



Report

„sound in the silence“ an intercultural memorial project

September 19-26, 2011

Production: MOTTE-community & cultural center

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sound in the silence – an intercultural memorial project

From September 19-26 the intercultural memorial project "sound in the silence" was hosted by the borough of Altona and cultural center MOTTE e.V. in cooperation with the Gymnasium Altona am Hohenzollernring, Polish students from the Gymnasium Zespól Szkół in Koszalin and the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme. For one week the 14-17 year old students compiled a performance composed of theater, dance and musical elements in the brick factory of the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme.

The teenagers were instructed by artists from various countries. The purpose of the workshop was to work through German and Polish history and the countries' mutual past, so that the past will not be forgotten – but remains alive.

The results of the workshops were presented during the closing events at the FABRIK on September 24 and the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme on September 26. A follow-up meeting in 2012 at the concentration camp memorial Stutthof (by Gdansk/Poland) is planned, as well as a presentation of the project in the USA in the spring of 2013.

The following chapters present the project in-depth

1. Performance as a new form of the culture of remembrance
2. Concentration camp memorial Neuengamme as a place of remembrance
and thematic examination
3. The processing of facts and emotions – a different way of knowledge transfer
4. Closing events at the FABRIK and the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme
5. Continuation of the Project
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1. Performance as a new form of the culture of remembrance

Through the theme of the workshop „new forms of remembrance“, the 14-17 year old students dealt with the German and Polish history and the issues of homeland, expulsion and tolerance.

They were instructed by artists from San Francisco, New York and Hamburg.

Within one week 21 German and 10 Polish teenagers compiled a performance using elements from theater, dance and music. These artistic instruments were utilized to find ways to process the mutual past and to enter into an intercultural dialogue.

„We want to find ways to transfer the German and Polish history into the present. After all, if there are no witnesses of a time period left, every young generation has to find its own ways and approaches to history.“

(Michael Wendt, Manager MOTTE e.V.)

Divided into three working groups – language, music and dance – the artistic process was initiated in cooperation with the students. The rapper and great grandson of the Wolf brothers, Dan Wolf from San Francisco worked with texts. The composer Michael Hearst from New York and the singer-songwriter Kijoka Junica from Hamburg worked with the teenagers on musical approaches to the past. Keith Pinto, a dancer from San Francisco, combined Hip Hop elements with “shadows of memory” in dance sequences. The choreographer Indrani Delmaine from the John Neumeier Hamburg Ballet supported the choreographic realization. The Hamburg based artist and filmmaker, Jens Huckeriede, was the manager of the project.

During the week, the teenagers and adults felt the presence of the past, worked together closely and shared their feelings intensively. Based on each participant’s own, but also other people’s biography and family history, a mutual dialogue emerged that lead from the past into the present. The different languages - German, Polish and English – were used as an artistic feature as well.



“I’m so happy to have met such great people. I was able to show my emotions through dancing, singing and writing. I would love to come back and work with these people again.”

(Paula Pstragowska, 15, student from Poland)

2. Concentration camp memorial Neuengamme as a place of remembrance and thematic examination

The brick factory of the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme – a former concentration camp near Hamburg - had been chosen as the venue for this workshop. In this place the prisoners, suffering from the torments of cold, hunger and the constant fear of death, produced red brick stones, from which, by command of Adolf Hitler, the "New Hamburg" was supposed to be build. The concentration camp memorial Neuengamme is reminiscent of the more than 100,000 people, who were prisoners at the biggest concentration camp in northwest Germany during the Second World War.



„It appears to me as if I could see the prisoners working. I can feel their fear and their pain. I hear them screaming, crying and dying. It's almost as if I could touch them. But I'm just the observer. I can see them, but I still can't change their past.“
(Student from Germany)

At first, the participants of the workshop took a two hour guided tour of the area, where they learned about the history of the camp. The participants, who all came from different cultural backgrounds, were supposed to work through this place using remembrance. Afterwards the group gathered at the brick factory of the concentration camp, which marked the emotional low point for the group. With the help of drama exercises, the group found ways to cope with the oppressing atmosphere. The brick factory became an ambivalent site – a place of horror and at the same time a place of inspiration. The way the teenagers dealt with this historical place and history itself was the starting point for the compilation of the performance.

„Being here, I have a feeling of pressure in my chest. It's as if a belt was tied around my chest and I can't release it. I can't breathe. It's sad, I'm moved to tears. I'm thinking of my Grandpa.“
(Student from Germany)

3. The processing of facts and emotions – a different kind of history class

„sound in the silence“ did not just focus on the teaching of historical facts, but also on the emotional involvement with the history of the place. There were no requirements or defined goals that the students were supposed to achieve. The motto has always been: „Everyone contributes to the project with whatever lies within his or her wealth of experience.“ That way each participant was able to shape the project with his or her own skills.



