



Osthofen: The Terrain of Denial

Hartmut M. Hanauske-Abel, M.D.*

I will speak here about events that occurred in the Rheinhesse region of Germany, located west of Frankfurt and the river Rhine. These events, whether ignored or acknowledged, determine perceptions of reality for all who live here. These events structure minds and shape identities. Hard-working people—Protestants and Catholics, and very few Jews nowadays—inhabit this rural region which is renowned for its outstanding wine and excellent bread (Fig 1).

This landscape, and especially the region around the city of Worms, is the arena of the “Nibelungenlied” [1], the national epic of modern Germany, originating around the year 1200 and first published in 1757. Its central figure, King Siegfried, heroically defends the Royal Court of King Gunther in Worms and marries Gunther’s sister, only to be betrayed and assassinated. His widow avenges Siegfried with utmost brutality. Using Siegfried’s own sword, she beheads the murderer before she is also killed. The final battle is fought until the death of King Gunther and the last of his followers—a genocidal ending.

Worms and Mainz, the other major city of the Rheinhesse region, and Speyer, just south of Worms,

were for centuries a center of Judaism in northern and eastern Europe. Jewish tradition accorded one name to these three cities: Schu”m. In Worms, the first mention of the Jewish community was recorded around 960. The synagogue was built in 1034, at the same time and by the same workers who built the cathedral, with stones from the same quarry



FIGURE 1. The Königstuhl area of Rheinhesse, the region between the cities of Mainz and Worms in Germany. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauske-Abel.

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* HMLA is a pediatrician and was affiliated with Rush-Presbyterian-St Luke’s Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois at the time this article was written. Address correspondence and reprint requests to Hartmut M. Hanauske-Abel, M.D., Department of Pediatrics, New York Hospital-Cornell University Medical College, 1300 York Avenue, NY 10021.

[2] In 1074, Emperor Heinrich IV granted virtual autonomy to the Jewish community, enabling it to settle all disputes in conformity with Jewish law. Jews were allowed to own buildings and real estate, to work as farmers and to employ Christians [2]. They dressed the same as gentiles. The Schu"m rabbis, like Isaac ben Eliazar ha-Levi of Worms or Gershom of Mainz, were respected throughout Europe for their scholarship. Their ordinances were accepted as authoritative and shaped Judaism. Rabbi Sholom ben Isaac, Rashi, one of the greatest of all Jewish commentators on the Bible and the Talmud [3], was educated in Worms and Mainz.

In 1096, troops for the First Crusade assembled at the banks of the Rhine and ravaged the Schu"m cities, murdering the Jews "whose ancestors killed Him and crucified Him groundlessly. Let us take vengeance first upon them. Let us wipe them out . . ." [4]. The Schu"m communities survived. The two volumes of the Worms Machsor, a collection of prayers for the High Holidays handwritten and illustrated in 1272, contain the first sentences written in the Yiddish language

A fresco in the synagogue of Mohilev in the Ukraine (Fig 2) attests to the pivotal influence of the Kahal Kadosch Warmaisa, the Holy Commune of Worms. The city depicted like Jerusalem, on a steep hillside with multiple towers and with the Tree of Life, is in fact Worms, as symbolized by the worm. The Hebrew letters to the right of the towers spell "Wirms."

Worms enjoys repute not only in Jewish history,



FIGURE 2. A fresco in the synagogue of Mohilev in the Ukraine depicting the city of Worms like the city of Jerusalem. Picture courtesy of Foto Stadtarchiv Worms.

but also figures prominently in the annals of Christianity. In 1048, Leo IX was elected Pope here, rather than in Rome. It was here, too, that Martin Luther was summoned in 1521 to face papal and imperial authorities, after having disturbed the unity of the Christian faith with his explosive critique of the only true church. At the Diet of Worms, he publicly defended his teachings not on theological grounds alone, but made his personal conscience the final argument. When ordered to recant, Luther refused: "I am a prisoner in conscience to the Word of God, and so I cannot retract and I will not retract. To not act in accord with one's conscience is neither safe nor right. God help me. Amen" [5]. A contemporary print (Fig 3) shows Luther after the Diet, leaving the town dressed as a knight. Within a few days, the Edict of Worms was passed, outlawing him and his followers. On the right side, close to the towers, you can read "Worms."

