracketing-off of certain aspects of the past as unrelated to the present, rendering any honest attempt at Vergangenheitsbewältigung superfluous. I will continue to explore this oscillation between continuity and discontinuity in the remainder of this chapter with reference to a variety of Triestine authors. As Claudio Magris writes in the passage from “Un mito al quadrato” (2002) cited at the beginning of this chapter, literature offers a unique perspective on the relationship between the past and the present in Trieste, because only literature is able to relate the irreconcilable contradictions of the city’s history without seeking to resolve them. Trieste thus becomes “a city of writers, great, mediocre, or failed writers, because the contrasts that cancel out and paralyze its history lead one to believe that it is only through writing, by expressing this impasse, that one can lend solidity to one’s own person” (Magris “Mito” 1395–6). The city itself, in other words, creates its writers and compels them to tell its story. In what follows, I will trace this narrative impulse through a series of literary texts of vastly different genres, all of which inhabit the border between memory and history, but, unlike Il cuore
nel pozzo, emphasize the disparity between the two by means of a meta-literary framework, which incorporates documentary and historiographic elements that reveal the processes and tensions inherent in writing about the past. Works by Italian and Slovene Triestine and Istrian authors such as Renato Sarti, Fulvio Tomizza, Boris Pahor, Filibert Benedetič, and Miroslav Košuta challenge the popular stereotype of the “good” Fascist versus the “evil” Nazi or Yugoslav and instead offer a more complex and multi-layered narrative that not only presents the larger historical context but also gives us access to truly forgotten and repressed histories. As we will see, these writers explore trans- or multinational solutions for the city and its region as an alternative or counter-narrative to an all-Italian memory and identity.

Uncanny Homeland: Pahor’s Trieste

Piazza Oberdan (orig. Trg Oberdan), one of Boris Pahor’s most recent works, was written in 2005, the year of the first Giorno del ricordo and the broadcast of Il cuore nel pozzo, and it is written against the culture of amnesia and silence surrounding the crimes of Fascism. Against the fictional story of the children in Il cuore, Pahor sets his own child-

There are several other authors whose works deal with the topic of the persecution of the Slovene minority in the region and the crimes committed in the occupied territories in the name of Fascist racism. Unfortunately, a detailed examination of these authors and their works is beyond the scope of this study. See for example Alojz Rebula, Nokturno za Primorsko (Celje: Mohorjeva Druzba 2004), Drago Jancar, Joyce’s Pupil (London: Brandon, 2006), Bruno Steffè, I cavalli di guerra non amano la pace (Trieste: Steffè, 1964), and Ismail Kadare, Il generale dell’armata morta (Milano: Longanesi, 2009).
hood experiences and those of his family, friends, and compatriots during the 1920s and 30s in Trieste. *Piazza Oberdan* features a series of short stories, some of them published in previous collections, and embeds these in a complex and multi-layered meta-narrative framework that centers on the history of one of Trieste’s most (in)famous squares. Pahor takes his readers on a walk through the “other” Trieste, which cannot be found in tourist guide books, nor can it be read about in most of the Italian literature about Trieste. The most recent temporal layer of the book is set in 2005 and presents the 92-year old Pahor strolling through his city and across Piazza Oberdan meditating on the continuities between the past and the present. Most of the buildings in the square are still the same as they were in the 1930s, and the architectural layout of the square and the city prompt the stories, memories, and observations that form the core of the book. From 2005, the text spirals backwards, revealing the forgotten history of Piazza Oberdan as a history of the Slovene community in the city.

*Piazza Oberdan* was named after the Triestine irredentist Guglielmo Oberdan, who became a national martyr after he was hanged for attempting to assassinate Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph in 1882. In the 1920s, the Fascists appropriated Oberdan’s memory and promoted him as a hero who had tried to “redeem” the Italian lands under foreign rule. In Trieste, they built a large mausoleum in his honor in the square they had renamed after him. However, as Pahor points out, the narrative that presents Oberdan as an Italian hero leaves out a crucial detail: Oberdan’s original name
was Viljem Oberdank, and he was the illegitimate son of a Slovene woman from Görz/Gorizia. Like so many young Slovenes during that time, Oberdan was ashamed of his lowly Slovene origin and thus Italianized himself. Even though he denied his Slovene heritage, for Pahor Oberdan nonetheless becomes an example of a long tradition of Slovene resistance to the dominating powers. From the pre-history of Piazza Oberdan, Pahor moves on to lived history. Pahor’s biography is linked to Piazza Oberdan by a series of traumatic events, which begins in 1920, when the seven-year old Pahor witnessed the burning of the Slovene Cultural Center, the Narodni Dom, by Fascist squads, an event which he has described repeatedly as a kind of Ur-trauma. The prohibition of the Slovene language and culture and the severe punishment for being caught speaking Slovene in public are themes that run through many of Pahor’s stories. In the decades after 1920, Piazza Oberdan became the site of Fascist and later Nazi oppression. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello Stato, which had its seat in the court building that had been built on Piazza Oberdan by the Austro-Hungarians and had a prison adjacent to it, pronounced long prison and death sentences for many of Pahor’s Slovene comrades. He describes powerfully the years of Fascist persecution, during which his hometown becomes a trap, “gefangen zwischen Hügeln und Kriegsschiffen” [trapped between hills and warships] (34). He is deeply impressed by the heroes of the Slovene resistance who are imprisoned in Piazza Oberdan and feels useless because he is too young to join the resistance: “Ich konnte nirgends bleiben, obwohl mir klar war, dass
ich überall im Wege stand” [I couldn’t stay anywhere, even though I knew that I was in the way wherever I went] (33). In 1940, Pahor was drafted into the Italian army and sent first to Libya, then to Lombardy where he worked as a military interpreter. After the armistice in 1943, Pahor returned to Trieste and joined the Yugoslav liberation front. The pro-Nazi Slovene Home Guard arrested him in January 1944 and turned him in to the Nazis, who had taken over the Fascist headquarters and prison on Piazza Oberdan. From there he was sent on an odyssey through several concentration camps, including Dachau, Dora-Mittelbau, Struthof, Harzungen, and finally Bergen-Belsen, where he was liberated in 1945. He returned to Trieste in 1946, graduated from the university of Padua a year later with a thesis on the Slovene poet Edvard Kočbek, and worked as a high school teacher and writer for twenty years.

Today, Piazza Oberdan has become one of the busiest bus terminals in Trieste. In one corner is the building which houses the Slovene radio station where Pahor made several appearances in the years after the war. Only a small commemorative plaque reminds attentive passers-by of the location of the former Gestapo headquarters and the prison, whose underground cells extended beneath the piazza. The small plaque is written only in Italian, even though, Pahor writes, “diese höllische Institution vor allem unser Leuten aus Triest und dem Karst zugedacht war, ebenso wie das aufgelassene Gebäude des Reislagers” (138–9). Like the Risiera, Piazza Oberdan is a site of memory especially for the Slovene community. The fact that there is no plaque in Slovene is for Pa-
hor a sign of a continuing humiliation: “es beschleicht mich [...] das Gefühl erniedrigter Würde, ähnlich jenem damals, als ich unter dem Straßenbelag gefangen war, über den ich jetzt schreite” (ibid.). The injustice that was inflicted upon the Slovenes in Trieste and its region is still not officially recognized and remains a taboo topic, shrouded in silence.

In Piazza Oberdan, this silence is countered with a multiplicity of voices: the book includes quotes from poems, folk songs, newspaper articles, historiographical accounts, eye-witness testimony, personal letters, and trial documents. Slovene historians and poets, family members of executed resistance fighters, and Pahor’s own short stories are bound together to create a single palimpsestic narrative, a powerful statement against cultural amnesia. In this mixture of memoir, historiography, and narrative, the square is recovered as a site of memory whose importance equals that of the Risiera di San Sabba. Historical accuracy is thus of utmost importance to Pahor. Names, dates, references, and innumerable historical details are not only the framework into which he embeds his short stories, they are also the proof that what he is writing is not fiction: “Ich hatte nicht die Absicht nach Texten zu greifen, aber es gibt fast keine andere Möglichkeit, wenn ich mich nicht dem Vorwurf aussetzen soll, dass ich irgendwie den Eindruck des

312 “[even though] this diabolical institution was primarily intended for our people from Trieste and the Karst, just like the abandoned building of the rice factory [...] I have the nagging feeling that my dignity has been violated, the same feeling I had back then when I was held prisoner underneath the square I am crossing right now.”
Bösen vergrößern möchte. So etwas ist geschehen” (39–40). Pahor gives a few examples of the difficulties he faced when he was trying to publish some of his short stories that deal with Italian violence against Slovenes, including “Der Schmetterling auf dem Kleiderhaken” [“The Butterfly on the Coat Hook”]. It is set in the fall of 1924 and tells the story of a little girl who addresses one of her Slovene classmates in their native language; a crime for which she is severely punished. The teacher picks her up by her braided pigtails and uses them to hang her from the coat rack on the classroom wall. Pahor relates how an unnamed American publisher declined to issue an English translation of this story because he thought the Italian-American audience would reject such a “made-up” story. Similarly, a French publishing house rejected the short story collection which contained this and other stories on the grounds that it expressed an “anti-Italian sentiment” (40). A German editor questioned a section in Pahor’s concentration camp memoir Nekropola in which an Italian teacher punishes his students for speaking Slovene by spitting into their mouths. This seemed exaggerated to the editor. Pahor sent him the name of the teacher and supporting documentary material. Besides this story, there are countless others that he could add: “Ich hätte ihm auch den Namen jener Lehrerin nennen können, es war dies Clementina Modelli aus Mecina bei Bologna, die das zehnjährige Mädchen Marija Tušar aus Idrija, nur weil sie sich mit den Mitschülerinnen

313 “It was not my intention to refer to other texts, but there is almost no other way, if I want to avoid being accused of trying to paint a darker picture of events. As I have been in the past.”
What Pahor does not mention in *Piazza Oberdan* are the problems he faced in his own country. While he had found a wide international readership by the late 1990s and had received several prestigious awards as well as a nomination for the Nobel prize for literature, it was only in 2008 that Pahor gained recognition in his own country with the long overdue Italian translation of *Nekropola*. Pahor’s concentration camp memoir was published in January, on the occasion of the 2008 *Giorno della memoria*. In August of 2008 followed a revised Italian translation of Pahor’s 1959 short story collection *Il rogo nel porto* (orig. *Kres v pristanu* [*The Pyre in the Harbor*]), which relates his experience of the Fascist repression during his childhood and youth in Trieste. The collection had previously been published in 2001 by a small press in Rovereto, but had not found its way into many bookstores. In 2009 appeared the novel *Qui è proibito parlare* (*Parnik trobi nji*, 1964 [*No Talking Here*]), which revolves around a young Slovene couple in the Trieste of the 1930s, who join the resistance and for whom a growing appreciation of their native Slovene becomes an act of rebellion. Finally, the Italian translation of *Trg Oberdan* came out in the fall of 2010. To this day, less than a quarter of Pahor’s œuvre

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314 “I could also have given him the name of Clementina Modelli from Mecina near Bologna, the teacher who beat the ten-year-old girl Marija Tušar from Idrija so badly that she had to stay in the hospital for several weeks, for no other reason than that she had spoken Slovene to her classmates.”

comprising ca. 40 novels, memoirs, short story and essay collections has appeared in Italian. With the exception of *Necropoli*, Pahor’s works have received very little attention in Italy outside of Trieste.\(^\text{316}\) One reason for this is no doubt the fact that besides his concentration camp experience, the main topic of Pahor’s oeuvre is the persecution of the Slovene people under Fascism. In a review of the Italian translation of *Nekropola*, Trieste journalist Paolo Rumiz writes in *La Repubblica*:

> Per troppo tempo ha fatto comodo non si sapesse che nella città italianissima c’era un grande capace di scrivere in un’altra lingua—la stessa che il fascismo aveva negato a suon di manganello, sputi e olio di ricino—e mettere con i suoi capolavori il dito sulla piaga.\(^\text{317}\)

Rumiz here explicitly establishes a continuity between Fascist Italianization politics and present-day attitudes regarding Trieste’s literary heritage, which is considered exclusively Italian. This disregard of the Slovene voice, however, goes back further than the Fascist period to Habsburg times, when the Slovenes were considered a people without a literary and cultural tradition. Furthermore, as German literary scholar Primus-Heinz Kucher writes, the conception of “Triestine Literature” as created by the field of Italian literary


\(^{317}\) “For too long we have conveniently ignored the fact that this most Italian of cities harbors a great author writing in another language—the same language that the Fascists sought to eradicate by the sound of their clubs, with spit and castor oil—whose masterpieces pour salt in the wound.” Paolo Rumiz, “Il caso Pahor. Il lager visto dal bosco,” *La Repubblica* 30 Jan. 2008.
studies, has been largely blind for the city’s Slovene writers and traditions. Trieste’s multi-cultural heritage was only emphasized as long as it meant its connections with German/Austrian and Italian culture. Kucher writes:

Reflections on diversità were often accompanied by a privileging glance to the North, towards Austrian culture or Germany, with the side effect that the Other in front of one’s nose was ignored for a long time: this Other close by, even inside oneself, was the Slovene reality, its culture and literature. (93)

Pahor himself comments on this fact in the short story “Una sosta sul Ponte Vecchio” [Stopping on the Ponte Vecchio]. As a teacher of Italian literature at a Slovene high school in Trieste, he reads Dante’s Divina Commedia with his students in the original, but lets them also look at the Slovene translation. When Slovene students in Trieste read Dante, how is it that Italian students do not read the poetry of one of the most famous Slovenes, Srečko Kosovel? Pahor writes: “se gli studenti italiani della nostra città potesse- ro conoscere Prešeren e Gradnik e Kosovel, allora la vita da noi diventerrebbe un vero paradiso. Sì, Kosovel, per esempio: se Seghers l’ha pubblicato nella collana dei ‘Poètes d’aujourd’hui,’ perché non potrebbe varcare la soglia dei licei italiani?”


319 “If the Italian students in our city could only read Prešeren and Gradnik and Kosovel, then we really would be living in paradise. Yes, Kosovel, for example: if Seghers published him in the series ‘Poètes d’aujourd’hui,’ why isn’t he being read in our Italian high schools?” Boris Pahor, Il rogo nel porto, trans. Boris Pahor, et al., ed. Anna Raffetto (Rovereto: Zandonai, 2008): 220.
But even in Trieste itself, Pahor’s official acknowledgement is mainly limited to his writings about the Nazi concentration camps, as the following example illustrates. In December 2009, Trieste’s (center-right) mayor Roberto Dipiazza announced that the city would award Pahor the Benemerenza civica, a medal recognizing his contribution to the cultural life of the city and his persecution under Nazism. Pahor, however, refused to accept the award, on the grounds that the award made no mention of the persecution he suffered under Italian Fascism. “I would have liked them to add one word. That word,” Pahor said in an interview, referring, of course, to the word “Fascism.” Dipiazza responded to Pahor’s refusal by emphasizing that the precise motivations of an award cannot be dictated by the recipient, adding that “we have to look ahead, let’s leave history to the historians.”

The controversy continued when, a few weeks later, the Triestine Associazione cittadini liberi ed uguali offered Pahor an alternative award:

> Per il suo impegno antifascista che investe la cultura, la dignità, la coerenza. A Pahor, testimone vivente della resistenza contro il fascismo di ieri e di oggi nel contesto della Trieste vera, multietnica e multicultural, al di fuori delle istituzioni ipocritamente silenti della nostra città.

