In this paper, I want to explore some of the different types of work done by photographic images in post-war popular publications about the bombing of German cities. The paper draws upon my current book project, Bodies and Ruins: Imagining the Bombing of Germany, 1945 to the Present, which is based upon three different types of post-1945 publications that depicted the bombing war and its results: (1) local narratives of the bombing of individual German cities, which described the bombing primarily in words but which also included photographic or other images\(^1\) (2) postwar picture books which presented the bombing primarily in images with words confined to the function of captions (3) the catalogs of postwar exhibitions which depicted the bombing war in both pictures and words. Not written by professional historians and usually lacking any scholarly pretensions, these publications are examples of the kind of “public history” which has been so influential in constructing and transmitting popular understandings of the past to successive generations of Germans since 1945.\(^2\)

Each of these different types of publications tried to respond to the challenge of helping their readers/viewers imagine the experience and the consequences of the air-war. The main thrust of my book will be to follow this search for the “right” stories and the “right” pictures of the bombing war and to determine how the answers given to these questions have changed over the course of the more than six decades since 1945.\(^3\) The boundaries between what could and could not be said or shown shifted as the needs of German audiences changed. Narratives and images deemed suitable in 1959 might have become unacceptable just ten years later. Yet, certain narratives and images have displayed remarkable staying power. It is still possible today to produce a book on the bombing of a German city that does not differ in essentials from a 1950s publication. Nevertheless, these older kinds of narratives have become more unusual. Today, they must compete for the attention of readers with a variety of new ways of telling and showing the story of the bombing. The range of current possibilities makes the representation of the bombing war more complex and contradictory than at any time since 1945.

In the first part of this paper, I want to draw attention to the ways in which images were used not only to document and celebrate the physical rebuilding of post-war German cities but also to mourn the loss of architectural heritage and to construct for German viewers a virtual city that no longer existed in reality. The tension between these documentary and imaginary functions of

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\(^1\) For a useful introduction to this type of publication see Winfried Mönch, “Städte zwischen Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau. Deutsche Ortsliteratur zum Bombenkrieg seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg” in Die alte Stadt, 3/2003, 265-289.


images generated a sense of permanent loss that always threatened to undermine any attempt merely to celebrate the undeniable achievements of postwar reconstruction. In the second part of this discussion, I want to suggest some of the problems posed by the use of photographs of people to tell the story of the bombing war, rather than pictures of buildings and ruins.

**The Centrality of the Local in Postwar Memory Cultures**

As British and American bombs began to fall on more and more German cities, some Germans may have begun to see themselves as the victims of a national disaster, yet the national was still experienced and imagined, first and foremost, through the prism of the local. Critics have argued that the intensely local nature of postwar discussion of the bombing war has meant that until the controversy unleashed by W.G. Sebald’s Zürich lectures (1997) and Jörg Friedrich’s book on the bombing war (2002), narratives and images of the bombing were banished to the margins of contemporary consciousness. I want to argue that far from being peripheral or somehow marginal, local memory cultures have actually played a crucial role in the memory work done by Germans in the years since 1945.

**Keeping the Nazis out of Local History**

Telling the story of the war from the vantage point of the localities and the provinces allowed Germans to export the crimes of Nazism to somewhere else—either the political center, Berlin, or the occupied East—leaving the German localities to claim untroubled status as innocent victims of the war. Avoiding direct reference to the Holocaust was a fundamental precondition for talking about German suffering in the early local publications (late 1940s-1960s). These bombing narratives implicitly rejected the claim made by Allied atrocity photos and stories in 1945 that Germany’s real story was the story of the Holocaust. In 1945, after liberating the concentration camps, the Western Allies tried to compel ordinary Germans to acknowledge their complicity in Nazi atrocities. In response, Germans insisted that they, too, were victims of the war.

Yet, as a student at a Nürnberg Gymnasium complained in an essay written several years after the war, “one learns everything there is to know about the concentration camps, what horrors happened [then], no one talks about...

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7. Paul B. Jaskot and Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “Introduction. Urban Space and the Nazi past in Postwar Germany” in Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot, editors, Beyond Berlin. Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 1. Two excellent recent local studies of Hamburg and Nuremberg have reconstructed the development of local memory cultures in very rich detail. See Malte Thiessen, Eingebannt ins Gedächtnis.Hamburgs Gedenken an Luftkrieg und Kriegsende 1934 bis 2005 (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag,2007) and Neil Gregor, Haunted City. Nuremberg and the Nazi Past (New Haven and London:Yale University Press, 2008). What I am doing here cannot claim to provide this level of detail for any single locality; on the other hand, it has the advantage of retrieving the full range of possible local narratives and visual representations and establishing the parameters and the limits of what it was possible to say and to show at different points in postwar German history.

that anymore."  

