

# Landscape, boundaries, and the limits of representation

The *Stolpersteine* as a commemorative space

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**ABSTRACT** • The article discusses the commemorative concept of Gunter Demnig's ongoing art project *Stolpersteine*, which is considered one of the world's largest decentralised Holocaust memorials. *Stolpersteine* are small, cobblestone-size memorial stones in urban spaces which are dedicated to individual victims of Nazism; it is the project's aim to install the stones in the pavement in front of an individual's last-known place of residence. The article aims to analyse the commemorative facets of the project's spatial dimension in relation to the concept of the 'residential'. The value of dwelling, presented in Demnig's project as a common ground for the commemoration of all victims as individual citizens, forms a predominant component in public reception. It contributes to a synthesising perception of each stone as being part of a vast commemorative landscape. This landscape, however, is semantically marked by an immanent concept of border, which suggests a polarising separation between included civil spaces and excluded heterotopias. By deviating from the project's general principles of placement and inscription, certain individual stones render visible this implicit borderline, thereby also critically reflecting on concepts of 'inside' and 'outside'.

## Introduction

One 'stone'. One name. One person.  
(Demnig 2016a)

With these words the artist Gunter Demnig describes the key principle of his ongoing art project *Stolpersteine*, which today is considered one of the world's largest decentralised Holocaust memorials. *Stolpersteine*, which can be translated as 'Stumbling Stones' or, metaphorically, 'Stumbling Blocks',<sup>1</sup> are small, cobblestone-sized memorial stones in urban spaces which are dedicated to individual victims of Nazism. Particularly over the last few years, the project has received growing public and scholarly attention. Started by Demnig as a local commemoration initiative in the early 1990s,<sup>2</sup>

the project today consists of more than 60,000 *Stolpersteine* in numerous European cities. All of them are recognisable by their similar forms (cubes of 96 × 96 × 100 mm) and their brass plates, which are usually inscribed with a person's name, their life dates, and a short indication of their fate (Demnig 2016b).

The English website of the *Stolpersteine* describes the concept of the memorial stones as follows:

The artist Gunter Demnig remembers the victims of National Socialism by installing commemorative brass plaques in the pavement in front of their last address of choice. There are now *STOLPERSTEINE* ... in over 610 places

commemoration of the deportation of Sinti and Roma. He then developed his concept of the *Stolpersteine*; in 1994, he first created 250 *Stolpersteine* for murdered Sinti and Roma in Cologne (Fritsche 2014: 194–218; Sommer 2007: 73).

- 1 These are also translations suggested on the artist's website (Demnig 2016a).
- 2 In 1992, Demnig first created a memorial stone in Cologne, which was dedicated to the



Fig. 1. Gunter Demnig, Stolpersteine for the City of Trier; published in NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln (2007): 57. © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich.

in Germany as well as in Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway and Ukraine.

Gunter Demnig cites the Talmud saying that ‘a person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten’. The Stolpersteine in front of the buildings bring back to memory the people who once lived here. Each ‘stone’ begins with *HERE LIVED ...* One ‘stone’. One name. One person.

For 120 euros, anybody can sponsor a stone, its manufacture and its installation. (Demnig 2016a)

Three aspects of this statement can be considered particularly significant with respect to the project’s self-image and its widespread public perception. First, it is indicated that the commemoration project is dedicated to all victims of National Socialism. Second, the project aims to remember the victims as individuals, in that a

Stolperstein is installed at the place that was the last-known address where a person lived of their own free will before they were expropriated or forced to leave, before they were deported, tortured, murdered. This aspect is re-emphasised in that the text stresses that the stones, by remembering a victim’s name and place of residence, bring people ‘back to memory’. And third, the site focuses on the plurality of the stones in terms of their widespread locations but also with respect to their ongoing production – anybody can contribute to this commemoration project by being a sponsor for a stone (Demnig 2016b; Sommer 2007: 76–7; Fritsche 2014: 254–7; Rehberg 2013: 31–6; Cook 2012: 45–9).

A photograph, which is published in the catalogue *Stolpersteine. Gunter Demnig und sein Projekt* (NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln 2007),<sup>3</sup> articulates the gist of these ideas in an expressive way (fig. 1). The close-up view shows twelve Stolpersteine, which have already been manufactured but not yet inserted into the pavement; they are arranged next to a map of the German city of Trier and a paper document. The centrally placed map marks the importance of the local space of the city as a common ground for commemorating the individual victims while the document on the right side indicates the imminent positioning of the stones according to the former addresses of the citizens.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, a growing number of publications from various disciplines have explored more closely the sociocultural, historical and

