Gazing at Ruins: German Defeat as Visual Experience

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In the summer of 1947, the German writer Alfred Döblin returned as an officer of the French occupational forces to the metropolis that had served as the stage for his classic modernist urban novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, twenty years earlier and which he had been forced to leave in 1933.[1] In his diary Döblin recorded his impressions of the demolished city in brief, almost photographic takes:

> The view along the way almost exceeds the limits of reality. It is an inconceivable nightmare in broad daylight. We are in Berlin. Long rows of streets are in this same deplorable condition, dead and yet not dead. We are approaching Chausseestrasse. On the other side of it we see a strange sight. There, in a faintly intact building, is an elegant restaurant with chandeliers and sheer curtains, the signs outside are in Russian. It must be for officers. We make our way carefully, the asphalt is ripped up and full of holes. It is early afternoon and an eerie silence reigns. Imagine, a huge city like Berlin, a broad street with no traffic, few people, and no noise. As we are coming to the Lehrter station a crowd streams toward us. Everyone is schlepping something, loaded down with bags and sacks. Many are in rags, a few look like cave dwellers. And then we sit down and have something to drink, an amazing experience. We drink tea from dainty cups and smoke cigarettes as if nothing at all had happened. And outside is the wasteland, the desert, the silent battlefield that stretches for miles, once a city that bore the name Berlin. We walk by *Café Vienna*, it still exists. People are sitting outside at tables, playing at pre-war life. And why not? The weather is beautiful, the bombs couldn't change that. Many customers seem to be from another era, come back to haunt this one. Friedrichstrasse is quiet and empty, as is the Linden, through which throngs of

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people and traffic once passed. It was once necessary for police to direct traffic at Kranzler-Ecke. Now, as we stand here, a young Russian soldier approaches us from Friedrichstrasse, he has a young woman on his arm. She wears a plain blue dress. They walk past us solemnly. A vision, a hallucination: across the ruins of this obliterated city, a young Russian soldier walks along, serious and quiet, with his wife. Could anyone have imagined this five years ago, not to mention fifteen years ago when I was still here?[2]

It is this astonishment, the bewilderment at the improbability of the post-war imagery, that is typical not only for Döblin, but also for contemporary ways of seeing the post-catastrophic city more generally – and these ways of seeing, or «visual experiences» will be the focus of this article. Modern historians have, justifiably, long concentrated on the question of how Germans turned into Nazis and were able to plunge Europe into a self-destructive, genocidal war during the 1930s and 1940s (the debate about Germany's *Sonderweg* has in principle been oriented around this question since the end of the Second World War). In contrast, the converse process – that is, the emergence of Europeans from this violent history – has only recently become a subject of historical synthesis, for instance in Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent*, Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer's *Shattered Past*, Tony Judt's *Postwar*, or most recently, in James Sheehan's *Transformation of Modern Europe*. These books investigate not only how Europe descended into violence, but also in particular how it emerged from this catastrophic history. The transition from war to peace had its costs, especially for the Europeans east of the Elbe River. Nevertheless, the 1940s constituted something like a watershed moment, or, to use a different metaphor, a «compressed time» (Dan Diner), in which historical events altered the social and political configurations of the continent violently, suddenly, and irrevocably. Within five years – between 1943 and 1947 – the descent into war and genocide was followed by the return to a stable and, in comparison to pre-war Europe, fundamentally different international order. The starting point was 1943: German mass killing policies in the East reached their zenith, Nazi Germany's defeat became a certainty, and the Allies began to draft plans for a post-war order. The transition ended in 1947, when the post-war settlement turned into a new conflict among the victorious powers, splitting the continent into communist East and capitalist West. The cold-war constellation, which lasted in Europe until 1989/90, emerged from this short transition period between war and peace.

In order to understand this transformative moment, it is essential to keep in mind the extent of violence unleashed in the final stage of the war. What had started as a blitzkrieg to subjugate and colonise Europe evolved in the East into

2 A. Döblin, *Destiny's Journey*, translated by Edna McCown, New York 1992, 299–301, 304.

a fierce life-or-death struggle, a war without limits between two dictatorships.[3] «At the beginning of 1945,» as Richard Bessel notes, «Germany witnessed the greatest killing frenzy that the world has ever seen, as military casualties reached their peak, the Allied bombing campaign was at its most intense, and millions of Germans fled westwards ahead of the Red Army.»[4] During the last four months of the war, more German soldiers were killed than in 1942 and 1943 combined, and they were killed for the most part in Germany. Allied casualties were probably even higher. In the battle of Berlin in April 1945, one of the last gruesome battles of the war and the only one – except for Stalingrad and Warsaw – where a major city became a battlefield, German and Soviet troops suffered 240.000 casualties in the space of only three weeks. More German civilians (over 100.000) died during these last three weeks of the war than during the entire bombing campaign against the city (approximately 20.000).

The shock of violence shaped the visual experiences of the transition from war to peace, although the ways in which this occurred still remain largely unexplored. To be sure, a number of important works have analysed American and British media coverage of the liberation of concentration camps in Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and Buchenwald. For various reasons (for example, war-time censorship), the post-war imagery was more violent for the American and British and even the German public than visual propaganda during the war. Both Western Allied and Nazi wartime propaganda suppressed photographs of their own dead soldiers as well as civilian victims of war-time violence, hence the importance of the horrifying images from the liberated camps for Western perceptions of Germany in April and May 1945, images which later gained iconic status in the visual memory of the Holocaust. In contrast, photographs of Nazi atrocities had been at the centre of Soviet visual propaganda since the first year of the war. In the spring of 1945, at the moment when the Western media «discovered» Nazi atrocities, these images had all but disappeared from the Soviet press, which focused instead on heroic conquest and victory.[5]

For Germans *and* for Allies, however, visual experiences of German defeat in 1945 were much more complex and contradictory. As the Döblin quote indicates, the astonished and bewildered ways of seeing post-war Germany were directed at two events that no longer determine the imagery of this era to the same degree today: the war-time destruction of German cities and the presence of Allied troops in everyday life among the ruins. My questions are therefore: how exactly were

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3 A. Weiner, «Something to Die For, A Lot to Kill For: The Soviet System and the Barbarisation of Warfare», in: G. Kassimeris (ed.), *The Barbarisation of Warfare*, London 2006, 101–125; M. Edele / M. Geyer, «States of Exception. The Nazi-Soviet War as a System of Violence, 1939–1945», in: M.

Geyer / S. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, New York 2009, 345–398.

