

## Christoph Mayer's *The Invisible Camp*— *Audio Walk Gusen*

Tanja Schult

### I. In a Soundscape through Time and Space

This article takes you to Upper Austria, to the market towns Langenstein, Gusen and St. Georgen, 15 km from Linz. This is the location of *The Invisible Camp—Audio Walk Gusen*, created by the artist Christoph Mayer. This landscape was once the site of three concentration camps, Gusen I–III. One-third of the 120,000 concentration camp victims who died in Austria during WW II lost their lives in these camps. It was also here that the majority of the Jews incarcerated in the country were murdered. Thus, the Gusen camps were one of Austria's major crime scenes during the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> In 1949, the near-by more prominent former concentration camp Mauthausen became an official memorial site, although it was in fact Gusen that had the higher death rate.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to other camps of comparable size and importance, Gusen was not

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of the Gusen camps see: Rudolf Haunschmied, "NS-Geschichte 1938/1945", *500 Jahre erweitertes Marktrecht St. Georgen an der Gusen*. St. Georgen an der Gusen: Marktgemeinde St. Georgen an der Gusen 1989, 74-112. *Idem*, "Die Bevölkerung von St. Georgen/Gusen und Langenstein", *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Polen und Österreich. Bestandsaufnahme und Entwicklungsperspektiven*. Ed. by Bogusław Dybaś, Tomasz Kranz, Irmgard Nöbauer & Heidemarie Uhl. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2013, 135-169; *idem*; "Zur Bedeutung des Pfarrgebiets von St. Georgen/Gusen als Schlüsselregion zur Ausbeutung von KZ-Häftlingen durch die Schutzstaffel", in Plattform Johann Gruber (ed.), *Denk.Statt. Neue Wege der Erinnerungskultur*. Linz/Donau: Wagner Verlag 2014, 26-38. *Idem*, Jan Ruth Mills & Siegi Witzany-Durda, *St. Georgen, Gusen, Mauthausen. Concentration Camp Mauthausen Reconsidered*. Norderstedt: the authors 2007, for the above see in particular 198 and epilogue; Christian Dürr, "Von Mauthausen nach Gusen und zurück. Verlassene Konzentrationslager—Gedenkstätten—traumatische Orte", *Erinnerungsorte in Bewegung. Zur Neugestaltung des Gedenkens an Orten nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*. Ed. by Daniela Allmeier, Peter Mörtenböck & Rudolf Scheuven. Bielefeld: transcript 2016, 145-165.

<sup>2</sup> Haunschmied, Mills & Witzany-Durda 2007, 198.

turned into a memorial,<sup>3</sup> but became a residential area some ten years after the war. For several decades, many Austrians shifted the process of “Aufarbeitung”, coming to terms with the Nazi past, to Mauthausen, nourished the victim myth and focused on the resistance.<sup>4</sup> It was only due to the engagement of Italian and French survivors that the crematorium in Langenstein was not, as planned, relocated to Mauthausen. They bought the land and the Italian architect group B.B.P.R. completed the Gusen memorial in 1965.<sup>5</sup> This huge concrete building was for a lengthy period widely perceived as “foreign matter” in the neighbourhood, a stubborn reminder of a past most locals, as other Austrians, preferred to forget.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1: The Memorial in Langenstein. All photographs by the author.

<sup>3</sup> die jungs kommunikation, *Das Unsichtbare Lager AUDIOWEG GUSEN*. With contributions by Christoph Mayer, Aleida Assmann, Harald Welzer, Rudolf Haunschmied. Broschüre. Vienna: die jungs kommunikation 2007 (unpaginated).

<sup>4</sup> Dürr 2016, 151, 155.

<sup>5</sup> The group's name consists of the group's founding members' names, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Gian Luigi Banfi (both prisoners in Gusen), and Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers. Banfi was gassed at Gusen shortly before the camp's liberation (email from local historian Rudolf A. Haunschmied to the author, November 13, 2017). On B.B.P.R cp. Susanne Elisabeth Wegner, *Erinnerungsort Stimme: der AUDIOWEG GUSEN*. Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Master of Arts. Supervisor: Angela Koch. Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung. Kunstuniversität Linz. Institut für Medien, Medienkultur- und Kunsttheorien (Linz 2013), 6-7. I thank Susanne Wegner and her supervisor for providing me with the unpublished manuscript of her thesis. Wegner's thesis came to my knowledge a year after my first draft was written and a paper presented at the Lessons and Legacies conference in Claremont, California in 2016. It provided many inspiring thoughts and a rich list of important literature.

<sup>6</sup> Haunschmied 2013, 151-152.

What happened in the Gusen camps remained for a long time widely unknown and received no wider international attention. However, during the last 30 years, Austrians have confronted their own role during the war and their collaboration in the Holocaust. Consequently, places other than Mauthausen garnered attention, and comprehensive memory-projects were established.<sup>7</sup> Due to the keen engagement of local activists, the Austrian state took over responsibility for the Memorial in Langenstein in 1997;<sup>8</sup> an adjacent visitor centre was built in 2004, this time with official support. Since 2005 it has presented an exhibition on the camp's history, and since 2007 provided Mayer's audio walk.<sup>9</sup>

Mayer's *Invisible Camp* testifies to, and is a result of, the forgone *Aufarbeitung* and continues to work actively to confront and integrate this past into people's consciousnesses. After picking up an MP3 player and headsets, the instructions provided by the audio walk enable a user to navigate their way independently through the unfamiliar landscape. For those who take the walk, the camp is no longer invisible.<sup>10</sup> As with historical audio walks that visitors might be familiar with from museums or memorial sites, Mayer's walk elucidates knowledge of the past. But *The Invisible Walk* departs in many ways from other historical audio walks, and is indeed best described as an artistic sound collage.

There is a wide and growing interest in sound art, walking practices and sensory engagement with public spaces. However, this article's foremost aim is not to categorise Mayer's walk within these fields.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars are

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<sup>7</sup> Cp. Heidmarie Uhl, "Gedenken 'vor Ort'. Das Denkmalprojekt in St. Georgen im Kontext der neuen Erinnerungskultur", in *Denk.Statt*, 58-63. Of course, much is still left to do, especially if one realises that our contemporary societies are built on the (economic) foundations established during the war, as pointed out by Dürr 2016, 148, 150.

<sup>8</sup> Dürr 2016, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Haunschmied, Mills & Witzany-Durda, 260.

<sup>10</sup> This text is based on the first version of the audio walk experienced in 2016, then 96-minutes long. When I returned to Gusen in 2017, the path leading to the last stop was blocked. Two huge apartment houses and a building fence hindered me from following the prescribed route to the end. Being situated in a residential area makes Mayer's audio walk particularly vulnerable, especially as the walk depends on a fixed route, a route, which in itself remains invisible. The walk's route was adjusted to the new situation and re-inaugurated on June 28, 2019, when I was about to finish my article. I have listened to the few additional minutes of the revised walk. That the houses were built without paying attention to the walk may indicate that "Aufarbeitung" was not really rooted. However, the local authorities did cover the expenses for the new recordings and promised to develop guidelines to better protect the audio walk's route in future (according to an interview with the artist in Berlin, 10 December 2018). This indicates commitment and a serious interest to commemorate. "Aufarbeitung" is of course never anything stable in itself but demands constant engagement.

<sup>11</sup> Some key references to these fields are given throughout this article; for sensory engagement see in particular Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Sage 2015 [2009]; in particular chapter 2, "Principles for Sensory Ethnography:

better equipped to do so and I hope that this article attracts their attention. My aim is to capture a sense of the aesthetic experience Mayer's audio walk provides,<sup>12</sup> transferred into the medium of a written academic article, supplemented with images and sound files. My text is therefore not meant to be a substitute for experiencing the walk *in situ*. Site-specific artworks such as Mayer's are location-dependent, interact with the site's geography, its (cultural) history and/or its social and political dimensions, and thus are not supposed to be displayed elsewhere, for example at another site or in an art gallery.<sup>13</sup>

What then motivates my focus and in-depth analysis of Mayer's walk, its layers, and the effects it has on its users and beyond? Mayer's walk is an exceptional artwork that truly deserves to be studied in detail. I am thankful to be given the space here for a lengthy exegesis, allowing me to ask what the work wants and to truly become involved with it. The digital content for this essay on the *Liminalities* site allows me to "juxtapose words and sound, the analysis and the objects of analysis", although my text, as with most studies of sound works, is bound to verbal practice.<sup>14</sup> Only a close reading of Mayer's walk offers an understanding of why the work succeeds in making memory matter. While this was the article's planned title, it had to be replaced (appearing now only as a section heading) when I came across Lisa Saltzman's *Making Memory Matter. Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (2006). Like Saltzman, I am interested in learning more about *how* memory is performed in contemporary art practice, how certain artworks are able to bear witness and

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Perception, Place, Knowing, Memory and Imagination" was inspiring as it reflects on how the researcher can make use of one's own experiencing body in order to contribute to new knowledge, and how humans and their environments are continually in a process of change. For the concept of soundwalking and its distinction from other kinds of mobile listening and field recording practices, see Andra McCarthy: "Soundwalking. Creating Moving Environmental Sound Narratives," in: Symanth Gopinath & Jason Stanyek (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies*. Vol. 2. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, 212-237 (Doi 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199913657.013.008); or Antonella Radicchi, "A Pocket Guide to Soundwalking. Some Introductory Notes on its Origin, Established Methods and Four Experimental Variations", in Anja Besecke, Josiane Meier, Ricarda Pätzold & Susanne Thomaier (eds), *Stadtökonomie—Blickwinkel und Perspektiven. Ein Gemischtwarenladen*. Berlin: Universitätsverlag der Technischen Universität 2017, 70-73.

<sup>12</sup> Here I differ substantially from Wegner (see note 5) whose Master Thesis operates converse to mine. Wegner treats the narratives of those interviewed as oral history resources. While the gathering of these sources was indeed important and gives the walk factual credibility, my aim is to capture another dimension of knowledge production resulting from the aesthetic experience this artwork offers, installing emotional and cognitive engagement, as will be explained in detail in the analysis.

<sup>13</sup> Doris Kolesch, "Wer sehen will, muss hören. Stimmlichkeit und Visualität in der Gegenwartskunst", in *idem* & Sybille Krämer, *Stimme, Annäherung an ein Phänomen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2006, 40-64, here 55.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Sterne (ed.), *The Sound Studies Reader*. London/New York: Routledge 2012, 4.

testify to the impact the past holds on our present, and “what it means in the present to represent, and in turn, to know history.”<sup>15</sup> I share her interest in exploring “the aesthetic dimensions and ethical capacities of visual objects that pursue the question of memory in the present.”<sup>16</sup> My approach deviates from hers not only because Saltzman focuses on the visual and I on sound. She writes art history while my undertaking, limited to a single artwork, strives to mediate a sense of the emotional experience Mayer’s audio work generates.

