

Content warning: Covers the ableist violence and genocide of the Nazi T4 program. Contains euphemistic language utilized by the perpetrators. For a discussion of the historical context, theoretical considerations, and poetic interventions of this poem, please see the accompanying essay: "Where are we going?" with T4 Postmemory: Creative Writing as Vicarious Witnessing"

Smoke & Ash

Some families fought
so they were deemed abusive & neglectful & the children were taken away
for their own protection.

Most simply didn't know,
for they were told these new facilities were erected to offer the best
in therapeutic care.

Several begged
for their kin to be put to death
for that surely wasn't life.

& the big grey busses came &
went,

ignoring cries of "where are you taking us?"
casting long shadows &
some 300,000 beautifully 'broken' people
to their deaths.

The dark smoke rose &
thick,
could not erase the marked bodies.

Death certificates falsified,
soon-to-be corpses
shuffled through multiple locations,
inevitable end postponed
for the sole purpose
of concealment.

Mass piles of ashes divided &
delivered,

proof stamped from places that did not exist,
journeyed to surviving family
with bits of others' personal effects
this indeed was

not
sweet Susanne

come home
to
rest.

MURDER
by
firing squad, lethal injection, gas inhalation,
suffocation, starvation
of
FELLOW PEOPLE

[REDACTED]
by
[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED],
[REDACTED]
of
[REDACTED]

~~murder~~
[REDACTED]

→

*medical procedures of disinfection,
treatment*

~~by firing squad, lethal injection, gas inhalation, suffocation, starvation~~
[REDACTED]

→

*natural causes,
a humane putting to sleep,
euthanasia,
mercy death*

An illegal & thus bureaucratic order 1939-1941 sanctioned the death & destruction of
clandestine

~~fellow people~~
[REDACTED]

→

*degenerates & defectives,
feeble-minded cripples,
empty human shells,
ballast existences,
horrible counterparts of real humans,
lives unworthy of life,*

accused of suffering & wasting & thus of medicalized genocide through 1945.
away worthy

All we have of them is an estimate, an incomplete roster of names,
yet in the form of insult rather than diagnosis,
somehow the term “idiot” remains.

The same medical systems once designed to kill us are now meant to treat us &
the smoke of those disassembly lines, now colorless,
still hovers, noxious.