Yet, it was important to ensure that descriptions of what Germans had experienced and lost in the bombing war did not promote unmitigated despair. While acknowledging German suffering, authors also tried to provide hope for the future. In the desperate post-war years, when many German cities had been reduced to fields of ruins, the past could serve as an important emotional resource. Some of the early narratives of the bombing tried to re-establish continuity with a past which could no longer be seen in the streets of these destroyed towns, by reminding readers that their city had a long history reaching back hundreds of years. Describing the bombing as one of several catastrophes that a city had experienced in its longer history offered re-assurance for the post-war future. If a city had recovered from a fire in the Middle Ages or from the destruction caused by the Thirty Years’ War, then surely it would be able to rebuild again after 1945?

When it came to the Nazi years, however, the record of the past had to be carefully edited. It was essential to avoid any suggestion that ordinary Germans might have been responsible for their own suffering in the air-war, that their support for Hitler and their enthusiasm for Hitler’s Blitzkrieg had eventually led to the destruction of their own cities. If these local publications did discuss the Nazi years and the war in any detail, they made sure to draw a clear line between the ordinary Germans who were presented as the innocent victims of the Allied bombing raids and the Nazis whose cowardice and incompetence had only added to the suffering of their fellow citizens.

**Picture Work**

The bombing war destroyed buildings and killed people, but it also damaged the distinctive sense of local identity that in Germany has usually been described as Heimat. German feelings of Heimat were deeply attached to an intense sense of place and of the uniqueness of each individual Heimat. When that Heimat was a town or city, place was identified by, amongst other things, historical buildings, specific architectural landmarks. The ruins left behind by the bombs deprived German cities of the visual differences that had made them distinctive before the war. Even life-long inhabitants of a particular town or city might no longer recognize locations that before the bombing they had known very well: "What actually remained of Hamm, Hammerbrook and Rothenburgsort?" In the morning, there was much that I could not recognize, what I could see was a picture of total destruction." The widespread use of “ruin pictures” in post-war publications reflected the belief that images of destroyed buildings were the most effective symbols of what Germans had suffered and lost during the bombing war. Yet one of the key problems faced by the authors of these publications was that pictures of ruined buildings all started to look the same.

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What might be done to retain and communicate the distinctiveness of any given location, even in the face of this dreary sameness of ruins?

One route of visual escape from the ruins led backwards to historic images of the city that no longer existed in reality. With its very cover, a 1950 publication on Heilbronn signaled the visual flight into the past of “Old Heilbronn, as we knew and loved it” which dominated the first 56 of the small book’s 82 pictures. The introduction written by the city’s Oberbürgermeister, informed readers that “on December 4, 1944, as the city of Heilbronn was reduced to a huge pile of rubble, thousands lost their lives and their Heimat. On that evening, the city also lost the face it had taken centuries to form.” 13 In this first section, the book presented images of the city’s major landmarks.

Like the second part of this book’s title--Ein Bildband der Erinnerung (A Picture Book of Memory)--Oberbürgermeister Meyle’s introduction made clear that the purpose of the images that followed would not be to show Heilbronn’s destruction but rather to counter the visual effects of this destruction on the memories of post-war citizens of Heilbronn: “The destruction was so complete, that the [city’s] once so familiar features … threatened to become blurred in our memories. I am thus very pleased if, with [this] book, what has been forgotten can be revived and what was destroyed can be retained.” 14 Meyle insisted that in the pictures which followed “the old Heilbronn that we were so proud of, just as a child is proud of its father, lives once more. The precious old sites, with which so many memories are connected, will once again emit their magic.” 15


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.
In his own “Vorwort”, Werner Gauss, editor of the volume, also emphasized the importance of the images which followed. Showing Heilbronn as it once had been was a crucial aid to the reconstitution of the identities of Heilbronn’s citizens after the war. Their previous experiences, their hopes, joys and memories could not be separated from the physical and architectural surroundings of Heilbronn in which local citizens had lived out their every-day lives before the bombing. Place and identity could not be separated from each other.