Dipiazza, among whose declared political aims is the fostering of peaceful Italo-Slovene relations in the city and region, reacted by accusing the Associazione of trying to rekin-

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321 “For his dedication to the fight against Fascism which enriches our culture, our dignity, our cohesion. To Pahor, a living witness to the resistance against Fascism yesterday and today within the real Trieste, multiethnic and multicultural, independent of those institutions of our city who maintain their hypocritical silence.” Marisa Fumagalli, “Pahor, un altro premio divide Trieste,” Corriere della Sera 9 Jan. 2010.
dle old conflicts: “C’è un disegno, intollerabile, di rinverdire l’odio, di alzare lo scontro fra gli estremisti di destra e di sinistra” [There is an intolerable effort to revive hatred and to augment the conflict between the extremists on the right and on the left] (ibid.). In early December 2010, Pahor and Dipiazza seemed to have put their differences behind them, when they both attended the performance of a Slovene play directed by Boris Kobal based on Nekropola at Trieste’s Teatro Verdi. It was the first time a play had been presented in Slovene at the Teatro Verdi, and the performance, co-sponsored by Dipiazza and the mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković, drew a large Slovene crowd from the entire region. Pahor considered the performance an important first step in the recognition of the Slovene community in Trieste:

Mi sento di dire che quantomeno, con questa manifestazione, molti si sono resi conto che la nostra minoranza esiste. Ed è già un risultato. Inoltre questa è una manifestazione importante legata a un vero cambiamento di cultura. La lingua slovena, ad esempio è riconosciuta e tutelata a tutti i livelli sull’altopiano, ma sono convinto che ci arriveremo anche a Trieste.322

Throughout Pahor’s writings, the status of the Slovene language in Trieste and its region is one of the central themes.323 Pahor’s short stories, as they present in nuce what he reiterates in various works: the shock experienced in the face of a Fascist violence that

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322 “I feel that this performance has finally made many people aware of the existence of our minority. And that’s something. But beyond that, this is an important performance that is tied to a real change in our culture. The Slovene language, for example, is acknowledge and fostered at all levels on the [Karst] plateau, but I am certain that we’ll get there in Trieste as well.” Furio Baldassi, “Necropoli, Cade un’altra frontiera del Novecento,” Il Piccolo 5 Dec. 2010.

323 A useful overview of the political and legal status of the Slovene minority in Trieste and its region can be found in Brohm, “Raum des Fremden”: 150–2.
was motivated only by the cultural and linguistic otherness of the Slovenes and the subsequent concern about the disappearance of the Slovene culture and language. The earlier short stories are told in the third person, from the perspective of a child, Pahor’s alter ego Branko, and focus on the small world of the family, the home, and the city in the 1920s. In the later stories the perspective shifts. Some are told in the first person and testify directly to events in Pahor’s life, others are presented as if they were told by a group of people, or by the whole community as a type of choral narrative. Taken together, the stories can be read as a chronicle, not only to his own suffering, but also to the plight of his people.

The stories collected in *Il rogo nel porto* span almost the entire century, beginning in the last years of World War I, and ending sometime in the late 1990s or early 2000s. It is divided into four sections, each prefaced by a poem by Srečko Kosovel or Umberto Saba. The first and longest section is dedicated to the Fascist repression in the interwar period; the second section, comprising only two stories, deals with Pahor’s imprisonment in Natzweiler-Struthof and the time he spent in France right after the liberation; and the third and fourth sections are dedicated to the difficulties and ongoing discrimination of the Slovene minority in Trieste during the post-war years. Reading the stories in their chronological sequence, it becomes clear that Pahor sees the Nazi crimes in the region as an extension and continuation of the Fascist persecution of the Slovenes. The title story of the collection, “*Il rogo nel porto,*” presents the burning of the
Narodni Dom as an emblem of Fascist persecution in Venezia Giulia, an act of violence that is perceived as madness by the seven year old protagonist. Standing in front of the burning building, Branko and his sister see the sky, the walls, everything tinged in red, the air smells of smoke, and the Fascists, who dance around the fire, screaming and singing, resemble savages from distant lands. The children see men and women who throw themselves from the windows to escape the flames. The scene is utterly incomprehensible to the little boy—especially since the men dressed in black do not let the firefighters approach the building. Branko cannot explain to himself why neither the crowd nor the police nor the soldiers from the nearby barracks intervene. From that day on, Branko has nightmares, in which the event he has witnessed becomes merged with the German fairy tales which Mizzi, a young Slovene woman who lives in the apartment upstairs, has been telling him and his sisters.\(^{324}\)

This initial traumatic event is connected in the story to three other events, all of which present different facets of how the life of the Slovene community in the city has changed forever. The first is connected to Mizzi. Branko and his sisters spend a lot of time with her because they like the fairy tales she tells them. Her uncle, a Slovene who denies his origins by insisting on speaking German at home, treats her like his personal

\(^{324}\) In her brief analysis of the scene, Heike Brohm writes: “At the center of the story lies the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. As the story progresses, the tale of the vanishing breadcrumbs and the threat of death in the witch’s oven emerges as a foreshadowing of the eradication of Slovene identity and the burning of the Narodni Dom and finally of the crematoria in the concentration camps” (154).
slave, a behavior which mirrors the way the Slovenes are treated by the Italians. On the
day on which Mizzi returns home from the Fascist census and tells her uncle that she has
declared herself Slovene, he is furious and calls her a S’ciava, and tells her, reiterating
the Fascist ideology: “You’re a foreign citizen,” he continues, “they’ll send you away.” We
do not find out what happened to Mizzi, but we may surmise that she joins the ranks of
the tens of thousands of Slovenes and Croats who emigrated during these years, and to
whom the story makes explicit reference in the end. The second episode takes place dur-
ing a Christmas celebration that is interrupted by the Fascists, who storm into the hall
armed with clubs and beat the attendees indiscriminately. Seen through Branko’s eyes,
the Fascists become black devils who beat not only the men, women and children in the
audience, but also threaten Santa Claus and the angels, who are the first to run away.
The third episode takes place during a lesson in the Slovene school Branko is attending.
The lesson is interrupted by Italian children dressed in their black Ballila outfits who
climb the trees outside the classroom windows, shout insults and throw stones at the
Slovene children.

Like snapshots, the different episodes in “Il rogo nel porto” illustrate different as-
pects of the violence that has come over the city and the Slovene people: all their cul-
tural institutions are destroyed, the Slovenes are not allowed to gather in public to cele-
brate their cultural events, and the schools are being closed or Italianized. Following
these traumatic events, the prohibition of the Slovene language takes center stage in the
remaining stories. The fear and insecurity his protagonist Branko feels with respect to the imposed Italian language becomes the symbol of a general state of estrangement, of no longer being at home in one’s own home. From one day to the next, an entire community is reduced to silence. Among all the stories that thematize the loss of the Slovene language, “Fiori per un lebbroso” [Flowers for a Leper] is the most harrowing. It relates the cruel death of Lojze Bratuž, organist and choir master in Podgora, a village near Gorizia, who was arrested by black-shirts for practicing traditional Slovene songs with his choir. During the interrogation, he was forced to drink a mixture of castor- and motor oil, which resulted in his hospitalization and a slow, agonizing death.

In Pahor’s story, the Slovene people in the village are portrayed as living in complete harmony with nature, with the landscape, and with their tradition, the symbol of which is the Slovene language. This symbiotic relationship between land and people is disrupted when the Fascists arrive with their uniforms, their cars, trucks, and torture methods. The choir master is presented as a martyr-figure whose death shatters the community, but also inspires acts of resistance. In the beginning of the story, Lojze is rehearsing a popular Slovene song with his girl choir. His powerful voice is described as redeeming, “un annuncio di salvezza” [a harbinger of salvation] (105) and the song becomes a promise of liberation. But the music is interrupted by the arrival of two Fascists. As they step onto the balcony, they resemble the Romans from the stations of the cross displayed along the church walls. They call out Lojze’s name in Italian, and take him
away. The arrest seems like sacrilege: “Quando lo condussero via, nel santuario aleggiava ancora l’odore dell’incenso; il paese invece taceva come il corpo di un annegato” (105–6), one of many references to the village, the land, and its people as a single body. In a suffocating prison cell in Gorizia the Fascists torture and mock him. Lojze does not beg for mercy, he endures everything in silence, and finally drinks the oil mixture they have placed in front of him. While Lojze lies dying, the people, the town, even nature are suspended in a state of shock and silence. Lojze’s suffering is mirrored by the land and the people:

Mentre era ricoverato all’ospedale tutta la regione respirava affannosamente come il suo petto. Un gelo pernicioso era calato sui pendii montani, sui campi della pianura, nelle cantine delle case. I cittadini si fermavano sui marciapiedi e si interrogavano con gli sguardi; la gente era immersa in un silenzioso cor–
doglio come se la morte avesse spalancato l’uscio di tutte le case slovene. Il contadino grattava pensieroso la fronte della giovane, sua moglie sedeva muta presso la bassa finestra delle cucina. Il gelo mortale s’era posato come un gas velenoso sul trifoglio e sul bosco; sul Nanos i pastori avevano tolto i sonagli alle pecore.

One night, however, the shocked and helpless silence of the villagers turns into defiant resistance. A group of boys ride their bikes into town and in front of Lojze’s open hospital window they sing the Slovene song that he had practiced with his choir. Again,

325 “When they led him away, the sanctuary was still filled with the scent of incense; but the town was silent like the body of a drowned man.”

326 “While he was in hospital, the entire region gasped for breath like his chest. A pernicious chill had fallen on the steep mountains, on the fields on the plain, into the cellars of the houses. The townsfolk stopped on the sidewalk and stared at each other; the people were immersed in silent grief as if death had torn upon the doors of all the Slovene houses. The farmer scratched the heifer’s brow thoughtfully, his wife sitting in silence by the low window in the kitchen. The deadly chill sat like a poisonous gas on the clover and the forest; the shepherds on the Nanos had removed the bells from their sheep.”
the song brings hope of liberation to the people and the land:

E sebbene il canto fosse melanconico, la campagna emise un sospiro di sollievo: s’era liberata dei pugnali, delle pistole, dei cani poliziotti. Il canto non era né una marcia militare né un grido di guerra, ma solo un tenero soggno, una timida aspirazione del cuore. Ecco perché era il brano preferito del maestro.327 (110)

Nature is presented as actively supporting this act of resistance: the forest, the animals, the moon, all help the boys escape: “i grilli [...] coprirono con il loro stridere il frusciore delle biciclette,” [the crickets masked the sound of the bicycles with their song] (110) like sentinels, they warn the boys: “cri, cri, fuggite giovani. E poi: cri, cri, i fascisti non sono più qui. E ancora: cri cri, o giovani cari, sì sì” [cree, cree, flee boys. And then: cree, cree, the Fascists are gone. And again: cree cree, oh dear boys, yes, yes] (111). After Lojze’s death, people from all the surrounding villages swarm into town like white blood cells towards the “focolaio dell’infezione” [source of the infection] (111). Again, the Slovenes and their land are described as a single organism infested by the Fascist disease. Lojze’s body is locked up in the mortuary, with Fascist guards at the door, and nobody is allowed to see him. But the mass of people, led by the women, becomes a raging sea ("marea") that inundates and overwhelms the guards and forces its way into the mortuary. The significance of the title becomes clear in the final scene, in which the villagers, barred from visiting Lojze’s grave, throw flowers over the cemetery wall “come si getta qualcosa

327 “And even though it was a melancholy song, the countryside gave a sigh of relief: it had freed itself of the daggers, pistols, and police dogs. The song was neither a military march nor a war cry but simply a tender dream, a faint aspiration of the heart. That’s why it was the master’s favorite.”
a un lebbroso” [the way you throw something to a leper] (113).

Throughout the text there are more or less overt parallels between the choir master and Jesus Christ, starting with the stations of the cross depicted in the church from which the Fascists seem to emerge like latter-day Romans to his mockery and painful death. But in the final scene it becomes clear that there is no prospect of a resurrection and instead Lojze is compared to a leper. The significance of this comparison is two-fold. On the one hand it reveals that Lojze is not a Jesus-figure, but instead one of the sick who needs a redeemer, on the other hand, leprosy as the condition of the dissolution of the body may be read symbolically as an indicator of the destruction of the Slovene community by the Fascists. Lojze is now an untouchable, as by implication are all members of the Slovene community under Fascism. The quiet indictment underlying all of Pahor’s writing is the recognition that this outcast status has endured even after the fall of Fascism.

The story “Una strana accoglienza” [A Strange Welcome] for example, illustrates how the deportati who have returned from the concentration camps, especially those who speak Slovene, are still regarded with suspicion after the end of the war. Written in the first person, it describes the in-between status of the deportati after their return from the concentration camps. Unable to find work and not wanting to be a burden to his family, the narrator, whom, for the sake of convenience, we will refer to as Pahor, aimlessly walks around Trieste to pass the time. He stops to talk to a pretty girl on the
street, and no sooner has she gone on her way than he is accosted by a policeman who has noticed him loitering in front of a shop window and immediately suspects him of attempted larceny. Pahor perceives the encounter as almost surreal, not least because the policeman resembles Tom Mix, star of innumerable silent Westerns. When asked what he is doing there, Pahor replies that he isn’t doing much of anything. Then the policeman wants to know whether he is Triestine, and, when Pahor prevaricates, “Tom Mix” instructs him to accompany him to the police station. “Disoccupato?” [unemployed] the policeman asks. Trying to explain his status, Pahor answers: “Prima ero internato,” [I was in the camps before] but the policeman is not interested in this fact. Instead, he wants his suspicion confirmed: “È disoccupato. E basta” [You’re unemployed and that’s that]. Pahor is detained for hours and interrogated about his alleged criminal activities.

Even in today’s Trieste, as Pahor’s last story suggests, Slovene speakers may be treated disrespectfully. “Una sosta sul Ponte Vecchio” is set in present-day Italy and presents the older Pahor with a female friend named Živka on a two-day-trip to Florence for an art exhibition of the works of Raffaello. On the train, the two are conversing in Slovene, which clearly irritates an Italian gentleman seated next to them, to the point where he gets up and demonstratively leaves the compartment. When the man keeps lingering outside in the corridor with his eyes fixed on the two Slovene speakers “con uno sguardo carico di rimprovero, ma anche come velato di sofferenza” [with a look
filled with reproach, but also as if veiled in suffering] (220), Pahor asks himself what he should do. Should he initiate a conversation with this stranger? Perhaps in response to the peculiar mixture of reproach and suffering he detects in the man’s gaze, Pahor begins to imagine what he could say to the man, whose obvious distaste at the sound of the Slovene language seems inextricably linked to the shared history of the Slovene and Italian populations of Trieste. In an imaginary monologue, he tells the stranger about the long tradition of Slovene cultural and spiritual life, of the Slovene authors who have lived in Trieste over the centuries. He explains the origins of the Italian hatred of the Slovenes in Trieste, which he traces back to the late-nineteenth century with the rise of the Slovene-Triestine bourgeoisie and the concomitant envy on the part of the Italians of their growing wealth and influence. He goes on to outline the marginalization of Slovenes after Trieste became Italian in 1918, followed by the Fascist Italianization campaign and the persecution of those who resisted. Finally, Pahor turns to what he sees as the source of the veiled suffering in the man’s eyes: the foibe and the exodus from Istria, which, paradoxically, emerge as a symbol of shared history and suffering:

Quella sciagura inaudita. Un’ecatombe che ci addolora e che riproviamo. E che sentiamo in modo tanto più vivo perché anche noi Sloveni siamo stati fortemente toccati da quegli eccessi rivoluzionari. No, in ciò che accadde nel maggio del 1945 la popolazione Slovena non c’entra per niente. Lo stesso si dica riguardo al vostro esodo dall’Istria. Ne siamo completamente estranei, ci

328 For a more detailed historical account of the relationship between Italians and Slovenes in Trieste and the reasons for the tensions between the two groups see, among others, Cattaruzza, “Slovenes and Italians”.
è facile, però, comprendervi perché dopo il 1918 moltissimi dei nostri dovettero andarsene. Ecco, la storia ci ha messi tutti alla prova, voi, la comunità maggioritaria, e noi, la minoritaria: il compito nostro, ora, è di fare in modo che ci si possa riunire in un saggio convivio. Lévy-Strauss afferma che non esistono i popoli-bambini, quindi potremmo, qui da noi, vivere da pari a pari.\textsuperscript{329} (221)

But this plea for mutual understanding and fraternity goes unuttered, and the two arrive in Florence without having spoken a word to the stranger. As he and Živka are walking through the streets of Florence, they stop on the Ponte Vecchio and Pahor is reminded of a passage in Dante’s \textit{Convivio} in which the Florentine poet berates those who disparage their own language and adopt another. “Bisognerebbe citargliela questa sentenza di Dante,” [One ought to quote him that line from Dante] (223) he says to Živka. She asks who he means. “Ma a quella specie di fantasma del rapido!” Pahor replies, referring to the ghostly stranger on the train.

