



ZFP SÜDWÜRTTEMBERG

## The Grey Bus Monument

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### **Commemoration of psychiatry during the period of National Socialism**

The history of the former asylum Weissenau in the “Third Reich” should not be forgotten. For that very reason the city of Ravensburg and the Centre for Psychiatry Suedwuerttemberg in Weissenau remember the victims of the so-called “euthanasia-operation” with a monument. In this context, a competing peer review process for a monument was organised in July 2005. Eight artists were invited to participate in this competition and to draft proposals for the monument.

The decision-making body proposed the draft of Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz in its meeting on 12 January 2006. Following this proposal, the draft was accepted and realised by the city of Ravensburg and the Centre for Psychiatry Suedwuerttemberg in January 2007.

With their draft for the Grey Bus Monument, the artists remember the transport buses of the GEKRAT. However, the bus as a monument should not just be a reminder of the victims of the “euthanasia-operation”: it also should reflect crimes and offenders. Thus, the artists use the Grey Buses as a vehicle of memory.

## **Memory**

### **The asylum Weissenau during National Socialism**

Seventy years have passed since the end of the era of National Socialism. But the murder of the patients with physical or mental disabilities is still one of those chapters of National Socialist history which remains difficult to confront with. In less than two years, between January 1940 and August 1941, over 70.000 psychiatric and mentally disabled people were murdered in so-called central euthanasia, many more died of forced starvation and poor care. In total over 300.000 patients fell victim to the National Socialists “euthanasia”.

Within the framework of the campaign “mercy killing”, which in fact meant the extermination of “worthless” lives, 691 patients of the former asylum Weissenau were murdered. Although the campaign in its early phase took place in the utmost secrecy, all personnel working in psychiatry as well as many citizens knew shortly thereafter what was happening. The patients were aware of the approaching danger, too.



In the German Southwest the patients were deported to the extermination camp of Grafeneck near Münsingen in the Swabian “Alb” by the repainted grey buses of the “non-profit ambulance service” GEKRAT with (later on) blinded windows. On the same day the patients were murdered in the gas chamber, their dead bodies were cremated. According to the current state of research, on the whole 10.654 psychiatric and mentally ill, mostly from the area of the present state Baden-Wuerttemberg, died in Grafeneck. These crimes can hardly be accomplished, but nevertheless ask for our lasting attention and reflection.

## Sites of the Monument

### **The „Old Gate“ Weissenau (*Alte Pforte Weissenau*)**

Hoheisel und Knitz created two identical buses. The permanent location of the first monument bus is the former entrance gate of the present Centre of Psychiatry Sueduerttemberg in Weissenau. During National Socialism, the patients were deported by the buses of the GEKRAT through this gate. After the end of the war, the gate was closed by wrought-iron doors. Today, the entrance is blocked by the Monument. The grey concrete bus was divided into two segments of equal size creating a centre aisle. The inside of the segments was inscribed by the paraphrased words of a patient: “Where are you taking us?” This question expresses the uncertainty of the patients concerned.

### **The second bus**

The second bus has already been installed at different locations in Germany. The Polish city of Poznań is the first international site, where the erection of the second bus took place. In this way, the mobile Monument also contributes to the preservation of historical memory in other regions, where the death transports took place too. Cities such as Berlin, Brandenburg, Braunschweig, Pirna, Neuendettelsau, Stuttgart, Cologne and Munich have already commemorated the victims of the “euthanasia” during National Socialism by the erection of the bus. Regularly, an educational program and an exhibition about the mobile Monument accompany this “monument in motion”.

### **Sites of the second bus**

The second mobile bus contributes to the preservation of historical memory in other regions, where the death transports took place, too.

*Text: Prof. Dr. med. Thomas Müller (für ZfP Südwürttemberg / Klinik für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie I der Universität Ulm)*