Cinema and Berlin's Spectacle of Destruction: The 'Ruin' Film, 1945–50
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Cinema and Berlin's Spectacle of Destruction
The 'Ruin' Film, 1945–50

Ralph Stern

The new reality. The sign of our time is the ruin. She surrounds our life. She lines the streets of our cities. She is our reality. In her burned-out façades blooms not the blue flower of the Romantics but the demonical spirit of destruction, collapse and Apocalypse. The ruin is the outer sign of the inner insecurity of the people of our age. The ruin lives in us as we live in her. She is our new reality, one which wants to be designed.

Hans Werner Richter [1]
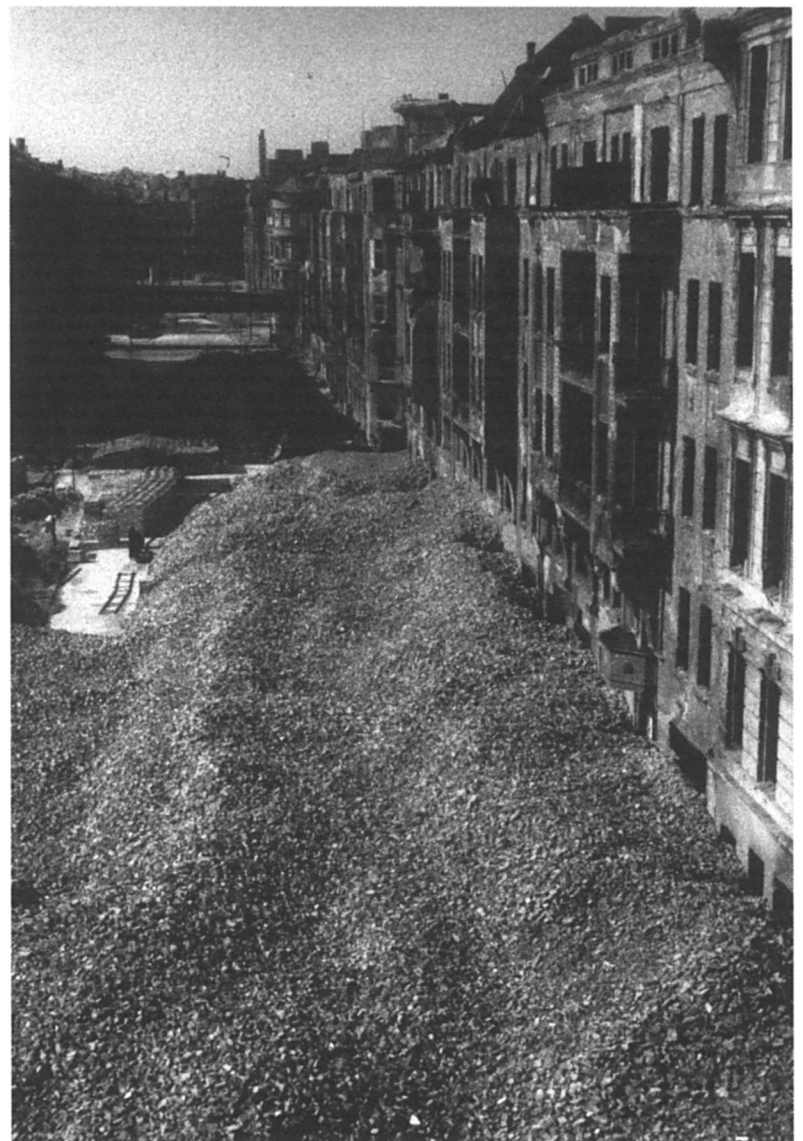
Figures 1 & 2 (courtesy of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, DHM): The destruction in the inner-city areas of Berlin was immense. On the left, a woman wearing a gas mask flees with a pram past the Gloria Palast, one of the city's major cinemas. Carrying the Ufa sign, the frontage advertises Hans Zerlett's *Reise in die Vergangenheit* (1943) (*Journey into the Past*).
On the right, a rubble-filled street with evidence of early postwar salvage operations (in the centre left of the image).

Architecture, Destruction and Visual Culture

The destruction of New York's World Trade Center brought with it unprecedented coverage of both the unfolding tragedy and the aftermath of cleanup and recovery. Images of these events have already become markers of a particular historical moment, serving as constitutive elements of an 'urban imaginary' specific to New York and underlining the vulnerability of any great city. As documents of conflict, they will take their place alongside other images of tragic, large-scale urban destruction, such as London during the Blitz, the levelling of Rotterdam and Warsaw, and the erasure of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Each of these might be considered a site which the French historian Pierre Nora has termed *un lieu de mémoire;* a site of memory where, in these instances, place and image are fused.

To this list must be added Germany's major metropolitan centres destroyed during the Second World War. However, unlike New York, London or Warsaw, Germany's devastated cities elicited little sympathy from the victorious Allies. Conceived of in British circles as a war of terror against a civilian population, the air war was deemed a justifiable act of retribution against a ruthlessly aggressive opponent.[2] By the close of the war, the scale of destruction inflicted by the Allies was immense: of Germany's 19 million homes, one quarter were destroyed. Cities were filled with 400 million cubic metres of rubble, creating an 'everyday psychotopography of German cities [...] dominated by ruins'.[3] Housing the psychological trauma of those who had experienced the destruction, this topography also had a distinctive ethical dimension. For Germans, their ruined cities symbolised a profound social and moral collapse; they were the 'moral ruins' of National Socialism. As a topography of moral debris, the ruins carried a unique metaphorical charge; one that would be deployed in the various social and political discourses seeking alignment with the new regimes of either East or West. Germany's ruined cities can therefore be seen both as an emotionally charged psycho-topography and as a potentially explosive ideological terrain, the ground on which the Cold War would later be fought.