During the course of finalising this article, my colleague Kim Skoldager-Nielsen kindly pointed me to Camilla Jalving’s *Værk som handling* (Art as Action; 2011). Reading her thesis brought me to greater insights into what I was actually doing. In order to facilitate the reader’s journey to Upper Austria, it seems helpful to summarise some essential aspects of Jalving’s important book. Jalving investigates how performativity can become a useful analytical tool in art historical research. Her approach is impressive in the way she develops her theoretical thinking on the concept of performativity in close conversation with the artworks she analyses. Most important: Jalving does not write *on* art but *with* art.<sup>17</sup> As with Saltzman, Jalving’s ambition is much more advanced than the aim of my article. However, of interest here is *how* we both approach art. Our emphasis is not on the works as objects, but on *how* the works work, what they do, which affects and effects they call forth. Tracing back how a work came into being is essential as its making defines its being in the world and how audiences thus respond to it.<sup>18</sup> The strategies used, the work’s materiality and its social, historical and physical context influence how a particular relationship to the beholder is established and thus how meaning is produced.

Like Jalving, I regard the concept of performativity as very suitable for understanding how meaning is created, how meaning results from the social interaction between work and beholder, and how users respond to the work.<sup>19</sup> As a theoretical concept performativity allows us to focus on the *how*, on processes, interactions and generated experiences, on the interplay between work and audience, the emotional involvement art triggers, and the bodily engagement it defines; all of this activating the participant’s reflectiveness.<sup>20</sup> It allows one to consider art’s reciprocal effects, the reactions it calls forth, which in short testify, as Jalving reminds us, to the fact that art is action, and that the

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<sup>15</sup> Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter. Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Saltzman 2006, 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Camilla Jalving, *Værk som handling* (Art as Action). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag/Copenhagen University 2011, here 18, 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Jalving 2011, 17, 247-8, 259.

<sup>19</sup> Jalving 2011, 252.

<sup>20</sup> It was the philosopher John L. Austin who coined the term performative in his influential *How to do things with words* (1962). See also Tanja Schult, “Introduction” to the Special Issue *Performative Commemoration of Painful Past, Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* (2018: 14) 3, 1-11.

work is its doing. Writing about such art experiences necessarily involves being reflective and sharing one's own subjectivity.<sup>21</sup>

My case study aims at providing an in-depth analysis of performative engagement and offers new venues to explore how participants, most not aware of or even familiar with the many (art) historical references within contemporary artworks, perceive the Gusen walk. Thereby, my ambition was to preserve a sense of the bewilderment that overwhelmed me when I first did the walk, using the German version, in July 2016. Its impact was no less the second time I walked, now listening to the English version (there is also an Italian version), nor when redoing it again in September 2017. It seems crucial that I had known very little about the work before exposing myself to this experience, and that all my further research—interviews, surveys, and the close analysis of the audio walk, including hearing it several times far away from where it was supposed to be experienced, rests on having done the walk more or less as an ordinary user.

My analysis builds on my own close reading of the work, supported by relevant literature. It is furthermore based on the evaluation of 111 surveys other users filled in after taking the walk between autumn 2016 and autumn 2017.<sup>22</sup> The surveys guided me in finding the relevant aspects to focus on and assured me that my reading of the work was not a result of being a trained art historian and a scholar of Holocaust memory. Most of the participants were not trained academics. Nevertheless, they shared my reading and appreciation of the work. I am deeply grateful for the insights the users provided me with. Their rich and subtle descriptions are reflected throughout the analysis.

This article will show how Mayer makes the past palpable, how he visualises different layers of time simultaneously, bridging the growing distance to the historical events by envisioning what was suppressed for many decades, without in fact presenting a single image or leaving a permanent visible trace. With the creation of a collage consisting of oral testimonies by survivors, perpetrators, bystanders, educators and residents of the housing area, the walk mediates what happened here during WW II, and discusses what it means to live in such a contaminated landscape on a daily basis.

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<sup>21</sup> Jalving 2011, 14.

<sup>22</sup> The surveys, composed after having walked the tour in July 2016, were handed out by Bernhard Mühleder, educator at the Mauthausen Memorial and contact person for the Gusen *Memorial*. He provides those interested with MP3 players and headsets. Sometimes, he accompanies smaller groups on their tour, or awaits the users upon their return offering them the opportunity to talk about their experiences. According to Mühleder, around 500 people take the walk annually. More than 1/5 received the survey, and almost all answered it. The majority of people take the tour in German, from April to July; approximately 10 % of the users are locals. More than half of the survey participants were pupils or students; the users were between 15 and 74 years old, slightly more women than men; the absolute majority were Austrians. This is based on the evaluation of the surveys, respectively on an email from Bernhard Mühleder to the author (October 18, 2017).

The performative entanglement Mayer's multi-vocal soundscape creates results from the artist's role in this project. Christoph Mayer was born in Linz in 1975. He grew up in St. Georgen, and thus has close ties to this landscape, its inhabitants and history. Mayer studied art in Vienna and Berlin, where he is still based. It is striking that there is no homepage covering his art production; his artistic pseudonym, chm, makes it almost impossible to find him online; instead, each work has an individual homepage.<sup>23</sup> As with all his projects, the Gusen walk is a result of teamwork, of close co-operation with local enthusiasts, academic scholars and other artists, as well as with the local population.<sup>24</sup> This sensitive co-operation determines to a large extent how the walk works.<sup>25</sup> It is the work itself that matters first and foremost to Christoph Mayer. Thus, my analysis will draw its arguments from the work and the reactions in called forth in me and others, and not the artist's biography.<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, Mayer's walk is thematically situated within the field of Holocaust Studies, where the term 'performative' captures the tension between the moral obligations of 'never forget' and 'never again'. These imperatives have belonged to the standard repertoire of Holocaust commemoration since the crimes were committed and have been at the core of Holocaust education ever since.<sup>27</sup> With the imminent loss of the last generation of witnesses, the imperatives to remember and to prevent similar crimes from occurring call for a new critical interrogation: how can this be achieved some 80 years after the events took place? What kind of artworks can contribute to establishing a meaningful connection to this past history—when soon there will be no more survivors that can come to schools or guide young people through former concentration camps?

Certainly, there is no one formula to make the imperatives work. However, there are artworks, which, due to the way they come into being, how they are constructed—their being in the world, and how they engage participants, have a high potential to reach out and make an impact. *The Invisible Camp* is a performative artwork *par excellence*, which succeeds in implementing the Holocaust imperatives, starting with the collaborative way in which it was created, thereby responding to the more than 30 years of engagement of a

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<sup>23</sup> Finding the homepages however prerequisites knowing of the works' existence. For Gusen see <http://audioweg.gusen.org/en/>.

<sup>24</sup> Among them Andreas Hagelüken (dramaturgy, co-director, audio production), Kai-Uwe Kohlschmidt (sound), German actress Jule Böwe (the voice/narrator), and Clava Grimm (psychological adviser), to mention just a few.

<sup>25</sup> Cp. Tanja Schult, "Citizens as Walking Memorials. Rethinking the Monument Genre in the Twenty-First Century", in *Monument Culture. International Perspectives of the Future of Monuments in a Changing World*. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2019, 205-217.

<sup>26</sup> I leave it to other scholars to investigate how Mayer' training, coming from dance, has influenced his artistic practice. Clearly, his background and knowledge about the body fundamentally shaped the *Audio Walk Gusen*.

<sup>27</sup> Cp. Diana I. Popescu & Tanja Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Holocaust Studies. A Journal of Culture and History*. London: Routledge 2019, 1-17.

number of enthusiasts and volunteers, who since the 1980s researched, cooperated with survivors, and urged the municipalities to pay attention to the camp's history. These individuals and the associations they founded have assured that Gusen's history between 1938-1945 did not fall into oblivion. It was their engagement that triggered Mayer to create his walk. His walk has called forth a number of spin-offs (such as novels and other artworks) that in their turn testify to its performative power. While some of these important aspects were taken up elsewhere, this article is dedicated to the immersive experience Mayer's walk offers.<sup>28</sup>

Why is this relevant? By studying this work at close range, a method can be detected: a form of working through, of taking in, of retrieving and processing. In its site-specific approach of walking through time and space, this method can serve as orientation and inspiration for how memory-works can be created elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> By uncovering how the walk functions and examining its effects on its users, I want to encourage educators and politicians to support artistic projects such as Mayer's. They might be difficult and time consuming, both in their coming into being and in their essence, but they have the capacity to reach out to people from all walks of life and render past events relevant. This case study reveals that performative Holocaust commemoration creates social bonds that go beyond temporary emotional engagement but secure a long-term commitment to coming to terms with the past, thereby answering to the Holocaust imperatives.

The *Audio Walk Gusen* is a collage of almost 30 voices: of survivors and perpetrators, of people who lived in the region during WW II and contemporary residents. The witnesses' narratives, carefully interwoven with each other, touch upon complex issues such as guilt, the scope of action, the significance of place and how to live responsibly in this region today. Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen* helps me to grasp how Mayer's collage of oral testimonies and sound succeeds in immersing participants in audible fireworks, sparking sensitive subjects while walking through a loaded landscape. The walker is encouraged to visualise a forgone past and to realise how this past still holds a grip on our present.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In a previous article, I have written more about the forms of co-operation that led towards the creation of the walk and the spin-offs it called forth, see Schult 2019 (note 25).

<sup>29</sup> Upon completing my text, I realised that this headline was similar to that of another article dealing with walking, see Brian Conway, "Moving through Time and Space: Performing Bodies in Derry, Northern Ireland", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 2007: 20 (1/2), 102-125.

<sup>30</sup> Artistic audio walks such as Mayer's are deeply influenced by the "Performatierung der Künste", going back to the performative turn that occurred in the arts in the 1960s and had become an established, constitutive reality in the 1990s (see Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2014, 22, 78) when audio walks started to be more and more frequently employed in museums and art galleries, see e.g. Toby Butler, "Memoryscape: How Audio Walks Can Deepen Our Sense of Place by Integrating Art, Oral History and Cultural Geography", in *Geography Compass* 1/2 (2007), 360-372. Butler is among the leading audio walk scholars, and in his



I treat Mayer's audio walk as a performance. Although the audio walk is a recording, it is like a theatre play in that it is potentially repeatable. Each time one takes the walk, it is activated and performed anew. Situated within everyday life, it will, as with any theatre performance, never be perceived in an identical way.<sup>31</sup> Mayer's well-choreographed multi-vocal memory-patchwork acts as a string, which pulls the listener forth through real and imagined time and space.<sup>32</sup> Both *what* is said and *how* it is said keeps us moving. I describe this all-encompassing notion of being all in, feeling all at once, being exposed to the overwhelming simultaneity of different timescapes projected in altered places, as performative resonance.

Two central characters are of special importance for the audio guide: the accompanying voice, here preliminary called narrator (*Begleiterin*) due to its similarity with the role of the narrator known from more conventional historical audio walks, and one female protagonist, Traude. From the multitude of voices these two are the ones that appear during the whole walk, from beginning to end.<sup>33</sup> They fulfil different functions. As will be discussed further in the analysis in part III, the narrator's voice is vital for immersing oneself into the walk, while Traude's story conveys essential information on what happened in the camp. In order to familiarise the reader with what the walk is all about, I begin by giving an abbreviated account of Traude's narrative. It is however important to understand that what I will summarise is disclosed *peu à peu*; it requires a careful listener to put these pieces together. The following short account stands somehow in contrast to the walk's collage-character, subsequently examined, but it helps the reader to grasp its essence.

My description concentrates on the information provided within the walk, with three exceptions: I disclose the occupations of the two interviewed

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own practice he makes frequently use of oral testimony. Together with Graeme Miller, Butler coined the term *memoryscape* to define audio walks based on spoken memory; see Simon Bradley, "History to go: oral history, audiowalks and mobile media", in *Oral History*, Special Issue: *Journeys* (2012: 40) 1, 99-110, here 104. Alan Licht gives a valuable account of the history of sound art: *Sound Art. Beyond Music, Between Categories*. Foreword by Jim O'Rourke. New York: Rizzoli International Publications 2007. For the history of portable devices and their use in museums from the 1980s onwards, see Wegner 2013, 28-34.