About 100 years earlier in Mainz, the other city of the Rheinhesse region, Gutenberg used movable metal type to produce the first printed Bible. The



FIGURE 3. A contemporary print showing Martin Luther leaving Worms in 1521, just before he and his followers were outlawed. At the Diet in Worms, he had publicly defended his teachings in front of papal and imperial authorities, maintaining that his conscience did not allow him to recant. Source unknown.

first leaflets in German that celebrated the victory of the ideals of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality were also printed here. In early 1793, in the wake of the American and the French Revolutions, the citizens



FIGURE 4. Eighteenth century print of a Liberty Tree. Source unknown.

of Mainz established the first democratically governed community in a German-speaking land. The colors of the American and the French Revolution, red, blue, and white, became the colors of the nascent Mainz Republic. The Republic's symbol of political self-determination was the Tree of Liberty (Fig 4), a pole topped by the red hat of galley-slaves and carrying the words "Cette terre est libre" (this land is free). Between Mainz and Worms, dozens of Trees of Liberty were erected, some even in the smallest hamlets. One of the political leaflets authorized by the fledgling Mainz Republic also depicts a female figure, almost identical to the Statue of Liberty, holding up the red hat of the galley slaves in triumph over the forces of oppression and inhumanity

In mid-1793, to put an end to the Mainz Republic and to wipe out the spirit of democracy from the German speaking countries, the Prussian army besieged and conquered Mainz. A copper engraving (Fig 5) depicts the shelling of the city by Prussian artillery firing across the Rhine. Mainz could have been the birthplace of democracy in Germany.

In 1984, in remembrance of the loss of democracy and the horrors of the Prussian victory, the mayor of Mainz decided that a Tree of Liberty should be erected in front of the city hall. The assembled crowd looked up at that red hat on top of the pole and at the red, blue, and white ribbons flying in the breeze, and some of the people had tears in their eyes.

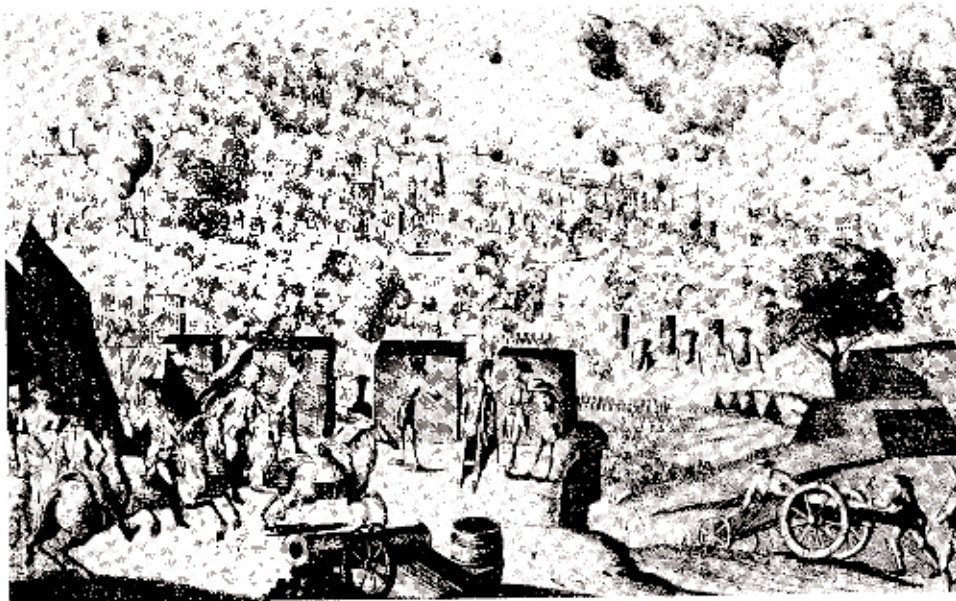


FIGURE 5. Prussian troops besieging and conquering the city of Mainz, the first German-speaking democratic community. Source unknown.

In the 1930s, local events in the Rheinhesse region again heralded developments in the society at large. On November 10, 1938, the 900-year old Worms synagogue was twice set on fire. During the night, Rabbi Dr. Frank had succeeded in putting out the first fire, so the "Schutzstaffeln" and the "Sturmabteilungen" (the SS and the SA) returned. At ten o'clock in the morning, amid crowds of onlookers, they forced their way into the synagogue, ravaged the house of God, and set it on fire once again. The firemen, when they finally arrived, took care not to fight the fire, and directed their jets of water away from the burning synagogue to cool the roofs of adjacent houses (Fig 6).



FIGURE 6. "Kristallnacht", the 900-year-old synagogue of Worms ablaze. Firemen protect "Aryan" houses. Citizens and police watch. Courtesy of Foto Stadtarchiv Worms.

The perpetrators of this violence referred to the "Nibelungenlied" as the highest expression of Germanic virtues, such as imperturbable obedience, even to the point of self-sacrifice, and disdain of death. These were the people who claimed that "non-Aryan" individuals, foreign to the "Aryan" constitution of the German people, had invaded its collective body and as "Krankheitserreger" (microbes) infected its organs (Fig 7). Accordingly, they had to be dealt with like living pathogenic agents: isolation and disinfection were the therapeutic imperatives to restore the collective health of the German people. In the imagery of healing the nation by the therapy of mass murder, medical terminology served to describe the treatment: "they have been disinfected" came to mean "they have been gassed."