To the psychological and ideological connotations of the topography of ruins a third dimension must be added, one of particular interest within the realm of urbanism and urban representation. In many respects the topography of ruins fulfilled the utopian dream of the dissolution of the city: the *Auflösung der Städte* that architects such as Bruno Taut had formulated. For those architects belonging to earlier expressionist utopian movements rejecting 'cities of stone', the destruction of war inadvertently offered the possibility of a radically new and 'democratic' urban landscape (*Stadtlandschaft*) liberated from the confining scale of the medieval city and rigid structure of the nineteenth-century perimeter block. In this vision, buildings, like individuals, were to stand free in the *Stadtlandschaft*. These were the *Träume in Trümmern*, the 'dreams in the ruins' dominating much postwar architectural discourse.[4] Comprising stark silhouettes, freestanding façades devoid of ornament and a ground plane defined by a rolling, landscape-like topography of rubble, urban ruins evoked a distinctive visual and spatial regimen that in many respects resembled the ideals of modern architecture. Therefore, despite their associations with hardship and tragedy, these traits lent the urban ruins of postwar Germany a dual resonance understood either as a condition of retribution and destruction or as the promise of reconstruction and moral rebirth; a promise rejecting the ordered, monumental and repressive systems of representation associated with fascism and the National Socialist state.

Removed from fascist codings, the topography of urban ruins lent itself to representational systems ranging from expressionism to neorealism, thereby linking the liberating aspects of early twentieth-century utopianism with those of mid-century modernism. And, although all of Germany was in a state of ruin, the specific intersection of the psychological, the ideological and the representational (whether urban, architectural or cinematic) was nowhere more apparent than in the physical, and very contested, terrain of Berlin. While other German cities suffered a greater percentage of destruction, Berlin lost the greatest number of structures. The statistics are staggering: of its 248,000 buildings, 28,000 were destroyed, another 20,000 were completely beyond repair and a further 178,000 were damaged. In 1945 Berlin was a city in which one could travel for kilometres and see nothing but ruins.

Berlin: 'Illusions in Stone' and the Theatre of War

A little more than a decade before the end of the war, Albert Speer, Hitler's personal architect, had developed a 'Theory of Ruin Value' (*Theorie vom Ruinenwert*) which in its essentials followed Gottfried Semper's views on the value of natural material, particularly stone.[5] To illustrate this point, two picturesque paintings of the ruins of the Roman Forum by the eighteenth-century painter Hubert Robert were hung in the cabinet room of Speer's new chancellery.[6] The construction site of the chancellery itself was the subject of two paintings by Paul Hermann, which served as colour illustrations in Speer's sumptuous publication *Die neue Reichskanzlei*. First published in 1940, this monograph from the NSDAP Press had reached its third printing, with a total run of 40,000 copies, by 1942. Architecture, together with its illustration and dissemination, was clearly central to the programmatic efforts of the Third Reich to synthesise and control all areas of visual culture. Whether as 'illusions in stone' or as the 'architecture of light' used by Speer in staging party rallies, cinematic efforts were deployed less for purposes of entertainment or historical documentation than as active agents in the construction of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which stagecraft and statecraft were ultimately synonymous.[7] Coupling ideological goals with modernist technologies appropriate for mass consumption, this culture reached its apotheosis in the medium of film.[8] Incorporating and subverting the resources of Weimar's progressive film industry, the Third Reich transformed Berlin into the heart of a propaganda machine that created its own cinematic regimen and successfully perpetuated this 'scopic regime' to the very end. Already in the first weeks after Hitler's ascension to power, Joseph Goebbels, Germany's Minister of Propaganda and the man responsible for the Reich's film production, 'placed a determined value on synthesising all the possibilities of propaganda into a singular effect'.[9] Supporting these efforts, films such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1934) fused the architecture and choreography of Albert Speer with the technology of montage to produce vast spectacles of power.[10] Such an intertwining of politics, architecture and film prompted the film historian Anton Kaes to deliver a biting indictment of the Third Reich's politics of film, writing of 'Germany as the location, Hitler as the producer, Goebbels and his officers as directors and stars, Albert Speer as set designer, and the rest of the population as extras'.[11] Even in the closing hours

of Berlin's rule, this endeavour never diminished in importance. As the Russians were almost within firing range of Berlin, Goebbels addressed a group of colleagues with the following challenge:

> Gentlemen, in a hundred years' time they will be showing a fine colour film of the terrible days we are living through. Wouldn't you like to play a part in that film? Hold out now, so that a hundred years hence, the audience will not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.[12]

Under the auspices of the Third Reich, war, destruction and cinema were fused into a seamless whole; a whole in which everyone had to literally play a part. In the 'ruin' films of the immediate postwar era, such a synthesis was neither possible nor desirable: no one wished to admit having played a role in this particular spectacle, one in which the props as well as the actors had become suspect.

Berlin: From 'Großstadt' to Graveyard

In 1927 Walther Ruttmann directed his seminal *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. The film opens with a sequence depicting the arrival in Berlin by train. To the tempo of its great engines, the train travels first through suburbs, then approaches the city centre and finally enters the dark womb-like enclosure of Anhalter Bahnhof. Disembarking passengers pass through the interior of the station, emerging as the newborn citizens of a great modern metropolis. The flickering light of the city is analogous to the flickering light of its cinematic representation. A decade later, in the opening minutes of *Olympia: Festival of the People* (1936), Riefenstahl linked Berlin more to antiquity than modernity, depicting the athletes of ancient Greece (born of stone) traversing the route northwards to Berlin. Continuing in Berlin with an aerial shot reminiscent of *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl's camera slowly circles Werner March's new Olympic Stadium before descending to the 'parade of nations' executed under the approving gaze of *Volk* and *Führer*. In *Olympia* the steel of the modern train station and the fragmented activities of the modern metropolis evident in Ruttmann's *Symphony* are replaced with the stone of the (ancient) stadium and the collective experience of a people united in spirit and purpose. Fast-forwarding another ten years to Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers Are Among Us* (1946), we are confronted with a double opening. The first sequence depicts a once-metropolitan city now littered with the debris of war: the shell of a tank, a makeshift grave, dirty children playing in front of an improvised honky-tonk. Coming towards us is a lone figure with a wild stare, a soldier in a shabby civilian coat, returning to Berlin. The second sequence once again uses the device of a train on its way to one of Berlin's stations. Reversing Ruttmann's *Symphony*, this train, teeming with refugees, arrives in a severely damaged station as cripples crowd past an outdated travel poster announcing *Das schöne Deutschland* ('beautiful Germany'). Four cinematic sequences in three films, each constructed a decade apart, depict the transformation of Berlin from a world city to a world without apparent hope. Regarding the Berlin of 1945, contemporary descriptions confirm that this was no cinematic invention:

> Slowly our train wound its way through Friedrichsfelde towards Lichtenberg. It was an infernal picture. Fire, rubble, ghostly

starving people in rags. Lost German soldiers who no longer knew what was happening. Red Army soldiers singing, celebrating and often drunk. Long lines of people patiently waiting in front of water pumps in order to fill small containers. All looked terribly tired, hungry, exhausted and decrepit.[13]

Willy Brandt, who was to become mayor of Berlin before becoming chancellor of West Germany, recounted that:

> Craters, caves, mountains of rubble, debris-covered fields, ruins that hardly allowed one to imagine that they had once been houses, cables and water pipes projecting from the ground like the mangled bowels of antediluvian monsters, no fuel, no light, every little garden a grave-yard and, above all, like an immovable cloud, the stink of putrefaction. In this no man's land lived human beings.[14]

Hans Speier, also returning to Berlin in 1945, told of similar scenes:

> Anything human among these indescribable ruins must exist in an unknown form. There remains nothing human about it. The water is polluted, it smells of corpses, you see the most extraordinary shapes of ruins and more ruins and still more ruins; houses, streets and districts in ruins. All people in civilian clothes among these mountains of ruins appear to merely deepen the nightmare.[15]

If the relationship between the city and cinema can be considered as one in which social realities can be both depicted and constructed, what, then, was the social reality of this nightmare of indescribable ruins, and what might comprise its relationship to cinema?

'They Ought to Scrape It Plum Clean'

For film directors such as Roberto Rossellini, renowned for his portrayal of Italian life under German occupation in *Rome: Open City* (1945), Berlin was a shattered city. Made in 1947 under the working title *Berlin: Year Zero* (later *Germany: Year Zero*), Rossellini's film paints a bleak picture of a city populated by 'rubble women' (*Trümmerfrauen*), the helpless and hapless elderly, and traumatised veterans. It is a city in which the ruins teem with rats, women selling themselves and children orphaned by the generation that has failed to provide them with a future. His depictions capture well the 'kaleidoscope of suffering' in the metropolis as the 'place without hope' that also characterised the postwar German ruin film.[16] As the camera unflinchingly pans across scenes of devastation, a recorded speech by Hitler promising the Germans a victorious future echoes from a gramophone in the great gallery, now bare, of Speer's chancellery, the emptiness of the gallery analogous to the vacuous flourishes of fascist rhetoric.[17] The record is sold as a souvenir to British soldiers, with the ruins of Hitler's bunker serving as background for snapshots of the occupying forces as tourists in an apocalyptic land.[18]

In contradistinction to the neorealism of the Rossellini film, Staudte's *The Murderers Are Among Us* depicts Berlin in a neo-expressionist idiom, emphasising the ghostly shapes of the ruins through dramatic angle shots or night-time illumination.[19] Opening with the title card '*Berlin 1945 – Die Stadt hat kapituliert*' ('the city has

Figures 3 & 4 (courtesy of the DHM): Destruction of major cultural and civic structures was devastating. Above, a view of Berlin's Gendarmenmarkt, with the shells of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Schauspielhaus and Carl von Gontard's Französische Dom. Below, a view across Berlin's denuded Tiergarten towards Paul Wallot's Reichstag. Already devastated by the infamous fire of 1933, the Reichstag was used as a fortified position by the German military in the final days of the war, thereby suffering substantial further damage.

Figures 5 & 6 (courtesy of the DHM): As the war intensified, developing protective measures against air raids was of paramount concern in urban areas. The poster below reads, 'Youth in Air Defence!'; and at the bottom, 'The Enemy Sees Your Light: Black Out!' The devastation visited upon German civilian populations has recently emerged as a topic of historical analysis and reflection.

Figures 7 & 8 (courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): Overtly propagandistic films such as *Triumph of the Will* (1934) were, in fact, in the minority of films produced under National Socialism. Many were entertainment films, including a number of revue films. These too had propagandistic traits, but presented images of the body, gender relations, loyalty and fealty during wartime, and general mobilisation in more subtle guises. Agfa also made technical advances in colour film technology during this period, and the years 1941–5 saw the completion of nine colour films despite the ever-worsening shortages of material. One hugely successful linkage of colour film technology, the revue film and a star of the German screen is Georg Jacoby's *The Woman of My Dreams* (1944), pictured in the stills below. Starring the Hungarian-born 'Ufa-Baby' Marika Rökk, the film received the personal attention of Joseph Goebbels during its editing and was released well after D-Day. At a time when Germany's 'total war' was at the point of collapse, it presents a Busby Berkeley-like fantasy world complete with exotic scenes, a waltz in the clouds and a happy ending.

surrendered'), the film is visually striking and references another story of the murder of innocents: Fritz Lang's *M: Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931), about the pathological child-killer, whose working title had been *The Murderer Among Us*. Lang later recounted receiving much resistance to this title, as the National Socialists apparently suspected that it implicitly referred to them. In the Staudte film 'the murderers' are Nazis who survived the war, seamlessly returning to positions of wealth and social prominence. A film with socialist aspirations, it articulates the fight against both a fascist past and a capitalist future. Regardless of its ideological bias, the film makes an important point against the notion of a 'year zero', arguing along the lines later articulated by Günter Grass in which the immediate postwar years exhibit 'no collapse, no absolute beginning, just sluggish and murky transitions'.[20] Indeed, the casting of Ernst Borchert as a leading figure in the film is itself strikingly illustrative of this murkiness.[21] However, unlike the Lang film, in which the clearly defined spaces of Weimar Berlin are characterised by a profound moral ambiguity, or the Rossellini film, in which spatial and moral ambiguity coalesce, Staudte's representation insists on the need for moral clarity and precision within the physical ambiguity of the destroyed city.