<sup>31</sup> Cp. Erika Fischer-Lichte 2014, 127-128, who writes about live theatre and performance art in which the corporeality of the actor and the audience is of crucial importance, in fact is the precondition for what she terms the *Feedback-Schleife* (Feedback loop), the mutual interdependence of actors/performers and audience for the success of the performance (114ff). Aware of the crucial differences between live performance and audio walk, I will show how similar effects arouse, even if the important aspect of corporeality in regard to the audio work, essential for Fischer-Lichte, is missing.

<sup>32</sup> My reading was much inspired by Peter Larndorfer's excellent observations in "Unsichtbares hören. Der 'Audioweg Gusen'", *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies of Contemporary History* 2011 (8), 315-321.

<sup>33</sup> Wegner 2013, 55. The interviews were conducted between May 2005 and January 2007, *die jungs* 2007 (see note 3). The brochure (for the audio walk) is provided free of charge at the Gusen Memorial.

perpetrators, not specified during the walk, and I explain the origin of the historical song and the historical recording used. Besides, I do not simply recount the walk by following Traude's story, but mediate associations and reflections that Mayer's collage called forth in me, hinting at the work's performative resonance, which I closely investigate in the subsequent analysis in part III.

## II. Retelling *The Invisible Camp* by Following Traude

Traude lived in St. Georgen during WW II, a teenager at the time. I get parts of her story, here and there, intertwined with other narratives. Early on, I understand that Traude was allowed to consult the camp's dentist, but it takes time until I get to the place where she once received medical treatment. Listening to the instructions Traude was once given to locate the medical barrack, I move on, and slowly start to grasp the spatial dispersal of the former Gusen concentration camps. Realising that Gusen had more prisoners than the main camp Mauthausen, I hear of the inhumane conditions, the exploitation of the slave workers in the quarries, and of their torture, told from the perspective of the survivors. I try to picture the enormity of the cruelties committed with up to 13,500 prisoners standing each day on the Gusen I *Appellplatz*.

At the time the camps were established and thousands of the inmates died in these grounds, Traude was in her youth. With the local men at the front, the "nice and sweet" German soldiers became objects of desire for the girls at home (all quotes without references from the audio walk). With this knowledge I enter the camp, together with Traude. As I walk through the neighbourhood, the former concentration camps take shape. At the same time, my attention is drawn to the environment, to the more than 200 existing residential houses, built during the last 60-70 years. The contrast between what I hear and see is disturbing. I walk through a quiet residential area, realising that Gusen I was not a cosy village in Traude's days. There were thousands of SS men and at least ten times as many prisoners. This was a place of economic significance due to the granite quarries and the war industries which emerged in Gusen in 1943.

Traude wrests some perpetrators from anonymity by naming them. One learns that Gusen I was not only a working camp but also a place of medical experiments. Upon entering the medical barrack, Traude, who apparently during that time worked in a Kindergarten in Gusen, witnessed the murder of small children who were put into bags and smashed against a wall until they were dead. Traude recalls her shock and fear. While she talks about the dental treatment she received after these dreadful scenes, I am standing on a parking lot between two large apartment houses. A survivor recounts that the medical barracks, which once stood here, were the last station for the weakest prisoners before they died of illness, starvation or were killed. His words echo in my head. I stare at the asphalt. I watch a man sitting on his balcony, feeling the warmth of the sun on my body, enduring the discrepancies of the heard, seen, felt.



Fig. 2: A parking lot behind the Memorial.

After learning about the murder of the children, the horrendous conditions in the medical barracks, and the existence of a gas chamber, the rhythm of the composition changes. The accompanying narrator takes over and provides more background information: except about the quarries, Gusen was important as a place for the armament industries, which led to the building of Gusen II. Passing through what is today Blumenstraße (Flower Street), before turning into Spielplatzstraße (Playground Street), the crackling noise of what appears to come from an old vinyl subsequently breaks through piecemeal from the remote distance. I detect a once famous song, the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, also known as *Die Fahne Hoch* (The Flag on High), a song still forbidden to play in Germany as it was the Nazi Party's anthem: "Und heute hört uns Deutschland, und morgen die ganze Welt!" (Today Germany hears us, and tomorrow the whole world). However, in my ears, the badly articulated vowels transform into "Heute gehört uns Deutschland", today Germany belongs to us, and tomorrow the whole world, which seems even scarier, a misunderstanding supported by the crackling background noise, incorporating what followed after Germany had *heard*, had elected the Nazis. Whilst attentively listening to the innocent-cocky child singing, I get a glimpse of a giant garden gnome. The absurdity of being when it knows no rest. Around the corner is a building that was used to train child inmates. Today, it is an administration building of the company Poschacher. I realise: remnants of Gusen I are still in use for profitable business.



Figs. 3 &amp; 4: Langenstein today.

Only now does the first perpetrator enter the scene. I am on my way to what once was Gusen II, the most terrible part of the whole Mauthausen-Gusen camp system. Up to 16,000 inmates were crammed into the former barracks. Jews unfit for work were left to die or murdered. Having been introduced to the cruelties committed in Gusen II, I drown in the vortex of enormities uttered by a self-centred former SS-man. Leaving the camp area once situated in this neighbourhood, the walk continues on the *Schleppbahntrasse*, the elevated railway embankment, on which the slave workers were transported daily in train wagons from Gusen II to their work in the tunnels housing the underground armaments industries of St. Georgen, called *Bergkristall*.

It takes some time until Traude appears again. Then mostly sporadically. Only towards the end of the walk does she have a longer presence in a sequence dealing with the dehumanisation of the prisoners, in which the locals and perpetrators, represented by an SS-man and a Luftwaffe airman, took part. The sight of the prisoners in the daily lives of the locals had initially shocked those residents, but became a common view. It becomes clear that valid norms and the fear for one's own safety contributed to adaptation. The significance of space is also discussed. Can a place hold memories? Does it transmit them? Or is this an over-interpretation, as it was people, not places, who committed the crimes? I follow the lines of argument while walking along what is now a much beloved hiking and cycling trail.



Fig. 5: Being confronted with complex questions amid beautiful surroundings.

I am invited to sit down. Certainly, this is a good time to rest after quite a walk. Above all, the severity of the subjects raised, demands close attention and one is thankful to take a seat on the wooden bench and listen carefully. The former SS-man develops into a leading protagonist, reflecting on how he was able to take part in such crimes. The narrator steps more and more into the background, allowing room to reflect on all said.

Walking further through the picturesque Danube wetlands, another recording, this time an archival one, is intersected into the collage: extracts from Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler's *Posener Rede*, held in front of SS-leaders in October 1943. In the speech, he addresses the annihilation of the European Jews. Himmler was one of the chief enforcers of the '*Endlösung der Judenfrage*', and had visited Gusen several times. However, the walk does not provide any of this information. One might recognise the recording from documentaries, or at least identify it as a historical source — one in fact never meant to be made public, but here dominating the scene.<sup>34</sup> It is repellent to listen to the subsequent self-pity of the perpetrators, especially side by side with the narratives of the survivors. Playing Himmler's speech in this context is however of particular relevance: the speech exposes the mechanisms that made perpetrators' and bystanders' behaviour possible. It gives insight into how social norms,

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<sup>34</sup> Wegner 2013, 46 (see note 174), 26.

inscribed in society by the ruling state ideology, forbade critical questioning, fostered a belief in suffering for the greater good of the German nation and one's loved ones, and made it possible to conceal one's own role during the war in the following decades. While hearing Himmler's words that the SS needed to face this difficult task, meaning the murder of the Jews, for the love of their nation, I stand and watch a group of young men from the voluntary fire brigade practising. A coincidence, of course, which however enhances the effect—the young men become potential listeners to the speech, actors in a scene, which evolves before my eyes, in my mind, contributing to the realisation that it was 'ordinary men' (to borrow from the title of historian Christopher R. Browning's well-known book<sup>35</sup>) who committed the murders.



Fig. 6: Listening to Himmler's *Posener Rede*.

The walk's strength is to provide a multitude of voices, including those of women, whose experiences have often been marginalised. Shortly after listening to Himmler's speech, I understand the importance of the women in relation to the crimes committed. Traude's honesty is crucial as it allows insight into human nature. Apparently, her mother was among the more decent people who dropped at least some bones from the soup in the hope that the prisoners picked them up. Traude, initially shocked by the killing of the children, got used to the sight of emaciated prisoners.

It strikes me: Traude was not only witness to the murder of the children, and not only witness to how these ordinary men treated the inmates worse than animals, as she says herself. She also played a role in the course of events. Traude and her mother normalized the events by opening their home to young

<sup>35</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Harper Collins 1992.

soldiers, offering joy and comfort while enabling ‘ordinary men’ to become perpetrators. The words of the former member of the air force indicate this [Editor’s note: to listen to audio excerpts that include the transcribed passages in this essay, go to [liminalities.net/16-1/invisiblecamp.html](http://liminalities.net/16-1/invisiblecamp.html)]:

- Airman: ehrlich gesagt, dass ich Traude kennengelernt habe mit der Mutter, das war mein Heil und Glück...
- Traude: der is wirklich vü bei uns gegessen, und, und...
- Airman: Ich mochte nix mit dem anderen Scheiss zu tun haben mit der SS...
- Traude: Sie san einfoch ins Haus gaunga, waun ma’s rlaubt hod und, und haum sie gern a bissl, bei da Bevölkerung a bissl niedagesitzt und a bissal Familie gsüd.
- Airman: Damals die Zeit: wir waren jung!  
Und das war ein Ausgleich mit Traude. Dann hab ich das ganz anders gesehen, mit dem Einsperren und Juden und alles...

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- Airman to be honest, that I met Traude with her mother, that was a blessing my good fortune
- Traude he visited us quite often and,
- Airman I didn’t want anything to do with all that other bullshit, the SS....
- Traude They just came into the house if you let them and they enjoyed sitting with the locals a bit and play family...
- Airman That was the time: we were young! And with Traude, that put things into perspective: I then saw things differently, with all the imprisoning and Jews and all.

Someone needed to be there for the soldier so that he could do what he did, someone who helped him live with his version of the truth later. Although not a perpetrator herself, Traude’s behaviour was not without significance for the course of events.

What maybe disturbs most is our own likeness to Traude. Many people uttered their concerns about how people can live at all in the location of a former concentration camp. This is a question raised recurrently in reviews of the walk, the visitor book at the Gusen Memorial and the surveys I conducted. Their reaction might not only result from a sense of impiety about living in a place of death. It reveals an inconvenient insight about ourselves: most of us are not victims nor perpetrators, most of us are Traudes. Hers was a common coping mechanism on the part of bystanders to go on living. I reconnect to what the narrator told me when crossing the main road: that a fence was built along it in order to shield the local women and children from the sight of naked prisoners. The cause was not complained about. The cause was put out of sight, out of mind. Traude’s coping mechanisms might be comprehensible given Nazi state terror. However, listening to Traude while facing the cosy family houses of today, reminds us that most people are foremost concerned with

their own well-being. We humans have a tremendous capacity to ignore or downplay injustices and cruelties if they do not affect us directly, even if they occur right in front of our eyes.