4 R. Bessel, *Germany 1945. From War to Peace*, London 2009, 5.

German and Allied visual experiences of the post-war moment shaped? And what was the significance of these divergent visual experiences – again, not only those of Germans – for the devolution of war-time violence and the emergence of cold-war realignments?

1. Berlin Interzone

The example of Berlin is particularly well-suited for exploring these questions. This is not because the destruction there was greater than in other European cities or because the occupation was especially brutal – the lawlessness of Soviet rule in Berlin, for example, pales in comparison to the annihilating power of Nazi rule in Warsaw – but because for contemporaries Berlin possessed a symbolic significance for the experience of civic rupture in the 1930s and 1940s. Along with New York, Weimar Berlin was *the* modern metropolis of the 1920s, defined by its vibrant urban culture (in 1930, Berlin had 4,3 million inhabitants of which in May 1945 only 2,6 million remained – today, the population is 3,4 million, as it was in 1950; in other words, Berlin as a metropolis never fully recovered from the aftermath of Nazi policies). In the 1930s and early 1940s, Berlin turned into the capital of the Nazi empire in Europe, even if perhaps, as Eric Hobsbawm claims in his memoirs, Berlin never became a Nazi city at heart.[6] After 1939, Berlin developed into the centre of the German war industry, surrounded by labour and concentration camps. Paradoxically, Nazi war-time efforts turned Germany into a multinational society in the early 1940s. There were more than half a million foreign and slave labourers in Berlin from all European countries under Nazi rule (almost twenty per cent of the city's population in June 1944). Only a few thousand Jews survived Nazi persecution in Berlin; about 35.000 were deported and killed in the camps, more than 100.000 left their native city.

During the Battle of Berlin vast parts of the inner city were completely razed. More than 100.000 women were raped by Soviet soldiers in April, May and June 1945, before American and British troops arrived in the city.[7] After the first violent encounters with the Red Army, the post-catastrophic city was divided in July 1945 into four different zones – and experiences – of occupation. Ironically enough, late Nazi and Allied Berlin was a polyglot metropolis, shattered but packed with people, predominantly women (in the summer of 1945, only half of the pre-war male work-force remained in the city), refugees from the East (Germans as well as displaced persons), and Allied troops.[8] The demolished *Reichshauptstadt* was *the* war

5 D. Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes. Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, New Brunswick 2011, 181.

6 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life*, New York 2002, 46.

7 A. Grossmann, «A Question of Silence. The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers», in:

October 72 (1995), 43–63; N. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949*, Cambridge/Mass. 1995, ch. 2.

8 W. Schivelbusch, *In Cold Crater. Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945–1948*, Berkeley 1998; A. Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies. Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, Princeton 2007.

trophy for the Allies. Subsequently, it became a laboratory for the post-war order, when for several years the city served as a microcosm of international politics, a contact zone between victors and vanquished and a space of everyday encounters, where we can observe in close-up how the hostilities of the total war were transformed into increasingly peaceful entanglements of Germans and Allies and then into a renewed global enmity, this time between the Allies in the early cold war.

2. Visual Propaganda vs. Visual Experiences

My contention is thus that in order to historicise visual experiences of German defeat one could begin with the imagery of documentary records – in particular, diaries and photographs – in which contemporaries captured the events as they were unfolding. In the 1940s, diary writing became a popular social practice to an unprecedented degree. These chronicles have yet to be incorporated into a history that integrates incommensurate or asymmetrical experiences of violence and loss into a single narrative. For my own research on Berlin under Allied occupation, which informs this article, I thus examined not only the files of the four military governments, but also hundreds of personal accounts by Germans, by the few Jews who survived underground in Berlin, by displaced persons and expellees who passed through the city in the wake of war, as well as by those Allies (Soviet, American, British and French troops and civilians, among them German émigrés like Döblin) who came to the city and recorded their impressions in diaries, letters and travel reports. Needless to say, these private records do not represent a more «authentic» everyday history of the entanglements and encounters connected to the war and occupation, but like documentary photographs they do reflect fundamentally different experiences and expectations in the transition from war to peace that enable a more nuanced understanding of why the transition happened in this particular way.[9]

Photographs are another obvious but under-explored source for such an entangled history of post-catastrophic cities. Allied troops were accompanied by war photographers who left a multitude of images that historians have only recently started to explore. The industrial manufacture of small, affordable and easy-to-handle cameras since the mid-1920s changed the social trajectories of photography dramatically in the 1930s and 1940s. Amateur photography emerged and the taking of photographs (like diary writing) entered the realms of everyday social practice.[10]

9 Many of these sources, especially Soviet diaries, have only recently become available to historians. See S.-L. Hoffmann, «Besiegte, Besatzer, Beobachter: Das Kriegsende im Tagebuch», in: D. Fulda et al. (eds.), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt. Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg*, Göttingen 2010, 25–55. For a similar approach, taking the battle of Stalingrad as an example, see J. Hellbeck, «‹The Diaries of Fritzes and the Letters of Gretchens›: Personal Writings from the German–Soviet War and Their Readers,» in: *Kritika* 10 (2009), 571–606.

10 See the pioneering study by T. Starl, *Knipser. Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980*, Munich 1985.

Moreover, the decades between the late 1920s and the mid-1950s, the pre-television age, were the hey-day of photographic journalism. In Weimar Berlin the first major illustrated magazines and newspapers were read by millions each week. During Weimar's final years the photo book was invented by modernist photographers like August Sander (*Antlitz der Zeit*, Face of Our Time), published in 1929, with an introduction by Döblin), who conveyed their meanings not through an interplay of text and images, but through photographs alone.[11] In Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, avant-garde photography was used experimentally as a propaganda tool. Similarly, between 1935 and 1943 American avant-garde photographers like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans were commissioned by the Farm Security Administration, a Roosevelt New Deal agency, to take everyday photographs of rural poverty in the South.[12] While Nazi and Stalinist propaganda machines retained a mistrust of modernist photography (preferring film and painting, or state-supervised amateur photography instead) and used images only if they were encapsulated in text, British and American photo journals, which emerged by the late 1930s, based their commercial success on the power of «documentary» images. The British photojournalistic magazine *Picture Post* emerged in 1938 and was an immediate success, selling 1.600.000 copies each week after only six months. War exponentially increased the circulation of *Life Magazine*. Founded in 1936, only six years later its editors could claim that tens of millions of civilians and two out of every three US servicemen read the magazine. Both magazines relied on the work of German émigrés like Stefan Lorant or Kurt Korff (previously editors of the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* and *Berliner Illustrierte*). Since the 1940s American and British photojournalism has set the international standards for the new medium.