Germany: Year Zero was produced with the assistance of the Deutsche Film AG, or DEFA, a film company founded by the Soviets in 1946 to replace the defunct Ufa, the latter hopelessly compromised by its incorporation into Goebbels's propaganda machine and robbed of equipment and film stock during the first weeks of Russian occupation. Staudte's *The Murderers* was the first film produced by the DEFA, and with successful premieres in New York, London, Paris and Moscow it was considered a positive indicator of Germans and the German film industry turning towards an anti-fascist realism.[22] The DEFA was the only company licensed to produce films in the Soviet Sector and (later) East Germany, and it did not make a practice of employing personnel with a clouded past.[23] The situation was different in western sectors, where many stars and directors of the National Socialist period continued their careers with little interruption. The DEFA, distancing itself from 'the murderers' of the recent past, also paid greater attention to the problems of living in the ruined city, completing the films *Somewhere in Berlin* (1946), *Razzia* (1947), *Street Acquaintance* (1948) and *Our Daily Bread* (1949). In strong contrast, *Say the Truth* (1946), the first German film to be released in the West after the war, was an uninspired comedy begun in late 1944 under the National Socialists and still being filmed in the Ufa's Tempelhof studios when the Russians rolled into Berlin. Three-quarters complete at the time of Soviet occupation, it was largely recycled under British licence.[24] Its release met with severe condemnation from critics, but in the West there was less interest in breaking with the compromised legacy of the late Ufa years, a situation which, as the architectural historian Werner Durth has shown, was mirrored in many architectural careers.[25] During the course of the late 1940s, several ruin films of merit were released in the western sectors, but West Germany would wait until the 1960s and the rise of the New German Cinema before making a decisive break with this tradition.

Appearing the same year as both *Say the Truth* and *The Murderers Are Among Us* was the DEFA production *Somewhere in Berlin*, directed by Gerhardt Lamprecht, who in 1931 had made *Emil and the Detectives*. Scripted by Billy Wilder, *Emil* was an entertaining and compelling film of children in the role of detectives following

a criminal through the streets of Berlin. In *Somewhere* Lamprecht again develops his action around children and a common thief, but instead of following the criminal through the well-defined public spaces depicted in *Emil*, Lamprecht uses Berlin's ruins, deploying them as a no-man's-land full of hidden spaces and dangers, accessible only to the naive or outlaw. Here the ruins are active agents in the destruction of innocent life; as Robert Shandley relates, 'rather than a mere metonymic extension of inner discontent, rubble becomes a player. The rubble is the other, the primary external force to which the characters must respond. It will kill children and corrupt adults [...] the rubble field [is a] space the adults cannot control.'[26] The film concludes with the children uniting behind their fathers to begin the arduous task of clearing ruins both literal and figurative as they strive to found a new state.

National Socialists used film as a tool of fascist propaganda, and the new DEFA company used film both to distance itself from the fascist past and to illustrate the potentials of a socialist future. Americans, highly sensitive to threats of residual fascism and encroaching socialism, also used cinematic representation as a tool of propaganda and moral reeducation. American films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) were not allowed to be shown in postwar Germany because they presented an all-too-critical image of American democracy.[27] These complex circumstances of film understood as both a tool of propaganda and as a subject of censorship met Billy Wilder as he returned to film in Germany. Prior to his role as scriptwriter for *Emil* he had held a similar position for the documentary-like *People on Sunday* (1930), a 'cross-section' film depicting the everyday life of Berlin. Leaving Berlin as a refugee and making his way via France to America, Wilder quickly rose to prominence with his groundbreaking film noir, the Los Angeles-set thriller *Double Indemnity* (1944). Then came an Academy Award, for *The Lost Weekend* (1945), this set in New York. In the summer of 1945 Wilder was in Berlin working as a US Military Government Film Officer, making recommendations for the reorganisation and de-nazification of the German film industry. On 16 August Wilder wrote a brief report titled 'Propaganda through Entertainment'. In it he records his fascination with the destroyed city: 'I have spent two weeks in Berlin [...] I have found the town mad, depraved, starving, fascinating as a background for a movie. My notebooks are filled with hot research stuff. I have photographed every corner I need for atmosphere.'[28] Wilder was not interested in exploiting this condition; rather, his concern was for reeducation through film. Quoting General Eisenhower, he insisted that: 'we are not here to degrade the German people but to make it impossible to wage war', giving Germans 'a little hope to redeem themselves in the eyes of the world'.[29] But it was not only hope for redemption; Wilder's objective was also to provide hope for existence:

I have met [...] a Frau in Berlin – she was working in a bucket brigade cleaning up the rubble on Kurfürstendamm. I had thrown away a cigarette and she had picked up the butt. We started a conversation. Here it is: 'I am so glad you Americans have finally come because....' 'Because what?' 'because now you will help us repair the gas.' 'Sure we will.' 'That's all we are waiting for, my mother and I....' 'I suppose it will be nice to get a warm meal again.' 'It is not to cook....' There was a long pause. I kind of felt what she meant, and I wished she would not say it. She did. 'We will turn it on, but we won't light it. Don't you see! It is just to

breathe it in, deep.' 'Why do you say that?' 'Why? Because we Germans have nothing to live for any more.' 'If you call living for Hitler a life, I guess you are right.' I held out a brand new Lucky Strike to her. She did not take it. She just picked up the bucket and went back to the rubble.[30]