- 3 The catalogue belongs to a number of book publications which accompany the project in a documentary way (Serup-Bilfeldt 2004, Rönneper 2010, Radies 2013, Meckel 2006).
- 4 In a certain sense, this composition might also give an idea of the pragmatic organisational character of the placement ceremonies; following a tight time schedule, the artist usually places several Stolpersteine for a certain city in the course of a day’s visit. The Stolpersteine website provides detailed information on the organisational processes (Demnig 2016b).

memorial dimensions of the Stolpersteine project. On the part of cultural geography, several field studies have analysed the memorial's public importance as the product of local participation and a vital part of the everyday urban space (Imort 2009, Drozdowski 2016, Cook 2012, Cook and Van Riemsdijk 2014). Some contributions within the field of history, philosophy and philology have paid particular attention to the rhetoric of the project's publicity work (Schrader 2006) as well as to the semantic structure of the memorial's language itself (Schmid 2011, Östman 2014, Sommer 2007), thereby also casting a critical eye over the project's scope. Harald Schmid (2011: 13–14) has pointed to the general lack of profound historical information with regard to the stone inscriptions, remarking that the stones' fixation on the victims prevents a more intensive preoccupation with the perpetrators. Lars Östman (2014), in his philosophical analysis of the Stolpersteine project, also focuses on the issue of the restrictedness and conceptual ambivalences of the monument's message by generally asking how history can be represented and commemorated through the stones when the fates of the victims are to be seen within the context of the particular political-juridical circumstances of National Socialism. He particularly criticises the restricted scheme of what he calls 'fate categories', which in his view the artist Demnig defines by his guideline for the stones' inscriptions,<sup>5</sup> and states that 'these categories are

simply far too vague in describing the inhumanity of the victims' fates' (Östman 2014: 239).<sup>6</sup>

Central to these various approaches to the ethical implications of the Stolpersteine is the question of whether and in what ways the project can render visible and do justice to the individual histories of the victims within the scope of its decentralised spatial structures on the one hand and its centralised textual and organisational structures on the other.

I would like here to analyse more closely the facets of the project's spatial dimension in relation to the concept of the 'residential', which is communicated as the central unifying principle of the stones' commemorative structure. The value of 'dwelling', presented in Demnig's project as a common ground for the commemoration of all victims as individual citizens, forms a predominant component in the public reception. It contributes to a synthesising perception of each stone as part of a vast commemorative landscape – which is semantically marked by an immanent concept of *border*. This concept of border suggests a separation between included civil spaces and excluded heterotopias of deportation, torture and murder. Through the project's intention of installing memorial stones at people's former places of residence, 'in front of their last address of choice' (Demnig 2016a), it aims at their commemorative reintegration into a common civil space.

5 The artist defines these fates in the following way: 'For Gunter Demnig, everyone who died in a concentration camp was murdered, and therefore the most common is ERMORDET ("murdered"). FLUCHT IN DEN TOD ("flight into death") is used in cases of suicide. The word "emigrated" is not used, instead "escape", "year" and "destination" are preferred. If a fate is not known, then the inscription SCHICKSAL UNBEKANNT ("fate unknown") can be used. If somebody survived in a concentration camp, then please use the word BEFREIT ("liberated") instead of "survived".' (Demnig 2016b)

6 Östman (2014: 158, italics in original) also states that 'the reality of the exterminations cannot be captured in juridical terminology', emphasising that 'Something *far worse than murder* happened' to victims whose fate is described as 'ermordet' (murdered): 'they were produced as naked life and later exterminated *as if they were not* human beings'. However, it should also be noted that the Stolpersteine's use of juridical terminology can be related to their attempt of commemorating the Holocaust victims as citizens, within the borders of their former civil life.

In the following sections, I first give a short introduction to some key aspects of the Stolpersteine project before pursuing more closely the aspect of the spatial implications of the artwork. Focusing on the commemorative consequences of the concept of dwelling, the article concludes with a critical analysis of four individual cases of Stolpersteine.

### The plurality of commemoration

Against the background of the identity-forming memorial culture in united Germany since 1990, since when memorials to victims of Nazism have increased in importance (Assmann 2013),<sup>7</sup> the Stolpersteine project particularly distinguishes itself by its decentralised form of commemoration. It has been stated that the project, which is frequently contrasted to the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005) in Berlin, largely contributes to rendering visible individual traces of victims of Nazism in everyday life (Harjes 2005: 140–3; Sommer 2007: 46–8; Drozdowski 2016: 24; Rehberg 2013: 20). This aspect is enhanced by the dynamic, ongoing process of the stones' installations, which are often the result of local initiatives that are sponsored by individuals or groups. As numerous stones have also been installed outside Germany in various European countries, with the number of participating cities and countries still growing,<sup>8</sup> the decen-

tralised monument also participates in fostering transnational forms of Holocaust remembrance.