Due to the walk's capacity to present different layers of time simultaneously, one realises that the stuffy idyll of everyday life emanating from today's family houses is actually very close to the normality lived by many residents back then. We balk at this thought, and want rather to separate that black-and-white past from our colourful world.<sup>36</sup> But, we walk through what is other people's lives, not a memorial site with restored, clean barracks accessible during certain opening hours. Hearing about the atrocities that took place here some decades ago, we are confronted with a normality not foreign to the residents' daily lives back then: amusement with the local girls, the possibility of finding comfort in family homes. All that made it possible for ordinary men to endure and take part in dehumanisation and murder, to separate oneself from one's action, or to motivate taking part in such cruelty.

Traude appears more and more dislikeable. Both because we understand that her boy-meets-girl episode led to an engagement with a member of the air force, but also as we sense our potential similarity to her. But we need Traude. It is she who gives insights into the crimes her boyfriend had committed while he refuses obstinately to reveal what exactly he had done. The walk culminates in a *crescendo* of revelation transmitted through Traude and the survivors, contrasted with the denial uttered by the perpetrators. Feeling close to Traude's former boyfriend due to his North German dialect, spoken in the region I grew up in, the sudden exposure of him being an *Ewiggestriger*, a die-hard, comes as a shock. Traude's once good-looking, blond German guy gets furious, insisting that he accepts "nothing against Adolf [...] who the fuck cares! The man wanted to achieve something, get it done." ("nix gegen Adolf [...] Ist doch scheißegal! Der Mann wollte etwas schaffen, wollte das hinkriegen.") Despite apparently suffering from having behaved violently, he proclaims that "I enjoyed being a soldier! If you'd asked me, Adolf did a good job after those masses of unemployment. ("Ehrlich gesagt, ich bin gerne Soldat gewesen! Und ich bin der Meinung: Adolf hat das gut gemacht, nach den schweren Arbeitslosen.") He spoke these words decades after the war ended. I am outraged: had he not learned anything? He stands by Hitler, who he even calls by his first name, and regards as a prophet, detached from the other Nazi criminals. I am at a loss. How dare he! His assurance that he had nothing to do with the crimes remains unverifiable when he refuses to talk about what he did: "I am not telling. It's none of their business." ("Das weiß kein Schwein! Erzähl ich nicht! Das geht denen gar nichts an!"). Given the information disclosed by Traude, his assurances appear highly questionable.

Standing at an intersection right in front of a railway underpass, I have no chance to vent my anger. I continue, hearing Traude again, describing her daily chores *vis à vis* the slave workers. The crimes were committed right in

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<sup>36</sup> Cp. Harald Welzer, "Latente Orte, gefühlte Geschichte", in *die jung*s 2007 (see note 3).



front of local people. The working slaves were visible to them on a daily basis as they made their way to Sunday church, whose beautiful tower I have spotted several times throughout my walk. My conflicting emotions are like a roller coaster about to jump the track.



Fig. 7: The Parish Church of St. Georgen.

While Traude recalls the beatings of the prisoners, her once beloved boyfriend proclaims that he had never been a Nazi and outbursts in self-pity: “Yes, I had to go through a lot, you know” (“Ja, ich hab’ viel mitmachen müssen”). I stand there, in my impotent anger, dressed with headphones. As if planned by the artist, the St. Georgen’s church bells start ringing. It takes a second to realise that this is not part of the recording, although acting as an exclamation mark, pointing to how journalist Stephan Lebert summarised the camp’s singularity: “Special about this concentration camp was that it was in the middle of the locality, that so to speak it was the whole locality.”<sup>37</sup>

And the walk is not over yet.

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<sup>37</sup> Stephan Lebert, “Ein Dorf und der Tod”, *ZEIT Online* (3 May 2007), <https://www.zeit.de/2007/19/KZ-Gusen> (accessed 24 July 2018). This passage reads in the original: “Das Besondere an diesem Konzentrationslager war, dass es mitten im Ort lag, dass es gewissermaßen der ganze Ort war.”

### III. Making Memory Matter: How Mayer's Walk Works

We will return to the very last part of the audio walk at the end of the article. The foregone presentation has already conveyed some insights into how Mayer's memory patchwork is organised. I will now analyse the walk's most important characteristics, explaining how this memory-patchwork operates.

#### *The Decisive Importance of 'The Voice'*

My analysis begins with the accompanying narrator's voice — although the absolute majority of the survey participants did not mention the voice at all.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, this results from the fact that the survey did not explicitly ask about it. This most likely relates to Western society's preference (since Greek antiquity) for the visual and the verbal, while other sounds and smells remain understudied senses.<sup>39</sup> Voices, sounds and smells have however no lesser impact on how we perceive the world; we are often simply not trained to describe these sensory experiences adequately.<sup>40</sup> This is also true for this scholar.

As Fischer-Lichte underlines, in general one can say that the characteristics of voices — their vocality, corporality, and spatiality — are of particular relevance for each performance.<sup>41</sup> Thus, albeit often overlooked and neglected, voices are in fact constitutive due to their capacity to establish social and spatial experience. They can define as well as transform spaces by creating soundscapes that overlap with each other, bridging distances in place and time by interlacing real and imagined spaces with the bodies that are moving through the designed spheres. The vocal quality and poignancy of voices affects us immediately. What we hear automatically triggers our imagination to visualise the things heard:

We cannot close the ear like the eye, we cannot step out of the auditory sphere, are permanently exposed to the audible, open to the world and connected to it; the sense of hearing conveys a connection and interconnectedness of the self and the world, which is why it is often referred to as the social sense. The affective-expansive power of the voice is doubled by the fact that [...] it appeals to be heard and answered.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Only one participant highlighted its quality; another found the voice rather annoying after walking a while.

<sup>39</sup> Cp. Sterne who speaks of "the hegemony of the visual and the privileging of the eye", 2012, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Cp. Doris Kolesch & Sybille Krämer, "Stimmen im Konzert der Disziplinen", in *idem* (eds.), 2006, 7-15. Cp. also the radio program "Så luktar sjukdom" on Swedish radio P1 (Vetandets värld, Spring 2018). <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/1113670?programid=412> (accessed 22 July 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2014, 226-227.

<sup>42</sup> This section is based on Jenny Schrödl, "Stimm(t)räume. Zu Audioinstallationen von Laurie Anderson und Janet Cardiff", in *Kunst-Stimmen*. Ed. by Doris Kolesch & Jenny Schrödl. Berlin: *Theater der Zeit* 2004, 143-160, in particular 143-151, quote 149. See also Thomas Macho, "Stimmen ohne Körper. Anmerkungen zur Technikge-

Oftentimes, we remain unconscious of the forcefulness that voices possess. Nevertheless, they always establish a social reality among the parties involved.

‘The voice’ appears from the very beginning to the very end of the walk. However, this is not the main reason I start with it. I regard the peculiarity of the voice as the very essence of *The Invisible Camp*.<sup>43</sup> This is in particular true of the German version when the actress Jule Böwe, the only professional participant, speaks in her mother tongue and appears especially enigmatic.<sup>44</sup> It is this voice, from the moment we activate the audio walk, that makes us understand that what we are confronted with is an artwork and not an historical audio guide. The vocal quality of this supporting voice determines the predominant emotional state the walk produces: bewilderment. It is a carefully chosen, kind, soft voice; at the beginning not easy to classify: is it a child’s, is it a woman’s voice? A bit mysterious but not intimidating. The initial, and recurring confusion is due to the voice, both at the beginning, and on a few later occasions, taking the role of the artist’s *alter ego* whom one knows is a man.

However, confusion applies not to the voice’s role as a guide through space. When, at the beginning of the tour, the voice invites me to walk with her, I trust her, despite her not physically being present. She navigates me safely through this unknown territory, installs my commitment to confront dreadful scenes and difficult questions.<sup>45</sup> “Come, walk with me.” It is this voice, which makes me comfortable enough to walk, pause, look, and move around

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schichte der Stimme”, in Kolesch & Krämer 2006, 130-146, in particular 130 and 132. The quote reads in the original: “Wir können das Ohr nicht wie das Auge verschließen, können nicht aus der Hörspäre heraustreten, sind dem Hörbaren permanent ausgesetzt, zur Welt hin offen und mit ihr verbunden; der Hörsinn vermittelt eine Verbundenheit und Vernetztheit von Ich und Welt, weshalb er auch oftmals als der soziale Sinn bezeichnet wird. Die affektiv-expansive Kraft der Stimme wird noch dadurch verdoppelt, dass in ihr [...] ein Apell, gehört und beantwortet zu werden, laut wird.” Translation by Ian Bild, Worpsswede. I thank Ian for proof-reading this article.

<sup>43</sup> As does Wegner (2013) who investigates the narrator’s supportive significance at close range, see in particular 35, 38-47.

<sup>44</sup> [Ed. note] Visit *Liminalities* to hear Böwe’s narration in both German and English. <http://liminalities.net/16-1/invisiblecamp.html>

<sup>45</sup> Apparently, there are some striking similarities with Janet Cardiff’s audio walks, as e.g. the *Louisiana Walk* (1996) and *Wanås Walk* (1998), in particular how the recorded footsteps and the voice guides the user through space, how the voice relates the narratives and stimulates thoughts, instilling a desire to continue and finish the walk. See Elizabeth Sweeney, “Walking with Janet Cardiff, Sitting with Massimo Guerra, and Eating Apples with R. Murray Schafer: Meaningful Museum Experiences with Participatory Art for Visitors with and without Visual Impairments”, *The Journal of Museum Education* (2009: 34) 3, Special Issue: *Building Diversity in Museums*, 235-248, here 239. However, there are also significant differences, as Cardiff’s walks are not based on oral testimony, but are largely fictional (cp. Bradley 2012, 101). Mayer’s walk is inseparably connected to the place and its history, while Cardiff’s walks could function in different environments (cp. Butler who wonders how site-specific Cardiff’s walks are, 2007, 362, 364).

in what is other people's daily life. I do not feel like a voyeur.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that I feel comfortable all the way, nor that everything is comprehensible, as for example when one is asked to visualise a scene which implies that one has to cower in an imagined opening in the ground. But the voice succeeds in that I trespass personal boundaries, that I open up to the experiences the walk aims to generate and to the knowledge and insights it wants to mediate.<sup>47</sup> I rely on this voice. And I am not misled. When she says, "This building used to be the main entrance of the concentration camp Gusen I" ("Dieses Haus war früher der Haupteingang des Konzentrationslagers von Gusen I"), I stand right in front of the closed gate. When she asks for my attention, wonders if I see the house that once was the camp brothel, I just have to look slightly over the fence to what is now a family home. I nod, but it is a survivor's voice answering: "That is the brothel" ("Ja, das ist das Bordell.") This example shows the technical brilliance of the walk's timing and dramaturgy, both characteristic quality markers of the work, which in their turn testify to its long and careful production process. That process involved many committed collaborators and adept partners, and shows the different levels of thoughtful entanglement—as when my nodding is answered by the survivor's words, at the right moment, at the right spot.

The voice gives the walker guidance: literally, in the sense of walking directions and essential information about the historical events that happened here several decades ago. This kind of information is reservedly embedded in the collage of testimonies. Furthermore, the voice sets the tone—thematically, and in what it demands from the viewer: a willingness to engage, to listen in, to picture history, and to brainstorm its consequences empathetically. Thereby it tunes the listener into performing the act of trying to understand, trying to make sense, comprehending the meaning of the work and the difficult subjects it raises, installing the sense of the necessity to remember and to act according to the Holocaust imperatives of 'never forget' and 'never again'.