In early 1933, the police accused Ludwig Ebert, a wealthy Jewish merchant living in Worms, of constituting a danger to the public and of "financially

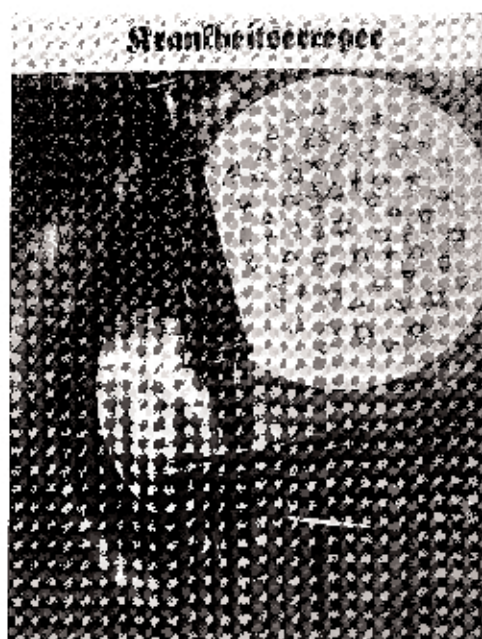


FIGURE 7. "Krankheitserreger" (microbial pathogens). Picture from page 1 of *Der Stürmer*, April 15, 1943.

supporting poor people and thus buying respect" [7]. His factory located in Osthofen, a few kilometers north of Worms, was made an institution for isolation and disinfection. He was sent there at once.

Ludwig Ebert's paper factory in Osthofen had convenient railway access. It was located next to the tracks connecting the population centers of Wiesbaden/Mainz with Heidelberg/Ludwigshafen. The plant was built like a bastion, complete with battlements, encircled by a high wall, and with only one major gate (Fig 8). The main building that faces

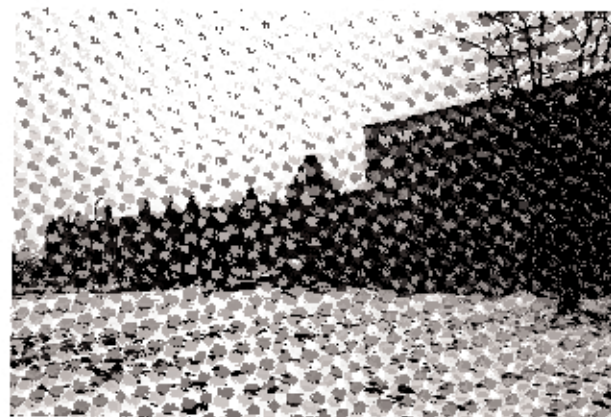


FIGURE 8. Entrance to Konzentrationslager Osthofen as it looked in early 1987. Note that the inscription over the building reads "Hildebrand und Böhner, Möbelfabrik Osthofen." Photograph: H. Hanausko-Abel and B. Schroeder-Bark.

Osthofen proper now carries, in large black letters on a white background, the inscription "Hildebrand und Bühner, Möbelfabrik Osthofen." It carried a different inscription during the spring of 1933, in that same space, in equally large letters, clearly visible from the many trains that passed: "Konzentrationslager Osthofen" (concentration camp Osthofen) (Fig 9).

On March 1, 1933, less than four weeks after Hitler was made chancellor by Reich President Hindenburg, the Konzentrationslager Osthofen was operating as a legal institution, organized and supervised by Dr. Werner Best, a lawyer who was the head of police in the state of Hesse and a senior officer in the SS. Dr. Best issued a series of decrees to regulate functions and procedures, determining, for instance, that an SS officer was in charge of the Konzentrationslager; that only hand-picked policemen were eligible for duty; that armed "Sonderkom-

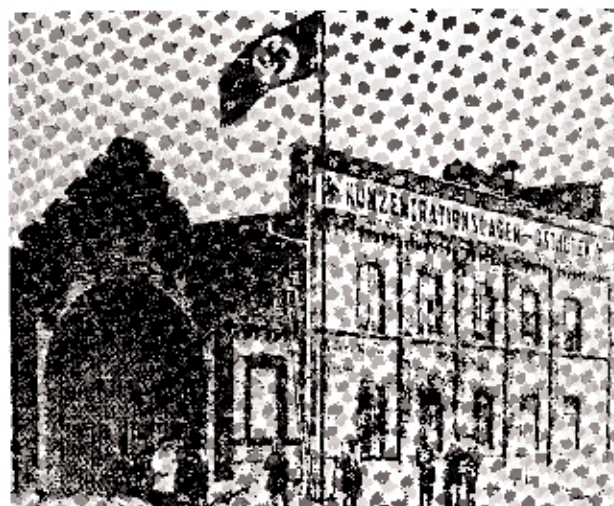


FIGURE 9. Entrance to Konzentrationslager Osthofen as it looked in 1933. The inscription over the building reads "Konzentrationslager—Osthofen." Courtesy of H. Leiwig, Mainz 1933–1948. Mainz: Verlag Dr. H. Krach.