In *A Foreign Affair* (1948) Wilder would reference this conversation through an American officer's remark that the repair of gas lines had brought with it an increase in suicides. Wilder believed that an 'entertainment film' involving a love story and (in contrast to the documentary-like character of Rossellini's film) the 'highest possible level [of] technique, writing, casting, etc.' would be the most effective means to achieve 'our program of re-educating the German people'.[31] However, it was not his intention to depict the American GI as a 'flag waving hero or a theorizing apostle of democracy. As a matter of fact, in the beginning of the picture I want him not to be too sure of what the hell this war was all about. I want to touch on fraternization, on homesickness, on [the] black market. [...] There shall be no pompous messages.'[32]

To achieve his objectives Wilder assembled an impressive cast, including Marlene Dietrich, who, like Wilder, had fled the National Socialists. It is from Dietrich's complex figure of Erika von Schlütow, fallen aristocrat and mistress of a ranking NS official, that we hear a succinct recapitulation of Berlin's recent history:

> Bombed out a dozen times, everything caved in and pulled out from under me, my country, my possessions, my beliefs. Yet somehow I kept going. Months and months in air raid shelters, crammed in with five thousand other people. I kept going [...] it was living hell.[33]

The response of the newly arriving American Congressional delegation to this trauma has its own twists. The opening sequence depicts an American plane flying first through the clouds and then over Berlin. The scene is a remarkable reversal of the opening sequence of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Here, rather than documenting a triumphant Hitler passing over the holistic contours of Nuremberg, the Americans pass over Berlin's sea of ruins. Nonetheless their supremacy is undercut when the leader of the delegation is beset with airsickness. Other members of the delegation voice various opinions as to what should be undertaken with ruins in which 'life goes on', the drawling Texan suggesting, 'They ought to scrape it plum clean, plant some grass and move in a herd of longhorns.'[34] But it is the Republican Congresswoman Frost who informs us as to 'why we were sent to Berlin'. In her words:

> We're here to investigate the morals of American occupation troops. There are 12,000 of our boys policing that pesthole down there, and according to our reports they are being infected by a kind of moral malaria. It is our duty to their wives, mothers and sisters, if these facts are true, to fumigate that place with all the insecticides at our disposal.[35]

Berlin as 'pesthole' was the site not only of a 'moral malaria' but of venereal disease and the often venal trade of the black market from which much of the city lived and which measured the price of goods in American cigarettes. The primary centre of the black market, both in fact and as depicted in the film, was the Brandenburg Gate and

the area immediately adjacent to the Reichstag. It was so integral to postwar existence that, once bus service began again, Berlin's drivers would announce the stop as 'Black Market' (*Schwarzmarkt*). Berlin was a site of trade and not one of currency; life in the city was concerned less with regulation than negotiation. In *A Foreign Affair*, Marlene Dietrich sings of the black market:

> I'm selling out. Take all I've got.
> Ambitions, convictions, the works, why not?
> Enjoy these goods
> For boy, these goods – are *hot*.[36]

In her encounter with the complexities of occupier and occupied as they negotiate for advantage in a Berlin dominated by the black market and ruins, Congresswoman Frost inevitably thaws. On 25 June 1948, just prior to the film's premiere, the Deutschmark was introduced and the black market put out of business. *A Foreign Affair* received favourable audience response, and French papers viewed it as an ironic version of Rossellini's *Germany: Year Zero*. The general American press was more critical, *Time* calling it 'too inhumane' and *The Saturday Review* insisting that 'the trials and tribulations of Berlin are not the stuff of which cheap comedy is made and rubble makes lousy custard pies'.[37] But it was Wilder's distancing of himself from the notion of reeducation and his depiction of American forces as frequently opportunistic that brought down the wrath of elements of the American government. At this time the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was opening its investigations into Hollywood, and within this context an 'indignant attack on the film was delivered from the floor of Congress'.[38] Given the long, costly war against the dictatorial control exercised by the National Socialists on all areas of visual culture, the deep irony of HUAC's attack on this film is only too clear. At this historical juncture the American government was not prepared to accept its often ambiguous role as occupier of a ruined city.

Borders, Blockades and the End of the Ruin Film

The topography of ruins and its dissolution of boundaries between public and private, right and wrong, East and West – with its inherent porosity – was understood by the Germans as a symbol of moral collapse and by the Americans as a preamble to the Cold War. As venereal disease infected the bodies, and 'moral malaria' the spirit, of the occupying Allies, alien 'agents', whether as Allied defectors, Russian spies or Hollywood directors, would be seen as destructive to the health of the body politic and the nation. As a primary point of contact between East and West, Berlin's permeability remained a source of contagion for both sides. Americans attempted to counteract this threat through a process of education; the Soviets took an explicitly spatial approach, erecting, during the spring and early summer, the Berlin Blockade. Berlin's isolation was further compounded by increased attention to exact lines of demarcation and control within the city, a condition depicted in George Seaton's *The Big Lift* (1950). Beginning in Hawaii with a Movietone News newsreel sequence on the Soviet Blockade of Berlin, we follow the organisation of American bombers flying once again to Germany, this time to participate not in destruction but in the Berlin Airlift. Starring Montgomery Clift, Paul Douglas and the German actress Cornell Borchers, the film incorporates a great deal

Figures 9 & 10 (courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): Erich Kettelhut, who was art director for such seminal films of the Weimar period as Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1933), *Der Spieler* (1938) and *Metropolis* (1927), as well as Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929), remained in Germany after the rise of the National Socialists, working on such musical entertainment fare as Georg Jacoby's *Gasparone* (1937), *Kora Terry* (1940) and *The Woman of My Dreams*. The fantastic staging for *The Woman of My Dreams* (top) often resulted in striking juxtapositions with the bombed-out locations in which the film was shown (above).