Invoking the national poet of Italy in support of his right to speak his native Slovene may seem like a defiant gesture, but it is clear that for Pahor it is necessary to transcend such narrow nationalist conceptions of historical identity and instead embrace the shared task of creating a “saggio convivio.” The past needs to be remembered and revisited in order that it may be overcome and transformed into a wiser and more mature

\textsuperscript{329} That unprecedented disaster. A massacre that pains us and that we still feel. And we feel it much more vividly because we Slovenes were also profoundly affected by those revolutionary excesses. No, the Slovene population has nothing to do with what happened in May of 1945. The same goes for your exodus from Istria. It’s got nothing to do with us, but it is easy for us to understand you, because after 1918 so many of us had to leave. So you see, history has put us all to the test, you, the majority, and us, the minority: our task now is to find a way to coexist. Lévi-Strauss says that there are no peoples without history, so we ought to be able to live here together as equals.”
A Question of Belonging: Fulvio Tomizza and Liminal Identity

“Bisogna schierarsi o con gli slavi o con gli italiani. Io invece volevo essere tutte e due.”

Fulvio Tomizza

Fulvio Tomizza, originally Tomica, was born in the small village Juricani/Giurizzani near Materada in 1935. Situated at the northwestern end of Istria between the mainly Croatian-speaking town Buje/Buie and the largely Italophone coastal town Umag/Umag, the village was at the center of a linguistically and culturally hybrid area where both a Croatian-Slovene and a Venetian dialect were spoken and mixed together. This hybrid language, which functioned as a cultural middle ground and linguistic manifestation of the symbiosis between the two local cultures, plays an important role in many of Tomizza’s works since it becomes a “Symbol eines konfliktfreien, selbstverständlichen Neben- und Miteinanders der verschiedenen Bevölkerungsgruppen.” Just as for Pahor the cultural position of the Slovene language becomes the key to recovering the forgotten Slovene

330 “You’ve got to decide whether you’re going to be with the Slavs or the Italians. I, on the other hand, wanted to be both.” Antonino Grillo, ed., Tomizza e la critica più recente. A proposito di C. Aliberti, “Fulvio Tomizza e la frontiera dell’anima” (Foggia: Bastogi, 2003): 17.

vene history of Trieste and preserving the Slovene cultural identity of the city, for Tomizza this Istrian dialect assumes the character of a supra-national idiom in which national identity dissolves into a shared linguistic identity. In an essay about his multilingualism Tomizza writes:

Questi due corsi, che quasi di continuo s’intrecciano mescolando le loro povere acque, inducono talvolta a pensare che essi non fungevano da canale di scolo tra le differenti parlate nazionali, bensì venivano a costituire una terza via, la quale, se incoraggiata dall’esterno e divenuta consapevole nel suo interno, avrebbe potuto rappresentare una soluzione linguistica italo-slava.332

Many of Tomizza’s Istrian novels present a world whose transnational status was perceived as enriching and in which the dialect, a hybrid made of both languages, could have contributed to finding a “third way,” as he calls it, a peaceful solution between the two nationalities in the region. This opportunity was missed, however, and the enforcement of first one national language under Fascism and then another under the Yugoslav government caused many Istrians to leave (Croats during Fascism, Italians after the war) and contributed to the irrevocable loss of the region’s unity. Tomizza presents himself as the chronicler of the fate of his fellow Istrians, who suffered under Fascism because of their use of “Slavic” idioms, and who suffered again under Yugoslav rule because of the Italian components in their dialect. The Istrians, Tomizza emphasizes, cannot easily be

332 “These two streams, constantly crossing each other and mixing their meager waters, often give the impression that they don’t act as a drainpipe between the different national dialects but rather came to construct a third way, which, if it had been encouraged from without and achieved a degree of self-conscious within, could have represented a linguistic solution to the Italo-Slavic problem.” Fulvio Tomizza, “Uno scrittore tra due dialetti di matrice linguistica diversa,” Alle spalle di Trieste. Scritti 1969–1994, (Milano: Bompiani, 1995): 185.
divided into Croats and Italians, just as the region’s history is more complex than simplistic portrayals of innocent Italians versus evil “Slavs” or vice versa. This is why he decided to tell the story of his village and its people:

Even though Tomizza chose to write in Italian, he nevertheless incorporates Croatian words and dialect expressions into the text, lists forgotten names of villages, streets, and families, and includes bilingual catalogs of names of plants and animals. Preserving the words and idioms of his childhood within his texts is a way for Tomizza to salvage the lost world of a unified Istrian Italian-Croatian culture. Tomizza’s Italian and his method of including dialect expressions provoked strong reactions not only among his Italian critics, but also from the Croatian side. In Italy, people accused Tomizza of writing a ‘bad’ Italian and of contaminating the language with these coarse expressions, whereas in Zagreb he was thought to be belittling the Croatian language. But this insistence on including the

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333 “In preparing to tell this story which took place before my eyes [...] I became aware of an burning desire to recreate, even in extremis, the lost harmony, to denounce the insults suffered, but also to tell the world about the tragic paradox of a community, part semi-Italian but mostly semi-slavic, which, in the head-on clash of their two respective countries of origin, became dispersed forever. And I chose the language which I knew the best and which I could most easily imagine as a literary one.”

334 In the title essay of the posthumously published collection Le mie estati letterarie, Tomizza compares the criticism he received from the Italian side with the criticism launched against Svevo’s style, which was
hybrid dialect expressions into his texts has also another reason besides a nostalgic longing for the past, namely his assuming the role of a mediator between the different ethnic groups, and of a witness to their stories, some of which have remained largely unheard:

la presa di coscienza di appartenere a entrambi i gruppi etnici e alle rispettive culture, unitamente al dovere di dare maggiore ascolto alla componente più sacrificata nell’intero arco della storia e meno nota alla letteratura, mi ha guidato nella scelta dei temi, dei personaggi, degli ambienti, fino a sconfinare nell’universo sloveno degli Sposi di via Rossetti [...]. Non è stata tuttavia un’operazione né calcolata né costruita a tavolino. Di volta in volta, col precipitare degli eventi, il mio istinto e con esso gli affetti, le fedi, le ansie, messi a dura prova, hanno reagito in modo tale da non contentare mai compiutamente nessuno, né la parte italiana, né la parte slava, e nemmeno quella mia, mista per non dire bastardina, così ardentemente amata per la sua naturale imparzialità, la quale per me si è infine tradotta in inappartenenza.335 (193–4)

This quote combines the two aspects of Tomizza’s writings that are crucial to an understanding of his relationship to writing and identity: firstly, the repeated insistence on his being both Italian and Croat, which results in a permanent state of “unbelonging”; and

considered inelegant, unpleasing to the ear, even incorrect. Paolo Milano, one of Tomizza’s Italian critics, states in no uncertain terms the ways in which Tomizza’s language is deficient: “It’s a coarse language, hybrid, bristling with solecisms, it’s the bastard and approximate (one assumes) Italian of an Istrian boy, or of a very insecure first-person narrator, who, wishing to recall his story, succeeds only in conveying the facts, and even that in a confused manner.” Qtd. in Fulvio Tomizza, Le mie estati letterarie (Venezia: Marsilio, 2009): 128.

335 “The realization that I belonged to both ethnic groups and their respective cultures, coupled with the need to pay more careful attention to the most neglected part of that whole story with which literature was less familiar, guided my choice of themes, of characters, of settings, to the point where I entered the Slovene world of Gli sposi di via Rossetti [...]. But in any case this was neither a calculated move nor one I had concocted at my desk. From time to time, as events unfolded, my instinct and with it the emotions, beliefs, fears, that had been put through the mill, reacted in a way that would never completely satisfy anyone, neither the Italians nor the Slavs, nor indeed myself, with my mixed, not to say bastard identity, which I loved so passionately for its natural impartiality and which in my case ultimately meant a state of unbelonging.”
secondly, the investment in creating as complete and inclusive a picture as possible of the multi-cultural character of the region. Tomizza feels it is his duty also to tell the story of those who have suffered a similar fate as his Istrian compatriots, but whose stories would otherwise disappear. In other words, Tomizza adopts the position of a vicarious witness to these forgotten histories, or, as literary critic Sergio Campailla writes, Tomizza makes it his duty “di essere umile cantore delle umili res gestae di un mondo escluso dalla storia, e pur riscattato da secoli di anonime sofferenze.” It is this dual imperative which drives Tomizza’s work as an author: to create a utopian world in which Italians and Slavic speakers literally speak the same language without having to choose which nationality they belong to, and to speak for those who have not been heard. At the same time, the almost impossible task as a mediator between and witness to both ethnic groups makes him a nomad. The lived experience of the border, as he says in an interview, is his state of being:

Mi sentivo diviso fra un mondo e l’altro, fra un’ideologia e un’altra. Per vari anni ero stato in collegio dai preti e ora tutt’a un tratto sentivo il fascino del verbo comunista. Amavo mio padre, che nel suo cuore aveva sempre optato per l’Italia e soffrivo vederlo perseguitato dagli jugoslavi. Andavo a Trieste e là venivo considerato slavo perché provenivo dall’interno, tornavo a Materada e qui venivo considerato un italiano. Era il dramma della frontiera vissuto fino in fondo.

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337 “I felt split between two words, two ideologies. For many years I’d been living with priests and now
Even though he and his family were victims of the conflict between two cultures (they lost their land and house, and his father was imprisoned by the Yugoslavs before the family decided to move to Trieste), Tomizza refuses to take sides. His state of unbelonging becomes the dominant mode of his engagement with the region and its history. This in-between status, coupled with Tomizza's insistence on historical detail and complexity, sets him apart from other authors who write about the Istrian exodus. The hybrid Slavo-Italian culture of his childhood presents itself especially in Tomizza's early works such as the *Triloga Istriana* (published in 1967, containing the novels *Materada, La ragazza di Petrovia, and Il bosco di acacie*), the novel *La quinta stagione*, but also the later *La miglior vita*, published in 1977. Much of his later work focuses on the city of Trieste and the

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338 Such as for example Marisa Madieri, *Verde acqua. La radura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), Anna Maria Morì, *Nata in Istria* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006), Enzo Bettiza, *Esilio* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), Delia Biasi, *I fiori azzurri* (Trieste: Lint, 1999), and Alessandra Fusco, *Tornerà l'imperatore* (Ancona: Affinità elettive, 2002). An exception is Guido Miglia, whose later writings, especially *L'Istria una quercia*, display an attentiveness and appreciation of the hybridity of the Istrian culture and language similar to Tomizza's. See Guido Miglia, *L'Istria una quercia* (Trieste: Circolo di cultura “Istria”, 1994). One must of course also to take into account the literature written by the *rimasti*, those who decided to stay in what officially became part of Yugoslavia after 1954, for example Giacomo Scotti or Eros Sequi, whose *Eravamo in tanti* chronicles the Fascist persecutions of the Croats in Istria and the author’s experiences as a partisan in Tito’s army. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of this book. An interesting case is also the book *Bora*, co-written by Anna Maria Morì (an *esula*) and Nelida Milani (a *rimasta*). Departing from an evocation of the shared childhood in Pola, the book describes the alienation and exile status both women felt, Morì as a consequence of the decision to leave, Milani as a result of her inner emigration in Communist Yugoslavia. See Giacomo Scotti, *Dossier Foibe* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2005), Eros Sequi, *Eravamo in tanti* (Rijeka: Edit, 1979), Anna Maria Morì and Nelida Milani, *Bora* (Milano: Frassinelli, 1998).
various protagonists struggle with the question of belonging and their inability to commit fully to being Italian. It is in this later phase that he includes other Triestine minorities such as the Jews (in La città di Miriam) or the Slovenes (L’idealista, Gli sposi di via Rossetti, or Franziska) into his works. Unlike Pahor, Tomizza has a large readership in Italy. Several of his books have won prizes; his greatest success was La miglior vita, which sold several hundred thousand copies in Italy and received the most prestigious Italian literary award, the Premio Strega. In 1984 he was awarded an honorary doctorate in letters from the University of Trieste “for the high artistic level of his extensive narrative work, in which he has made himself an acute, original interpreter of a culture based on the values of the peaceful coexistence of peoples.”339 Even so, there is little to no scholarship in Italian on him (or in English, for that matter).340

Tomizza’s novels present a collective autobiography, so to speak, of the Istria of his childhood, in which the Croat/Slovene and Italian cultures are inextricably interwo-


ven, and whose close-knit webs of multiculturality are forcefully broken apart by the larger historical events. Thus, his endeavor is as much a literary one as it is a historiographical one. The best example of this literary-documentary style is, perhaps, the novel *La miglior vita*, whose narrative stretches the entire century from Habsburg rule to the 1970’s. The “official” narrator of the novel is Martin Crusich, the Croat sexton of a parish in a small Istrian village. But the “unofficial” narrator is the village and its people. The small community, archaic and geographically marginal, is composed of various ethnic groups who are united in their attempt at maintaining the cohesion and identity of the village in spite of the changing macro-historical and political events. The changing history of the village is crystallized in the changing nationalities of the different pastors who come to the village over the course of the novel: first, a Polish pastor who addresses his congregation “in una lingua che compendiava ogni idioma slavo parlato nell'Impero,” [in a language that contained every Slavic idiom spoken in the Empire]³⁴¹ later a Croat pastor who is working on a dissertation on Slavic liturgy in Istria, an Italian pastor who is pro-Fascist and gets money from the Fascist government to complete the construction of the church tower, and, finally, a Croat pastor, who was among Tito’s partisans. At the incorporation of the village into the Yugoslav state, the position of the pastor is not filled anymore and only Crusich is left to tell the story. Great importance is placed on small historical details even from the remote past, so that the reader gets the sense that the

village has a long Slavic history that precedes even the Venetian dominion over the region:

Ora apprendevo che sempre sotto il dominio della repubblica veneta preesisteva una piccola comunità, probabilmente distrutta con la peste del 1630, dotata da una propria cappella retta da un prete illirico che usava il glagolitico, la prima scrittura slava portata da San Metodio in Moravia e tramandata dai discepoli fuggiti dopo la sua morte alcuni in Bulgaria, altri nell’Istria e in Dalmazia.342

Tomizza’s narrator chronicles the fragmentation and destruction of this multicultural community over the course of his life span: World War I, Fascism and the Italianization of the village, World War II, the German occupation, and finally Communism and the village becoming a part of Yugoslavia. The internal rupture of the community reaches its highpoint in the years immediately after the end of World War II, when the village is assigned first to the Free Territory of Trieste, later to Yugoslavia, and the question of whether to be pro-Italian or pro-Yugoslav divides even families and couples. Cusich sums up the absurdity of this question of national belonging in one sentence: “Eravamo in guerra, continuavamo a trovarci in piena guerra per l’eterna questione dell’essere italiani e dell’essere slavi, quando in realtà non eravamo che bastardì” [We were at war, we continued to find ourselves in the middle of a war over the eternal question of who was Ital-

342 “Now I discovered that beneath the dominance of the Venetian Republic there had been a small pre-existing community, probably wiped out by the plague of 1630, which had its own chapel run by an Illyrian priest, and which wrote in Glagolitic, the first Slavic script brought to Moravia by Saint Methodius and handed down by his disciples, some of whom had fled to Bulgaria after his death, others to Istria and Dalmatia.” (41)
ian and who was a Slav, when in reality we were all just bastards] (199–200). \(^{343}\)

Unlike the simplistic narrative of the Istrian exodus promoted by popular representations such as *Il cuore nel pozzo*, Tomizza emphasizes the historical context and gives his readers a sweeping overview of the complex historical continuities and ruptures that have led to the struggles in the region. \(^{344}\) In this context, the title, *La miglior vita*, can be read as referring to the impossible decision the villagers, and by extension all Istrians, were confronted with: does finding a better life mean to embrace one nationality over another; does it mean to stay in Istria or to leave? This is how Tomizza describes the exodus:

Partì dal sessanta al settanta per cento della popolazione, con camion stracchini di supplì e dell’entrata di quell’estate, nei carri tirati da manzi come uscissero dai campi... Lasciavano le case spalancate a tutti i venti, oppure con la porta e le finestre sbarrate, quasi che l’ultima pestilenza non avesse rispettato uno solo della famiglia. \(^{345}\) (208)

Tomizza emphasizes the fact that the emigration was a decision, and that there was a sizeable part of the Istrian Italian population who decided to stay behind, the *rimasti*, who did not want to give up their homes. One of the *rimasti* is Cusich, who continues to

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\(^{343}\) Claudio Magris also discusses the impossibility of establishing a clear ethnic lineage for the people of the region in his book *Microcosmi* (Milano: Garzanti, 1997): 190–3 and passim.