Photographs are, of course, a tricky source, which is one of the reasons why the few historical works on the subject have focused primarily on visual propaganda. Although accounts of American media coverage of the liberation of concentration camps, for example, are extremely important, they primarily illuminate American atrocity propaganda at home and in Germany at the end of the Third Reich. Naturally, they omit large parts of the visual experiences of genocidal war and military occupation in Eastern Europe. To this day, the visual imagery of the Holocaust is shaped by American and British images of the liberated camps on German territory rather than by images from the actual sites of genocide in the East that were liberated by the Red Army (and which did not feature as prominently in Soviet

11 M. Jennings, «Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic", in: *October* 93 (2000), 23–56; H. Hardt, «Constructing Photojournalism in Weimar Germany 1928–33», in: *Communication Review* 1 (1996) 3, 373–402.

12 For more on the striking similarities of Soviet and American documentary photography of the 1930s,

see L. Bendavid-Val, *Photographie und Propaganda. Die 30er Jahre in den USA und der UdSSR*, Zurich 1999.

13 S. Moyn, «In the Aftermath of Camps», in: F. Biess / R. Moeller (eds.), *Histories of the Aftermath. The Legacies of World War II in Comparative European Perspective*, Cambridge 2010, 49–64.

visual propaganda in 1945).[13] To focus only on published photographs, moreover, is similar to relying only on official (German and Allied) sources and propaganda.[14] Censorship practices are important, but even Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda failed to control pictorial information completely. The photographic record of Nazi genocidal policies, for example, is primarily in archives, not in the pages of the press.[15] Still, it remains unclear how to use the vast amount of unpublished war-time and post-war documentary images (including amateur photography) that we find not only in archives, but in commercial and private collections.

I will not rehearse here at length the critical theory of photography or visual culture[16] beyond noting two of its governing distinctions, the first of which is that photographs are indeed captured experiences, but they also convert experiences into an image. In this respect, photographs are no different from diaries, which also convert experiences into something new: a text. War-time and post-war diarists were acutely aware of the impossibility of representing their experiences accurately in language – or painting, as indicated by the example of the British artist Mary Kessel, who recorded her impressions of Berlin on 6 September 1945 in her diary:

> Berlin smells of death. Incredible, like a million year old ruin, standing silent so that crickets sing – one can hear them + pale figures creeping around cutting trees, hidden in [the] dark. Pools of water – pale in [the] moonlight + white ruins like great teeth bared. Oh – unforgettable smell of thousands of dead – The ‹still lives› of burnt out cars + tanks in the gutters – + and mile on [after] mile on [after] mile, where no one lives or can ever live again – just smelling –+ there the crickets sing. Can you imagine the stillness. And how can one paint it? HOW [to] get it all in?»[17]

In other words, photographs are traces of past experiences, of things that actually happened, but they also offer a particular, aesthetic perspective on reality that needs to be reconstructed if we think, for example, of the eerie beauty of certain photographic records of ruined city-scapes, or the emotional intensity conjured up by Holocaust liberation photography.

14 On war-time and post-war American visual propaganda, see, for example, the excellent works of C. S. Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye. American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany*, Chicago 2009; C. Zemel, «Emblems of Atrocity. Holocaust Liberation Photographs,» in: S. Hornstein /F. Jacobowitz (eds.), *Image and Remembrance. Representation and the Holocaust*, Bloomington, 2003, 201–219; B. Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget. Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*, Chicago 2000; C. Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern*, Berlin 1998; D. Barnouw, *Germany 1945. Views of War and Violence*, Bloomington 1996; and, with a specific focus on censorship practices: G. H. Roeder Jr., *The Censored War. American Visual Experience During World War II*, New Haven 1993.

15 Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, 177.

16 See, for example, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994; J. Evans / S. Hall (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, Oxford 2001; and, for a critique of «photography criticism»: S. Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance. Photography and Political Violence*, Chicago 2010.

17 M. Kessel, *German Diary, August–October 1945*, Imperial War Museum, London.

A second and particularly pertinent observation for my argument is that the camera is also a way to appropriate the thing photographed. «The camera,» as Susan Sontag famously wrote, «makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality.»[18] Photographic seeing is a way of appropriating the experiences of others, for example suffering, and turning it into something consumable. This is what I will discuss later as the «politics of pity». The Second World War in particular was a pivotal moment in this emergence of photography as a way to appropriate experiences of political violence – not simply as «distorted» or «propagandistic» representations of events, but also as complex and contradictory, yet powerful, ways of giving meaning to human suffering.

3. The Spectacle of German Defeat

In the following, I will reconstruct different visual experiences of German defeat in 1945 and lay out an argument as to their political implications, although I am painfully aware how preliminary my findings are. For this article, I have examined several thousands of images by Soviet, British, American and German photographers (mostly professional), who were in Berlin at the end of the war and during the early Allied occupation. The majority of these photographs was never published and is now in private and public collections throughout Europe and the United States. It is impossible to assemble a comprehensive sample of these visual records, and the following are mere suggestions for possible ways of understanding those photographs that are available.

For the sake of argument, I claim that there are three dominant visual experiences of German defeat: a triumphalist mode, an elegiac mode and an ethnographic gaze. These are not identical in every case but are predominantly connected to Soviet, German and British/American war-time experiences and ways of photographic seeing. As will become more apparent later, by «Soviet», «German» and «British/American» perspectives I do not wish to imply that photographic seeing can be neatly divided into national categories. Some of the most eminent American war photographers like Robert Capa (Endre Ernő Friedmann) or David Seymour (David Robert Szymin) were European immigrants and were deeply indebted to the German and Soviet avant-garde photography of the 1920s and early 1930s. This was also the case for Kurt Hutton, who at the time worked in Berlin (then still Kurt Hübschmann) for the famous photo agency Dephot, before migrating to Britain in 1934 where he belonged to the founding staff of *Picture Post*. Then there was Margaret Bourke-White, who travelled from America to Soviet Russia in the 1930s with the official task of photographing industrial construction sites for Soviet magazines. Her sympathetic photo book *Eyes on Russia* (1931) and her photo-reportages for the *New York Times Magazine* hardly differ

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18 S. Sontag, *On Photography*, New York 2001, 5.

from Soviet visual propaganda at the time. Still, I would argue that different war-time experiences shaped ways of photographic seeing. Photographs of post-war Berlin by German émigrés who returned in an American uniform to their native city in 1945 differ from those who had remained in Nazi Europe. But what all these photographs have in common is that they depict German defeat as a liminal moment in European history.