Figure 13 (courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): A still from Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers Are Among Us* (1946) illustrates the neo-expressionistic use of light to illuminate the jagged edges of Berlin's ruins, leading one contemporary reviewer (Werner Fiedler, *Neue Zeit*, 17 October 1946) to comment on the 'shockingly beautiful landscape of ruins'. Although Staudte did make use of a number of actual locations in the city, many of the sets were constructed in Berlin studios.

of documentary footage and technical information pertaining to the logistics of the Airlift and relieving the blockaded city. Clift had made his film debut only two years earlier, in Fred Zinnemann's wrenching *The Search* (1948), in which he plays a young soldier who befriends a lost boy suffering from amnesia in the ruined cities of Bavaria.[39] In *The Big Lift*, Clift, cast as a member of the United States Air Force, flies to Berlin, where he encounters the character played by Borchers. Highly adept at negotiating the complicated territory of occupied Berlin, Borchers's character is a *Trümmerfrau* with implied allegiances to National Socialism as well as an explicit attachment to a German lover who has made his way to America. Hoping to escape Berlin for America by means of marrying Clift, Borchers is ultimately foiled by the efforts of a congenial but very observant prewar actor turned postwar spy.[40]

Striking scenes of Berlin's Tiergarten, replete with the great flak tower that would be demolished a short time later, do impart the sense that parts of the city are still wild, still a no-man's-land. *Trümmerfrauen*, however, have succeeded – at least in the western sector – in ordering the destruction into specific sites waiting to be cleared. Of interest is a scene at Potsdamer Platz, which, once again a busy crossing point, is depicted as a site of control and confrontation between Soviet and British military authorities. In the heart of old Berlin, what is of importance in the years 1949–50 is the exactness of the lines of demarcation between the controlling authorities. Precision is of paramount concern, as a few metres made the difference between incarceration and freedom. Some confusion over the exact line of demarcation still existed, but given its 1950 production date, this is a remarkably prescient scene, prefiguring the final partitioning of Berlin a decade later. Thus Berlin, considered in fact, in the urban imaginary and in its cinematic representation, was transformed once again, shifting first from the ruined to the blockaded city, and finally, on 13 August 1961, to the divided city.[41]

Conclusion

Even though ruins remained in the city well into the post-reunification period, the topography of ruins as a terrain without borders, in which the realms of private and public, legal and illegal, life and death, were continually negotiated, came to an end with the reestablishment of decisive lines of demarcation and control. Similarly, the ruin film as both a reflection of a particular historical moment and as a potential agent for imagining and fashioning an urban landscape, a *Stadtlandschaft* as envisioned by many of Berlin's early modernists, was replaced by the images associated with the early phases of the West's 'economic miracle' and the East's increasing political and spatial isolation.

Important distinctions must be made between the films addressed above, and it is necessary to understand the Italian tradition of neorealism and its aesthetics of resistance as distinct from that of the German postwar ruin film. Similarly it is necessary to distinguish the trajectories of the East German ruin film from those made in West Germany in terms of economics, ideology and censorship. Lastly, with American films such as *The Big Lift*, it is important to recognise the reception and impact that newsreels had on a mid-century moviegoing public. Nonetheless, all of these cinematic efforts addressed Berlin as a city of ruins, and taken together, they are both valuable historical documents and remarkable examples of urban representation.

Notes

1 Hans Werner Richter in: *Der Ruf*, 15 (15 March 1947). Translation by the author. The original text is as follows: '*Die neue Wirklichkeit. Das Kennzeichen unsere Zeit ist die Ruine. Sie umgibt unser leben. Sie umsäumt die Straßen unsere Städte. Sie ist unsere Wirklichkeit. In ihren ausgebrannten Fassaden blüht nicht die blaue Blume der Romantik, sondern der dämonischen geist der Zerstörung, des Verfalls und der Apokalypse. Sie ist die äußere Wahrzeichen der inneren Unsicherheit des menschen unsere Zeit. Die Ruine lebt in uns wie wir in ihr. Sie ist unsere neue Wirklichkeit, die gestaltet werden will.*'

2 In the decades following the Second World War any discussion of Great Britain's air war against civilian population centres and the effects upon the German populace was largely repressed in Germany. The reasons for this are complex, with different approaches taken by the former East (which made ample use of the destruction of Dresden as a vehicle for both anti-fascist and anti-capitalist propaganda) and the former West. Neither side, however, wished ever to appear as seeking a legitimisation for the horrors of the Holocaust. Recently greater attention has been paid to the topic of the ruthless destructiveness of the air war, most particularly since the appearance of W G Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (Munich, 1999). Resulting from a series of lectures in Zurich in 1997, this essay appeared in translation first in *The New Yorker* (4 November 2002) under the title 'A Natural History of Destruction' and then in the collection entitled *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York, 2003). In Germany, Sebald's work prompted further publications addressing this issue, such as Jörg Friedrich's factually detailed *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (Munich, 2002). Friedrich's book ran to at least 11 printings in the first year of publication and was followed by a pictorial account entitled *Brandstätten: Der Anblick des Bombenkrieges* (Munich, 2003). The German weekly *Der Spiegel* has popularised this topic with *Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel: Der Bombenkrieg gegen die Deutschen* (Special Issue 1, 2003), and specific to Berlin, Felix Kellerhoff and Wieland Giebel have edited a series of recollections under the title *Als die Tage zu Nächten wurden: Berliner Schicksale im Luftkrieg* (Berlin, 2003). For a general introduction to the destruction throughout Europe, see Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Europa in Ruinen: Augenzeugenberichte aus den Jahren 1944 bis 1958* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990). Most incisive are those texts written during or shortly after the war, particularly Hans Erich Nossack's *Der Untergang* (Hamburg, 1948), Edgar A Hoffmann's *Hamburg '45: So lebten wir zwischen Trümmern und Ruinen* (Leer, 1985) as well as Curt Riess's descriptions in *Berlin Berlin 1945–1953* (Berlin, 1953). Heinrich Böll's novel *Der Engel schwieg* (Cologne, 1992) is also of note.