In regard to the non-static openness and plurality of their small spatial dimensions, the Stolpersteine have repeatedly been characterised as counter-monuments, in James E. Young's sense (Harjes 2005: 143; Sommer 2007: 61; Drozdowski 2016: 24; Krzyżanowska 2016: 478). Young (1992: 271) defines counter-monuments as 'brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being'. He highlights 'the activity that brings monuments into being, ... the ongoing exchange between people and their historical markers, and finally, ... the concrete actions we take in light of a memorialised past' (*ibid.* 296).

With respect to the Stolpersteine, one of the most central aspects of this 'ongoing exchange' can be related to their literal role as 'stumbling stones', or, metaphorically, 'stumbling blocks'.<sup>9</sup> This refers to the – not uncontroversial<sup>10</sup> – idea that pedestrians virtually stumble over the small memorials in their everyday lives, thus

7 On controversial debates on and critical positions towards the *Erinnerungskultur* ('memorial culture') in Germany, see also, among others, Knigge and Frei 2002, Giesecke and Welzer 2012, Frölich *et al.* 2012.

8 By the end of 2016, stones had been placed in Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine (Demnig 2017). With regard to possible future first installations, there are currently initiatives in Sweden (Lenas 2017).

9 On the biblical meaning of 'stumbling blocks' see Harjes 2005: 144.

10 This aspect has also received public criticism with regard to the possibility that people might step on the stones in the pavement, thereby insulting the memory of the victims. In Munich, Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern and former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, has emphasised the insulting character of the Stolpersteine, in that the stones on the pavements invite pedestrians to trample on them. This opinion, which is shared by other representatives of the city (while there is also a large group of supporters of the Stolpersteine), was one of the city's arguments for the official decision against the placement of Stolpersteine on public property in Munich (Fritsche 2014: 318–21; Imort 2009: 237–40; Richarz 2008: 331). This decision was reconfirmed by the city council in July 2015 (Hutter 2015).

becoming involved in individualised commemorative acts without being prepared for it. This lack of preparation and anticipation strongly contrasts with the concept of purposefully visiting a memorial, and highlights the project's aim of provoking alternative or, as Kirsten Harjes (2005: 145) puts it, 'authentic' forms of memory, 'understood as an individual spontaneous act that comes about in some sort of unconventional manner. In this sense, an authentic act of memory is also a democratic act of memory, because it originates from individual citizens rather than being directed by state institutions.'

Central to this individual commemorative involvement is the experience of a tension between the stones' singularity and their multitude, a tension which at the same time reminds people of the sheer impossibility of ever representing the full extent of the Holocaust (Sommer 2007: 81; Imort 2009: 235–6). While it has been critically remarked that the Stolpersteine lack detailed information (Schrader 2006: 176), it should be noted that the Stolpersteine are conceived as an additional voice, an interactive response to existing commemorative cultures rather than their replacement.

Connectivity rather than collectivity can be considered a central element of this response when characterising the Stolpersteine's particular concept of interactive commemoration. This principle also becomes evident when taking into account the numerous digital databases of municipal institutions which document and locate the Stolpersteine of a city,<sup>11</sup> thereby rendering it possible to search for a victim's biography and to find the location of their memorial stone.<sup>12</sup> In some cases, the Stolpersteine also

give rise to more profound biographical projects which even lead to critical revisions of particular stone placements. This is the case, for example, with the Hamburg publication project of the Biographische Spurensuche, the 'Biographical Search for Traces' (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016b), an initiative undertaken by more than 300 researchers, individuals as well as members of institutions, taking the Stolpersteine as the point of departure in order to investigate the biographies of individual victims.<sup>13</sup> In the course of the project, biographical research has shown, for example, that in some cases a Stolperstein memorial has not been installed at the last address of choice, as many Jewish citizens were expropriated, forced to leave their homes and ghettoised. The website notes that some memorial stones have been reinstalled at the original places of residence (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016d).

## Spaces and borders of commemoration

### The Stolpersteine as a landscape

Particularly when assuming that the stones are conceived to respond to and reflect on other existing forms of cultural commemoration, the Stolpersteine's lack of detailed information can

(2016: 65) has pointed out, 'acquire an uncanny function as surrogate graves for people whose remains were never found and who therefore have no grave'.

- 13 On the German website of the Hamburg Stolpersteine (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016c), the project critically distances itself from the language of the stones' inscriptions: 'Der Künstler ist in seiner Gestaltung autonom. Die Forscherinnen und Forscher des Projektes "Biographische Spurensuche" sind für seine Inschriften auf den Stolpersteinen nicht verantwortlich, hätten oftmals andere Begrifflichkeiten gewählt bzw. auf einzelne Verfolgungstatbestände in der Inschrift verzichtet.'

11 See, for example, the website of the Stolpersteine in Hamburg (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016a). The Hamburg website also provides the reader with links to city maps and auditive projects.