The following example, from the very beginning of the walk, illustrates how this peculiar voice creates a multi-layered wordscape, an atmospheric virtual reality:

Wir waren auf dem Weg zum Zug. Hier hat mich meine Mutter an der Hand genommen. Es war ein schöner Frühsommertag. Ihr Kleid wehte um ihre Beine. Ich sah nicht ihr Gesicht. Ich glaube, ich fühlte nur ihre Haut. Ihre Hand, konnte sie riechen.

Der Platz hier sieht jetzt anders aus.

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<sup>46</sup> It would be of interest to complement the surveys with interviews with the local inhabitants to learn more about the experiences made by those who are passed by.

<sup>47</sup> As Sweeney shows, the value of being physically entangled, of being addressed through a variety of senses has a huge impact on how we take in new knowledge, 2009, 236, 241. She refers to studies in cognitive psychology that showed that we learn more when we are able to touch what we are looking at and hearing about.

Dieser Ort, diese Landschaft, dieser Geruch. Das ist die Landschaft meiner Kindheit.

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We were on the way to the train. My mother had taken me by the hand. It was a beautiful day in early summer. Her dress wafted around her legs. I couldn't see her face, I only felt her skin, her hand, the way she smelled.

The place looks different now.

The village, the land, the smell. This is the landscape of my childhood.

These words establish immediately a “we” — once a mother and a child, an image of confidence. Now it is me who becomes part of the “we”: it is me, who is taken by the hand, guided by the voice, sensing at once that what we will face is no walk in the park. Already the word “Zug” signals a warning, given that it is a loaded term in the Holocaust context. We are on the move, as those two were then, in fact, we are walking; our footsteps tuned to each other. The sound of the voice's footsteps resonates in my body, creating a sense of belonging, of community.<sup>48</sup> Her words prepare me to activate my imagination, my senses. I feel, smell, experience, and accept that I am entering a realm of uncertainty.

The quote from the beginning of the walk also reminds us that memory is fickle: what one thinks one remembers may contrast with what one knows for sure. And the place, is it a reliable source? It “looks different now”, not as in the time of the artist's childhood, which was not the time when crimes were committed in this region.

Immediately, a place is constituted, and simultaneously there exist several overlapping layers of time.<sup>49</sup> This intersection of imagined and physical reality is important. One is here but also in another time, which one projects into the present. This is similar to the effect a theatre performance produces: the effect of *hic et nunc*, instilling a sense of present-ness, and an intense experience of being in the present<sup>50</sup>:

That which is concurrent, always occurs for itself and has a common present [...] That which occurs at the same time is temporal togetherness [...] Being concurrent therefore means to happen in a moment of time [...] Time [however] presents itself as succession [...] Accordingly, it shouldn't surprise when concurrence as such is not to be understood

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<sup>48</sup> Cp. Fischer-Lichte 2014, 97-99.

<sup>49</sup> Cp. Welzer 2007, and Wegner 2013, 35. Examining different examples, also Fischer-Lichte describes clearly the act of generating space by overlapping imagination and memories, 2014, 196.

<sup>50</sup> This paragraph builds on Fischer-Lichte 2014, 160-166, 193, 208.

as temporal but spatial. Space is presented as a juxtaposition, that is as an order of possible simultaneous things [...].<sup>51</sup>

In the very first sentences quoted above, much is already said about how the artwork works, and which aspects will be taken up during the walk, such as the significance of place. A few moments later, the voice explains, how the walk came about and why:

Ich habe nach Erinnerungen gesucht, nach Menschen, die hier waren, als das alles gebaut wurde. [...] Ich bin mit ihnen zu den Plätzen ihrer Jugend gegangen und hab sie gebeten, mir ihre Bilder, das, was sie mit ihren Augen gesehen haben, was sie erlebt haben, zu erzählen. Manche von ihnen haben nach 60 Jahren das erste Mal darüber gesprochen. [...] Jetzt möchte ich Ihnen diese Plätze zeigen und die Gedanken der Menschen vorstellen, die damals hier waren und auch der Menschen, die jetzt hier wohnen.

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I've searched for memories. For those people who were here when all this was built. [...] I accompanied them to the places of their youth and asked them to describe the images of what they had seen with their own eyes, what they had experienced. For some of them, it was the first time they talked about it, after 60 years. [...] Now, I'd like to show you these places and share with you the thoughts of those who were here then, and of those who live here now.

Nothing is kept in the dark for me. I am on the inside. Ready to listen to those who saw with their own eyes and those who live with this past. Thus, I walk with her, following the sound of her recorded footsteps.

It is not only important *what* the voice says but also *how* she says it. The accompanying narrator describes events from the past as if she is establishing a scene, visualising it bit by bit: slow, thoughtful, intensive, deeply moved:

Die Häftlinge aus Gusen II wurden hier aus den Waggons geprügelt und mussten sich auf dieser Wiese—rechts—unter Peitschenschlägen und Hundegebell in ihren Kommandos zu Fünfhundertern formieren. Einhundert Reihen mit je fünf Häftlingen.

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<sup>51</sup> Rainer Marten, "Philosophische Aspekte der Gleichzeitigkeit", in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*. "Was zugleich ist, kommt je für sich vor und hat eine gemeinsame Gegenwart [...] Gleichzeitig ist, was miteinander in der Zeit ist [...] Zugleichsein heißt dann: sich in *einem* Zeitmoment ereignen [...] Die Zeit [aber] wird durch das Nacheinander vorgestellt [...] Demnach muß es nicht Wunder nehmen, wenn das Gleichzeitige als solches nicht zeitlich, sondern räumlich verstanden wird. Der Raum wird als Nebeneinander vorgestellt, d. h. als Ordnung der möglichen gleichzeitigen Dinge [...]." Translation by Ian Bild.

Vom Sammelplatz ging es an Bauernhäusern vorbei zur unterirdischen Anlage.

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The prisoners of Gusen II were clubbed out at the trains and had to gather in battalions of 500—to the right—at the meadow behind this hedge of trees, accompanied by barking dogs and slashing whips. One hundred rows with five prisoners each.

From the gathering place, they were marched past farm houses to the underground site.

It is this combination of the quality of the voice and the method of articulation that encourages the walker to imagine, to be moved by what one hears happened here.

### *Mayer's Multi-Vocal Memory-Patchwork*

The accompanying narrator's voice makes up one component of the walk's vocal soundscape consisting of almost 30 voices. Most of them remain nameless, all of them faceless. The mother's face remained invisible to the child, the voice's face remains invisible to me. Almost 80 years after WW II started, there is hardly anyone alive able to retell their experiences. Mayer's audio walk may have been one of the last chances to record these voices from the past, many silenced since then. With its combination of oral history and mobile media, Mayer's walk satisfies the growing interest "to experience the past through the voices and stories of the people who were there."<sup>52</sup> They walk with us, talk to us, appear present throughout our physical performance: "As an indicator that testifies and speaks of the dead, the voice is now conversely connected to those absent, a sign of difference in time and place. It becomes the medium of the afterlife of past generations, the medium of cultural memory."<sup>53</sup> Since 2007, individuals born long after the actual events took place have been able to hear these voices, again and again. By listening to their narratives, one becomes a retrospective witness.

The soundscape that Mayer created is detached from the bodies which once performed them. They exist in a time-space continuum, which can be activated each time one walks anew.<sup>54</sup> The experience of present-ness is constituted by the interplay of the space one is in, present in its materiality, with

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<sup>52</sup> Bradley 2012, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Sigrid Weigel, "Die Stimme als Medium des Nachlebens: Pathosformel, Nachhall, Phantom, kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven", Kolesch & Krämer 2006, 16-39, here 23. The original reads: "Als Spur, die von den Toten zeugt und spricht, ist die Stimme nun umgekehrt gerade mit den oder dem Abwesenden verbunden, Signum von Differenz in Zeit und Ort. Sie wird zum Medium des Nachlebens vergangener Generationen, zum Medium des kulturellen Gedächtnisses." Translation by Ian Bild.

<sup>54</sup> Cp. Schrödl 2004, 144.

one's own, very much alive body. The space is shared with the present-ness of different voices once having emanated from a living organism, uttered by real people, "recorded at a different time, to which the walker nonetheless clings in order to follow the narrative."<sup>55</sup> Thus, the audio walk enables the participant "to hear what *was* and see what *is*."<sup>56</sup>

In contrast to traditional theatre performances, the familiar partition between scene and audience does not apply to the audio walk. The participant cannot remain in the position of a somehow distanced spectator, hidden in the dark of the auditorium. The walker is the performer. By walking she activates the protagonists' voices constituting the scene. The act of speaking as well as the act of hearing involves the whole body, both the speaker's and the listener's.<sup>57</sup> From the moment one starts walking, the voices' forcefulness involves the whole body, an impact one cannot defy. One gets emotionally and cognitively engaged.<sup>58</sup> The result is a particular embodied, immediate and intimate experience.<sup>59</sup> It is the participant listening, walking, imagining, to the sound of different voices, which one cannot easily keep apart,<sup>60</sup> whose dialects are sometimes difficult to understand. This work demands the walker's full attention.

Essentially, Mayer's audio walk is perceived as a live performance: the recorded voices are activated by the walker, who carries them through the space. Thus, Mayer's careful choreography creates a sense that past and present coexist in the space one passes through. The past is present in resonance, reinserted in places which stretch through time.<sup>61</sup> History is not taught, but first and foremost felt: in the listener's body.<sup>62</sup> We walk through a well-arranged clutter, a multi-dimensional memory-patchwork,<sup>63</sup> or a calculated *mise-en-scène*, as Camilla Jalving described Jeppe Hein's *Space in Action/Action in*

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<sup>55</sup> Christine Ross, "Movement That Matters Historically: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's 2012 *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*", in *Discourse* (2013: 35) 2, 212-227, here 220. Cp. also Wegner 2013, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Steven High, "Embodied Ways of Listening: Oral History, Genocide and the Audio Tour", in *Anthropologica* 55 (2013), 73-85, here 76.

<sup>57</sup> Schrödl 2004, 147.

<sup>58</sup> Fischer-Lichte defines the users (of theatre productions) as "Mit-Erzeuger" (co-producer), and underlines the importance of the involvement of the participants for the success of the performance (2014, 80-82). Her concept of the feedback-loop cannot necessarily be applied directly to Mayer's work, as the recorded walk cannot be affected by the reactions to the artwork (in contrast to the actors on-scene, or live performers in performance art), but the concept comes forth in the interaction between users and local inhabitants as described above.

<sup>59</sup> As Butler has shown for the artistic walks he developed; he too builds his conclusions on audience reception studies, 2007, 369.

<sup>60</sup> Cp. Wegner 2013, 63.

<sup>61</sup> Cp. Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts", *History Workshop Journal* (1995) 39, 182-191, here 187, 188.

<sup>62</sup> Cp. Ross 2013, 225.

<sup>63</sup> Cp. Larndorfer 2011.



*Space* (2002).<sup>64</sup> The spoken words as well as the acoustic colour, the timber and accents of the different speakers' voices, penetrate our hearing. The impression described is even stronger in the English version that allows the original voices with their different dialects and vocal qualities to be heard before the translation kicks in. Their oral testimonies were rendered in dialogue with the artist, many while walking through the actual sites we encounter throughout the walk. By contrast, the interviews with the perpetrators were not conducted on the spot; they appear much more static.