Other cities destroyed by the war had already recognized and responded to these visual needs of their citizens with their own “memory books…which…captured in a picture that which had been lost.” Now, fortunately, it was time that “a monument in the form of an image…be dedicated to dear old Heilbronn.” Restoring “Alt Heilbronn”, at least visually in the form of a picture book, would recuperate its distinctive individuality which had been erased by the bombs and the war. The pictures of the Alt-Heilbronn that followed were, “with the exception of those on pages 42 and 43—exclusively views from historic Heilbronn inside the old city walls.” All of these buildings had been destroyed or damaged by the air-raid of December 4, 1944 “together with large areas of housing and industry, because the attack extended to the periphery of the city.” However, the book included no photographs of these devastated residential and industrial districts; Heilbronn was to be identified visually with its medieval and early modern old town, not with the city it had become by the time the war began.

Roland Barthes has drawn attention to the morbid aspect of photography. Because the people in photographs taken in the past are often already dead when we see them, these pictures point towards the mortality of their own subjects. The photographic images in the 1950 picture book on Heilbronn performed a quite different function; they visually resurrected the Alte Stadt that was now “dead”, killed by Allied bombs. Yet, in his contribution to a 1953 book on Hanover, Hermann Deckert doubted that photographs could really serve this purpose. Deckert acknowledged that pictures of buildings as they had looked before the war might provide later generations with some knowledge of the extent of individual losses. But he thought it would be impossible to understand from these photographs what the larger architectural ensembles had actually meant to those who had lived with them. Reversing the usual relationship between image and reality, a book on Paderborn suggested that the handful of historic buildings that had survived the bombing resembled “the remaining, colorful pages of a once exquisite picture book, callously torn apart by ignorant hands…The next generation will be deprived forever of the familiar

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16. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
17. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
18. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
19. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
20. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
21. Ibid., Vorwort des Herausgebers.
sight of the city with all its unique characteristics, created by successive phases of history over the past thousand years. From books, they can pick out only fragments of what for us was a reality filled with life." If one of the ways in which the distinctive German concept of Heimat was transmitted from one generation to the next was through the buildings in which people lived and worked, then the destruction of a city's architectural fabric by the Allied bombing was a severe rupture in Heimat history. This was a permanent loss to which it was impossible ever to become reconciled.

The second path of visual escape from the ruins took viewers into the post-war reconstructed city. It is not surprising that local publications increasingly offered pictures of the new buildings that, by the 1950s, had begun to replace the fields of ruins Germans were left with in 1945. In East Germany, pictures of new buildings were meant to demonstrate that the GDR was building a new socialist state on German soil. In West Germany, photographs of new buildings symbolized the Federal Republic’s embrace of modernity. Another small picture book on Heilbronn published in 1954 gave the viewer 35 photographs, some in color. Less than half of these pictures showed the city as it had been before the war or showed the viewer the ruins after the bombing. Some of the pre-war images were accompanied by nostalgic captions, but one picture of a street in the Altstadt was described as having been “just as unhealthy as it was picturesque. Even without the war, it probably would not be there anymore”.

All of the remaining photographs were devoted to the new face of Heilbronn embodied in such structures as the ultra-modern interior of a new church, the entrance to the new train station, rows of new housing, and the new building for the county savings bank.

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26. Ibid.
Figures 2.

Figures 3 and 4.

A picture of the new home of a local newspaper commended local citizens for their “openness to new ways of building”.

Figure 5.
The caption attached to a picture of the Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium expressed local pride in an institution that was not only named for a native son but which also “combined modern style with humanistic tradition.”

Figure 6.

The book did include pictures of some old buildings that had been reconstructed, but in general the visual emphasis focused upon the new Heilbronn.

A similar affirmation of post-war reconstruction can be found in a 1967 picture book, Hamburg. Phönix aus der Asche. Ein dokumentarischer Bildband (Hamburg. Phoenix from the Ashes. A documentary picture book) by the Hamburg photographer, Hugo Schmidt-Luchs, and his son, Werner Schmidt-Luchs. This book shows how Hamburg’s unique qualities as a hard-headed port and commercial center gave it the strength, the drive and the direction needed to rebuild after the devastation of the bombing war. The two photographers begin their story with a photo of the “Trümmer-Express” (“Ruins Express”) which shows a small locomotive pulling open cars filled with rubble from left to right. The train is presented as a symbol of progress into a future that “would in any case be better than the dark present, which was scarcely to be endured with no roof and with inadequate food.” In 1945, no German had any idea “at what surprising stations the train of time would…arrive. Who would have dared to predict that the lumbering “Ruin Express” one day would become an elegant, comfortable “Europa-Express”.


