

"Like acts of courage, these stories of agency, defiance, and resistance come as free and precious gifts, instants of unexpected grace amidst an ocean of horror," writes Robert Jan van Pelt about Michaela Melián's unique and remarkable memorial *Memory Loops*. "The visitor to *Memory Loops* must stumble over them, as there is no index or search engine that allows him to sort the audio recordings with the help of concepts such as 'Jewish agency,' 'Jewish defiance,' or 'Jewish resistance.' These stories cannot be forced from the site. Therefore, when they do present themselves, the listener cannot but receive them with reverence and gratitude—and as calls to reflection."

*Robert Jan van Pelt*

## "I Shall Survive You All!" An Instant of Grace Amidst Michaela Melián's *Memory Loops* Memorial



**FIG. 1:** Dr. Michael Sieger and SA men on the Karlsplatz, Munich, March 10, 1933. German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), picture 146-1971-006-02, photographer Heinrich Sander.



**FIG. 2:** Dr. Michael Siegel and SA men in the Prielmayerstraße, Munich, March 10, 1933. German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv), picture 183-R99542, photographer Heinrich Sander.

On March 23, 1933, the *Washington Times* published two photos taken 13 days earlier in Munich. Both showed a barefooted man wearing long johns and carrying a board with a text [Fig. 1]. He is accompanied by armed SA men.

One photo was taken on the *Karlsplatz*, a major public square; the other, close to the (at that time) already irrelevant *Justizpalast* (Palace of Justice) in the *Prielmayerstraße*. These photos were accompanied by the caption “How Hitlerites treat foes.”

The paper noted that this incident had occurred in Munich, but it did not mention the identity of the man; today, we know it was Dr. Michael Siegel, a Jewish lawyer who was a partner in the well-known *Kanzlei* [law firm] Siegel.

One of the earliest pictures illustrating the Nazi violation of human rights and disregard for human dignity, the photo of Dr. Siegel’s humiliation [Fig. 2] has become a staple in histories of the Holocaust, a ghost who continues to haunt us when we think of the possibilities, still present in March 1933, for decent Germans to stand up and oppose the imposition of the Nazi dictatorship. I think that I was nine when I saw it for the first time in the mid 1960s—that is, in a time before the term “Holocaust” was widely used to

denote the genocide of the Jews. The man’s walk of shame touched me even at that age—perhaps I should say “especially at that age,” because too many nine-year-olds experience the deep and seemingly irredeemable humiliation that results from everyday schoolyard bullying.

#### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The historical background of the picture is as follows. On January 30, 1933, Hitler had become Reich Chancellor, presiding over a coalition cabinet in which Nazis were in the minority. A little over four weeks later, Hitler had received emergency powers in the wake of the Reichstag fire. This initiated the Nazi destruction of civil liberties. On March 9, the Nazis took control of Bavaria: The local Nazi boss, Adolf Wagner, became Interior Minister, and the latter appointed SS Chief Heinrich Himmler as police chief of Munich. On Wagner’s orders, the police began to arrest communist and social democratic functionaries and some prominent members of other political parties. One of them was Max Uhlfelder, the owner of *Kaufhaus Heinrich Uhlfelder GMBH* [inc.], which was, with a sales area of 70,000 sq. ft. and 1,000 employees, the second largest department store in Munich. Uhlfelder was a Jew—one of the 9,000 Jews living in the city.

On March 10, Dr. Siegel, Uhlfelder's lawyer, heard about the arrest of his client. He immediately went to the city's police headquarters, located at the Ettstraße, and demanded Uhlfelder's release. In the 24 hours since Himmler had taken control, however, much had changed. Dr. Siegel was not greeted with the usual respect due to a prominent lawyer but was instead brought into a room full of SA men who had been given the status of auxiliary police constables. The guardians of the new order beat him, knocking out Dr. Siegel's front teeth, perforating an eardrum, and, to add insult to injury, cutting off the legs of his trousers above his knees, revealing his long underwear (in Munich, March can be cold). Then they created a big board, painted on it a text, the exact wording of which continues to be a matter of dispute, and paraded him with the board around his neck through Munich as a clear warning to all who contemplated insisting on *habeas corpus* and other fundamental civil rights.