mandos," recruited exclusively from members of the SS, SA, or the National Socialist Party, had to be organized for special operations, e.g., taking certain individuals into "protective custody" and that such "prisoners" had to pay for their transport to Osthofen and for their meals in the Konzentrationslager.

The local and regional press reported extensively on the Konzentrationslager Osthofen. The newspaper *Landskrone*, in several lengthy articles during the spring and summer of 1933, stated that, for the sake of national security and in the interest of all true

Germans, approximately 200 "politically irresponsible persons" and others who had not accommodated themselves to the new order were taken to Konzentrationslager Osthofen as a preventive measure. The news articles praised the treatment and the provisions enjoyed by the prisoners. The medical care was deemed excellent, and no prisoner was admitted without detailed physical examination by a physician.

Newspapers kept readers well informed of deportations and diligently provided the names and professions of those sent to Konzentrationslager Osthofen. Indeed, during the first year of the concentration camp's existence, from March 1933 to March 1934, no fewer than 56 such reports appeared in the *Landskrone* alone. Often featured under bold headlines, these accounts were prominently positioned and some were as long as an entire column. Newspapers often singled out the "Sonderkommandos" for special praise, publishing their pictures, giving their names, and describing in respectful tone their professional performance and self-sacrifice in the struggle to contain the "deadly infection" of the collective body of the German nation.

The first commandant of Osthofen, Karl de Angelo, later continued his career at Dachau. Dr. Werner Best became Reinhard Heydrich's chief of staff and masterminded the formation of the Gestapo. Dr. Best supervised deportations from France and Denmark and was responsible for the murder of more than 11,000 Poles and Jews [7].

The "Tanzplatz" (dancing ground) (Fig 10) was the site of the roll-calls each morning and each

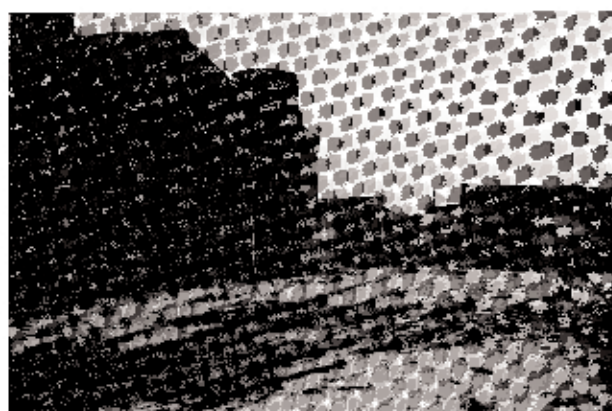


FIGURE 10. The "Tanzplatz" of Konzentrationslager Osthofen as it looked in early 1987. Photograph: H. Hanauske-Abel and B. Schroeder-Bark.

evening, and the place of severe punishment in full view of all inmates. The infliction of pain was part of the daily routine. The destruction of mental and physical integrity became the explicit aim of those in authority, and guards were encouraged to develop brutality. The inmates were not allowed to use soap for personal hygiene and had to sleep on soiled straw. Their diet consisted of watery barley broth, some bread, and a few potatoes. Strenuous physical work was required and was enforced under the most humiliating conditions. "Vernichtung durch Arbeit" (extermination by labor) emerged here. As early as April 1933, the newspapers were denying rumors that officials were committing atrocities in Konzentrationslager Osthofen.

One of the most acclaimed German novels of the period centers around the Tanzplatz: Anna Seghers' *Das siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*). Written in exile and first published in New York in 1942, it describes the escape of seven men from this Konzentrationslager and depicts their desperate dash through the Rheinhesse region, naming the cities of Worms and Mainz and the towns of Oppenheim, Nierstein, and Kastel. The commandant of the Konzentrationslager, during a roll-call on the "dancing ground," promises to hang the escapees, one by one, from seven trees that stand in front of the Tanzplatz. Within a few days, six are caught, one of them already dead. The other five are hanged or beaten to death. The seventh, however, manages repeatedly to elude the police, the Gestapo, and the SS under dramatic circumstances. He escapes as a result of the organized assistance from the German resistance movement. For weeks, roll call after roll call, the seventh tree remains empty, mute testimony to the failure of the new order. For the inmates, this tree comes to symbolize liberty, successful resistance, and therefore hope. The commandant eventually orders the prisoners to cut down that tree and hew it into matchwood. Anna Seghers has him state: "The National Socialist state prosecutes without mercy those who violate the interest of the German people. Our state protects what is worth protection, punishes what is worth punishment, exterminates what is worth extermination. The German nation is healthy, it rids itself of the sick, it kills the mentally ill" [8].¹

