

Monument of the Grey Buses

Monument for the Victims of the „Euthanasia-Action T 4“ 1940/41

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„Where are you taking us?“

The so-called “Euthanasia-Action” (Aktion T 4) of the National Socialists claimed about 200,000 mentally ill and handicapped victims during World War II. They were considered “not worthy of living”. At least 90,000 patients died of hunger or inadequate nourishment, or were murdered with drugs in state-run sanatoriums. More than 70,000 men, women, and children were murdered in gas chambers during the secret operation “T4” in 1940/41. The mass murder was centrally organised at Tiergartenstraße 4 in Berlin (therefore the abbreviation “T4”). Grafeneck, Brandenburg, Bernburg, Hartheim (near Linz), Sonnenstein and Hadamar were the towns where the murders took place. The staff of these killing institutions later worked in concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec. There is hardly a region in Germany that was not effected by this organised mass murder. Mentally and physically handicapped people were the first victims of a systematic, well-organised annihilation plan directed against the ill and those regarded as “racially inferior” by the Nazi-regime. The “Monument of the Grey Buses” serves as a reminder of the transports of the patients to their deaths. The artists Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz designed the monument for the Weißenau Psychiatric Centre near Ravensburg in 2006. A bus based on the same model as the one that drove from the hospitals to the death camps in the years 1940 and 1941, in its original size and concrete form, commemorates the mass murder. “Where are you taking us?” – the question of one of the patients - is inscribed on the bus monument.

The Monument on the Move

One of the two buses created by the artists is stationery. The other bus moves from place to place. The first site is in Ravensburg and will later move, along the historic route passing several other places, to Grafeneck. Other locations not on the route to Grafeneck may also serve as sites for the memory (lieux de memoire) of these events – such as the patients’ hometowns or places where the organisation of the “Aktion T4” took place. The length of stay of the second bus at each particular site can be several months or years, depending on the result of negotiations and on the participation of the respective municipalities and institutions (the transport will ideally be financed by donations and public funds). It is crucial for the monument to stay on the move.

The Monument in Berlin

The “Monument of the Grey Buses” has now arrived on the site of the organisation, the special agency of the Third Reich at Tiergartenstraße 4, where the former bureaucratic headquarters were. Today, almost beyond coincidence and destiny, a bus stop stands exactly where the “T4” building was located, and is named *Philharmonic Hall*. This work of art is erected not only as a monument to the victims of “Euthanasia” but also to reflect the deed itself and the perpetrators themselves by using the grey buses, the perpetrators’ instruments, as a means for transporting memory – as vehicles of history. The transport of the 70 ton concrete bus is one of suppressed history. The changing positions play an important role. Similar to our memories, this sign of memory in the shape of a grey bus comes and goes; just like suppressed memories and taboo topics continue to emerge and disappear in everyday life. Commemoration is a process. It creates images, loses images, is in a permanent state of change, and in constant motion. Commemoration and suppression are central topics in psychiatry, too.

The bus follows the organisational route of the “Euthanasia” crime, marking the sites of the crimes, the sites of the victims and the sites of the perpetrators and then departs again.