The triumphalist gaze at German defeat

In Soviet photography, Berlin is inextricably connected to the conquest and defeat of a deadly enemy who had conducted the war in such a way that it could not hope for peace. Not only in well-known Soviet visual icons of the war such as Evgenii Khaldei's photograph of the taking of the Reichstag did the gesture of heroic triumph predominate over the German defeat. The most important Soviet war photographers were in Berlin at the end of the war, and they all took photographs of the Reichstag in ruins. If Berlin was in Soviet propaganda parlance «the cave of the beast», the Reichstag was its heart (although this is not quite logical, since the Reichstag had been the place of German parliamentarism abandoned by the Nazis after the burning in 1934) (fig. 1). Other preferred images of Berlin in 1945 were Hitler's Reichskanzlei, largely destroyed and littered with Nazi paraphernalia, and the thousands of German prisoners of war who had to march through Berlin before being deported to the gulags (a triumphalist spectacle like the march of German prisoners of war through Moscow on 17 July 1944), and who were photographed not as individuals but (for example from above) in large columns (fig. 2).

Soviet war correspondents like Arkadii Shaikhet, Georgii Zelma, Boris Ignatovich and Georgii Petrusov were well-known photojournalists in the 1930s. They had learned their trade by photographing the gigantic Stalinist construction sites, for example in Magnitogorsk, published in the propaganda photo magazine *SSR na stroike* (USSR in Construction), designed by El Lissitzki between 1930 and 1941. The 1930s witnessed the shift from Soviet avant-garde photography to the academic aestheticism of socialist realism, with its staged and overt heroising imagery (emulating bombastic paintings, the preferred art form during Stalinism).[19] For the duration of the war, photography regained some of its prestige in Soviet propaganda. While modernist techniques (like close-ups or diagonals) were still considered too formalistic by authorities, war itself eliminated the dull and idyllic imagery of Stalinist propaganda before and after the Second World War. Instead,

19 See K. Akinsha, «Painting versus Photography. A Battle of Mediums in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture», in: D. Neumaier (ed.), *Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art*, New Brunswick 2004, 31–46; A. Lavrentiev, «Photo-Dreams of the Avant-Garde», in: D. Elliott (ed.), *Photography in Russia 1840–1940*, London 1992; M. Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph 1924–1937*, New Haven 1996; B. Ignatovich, *Kunst im Auftrag/Iskusstvo na zakaz 1927–1946*, Berlin 2006.

Figure 1: Berlin, May 1945,
Shooting of salute on the roof of the
Reichstag
Photo: Georgii Petrusov © Berlinische Galerie

Figure 2: Berlin, end of April/early May 1945, German prisoners of war at Frankfurter Allee
(«Reichsstrasse 1») marching towards the East
Photo: Timofei Melnik © Deutsch-Russisches Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

Soviet war photography employed a heroic visual language that used certain modernist elements, in particular unusual camera angles, dramatic lighting and a focus on expressive movement, as well as «conscious» socialist realist elements like retouching or even the staging of photographs (as is the case in Khaldei's photograph of the taking of the Reichstag). This heroic visual language also informed Soviet images of German defeat, as did the fact that they – unlike American photojournalists – were part of the fighting troops. Some, like Timofei Melnik, had been severely wounded in combat or, like Khaldei, had lost family members in the Holocaust. Most of these images did not shy away from the realities of war and were not published in Soviet newspapers. However, as was the case for Soviet diaries or letters from Berlin in 1945 (with the notable exception of Vasilii Grossman's diaries), which used key terms of Soviet propaganda to describe, for example, faces of German civilians as *zverskii* (beastly),[20] Soviet visual propaganda did not differ entirely from these unpublished images. There was a clear sense in both published and unpublished photographs that the tables had been turned, that Soviet troops in Berlin were now, in a dramatic reversal, masters of the master race.

Moreover, in the immediate post-war period, photographs of everyday life in the German territories under Soviet rule rarely appeared in the Soviet media. If magazines like *Ogonyok* (the Soviet equivalent to *Life*) reported from Berlin at all, the pictures of ruins and reconstruction (taken, for example, by Petrusov) were accompanied by articles that stressed German war crimes and the possibility of a resurrection of Nazism. One article in *Ogonyok* from February 1946, for example, notes: «The Germans like to complain now about their bitter fate, about living with cold and hunger. They claim to be forced to sell their last piece of clothing on the black market. Yet, all this is not correct. Many servants of the Third Reich, among them many Berliners, have robbed Europeans during the war of so many possessions that these will last for a long time.»[21] Instead of images of post-war Germans in despair, every year the Soviet media republished photographic accounts of the heroic conquest of Berlin. In the narrative of the main exhibition in Moscow in 1948, *The Great War of the Fatherland and Artistic Photography*, as well as in subsequent Soviet photo books of the Second World War, Berlin remained the trophy of the heroic war against German Fascism.[22] In other words, Soviet Berlin (in contrast, as we shall see, to America's Berlin) was visually frozen in the moment of triumphalist subjugation. On the other hand, amateur photographs by

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20 See, for example, Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Fond 2581, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 118–141: Lazar Bernshtein, Zapisnye knishki s dnevnikovymi zapisyami, 1933–1960; Dnevnikovye zapiski o poezdke v Germaniyu, 7 March 1945. V. Grossman, *A Writer at War. Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945*, ed. and transl. by A. Beevor / L. Vinogradova, London 2006; see also

the important collection of war-time letters by Red Army soldiers, E. Scherstjanoi (ed.), *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland. Briefe von der Front 1945*, Munich 2004.

21 V. Barykin, «Berlin», in: *Ogonyok* 5 (February 1946).

22 See, for example, M. Trachman, *1418 dnei*, Moscow 1968.

Figure 3: Vladmir Gelfand in front of the Reichstag (25 August 1946)
Photo: Vladimir Gelfand

Figure 4: Prenzlauer Allee (1946)
Photo: Vladimir Gelfand

Soviet officers or civilians in post-war Berlin that have showed up in private collections in recent years depict not only the extent of destruction and defeat, but also, occasionally, cordial interactions with the civilian population in the everyday life of the city (fig. 3, 4).[23]

The elegiac gaze at ruins

There are few pictures of the end of the war in Berlin taken by professional or amateur German photographers.[24] If the notion of *Stunde Null* (introduced by the neo-realist Italian film *Germany Year Zero* by Roberto Rossellini in 1947, which was set in Berlin and incorporated documentary film material of the ruined cityscape) has any meaning, then for German visual memories of the end of war. Many German photographers were deployed with propaganda companies of the Wehrmacht and had not yet returned to the city. German-Jewish photographers like Abraham Pisarek, Eva Kemlein or Fritz Eschen had barely survived Nazi persecution and were still in hiding. Others buried their cameras shortly before the end of the war and could only begin taking pictures with them again during the

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23 See, for example, the amateur photographs by Boris Tartakovsky (author's collection), who worked for the Soviet military government in post-war Berlin and by Vladimir Gelfand (Vitali Gelfand collection; www.gelfand.de), who also wrote an eloquent diary of his experiences in Germany. I wish to thank Alexander Tartakovsky and Vitali

Gelfand for making these photographs available for this article.