¹ Anna Seghers, herself raised in Mainz, intimately knew the Rheinhesse region. In her novel she made extensive use of information obtained from emigrants and German newspapers. The storyline of the novel is based on

The physicians working at Konzentrationslager Osthofen were among the first doctors to become accomplices in this national effort to get rid of "living pathogens endangering the collective body of the German nation." Documents show that whatever the physical condition of a prisoner, whether emaciated or tortured, the "Lagerarzt" (the attending physician) always declared the prisoner in excellent health. The physical examination upon admission never produced findings requiring hospitalization, and everyone released from Konzentrationslager Osthofen was certified as able to work immediately. The physician was no longer the advocate of the patients, but had turned into a willing servant of the public and the state. The transition was almost imperceptible. After all, the physician still did the job that had to be done, and there was no other obligation than doing the job well. This job was all routine, a question of performance, not a challenge to moral responsibility or one's conscience.

Figure 11 is an excerpt from the only map of present-day Osthofen available to the public. Widely distributed, it is used by the emergency medicine service, the fire department, and the regional tourist industry. It is, however, more than just a street map of Osthofen. Its printing was sponsored by the local business community and its distribution promoted by the city administration. The map bears the title: "784–1984: 1200 Jahre Osthofen, Stadt Osthofen, Weinmetropole des Wonnegaues" (the City of Osthofen, 1200 years old, the center of viticulture in Delight County).

The map generates the impression of a sedate little town amid rolling vineyards. It charts historic sites, such as old churches. It identifies schools and the kindergarten, the waterworks and the stadium, the railway station, city hall, and the emergency medical center. The street names amount to an encyclopedia of the Germanic contribution to western civilization: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schumann, Bach, Liszt, Schiller, Goethe, Hölderlin, Büchner, Heine, Mann. Two of the streets are named

a real event, the escape of Max Ischornicki from KZ Osthofen, then widely reported in the press. Max Ischornicki, who was an attorney in Mainz, had a reputation for courageously and successfully defending active opponents to the National Socialist movement immediately before Hitler's rise to power. For that, and for being Jewish, he became one of the first "prisoners" of KZ Osthofen, where he was "extremely mistreated and assigned the most humiliating tasks, like cleaning the latrines with bare hands." Max Ischornicki was caught by the Gestapo in Marseille, tortured, transferred to KZ Dachau, and killed [9].



FIGURE 11. Part of the only map of present-day Osthofen, sponsored by the local business community and promoted by the city's administration. The area around the Konzentrationslager Osthofen is shown. Its existence is not indicated on the map

in honor of writers Stefan Zweig and Kurt Tucholsky, both of whom were Jewish. These two men escaped the Holocaust and, despairing of Germany, committed suicide in exile. Other streets carry the names of politicians who abhorred the excessive nationalism and worked for a democratic German state: Walter Rathenau, Matthias Erzberger, Karl Liebknecht. They all were assassinated by right-wing activists. Osthofen has even named a square in honor of Ernst Thälmann, secretary-general of the German Communist Party in the early 1930s and an ardent Stalinist.

No other German community of comparable size invokes the names of so many "good Germans" for the sake of orientation in space and time. No other city in the western part of Germany during the decades of pervasive anti-Communism had the au-

dacity and steadfastness to make and uphold a public gesture of respect to Thälmann.

The map displays many details, but it does not identify the location of the former Konzentrationslager. On this map, the site is nowhere to be found. It does not exist. By paying homage to the best in the German past, the reality of the local history is conjured away. Denial becomes an integral part of remembrance.

One of the major streets is named in honor of Dr. Karl Mierendorff. Signs state that he was a leading democrat in the parliament of Hesse and a member of the Reichstag during the Weimar Republic, who later suffered prosecution by the Hitler administration. No mention is made of the fact that because of his political convictions he was imprisoned and almost beaten to death in the Konzentrationslager

Osthofen, just a few hundred meters away from the street that bears his name.

The buildings of the Konzentrationslager Osthofen are located on Ziegelhüttenweg, just east of the railroad (Fig 11). Standing in the hilly vineyards overlooking Ziegelhüttenweg, one has a unique view of the Konzentrationslager (Fig 12). The complex is located between the high-speed railroad for ultramodern trains and blocks of shiny new apartment buildings erected directly beyond its walls. From their living room windows, the occupants of these apartments, mostly young couples, have a unique view of the Tanzplatz.