12 In that the stones function as individual memorials, they can also, as Peter Carrier



be regarded as essential when it comes to their spatial perception. Pedestrians, when seeing a stone in the urban space, remain focused on the historical implications of the inscription's blind spots and may thereby be reminded more directly of the local dimensions of the perpetrators (Sommer 2007: 48; 82). In this way, the stones, as Monika Richarz (2008: 329) puts it, 'point directly to the question of who were the perpetrators and who stood by and watched'. In this respect it is also significant that the Stolpersteine, by the intermediate position of their placement in the pavement, are conceived as part of a place of residence but also as part of the surrounding street. The pavement can be seen as a connection between spheres of the house and the street, between private and public space. This spatial opening contributes to multilayered commemoration processes. Individual victims can be associated with their private homes but also with the public space when imagining them moving through the streets, following everyday activities and walking along pavements, just like present-day pedestrians.<sup>14</sup> This perception constantly raises awareness of the responsibility of neighbours and fellow citizens.

Danielle Drozdowski (2016) has recently published the results of her fieldwork, in which she has explored people's encounters with the Stolpersteine on three busy streets in Berlin. She has pointed out that during the period of her investigation, the vast majority of people just passed the Stolpersteine of these streets without stopping to look down and read them.<sup>15</sup> In her

14 The German translation of 'pavement' as *Bürgersteig* directly connotes the aspect of the urban citizen (*Bürger*).

15 'At Gipsstraße, over the seven days of observation (consisting of 3.5 hours of observation in 30-minute increments), 255 people passed the four *Stolpersteine* on that street. In the same time frame 2 people looked down at the stones and 2 people stopped. At Ackerstraße, 296 people passed, 5 people looked down at the stones, 2 people stepped on them, no one

view, this can partially be explained by the fact that most people were already familiar with the Stolpersteine in question when passing by; she also cites respondents who have emphasised that the stones are 'everyday life. It's everywhere. The mass of stones makes people aware' (*ibid.* 27).<sup>16</sup>

This case indicates the significance of the long-term effect of the perception of the Stolpersteine. People's awareness of the stones' urban presence, which is not necessarily related to the individual decision to stop and read an inscription, shapes their everyday perception of a city's commemorative traces. Hence, a single Stolperstein can raise awareness of an individual victim's fate and the related fact of perpetration within the local space; and at the same time it also calls to mind the incomprehensible number of individual victims of Nazism.<sup>17</sup>

Within the context of Holocaust postmemory, Brett Kaplan (2011: 3) has emphasised the potential of the term 'landscape' when analysing the Holocaust as a 'global phenomenon' in that the 'concrete existence of spaces where events associated with the Nazi regime and its atrocities

stopped at them. At the busiest site, Große Hamburger Straße, which was frequented by tour groups who stopped specifically at the site, 511 people passed by the stones. Seventeen people looked down at them, 27 people stepped on them and 21 people stopped at them (this does not include the designated tour groups at this site, which would raise this number to approximately 70 people who stopped' (Drozdowski 2016: 25).

16 In this respect, the author also describes an incident during a discussion of her project at a conference in Hamburg when an audience member from Hamburg stated that 'they knew the exact locations of the stones in their neighbourhood and while they did not look down when they passed them every day they did consciously think on them as they stepped over them' (Drozdowski 2016: 25).

17 Demnig himself has stated that, in his view, each stone, dedicated to the commemoration of an individual victim, is also a reminder of all Holocaust victims (Sommer 2007: 81).

happened forces us to grapple with ... how memory embeds in space'. Using a broad landscape concept, it can be stated that the Stolpersteine form part of a memorial landscape which can be described as a mental-material pattern or structure, connecting spaces, objects, and memories. This network can also be defined as a visualised thought structure imagined and articulated by people who relate to these spaces and objects.

The sociologist Lucius Burckhardt in his theory of strollology has pointed to the 'feat of integration' (2015: 239) when describing synthesising forms of cultural landscape perception, by this term defining the 'capacity to process fleeting sequences of heterogeneous impressions ... and to integrate these in a single image'. This integrative capacity makes it possible that 'From the wealth of information that impacts the eye and all other senses we select those bits we believe we have seen before or that can be subsumed in our previous knowledge' (*ibid.* 239). This aspect is directly linked to and reflected in the term 'landscape' which 'subsume[s] in a single image an environment comprised of numerous bits of information', thereby enabling 'us to filter from a heterogeneous environment a single entity that makes all we have seen communicable' (*ibid.* 235).

These processes are vital when it comes to the everyday perception of Stolpersteine as a memorial landscape, particularly with regard to their spatial connectivity. Even when people who are familiar with the art monument visit cities and places for the first time and encounter a Stolperstein that they have not seen before, they are reminded at once of the commemorative project as a whole; against the background of their individual knowledge they see a particular stone as an integral part of an imaginary landscape which consists of seen and unseen, known and unknown memorial stones.