24 The forthcoming study by M. Otte, *Autofocus: Photography and Self-Reflection in East and West Germany*, explores the absence of Nazi defeat in German family photo albums from the 1940s.

Figure 5: Pieces of the monument of Friedrich Wilhelm III, Lustgarten, Summer 1945
Photo: Willi Saeger, © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz

course of the summer, when they obtained supplies on the black market (supplies that were amply available to Allied photojournalists). Furthermore, the Nazis had forbidden photographs of the social chaos at the end of the war as well as images of the devastating results of the air raids. During the initial weeks of the Soviet occupation, authorities ordered that all cameras should be turned in. For a few weeks, taking photographs continued to be dangerous for German civilians. As a result, most of the existing pictures of German defeat were taken by the Allies – for the same reason that the only images of the final and systematic destruction of Warsaw in November 1944 were taken by Germans.[25]

Early post-war images by German photographers exhibit a marked allegorical tendency. In the photographs of Friedrich Seidenstücker, Willi Saeger and Willy Römer, to name a few, the defeat and destruction of the city appears as an ancient, far-away world, like the ruins of Pompey (fig. 5). An elegiac aesthetic reminiscent of the images of romanticist, post-revolutionary paintings, in particular the work of Caspar David Friedrich, pervades their photographs, even in the rare cases where human figures are included. (A similar allegorical tendency can be discerned in German novels from the immediate post-war period, such as Hermann Kasack's *Stadt hinter dem Strom* or Ernst Jünger's *Heliopolis: Rückblick auf eine Stadt*.)[26] It is important to note that most of these images were not published at

25 See, for example, J. J. Heydecker, *Die Stille der Steine. Warschau im November 1944*, Berlin 1994.

26 This sparked the criticism of W. G. Sebald, who claimed in *On the Natural History of Destruction* (2003) that post-war German writers omitted the experience of urban destruction in their writings.

the time. However, this gazing at ruins was so predominant in German photography in 1945/46 that it constitutes a distinctive photographic genre, the so-called *Ruinenfotografie*. These elegiac images of ruins have been interpreted recently by cultural historians as a visual denial of German responsibility for Nazi crimes.[27] To be sure, these images are indeed very different from Allied atrocity photography. Still, it is remarkable that the most prominent German *Ruinenfotografen* were not Nazi or even Wehrmacht photographers, but rather representatives of Weimar culture who had been forced to stop working during the Third Reich. August Sander, for example, whose work was banned by the Nazis and whose son died in prison, spent the post-war years obsessively photographing the ruins of Cologne. Seidenstücker and Römer, who did the same in Berlin, had been socially engaged chroniclers of everyday life in the modern metropolis before 1933. This makes the fact all the more striking that social life and human figures are largely absent from their post-war photography. Their images of ruins were not commercially successful. Only a small fraction of this material has been published posthumously since the 1980s; most of it remains unexplored in private or commercial collections.[28]

In contrast, photographers who were more committed to the visual propaganda of the Third Reich, such as Hilmar Pabel, Hanns Hubmann or Gerhard Gronefeld, had no difficulties adjusting in 1945 and soon published their work on post-war Berlin on both sides during the early cold war, even in *Life*.[29] Moreover, visual documentation of the devastating effects of allied bombing campaigns against German cities was censored by Nazi authorities. Reports in Nazi newspapers and magazines about Allied bombings, for example, rarely included photographic images of the ruins (despite the Nazi leadership's fascination with imperial

On the ensuing debate see A. Huyssen, «Rewritings and New Beginnings: W. G. Sebald and the Literature on the Air War», in: Idem, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford 2003, 138–157.

27 J. Glasenapp, «Nach dem Brand. Überlegungen zur deutschen Trümmerfotografie», in: *Fotogeschichte* 24 (2004), 47–64, 48. Glasenapp's argument is based on the analysis of two post-war photoessays: H. Claasen, *Gesang im Feuerofen* (1947) and R. Peter, *Dresden – eine Kamera klagt an* (1949). For more nuanced accounts of postwar German photography see L. Derenthal, *Bilder der Trümmer- und Aufbaujahre. Fotografie im sich teilenden Deutschland*, Marburg 1999; and J. Jäger, «Fotografie – Erinnerung – Identität. Die Trümmeraufnahmen aus deutschen Städten 1945», in: J. Hillmann et al. (eds.), *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, Munich 2002, 287–300.

28 A. Sander, *Die Zerstörung Kölns. Photographien 1945–1946*, Munich 1985; F. Seidenstücker, *Von*

Weimar bis zum Ende. Fotografien aus bewegter Zeit, Dortmund 1980; D. Kerbs (ed.), *Der Fotograf Willy Römer 1887–1979. Auf den Strassen von Berlin*, Berlin 2005. I am grateful to Diethart Kerbs and the Agentur für Bilder zur Zeitgeschichte for making Römer's post-war photographs available to me.

29 Gronefeld, who photographed Nazi rule in Eastern Europe as a member of a Wehrmacht propaganda unit, did his first post-war photo-reportage in July 1945 on returning Jewish survivors in Berlin. He published several photo-essays for *Life* between 1946 and 1949, starting with «The Death Walk – German Acrobats Do Stunts Above the City», 1 July 1946. Since the 1950s he focused on animal and nature photography like many other German war photographers. See the interview by D. Kerbs, «‹Da kommen Menschen zu Tode.› Ein Gespräch mit Gerhard Gronefeld über die Geisel-Exekution 1941 und seine Tätigkeit als Kriegsberichterstatter», in: *Fotogeschichte* 4 (1984) 13, 51–64.

ruins[30]), but strikingly they often featured medieval drawings of the intact city-scape. If shown at all, photographs of city ruins displayed the resilience of the civilian population, of civil defence and moral resourcefulness, in spite of the «barbaric» terror attacks. The visual narrative of these Nazi reports has more in common with cold-war photographic accounts of Berlin as a *Frontstadt* than with the melancholic gazing at ruins in the immediate post-war period.[31]