For two years I worked as an emergency physician in Osthofen and made housecalls in these buildings. Sometimes I cautiously brought up the subject of their view. These people did not express discomfort with their surroundings. They live here, raise their children, and enjoy peaceful Sunday barbecues on their balconies that overlook the Tanzplatz—just a factory backyard that does not seem to fit into this nice neighborhood.

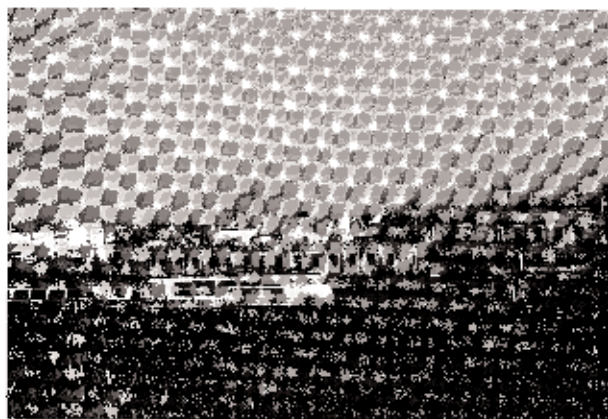


FIGURE 12. The buildings of Konzentrationslager Osthofen today, located between the high-speed train tracks and a block of new apartment buildings, on Ziegelhüttenweg east of Schwerd-Strasse. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauske-Abel.

Due to an obscure transaction, the Konzentrationslager became private property. The former prisoner quarters, for many years turned into a furniture factory, currently are used to store bottled wine, and another building provides cheap housing. Those who live in these apartments, in rooms that formerly were the SS quarters, park their cars right at the entrance to the Tanzplatz (Fig 13).

I remember a rainy, stormy night when I made an emergency call to an apartment in this building. I,

too, parked my car right at the entrance to the Tanzplatz and went upstairs, separated and protected from the SS by nothing else but time. I felt dragged into the collective effort to ignore the history of the floor I walked, and was perplexed by my lack of outrage. I somehow took comfort from the thought that forgetfulness is the virtue that allows life to continue. I tried to convince myself that one cannot live and work in Osthofen without succumbing to some degree of complicity and complacency. It's part of being social. After all, I had been called to do my job, I had no other responsibilities except doing my job well, and seeing this patient. My job was all routine, a question of performance only. They had called for a doctor.

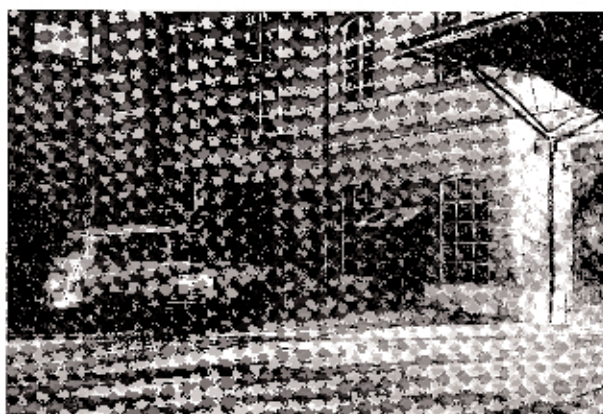


FIGURE 13. A part of the Tanzplatz now serves as a parking lot for those who now live in the former SS quarters. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauske-Abel.

If one follows Schwerd-Strasse northbound, leaving Osthofen behind, and turning left before crossing the old railway tracks, one should, according to the map (Fig 11), be in the middle of vineyards. In reality, however, one stands amid the second Jewish graveyard of Osthofen (Fig 14). The map identifies the Christian graveyard in great detail; however, the first and the second Jewish graveyards of Osthofen are not on the map. The world that is charted by this map is "judenfrei" (freed of Jews). The "Endlösung" (the Final Solution) has become reality. Things that do not exist are not on maps. Not on the map is not to be there. Not on the map, out of mind.

I am not aware of any contemporary map revealing the locations of the numerous Jewish graveyards between the Schutz cities Mainz and Worms. After the construction for the Autobahn to Mainz had



FIGURE 14. The Jewish cemetery on Schwert-Strasse, on the northern outskirts of Osthofen. Its existence is not indicated on maps of the area. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauske-Abel.

begun, the state authorities found out, by helicopter inspection of the planned course, that a Jewish graveyard was in their way. The maps had not revealed its location. They asked the small Jewish community in Mainz to move it. The request was refused.