\(^{344}\) In *Le mie estati letterarie*, Tomizza describes his extended archival research at the church archive in Materada and at several libraries in Trieste in order to access also the older history of Istria. (Tomizza, *Le mie estati*: 137).

\(^{345}\) “Sixty to seventy per cent of the population left, with trucks overloaded with their belongings and that summer’s income, on wagons drawn by oxen as if they were just leaving the fields... They left their homes wide open, or else with the door and windows barred, almost as if the latest plague had not spared a single member of the family.”
narrate the story of the village under the Yugoslav regime until his death. By assuming the perspective of a rimasto, Tomizza is able to imagine how life was for the other half of the Istrians, those who did not, like him, emigrate to Italy.

This double perspective is rare within Istrian exile writing. While most of the esuli writers struggle to come to terms with the discrepancy between their self-identification as Italian and the alienation they felt upon arriving in Italy and as a result of their exile from Istria, for Tomizza, the identity he wishes to construct is not so much informed by a nostalgia for a lost Italian Istria, as by the refusal to conform to pre-established binaries of Italian/non-Italian. What is more, Tomizza’s determination to explore the facets of this liminal identity is coupled with a need to give voice to other marginal lives which would otherwise fall through the cracks of history. It was this impulse toward vicarious witnessing which drove him to tell the forgotten story of the young Slovene couple in his novel Gli sposi di via Rossetti.\footnote{In another of his autobiographical essays, entitled “Lo scrittore Mitteleuropeo,” Tomizza thematizes what he considers the duty of a writer, namely, his “impegno umano e civile” (156). As an example of this duty, he names his book Gli sposi di via Rossetti and the story of Stanko Vuk in particular. Furthermore, he emphasizes how important it is for him to practice what he preaches and actively seek the dialogue with other minorities in Trieste. Hence, he frequents Slovene cultural circles and regularly attends conferences, and even goes to Slovene schools in order to speak to the students about his books. This reaching out across minority and ethnic dividing lines is regarded with suspicion or even disapproval among the Istrian community in Trieste (155).}

Gli sposi di via Rossetti attempts to reconstruct the events that led to the assassination of Dani and Stanko Vuk in their home in Via Rossetti in 1944. The murderers were never found and the motivation for the crime remains obscure. Even forty years after
the murder, Tomizza writes in the beginning of the book, the memory of this crime still divides the Slovene community in Trieste:

Per il partito cattolico, o per quello più genericamente conservatore o ‘ben-pensante,’ a irrompere armato di pistola nell’abitazione di via Rossetti il 10 marzo 1944 fu un commando rosso. Per gli altri (comunisti, progressisti, laici, quanti cioè ritengono di camminare al passo della storia), i tre assassini in trench chiaro e basco blu non potevano che essere bianchi, vale a dire collaborazionisti dei tedeschi. La sola cosa certa è che erano sloveni, come le loro vittime, e come tutti coloro che ancora si mostrano interessati al grave fatto.347

In the Italian community, on the other hand, the story is largely unknown. As the subtitle—Tragedia in una minoranza—suggests, the purpose of Gli sposi is twofold. On the one hand it introduces Tomizza’s Italian readership not only to this unique and tragic love story but also to the suffering of the Slovene community in Trieste during the years of Fascism. Through the prism of this family’s story, Tomizza is able to portray the entire spectrum of the Triestine Slovene community and to limn their different stances and responses to the Fascist persecutions. For the Slovene readers on the other hand, the book is an attempt at grounding the controversial matter of the assassination in the historical details and give a sober account of what happened. Because Tomizza is not Slovene, he can not only look at the events in an impartial light, but also portray the reper-

347 “As far as the Catholic Party, or the more generally conservative or ‘orthodox’ people were concerned, it was a red brigade that had burst into the house at via Rossetti 10, armed with guns. As far as the others (communists, progressives, non-Catholics; all those, in short, who claim to move with the times), the three assassins in white trench coats and blue berets could only have been ‘whites,’ i.e. those who collaborated with the Germans. The only thing anyone knew for certain was that they had been Slovenes, like their victims, and like all those who still show an interest in this serious matter.” Fulvio Tomizza, Gli sposi di via Rossetti (Milano: Mondadori, 1986): 9–10.
cussions they still have in today’s Trieste. As literary critic Carmelo Aliberti argues, the constant interplay between the micro- and macro-levels of history, allows him to “farci capire come i clandestine o palesi scontri del passato continuano a necrotizzare la convivenza civile del presente” [make us understand how the secret or overt clashes of the past continue to necrotize civil cohabitation in the present] (Aliberti 82). In order to avoid the rancor of either side in this story, Tomizza adopts the stance of an objective chronicler, relying almost exclusively on the historical documents and foregrounding the personal and emotional aspects while withholding any judgment of the political choices of the protagonists. The book is based on a selection of the more than 400 letters the two lovers wrote to each other in Italian during the four years Stanko spent in prison, and some other family documents. Tomizza received the letters from an unnamed friend and was so fascinated by this “extraordinary love story” and the character of Stanko Vuk, that he abandoned the historical novel he was working on at the time and decided to use these letters as the basis for a historical book. In the same year, the editors of a collection of this correspondence contacted Tomizza and invited him to write the foreword. Both books were published in 1986, and together they can be seen as a belated and rare testimony in Italian to the suffering of the Slovene community in Trieste. The book is divided into three parts. In the first, Tomizza recounts how he came into

348 See also Tomizza’s “Riflessioni”: 106. This article originally appeared in the daily newspaper Il Gazzettino in August 1986.
possession of these letters and provides Stanko’s and Dani’s family background, and the events leading up to his imprisonment. The second and largest section is devoted to the letters themselves, including Tomizza’s glosses. The third and final part deals with Stanko’s release from prison and the mystery surrounding the couple’s murder. *Gli sposi di via Rossetti* is neither a novel nor a documentary; rather, one could describe it as an extensive portrait of these two young people, their desires, fears, and anxieties, and of the historical moment in which they lived.

Besides the recovery of a marginal history, there is also another aspect that is of interest to the author, namely the poetic nature of Stanko’s letters, all of which were written in Italian. Tommizza is profoundly impressed by Stanko’s ability to express his innermost feelings so beautifully in an imposed language. Stanko seems to become something like a kindred spirit for Tomizza since he weaves dialect expressions into his letters in order to evoke the intimate world of home:

Vero è che egli stesso, come insofferente, ogni tanto riusciva a contrabbandare sotto gli occhi dei censori in uniforme metafore ed epitetti della loro parlata nativa e che quasi a mediare tra le due lingue nazionali, la proibita e la obbligata, affiorassero dialettismi a cui non sfuggono neppure gli scrittori più fieri di appartenere alla cultura dominante di questa zona di confine.349 (11–2)

In other words, Stanko’s use of Slovene-Italian dialect words is, for Tomizza, a brave act

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349 “It’s true that he, restless soul that he was, every now and then succeeded in sneaking metaphors and epithets from their native tongue past the eyes of the uniformed censors, and that as if to mediate between the two national languages, one forbidden, the other imposed, there emerged dialect expressions from which not even writers who are the proudest of belonging to the dominant culture of this border region can escape.”
of resistance to the oppressors from within the prison. Another aspect that seems to be intriguing to Tomizza is the fact that the two lovers could not be more different in their personalities, their family backgrounds, their faith, and political views. Stanko Vuk is a poet and Catholic intellectual from Gorizia, who, after studying diplomacy in Venice, comes to Trieste and begins to organize the Catholic Slovene resistance in the city, writing and editing anti-Fascist texts. Dani Tomažič, his young wife, is the daughter of well-to-do Slovenes who have established themselves firmly in the Triestine bourgeoisie and willingly changed their name to Tomasi. A third protagonist is Dani’s brother Pino, a leading figure in the Communist resistance movement in the city. Estranged from his parents because of his Communist beliefs, Pino nonetheless plays a significant role in Dani’s life: her political mentor, he rejects Stanko and especially his politics and is against the marriage. By choosing Stanko and rejecting Communism, Dani decisively severs the ties that link her to her brother. Another presence in the book is Boris Pahor, also engaged in the Catholic resistance in Trieste, and a close friend of Stanko’s. With Stanko in prison, Dani’s friendship with Pahor assumes greater significance.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁵⁰ Pahor comments on his friendship with Dani in Piazza Oberdan: “I had a unique connection to Pino’s fate because of my close friendship with his sister Dani, who was estranged from her brother and political mentor because of her marriage to the leader of the Christian Democrats, Stanko Vuk. After her initial condemnation of her brother’s rejection, there was a reconciliation, as the letters which he received from her in prison show. [...] Three years after her brother’s death, she still dressed in black, but while we were all filled with enthusiasm for the resistance movement, she could no longer embrace any particular ideology, neither her brother’s nor her husband’s” (84–5). Significantly, Pahor does not say much about the context of Dani’s and Stanko’s mysterious and unresolved death, only that Dani was killed in a “treacherous assassination” (143). In Gli sposi, Tomizza suggests that Pahor might have worked through his rela-
In December of 1941, just months after the wedding, Stanko and Pino both are arrested and put on trial by the Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello Stato. The trial, which later became known as the Tomažič trial because Pino was the main defendant, although roughly 60 other members of the Slovene resistance were also tried, sent shock waves through the entire community and even divided the foreign press. Pino was among those who were sentenced to death and executed, Stanko was sentenced to 15 years in prison and is brought to various prisons all over northern Italy. The years of Stanko’s imprisonment take up the main section of the book. Quoting extensively from the letters and interpreting and commenting on them, Tomizza delineates the slow estrangement of the two lovers, whose differences in character begin to come out in this trying time. Stanko, who seems madly in love with his wife, tries to mold her into a perfect spiritual and intellectual companion and invites her to read the same books and find her faith. Dani, on the other hand, is not interested in educating herself, nor in embracing Catholicism; instead, she struggles with the unresolved matter concerning her brother, whose death stands permanently between her and Stanko. Their mutual friend Boris

351 For an extensive analysis of the Tomažič trial see Marta Verginella, *Il confine degli altri. La questione giuliana e la memoria slovena* (Roma: Donzelli, 2008), in particular chapter I: “La minoranza slovena di fronte al Tribunale special” (7–33), where she mentions foreign press commentary on the trial on p. 11.
Pahor seems to have been distraction and consolation for Dani during this time. They spend so much time together that Stanko even begins to question her fidelity.

The problems between the two culminate when Stanko is released from prison in February of 1944 and returns to Trieste. Desperately longed for and often imagined by Stanko, the reunion between the two lovers is feared by Dani, who feels that her husband has become a stranger, and she refuses to share his bed. The atmosphere of insecurity and confusion between the couple corresponds to the more general atmosphere in the city now occupied by the Nazis. The pressing question for Stanko is now whether or not to join the armed resistance forces. Just as their Italian counterpart, there were several rival Slovene resistance groups operating in Trieste at that time, each engaged in internecine fighting with the others. In addition, there was the Slovene Home Guard, called the “bianchi” because of their white trench coats, who worked for the German occupiers, and who arrested Boris Pahor in January 1944. Because Stanko was still considered the spiritual leader of the Slovene Catholics in the city, he received threats from various sides, especially the Nazi-sympathizers, and the couple decided to leave the city and go into hiding, but before they were able go through with their plan, they were shot dead in their home. Tomizza narrates their murder as if he were leafing through a police report. He gives a precise play-by-play of their last evening. At quarter to eight Stanko went to his in-laws for dinner, Dani stayed at home, since she was feeling unwell. After dinner, Stanko returned home, where he was to meet with a certain Dottor Zajc at eight
thirty. Dottor Zajc was on the run from the Communists. Why Stanko agreed to meet with him is unclear. Between nine and quarter past nine, Dani’s parents received a phone call from the concierge of the apartment building in Via Rossetti: she had heard shots in the apartment. They rushed over there with the keys and entered the apartment with the police to find Dani, Stanko, and Zajc dead: “l’ospite forestiero riverso su due sedie accostate al tavolo col cristallo nero, Stanko pure esanime steso sul pavimento, Dani inginocchiata alla base della parete, ma col dorso proteso verso il marito, aveva appena esalato l’ultimo respiro in mezzo a una pozza di sangue”\(^\text{352}\) (181). From this moment on, the last few pages of the book turn into a detective story. Tomizza gives precise descriptions of their wounds and reconstructs the sequence of the murder; he also reviews the various testimonies given, for example that of the concierge who saw three men in white trench coats and with blue berets come down the stairs at around nine, who spoke to her “in cattivo dialetto veneto e con pronuncia slava” [in a nasty Venetian dialect with a Slavic accent] (181). Tomizza even does some detective work himself: he speaks to Zajc’s widow who gives him additional information about the mysterious third person murdered. Ultimately, however, all the accounts he collects and reviews lead him only to more speculations. The book ends with the funeral of the couple in the family tomb, in the obituary the two families’ loss was attributed to “crudel destino” (195).

\(^{352}\) “the foreign guest, lying on his back across two chairs by the table with the black crystal, Stanko too was dead, stretched out on the floor, Dani, kneeling by the wall with her back arched toward her husband, had just breathed her last in the middle of a pool of blood.”
In many of his works about Istria, but also in *Gli sposi di via Rossetti*, Tomizza attempts to do what Pahor talks about in *Piazza Oberdan*, namely to establish a real connection to the past. The hybrid character of *Gli sposi*, mixing different aspects of the documentary, the biography, and the detective novel, reflects Tomizza’s approach to writing, which sees the author’s task as first and foremost that of presenting a solid and detailed historical framework based on authentic documents. Unlike Pahor, Tomizza does not insert quotations from historiographical works in the text, rather, he inserts his explanations into the narrative. As a result of this and of the somewhat sparing use of dates, a reader who is unfamiliar with the historical details and the complex issue of the different rival factions of the resistance movement in Trieste will find it disorienting. To counteract this, Tomizza has included a bibliography in the book that lists several historiographical works in Italian and Slovene. Like Pahor, Tomizza is also aware that the documentary framework alone is not enough to establish a connection to the past. Tomizza describes his method as zooming in on the personal details of a life in order to get a glimpse of history in slow motion: “la realtà storica, politica, e semplicemente umana, è vista come al rallentatore” (Tomizza “Riflessioni” 107). It is through the figures of Dani and Stanko, the most authentic incarnations of *giulianità*, that the larger history becomes accessible: “nel dipanarsi della loro storia intima e pubblica emergono il costume, lo spirito, la cronaca spicciola e i grossi fatti dell’Italia degli anni Trenta e della parte deci-
siva degli anni Quaranta” (106). Hence, Tomizza pays close attention to the emotional reactions of his protagonists, filling in the gaps with his own interpretations, observations, and musings. Tomizza does not pretend that his version of the story and his reconstruction of their assassination are definitive: at the end of Gli sposi, nothing is resolved and it is up to the reader to ponder the deeper implications of the story. It is significant that the perpetrators of this particular crime were not the Fascists or the Nazis, but rather Slovenes. In history, Tomizza emphasizes, it is never simply a question of good versus evil, of perpetrators versus victims. His task as a writer is to recover the grey zones and read between the lines—or to preserve a story from being erased or overwritten.

Literature and the Risiera

Let us return for a moment to Magris’s diagnosis of Trieste as a city of writers, all trying to express the irreconcilable differences and contradictions of the city’s history and its multiple ethnicities and cultures. Magris describes the city as an archipelago rather than a crucible, meaning that it consists of a multitude of disparate elements separated by a

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353 "As their private and public story unravels, we begin to see the customs, the spirit, the disjointed chronicle and the major events of Italy in the 30s and the most important part of the 40s."