„We are very happy that this project has been realized. We were able to develop ways for mutual tolerance using artistic techniques. This was a very important encounter for the Polish teenagers. We were able to make history tangible and we hope everyone understood that we should do everything so these horrible events of the past will never happen again. To us this project was the best history lesson.“

(Aleksandra Klukowska and Kamilla Derlatka, teachers from Poland)

There was a lot of grieving during this week, but also a lot of laughing. The common experiences helped the participants to grow together as a group and new friendships were formed. Most importantly, people were remembered who should not be forgotten. Through the interaction of facts and emotion, the memory of Neuengamme remains alive and current and the adolescent's awareness of who is missing is made more acute.

„Am I seeing ghosts? Are they something that belongs to the past? No, they are not! Because they are still alive. In our minds, our emotions, our memories and the memories of our ancestors. They are in us. In all of us.“

(Student from Germany)

„sound in the silence was one of the most difficult, exhausting and emotional project that I ever took part in. But at the same time the most important and rewarding one! I'm positive that the ghosts of the 55,000 victims of the concentration camp Neuengamme would be delighted that young Germans, Polish and Jews are working together to create something positive in a setting, in which the past must never be allowed to be forgotten.“

(Michael Hearst, composer from New York/USA)

4. Final presentation at the FABRIK and the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme

The results of the five day long workshop were presented in front of parents, friends and other audience members in a thirty-five minute long performance on September 24 at the FABRIK and in front of four school classes on September 26 at the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme.

In order to achieve this aim – the presentation of a performance – it was important to not put any pressure on the teenagers. After all, the workshop focused on the “process of dealing with the issue”.

„Even if we had not said anything for one hour – our speechlessness would have been the result that we would have presented. For us, the instructing artists, it has been important to not put any pressure on the students at any time, but to give them room for their emotional expression.“

(Jens Huckeriede, manager of the project)

As a matter of fact, within one week the participants put together an impressive performance. The performance at the FABRIK in Altona, which is usually used as a concert venue, needs to be especially emphasized. Where famous singers and bands normally thrill the audience with their loud sound, now there was a “dead silence”. The students were able to transfer their emotions from the brick factory of the concentration camp memorial Neuengamme to the FABRIK and to give the audience an impression of their sensual perception and state of mind.



„I would have never imagined that the project would turn out as such a success. I really liked it. Not only was I able to learn more about World War II and concentration camps, but I also got closer to all the participants and made new friends. This cooperation should never end. I have great respect for the artists and it amazes me how such great things can be created out of chaos!“

(Laura Hoelandt, 16, student from Germany)

5. Continuation of the project

A film team filmed the participants while they were working at the brick factory in Neuengamme and at their final performance. The Hamburg based filmmaker Jens Huckeriede is planning to use the material for a documentary next year.

„When I got here, I was especially excited by the openness and warmth of the participants. We were able to express our feelings through the music. Everyone was fantastic. I will go back to my country with new experiences and memories. I think there should be more projects like „sound in the silence“. They turn the participants into better people and the world into a better place.“

(Maciek Igras, 15, student from Poland)

A follow up meeting for the two student groups is already planned for 2012 at the memorial site Stutthof (near Gdansk, Poland) as well as a presentation of the project in the USA in the spring of 2013.

„This project was a completely positive surprise for me. It was an incredible experience. Working with the different cultures, languages and situations was so much fun, but also moved me sometimes. Especially the different ethnic backgrounds made this project unique. I'm really happy I was a part of it. I would do it again at any time.“

(Alina Degener, 16, student from Germany)



„The project is not only a new way to look back on the mutual past, but also a comprehensive creative experience that requires us to utilize our heart, soul and skills to process the experience.

The result is a moment to think and reflect on how we treat each other and act in the world. That way we take back „the territory“ and claim it for everyone that died on it. We fill it with happiness and triumph and life, opening up an endless number of possibilities in the future.“

(Dan Wolf, Rapper from San Francisco/USA)

Annex

Artists:

Dan Wolf, artist, Keith Pinto, musician, Felonius, San Francisco/USA

Michael Hearst, composer und multi-instrumentalist, New York/USA

Jens Huckeriede, artist and filmmaker, Hamburg

Kijoka Junica, artist / singer-songwriter, Hamburg

Indrani Delmaine, Choreographer, youth work Hamburg ballet/John Neumeier



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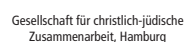
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