A connecting element, which reinforces this overarching structure, is the idea mentioned above of dwelling within a civil space. The

placement of a Stolperstein in front of a person's last address of choice is a central aspect of the public reception of the memorial project; the artist prominently emphasises this on his website and it is often repeated on accompanying websites and catalogues (Demnig 2016a, 2016b; Koordinierungsstelle Stolpersteine Berlin 2016; Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016a; NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln 2007: 46–55; Meckel 2006: 9–10).<sup>18</sup> This self-understanding also becomes visible in Demnig's website instructions for inscriptions on the Stolpersteine.<sup>19</sup> The website generally notes that a stone should relate to an individual's home or else workplace and should 'never [be installed] in front of places that people were forced to move to' (Demnig 2016b). In the case of a private home, the German website recommends, next to the general indication *hier lebte* ('here lived'), the expression *hier wohnte* ('here dwelt' in the sense of having a place of residence) which can be found on many stones.<sup>20</sup> In that public discourses and

18 The website informs us that 'If possible, STOLPERSTEINE are always placed in front of the last residence of choice – never in front of places that people were forced to move to. Therefore, they should never be placed in front of what the Nazis called *Judenhäuser* ("Houses for Jews")' (Demnig 2016b).

19 People who initiate the installation of a Stolperstein can suggest an inscription according to the general guidelines but the artist has, as the website informs us, 'the final say on inscriptions'. However, it also says that 'The STOLPERSTEINE are a "work in progress" and sometimes there will be changes to wording of inscriptions as the project develops' (Demnig 2016b). As will be discussed below, in some cases there are remarkable deviations from the general scheme.

20 The whole section of the English website reads as follows: 'Exceptions might be made if a street no longer exists or if there is a reason for placing a STOLPERSTEIN in front of a place of employment for example. In such cases it

the artist's definitions form a vital part of the project's ongoing production and reception, the aspect of bringing the memory of an individual back to their civil space vitally forms the semantic structures of the Stolpersteine as a whole. Thus it can be considered an essential part of the Stolpersteine's landscape concept. Seen from this point of view, civil dwelling becomes a condition for commemoration.

Reading this conceptual structure in the theoretical framework of the spatial model that the cultural theorist Yuri Lotman (1977: 217–18) has offered for the analysis of the structure of literary works, it may be stated that the artwork's underlying spatial dimensions correspond with the semantics of civil space. The landscape of the Stolpersteine, conceptually reflecting the idea of people's commemorative reintegration into the sphere of civil life, is semantically structured within the boundaries of a certain idea of civil space which is separated from or even constructed by excluded spaces of deportation, torture and murder. The implicit borderline between 'inside' and 'outside' becomes visible in individual stone installations which, by their deviating schemes of inscriptions and placement, challenge, question or even redefine the idea of civil space.

### Inside and outside: case studies

At 100 August-Krogmann-Straße in Hamburg, pedestrians encounter the memorial stones for Martin Lentfer (1875–1938), Ludwig Döpking (1881–1938), Gustav Remi (1905–43) and Richard Elkeles (1906–41) (fig. 2). Each stone is inscribed with 'hier wohnte' ('here dwelt'), thereby following the general scheme which has been outlined above. However, a fifth stone,

might bear the heading **HIER LERNT** ("here studied"), **HIER LEHRT** ("here taught"), **HIER ARBEITET** ("here worked") or **HIER PRAKTIZIERTE** ("here practiced") instead of **HIER WOHNTE** ("here lived").' (Demnig 2016b)

which is placed above the others, suggests a different reading of this place. People who choose to stop and read the inscription may be surprised to realise that this stone is not dedicated to an individual but rather functions as a headline. It reads: 'Opfer des Nationalsozialismus, 1933 bis 1945, Versorgungsheim Farmsen' ('victims of National Socialism, 1933–45, Farmsen care home'). During the Nazi period, this 'care home' (which was situated at 100 August-Krogmann-Straße) was a place to which numerous people were committed who were accused of 'homosexual behaviour' or persecuted as 'asocials'. For many of those who 'dwelt' there, the Versorgungsheim meant imprisonment, humiliation and murder; cases of forced sterilisation took place in the Versorgungsheim and it is also documented that people were directly deported to death camps from this place (Lorenz 2013: 239–42; Freund-Widder 2003: 70–6).

The website on the Stolpersteine in Hamburg states that the Versorgungsheim Farmsen was officially registered as a 'regular residence' on Ludwig Döpking's death certificate as being a place where he was committed to stay for a certain period (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hamburg 2016e). Pedestrians who just pass the stones without further reading might not be aware that this was not a place which Martin Lentfer, Ludwig Döpking, Gustav Remi and Richard Elkeles would have called home.<sup>21</sup> People can only get a certain idea of the historical role of this place when reading the headline stone. Only then does it become apparent that this instalment does not follow the Stolpersteine's general concept of dwelling.