354 Tomizza recounts how he quite literally saved the story of Dani and Stanko Vuk from oblivion after some of the letters which were lying on Tomizza’s desk by the open window got drenched during a sudden thunderstorm. Several of the letters were completely illegible, the ink dissolved by the rain. Tomizza feared the worst, but after ironing them and letting them dry, he could still see the faint traces left on the page by the pen with which they were written. See Tomizza, Le mie estati: 139–40.
sea of incomprehension and mutual distrust. Nonetheless, certain points of contact do exist, and perhaps the most prominent of these is the Risiera di San Sabba. To be sure, as the previous chapter made abundantly clear, the Risiera is by no means an unproblematic or unifying force in the region, but it is seen by many as a site of a communal history, where the fates of a large number of these disparate groups became interwoven. For this very reason, a glance at the various literary representations of the Risiera and its memory may offer a cross-section of the myriad modes and strategies writers have employed in the past seven decades in an attempt to come to terms with this shared yet divided history.

One of the first literary texts to discuss the Risiera di San Sabbia was Bruno Piazza’s concentration camp memoir Perché gli altri dimenticano. Un italiano ad Auschwitz, written shortly before his death in 1946 and published in 1956. The book went through four reprints but was very little received within Italy, and it has not been translated into any other language.\textsuperscript{355} Piazza was arrested after an anonymous denunciation on July 13,

\textsuperscript{355} The only in-depth analysis of Piazza’s book that exists so far can be found in Risa Sodi’s survey on Italian literature about the Holocaust, \textit{Narrative and Imperative. The First Fifty Years of Italian Holocaust Writing}. Sodi attempts to reconstruct Piazza’s family story, outlines the environment in which he grew up and traces his career as a lawyer and contributor for the socialist newspaper \textit{Il Lavoratore}. She summarizes the minimal press attention the book got after its delayed publication, including a revisionist article about the Risiera in which Piazza’s memoir was quoted as a proof that the Risiera was not a death camp. Since Piazza did not explicitly mention a crematorium at the Risiera, the authors of this article concluded, it did not exist. Therefore, the Risiera was merely a concentration camp. Sodi also gives an extended discussion of the memoir itself, focusing on the part of the book that deals with Auschwitz. See Risa B. Sodi, \textit{Narrative & Imperative: The First Fifty Years of Italian Holocaust Writing (1944–1994)} (New York: Lang, 2007) and “Bruno Piazza e il destino degli ebrei triestini,” \textit{Qualestoria} 25.1 (1997). See also the brief commemorative article by Sergio Franco, “Ricordo di Bruno Piazza,” \textit{Qualestoria} 21.2–3 (1993).
1944, and spent a few days at the Risiera before being transferred to another SS prison in Via Coroneo, from where he was deported to Auschwitz on July 30. There is almost no biographical information about Piazza’s life before his imprisonment in the book and very little about the experience at the Risiera. He spent one night in one of the cells on the ground floor and a few nights in the large room on the third floor of the adjacent building in which the Jewish prisoners were awaiting their deportation. At night he hears shots and dogs barking in the courtyard. The main impressions Piazza conveys about the Risiera concern the squalor and lice infestation that resulted from confining so many people in such a limited space, the hard physical work the prisoners were forced to do, and the randomness of the executions. Political prisoners were shot every night, but sometimes Jewish prisoners were taken out and shot as well. Piazza hears from the other prisoners that these executions took place because someone had tried to hide away gold coins from the guards.\(^{356}\) It seems that at this late point, in July ‘44, the prisoners in the Risiera were relatively well informed about what happened to those who were deported to Germany or Poland, and they were also able to gather some information about the progress of the Allied forces. Thus, Piazza writes, imprisonment in the Risiera was in any case preferable to being deported: all of the prisoners spoke Italian, the food

\(^{356}\) This episode is revisited in a scene in the Slovene theater play \textit{Rižarna}, which I discuss later in this chapter.
was sufficient, there were blankets to keep warm and ways to keep clean.\(^{357}\) The remaining 170 pages of Piazza’s memoir are dedicated to the five months he spent in Auschwitz and his liberation. The book ends abruptly right after his return to Trieste, and he gives no description of the post-war situation in Trieste. The experience of Auschwitz completely overshadows his imprisonment in the Risiera, which remains relegated to the frame narrative. Piazza is not interested in giving the larger historical context, or discussing the role of Italy in the Holocaust; he wants to tell in as detached and factual a manner as possible what happened to him in Auschwitz in order to testify to his and his fellow-prisoners’ experiences. His main aim, therefore, as he briefly states at the beginning of the book, is the “rivelazione esatta e oggettiva di tali misfatti […] perché frutti infamia perenne a chi li perpetrò” [exact and objective revelation of such misdeeds … so that those who committed them may live in infamy forever] (Piazza 9). A similarly minimal account of the Risiera as a sort of “ante-chamber to Auschwitz” can be found in other memoirs written by survivors of the Risiera, for example in Marta Ascoli’s *Auschwitz è di tutti*, published in 1998.\(^{358}\)


\(^{358}\) Ascoli is the only one to describe in more detail how the Risiera functioned and mentions the fact that Italians helped with the arrests and other tasks. Her brief account reads very much like a court testimony, avoiding emotions or interpretations so as not to obscure the facts. Like Piazza, she describes how she heard the sounds of prisoners being tortured and shot, the shots covered up with dog barking and loud music. Ascoli is also one of the few to mention the fact that prisoners were gassed in vans: ”At first, many Jews were killed in hermetically sealed trucks, which were filled with exhaust fumes. You couldn’t peer through the blacked-out windows to see what was going on in the courtyard below, without risking severe punishment for such a transgression.ˮ Marta Ascoli, *Auschwitz è di tutti* (Trieste: Lint, 1998): 14.
Giani Stuparich, the Triestine author and probably the most famous survivor of the Risiera, flatly refuses to discuss his experience there. Stuparich, his wife and mother were imprisoned in the Risiera for six days at the end of August in 1944 before being released at the request of the Triestine bishop. His mother and wife were Jewish, he himself was of “mixed” race and a well-known anti-Fascist. In his memoir, *Trieste nei miei ricordi*, published in 1948, Stuparich has only the following to say about his experience in the Risiera:

Con l’8 settembre e la calata dei tedeschi, venne anche peggio ed io fui, assieme con mia madre e con mia moglie, sulla soglia del campo di annientamento. (Ma questo del nostro arresto e della settimana passata nella Risiera di San Sabba, è un capitolo che sta fuori del quadro di queste mie memorie e che forse un giorno scriverò a sé.) Mi basti dire che fu la stessa Trieste, da cui mi venne la pugnalata, voglio dire gli altri concittadini che mi volevano bene, ed erano la maggioranza, a insorgere, come già accennai, e a liberarmi dalle SS. Tanto erano vicini i buoni ai malvagi.\(^\text{359}\)

The parenthetical refusal to make this doubtlessly traumatizing experience part of his memoir, or even admit that it is part of the life that he is narrating, is striking. It seems that the fact that he was only “on the threshold of an extermination camp” while so many millions actually perished there, is something he feels ashamed or guilty about.\(^\text{360}\)

\(^{359}\) “On the 8\(^{th}\) of September with the arrival of the Germans matters got even worse and, along with my mother and my wife, I found myself at the threshold of the death camp. (But our arrest and the week we spent at the Risiera di San Sabba are a chapter that is outside the purview of my memoirs and maybe one day I’ll write it separately.) Suffice it to say that having been betrayed in this way, it was Trieste itself, by which I mean my fellow citizens who cared for me, which was most of them, who revolted, as I’ve already said, and liberated me from the SS. That’s how close the good were to the bad.” Giani Stuparich, *Trieste nei miei ricordi* (Milano: Garzanti, 1984): 200.

\(^{360}\) This interpretation of Stuparich’s silence is also the one given by Bruno Vasari, a former pupil of Stupa-
Given the lack of survivor literature about the Risiera or the refusal to write about it for one reason or another, one must turn elsewhere to find literary accounts of the Risiera. More precisely, one must turn to writers who are more detached from the experience of the Risiera itself, but who are interested in preserving its memory as a crucial site in Trieste’s commemorative landscape. This may be in the form of a personal work of mourning and working though, such as in the case of Ketty Daneo, whose brother was imprisoned in the Risiera, or in the form of a more general taking stock of the sacrifices and losses after the end of the war, such as in the poems of Carolus L. Cergoly.

Daneo’s poem “La Risiera di San Sabha” is engraved on one of the commemorative plaques. The only literary accounts that exist about their imprisonment is a poem written by Elody Oblath, Stuparich’s wife, and a few lines in bishop Santin’s memoir. See Bruno Vasari, Giani Stuparich. Ricordi di un allievo (Trieste: Lint, 1999): 55–72.
tive plaques in the courtyard of the Risiera (Fig. 26). It was put up in 1955 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the liberation. The poem describes the war and the Nazi occupation as a brutal rupture with the past. Embodied in the idyllic initial image of young women working at the Risiera when it was still a rice husking factory, the past is contrasted with a present full of terror and suffering: foreign soldiers now occupy the Risiera; and the sons of those workers are now the prisoners tortured there, whilst outside the city is paralyzed by fear and mourning. The poem ends with the image of the victims’ ashes rising into the sky while the mothers stand silently outside the gates.

A similarly emotional approach can be seen throughout a collection of poems Daneo wrote about the Risiera, which was published in 1980 and which is entitled *Trieste e un lager*, a reference to the title of Umberto Saba’s collection *Trieste e una donna*.361 Written in free verse, the poems are imagined conversations with her incarcerated brother, memories of happy family life, prayers on his behalf, or imagined accounts of the goings on inside the Risiera. Unlike the poem on the commemorative plaque, which can be read as a more universal message against terror and oppression, the poems in the collection are more personal and intimate, with decidedly religious overtones and symbolism. For example, in the poem “Lettera clandestina dalla Risiera,” her brother is presented as a Christian martyr: “Sul foglio cui riuscisti a dare ali / rosse di sangue (almeno un segno di Dio) / la parola cancellata era ‘stigmate’?” [On the piece of paper

which you managed to give wings / red with blood (at least a sign from God) / was the crossed-out word ‘stigmata’?] (19) and in the poem “Delazione,” the informer is likened to Judas betraying Jesus to the Romans. Many of the poems thematize the helplessness of those whose loved ones were imprisoned and the ignorance of the people in the city about what actually goes on inside the walls of the Risiera. In “Notte esiziale” [Fatal night] for example:

Di lassù non tutto sapevamo,
solo il fumo che saliva alto al cielo la notte
denunciava il forno sottoterra,
la bottega di tortura, dove anatome intatte
diventano massa astratta
pane umano sulle lamiere arroventate.362 (30–1)

The inside-outside dichotomy is one of the structuring principles in each of the poems. In fact, the entire collection can be read as a series of attempts at coming to terms with and expressing in words not only what is happening to Daneo’s brother inside the prison, but also what this imprisonment does to her and her family on the outside. It is the women in the family, the mother and the sister of the imprisoned, who become the carriers of his memory, and the poems are the space in which he lives on, as a son and a brother, not only as a victim: “Come un tempo la casa odora di mele / e pane impastato dalle tue mani” [Like before, the house smells of apples / and of bread kneaded by your

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362 “From up there we did not know everything, / only the smoke that rose high in the sky at night / betrayed the furnace underground, / the torture chamber, where intact anatomies / became abstract mass / human bread on the red-hot trays.”
hands] (14). The mere facts surrounding the deaths of these victims alone are sufficient to evoke horror and pain. As Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti writes in his introduction to the collection, it is the task of poetry to humanize the victims, “cioè mostrare il volto sempli-
ce e comune e familiare delle vittime” [that is to show the simple, common, and familiar face of the victims].

The representational strategies employed by Carolus L. Cergoly are diametrically opposed to Daneo’s emotive and identificatory poems. Cergoly, born in Trieste in 1908, began his literary development as a member the Triestine Futurist Circolo de Magalà, where he wrote Futurist poetry under the pseudonym Sempresù. In the 1930s he began writing poetry in the Venetian and Triestine dialects and published several collections until the beginning of the war. In 1940 he joined the Italian Red Cross, and in 1944 the Italian partisan unit Fontanot, who were part of the IX corps of Tito’s liberation army. In the first post-war years, Cergoly founded the independent democratic newspaper Il Cor-
rriere di Trieste, which advocated independence for Venezia Giulia, and called for a tho-
rough de-fascitization across the board. In the 1970’s and 80’s he published his most famous collections of poetry in Triestine dialect, dealing on the one hand with Trieste’s Habsburg legacy and its Mitteleuropean identity (such as, for example, Il Portolano or

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363 Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, Introduction to Trieste e un lager, by Ketty Daneo (Fossalta di Piave: Rebellato, 1980): 8–9. I have been unable to find any other critical engagements with Daneo’s poetry or any biographical information on her.

Latitudine Nord and on the other with the legacy of Fascism and Nazism (such as Inter Pocula and Ponterosso, which were dedicated to the Jewish, Slovene, and Croat victims of Fascist and Nazi persecution.) Cergoly’s Triestine dialect is steeped in nostalgia for a lost and idealized Habsburg world in which Italian was only one among several other languages spoken. Interspersed with words and expressions in German, Slavic, and Yiddish, this dialect becomes a linguistic manifestation, as literary critic Renate Lunzer calls it, of a mythical Habsburg empire in which the many different ethnicities and religions lived peacefully in Trieste. His poetry, thus, can be read as a

Form des politischen Protests gegen eine als unerträglich empfundene (National) Geschichte, die Zurückweisung der aus allen Fugen geratenen Gegenwart, eine bewusste Regression auf eine idealisierte Übernation (Lunzer 387)

Looking at some of the relevant poems from Inter Pocula and Ponterosso, especially the Canti Clandestini, one is immediately struck not only by the minimal space they take up on the page, but also by the fragmented, staccato style:

Arone Pakitz
Ebreo coi rizzi
Del ghetto de Cracovia
Un misirizzi
Import Export
Morto a Varsavia

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366 “a form of political protest against a (national) history which is perceived as insupportable, the rejection of a present that seems completely out of control, a conscious regression to an idealized supranation.”
Suo fio Simon
Chirurgo a Vienna
Fatto baron
Per ordine del Kaiser
Morto a Gorizia

Paola sua fia
Cantante d’operetta
Fatta savon
Per ordine del Führer
Morta a Mauthausen367

Another poem in the same collection tells the story of Gino Parin (1876–1944, born Federico G. Pollack), a Jewish painter from Trieste who died at the Risiera:

Gino Parin
Pittor
El se firmava
Ma in Sinagoga
Sui libri
Pollack el se ciamava

Fermà una sera
Per schiarimenti
Portà in Risiera

Nissun più lo ga visto
Al solito Caffè
Del Ponterosso

Ieri el camin
Buttava fumo
Tutto de colori

Cergoly names the victims, their professions and the circumstances of their death, as if he were inscribing these details on their grave stones or on a commemorative plaque. The poems have no titles, they just begin, sometimes with a name, sometimes with an image: “Fuma el camin / mattina e sera” [The chimney smokes / morning and night] (53), and then end as abruptly as they have begun. Characterized by a preponderance of nouns and a staccato rhythm without punctuation, this style of poetic enumeration is a litany, a mournful taking stock of the losses. In addition, Cergoly employs a type of montage technique by including lists of the instruments of persecution, (“lagher, torture, forni” (54)), terms and quotes in German (Kapo, Führer, “Ordnung”), or snippets that read like news items, such as “Stasera ‘Parsifal’/ Di Richard Wagner/ Toscanini dirige” (53) into the poems.

Unlike Daneo’s poetry, which is a personal work of mourning focused almost exclusively on her family, Cergoly’s poems, largely without pathos, assume a quasi-documentary status: he lets the facts, the many dead, speak for themselves. The lyrical “I”

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368 “Gino Parin / Painter / He signed his name / But at the synagogue / In the books / His name was Pollack // Stopped one night / And asked for his papers / Taken to the Risiera // Nobody ever saw him again / At the usual café / by the Ponterosso // Yesterday the chimney / Spat smoke / All those colors / On windows locked / And desperate / In the quarter / of San Sabba.”