Heinrich Sanden, an unemployed press photographer, saw the scene and took two pictures that he developed, with the help of Wilhelm Wissmann, on glass plates. He offered these negatives to Munich papers, which did not dare to publish them. However, the Berlin representative of Hearst's International News Service believed that they had potential, bought the plates, and sold them to the *Washington Times*, which was the first to publish them, and to four other dailies and serials in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Argentina.

The editors of these papers immediately recognized the two photos as an indictment against the emerging tyranny in Germany. Yet they faced a problem. When they finally had a positive print in their hands, they realized that the text on the board was partly illegible. They all made an effort to reconstruct the text and retouched the photos to reflect their conclusions. The *Washington Times* and the New York-based *Daily Mirror* applied the text "*Ich werde nie wieder um Schutz bitten bei der Polizei*" (I will never again request protection from the police), but an Argentinian newspaper published the photo with the text "*Ich bin Jude, aber ich will mich nicht über die Nazis beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will not complain about the Nazis), while a French publication published a redrawn version of the photo with the board carrying the text "*Ich bin Jude, will mich aber nicht mehr über die Nazis beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will not complain about the Nazis anymore). The Nazis used the discrepancy to their advantage. They happily pointed to the differences, claiming it was proof that the photos were forgeries. Dr. Siegel himself, who survived the war as a refugee in Peru, was absolutely certain that the text had read "*Ich bin Jude, aber ich will mich nie mehr bei der Polizei beschweren*" (I am a Jew, but I will never again complain to the police).

In recent years, I had read various discussions published on the Internet that contributed to establish the identity of the man who was carrying the sign, the historical circumstances of Dr. Siegel's civic courage and his humiliation, and the questions surrounding the exact wording of the text. A few months ago, I was reminded again of the picture. I discovered the *Memory Loops* website, the new Internet-based memorial to the Nazi tyranny and the persecution and killing of Jews, homosexuals, the insane and hereditary ill, and others, maintained by the city of Munich. On the website, I found an audio recording in which an actor, accompanied by piano music, read the testimony of Dr. Siegel's daughter, Beate, who, age 14, on June 26, 1939, had left Munich on a *Kindertransport* train for Britain. Listening to this account, I began to realize the drama embodied in the photo—a drama that did not end when the SA let Dr. Siegel go after an hour's march through Munich.

### THE MEMORY LOOPS MEMORIAL

The origins of *Memory Loops* go back to 2005 when the Munich City Council took the initiative to create a new monument for victims of National Socialism. The 20-year-old *Denkmal für die Opfer der NS Gewaltherrschaft* (Monument for the Victims of National Socialist Tyranny) had become a source of embarrassment: The conventional form of the monument—a nine-foot-high basalt pillar on which rests a cubical steel cage that holds an eternal flame—seemed mute, if not provincial, compared to the innovative and thought-provoking (counter) monuments created to memorialize National Socialist terror in general, and the Holocaust in particular, such as Jochen Gerz's and Esther Slavev-Gerz's vanishing monument in the Hamburg suburb of Harburg (1986), Norbert Radermacher's slide projections that make up the *Neukölln Memorial* (1994), or Peter Eisenman's vast *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe) close to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin (2005).

Munich politicians faced a serious question: Should they attempt to trump Berlin's *Holocaust-Mahnmal* (Holocaust Memorial)? Instead of running headlong into a competition, the cultural department of the city decided to invite specialists and lay people to reflect on the place and nature of a memorial in the 21st century. It organized a two-day symposium of academics involved in the field of public remembrance, a workshop in which 16 high school students from Munich wrestled with the question of what a 75-year-old past meant to them, and a roundtable discussion that also involved citizens from Munich. From these three preparatory events arose an ambition to create a memorial to the victims of National Socialism that would not only embody new forms of cultural memory but would also engage and link various places within the city that are

associated with both the victims and the perpetrators. In December 2007, Munich officials invited the artist Michaela Melián and 13 others to join a closed competition to develop such a memorial project. The competition brief did not offer nor suggest a particular site.