For *The Invisible Camp* it is important that the original voices can also be heard in the English version.<sup>65</sup> The local dialects reinforce the connection to the region, while the multitude of voices remind one that during WW II many languages were spoken in Gusen by prisoners brought from all over Europe. We hear different Austrian and German dialects, survivors speaking English with French or Polish accents, hinting at their countries of origin or where they lived after the war. Some survivors speak German, some with beautiful Eastern European accents, slowly, deliberate and thoughtful. The wide spectrum of voices encompasses both female and male, all apparently adults but spanning different ages.

Important in this context is also the disclosure of the voices' physicality. We are not occupied by looks, the shape of the body or texture of the skin. The voices make up the protagonists' personalities. By taking the walk, each walker co-creates the presence of these bodiless voices. Interestingly, while they remain figureless, one becomes more aware of one's own physicality, and how one moves through space. This in turn contributes towards sharpening one's awareness of the surroundings.

Although the audio walk consists of a multitude of voices, thereby avoiding a one-sided image of the past, there is hardly any doubt that it is sympathetic to the survivors and critical of the perpetrators and bystanders. This is foremost a result of the soundscape, which subtly influences the user's receptiveness.<sup>66</sup> This becomes particularly obvious when listening to the English version: the voice-over of the translated passages sets the tone of how a person's character is supposed to be perceived: for example, the German SS man does not immediately disguise himself as die-hard, but his English counterpart appears directly as gruff and narrow-minded; the English Traude appears much more discomposed and strident than her full-bodied original; a local inhabitant states in calm tones that this region is a beautiful place to live in, in the English version he sounds defensive, as if he is reluctant to speak about what happened here. By contrast, one sympathises with the survivors, who tell of their childhood memories, with warm, misty-eyed voices, captured in the English version as well, emphasised by their fragile intonation, revealing the pain they feel when recounting the suffering they had to endure in this place; their heavy exhalations are, as one understands, a result of trying not to

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<sup>64</sup> Jalving 2011, 135.

<sup>65</sup> In the English version, a few shorter phrases were deleted. Most likely to ensure that both versions have the same length.

<sup>66</sup> Cp. Wegner 2013, 25-6.

break out in tears. The walk's fragmentary character also shows itself in the uttered sentences, often not completed, or in the questions that remain unanswered, reminding us that all this knowledge was suppressed for a long time, illustrating the strain it took to bring such knowledge back to light.

### *The Patchwork's Multi-Layered Soundscape*

The patchwork of voices is supported by various sounds, which together have a strong impact on the user.<sup>67</sup> Sounds have the capacity to embrace and envelop the listener, turning her corporeality into a body of resonance. What assails via the ear penetrates the whole anatomy, one feels the hearing as an "inner-bodily process."<sup>68</sup> It is the accompanying acoustic soundscape which intensifies the sense of entanglement called forth by the words uttered by the different voices.

The created soundscape acts largely in a supportive way. It reinforces the atmosphere established by the interviewees' accounts. For example, survivors' childhood memories are supplemented by harmonious, warm tones. Piercing sounds, generating uncomfortable audible vibrations, are intersected when it slowly becomes clear that the house one stands in front of was used as a brothel. Electronic tunes or high annoying tones, cracking or sizzling noises are intersected at certain alarming scenes, for instance when the camp is presented, or to enhance the danger emanating from words such as 'watchtower'. The sound of the footsteps, on asphalt or gravel, depending on the material one walks on, are a recurrent reminder to continue.

During the course of the walk, the soundscape changes and intensifies. Shorter, recurring motifs manifest themselves, for example a piece performed by violins, a euphonic and romantic but at the same time ominous melody that creates a melancholic mood. It comprises of only a few notes but acts nevertheless as a spiral, swinging up and down, interrupted by harsh electronic tunes. This piece spurs one to move forward. The nostalgic motif also reverberates after Himmler's speech until it is suddenly interrupted by a craggy cough, a cough one uses to clear one's throat. In the sound collage, the cough acts as the answer of a local inhabitant to Himmler's statement that the murder of the Jews took place out of love for the German nation. After clearing his throat, the Gusener claims that many of those who were involved in committing the genocide later committed suicide, thereby implying that the love Himmler praised would have had deathly consequences not only for the murdered but for some perpetrators, too.

The augur of distant drums, like an approaching rumble of thunder, enforces the atmosphere when the treatment of the prisoners is brought up. This becomes a recurrent motif, which gains more and more vigour and momentum throughout the walk. Louder, more forceful drum rolls appear when the

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<sup>67</sup> However, as with the voice, few participants commented on the soundscape, with the exception of a trained professional, a 'Klangwerkerin' (sound artist).

<sup>68</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2014, 207-8.

question is asked how the perpetrators' crimes affect the later-born generations. It seems as if the drums spur on this delicate discussion. The motif appears again when the perpetrator repeatedly urges the interviewer to show understanding for his situation, asking the younger generations for absolution, so that he can die in peace. The sound of the escalating drum rolls seems to insist that absolution is not possible.

During a sequence at the former *Schleppbahntrasse* one hears the sound of a freight train approaching, the metallic chattering getting louder and louder, reminiscent of the transport of the prisoners. This rather long sequence is disturbing, forcefully penetrating the body. Completely steeped in this soundscape, I surrender, taking the opportunity to think about the things heard. Suddenly a voice breaks into the *crescendo* and opens the discussion about the significance of the place, as if the soil contains information about what happened in this region. Through the overlapping of sound and landscape, I become painfully aware that there is nothing that is not contaminated by Nazism. Tracks, freight wagons, trains can never again be perceived detached from their misuses. It is the sound that prompts, or maybe rather confirms, this insight. Thus, it is neither the narratives nor the movement within this site of historical relevance that alone determine the perception of this place. It also stems from the intersected sound.

The acoustic backdrop enhances and emphasises what is said. But the recorded sounds are in their turn exposed to the sounds of daily life appearing during the walk. While pausing, looking, listening, sometimes to silence, one also hears noises of the moment: a rattling lawn-mower, birds chirping, or children playing joyfully. The conflation of the recorded and the ambient evokes more images than those that are there to see. The soundscape transmitted via earphones enters an intense relationship with the existing landscape, at times they seem to interact, as in the example I mentioned, when the church bells started to ring. The bells appear both recorded and accidental during my walk, becoming a symbolic moment. It is such coincidences that create additional layers of meaning, shifting for each individual tour (an aspect we will come back to). The recorded narrative and the performance of me walking and hearing sounds of the moment interact. The entanglement of past and present is also reinforced by the fact that the church was already there when the crimes were committed. The entanglement of history with this presence is made imaginable, tangible. As a result of that, all our senses are addressed.

At times, the acoustic backdrop acts as a counterpart to the verbal. Carefully inserted, disturbing tones admonish us to be observant. The sounds affect me directly. The enervating sizzling noise—as if one is trying to find a radio channel or as if a plastic bag scrapes on one's bicycle wheel—is disturbing. Instinctively, I shake my head. Some sonorous, drawn-out tones make me raise my eye-brows in disbelief when being confronted with the perpetrators' and bystanders' attempts to absolve themselves from their responsibility for

the committed crimes. The intersection of annoying sounds contributes to a mood of questioning, processing, making sense.<sup>69</sup>

Some long-drawn-out tones enhance the tension one feels upon hearing the walking instructions, not knowing where all this will lead to, nor which topic will next be taken up. Recorded sounds are contrasted with sections kept in silence. There are in fact many passages without any sound at all. At times, the sound of barking dogs, screaming crows, braking freight trains or unidentifiable scraping fade away. The sudden reverberant sound of silence is however not mute: one listens intensely. Is the device still working? What comes next? The silences have nuances: some are necessary for the listener to picture what is heard, as when facing the roll call area, which in the listener's imagination slowly emerges out of the ground. Some silences make one re-focus: where am I? What was just said? What does it mean? Other silences are like holes that risk swallowing the listener.

Together, these different layers of soundscape create an historical awareness of what took place here.<sup>70</sup> One enters the realm of history, the former camp, its facilities. One encounters the suffering of its inmates, the people responsible for their fate, and later-born generations who have to live with this past.

### *(Re-)Locating History*

[including silence] Hier ist so ruhig. Gusen ist so ruhig. Ist das Gusen hier?  
Gusen? [including silence]

\*

It's so quiet here. Gusen is so quiet. Is this really Gusen? Gusen?

These words of a survivor indicate that he can hardly situate the experiences he once had in this place within the scenery the family homes offer today. Apparently, this interview was made while walking through the neighbourhood: we hear birds singing on the day of the recording, while the survivor tells us of the beatings and the screaming of the victims. Scenes, sounds, smells that he and other survivors who are heard during the walk, cannot forget:

You just can't forget the picture of it, it's so imprinted in the memory that I see it clearly if I shut my eyes!<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> According to Wegner 2013, 32, who states that the experience generated by Mayer's audio walk encompasses three levels: the user acts, observes, and feels.

<sup>70</sup> Cp. Ross 2013, 217.

<sup>71</sup> The audio walk had a sustaining effect on me. In order to learn more about the long-term effects of taking the walk, I had asked participants in the surveys for their email addresses, which, however, pupils doing the walk were not encouraged to provide. Given the high level of scepticism about providing personal data in Austria and Germany, only 18 people offered email addresses. Not all were legible, or still functioning when I contacted them again in July 2018. Those I reached responded immediately

Without wanting to equate the memories of survivors with the impact the audio walk has on users, the quote points to how the majority of participants describe the walk's impact. Albeit no memorial site, the work enables the walker to get at least an idea of the dimensions of the former camps Gusen I and II, and of the scale of *Bergkristall* where during WW II tens of thousands of slave workers were forced to work under inhumane conditions and many of them lost their lives constructing the giant underground factory, producing *Messerschmitt* jet planes. It is the demanded act of imagining and projecting the past into the present that contributes to the perception and appreciation of the work.<sup>72</sup> Participants welcome the walk's capacity to address their imagination and to let them experience several layers of history at the same time. They value the well-thought out collage, which testifies to the deep engagement of the artist with the subject. The walkers feel that they are being taken seriously.

The work's capacity to (re-)locate and evoke the history of WW II within the market towns of Langenstein, Gusen and St. Georgen depends on the combination of different elements: spoken words, sound, and site-specificity. It succeeds in locating history by creating spatial and temporal simultaneities and by immersive re-projection of the past into the present.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the history profoundly impacts the walkers. One listens to the conflicting narratives of survivors and perpetrators while confronting the inhabitants' privacy, passing by their houses, realising the burden of living at this contaminated site day by day.<sup>74</sup> When houses or swimming pools are built in the area, one still finds human remains in the soil, as the audio walk reports.

While walking, I realise that the former camp has not completely vanished; it is not completely invisible. Mayer succeeds in bringing forth what was for a long time covered or overlooked. The most obvious visible, preserved marker is the previously mentioned crematorium and the Memorial that was built around it. This concrete cube block contrasts sharply with the environment in which it is embedded. However, over decades the past was mostly swept under the carpet. It was the survivor committees that caused occasional ruptures in the daily routines when they visited the place, often on commemoration days. Still, the recurring assertions heard during the walk that the residents had no clue of what happened here during the war, while at the same time telling us that the local youth met around the former crematorium, exposes these statements as lies or deep-set repressions of the historical

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and wrote that they had later on been reminded of the walk several times, were encouraged to learn more about the Gusen concentration camps or explore family history with a planned book project as a goal.