369 In fact, the format of the first four stanzas (name, profession, place of death) is eerily reminiscent of the inscriptions on Gunter Demnig’s stumbling stones, which I discuss in Chapter 1 (p. 75).
retreats largely behind the people commemorated in the poems. When it is present, the "I" assumes the role of the detached chronicler of events and people. Only in certain adjectives or turns of phrase is a more subjective attitude toward the subject matter in evidence. Thus, in one poem, Cergoly writes:

Lagher torture forni
vista no la go più
Anaw Regina
Bella come sto nuvolo
In marina
Fermo sul Ponterosso (54)

[Lager torture ovens / I never saw her again / Anaw Regina / beautiful as this cloud / reflected in the harbor / stopped on the Ponterosso bridge]

About a dead partisan companion he writes: "Le sue povere man / Senza ongie pianzeva
/ Tutto sbregado storto / In cella ributtà" [His poor hands / Without fingernails he cried / Completely finished distorted / Thrown in a cell] (59). The adjectives "bella" and "povere" here speak to a more personal, compassionate stance towards these people. Yet, as suddenly as it surfaces, this glimpse of compassion can turn into bitter irony. Immediately after the description of the partisan's mutilated hands, we read: "Nudo e senza cassa / Cussì el e sta interrà / E bella ciao / Viva la Libertà" [Naked and without a coffin / this is how he was buried / And bella ciao / Long live liberty] (ibid.). As literary critic Luciana Borsetto observes, by listing exclusively the Jewish, Slovene, and Croat victims (the names in the poems are all either Jewish or Slavic), Cergoly wishes to underline "il tributo individuale pagato particolarmente dalle minoranze ebraiche e slave" [the individual
price paid particularly by the Jewish and Slavic minorities]. Because it includes elements of all the languages spoken in the city, Cergoly’s Triestine dialect, Borsetto suggests, represents

l’elemento equilibratore medio che filtra i contatti e mette in risalto le fusioni e le barriere, gli amalgami e le diversità inconciliabili.

La coscienza della storia fa di esso [sc. del triestino] un linguaggio della coscienza, un lessico dell’idea sovranazionale, in fuga ugualmente dall’italiano di regime come dal tedesco, demistificatore dei contenuti nazionalistici dei loro messaggi, una lingua ‘territoriale’ della tolleranza, della civiltà e del significato nei confronti delle lingue ‘determinatorializzate’ e formalizzate dello stato e della loro politica di sopraffazione.370

Like Tomizza’s Istrian dialect, Cergoly’s is conceived as a mediator between the different national languages in the city. A “language of conscience” that, besides preserving the memory of the people listed in the poems, is itself an act of preservation. Primus-Heinz Kucher calls it “Inventarisierung”—making an inventory of Trieste’s lost plurivocality. Kucher refers to the linguistic fragments that pervade Cergoly’s poetry as “Sprachsplitter,” splinters of language; an apt description, for, as Kucher explains, it is an “Ausdruck einer existentiellen Verstörung” (Kucher 102). In other words, the fragmentation the reader perceives at a linguistic level mirrors that of the entire region in the wake of the political and cultural upheavals of the twentieth century. And it is here that the contrast

370 “the balancing element that sorts through the points of contact and exposes the mergers and the divisions, the amalgams and the irreconcilable differences. // Historical consciousness transforms the Triestine dialect into a language of conscience, a vocabulary of the idea of supra-nationality, eschewing both the Italian of the régime and German, demystifying the nationalist content of their messages, a ‘territorial’ language of tolerance, of civility, and of meaning in the face of languages ‘determinatorialized’ and formalized by the State and its tyrannical politics.” Borsetto, “Trieste segreta”: 208.
to Tomizza’s linguistic project becomes clear: whereas for Tomizza, introducing dialect into his standard Italian texts is equivalent to preserving them like prehistoric insects in amber, in Cergoly’s work the ironic distance which Cergoly maintains to his subject matter, prohibits his linguistic project from attaining the utopian dimensions of Tomizza’s. The splinters embedded in his texts mark the destruction of what was there before. This is the dialectic of the fragment: in order to preserve it, you must first acknowledge that the whole is irrevocably lost.

The Living Word on the Stage: Rižarna and I me ciamava per nome: 44.787

Notwithstanding figures such as Tomizza and Cergoly, who appeal to a common, hybrid memory, the division between the Italian and Slovene/Croat sections of Trieste and its region persists, which only serves to complicate any attempt at addressing and working through the city’s past further. Throughout this study, we have been concerned with different forms of Vergangenheitsbewältigung and one of the guiding questions has been: whose past are we coming to terms with? In one way or another, the literary texts we have seen so far in this chapter all make use of historical documents or incorporate documentary elements in order to lend legitimacy to the stories they are telling. Nevertheless, all the authors we have considered in this chapter are each writing about a different aspect of the larger history of the region—Pahor tells the story of the Slovenes in Trieste,
Tomizza that of the Istrians in Istria and in Italy, Piazza the Jewish experience of the Holocaust in Trieste, etc. These authors all make a certain claim to historical veracity, and read together, these texts form a mosaic of the region’s history and memory, yet, even though they are all part of the same “big picture,” the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* they engage in is geared to the specific past of a certain group, focusing on different events and different sites.

A point of convergence for several of these group identities is the Risiera di San Sabba. As we saw in the previous chapter, over the years, the Risiera has served as a unifying symbol of collective victimhood for a number of different groups. Precisely because different victim groups have laid claim to the Risiera, an examination of literary representations of that site is particularly revealing with regard to the nature of collective memory in Trieste. In what follows, I will discuss two plays: *Rižarna*, written in 1975 by Filibert Benedetič and Miroslav Košuta, and *I me ciamava per nome: 44.787*, written by Renato Sarti in 1995. Both plays rely heavily on eyewitness accounts and documentary material relating to the 18 months of the Risiera’s operation. Given that both plays effectively draw on the same material, the differences between them tell us a lot not only about the political climate in which they were written but also about these two groups’ conception of the meaning of the Risiera. A comparative reading of these two plays thus highlights the difficulty and incommensurability of the two visions of the city’s history.
Rižarna, directed by Jože Babič and Marij Uršič, premiered in May 1975 at the Stalno Slovensko Gledališče (Permanent Slovene Theater) in Trieste on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Liberation. The text was adapted from documents and testimonies gathered over a period of thirty years by the journalist Albin Bubnič, who was himself imprisoned in several German concentration camps for his activity in the resistance movement. The performance received considerable media attention; it was broadcast on local television and put on in the theater in Gorizia as well as in the Križanke open air theater in Ljubljana later that month. All the performances were sold out in advance. The reception of Rižarna in the press was generally favorable albeit limited exclusively to the Slovene community. To my knowledge, Rižarna has not been performed since, it has not been translated into Italian or any other language, and there is, as far as I could ascertain, no critical discussion of the play apart from the Slovene newspaper reviews from 1975. Rižarna, in other words, never entered public consciousness in Italy and is now all but forgotten. It is only thanks to the staff at the Slovene Theater in Trieste that I was able to obtain any information on the play and its performance, including the text itself.371

The play consists of seventeen short scenes and five songs sung by a chorus. The action alternates between two temporal levels, the past (the time between 1943 and

371I am grateful to Marta Verginella for alerting me to the existence of this play, to Rossana Paliaga at the Slovene Theater providing me with the relevant materials. I am also grateful to Melita Silič for her help with the translation of Rižarna and the newspaper articles relating to its premiere.
1945 when the Risiera was a death camp) and the present (the early 1970s). The play features an anonymous protagonist (in the program he is called “the investigator”) who is trying to gather information about his wife and children, all of whom were deported to different concentration camps during the war and never returned. He himself was a prisoner in a German concentration camp, which he reveals at one point by showing the number tattooed on his arm. This unnamed investigator (we can assume that he is based on Bubnič) reveals the story of the Risiera by collecting survivor testimonies as well as letters smuggled out of the Risiera to families and friends of victims. These testimonies and letters, written in Italian, Slovene, and Croatian, are recited by the actors in between scenes, and constitute the transition from the present to the past. The past comes to life in short scenes that illustrate, like snapshots, daily life in the Risiera and the brutal and random acts of violence suffered by the victims. Through the prism of one small group of prisoners, their conversations and stories, the audience is given detailed information about the goings on in the Risiera and in the city: detailed descriptions of arrests, torture methods, looting, nightly executions, and deportations. One scene takes place in the Risiera’s latrines, where a Nazi officer named Schulz forces a group of five Jews to dig around in the excrement in order to retrieve five gold coins they have hidden there.

The scenes at the Risiera take place in a “dark and anxious” set, whose only ele-

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ments are bare walls and a large iron grid, sometimes illuminated, symbolizing the crematorium. By contrast, the scenes that take place in the present are set in various places in the city, at the Risiera, at the courthouse, at a bar, etc. They show the protagonist in his desperate attempt at collecting information from traumatized survivors and reluctant eye-witnesses. The survivors see no point in telling their story, and the eye-witnesses claim not to have seen anything or else that they have forgotten what they saw. About half-way through the play it emerges that the Bubnič-character is trying to collect evidence not only for his personal investigation but also for the city magistrate to bring those who operated the Risiera to court. Repeatedly, the protagonist approaches the magistrate in order to bring him information, especially also about the perpetrators, and repeatedly, the magistrate sends him away saying that the information he brings is not proof enough, that is, it is not documentary evidence. The discussions between the magistrate and the protagonist are among the most interesting parts of the play because they can be read as a commentary on the actual legal proceedings against a few of the Aktion Reinhard perpetrators that took place in Germany in 1975 and that led to the Risiera trial in Trieste the following year. On the one hand they thematize the failure of the post-war Triestine (and Italian) legislature to prosecute not only German war criminals but also Italian collaborators. And on the other hand they address the reasons for this failure, namely the continuities between the past and the present, and the political effects of the Cold War. The following exchange between the magistrate and the protagonist:
ist (HE) in Scene 8 may suffice as an example:

**HE:** Your Honour, do you know what happened to Gaetano Colotti?

**MAGISTRATE:** He was killed by partisans in April 1945 at Treviso.

**HE:** Exactly. But in the memory of this beast, and due to one of his “heroic” actions against the partisans the authorities posthumously awarded him a bronze medal for military merit in 1954. Yes, al valor militare!

**MAGISTRATE:** Obviously, there wasn’t any trace of the crimes he committed in his records. These things are always very delicate. The main threads are pulled by the circles beyond reach, therefore...

**HE:** Exactly! [...] As far as circles beyond reach are concerned, I believe they are the answer to how a camp like the Risiera could have been founded in Trieste. It definitely wasn’t the Germans who suddenly came up with the idea of building a crematorium in Trieste!

**MAGISTRATE:** Take it easy, take it easy! Don’t jump to conclusions! The Risiera was the result of Nazi destruction projects. We can’t forget that the Germans established their own authority within the so-called Adriatisches Küstenland immediately after their arrival in Trieste.

**HE:** And immediately felt at home as well. Black gangs with Colotti in charge, local inhabitants in the SS battalion, local Schutzpolizei, the notorious Corpo Guardie di Finanza, the prefect, the Questura, the Difesa Territoriale, the mayor... Not to mention tea parties and dances organized in various Triestine villas, and ceremonies with speeches by the SS magnates in a crowded Rossetti Theatre... While in another part of the city the crematorium was already smoking!

**MAGISTRATE:** There is no evidence who were the executioners deciding on life or death, and you’re already speaking about wilful collaboration of eminent Triestini.

**HE:** You know, Your Honour, that I am not making anything up!

**MAGISTRATE:** This is not what I’m saying. I just want to warn you how dangerous and harmful it might be to make general accusations.373

The magistrate’s ominous warning is brushed off by the protagonist as irrelevant. He feels it is his duty to keep searching for documentary evidence, which he is sure exists.

However, not even the interrogation of Nazi perpetrators, some of whom are be-

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ing tried in Germany, helps procure the needed proof: they have conveniently forgotten what they saw and did. A farcical scene at the German court follows. An unnamed defendant, presumably one of the Risiera perpetrators, is being questioned about his career in the Third Reich. The judge is presented as excessively lenient with respect to the defendant. On several occasions during the questioning, the judge advises the defendant: “I give you warning that compliant with the paragraphs 55 and 57 of StPO you have the right to remain silent regarding this matter” (Scene 13). The defendant refuses to exercise this right, but he also does not provide any useful information whatsoever. A voice from the off comments on the defendant’s mendacious and evasive answers, countering them with a list of his real crimes. The hearing ends with the statement: “Some of these prisoners were released and absolutely nobody was executed at the Risiera!” In the end the case is closed, due to lack of hard evidence. The scene ends with a bitterly ironic chorus entitled “We know nothing,” which re-plays the questioning of the perpetrators, and each time the answer is “We know nothing. We know nothing.”

There is a third group of characters in the play which represents another facet of the continuities between the past and present. Three of these characters, a Triestine lawyer and his wife, and an Italian nobleman, represent Triestine high society, who, during the war, colluded with the German occupiers, embodied here in an unnamed German SS officer. At the level of the present, these four characters are assembled on a yacht in the bay reminiscing about the good old times of the Adriatisches Küstenland.
This scene mirrors a similar scene earlier in the play set in 1944, in which these characters discuss the Risiera and the potential extortion of Jewish families in Trieste, as well as reliable informants. The scene ends with the news of Christian Wirth’s assassination. Since the end of the war, the SS officer has led an undisturbed civilian existence, as have his three companions. Now, on the yacht, the officer mentions that he is still in contact with his comrades from the SS, all of whom have so far escaped prosecution. He asks the lawyer whether he has never been summoned, to which the lawyer glibly replies, “Of course I could have been, but ... you forget that this is Italy,” adding that a trial is being prepared at the court in Trieste (Scene 16). To this the SS officer replies that plans are in motion to “take care of” the troublesome investigator. The final scene shows how the protagonist, in the midst of collecting evidence, falls victim to a gun shot in a dark alley: he is the last victim of the Risiera perpetrators. The play ends with a final song against the silence surrounding the crimes of Fascism and Nazism.

Silence is a messenger of defeat
Silence is merely a mask of fear
Silence is an evident confession
That fascism lives, here and now. (46)

The song is an exhortation to break the silence and to “Stand up and scream out: Enough!” directed at the audience, imploring them to “Defend freedom!” when they leave the theater. Many of the reviews of the premiere note how the audience, which included several survivors of the Risiera, was visibly moved by the performance. Review-
ers generally praised the fact that the play drew attention to the crimes about which especially a younger generation knew little to nothing, and thus had accomplished a “significant cultural and educational mission.” At the same time, several reviewers commented on the lack of a more elaborate plot or dramatic arc, which would have transformed the multitude of facts and human life stories into a coherent dramatic form.

Indeed, the play seems in many ways weighed down by the sheer mass of documentary material presented and its adherence to it. The text itself reads more like a fragmented film script than a play, with stage directions kept to a minimum and no description of stage set or props. There are a few elements in the play, however, which have the potential to elevate it above the mere facts. For example, the songs provide more of a metatheatrical perspective on the historical events by commenting on the action of the preceding scenes. There is also a gesture toward overt symbolism in Scene 10 where a mother and daughter spot a green shoot sprouting out of a small crevice in the Risiera’s wall. The mother remarks that “it has grown in memory of the victims,” at which point she sings a song about the hope for future commemoration. As can be gathered from the reviews, the staging also contributed significantly to complementing the narrative; music and sound effects like the sound of walking boots, the mumbling of prayers, or the barking of dogs and loud music evoked the prisoners’ aural experience at the Risiera.

