

Austrian National Library
Karen Frostig, Ph.D. President and Artistic Director

Danke, Rubina Möhring for that beautiful introduction. I would like to thank Dr. Johanna Rachinger for welcoming us into her house, and to Margit Fisher for providing the welcoming address. I also want to acknowledge the very sad loss of Barbara Prammer, President of the National Council from 2006-2014 and Chief Patron of this Event, who is no longer with us.

It is a great honor to present *The Vienna Project's* Closing Ceremony and the "Naming Memorial," to you tonight. *The Vienna Project* is about bringing people together, specifically the seven different victim groups: Jews, Roma and Sinti, mentally ill and physically and mentally disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Carinthian Slovenian resisters, and persons persecuted on political grounds. It is about building bridges between people inside and outside of Austria.

For instance, yesterday, we completed a citywide "Reading Marathon." Filling the streets with the sounds of memory, a living enactment of the project's "Memory Map," archival letters from nine countries were read at 26 Memory Sites, in 14 districts producing a chorus of memory.

This project is about the story of those sent into exile, the refugees, the survivors, *and* their descendants. It is about telling the story of the multiple

victim groups persecuted and murdered under National Socialism, and about party members responsible for these crimes, as well as those who chose not to intervene. It is about everybody.

“Difference” and “otherness” produce fear, hate, and murder. Under National Socialism, “difference” became a death sentence. The classification labels represent the criteria that ultimately determined a victim’s fate. This is the history.

The Vienna Project relies on new technologies to create a flexible presentation of this history and the 85,000 names of murdered Austrian victims of National Socialism. Using design elements to represent difference and identity, the “Naming Memorial” includes multiple victim groups while presenting each name as equal: same font, same size, same color, and same duration. The alphabetization of names helps viewers grasp the objectives of genocide, to eradicate whole families and entire groups. My family, for instance, was sent to seven camps and it is only in looking at *this* wall, that I can see how many members of my family were murdered. While the “Naming Memorial” is ostensibly about “performing the archives,” bringing the names from darkness into light, the memorial is designed to humanize the archives, to make memory personal. By leading with first names, the hierarchical appearance of the database recedes. We are left contemplating a vast sea of names that embody actual families and lived relationships. By identifying the different groups, we create

relationships *between* the groups, deepening our appreciation of who was targeted, and why.

Elisabeth Wildling, our video artist, introduces a unique and dramatic presentation of four groups—Jews, Roma and Sinti, victims of mental illness and physical disabilities, and dissidents—using space and movement to interface with the names. After many conversations on the topic of difference, we also agreed upon a subtle use of slants to be introduced as a non-hierarchical method of differentiating victims of genocide from victims of murder. We must remember, however, that for *all* groups, “difference” provoked intolerance and murder.

Representing 85,000 names in a confined space meant that our ability to read individual names on some occasions would be fundamentally compromised. Elisabeth and I concluded that for the presentation of the 85,000 names, the light, the movement and the knowledge that patterns of text represented thousands of victims’ names would stir a nuanced experience of loss that is more directly tied to the emotional composition of memory. Conceived as a temporal event, name recognition would occur intermittently, as part of a larger choreography of the names.

Regrettably, we now know that memory does not prevent genocide. And yet, memory coupled with education, action, and intervention, remains our best strategy for deterring hatred based on an intolerance of difference.

The Vienna Project began as an idea, to “make memory visible on the streets of Vienna.” I wanted to tell the story, unequivocally that “this happened here.” Starting out with a plan to represent my family’s history, I came to appreciate the many stories of betrayal and loss, expressed by members of the different victim groups. Bidding farewell to loved ones, whether by deportation or execution, was equally heart wrenching.

In closing, I want to thank my family, friends and colleagues for their support, and my very talented and committed project team for their extraordinary work. While the team expanded and contracted in response to the demands of the work, the core team includes: Elisabeth Wildling, Jerome Segal, Georg Traska, Nikolaus Gansterer, Johanna Taufner, Kabren Levinson, Ildiko Meny, Peter Mlczoch, Waltraud Jungwirth, Alexander Matthias Kosnopfl, and Kate Melchior.

The government’s willingness to work with me, and to provide the bulk of financial support, signals a new chapter in Austria’s readiness to reflect upon the past. In particular, I want to thank Roland Lehner and Bernhard Engleder for their early support of the project, providing critical assistance along the way.

The partnership with the University of Applied Arts proved most instrumental in creating the memorial project. Faculty and students from the transmedia art and graphic design departments were outstanding, contributing to the overall artistry of *The Vienna Project*. I also want to

recognize the significant work completed by Austrian historians over many years. Their scholarship regarding the history of National Socialism provided the necessary foundation for growing *The Vienna Project*.

I am honored that I could be a part of this important conversation about memory in Vienna. As we begin tonight's program, I want to say: "danke schön" to everyone who made this project possible.