Where does denial begin? To me, the most disturbing discovery about the Konzentrationslager Osthofen came when I read *Das siebte Kreuz*. Anna Segher's novel pictures the events at the Konzentrationslager and the entire Rheinhesse region in realistic detail, using and documenting the information available before 1942. The novel is written as factually as possible, dedicated to the "dead and living antifascists of Germany." But not once does the name "Osthofen" appear. In Segher's novel, the Konzentrationslager is located in Westhofen. Westhofen exists, a small village close to Osthofen. Segher turned East into West, Osthofen into Westhofen. And so, even in one of the few documents in the German language written during the Third Reich explicitly to combat denial, there is the invitation to undo reality and the offer to nurture denial. Even she did not name the place, even she did not put it

on the map. *Das siebte Kreuz* is read in Osthofen's schools with relief.

Just a few days prior to the liberation of Worms and Osthofen by American troops, Karl de Angelo, the first commandant of Konzentrationslager Osthofen, was found drowned in the Rhine. None of the former prison guards of Konzentrationslager Osthofen, however, were ever indicted. The current legal system acknowledges them as employees of a German government, thus making them eligible for state benefits and state pensions. The same legal system does not recognize the victims of the Euthanasia Program as victims of the Third Reich and thus denies them access to appropriate compensations [10]. Dr. Werner Best, who was sentenced to death in Copenhagen in 1948, became a respected lawyer in the Federal Republic and a top executive with one of the Ruhr conglomerates, representative of the postwar careers of the physicians, lawyers, and bureaucrats who engineered the Holocaust and the Euthanasia Program [11, 12]. Denial is as structural as grotesque: In 1987, the national assembly of the German Chamber of Physicians deliberated a motion calling for the annulment of the 1933 law on state-enforced sterilization *and at the same time* gave its most respected award to Dr. W. Kreienberg, formerly a staunch and publicly outspoken advocate of that law who, in 1937, even earned his medical doctorate by studying its beneficial effects for the "Aryan" constitution of the German people [11]. In 1985, the German Parliament, after embarrassing maneuvers, declared "as null and void from the beginning" only the decisions of Hitler's supreme court, but not those of the special courts—and still could not overcome the refusal of the Minister of Justice to set aside any legal decisions by National Socialist judges. "Thus, the absurd situation was created in which the federal legislature passed a resolution—unanimously—expressing its opinion that the existing legal situation was 'intolerable' and *at the same time* refused to use the only means at its disposal—namely, new legislation—to end it. After all attempts to make the judges of the Third Reich accountable for their actions had utterly failed, the victims were refused formal acknowledgment that their treatment had been unjust" [13].

There are no surviving documents to confirm the death of even one person at the Konzentrationslager Osthofen. The owner of the Konzentrationslager

also maintains that in the spring of 1933 the facility was used only for educational purposes, as a safe haven for people who needed time to adjust to the change in government; that Osthofen cannot be regarded as the birthplace of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, because nobody knows what actually happened there either; and that all the buildings, useless as they are, should be torn down to make way for urban renewal. The owner wanted to use the property without government-imposed restrictions, while a small group of young Germans and the state conservator tried to preserve its architectural integrity, arguing that the site was important for German history and identity. After a protracted legal conflict, the Court of Appeals of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate handed down a remarkable decision. The former paper factory at Osthofen, it stated, consisted of *several* buildings and therefore does not constitute a *single* historical monument. It is therefore exempt from legal procedures intended to preserve *single* historical monuments. The Konzentrationslager thus is not eligible to receive the protection and preservation ordinarily given to historically significant sites. Further, in the Court's opinion, the buildings are architecturally worthless [14].

The court ruling reflects the widespread willingness to cope with past events by getting rid of their architectural sites, and creating a geography washed clean of history. Soon, there will be nothing left to reveal. Even the most exact maps can no longer locate the elements of past reality. In Berlin, the building that housed the headquarters of the Gestapo and the administration of all concentration camps, with Dr. Werner Best directing one of the main departments, the building that represented the very center of National Socialist terror, was blown up in 1956. The authors of a study reviewing that building's history state: "It is not known who ordered the demolition, or for what reason. One motive is evident: the capital of Berlin tries to rid itself of the symbols of the National Socialist past" [15].

The Osthofen Memorial (Fig 15) is a simple bronze plaque on the outside of a wall of the Konzentrationslager. It reads:

This was, during the years 1933 to 1935, the site of the Konzentrationslager Osthofen. *Never again.*

Figure 15 was photographed on November 22, 1986, on Totensonntag, a national holiday when the Germans mourn their dead. Fresh flowers and green wreaths are laid down at the graves and the me-