21 There are, however, other victims of the Versorgungsheim Farmsen who are commemorated through a Stolperstein at their last address of free choice. This is, for example, the case with Kurt Dombeck (1890–1943) whose Stolperstein is located in 3 Brüderstraße, Hamburg (Lorenz 2013: 243).





Fig. 2. Gunter Demnig, Stolpersteine for Martin Lentfer (2007), Ludwig Döpking (2007), Gustav Remi (2007), and Richard Elkeles (2007), 100 August-Krogmann-Straße, Hamburg. Photo by the author, March 2017. © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich.





Fig. 3 (above). Gunter Demnig, Stolperstein for Justus Finanz Rose (2013), Town Hall (Stadthaus), Burgplatz, Leipzig. Photo by the author, March 2017. © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich.



Fig. 4 (right). Pavement in front of the Town Hall (Stadthaus), Burgplatz, Leipzig. Photograph by the author, March 2017.

This case raises awareness of blind spots when it comes to the history of such ‘care homes’, particularly against the background of a society’s longer-lasting ideological beliefs and processes of stigmatisation. In this way, it also points towards the difficulty of the concept of dwelling.

The following example will show a different form of coping with this problem. On Burgplatz in Leipzig, in the heart of the city, a single Stolperstein is placed (figs. 3, 4). Its fairly detailed inscription reveals that Justus Finanz Rose was persecuted for ‘homosexual behaviour’ under §175 of the German Criminal Code (StGB); it reads: ‘In Leipzig wohnte “Justus” Finanz Rose, Jg. 1903, verhaftet 1936, verurteilt §175, Flucht aus Haft, 1940 Zuchthaus Zwickau, deportiert 1941, Buchenwald, ermordet 15.9.1941’ (‘In Leipzig dwelt “Justus” Finanz Rose, born 1903,

arrested 1936, sentenced §175, escaped from prison, 1940 Zuchthaus Zwickau, deported 1941, Buchenwald, murdered 15.9.1941’).

The website on the Stolpersteine in Leipzig gives insight into Justus Finanz Rose’s biography, focusing on an incident which, as the text informs us, is directly related to the placement of his stone. Quoting from a police document of 28 May 1936, it is related that Justus Finanz Rose, holding his child in his arms, was seen leaving the Leipzig Town Hall<sup>22</sup> on 27 May 1936. He then stopped on the pavement and was heard

22 The town hall (constructed 1908–12) is an additional municipal building which is located near the new town hall (Neues Rathaus); a bridge connects the two buildings.





Fig. 5 (above). Pavement, 240 Eichborndamm, Berlin. Photograph by the author, March 2017.



Fig. 6 (right). Gunter Demnig, Stolperstein for Dieter Ziegler (2004), 240 Eichborndamm, Berlin. Photograph by the author, March 2017. © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich.

shouting loudly that, being a human just like everyone else, he was being discriminated against because of his being a Sinto (Bürgerkomitee Leipzig e. V. 2016).

This place on the pavement in front of the town hall is the very place where the Stolperstein for Justus Finanz Rose is installed. This location indicates a critical distance from the Stolpersteine's general concept of dwelling. The stone is not placed at 69 Waldstraße, where Rose had lived in a caravan in 1933 (Bürgerkomitee Leipzig e. V. 2016). Instead, the placement suggests another, ideal dimension of civil space by commemorating Justus Finanz Rose at the place where he had claimed and exercised his civil rights.

Another example, at 240 Eichborndamm in Berlin (fig. 5), reveals further dimensions of this

representational problem. This is the location of three Stolpersteine, which are dedicated to the children Manfred Röglin (1941–3), Sigrüd Röhling (1941–3) and Dieter Ziegler (1941–3).<sup>23</sup> On each stone one can read *hier lebte* ('here lived'), in one case also in the above-mentioned form of *hier wohnte* ('here dwelt'). Each of the stones' inscriptions ends by indicating in a similar way that the Nervenlinik Wiesengrund was the place of the child's murder. The inscription of Dieter Ziegler's stone reads: 'Hier wohnte Dieter Ziegler, Jg. 1941, ermordet 16.8.1943, Nervenlinik Wiesengrund' ('Here dwelt Dieter Ziegler, born 1941, murdered 16.8.1943,

23 See also the database of the Stolpersteine in Berlin (Koordinierungsstelle Stolpersteine Berlin 2016).

Nervenklinik Wiesengrund') (fig. 6). The Nervenklinik Wiesengrund was a 'clinic for nervous diseases' where in the Nazi period under the pretext of 'medical studies' children were murdered during 'experiments' (Krüger 1988). It was located at 238/240 Eichborndamm – the address where the stones have been set.<sup>24</sup>