Born in 1956 in Munich, Melián (whose surname derives from a Spanish grandfather) studied cello at the Richard Strauss Conservatory in Munich and then attended the famous Academy of Fine Arts there. As the singer and bass guitarist of the new wave FSK band, and as the author of several solo albums, she became well known as a musician, while her work as a visual artist received critical acclaim for the manner in which she addressed the politics of both public and private memory. In 2005, she confronted for the first time the continued presence of the ghosts of the Nazi era in the contemporary German landscape in her installation on the Föhrenwald (Pine Forest) settlement that was exhibited in the major gallery for contemporary art in Munich. Built in the late 1930s on the outskirts of the Bavarian town of Wolfratshausen as a model settlement to house the personnel and their families of a nearby munitions factory, the place became, during the war, a fenced-in, overcrowded internment camp for the forced laborers who made up the bulk of the workers in the plant. After the collapse of the Third Reich, the United States Army took over the settlement, making it into a transit camp for displaced persons of various nationalities. In October 1945, General Eisenhower decided that Föhrenwald was to be used by Jewish Holocaust survivors only, and for the next 12 years, it was to be a *de facto* extraterritorial and autonomous Jewish town within Germany. During this time, the place had a rich political, cultural, and religious life. When the last Jewish inhabitants left in 1957, Föhrenwald was renamed Waldram. It became first a neighborhood for Germans who had been expelled from the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia and slowly morphed into a “normal” suburb in which residency is determined by one’s attraction to the place and one’s financial situation. Yet in its five incarnations—Nazi model village, internment camp, displaced persons camp, *Heimatvertriebenen* (expellees) village, suburb—the place looked essentially the same. Using recordings of historical texts and interviews with munitions factory employees, forced laborers, Jewish displaced persons, and expellees who had lived, or in the case of the latter, were still living, in Föhrenwald, and combining it with her own musical compositions and the projection of line drawings of the place, Melián created a powerful audiovisual narrative in which she raised the many ghosts that still inhabited the place.

To understand Melián’s work, it is important to remember that she explores the relationship between auditory and visual space, a fertile field of investigation and experimen-

tation. The Jewish-Austrian musical philosopher Viktor Zuckerkandl, who was to find refuge in the United States in 1940, explained, in his magnum opus *Sound and Symbol* (1956), that, contrary to popular opinion, music is eminently spatial, but in a way that is radically different from the space understood by painters, sculptors, or architects.

The space experience of eye and hand is basically an experience of places and distinctions between places. . . . The ear, on the other hand, knows space only as an undivided whole; of places and distinctions between places it knows nothing. The space we hear is a space without places. (p. 276)

The basic phenomenology of auditory space, the space of the musician, which also happens to be the space of the storyteller, was significantly present in the work on Föhrenwald and became of critical importance in Melián’s spell-binding proposal for the Munich memorial. Many of the artists invited to join the competition were defeated by the fact that the brief had not supplied a site for the new memorial. Melián was energized by it. As a musician, she realized that she could transform the whole of Munich into an entrancing auditory space, that the memorial could be everywhere if she were to focus on spoken words and music only. If, in the Föhrenwald project, images had still played an important role, she was to dispense with them for the Munich memorial.

Her idea was to create 300 German-language and 175 English-language audio tracks and tie them to particular places in the city. These tracks, which contain the narration of eyewitness testimonies or Nazi documents, accompanied for each document by a unique musical score composed and performed by Melián herself, were to be made accessible in three ways: (1) through the Internet, where the tracks are tied to locations drawn on a big hand-drawn map of Munich; (2) through a combination of signage and the telephone net, in which signs, each indicating a telephone number and placed at the relevant location within the city, encourage cell phone users to call a free 0-800-number, where they hear the audio track that records a testimony of an event that occurred at that very place; and (3) by making MP3 players containing the audio tracks available to those who seek to discover Munich on foot.

Melián’s proposal won the competition. When, after more than three years of work, it was dedicated in the fall of 2010, it received unequivocal acclaim. “In Munich something like a miracle has happened, and it reaches far beyond the city,” the prominent German art critic Jörg Heiser wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German paper of record.