3 See Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), pp. 200–2.

4 See for example Werner Durth and Niels Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern: Planungen zum Wiederaufbau zerstörter Städte im Westen Deutschlands, 1940–1950* (Brunswick, 1988).

5 See for example Alex Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park, PA, 1990), pp. 93–6.

6 Ibid, p. 94; footnote 5.

7 See Dieter Bartetzko, *Illusionen in Stein: Stimmungsarchitektur im deutschen Faschismus; Ihre Vorgeschichte in Theater- und Film-Bauten* (Hamburg, 1985) and D Bartetzko, *Zwischen Zucht und Ekstase: Zur Theatralik von NS-Architektur* (Berlin, 1985).

8 The interest of the National Socialists in film is well-documented. See for example Thomas Hannah-Daoud, *Die NSDAP und der Film bis zur Machtergreifung* (Cologne, 1996); Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA, 1996); Harro Segeberg (ed.), *Mediale Mobilmachung I: Das Dritte Reich und der Film* (Munich, 2004).

9 *Licht-Bild-Bühne*, 9 (March 1933). Quoted in Joseph Wulf, *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Reinbeck, 1966), p. 290. '*Über Dr. Goebbels' Pläne ist so viel bekannt, daß er entscheidenden Wert auf die Zusammenfassung aller Möglichkeiten der Propaganda zu einheitlicher Wirkung legen würde.*'

10 In 1943 Otto Kriegk wrote that 'Spectators sat stunned by *Triumph of the Will*. They suddenly recognized that what thirty-two camera eyes see is worth a thousand times more than what the two eyes of an individual are capable of perceiving. Now it became clear to millions why the camera must be placed in the service of the community – even, if necessary, by force.' Quoted in Rentschler, op. cit., p. 1.

11 Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 4. Originally published as A Kaes, *Deutschlandbilder: Die Wiederkehr der Geschichte als Film* (Munich, 1987).

12 Ibid. For an excellent account of Joseph Goebbels and his official interest in film see Felix Moeller, *Der Filmminister: Goebbels und der Film im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1998). For an account of the fate of the Third Reich's film material in the immediate postwar years, particularly films started but not completed under the National Socialists, see Holger Theuerkauf, *Goebbels' Filmerbe: Das Geschäft mit unveröffentlichten Ufa-Filmen* (Berlin, 1998).

13 Wolfgang Leonard. Quoted in Alexandra Richie, Faust's *Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York, 1998), p. 608.

14 Willy Brandt. Quoted in ibid.

15 Hans Speier. Quoted in ibid., p. 632.

16 See Bettina Greffrath, *Gesellschaftsbilder der Nachkriegszeit: Deutsche Spielfilme 1945–49* (Pfaffenweiler, 1995), pp. 216–7. The relationship between Italian neorealism and the German ruin film is a problematic one. Robert R Shandley argues that 'Neo-realism should not be used as a yardstick for German rubble films. They arise out of entirely different conditions.

Figures 11 & 12 (courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): Photographs taken during the filming of Roberto Rossellini's *Germany: Year Zero* (1947) in the streets of a devastated Berlin. The image on the left is of a street adjacent to Albert Speer's chancellery, the destroyed interior of which is depicted in the film. On the right, the truck carrying coffins is one of the more trenchant images of Rossellini's evocation of a city as necropolis, a topic he would return to in the depictions of Pompeii in his *Journey to Italy* (1954).

Neo-realism in Italy originated under fascism as an aesthetic resistance movement, showing from the start a willingness to take not only aesthetic but also political risks. German filmmakers in the late 1940s show no will toward taking political risks and little toward taking aesthetic ones.' See Robert R Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 49. Shandley himself, however, also argues that the early postwar films addressed 'moral events […] anchored in the depressing psychological and material reality of Germany's absolute defeat' (p. 24). Complicating any reading of the German film industry in the early postwar years is the division between the occupied East and the occupied West, the varying forms of censorship imposed by the four occupying powers, the varying modes of self-censorship exercised by German filmmakers seeking official licensure for their films and the varying economic interests in either supporting or repressing the resurgence of the German film industry. In German-language literature on the topic (in addition to Greffrath's excellent text) see also Thomas Brandlmeier, 'Von Hitler zu Adenauer: Deutsche Trümmerfilme', in H Hoffmann and W Schobert (eds.), *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen: Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946–1962* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989); Wolfgang Becker and Norbert Schöll, *In jenen Tagen ... Wie der deutsche Nachkriegsfilm die Vergangenheit bewältigt* (Opladen, 1995); Johannes Hauser, *Neuaufbau der westdeutschen Filmwirtschaft 1945–1955 und der Einfluß der US-amerikanischen Filmpolitik* (Pfaffenweiler, 1989); Christiane Mückenberger, *'Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst...' Die DEFA von irhen Anfängen bis 1949* (Marburg, 1994).

17 For Rossellini's critique of fascist rhetoric in *Open City*, see Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 33–7.

18 For a general discussion of cultural life in early postwar Berlin see also Wolfgang Schivelbush, *In a Cold Crater: Cultural and Intellectual Life in Berlin, 1945–1948*, trans. K Barry (Berkeley, 1998). Schivelbush devotes one chapter to film, but is not concerned with the representations of Berlin in ruin.

19 Many of the ruins and neo-expressionist scenes were created in the studio, a device that would be rejected in the following DEFA production, *Somewhere in Berlin* (see below).

20 Quoted in Koshar, op. cit., p. 200.

21 Ernst Borchert starred as the film's primary character, Dr Mertens, an individual traumatised by the inhumanity and brutality of a war waged against civilians. Unlike the fictional Dr Mertens, Borchert had joined the NSDAP in 1933, making a career for himself by starring in films such as *U-Boote westwärts* (1941). Hardly an innocent, in 1945 he failed to provide proper information to the authorities regarding his past, thus avoiding his de-nazification process and risking an appearance before an American military tribunal, before the film's debut.