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often described in survivor accounts.376

In the absence of a recording of the performance, my description of the staging is based entirely on the few stage directions in the typescript and the comments and descriptions of the reviewers as well as a handful of photographs of a performance (see Fig. 27). Nevertheless, Ržarna exhibits several of the hallmarks of documentary theater. The inclusion of sound effects and songs, as well as, of course, the extensive quotes from documentary sources and testimonies and the direct address of the audience at the end, are characteristic of much documentary theater in the Piscatorian vein.377 Through the


vehicle of the anonymous protagonist, the audience is invited to take part in an investigation of a hitherto hidden past and to uncover the ways in which this past is still present. Moreover, in the program notes, director Jože Babič writes that the play is the result of a co-operative effort, the main structure, the characters, and the main conflict (the struggle of the investigator) were determined during a series of discussions between the authors, the directors, and Bubnič. The play was then finalized during the rehearsals with the participation of the actors. An additional dimension was added through the songs written by Miroslav Košuta and Filibert Benedetič and the music composed by Aleksander Vodopivec (Bubnič et al. 22–3). This collective paradigm, the idea of a play as a work in progress as opposed to being a finished product of a single author, is not only a salient characteristic of much documentary theater but in this case also reflects the political climate in which the play was conceived. Despite these critical aspirations and democratic approach to artistic production, the play nevertheless has significant blind spots, most importantly with regard to the question of Slovene and Croat collaboration with the Nazis, as described, for example, in Pahor’s and Tomizza’s works. It is clear from Bubnič’s program notes that the play is conceived as a memorial to those who perished in the Risiera, who gave their lives “for your, my and our freedom” [za tvojo, mojo in našo svobodo] (3). This emphasis on this narrative of sacrifice and mourning cannot accommodate an examination of the complex and contradictory roles played by

Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft (Westport: Greenwood, 1999).
different groups within the Slovene community, which instead is presented as a uniformly heroic and victimized unit. On the other hand, since the temporal framework of the play encompasses only events from 1944 and onward, the larger historical context, including the Fascist persecution of the Slovenes and Croats, as well as the impact of the 1938 racial laws, is left out entirely. This fact would seem to vitiate the argument that the play is merely interested in presenting the Slovenes as innocent martyrs to Fascist oppression, since if that were the case, it misses a prime opportunity to undergird this view in the pre-war persecutions. At the same time, in leaving this historical context out or taking it for granted, the play runs the risk of deracinating the events it portrays. Despite the abundance of documentary material, the lack of a broader historical context strips these events of their lager historical significance, particularly in the absence of a more carefully constructed dramatic arc.

In contrast to Rižarna’s episodic structure, I me ciamava per nome: 44.787 embeds the events at the Risiera in a sweeping historical narrative, which stretches almost the entire twentieth Century and which presents the persecutions under Nazism and Fascism as two lines converging in Trieste. Written by the Triestine actor, playwright and director Renato Sarti in 1995, I me ciamava per nome: 44.787 is based on testimonies collected by the historians Silva Bon and Marco Coslovich for the Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia (IRSML). It also uses footage from Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah and statements made by the perpetrators in
several different war crime trials in Germany. *I me ciamava* premiered in July 1995 in the context of the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Italy. In his introduction to the most recent edition of the play, published in 2001, Renato Sarti rather implausibly claims that more than 4,000 people attended this staged reading of his play at the Risiera. Since then, a revised and abridged version of the play has toured all the major cities in Italy. Most recently, it was performed in Rome on the occasion of the *Giorno della Memoria* 2011. As Sarti explains, in recent years, the play has been performed primarily for school children and students because the younger generations appear to have a fragmentary or even false idea of Italy’s recent history. Sarti writes: “I giovani vivono la propria storia come un ramo tagliato su cui stanno seduti. Arrendersi a questa sorta di oblio vuol dire spalancare le porte a un futuro a dir poco inquietante. Il nazionalismo, il razzismo, la xenofobia sono sempre in agguato.” Sarti’s characterization of the youth of Italy as sitting on a severed branch reveals the similarity of his project to Pahor’s who lamented the impossibility of connecting to the past within the present socio-political climate of historical ignorance and the whitewashing of Fascism in Italy. In Sarti’s view, the youth of the nation is quite literally cut off from the past, a fact

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378 The only way that this number makes sense is if there were multiple performances over several days, otherwise it is hard to imagine how the limited space of the Risiera could have accommodated such a large number of people.

379 “The youth of today experience their own history as a severed branch on which they are sitting. To give in to this sort of forgetting means leaving the door wide open for a disquieting future, to put it mildly. Nationalism, racism, and xenophobia are always lying in wait.” Renato Sarti, *I me ciamava per nome*: 44.787 (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 2001): 8.
which makes room for a resurgence of racist or xenophobic attitudes.\footnote{He mentions several examples, including the parade of battalions of the Decima Flottiglia Mas, the infamous Fascist maritime combat unit, in Gorizia and their subsequent official reception by the mayor, and the jeering of soccer players because of the color of their skin (9).} Sarti considers his play as an intervention in the prevailing culture of historical myopia and repression.

The play is divided into ten unequal sections, each focusing on a different aspect of the history of Fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany as well as the post-war period. As the audience enters, they see the narrator and four actors on the stage and behind them a list of names, projected onto a screen. The actors read out the names as the audience finds their seats. Once the audience is seated, the theater goes dark and the narrator begins a long monologue explaining how Hitler and Goebbels had long sought access to the Mediterranean, which let them to establish the Operazionszone Adriatisches Küstenland (OZAK) in 1943. On the screen behind him, we see an image of the Risiera. As the narrator enumerates the list of Nazi perpetrators who worked there, photographs of them flash up on the screen, and the actors recite quotes from their court testimonies. The audience learns about their careers in the Nazi euthanasia program and later in Poland, as members of the \textit{Aktion Reinhard}. Two video clips from Lanzmann’s \textit{Shoah} help to establish very succinctly what happened to the victims of the Polish death camps. For every camp mentioned, the narrator gives an approximate death toll. This first section ends with the perpetrators’ arrival in Trieste and the return of native Triestine Odilo Globocnik.
The next section deals with the events that have transpired since Globocnik left Trieste in 1914: the Fascist persecution of Slovenes and Croats, the 1938 racial laws, and the occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941. Moments from these three decades are invoked by the actors reciting accounts by witnesses in Italian, Slovene, and Croat, detailing the crimes of the Italian occupiers and the terrible conditions in the Italian concentration camps there, again, bolstered with statistics on the number of people killed and deported. In the next section, these two strands converge in Trieste in 1943 with the establishment of OZAK. The ease with which the Nazis were able to establish their base of operations in Trieste, is explained through the local population’s willingness to collaborate with the occupiers. We see photos of various prominent collaborators, such as Gaetano Collotti, chief of the Ispettorato Speciale di Pubblica Sicurezza della Venezia Giulia and Augusta Reiss, who worked for the Nazis as an interpreter and helped arrest Jews in Trieste, and hear detailed descriptions of the torture methods employed by the Collotti gang. An actor reads out a letter from Globocnik to Himmler, in which he writes “Mai prima d’ora, in nessuna altra località ho trovato tanta spontanea collaborazione da parte della popolazione civile nell’individuazione di ebrei, zingari, slavi e sovversivi italiani come in questa città” (44). This view is echoed by SS officer Gottlieb Hering, who told Augusta Reiss that “in nessun luogo come a Trieste, né in Polonia, né in Belgio, né in

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381 “Never before, in any other place, have I encountered so much spontaneous collaboration on the part of the civilian population in pointing out Jews, gypsies, Slavs and subversive Italians, as in this city.”
Francia, si sono verificati tanti episodi di delazioni scritte e orali fatte agli occupatori da abitanti della stessa città, mai tante vendette personali” (ibid.). Evidently, the deep divisions in the population of Trieste and the resentment the different ethnic groups felt toward each other played into the hands of the Nazi occupiers. Globocnik and others seem genuinely taken aback by the Triestines’s willingness to sell each other out, a fact, which is also briefly alluded to in Ržarna. This is followed by the very moving testimony of a Triestine woman whose entire family was betrayed to the Fascists by the woman who had been sheltering them for 10,000 lire per person. Upon returning to Trieste at the end of the war as the only survivor in her family, she saw the woman who betrayed her on the street, wearing clothes that had belonged to her sister.

There follows an account of two trials against perpetrators held in Frankfurt in 1965 and in Münster in 1967. Through the testimony given by the witnesses and the defendants at these trials, we discover the fate of those who were deported from the Risiera to the camps in Poland and Germany. This section is also the origin of the play’s title, and through the actors, we hear several survivors talking about the numbers they were allocated upon arrival in the camp. “I me ciamava per nome vierundvierzigtausendsiebenhundertsiebenundachtzig” [They called me 44,787]. Another survivor says “Mi gavevo 74.521. E chi se lo ricorda ’sto nome in tedesco!” [I was

382 “Nowhere, not in Poland, not in Belgium, not in France, have there been as many written and oral denunciations to the occupiers by the inhabitants of a single city as in Trieste; never so many personal vendettas.”
74,521. And who can remember that name in German!] (55). An ironic accent within this otherwise harrowing account of dehumanization and mass murder. A brief section about the liberation and the respective post-war fates of the survivors and perpetrators is followed by an account of the Risiera trial in 1976. The narrator’s account of Oberhauser’s refusal to appear at the trial or issue a statement, is accompanied by another short clip from Shoah, in which Lanzmann goes to seek him out in the Munich beer hall where he worked as a bartender.

Legal proceedings and cross examination can be said to have played a crucial role in documentary theatre as a whole, especially in plays such as Rolf Hochhuth’s Der Stellvertreter (1963), Peter Weiss’s Die Ermittlung (1965), and Heinar Kipphardt’s In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer (1964). Here the stage becomes “a place for a trial of history by exposing the political forces behind historical events.”383 The audience witness the investigation unfolding in front of them, participating in the search for truth. Trials such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963–5) come under close scrutiny in these plays, as the actors on stage and the audience probe the mechanisms of historical and legal Aufarbeitung. Both Rižarna and I me ciamava are characterized by a profound distrust of the legal system in Germany and Italy and seek to expose the legal system’s implication in the politics of forgetting. In Rižarna the perpetrators remain anonymous, represented

by a single, unnamed SS-officer, and the anonymous investigator protagonist is shot and killed by a sinister cabal of former Nazis—described in the program notes as an éminence grise. In I me ciamava, by contrast, the perpetrators and collaborators are presented as named individuals, their faces shown on photographs, whose personal responsibility is to be analyzed by the audience. Both plays seek to impel their audiences to political and civic action, but whereas Rižarna presents the enemy as a monolithic and inscrutable conspiracy of silence, the emphasis in Sarti’s play lies on personal responsibility and the contribution of the individual to the whole. The interpreter Augusta Reiss is a case in point: far from being a member of a sinister élite operating clandestinely behind the scenes, she “merely” offered her translation skills to the occupiers, thus effectively helping to oil the machinery of deportation and death.

The final section begins with a slide bearing the caption: “Sogni, incubi e alcune riflessioni dei sopravvissuti” [Dreams, nightmares, and some reflections of the survivors] (80). This section paints a largely pessimistic picture of post-war Trieste with the actors relaying the survivors’ dissatisfaction or resignation in the face of public apathy and indifference. Not much has changed, many of the old institutions are still in place, and, as one former partisan puts it, “non gavevimo combatudo proprio per niente” [we fought for nothing] (83). Much like Rižarna, the play ends with an exhortation to the audience in Italian, Slovene, and Croatian: “Credo che tutti dovrebbero sapere e non dimenticare, dimenticare mai!” [I believe that everyone should know and not forget, never forget!]
Another actor says: “Siamo in pochi, la generazione sta andando. Però la nostra Risiera potrebbe anche essere un punto di riferimento, d’incontro, di solidarietà” [There aren’t many of us left, the generation is dying out. But our Risiera could also be a point of reference, of encounter, of solidarity] (84). This idea of the Risiera as a space in which people of different backgrounds can come together and find common ground is a powerful vision of what a site of memory can be. And this vision is almost immediately undermined by Marco Coslovich in his afterword where he falls back on the notion of the Risiera as a “tempio laico” [secular temple] (85) which embodies an altogether more static and sterile conception of memory and commemoration. Instead of being an object of quiet contemplation, the Risiera as presented in the final words of the play is a site of encounter which invites active participation in and engagement with a shared history.

Coslovich recognizes the moral and pedagogical potential of a play such as I me ciamava when he writes “è il teatro che fa rivivere alla collettività i valori della società civile alla quale appartiene” [it is the theater which brings the civic values of a society to life before its eyes] (88). The play becomes an elaborate act of prosopopeia, whereby the victims of the Risiera speak to us directly through the actors on stage. Coslovich concludes that through this play and his conversation with Sarti, he has “visto realizzarsi il sogno di una pagina che, grazie alla rappresentazione teatrale, vive e parla” [seen the dream of a page that lives and speaks come true through theatrical representation] (90). With regard to theatrical representation, however, it is important to note that in docu-
mentary as opposed to other forms of theater, for example historical fiction, the actors on stage simultaneously inhabit two roles, namely that of themselves as actors on a stage and that of whichever character they are portraying. As Carol Martin notes in this regard, “[t]he absent, unavailable, dead, and disappeared make an appearance by means of surrogation.”384 This, in other words, may be regarded as a form of vicarious witnessing.

Vicarious witnessing, as I have discussed it up until now, however, has always taken place in a written text. The interplay of presence and absence takes on a different, more immediate dimension through the medium of drama. Ultimately, however, the basic impulse is the same, in that the author wishes to lend his or her voice to the silent or silenced witnesses to history. Just as documentary theater may be distinguished from historical drama by the deliberate disjunction of the performer and the character in addition to the prevalent use of montage and re-mediation, the literary authors whom I have described as engaging in vicarious witnessing likewise embed the voices of the departed in an elaborate metaliterary framework, which foregrounds the act of staging and mediation. In this way, as Martin observes, documentary theater (and, I would argue, vicarious witnessing more generally) is as much about staging historiography as it is about staging history (17). That is to say, by revealing the processes and mechanisms by

which history is written and disseminated, these texts ultimately aim to teach readers and theatergoers to adopt a more critical position vis-à-vis history. As Derek Paget writes: “documentary modes participate in, indeed are a symptom of, two distinct, but interlinked, structures of feeling: one is expressive of a faith in facts, grounded upon positivist scientific rationality; the other is expressive of a profound political scepticism which disputes the notion that ‘facts = truth’” (Paget 17). In other words, these forms of literary and theatrical representation use facts to instill a skepticism about facts in their readers/audience. This is precisely the opposite of what cultural products like Il cuore nel pozzo try to do by claiming to be based on a true story and by incorporating (spuriously, in this instance) documentary material. As Paget succinctly notes with regard to so-called True Stories on stage and screen, “the makers of such films and plays tell us, ‘it is completely factual,’ (or ‘based on fact’). With such assurances they ‘buy’ our attention, believing that audiences will suspend disbelief more easily in the acted performance which follows” (3). This paradox lies at the heart of Gasparri’s assertion that a TV drama will be more “effective” than a straight documentary because audiences will watch the drama as entertainment, but because it is predicated on historical “fact,” they will be more inclined to uncritically accept the events presented as authentic. The peculiar situation in Italy, where television dramas of this sort are not only sanctioned but even commissioned by the government, only exacerbates the severed connection to the past which Pahor so poignantly identifies. Which is why it is all the more necessary for au-
thors, playwrights, and filmmakers to provide a counter-narrative to the “official” version of history in which they open up a space in which to question such normative or definitive versions of the past.
Conclusion

A Day in the Life of a Fascist

The oscillation between commemoration and civic engagement described with respect to Renato Sarti’s *I me ciamava per nome: 44.787* can be traced also through all of his more recent plays. Whether he breaks the silence surrounding the tragic boat accident in December 1996, where 283 illegal immigrants drowned in the sea not far from Sicily with his play *La nave fantasma* (2004) or takes on the economic exploitation of disaster-shocked people and countries in *Chicago Boys* (2009, inspired by Naomi Klein’s book *The Shock Doctrine*), Sarti seeks not only to recover forgotten histories or uncomfortable truths but also to provoke his audiences to engage more critically with what they see, read, and hear in the media about the past or the present. *Mai morti*, written in 2000, was the most controversial of his plays to date. The title refers to the name of one of the most infamous battalions of the Decima Flottiglia Mas, an elite naval special forces unit,
whose members were responsible for the sinking of several Allied warships and many merchant ships during World War II, but who were also employed in anti-partisan combat. The play is a monologue of roughly 70 minutes in which the protagonist, an ardent Fascist and a former member of this Decima Mas unit, nostalgically recalls the heroic deeds during Fascism. These run the gamut from the use of poison gas against civilians during the Italian colonial wars in Africa, to the execution, in 1937, of hundreds of civilians, among them many monks, of the Coptic community in Debrà Libanos in Ethiopia, to the torture of partisans in Milan, Turin, and in the region of Trieste in the last two years of the war. But the reminiscing of past acts of violence in the name of the state does not end there. The narrative extends into the present day, revealing the connections which some members of the Decima Mas have maintained and the positions they occupy in today’s Republic. In his delirious fantasies, the protagonist revisits more recent instances in which the public order was successfully defended from anarchists, gypsies, immigrants, and “extracomunitari,” even homosexuals and drug addicts. For example, he fondly remembers the investigations after the bombing in Piazza Fontana in Milan in 1969, during which the main suspect, anarchist railway worker Giuseppe Pinelli, died after he mysteriously fell from the fourth-floor window of the police station where he was being questioned. Or the bomb placed at a Slovene school in Trieste. The repeated and violent operations of the police during street protests, for example on the occasion of the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, when more than 400 protesters were severely in-
jured in clashes with the police or during night-time raids, and a 23 year old student was shot dead by a Carabinieri officer.