## “WWW.MEMORYLOOPS.NET”

I discovered *Memory Loops* in February 2011. I typed “www.memoryloops.net” and, after clicking on an English flag to get the English-language version, I was presented with a map of the city of Munich, filled with blue circles, distinguishable in the suburbs but making a dense agglomeration in the city center. I noticed that when the cursor touched a circle, it turned from blue to white, and within its center appeared a blue dot and a label that contained a number and an address. I clicked on a part of the map that depicted the district that was home to one of my favorite buildings: the Glyptothek, or sculpture museum, famous for the magnificent *Barberini Faun*. I noticed that as I zoomed in, the confusion of circles in the center now began to dissolve, with each circle becoming a marker of a recognizable location with a particular address. I found myself close to the Glyptothek in the *Arcissstraße*, which marked the heart of Nazi Munich (from 1935 until 1945, it housed Hitler’s local headquarters; the building, located at number 12, is now a music and theatre academy). The map showed three memory points on the block between the *Briener Straße* and the *Gabelsbergerstraße*. The first referred to number 12, the second, to number 11. I clicked on the first one of number 11, and a window opened that told me that I was connecting to audio track 230 with a story about the *Landesentschädigungsamt* (State Compensation Office). I heard a man’s voice, accompanied by a piano. A former inmate of Dachau, he talked about the trauma of survival amidst a community that did not want to acknowledge the past.

The nightmares troubled me for a long time. I also suffered from depression, and didn’t know what I could do about it. Then, in the ’60s, I went to a consultant psychiatrist to apply for health damage to be recognized by the Regional Compensation Office. He took my blood pressure and asked me the usual questions, confessional affiliation, and so on. And although he had seen my résumé, he diagnosed that my nightmares were a result of my low blood pressure. Outwardly calm, but boiling over inside, I said, “Doctor, I think you know everything now.” “Yes,” he said. Then I left. I never received any recognition of health damage. That was how things were.

The tours and lectures at Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site helped me a lot. What Freud did horizontally, I do vertically: I tell stories—I tell them and I tell them and I tell them. I’ve been doing it for many years now. I’m off the tablets. To begin with, it was very difficult to go past the crematoria at Dachau. It wasn’t possible just to shut out the associations—although my parents didn’t die in Dachau—and one has to be very

careful how one treats one’s soul.

Right at the beginning I had come across a story that touched the very core of the project: The indifference of postwar Munich society to the events that had passed in that city between 1933 and 1945, and the way a particular but otherwise unnamed survivor had finally decided to take ownership of his own past and break the silence by giving his story to visitors to the Dachau memorial site. The unnamed survivor told his story, the *Memory Loops* website brought it together with all the other stories—of victims, bystanders, and perpetrators, with those of the latter often embodied in the documents they had created, terrible documents, shocking documents—but always read by cheerful children. The horror of those texts was articulated by the innocence of the voices that read them.

As I listened to the tracks, I realized that they affected me more directly than did photos, texts, or attempts by Radermacher to summon the spirits of the murdered Jews through slide projections of their photos at the places where they had lived. It is an experience that everyone who *listens* to testimony has had. Zuckerkandl explained that the auditory space is dynamic; it flows towards the hearer and catches him. Visual space is static and can be measured and controlled by the seeing subject.

As a creature who sees, I know space as something that is without, that confronts me—here I am, there it is, two worlds rigidly and permanently separated; as hearer, hearer of tone, who has no conception of ‘being without,’ I know space of coming from without, as something that is always directed toward me, that is always in motion toward. (p. 277)

Or, more concisely, “the road to the heart of the living is more difficult, more circuitous, by way of the visible than of the audible” (p. 2).

*Memory Loops* provides an auditory space in which music takes the place of pictures. Indeed: the music that accompanies the reading of the testimonies is vitally important. It doesn’t take away from the story; to the contrary: It quite literally “attunes” the listener to the story, creating a mindfulness that overcomes the short attention span endemic to the world of the Internet and forging a responsiveness to the world at large and, in the case of *Memory Loops*, to the words spoken. Music serves “to restore one’s hearing to the hearable,” the Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane (2008) has written in his beautiful study *Sacred Attunement* (p. 28). I cannot but agree with him: As I listened to the testimonies, I noticed that the music held me captive at moments that the story lost its punch.