For this reason, I would argue that the elegiac narrative in early German post-war photography was a specific way of coping with the after-shocks of German defeat and the destruction of German cities. It reflected a particular aesthetic distance from the Nazi past as well as from Allied atrocity propaganda.[32] This changed during the early years of the cold war, in particular during the Airlift in 1947/48. The resilient city (and not the ruins) became the dominant theme of visual representations of Berlin – in contrast to Cologne or Dresden – by (now West) German and, as we shall see, British and American photographers.[33]

The ethnographic gaze with an emphasis on suffering and strategies of survival
In contrast to Soviet war photographers, the Americans and British came to Berlin when the war was over. They did not experience German occupation and genocidal warfare between the Elbe and Volga rivers first-hand. To be sure, there was also a clear sense of revenge in the early American and British imagery of defeated Germany (as in Soviet photography), for example in the shockingly new aerial photographs of razed German cities (famously by Bourke-White), portrait pictures of German prisoners of war or of dead local Nazis who had committed suicide with their families in the last days of the war. As in Soviet photography, the destroyed Reichskanzlei (and, to a lesser degree, the Reichstag) were initially preferred subjects in British and American photographic accounts of Hitler's Berlin in ruins (fig. 6). But while atrocity propaganda still defined the image of Germans among the American and British public in the spring of 1945, this changed over the course of that year. The result was a kind of visual denazification: Nazi Germans became Germans again.[34] An ethnographic gaze at life among the ruins of Berlin, I would

30   J. Hell, «Imperial Ruin Gazers, or Why did Scipio Weep?», in: J. Hell / A. Schönle (eds.), *Ruins of Modernity*, Durham 2010, 169–192.

31   See, for example, the photo-essays «Nach dem Terrorangriff», in: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 25 February 1943, «Britische Bomber greifen an», in: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 27 May 1943, «Ruinen klagen an», in: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 30 September 1943, «Berlin improvisiert», in: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 10 August 1944, «Front-Stadt Köln», in: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 16 November 1944. On Nazi visual propaganda see, for example, R. Rutz, *Signal. Eine deutsche Auslandsil-* *lustrierte als Propagandainstrument im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Essen 2007.

32   See, Jäger, «Trümmeraufnahmen». On the failure of Allied atrocity propaganda for German re-education, see Brink, Ikonen der Vernichtung.

33   See, for example, the photobook by H.-U. Wieselmann, *Unsterbliches Berlin*, Berlin 1948.

34   This is one of Barnouw's findings in *Germany 1945*, although it contradicts her main argument that Allied photographers (contrary to German photographers) did not capture post-war German suffering.

Figure 6: Sergeant R. S. Baker of the Army Film & Photographic Unit (AFPU)
looks at a fallen Nazi eagle and swastika amidst the ruins of Hitler's Reich
Chancellery, 3 July 1945

Photo: No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit Hewitt (Sergeant) © Imperial War Museum

argue, figured prominently in this shift from punitive to compassionate images of post-war Germans. For American photographers, Berlin became the visual short-hand for the pity of war and for the resilience of civic life.

With this shift, the motifs informing the photographs also changed. Images of concentration camps and portraits of unrepentant Nazi leaders and the wealth they had accumulated throughout Europe were replaced by images of German women with children, often interacting on friendly terms with Allied (British, American *and* Soviet) soldiers. These images of the «culture of defeat» (Wolfgang Schivelbusch) captured suffering as well as strategies of survival. While they were initially often juxtaposed with captions that emphasised German responsibility for Nazi crimes, these captions were eventually dropped. Instead, an emphasis on the resilience of the civilian population and the surprising return to urban life shaped American and British imagery of post-war Berlin. This holds true for amateur photography by Allied troops and civilians employed in the occupied city,[35] but also and even more so for American and British photojournalists who

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35 See Alliierten Museum Berlin (ed.), *Berlin 1945.*
Der private Blick. Fotografien amerikanischer,
britischer und französischer Soldaten, Berlin 2005.

Figure 7: «Return to Berlin. German Child Remembers What Air Raids Were Like» (Life Magazine, 11 November 1946)
Photo: Walter Sanders
© Life Magazine

Figure 8: «Berlin under Siege. Out of the City's Ruin and Frustration a Strong New Spirit Rises and Challenges the West to Hold its Military and Moral Position», July 1948 (Life Magazine, 19 July 1948)
Photo: Walter Sanders
© Life Magazine

came to Berlin between 1945 and 1948. Post-war Berlin features prominently in the works of well-known war correspondents such as Bourke-White, Capa, Seymour, Leonard McCombe and Lee Miller. Several, like Henry Ries or Walter Sanders, returned to their native city wearing American uniforms. Sanders' photoreportage «The Road Back to Berlin» in *Life* (11 November 1946), for example, depicted images of a German boy vividly remembering the air raids (fig. 7) placed side by side with an image of a German *Fräulein* enjoying the afternoon sun at one of the reopened cafés on Berlin's fashionable Kurfürstendamm. There were also increasingly socio-critical photographs of the humanitarian crisis in post-war Germany, images of hunger, deprivation and wayward adolescents, and beginning in 1947/48, images of a return to modest consumption and islands of domesticity and peace in the midst of destruction.[36] In *Life*, these documentary images of post-war poverty in Europe were often visually juxtaposed with American abundance, for example, in advertisements for American consumers. This visual denazification is epitomised in images of the Airlift in 1947/48 (by Ries, Sanders and others) which showed German women and children looking to the sky, full of hope, at their American saviours – the same inhabitants of German cities whose loyalty to the Nazi regime only a few years earlier was supposed to be broken through aerial warfare (fig. 8).
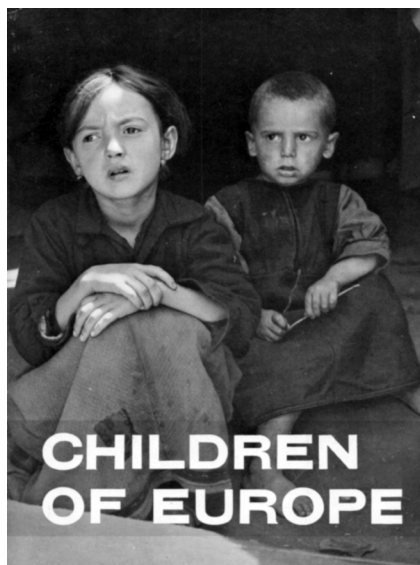
4. The Politics of Pity

For Soviet photographers (and diarists), whose country had been devastated by Nazi Germany and who had witnessed genocidal warfare, the destruction of German cities was regarded as a justified form of retribution, especially given the fact that the Germans they encountered at the end of the war were always better nourished, better dressed and possessed more material wealth than their own families had ever had. The gesture of heroic triumph over a deadly enemy continued to inform Soviet visual representations of Berlin in 1945, despite the official propaganda about a German–Soviet friendship, which was inaugurated immediately after the war. Images of the increasingly peaceful interactions and entanglements in 1945/46 between Soviet troops and German civilians (taken mainly by British and American photographers) were at first a nuisance for the phobias of Stalinist authorities and were later conveniently silenced on both sides during the cold war. They did not enter German or Soviet visual memories of the end of war.