22 See Greffrath, op. cit., p. 113. In the Soviet sector, anti-fascist realism was quickly redirected to socialist realism.

23 On 4 September 1945 the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) issued Order 51, stipulating a) the complete liberation of art from all National Socialist, racist, military and reactionary ideas and traditions; b) the active utilisation of artistic means in the fight against fascism and in the reeducation of the German people in a democratic sense; c) the broadest announcement (*Bekanntmachung*) of the values of Russian and world art. See ibid., p. 107. The exact criteria used for determining who could work for the DEFA is not clear, and many of those who had worked in film production during the 12 years of the NS dictatorship were employed during

Figures 14 & 15 (courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): A still and a photograph taken during filming of Gerhard Lamprecht's *Somewhere in Berlin* (1946). The image below depicts the children in a landscape of ruins, a complex environment into which adults cannot easily enter. The image on the bottom shows the director and crew with one of Berlin's air raid shelters, a structure that still stands in the city's Mitte district.

the early years of the DEFA. Nonetheless, many of the film figures with problematic pasts had fled the Red Army for the western parts of Germany. The DEFA was concerned with finding new 'faces' for their films that were not associated with the NS years. See ibid., pp. 110–2.

24 The first 'new' films to be released under British licence were Rolf Meyer's *Zugvögel* (premiere 5 May 1947) and Helmut Käutner's *In Jenen Tagen* (premiere 13 June 1947). The first film to be released under French licence was Helmut Weiß's *Herzkönig* – also known as *A Waltz into Happiness* – (premiere 25 August 1947). The American occupation forces first granted licences to two films at the end of 1947: Josef von Baky's *Und Über uns der Himmel* (set in Berlin and starring Hans Albers; premiere 9 December 1947) and Harald Braun's *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (set in Munich; premiere 12 December 1947). The latter was filmed in Munich's *Geiselgasteig* studios, which had survived the war largely intact and had been reopened by the Americans in the summer of 1947. It represented the early (re)turn from the reality of destroyed cities to fanciful studio sets. Film production in the western sectors suffered from lack of state funding as well as, on the part of the Americans at least, a great interest in Germany as an export market for its own Hollywood fare.

25 Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten: Biographische Verflechtungen, 1900–1970* (Brunswick, 1986).

26 See Shandley, op. cit., pp. 120–1.

27 Ralph Willett, 'Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1945–1948): "The trials and tribulations of Berlin"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 7, 1 (1987): 3–14, esp. 4. See also Willet, *The Americanization of Germany 1945–49* (London, 1989), pp. 28–44.

28 Billy Wilder to Davidson Taylor, 16 August 1945: 'Propaganda through Entertainment'. Reprinted in Willett, op. cit. Wilder's letter, printed with the letterhead 'Headquarters United States Air Force, European Theater. Information Control Division' is reprinted on pages 13–14, this quote from page 14.

29 Ibid., p. 14.

30 Ibid., p. 13.

31 Ibid., p. 13. Wilder's ideal propaganda film was William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), of which he states, 'President Roosevelt having seen the first print of Mrs. Miniver urged Metro to put the film on the market as quickly as possible. They rushed it out. It did a job no documentary, no 50 newsreels could have done.' *Mrs. Miniver* was also a film held in highest esteem by Joseph

Goebbels, who, on the subject of Veit Harlan's preparations for the monumental film *Kolberg*, wrote, '*Harlan [...] muß von seinen Monumentalplänen etwas herunter und den Film etwas mehr im Stil von "Mrs. Miniver": gestalten.*' ('Harlan [...] must back off a bit from his monumental plans and create a film more in the style of *Mrs. Miniver*'). Quoted in Moeller, op. cit., pp. 299–300.

32 Ibid., p. 14.

33 From Wilder's *A Foreign Affair*.

34 Ibid. Although this assessment seems harsh, it pales next to a comment made by the character of actor Paul Douglas in George Seaton's *The Big Lift* (1950). While flying over Frankfurt en route to Berlin and participation in the Airlift, the following conversation occurs between Douglas (portraying a veteran of the war harbouring a particular dislike for Germans and Berlin) and another serviceman in the plane.
Serviceman: Boy, this place sure caught it, didn't it?
Douglas: Not enough – this is where they should have used the A-bomb.

35 From Wilder's *A Foreign Affair*.

36 Ibid.

37 Quoted in Willett, op. cit., p. 11.

38 Ibid., p. 5.

39 *The Search* was directed by Fred Zinnemann, who together with the brothers Curt and Robert Siodmak and Edgar G Ulmer was one of the codirectors of *People on Sunday*. In the same year that he directed *The Search*, Zinnemann also directed *Act of Violence*, a film noir about a returning veteran featuring some remarkable footage from Los Angeles's Bunker Hill area.

40 I have analysed many of the elements concerning *The Big Lift* and urban representation in an article entitled '"The Big Lift" (1950): Image and Identity in Blockaded Berlin' (forthcoming in *Cinema Journal*).

41 A later Billy Wilder film, *One, Two, Three* (1961), depicts Berlin just prior to the erection of the Wall, which was built towards the end of the filming in Berlin and is referenced in the opening narrative.

Figures 16 & 17 (Courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek): The film crew of Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1948) working in Berlin, the image on the left depicting the ruins of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche at the Breitscheidplatz. After the war, the ruins were stabilised and, as a memorial to the destruction of the Second World War, became an icon of West Berlin. The shot being set up here appears in an early scene in which the character Captain John Pringle drives his 'kidney killer' jeep from the black market at the Brandenburg Gate (where he has traded a chocolate cake for a mattress) to the bombed-out apartment of Erika von Schlütow (Marlene Dietrich).