As I went from location to location, the Nazi epoch and

its aftermath as it had unfolded within the city of Munich began to envelop me in all its historical complexity and numinous power. Most of the stories that told of the life of Jews between 1933, when 9,000 lived in the city, and 1944, when only seven were left, reveal to the listener the sense of shock and confusion as new decrees robbed them of their livelihoods and their ability to participate in the city's life. They provide an understanding of the quiet desperation of shifting relations with friends and neighbors, make palpable the fear when the first deportation trains leave for unknown destinations in the East, and contextualize the difficulty of any kind of Jewish resistance at that time and the importance of the moments of defiance that did occur. Among the stories are those of quiet resolve, such as that of a boy who tells how his non-Jewish father refused to divorce his Jewish wife, an act of courage that sent him to a labor camp but saved the family.

### 86 ETTSTRASSE

Most of the stories are about things that had happened in the intimate sphere. Hence, it is not surprising that they were unknown to me. I made up my own images as I listened to these stories. Then, quite accidentally, I clicked on a location marked as "86 Ettstraße." A window opened and informed me that this was the location of the *Polizeipräsidium* (Police Headquarters). The audio track kicked in. I heard a woman's voice, accompanied by a few simple melodic chords played on a piano—chords that, as Zuckerkandl (1956) observed, always "open up" space and, as I believe, open up the space of our imagination as well (pp. 307–308). The result was an ever-extending frame for the words spoken.

In January 1933, Hitler came to power. On March 10, '33, my father went to Police Headquarters where he was beaten up, his teeth were knocked out, his eardrums damaged. He was beaten bloody, his trouser legs were cut off, and, barefoot, he was led around central Munich with a placard round his neck with the inscription: "I am a Jew, and I shall never again complain to the police."

I immediately saw the picture that had haunted me for almost half a century, the picture of Dr. Siegel carrying the sign through the Munich streets. Now, though, I was not watching a frozen instant of the scene but was instead listening to the account of how it unfolded, an account that, for the first time, made me ask about the impact of the public humiliation of the *paterfamilias* on his wife, Mathilde; his son, Peter; and his daughter, Beate, the author of the testimony. I was captivated.

I was in bed that day with a bit of a cold. My mother

was out shopping and I heard the front door open and shut and expected her to come to my room to ask me if I was all right. No one came. Normally my father would unlock the door, come in, [and] whistle, and my brother and I would run down the corridor to greet him, each of us trying to get there first. . . .

I got out of bed and went out into the corridor. There, on hooks outside the bathroom, hung my father's blood-drenched clothes.

It was the first time that I was really scared. Children are sometimes afraid of the dark, or of imaginary ghosts or whatever, but this was a real fear, not anything that I imagined. I tiptoed along the corridor to my parents' bedroom where, for the first time in my life, I knocked at the door and opened it gingerly. I saw my father pull up the eiderdown to cover his face up to his eyes so I shouldn't see his injuries. And he said: "Wait till your mother comes home." And that was weird; he would always refer to her as "Mutti," Mum.

After that, they tried to protect me from knowing more. It was some years later that I got the whole story. . . .

Uhlfelder, the owner of the big Uhlfelder Store, had been arrested. My father, his lawyer, had gone to Police Headquarters in Ettstraße to lay a complaint. [There] someone said: "Dr. Siegel, you are wanted in room number so and so." And that's where these SA chaps beat him up, cut off his trouser legs, and, barefoot, with a placard round his neck that said "I am a Jew, and I shall never again complain to the police," he was led [a]round Munich. When they got to the main station, they got tired of it all and let him go. When he was about to get into a taxi there, a man came up—and this my father told me himself—a man with an English or an American accent—who said: "I've just taken a photo of you; may I publish it?" My father told him he could do what he liked with it and got into the taxi. . . .