The shock over life in a post-catastrophic metropolis was, in contrast, the privilege of American and British photographers who had not experienced first-hand the war of extermination in the East. Their photographs reflected the emergence of a new kind of compassionate gaze that has become the dominant form of war

36 Similarly, for this shift in British visual representations of post-war Germany see M. Caiger-Smith, *The Face of the Enemy. British Photographers in Germany 1944–1952*, London 1988.

Comme cadre : un amas de ruines. Comme jouets : des instruments de mort.
Our playground : ruins. Our toys : shell-cases and bombs.
Jugamos entre las ruinas. Nuestros juguetes son cajas de municiones y bombas.

photojournalism up to the present day. Ironically, for Western photographers (and media) it was demolished and occupied post-war Germany and not the desolate death zone left by Nazi rule in Eastern Europe – that is, Berlin rather than Warsaw, Kiev or Minsk – that became the visual shorthand for the pity of war, a war that had ostensibly destroyed the principles of civilisation. The central paradox for the Allies in post-war Germany was that they expected to find a populace of fanatical Nazis and violent insurgents, and what they actually encountered was a people who were sick of war, contemptuous of the ruling elite that had led them into disaster and who were initially complacent about the realities of occupation. To the Western Allies, Soviet lawlessness against the defeated soon appeared to be a greater threat than the feminised imagery of the former enemy. In American and British visual experiences, German women and children in particular became passive victims of the war, an attribution that Germans soon assumed for themselves – politically, but also visually in the photographs of everyday life in post-war Berlin, for example, by Gronefeld.[37]

The compassionate imagery of Germans as victims of Nazi and Soviet rule was in many ways the product of American and British experiences in post-war and early cold-war Germany and of everyday encounters and entanglements on a local

37 See G. Gronefeld, *Frauen in Berlin 1945–1947*, ed. by A. Tröger, Berlin 1984. This feminised notion of German victimhood gained dominance in 1950s West Germany. See, E. Heineman, «The Hour of the Woman. Memories of the German's ‹Crisis Years› and West German National Identity», in: *American Historical Review* 101 (1996), 354–395.

Figure 9 a–b (left page):
«Our playground: ruins.
Our toys: shell-cases and bombs.»,
Front cover and page from David Seymour,
Children of Europe
(Paris: Unesco, 1949).

Figure 10:
«Who is on my side? Who? II. Kings 9:32»,
Center: South Africa, Photo: Homer Page,
Left: Indonesia, Photo: John Florea Life,
Right: Germany, Photographer unkown
AP; from: Edward Steichen,
The Family of Man (New York: MoMa, 1955),
171
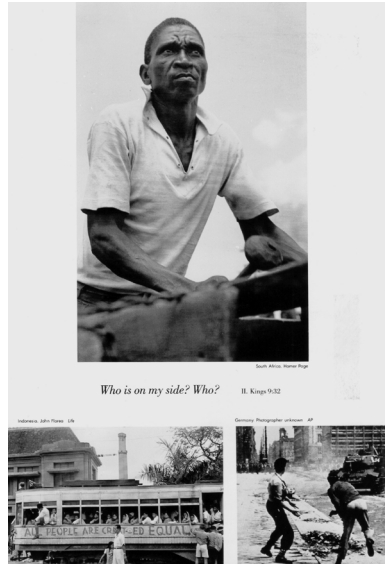
level. In the aftermath of the war, American photojournalism in particular trans-
formed, at first reluctantly, the former *Reichshauptstadt* into «America's Berlin»,
a dramatic reversal that has already been described by cultural historians, but with-
out taking documentary photography into account.[38] However misguided the
visual representations of Germans as victims of Nazi and Soviet rule may appear
to us today, it was, I would argue, precisely this humanitarian sentiment evident in
American photographic accounts of post-war Berlin that contributed to the rapid
transition from punitive occupation to political alignment.

This humanitarian sentiment is even more apparent in other photographic
projects of the post-war period, for example in David Seymour's *Children of Europe*
(Paris, 1949), prepared for the newly founded UNESCO, which depicted the uni-
versal suffering of children in post-war Europe without making distinctions such
as providing explanatory captions about the date and location of the photographs
or the nationality of the children (fig. 9).[39] It is also apparent in the most success-
ful photographic exhibition of the cold war, *The Family of Man*, which opened at
the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955 and had its European debut in

38 See A. W. Daum, «America's Berlin 1945–2000.
Between Myths and Visions», in: F. Trommler
(ed.), *Berlin. The New Capital in the East. A Transat-
lantic Appraisal*, Washington, DC 2000, 49–73;
more generally: P. Goedde, *GIs and Germans. Cul-
ture, Gender, and Foreign Relations 1945–1949*, New
Haven/CT 2002; both follow the argument laid
out first by A. Iriye, «Culture and Power: Interna-

tional Relations as Intercultural Relations», in:
Diplomatic History 3 (1979), 115–128.
39 For more on post-war humanitarianism and its
particular focus on the fate of European children,
see T. Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing
Europe's Families after World War II*, Cambridge/
Mass. 2011.

West Berlin in the same year. 44.000 visitors viewed the exhibition during its 25-day run in Berlin, many of whom (including Bertolt Brecht) came from the Eastern part of the ideologically, but not yet physically divided city. The exhibition not only contained the now well-established imagery of a German child with satchel, walking home from school among the ruins, but also a picture of Berlin youths facing a Soviet tank, taken by Wolfang Albrecht at the uprising on 17 June 1953 against Communist rule (published by the *New York Times* four days later). This image was placed next to photographs of human and civil rights struggles in South Africa and Indonesia (fig. 10), thereby suggesting that post-war Germans, black South Africans and Indonesians under colonial rule were all fighting for the same universal rights.