As has been outlined above, stone inscriptions mention places of murder while the stones themselves indicate the place of living and dwelling. However, in this case, the place of murder is the very place where the children's stones are installed. Yet this fact might not become fully evident when only reading the stone inscriptions, particularly with regard to their uses of the headline 'here lived'; when only passing the Stolpersteine without reading them, people are even more likely to consider the location as part of the individual victims' civil space without being aware that they are passing the place of their murder.<sup>25</sup> Again, in this example the Stolpersteine are characterised by a serious break with their general principles,

24 At 238 Eichborndamm, there are also four Stolpersteine which are dedicated to children who were murdered in the Nervenklinik Wiesengrund: Werner Burthz (1929–42), Paul Höhlmann (1927–42), Erich Korepka (1941–3), and Dagmar Ullrich (1941–3). See also the database of the Stolpersteine in Berlin (Koordinierungsstelle Stolpersteine Berlin 2016).

25 A sign on the wall of the neighbouring building at 238 Eichborndamm relates this place's history. In this building (where the Office of Public Roads of the Reinickendorf District is located today) there is also a small 'history laboratory' for individual school workshops and school projects on the topic of the Nervenklinik Wiesengrund (Museum Reinickendorf 2017); a small signpost in front of the entrance announces this facility. But neither sign is visible when standing in front of the entrance to the other building in Eichborndamm 240, where these three stones are placed.

which is highly problematical when considering that these children are 'united' by relating them to the heterotopic place of exclusion and murder. Clashing with the overarching spatial scheme of the Stolpersteine, these stones point towards the ongoing invisibility of an excluded heterotopia; in a certain sense, they also partially recollectivise the individual victims by marking a place where they were kept together against their will. This contrasts with stone groups which aim to fulfil the project's general objective of 'uniting families' at the places of their private residences (or colleagues at their workplaces), by installing a stone for each individual family member (Demnig 2016b). Against the background of the prominent discourse of dwelling, the Stolpersteine's significant role in literally being experienced *en passant* involves the risk of creating blind spots; passers-by who do not stop to read might involuntarily interpret these particular stones as 'family stones', integral parts of the Stolpersteine's concept of civil space. Both the Hamburg and Berlin examples raise awareness for the necessity of creating memorials in order to render visible the urban traces of perpetration; and at the same time they reflect the difficulties of finding a visual, textual and spatial language which enables the commemoration of the victims within the given structure of the Stolpersteine project.<sup>26</sup>

26 Demnig's more recent project of the *Stolperschwellen* ('Stumbling Thresholds') seems to relate to this representational problem. On the Stolpersteine website, the artist introduces his concept of the Stolperschwellen as follows: 'There are certain cases when hundreds or thousands of Stolpersteine would have to be laid in a single place. This being almost impossible, Gunter Demnig has come up with an alternative, the STOLPERSCHWELLE (which can be roughly translated as 'stumbling threshold'). A STOLPERSCHWELLE can record the fate of a group of victims in a few lines' (Demnig 2016b). Thus the artist directly (and also literally) connects the Stolperschwellen





Fig. 7. Gunter Demnig, Stolpersteine for Edeltraut Wölki (2005), Bernhard Filusch (2005), and Charlotte Regenthal (2009), 1 Am Wienebütteler Weg, Lüneburg. Photo by the author, March 2017. © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich.

I would like to conclude by discussing another example of Stolpersteine which shows a different, critical approach towards this dominant discursive structure. At 1 Am Wienebütteler Weg, Lüneburg, there are three Stolpersteine for the children Charlotte Regenthal (1939–42), Edeltraut Wölki (1937–43) and Bernhard Filusch (1941–2) (fig. 7). The stones for Edeltraut Wölki and Bernhard Filusch bear a similar inscription. They read as follows: 'Hier ermordet, Edeltraut Wölki, Jg. 1937, Tot Mai 1943' ('Murdered here, Edeltraut Wölki, born 1937, dead May 1943'); 'Hier ermordet, Bernhard Filusch, Jg. 1941, Tot Juni 1942'

to the Stolpersteine. However, the Stolperschwellen seem to have a different semantic structure. While sharing the term 'stumbling', they are characterised by the idea of collectivising victims, which contrasts with the Stolpersteine's concept of reintegrating individuals. In this way, they are comparable to other forms of commemorative plaques.

('Murdered here, Bernhard Filusch, born 1941, dead June 1942').<sup>27</sup>

These two stones communicate the victims' fates in a different, direct way. The usual headline 'here lived' is replaced by 'murdered here' – these two words now being the very beginning of the inscriptions. They explicitly underline that this was the place where the children were murdered. In omitting the verb *wurde* ('was'), the text even distances itself from the more narrative past form, thereby enhancing the message's immediacy. At the same time, the absence of the expression 'here lived' also emphasises that these children, who died at a very young age, were kept away from civil space and were murdered in the heterotopia of the clinic. During the Nazi period, the local 'psychiatric clinic', the Landes-, Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Lüneburg, accommodated one

27 The stone for Charlotte Regenthal, which was installed some years later, directly begins with her name, thereby omitting the headline.