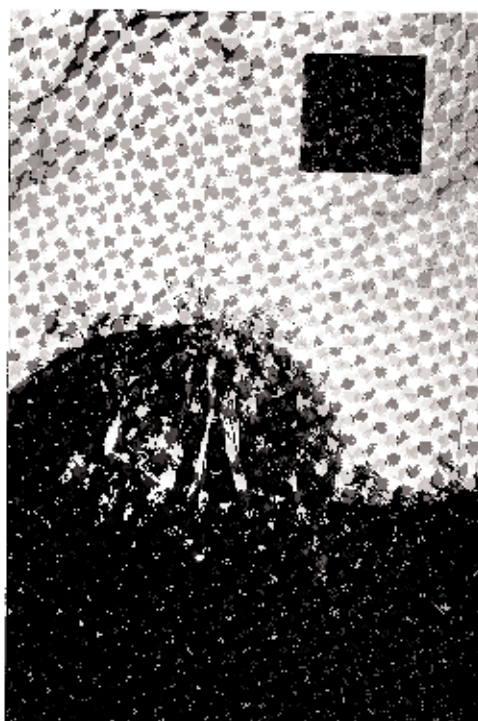


FIGURE 15. Nothing but a single decaying wreath at the Osthofen Memorial on the German national holiday of Totensonntag, November 22, 1986. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauke-Abel.

morials throughout the country. At the Osthofen Memorial, that day I saw only this rotten wreath.

The attempts to deny the existence of Konzentrationslager Osthofen and make the city fit its map may fail. The buildings of the Konzentrationslager Osthofen were classified as a historically significant site, and now are protected from destruction. As I write these lines, the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, in cooperation with a support group of a few German citizens (Förderverein Projekt Osthofen e.V., Ziegelhüttenweg 38, D-6522 Osthofen, Germany), is moving to buy the entire complex in order to maintain it, in remembrance of the victims and as a memento of the past for future generations. Yet the decision to grant preservation to the buildings of Konzentrationslager Osthofen may not at all affect the prevalent denial of their former function. A recent analysis of the wording of German memorial texts and dedication speeches concluded: "The official culture of commemorative plaques and memorials has become specialized in obscuring the perpetrators and their deeds" [10].

The consequences of these deeds remain. Beginning in 1959, the synagogue of Worms was meticulously rebuilt, financed by the Federal Govern-

ment, the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, and the City of Worms. In 1961, the synagogue was rededicated as a sign of atonement. The city of Worms carefully renovated the Jewish Quarter to preserve it for the future. The city's archives are now located in the Raschi-Haus, a building where Rashi used to study during his stay in Worms. The Raschi-Haus also houses the Jewish Museum and a center for Jewish-German dialogue. There is, however, no Jewish community in Worms. The Kahal Kadosch Warmaisa has ceased to exist.

Postscript

On public maps of the Rheinhessen region, the complex of buildings shown in Figure 16 also remains unidentified. It displays all the visual hallmarks of a concentration camp: double fence, armed guards, cleared perimeters, assembly yards, watch-towers, and barracks.

Figure 16 shows one of the nuclear weapons

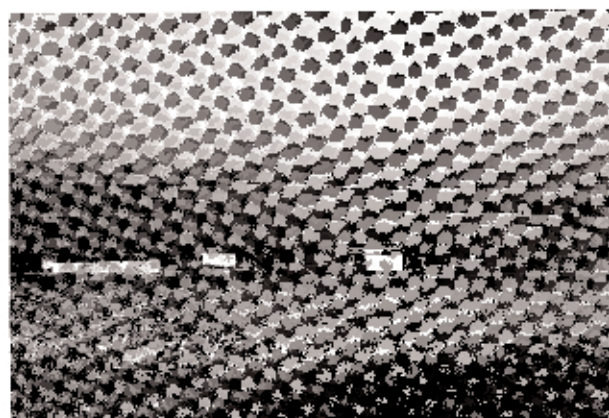


FIGURE 16. The nuclear weapons depot at the hamlet of Dexhelm, halfway between Mainz and Worms. Its existence is not indicated on maps of the area. Photograph: H. Kretschmer and H. Hanauke-Abel.

depots. Even those public maps that diligently chart all kinds of military installations in the Mainz-Worms area, such as barracks, ammunition depots, airports, heliports, and ferries, fail to identify the location of these weapons sites.

To many Germans of my generation, the convergence of material structures and psychological mechanisms induced first by the Holocaust and the Euthanasia Program and now by the threat of nuclear war is painful and disturbing. Certainly, the object of denial is different. In one case, it is the documented capacity to commit legalized and industrialized mass murder; in the other, the possibil-

ity that we might be capable of publicly announced mass murder to a degree that equals mass suicide. Yet our habituation to denial not only allows us to ignore the past, it also allows us to disregard the meaning of current reality. Denial has become the very foundation of the normal. Denial guides our eyes, is the substance of our thoughts, is the source of our energy.

To take up the nuclear issue requires a journey through denial. In that journey, we must run into our past, or we have not traveled far enough. ❧

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