The exhibition subsequently travelled around the globe and had been seen by more than nine million visitors by 1962. It was shown in Moscow's Sokolniki Park at a time when Stalinist photography was officially criticised for its pompous and staged picture style. During the Thaw, documentary photography or eyewitness reportage was privileged instead.[40] In this regard, *The Family of Man* offered an alternative photographic style to official Soviet (and East German) photography.[41] With *The Family of Man*, the socially engaged and compassionate documentary photographic style of the 1930s and 1940s reached its climax. Many of the contributing photographers, including the organiser Edward Steichen, had served as war correspondents in Europe; several, like Capa and Seymour, were now reporting about the wars of decolonisation in Africa and Asia. The main trajectory of the exhibition, as Steichen explained in his call for exhibition photographs in 1954, was to search for images that express the universal through the individual and the particular: «It is essential to keep in mind the universal elements and aspects of human relationships and the experiences common to all mankind rather than situations that represent conditions exclusively related or peculiar to a race, an event, a time, or a place.»[42] *The Family of Man* was hence part and parcel of the mid-century search for a new universal morality – and photography seemed to provide its lingua franca. As critics of post-war photography like Roland Barthes or Susan Sontag have stressed, «by purporting to show that individuals are born, work, laugh, and die everywhere in the same way, *The Family of Man* denied the determining weight of history – of genuine and historically embedded differences,

40 S. E. Reid, «Photography in the Thaw», in: *Art Journal* 53 (1994), 33–39, 33.

41 A. Ihle, «Wandering the Streets of Socialism. A Discussion of the Street Photography of Arno Fischer and Ursula Arnold», in: D. Crowley / S. E. Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces. Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, Oxford 2002, 95; Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, Ch. 7. Picturing Privacy: Photography and Domesticity, Oxford 2010; On the subversive implications of the imagery of ruins for the representational cosmos of socialism during the 1950s see David Crowley's contribution in this issue.

42 Cited in E. J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition. The Family of Man and 1950s America*, Albuquerque 1995, 167. See also B. Stimson, *The Pivot of the World. Photography and Its Nation*, Cambridge 2006.

injustices, and conflicts.»[43] Documentary photography was especially prone to the rise of this humanitarian morality and the emphasis on distant suffering that began with a compassionate gaze at Europeans, including Germans, as examples of the pity of war. We encounter similar depoliticised photographic imagery of distant human suffering in the wars of decolonisation and post-colonial conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s (like the photographs by Don McCullin of the starving children of Biafra or the refugees in Bangladesh), which have ultimately merged into contemporary Western notions of humanitarian emergencies.[44]

43 Sontag, *On Photography*, 33; S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York 2003; R. Barthes, «Le grande famille des hommes», in: Idem, *Mythologies*, Paris 1957. See also L. Boltanski, *Distant Suffering. Morality, Media and Politics*, Cambridge 1999, who – following Arendt– makes the impor-

tant distinction between compassion, which is linked to presence and thereby apparently local, and pity, which generalises and integrates the dimension of distance.

44 D. Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present*, Berkeley 2011.

Gazing at Ruins: German Defeat as Visual Experience

ABSTRACTS

This essay explores documentary photography and, by way of comparison, diary-writing as the most common social practices for registering experiences of German defeat in 1945. Berlin witnessed one of the last gruesome battles of the war in Europe and the only one – with the exceptions of Stalingrad and Warsaw – where a major city became a battle-field. Soviet and German troops suffered more than 240.000 casualties in the space of only three weeks. More German civilians died during these last weeks of the war than during the entire bombing campaign against the city. The shattered capital of the Nazi empire was a war trophy for the Allies and subsequently became the social laboratory for the post-war international order. By moving beyond an exploration of visual propaganda, the main claim is that visual experiences in the wake of war constituted distinctive ways of making sense of defeat, destruction, and desolation. Finally, the paper will investigate how different modes of the photographic gaze at ruins shaped the «politics of pity» in the early cold-war years.

ABSTRACTS

Der Blick auf Ruinen:
Die deutsche Kriegsniederlage als visuelle Erfahrung

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht Dokumentarfotografie (im Vergleich zum Tagebuchschrei-ben) als weitverbreitete soziale Praxis, um die Erfahrungen der deutschen Nieder-lage 1945 festzuhalten. Berlin erlebte eine der letzten grausamen Schlachten des Krieges in Europa, die einzige – mit Ausnahme von Stalingrad und Warschau –in der eine Großstadt selbst zum Schlachtfeld wurde. Innerhalb von nur drei Wochen erlit-ten sowjetische und deutsche Truppen Verluste von mehr als 240.000 Soldaten. In diesen letzten Wochen des Krieges starben mehr deutsche Zivilisten als während des gesamten Bombenkrieges gegen die Stadt. Für die Alliierten war die zerstörte Hauptstadt des Nazireichs eine Kriegstrophäe, die anschließend zum sozialen Laboratorium für die internationale Ordnung der Nachkriegszeit wurde. Der Aufsatz geht über die Untersuchung visueller Propaganda hinaus und zielt vor allem darauf ab, zu zeigen, wie unterschiedlich die visuellen Erfahrungen von Niederlage, Zerstö-rung und Verwüstung ausfielen. Schließlich wird analysiert, wie die verschiedenen Arten des fotografischen Blicks auf Ruinen die «Politik des Mitleids» in den ersten Jahren des Kalten Krieges geformt und beeinflusst haben.

Contempler les ruines:
la défaite allemande en tant qu'expérience visuelle.

Cet article étudie la photographie documentaire en la comparant à l'écriture de journaux intimes en tant que pratique sociale la plus fréquente pour enregistrer les expériences de la défaite allemande de 1945. Berlin fut témoin d'une des dernières batailles les plus destructrices de la guerre en Europe, et la seule – à l'exception de Stalingrad et de Varsovie – où une grande ville fut transformée en champ de bataille. En seulement trois semaines, les troupes soviétiques et alle-mandes subirent des pertes dépassant les 240.000 hommes. Au cours de ces dernières semaines de la guerre, plus de civils allemands moururent que pendant toute la campagne de bombardement contre la cité. Pour les Alliés, la capitale dév-astée du IIIe Reich fut un trophée de guerre et devint ultérieurement le laboratoire social de l'ordre international de l'après-guerre. En allant au-delà de l'examen de la propagande visuelle, l'article souhaite avant tout démontrer que l'expérience visuelle de la défaite, la destruction et la désolation au lendemain de la guerre pou-vait prendre des formes très différentes. Enfin, l'article examine comment différents modes du regard photographique portant sur des ruines façonnaient les «poli-tiques de la pitié» dans les premières années de la Guerre froide.

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