All these events merge and intermingle in the sweeping monologue, in which the protagonist, first lying in bed, wearing sunglasses and holding a bottle of bourbon, then parading around the room in his uniform, screaming, laughing, whispering, waving a WWII pistol (“il regalo di una SS”), and raising his arm for the Fascist salute, drunkenly revisits the highlights of his career and bemoans the vanished good old days of camaraderie and action. “These hands,” he laments, “these hands, idle for too long, they itch, oh how they itch and find no release.” He sings the anthem of the Decima Mas, gives detailed descriptions of torture methods and the effect of poison gas on a human body. He provokes, not least with
statements like: “In Africa we never used gas! Ha ha ha! Sure we used gas in Africa! And today people are scandalized just because a black midfielder gets catcalled a few times at the soccer stadium!” Towards the end of the play he walks into the audience to tell them of his successful work as part of a committee that promotes public order by supervising and, if necessary, intimidating and arresting homosexuals, prostitutes, immigrants, drug addicts, all those “elements” of Italian society that are not wanted. In a maniacal last vision he sees himself as the heroic defender of the fatherland, ready to murder his own mother if necessary, ending the play with a harrowing “Sieg Heil!”

At its premiere in 2000 during the “Maratona di Milano,” an all-night theater event, the play caused a minor scandal, dividing the audience and the critics. Since then, it has been touring the Italian peninsula, in theaters in all major cities, but also in schools, community centers, and smaller villages, alternately starring Renato Sarti himself or the actor Bebo Storti, for whom the play was written originally. In 2003, Mondadori published the text together with a video cassette of the play. For its tenth anniversary in 2010, the play came back to Milan, for six sold out shows. In January 2010, Renato Sarti and Bebo Storti were invited to Naples to perform the play on the occasion of a rally protesting the establishment of a Casa Pound in the city.

385 Renato Sarti, Mai morti (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).
387 “Mai morti. Perché la parola antifascismo ha ancora un fondamentale e profondo motivo di esistere,” Collettivo autorganizzato universitario di Napoli, accessed 28 Mar. 2011. The first Casa Pound was estab-
The Tree of History

It would be too easy to dismiss Sarti’s play as operating merely on shock value. Instead, *Mai morti*, like all of Sarti’s plays, must be seen in the light of his declared aim of reconnecting the youth of today with the history of their country. As discussed at the end of Chapter Five, the director characterizes the relationship of Italy’s youth to the past as that of someone sitting on a “ramo tagliato” [severed branch]. This is a view which is consonant with Boris Pahor’s assertion that the current climate of historical revisionism makes it impossible to establish a connection with the past. But while Pahor seems fatalistic about this state of affairs, Sarti actively tries to counteract the younger generations’ attitude of indifference toward their own history, which allows the mechanisms of silencing, repression, and falsification to run rampant in contemporary Italian society. In short, what Sarti aims to awaken in his audience is a critical attitude toward history. The metaphor of the severed branch aptly describes the precarious situation of Italy’s youth:

lished in Rome in 2003 when a group of neo-Fascists occupied a vacant building in Esquilino, a part of Rome with a high immigrant population. The group named itself after the openly pro-Fascist poet Ezra Pound, a choice which reflects their advocacy of a union of politics and culture. Indeed, the Casa Pound is intended as a social and cultural center that promotes Italian values by offering a variety of readings, concerts, and charitable events, and sports clubs. Associated with the Casa there is not only a bookstore and a bar, but also the online radio station Bandiera Nera, an online television station, a monthly review, and the theater group Teatro non conforme F.T. Marinetti. Tolerated by the city government and even protected by the police, the movement has expanded over the years to include other buildings in Rome, and other right-wing groups and circles. In 2008, they went national, and since then, Casa Pound Italia has established centers in cities such as Udine, Parma, Pistoia, and Lecce. In many of these cities, the opening of a Casa Pound caused significant, sometimes even violent protest, particularly by leftist groups and anti-Fascist associations such as the ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia). See Volker Weiß, “Popkulturell anschlussfähig. Neofaschistisch: Die Casa Pound in Rom,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 4 Nov. 2010.
cut off from the tree of history, they act as if there were no connection between it and their present situation, not realizing that it must support them. Sarti’s ultimate goal is not so much artificially to reattach this branch, but rather to create an awareness among those sitting on it (to remain with the metaphor) that they must work toward reattaching it themselves. Through his plays, Sarti seeks to jolt his audience into critical reflection on not only history itself, but also the media through which it is transmitted. Bringing history to life via documentary theater is one way of counteracting what Eric Hobsbawm, in a phrase that resonates powerfully with Sarti’s, has called “the destruction of the past.”

Hobsbawm, like Sarti, argues that the youth of today live in a “permanent present” without an “organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.” We might consider these statements in conjunction with Pierre Nora’s obituary of the immediate and natural *milieux de mémoire* of the past, which have now been supplanted by artificially constructed *lieux de mémoire*. The narratives of progressive alienation and fragmentation posited by such conceptions of history and our relation to it do little to remedy the present situation they diagnose, unless they also recognize that a critical historical consciousness (which Hobsbawm, following Gramsci, calls “organic”) has always had to be cultivated, rather than being some innate quality which we have now lost. Hobsbawm says as much when he writes that the “destruction of the past” more properly describes the erosion of the “social mechanisms that link one’s contemporary expe-
rience to that of earlier generations.” On the one hand this has to do with changing family structures in Western society, which render intergenerational communication rarer and less constitutive of daily life. On the other hand, this erosion may be regarded as a factor of inevitable and necessary developments in our approach to and understanding of the recent past. The diversification of history into a mosaic of discrete group histories necessarily questions or invalidates previous grand unified narratives according to national frameworks. As I discussed in the introduction, one of the shortcomings of Nora’s lieux de mémoire project is its reliance on a model of national identity as its guiding principle. At the same time, however, in order for such a project to make sense, there must be some unifying principle which goes beyond narrow categories of different minority identities. The aim must be to construct a network connecting individual sites and memories to each other without subordinating them to a “master narrative.” It may be that the social mechanisms that used to connect individuals to the public or shared past are on the verge of disappearing but this only means that new social mechanisms or new structures need to be found that could operate in this new environment.

**Multidirectionality Internal and External**

To a large extent, the concepts and methodologies that I have elaborated in this dissertation should be seen as participating in this process of re-structuring our relationship to
the past. Most importantly, the conception of memory as multidirectional is fundamen-
tal to my understanding of a productive engagement with the past. As I write in the in-
troduction, in borrowing Michael Rothberg’s terminology I nevertheless inflect it, turn-
ing it in on itself in order to make it useful as a methodological principle for examining
also the internal multidirectionality of memory as such. Multidirectional memory as
Rothberg uses the term is primarily external, in that it refers to the co-presence of two
separate memorial units in a single discourse or text, most notably colonialism and the
Holocaust. Thus W. E. B. Du Bois’s “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” comes to serve
as a model of multidirectional memory because of the way it rearticulates Du Bois’s no-
tion of the “color line” in response to his experiences in post-WWII Poland. Rothberg
makes a compelling case for how multidirectionality may be productive at a disciplinary
level, by showing how Holocaust studies, post-colonial studies, and African American
studies can engage in mutually enlightening conversation across disciplinary lines. In
particular, because Du Bois in his essay “avoids the binary opposition between absolute
discontinuity and complete continuity that characterizes much discourse on the Holo-
caust and its relation to other histories, it helps point the way toward new, multidirec-
tional approaches to genocide, racism, and collective memory” (Rothberg 114). This is
certainly true, and maintaining a balance between continuity and discontinuity is a key
factor in multidirectional memory studies. Through my analyses of the memory of Nazi
euthanasia in Germany and the complex memory of the twenty years of Fascist rule and
the Nazi occupation in Italy I have sought to account for the particularity of each case while demonstrating how they factor into broader contexts. The structuring principle behind each half as well as the dissertation as a whole has been the attempt to reveal the *internal* and *external* multidirectionality of each of these two “sites” of memory.388

Internally, the memory of Nazi euthanasia is multidirectional because it is at once contained in and separate from the memory of the Holocaust. By this fact, it troubles common assumptions about the nature and identity of the Holocaust and its victims, revealing continuities between this event and other historical processes that preceded it, which might otherwise have remained obscure. As a result, an examination of the memory of the Nazi euthanasia program and in particular of the mechanisms and assumptions which have led to its ongoing exclusion from the discourse and memory of the Holocaust more generally necessarily uncovers links to prevalent issues and prejudices in contemporary society concerning disability and mental illness. This in turn opens up an avenue of exchange between memory and Holocaust studies and disability studies, which I pursue in Chapter Two, and which constitutes one of the ways in which the memory of Nazi euthanasia is externally multidirectional.

Vicarious witnessing, the concept I develop in Chapter Two on the basis of texts in which the stories of the victims of Nazi euthanasia are told by means of surrogation, in that the authors adopt the role of witness to the crimes perpetrated against them,

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388 For my definition of “site of memory” see the introduction, p. 8.
emerges at the intersection between these two discourses. In its traditional form, memory studies, as predicated on witness testimony, is unable to account for the memory of Nazi euthanasia, for which no such testimony exists. For disability studies, the notion of vicarious witnessing is problematic for other reasons: much of its ethico-critical momentum derives from the need to allow people with disabilities their own voice in society, and as such speaking for them might be perceived as appropriation or condescension. Furthermore, the strong advocacy component inherent in disability studies effectively roots it in the present day, a fact which, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder compellingly argue in their book Cultural Locations of Disability, has led scholars in the field to disregard the historical continuities between contemporary attitudes toward disability and the transatlantic eugenics movement. The prevailing assumption that eugenics was a historical and medical aberration has led to the marginalization of the Nazi euthanasia program within both memory and disability studies. The place of disability in the Holocaust is thus ignored by both fields, and the multidirectional potential of the memory of Nazi euthanasia resides in this fact.

As an independent field, memory studies does not exist in Italy. Conversely, Italy has played a relatively marginal role in memory studies in the rest of Europe and in North America. Except for certain key figures such as Primo Levi, Italian memory culture is only now becoming the subject of sustained critical engagement. The question of multidirectionality becomes infinitely more complex with respect to Trieste and the memo-
ry of Fascism and Nazism in the region. It is impossible to approach the topic without taking into account the multitude of ethnic, political, national, and cultural memories and viewpoints which pervade the city and its history. As I have shown, the numerous attempts to resolve the situation in Trieste into a unilateral, homogeneous narrative have ultimately proved inadequate. In many ways, the internal and external multidirectionality of Trieste’s memory is embodied in the figure of the Slovene-Triestine author Boris Pahor, whose very biography links the Fascist persecution of the Slovenes in and around Trieste to the Holocaust, and whose writings explicitly reveal the continuities between the pre- and post-War reality for the Slavic minority in the city. But there are also other multidirectionalities at work in the city and its memory. The memorials at the Risiera di San Sabba and at the Foiba di Basovizza are engaged in what Rothberg would refer to as a “zero-sum game” whereby the version of history narrated at each site is presented as exclusive and definitive. As my analysis reveals, however, this “game” is itself subordinate to the larger, shared agenda to present the Italians as victims of foreign aggressors. This bid for victim status in itself reflects a desire to limit or circumvent the multidirectionality inherent in the city’s history. By revealing these mechanisms, and by insisting on a more multilateral and nuanced engagement with the memory of Fascism and the Nazi occupation, I show how the strong desire to establish a unified identity evident throughout the history of Trieste is directly proportionate to the irreducible complexity of the different memories and identities at work there.
The most important aspect of multidirectionality, if it is to provide a means of re-establishing a connection between the past and the present, is that it necessarily historicizes memory and embeds the events remembered in their historical context, situating them in a continuum of memory, which is moreover dynamic and constantly evolving. But this also means that as a methodological principle, multidirectional memory requires us to consider a given memory from all available perspectives. Perhaps the most surprising discovery I have made over the course of my research was the significant lack of serious scholarship on the representation and role of perpetrators at sites of memory and in memory culture in general. As I show in Chapter Three, the representation of perpetrators at sites of memory reveals the ideological underpinnings of a country’s conception and production of its own history and reflects a nation’s attitudes towards questions of guilt and victimhood. Theodor W. Adorno was among those who understood the importance of engaging with the perpetrators for civic education. Warning against considering the Holocaust as a historical aberration, Adorno instead insists that it was rather “the expression of an extremely powerful societal tendency” (“Education” 20) and that the basic structure of society is the same today as it was under National Socialism. In this context, Adorno argues that without studying the perpetrators and trying to account for their motivations and the mechanisms which made it possible for these men and women to commit the crimes whose victims we commemorate, we can never hope to ensure that such atrocities do not happen again. When Adorno writes
that the “single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy [...] the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating” (23), he is also advocating a “critical” conception of history, as opposed to a merely “organic” one. It is the role of education to foster such a critical consciousness.

The importance of education as a means of establishing a connection to the past has been a central motif throughout this dissertation. This applies not only to my analysis of the memorials and the documentary exhibitions and commemorative events there, but also of the literary works, films, theater plays, etc. that I discuss. Thus, the Grey Bus memorial and the Spur der Erinnerung emerged as examples of provocative and democratic vehicles of commemoration which encourage active participation and contemplation on the part of ordinary citizens. Through these dynamic memorials their individual daily lives become connected to a shared past. In Helga Schubert’s Die Welt da drinnen the author narrates how she visited school classes and discussed the memory of Nazi euthanasia with the students. She, too, places great emphasis on the importance of engaging with the perpetrators and of trying to understand the decisions and choices involved. Schubert’s is one of the most compelling engagements with the problem of remembering Nazi euthanasia precisely because of the educational framework and the links she establishes to contemporary issues. In Trieste, the Percorso tra le violenze del novecento, published by the IRSML, offers a similarly pedagogical (and multidirectional) approach in that it invites readers and students to walk through the city’s
history and explore the links between sites of Fascist, Nazi, and Yugoslav violence. Of all
the writers discussed in this dissertation, Renato Sarti is probably the most dedicated to
educational principles in promoting a historical consciousness in the audience of his do-
cumentary plays. Both Mai morti and I me ciamava are regularly performed in schools
throughout the country, serving not only to exhort students and other theatergoers to
think critically about their country’s history, but even more basically, Sarti’s plays are
explicitly intended to supplement the deficient historical education which he feels his
audiences otherwise receive.

The two case studies presented here are only a small part of what a comparative
study of German and Italian post-war memory culture can and must encompass. There
are innumerable other sites and combinations that merit further inquiry, such as the
Fosse Ardeatine in Rome, the memorial at the Fossoli concentration camp, Castle Har-
theim in Austria, not to mention the military cemetery at Costermano, which I discuss
only briefly in this dissertation. Other media such as cinema in particular would warrant
a study in and of themselves. I hope that the methodological and conceptual framework
for such a comparative, transnational, and interdisciplinary project which I have elabo-
rated here will prove useful for other scholars wishing to explore some facet of how so-
cieties remember.
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