<sup>72</sup> It is Mayer's work in this very specific historic landscape that makes his project truly unique, rather than the fact that he situates his memory work within the daily sphere of everyday life, as claimed by Wegner 2013, 79. Examples of memory works situated in the daily sphere are e.g. Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* (since 1995, ongoing) or Renata Stih and Frider Schnock's *Places of Remembrance* in Berlin-Schöneberg (1993).

<sup>73</sup> Cp. Welzer 2007, and Wegner 2013, 38-40, 70.

<sup>74</sup> This issue is confronted by filmmaker Bernd Fischer in his excellent *Grüße aus Dachau* (2003).

truth — not least because of the sheer size of the Memorial. Furthermore, after one's attention is drawn to it by the audio walk, one becomes aware that there are more remnants and relics testifying to the past: some concrete fence pillars, a bridge built by prisoners leading over the Gusen river, even entire buildings adapted to a new use, often functioning as private residences, for example the former brothel. The *Schleppbahntrasse* today offers leisure activities, parts of the quarries provide working opportunities. One needs only some assistance to see the traces left.

Initially, I had assumed that the walk might overburden users, and that it would be foremost appreciated by people who already knew a lot about the subject. I was proven wrong. Instead, most appreciate the work,<sup>75</sup> despite it been demanding, and given that one first has to know that Gusen and the audio walk exist at all and that one has to arrange for use of the device. The Memorial is open to the public daily except for Monday, but unstaffed. In order to get the equipment, you have to organise this in advance or call the Mauthausen Memorial that then tries to send a member of staff to provide the visitor with the audio walk.

The MP3 player is a well-chosen device. It is important that it is collected at a set place that offers further information before or after the walk. Mayer's work should not be downloaded as it is a walk that should be experienced *in situ*. The work depends on its site-specificity. It is crucial that it takes place at the sites where the crimes were actually committed. Hearing the walk far away from where it was meant to be experienced would disregard the work's logic. This exclusivity should be preserved despite the complications involved with obtaining the equipment.<sup>76</sup>

### *Non-Identification and Unresolvedness as Quality Markers*

Most Holocaust museums are built on individual survivor stories in order to give back the victims their identities taken from them by the Nazis. They offer visitors a person to identify with. Mayer's walk does no such thing. This is of utmost importance. His collage of voices forces us to take in different points

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<sup>75</sup> Except for some pupils around 14-16, an age group possibly too young to grasp the work's complexity, and (elderly) people with restricted walking faculties. The educators at the Memorial recommend the walk for pupils over 16 but do not refuse anyone younger should their teacher insist they take part (according to an email from Bernhard Mühleder to the author, October 18, 2017). The surveys reveal however that many of these young people are also very appreciative of the walk.

<sup>76</sup> That is not saying that it is impossible to create a work which functions well far away from the place where the crimes it commemorates were committed, as Steven High (2013, see note 57) demonstrates with his article on the audio walk *A Flower in the River*. This walk is based upon the narratives of Montréal's local community of Rwandan exiles and survivors of the Tutsi genocide. Their testimony follows an established route of an annual commemoration procession, firmly anchored in local cultural memory. In July 2019, a shorter radio version of the *Audio Walk Gusen* was produced (<https://oe1.orf.at/programm/20190707/559151/Gusen-Das-unsichtbare-Lager>; retrieved July 18, 2019), which I find however less impressive than the walk.

of view, with standpoints constantly shifting.<sup>77</sup> Non-identification allows one to really take in what is said, no matter how uncomfortable or difficult.<sup>78</sup> There is no clear division between us and them. Even the perpetrators' personalities appear complex. We believe them when they tell us that they initially had no idea of what awaited them, or that what they were confronted with was completely shocking for them too. The quick change of viewpoints forces us to refrain from over hasty judgements. Thrown from one statement to another, it is most likely that one can take a position first after the walk has ended.

The walk demands deep engagement, physically, mentally, cognitively. One needs to listen carefully if one wants to follow the different narrative strands that, as with information about the camp, emerge *peu à peu*. The collage of characters illustrates that this past, as with the present, consists of a multitude of often conflicting voices.

With its multitude of voices Mayer's walk is rather an exception. According to Stephen High, most audio tours present a unified story, in that they only adopt one viewpoint.<sup>79</sup> The participants of Mayer's walk appreciate being exposed to the many nuances that make up this difficult historical complexity. In fact, it is the work's strength that it integrates uncomfortable statements by perpetrators that are not easy to listen to.<sup>80</sup> During the walk, existential questions are raised that receive their urgency during the process of walking through this topography of terror. One senses that much more lurks beneath the surface. We are not given answers but are prompted to further reflect on the topics on our own. Mayer's walk has the courage to confront the uncomfortable, and leave it unresolved, without making moralistic pledges.<sup>81</sup>

My description of the work being at times unbearable was shared by many users, who, like me, still value it no less. Although the effect of being exposed to this multitude of conflicting emotions, as well as unresolved questions, is disturbing and can lead to a feeling of helplessness, nearly everyone describes being exposed to this experience in positive terms, and as profoundly thought-provoking. Despite it being challenging and uncomfortable, 2/3 would want to experience the time-consuming walk anew.

### *Experienced Uniqueness and Novelty*

Most users perceive the walk's capacity to mediate historical knowledge, and encourage the walker to visualise the past in the present, as innovative and unique. This is somehow astonishing as Mayer's audio walk is far from inventive when it comes to the technical solutions the digital age provides some 10 years after the walk came into existence. Now it is possible to project

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<sup>77</sup> Cp. die jungs [front page]; cp. Wegner 2013, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Cp. Wegner 2013, 45.

<sup>79</sup> High 2013, 80.

<sup>80</sup> Cp. Welzer 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Wegner is of a different opinion (2013, 77). According to her, the walk is rather manipulative and the narrator's voice is used as an instrument of power (41-42). By contrast, Larndorfer regards Mayer's walk as non-moralistic, 2011, 318-9.

images of the past into the present using technology and not just imagination.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the great majority of its users perceive the work as novel, authentic, and innovative, or simply as different from established Holocaust education. One explanation is certainly that the walk, albeit sharing some similarities with historical audio walks known from museums and memorial sites, takes place in a non-institutionalised, non-ritualised setting. It begins at a memorial, but leads through what is other people's daily lives.<sup>83</sup> This detachment from institutionalised places of memory implies that a standardised way of behaviour cannot be re-performed. One simply does not know which behaviour is expected in the given context. If one walks alone, no other person's way of walking indicates what could be regarded as appropriate. Thus, each individual has to respond in her own way. Mayer refuses using historical images, or producing new ones, which risk one looking away from the atrocities they show, or that the aestheticized after-images become too beautiful.<sup>84</sup> Instead, Mayer's combination of walking and listening leads to the activation of one's own memories (the acquired repertoire of images and knowledge), and imagination.<sup>85</sup> You cannot look away, as you need to orient yourself simply not to be hit by a car, neither can you close your ears. This is a truly immersive experience that allows and forces us to be both inside and outside, a paradoxical, but very productive situation that promotes an emotional experience and at the same time activates our cognitive abilities.

Christoph Mayer has created his work carefully. Nevertheless, each person will experience it differently. The walk depends on who you are, how you are met by those you come across during your walk, if you walk alone or as part of a group. There will be encounters only you will have, odds and ends only you will hear, and moods only you will be amenable to on your tour. Even if you walk again, it would never be the same, as you may freeze in the rain, or find it hard to concentrate in the heat of the summer; you may walk by a garden party, listen to laughter, or meet no one at all on a grey afternoon. While the work remains the same, the experience rests on other factors out of the artist's control.

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<sup>82</sup> Such as, e.g. Janet Cardiff in her *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012); or Nikolina Ställborn, *Tidsloop: Grälle 1946, Pålle 1976, ARW 2018* (2018). 360 Grad photography.

<sup>83</sup> Cp. Larndorfer 2011, 321.

<sup>84</sup> See Susan Sontag's canonical *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2003. I used the Swedish translation by Caj Lundgren, *Att se andras lidande*. Stockholm: Brombergs 2004, and refer in particular to page 18, 121, 124; see also Brett Ashley Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty. Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2007. The public space demands *per se* a certain degree of awareness, as the walker needs to be observant and negotiate the place she occupies, which includes oncoming pedestrians, cyclists or cars. Thus, an audio walk taking place in the sphere of everyday life must necessarily be created with a view to the walker's safety. Consequently, the walk's pace is most likely slow which in its turn implies slowing down the walker, and thus evoking a contemplative mood, see High 2013, 75-6.

<sup>85</sup> Cp. Pink 2015, 44.



This tension between constants and coincidences is of crucial importance. The audio is recorded, and thus repeatable, but it is not experienced as static or authoritative. It is the exposure to everyday life that turns each walk into a new experience.<sup>86</sup> These experiences depend on weather conditions, smells, the appearance of other people, as well as each walker's background and mood. What the work calls forth in the user is determined solely by the walker's individual image repertoire, consisting of perceptions mediated by popular culture, family history, books or documentaries.

Therefore, the decision to illustrate this article with photographs, if only a few, was not self-evident. The photographs give the reader an idea of the surroundings that confronted me during my walk in July 2016. However, the images the walk invoked in me remain invisible. When standing opposite the former brothel, a sign with a German Schäfer warns one not to enter the property; in my mind, dozens of images from feature films and descriptions from novels and memoirs unreeled. Some random encounters seem to fit one's experiences well, as, in my case, the interplay of hearing Himmler's speech and watching the fire brigade practising, or hearing the church bells ringing. Next time I walk, other occurrences may call forth other associations. This interplay of constants and coincidences contributes to the novelty of the experience, as described by many users. The walk's perceived character as a live-performance encourages users to take the walk again, and also explains why the walk is described as so radically different to the sterile spaces offered by many museums and memorials.<sup>87</sup>

Open to the random, this artistic solution fulfils yet another, important function: it reminds us of the world in a state of constant becoming. Experiencing physically that the walked-through-spaces are places of continuous transition, encourages reflectiveness and offers the insight that one can potentially be changed – for example by projects such as Mayer's walk, as they create an emotional receptivity to an otherwise largely invisible history.<sup>88</sup> This capacity is crucial although it cannot and is not meant as a substitute for learning more about the factual history that took place in this area. In the creation of the audio walk (from collecting the oral testimonies, encouraging awareness among the locals through lectures and panel debates, and setting up the walk with their help),<sup>89</sup> Mayer had combined different roles—of a researcher or investigative journalist, of a social worker and manager, and of course of the

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<sup>86</sup> Mayer does not build his work on coincidences, as e.g. Christina Kubisch in her *Electrical Walks* (2003), which would allow ever changing perceptions. Neither does Mayer offer any form of interaction or eligible choices for the user as e.g. Nalasco's *The New York Sound Walks*, see Toby Butler, "A Walk of Art. The Potential of the Sound Walk as Practice in Cultural Geography", *Social & Cultural Geography* (2006: 7) 6, 889-908).

<sup>87</sup> This multi-layered collage will hardly be grasped in all the described nuances by just taking the walk once.

<sup>88</sup> Cp. Fischer-Lichte 2014, 109, 171, 208; and Ross 2013.