Fig. 8. Psychiatrische Klinik Lüneburg: Bathhouse and Water Tower, 'Euthanasie'-Gedenkstätte Lüneburg. Photograph by the author, March 2017.



Fig. 9. Psychiatrische Klinik Lüneburg: Clinic Park with Water Tower. Photograph by the author, March 2017.

of the so-called *Kinderfachabteilungen* ('special children's wards'), which were responsible for the organised murder of children (Reiter 2005). Passers-by who stop to read the stones are directly confronted with the acts of murder which took place at this location. In their break with the overarching scheme of 'here lived', the *Stolpersteine* explicitly render visible the individual dimensions of perpetration. The stones are not placed in the pavement of the main street *Am Wienebütteler Weg* but are directly located in the hospital area (which as a whole complex has the address 1 *Am Wienebütteler Weg*). They are installed in front of the entrance to the building of a former bathhouse, which is connected to the clinic's former water tower (fig. 8, 9); since 2004 the bathhouse accommodates a memorial site, which relates the clinic's history and is open to the public once a month (Psychiatrische Klinik Lüneburg 2017). The bathhouse entrance

is arranged on a straight axis, being the end of a longer pathway through the clinic park. Visitors and passers-by, when coming from this direction, can also experience the stones as part of this axis in that they move directly towards them and have to pass them when entering the memorial site of the bathhouse.

The installation, while still following the *Stolpersteine*'s general aim of commemorating individual victims, suggests a different conceptual perspective, by rendering visible the particular tension of dwelling and suffering in the case of these children, who were murdered in the clinic at that very place. What is more, the placement of the stones re-explores the borderline between heterotopia and civil space. The stones' particular location in the park of today's Psychiatrische Klinik Lüneburg implies the conceptual reintegration of the former heterotopia into a common civil space, where it is

possible for the public to enter and to experience the institution and its history in situ. At the same time, this reintegration is only made possible in that it can refer to the established imaginary landscape of the Stolpersteine. From this point of view, this example demonstrates the Stolpersteine's potential to enable diverse and even self-referential installation practices.

## Summary

The article discusses the commemorative concept of Gunter Demnig's art project Stolpersteine. It particularly seeks to reflect upon the conceptual and practical consequences of the project's general aim of commemorating individual victims of Nazism by installing memorial stones in front of their former places of residence, where they had lived before they were deported, tortured and murdered.

The first two sections are dedicated to introductory remarks on the project's commemorative scope. Emphasis was laid on investigating the decentralised character of the Stolpersteine project and the dynamic, ongoing process of the stones' installations. Connectivity rather than collectivity can be regarded as a leading principle with respect to the interactive potential of the project's local installations and the various accompanying digital and scientific initiatives. At the same time, the principle of connectivity is also crucial with regard to the forms of individual commemorative involvement in the stones' everyday perception. Central to this involvement is the experience of a tension between the stones' singularity and their multitude, a tension which at the same time reminds people of the sheer impossibility of ever representing the full extent of the Holocaust. A single Stolperstein can raise awareness of an individual victim's fate and the related fact of perpetration within the local space; and at the same time it also calls to mind the incomprehensible number of individual Holocaust victims.

The third and main section elaborates on the spatial dimensions of this everyday perception. The urban presences of individual stones, by frequently reminding people of the commemorative project as a whole can be described as elements of a vast memorial landscape. They form a mental-material pattern or structure, consisting of seen and unseen, known and unknown memorial stones, in this way connecting spaces, objects and memories. A central connecting element of this imaginary landscape structure, which reinforces its overarching conceptual principles, is the idea of dwelling within a civil space that is often presented as a common ground for the commemoration of all victims as individual citizens.

The article closes by analysing more closely the theoretical implications of and practical reflections on this concept of dwelling. From a theoretical perspective it is argued that the conceptual commemorative landscape of the Stolpersteine is semantically marked by an immanent concept of border which suggests a separation between included civil spaces and excluded heterotopias of deportation, torture, and murder. Through the project's objective of installing memorial stones at people's former places of residence, it aims at their commemorative reintegration into the common civil space.

Through a critical analysis of four individual examples of Stolpersteine, the article concludes by discussing the representational difficulties, limits and challenges of the overarching concept of the residential. The representational problem of this concept becomes visible, for example, in different cases of memorial stones for children; these stones are installed at the very place where the children were kept and murdered in so-called 'special children's wards'. Some of these stones, however, by their deviating schemes of placement and inscription, render visible the historical traces of non-dwelling in relation to localised forms of torture and death. These reinterpretations of the Stolpersteine project's

general principles also point to the dangers of and the ongoing need to discuss the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside'. ■



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