Many years after this event, when he visited us in London—my mother had died a year or so before—my middle son, Paul, announced at dinner: "You know something, Grandpa? Your picture is in our history book." My father said: "Let's have a look at it!" So, Paul went upstairs to get it while we . . . sat there rather anxious as to how my father would react. He looked at it and said: "Yes, very interesting." We laughed, relieved. Then Michael, my husband, a historian said: "I've always wanted to ask you this: What went on in your head at that moment?" My father answered: "I can answer that. From the moment they started laying in to me, I had only one thought . . . : 'I shall survive you all!'" That is defiance, not humiliation.

I continued to click on the circles of the *Memory Loops* site.

It contained many surprises. One of them was audio track 194, which was tied to the *Hauptbahnhof* (Central Station). It provided a narrative by Dr. Siegel's son, Peter. It revealed that his father's inner defiance had not ended in March 1933. You, our readers, have access to the Internet, so I'll leave it to you to log on to [www.memoryloops.net/en#!/start/](http://www.memoryloops.net/en#!/start/) and discover for yourselves the way Dr. Siegel, at the age of 58, decided not to wait for the fate the Nazis had planned for him but, against all odds, preserved his sense of agency, saved his children and then his wife and himself, and with nothing more than the clothes on his back, began again.

#### NOTES

1. See Isabel A [family name unknown]. "Two Photos Make History: The 10th March 1933 in the Life of Dr. Michael Siegel," Peter Sinclair (Trans.). p. 17. Retrieved October 28, 2011, from [www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN\\_MU\\_JU\\_siegel\\_e.pdf](http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/pdf/EN_MU_JU_siegel_e.pdf).

2. Helmut Hanko, "Die nationalsozialistische Machtübernahme im Müncher Rathaus," in Richard Bauer and others. (Eds.) (2002). *München—Hauptstadt der Bewegung: Bayerns Metropole und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Edition Minerva), p. 196; L. Eiber, "Polizei, Justiz und Verfolgung in München 1933 bis 1945." In Bauer (2002), *München —Hauptstadt der Bewegung*, p. 235. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from [www.stadtmuseum-online.de/aktuell/chiffre2.htm](http://www.stadtmuseum-online.de/aktuell/chiffre2.htm).

3. "Two Photos Make History," p. 4.

4. "Two Photos Make History," pp. 10–13.

5. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from [www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/our\\_collections/siegel/index.asp](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/our_collections/siegel/index.asp).

6. Retrieved November 6, 2011, from [www.muenchen.de/Rathaus/kult/bildende\\_kunst/kunst\\_im\\_oeffentlichen\\_raum/opfer\\_nationalsozialismus/321635/wettbewerb.html](http://www.muenchen.de/Rathaus/kult/bildende_kunst/kunst_im_oeffentlichen_raum/opfer_nationalsozialismus/321635/wettbewerb.html).

7. FSK is an acronym for *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle* (voluntary self-control), a concept that refers to the self-censorship with which the German film industry polices itself.

8. Heike Ander and Michaela Melián, Eds. (2005). *Föhrenwald*. (Berlin: Revolver); also retrieved November 4, 2011, from [www.foehrenwald-projekt.de/](http://www.foehrenwald-projekt.de/).

9. Jörg Heiser, "Das Unbehagen am geregelten Gedenken," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 19, 2010. See also: [www.faz.net/artikel/C30997/memory-loops-in-muenchen-das-unbehagen-am-geregelten-gedenken-30282176.html](http://www.faz.net/artikel/C30997/memory-loops-in-muenchen-das-unbehagen-am-geregelten-gedenken-30282176.html).

10. Retrieved November 9, 2011, from [www.memoryloops.net/en#!/321/](http://www.memoryloops.net/en#!/321/).

11. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from [www.memoryloops.net/en#!/105/](http://www.memoryloops.net/en#!/105/).

12. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from [www.memoryloops.net/en#!/258/](http://www.memoryloops.net/en#!/258/).

13. With my thanks to Michaela Melián and Miriam Greenbaum.

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Fishbane, M. (2008). *Sacred attunement: A Jewish theology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Zuckerkandl, V. (1956). *Sound and symbol: Music and the external world*. Willard R. Trask (Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.