<sup>89</sup> See Schult 2019.

artist who then carefully arranged the walk—a work of art that truly functions “as a catalyst for and agent of memory.”<sup>90</sup>

Mayer’s walk is far from being a product of today’s experience economies, (nor part of the so-called dark tourism),<sup>91</sup> despite its bodily engagement and the individual experience it creates within this topography of terror. This walk takes time. It is not a ‘been there, done that, three Holocaust sites in a day-experience’ that you can post on social media. Mayer’s walk demands performative engagement. The individual experience provided by the walk is widely appreciated and is of crucial importance given that we in the Western world live in highly individualised societies.

### *Mayer’s Sound Sculpture Creates Walking Memorials*

The previous sections demonstrated how Mayer’s walk succeeds in substantially grasping the subject’s complexity. My analysis concludes by showing how the walk transforms peoples’ relationships with this past by establishing new, temporal connections with the surroundings. The work turns the involved parties into agents of commemoration, literally into walking memorials. Thereby it activates the historical consciousness of those who walk as well as of those watching the walkers.

Mayer’s well-thought out collage can of course only act performatively if someone activates it. This can potentially be said about any artwork,<sup>92</sup> but the demanded level of engagement varies. One needs to get the MP3 player, to walk and to be open for the experience it offers. Due to the composition of the walk the participants are encouraged to re-see the landscape they walk through, and re-think their own position towards the past which once took place there. The landscape is, at least temporarily, transformed through the imagination of the walker, who projects what is heard into the scenes encountered. Thus, a new actual situation is established. This act is called forth by the participant’s own personal contribution, opening up the possibility of being altered herself. Thus, although ephemeral, Mayer’s walk can have a lasting impact on each user.

The absolute majority of the survey participants answered that they have gathered substantial knowledge about a camp they had not known of, or had

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<sup>90</sup> I borrow these words from Saltzman 2006, 12. There are obvious similarities to Beuys’ social sculpture developed in the 1960s with its emphasis on participation leading to concrete actions and social change, see Erika Bidle, “Re-Animating Joseph Beuys’ ‘Social Sculpture’: Artistic Interventions and the Occupy Movement”, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (2013: 11, 1), 25-33.

<sup>91</sup> The term experience economy hints at companies who seek to make money by, rather than producing goods, creating activities, which provide consumers with experiences. See e.g. B. Joseph Pine II & James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*. Boston: Harvard 2011 [updated edition]. For dark tourism see e.g. Glenn Hooper & John J. Lennon, *Dark Tourism: Practices and Interpretation*. London/New York: Routledge 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art. What Performativity Means in Art*. Zürich: JRP Ringier 2010, 18.

known very little about, and they felt inspired to learn more, willing to discuss this past with family and friends. Thus, Mayer's walk seems to encapsulate the core of 'never forget' and 'never again' through enacting change and transforming perception, behaviour and identity, on a personal and regional level.

Mayer describes his work fittingly as "sculpture of memory",<sup>93</sup> but also as a "walkable sculpture",<sup>94</sup> which has a physical component: the user, moving through space. Listening with headsets is an inverted process, intimate and lonely, but this process is displayed in public. Indeed, the user becomes a temporal, walking memorial, reminding the residents once again of the past, reminding them to remember. Consequently, the walk affects not only the one who walks.<sup>95</sup> Seeing a walker also affects the one passed by, and thus stimulates local inhabitants to think anew about the history of this place and what it means for them today. In this way, the walk influences the social and historical awareness of all those who are involved.<sup>96</sup> This would be the same even if the more visible headsets were exchanged for smaller earphones. The inhabitants of these largely residential areas could easily guess who is taking the tour, as the walker walks at a certain pace and looks at certain houses. Thus, even those who have not walked *The Invisible Camp* are affected, even those who have no clue about what the walk is about will at least wonder why people are behaving in such a slow, contemplative manner and what they are doing in their neighbourhood. And maybe they feel encouraged to find out why, asking friends or family members. Thus, the walk involves and affects more than the one walking.

The layers of memory, the multitude of thought-provoking insights, the realisation of the past's outreach into the present and the different responses to the past overwhelm and disturb the individual. I was relieved to escape this place the next day, but by walking I had made a statement: I wanted to learn more, I wanted to remember. This statement was visible to others, due to my physical participation, as inspiration, confirmation, or affront. I became what Ulrich Baer calls a "secondary witness". The act of vicarious witnessing implies a promise: to not forget what I had heard.<sup>97</sup> As Wegner writes accurately, the "act of experiencing is simultaneously an act of witnessing which provokes an intellectual process of coming to terms with a site, its history, and its imaginary visuals".<sup>98</sup> Walking *The Invisible Camp* constitutes a form of social or symbolic community among those involved, a community united in the will to

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<sup>93</sup> Ola Larsmo, "Rösterna från Gusen", *Dagens Nyheter* (December 20, 2007).

<sup>94</sup> audioweg.gusen.org

<sup>95</sup> Cp. Wegner 2013, 72-3, 79.

<sup>96</sup> It is here Fischer-Lichte's feedback-loop comes to work; for the transformational potential see *idem*, 2014, 32.

<sup>97</sup> Angela Koch & Susanne Wegner, "Mit Stimmen aus der Vergangenheit auf die Gegenwart blicken: Der AUDIOWEG GUSEN," in: *Notwendige Unzulänglichkeit. Künstlerische und mediale Repräsentationen des Holocaust*. Ed. by Nina Heindl & Véronique Sina. Berlin: LIT Verlag 2017, 205-223, here 219-20.

<sup>98</sup> Wegner 2013 ii.

remember this past.<sup>99</sup> A community, which does not physically take shape as a group but is felt—by sensing the work’s pre-history and being greeted by the locals when passing through their neighbourhood. Each time someone walks, this performative act reaffirms a mental community,<sup>100</sup> called on by the multi-vocal soundscape.



Fig. 8: Becoming a walking memorial.

Being a walkable memorial may act as a recurrent exclamation mark to those who see one passing by. However, walking in such a contemplative manner encompasses making oneself vulnerable too. One looks, and is looked at. Not everyone feels comfortable being a mobile memorial. Indeed, some feel themselves to be intruders into the privacy of the family homes.

As the surveys show, the discussion about the significance of place raised incredulity over how living in such contaminated territory is possible, but also enhanced empathy for the inhabitants. One realises that it is much easier to visit The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, learning about the atrocities in a place far away from the crime sites, than to live in the places where these crimes were actually committed, trying to find a responsible,

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<sup>99</sup> Cp. Fischer-Lichte 2014, 89.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, 38.

endurable way of living with this past. Thus, the walk indicates that the artist is not interested in blaming the residents for holding on to what has become their homes. Rather, the walk wants to contribute to a greater awareness of the past, and to a mutual understanding for those who walk and those who see the walkers.

#### IV. The Closed Door

Just before receiving the final briefing on how to come back to the *Memorial* to return the device, the voice addresses a last, utterly complex and at that moment not comprehensible question: “Dear Medusa—are you in me?” This sentence has lingered on ever since I took the walk for the first time. What does it mean?

When the walk ends, irrespective of the magnificence of this work of art in its confrontation of the past, I feel trapped—in this history’s inevitability that forbids me to leave it behind: In the paradox that this history remains inaccessible in the end, no matter what.<sup>101</sup> Literally, because I face a closed door: the entrance to *Bergkristall*. Metaphorically, because the former SS-man with his now old, nasal voice claims that going through this door “might not be made for me”.<sup>102</sup> It is he who is in charge. He refuses to open the door to the past, refusing me access to the knowledge he possesses.

Confronting what human beings are capable of doing to other human beings implies facing an abyss. I was not alone while walking, as I was guided by my gentle companion leading me during one and a half hours through the unfamiliar streets of Langenstein, Gussen and St. Georgen. The voice was my reliable support when listening to the multitude of narratives, escorting me through a camp complex I had not known before, but now had encountered by criss-crossing the space it formerly occupied. I had visualised the camp’s atrocities, pictured it in the here-and-now of the cosy neighbourhoods by listening to extracts of narratives interwoven with each other into a thought-out

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<sup>101</sup> In another article, I reflect on the impossibility of grasping the Holocaust, cp. Schult, “To go or not to go”, in Diana I. Popescu & *idem* (eds.), *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*. New York/Basingstoke 2015, 107-131.

<sup>102</sup> The refusal of the perpetrators appears presumably that drastic, because the metaphor of the door is a recurrent one during the walk, hinting at destruction and death. Another scholar may want to pay closer attention to the recurrence of certain words used by the protagonists (e.g. “dream”), or key words indicating a playful childhood (such as “home/Heimat/house”, even “river” or “village”). Important is the pattern of the patchwork in which the words’ recurrent appearance subtly catches the listener’s attention, who then starts to reflect on their meaning and connotation, depending on who uses the words and in which context. Survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders occasionally use very similar word constructions, but it becomes obvious that their motivation, for not-speaking about the past differs fundamentally: the perpetrators are unwilling, while it is painfully impossible for the survivors to do so.

collage that let me envision the historical complexity, grasping some of its nuances, and reflecting on its meaning today.<sup>103</sup>

I am alone now. After the walk has ended. The voices silenced. Left with an echo of the many questions raised within me. Astonished that I might go and enjoy this sunny July afternoon. Though not yet. The walk back is necessary, not only to return the device. It is part of the work, as one needs time to digest, to reflect in tranquillity, and to re-see the envisioned scenes called forth earlier during the walk, to re-call the narratives told, trying to understand what all this means for the people who live here now, what it means for me who pays only a flying visit to this region.

According to my reading, “Dear old Medusa” is directed at the former SS-man who at the very end exposes his true nature, becoming vicious when being begged to open the door to the past.<sup>104</sup> It is himself he cannot face as it would be too painful to confront his own actions. However, he uses his unwillingness as an instrument of power: his refusal to open the door leaves us with feelings of insufficiency. The perpetrators’ refusal to face the crimes they are responsible for and their unwillingness to share their full knowledge leaves us powerless; with nightmares, similar to those of the artist’s *alter ego* mentioned in the walk.

There is only one sentence in the audio collage, which is repeated: “Hat man mit Schuldgefühlen gelebt? Nein.”; “Have you lived with feelings of guilt? No.” This is the answer of the former SS-man to his own question. The feeling of guilt, which puzzles later-born generations, seems unsolvable. Theirs is not a question of actual, factual guilt but the felt incapacity of not having been able to convince the perpetrators of their moral plight to open up for us. Now it is too late. We failed to achieve closure. Besides the nature of the crimes, it is the suppressed and the untold that makes closure impossible.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Cp. Aleida Assmann’s short but inspiring essay “Das Gedächtnis der Orte”, in *die jungs* (see note 3).

<sup>104</sup> Wegner, too, has difficulty making sense of the Medusa metaphor. She comes to a different, or rather a number of possible, interpretations, e.g. the user’s confrontation with her potential to be a perpetrator. She builds this argumentation on statements made by the artist himself from *die jungs*, see Wegner 2013, 27, 62, 72. According to Koch & Wegner, 2017, 213, note 15, the Medusa metaphor serves to excuse the perpetrator; a reading I cannot follow.

<sup>105</sup> This aspect, as with many others raised in this article, could of course be elaborated further, e.g. by considering Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books 1999 (translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen).



Fig. 9: Entrance to *Bergkristall*.

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