Opening with this photograph let readers know where they were going—the present was the destination—a present which the post-war generation of Germans might take for granted. But they needed to be reminded about what had to be overcome. The authors might also have chosen to begin their book with this picture of the “Ruins-Express” because they recognized the emotional effect it could have on viewers. Here they were confronted not simply with ruins, as on the second page (“This picture captures the entirely hopeless and oppressive atmosphere of March 1945” 29) but with a symbol of hope for the future quite literally emerging from these ruins.

The post-war city would be a very different metropolis; a modern urban center shaped by the needs of the automobile. The pre-war urban past is gone, destroyed by the bombs but also rejected by post-war city planners. Hamburg has paved over the fields of ruins to construct new, wide streets that meet the needs of a motorized post-war Germany; “familiar streets disappeared without a trace, in their place, imposing skyscrapers grew up along the new rows of streets.” 30 In most of this book, the emphasis is upon the modernity of post-war Hamburg, forward-looking, dynamic, not nostalgic about its past. Occasionally, a note of regret intrudes upon this optimism, regret that in a city that already was doing little enough before the war to preserve architectural reminders of its historical past the few remaining architectural monuments had been wiped out by the bombing. In general, however, the tone of Phönix aus der Asche with regard to the post-war

29.Ibid, 22.
30.Ibid.,23.
architectural transformation of Hamburg is approving. The caption for one picture suggests that “in this sober city there is no room for melancholy reminiscing. The old must give way to the new—and perhaps in this posture lies some small part of the secret upon which the success of this vital, tough, impressive—and beautiful—city is based.” 31

How Photographs Might “Age”

In the 1950s, the Germans who had lived through the bombing war would have seen ruin pictures, especially when paired with photographs of the city as it had once looked, as very immediate reflections of their own suffering and loss. When juxtaposed with pictures of new buildings, ruin pictures might provide visual confirmation of this generation’s post-war achievements. At the very least, photographs of new buildings served as a promise to Germans that a better future awaited them once the ruins had been cleared away. In that sense, photographic images played an active role in reconstruction; they were not simply documenting what had happened but helping Germans to imagine the future. 32

The work of imagination performed by photographs became even more important as the bombing war receded into the historical past. By the late 1960s, when West German cities had been rebuilt, the authors of local publications realized that they had to address a new generation of readers/viewers born after 1945, who had no direct experience of the bombing and who could no longer see the traces of destruction in the urban landscape. The younger generation of Germans might not know how the pre-war cities or their post-war ruins had looked even though they could at times actually be standing upon some of the rubble which had been incorporated into the physical fabric of the post-war city; “who among the football fans, who cheer on the HSV [Hamburg Sport Club-DFC] in the Volksparkstadion, ever thinks that they are standing on Hamburg’s rubble? The entire, enormous oval of the spectator tiers consists of debris from West Hamburg.” 33

Photographs were supposed to help these younger Germans imagine the unthinkable horrors of the bombing war so that they could appreciate the achievements of reconstruction.

Yet, time can significantly alter the meaning of a photograph. By the 1960s, the flight into the future offered by pictures of new postwar buildings was threatening to become a depressing journey. In 1965, Alexander Mitscherlich complained, for example, that “after the war, we threw away the chance to build cleverly thought-out, really new cities.” 34 Mitscherlich felt that German post-war cities exhibited a depressing uniformity: “someone only knows whether they have in front of them the housing silos of Ludwigshafen or Dortmund because they know that they traveled to one or the other of these cities.” 35 Lacking a unique identity, the rebuilt German city could never

31 . Ibid., 49.

32 . My observation here follows the line of argument developed by Jonathan Wiesen that the West German “economic miracle” was imagined, scripted, and staged well before it actually happened; S. Jonathan Wiesen, “Miracles for Sale:Consumer Displays and Advertising in Postwar Germany” in David F. Crew, editor, Consuming Germany in the Cold War (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 151-178.

33 . Schmidt-Luchs, op.cit., 14

34 . Alexander Mitscherlich, Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte. Anstiftung zum Unfrieden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965),16.

35 . Ibid., 14-16.
become a genuine Heimat for the postwar Germans who lived and worked in it. Pictures which confronted Germans with what Mitscherlich called Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte (Our Inhospitable Cities) would no longer be able to serve their original purpose of celebrating the achievements of post-war reconstruction.

Rebuilding Lives

Many of the Germans who survived the bombing war had lost everything—the roof over their heads, their furniture and household goods, sometimes also relatives and friends. These survivors had to rebuild not only their cities but also their own lives. Yet, postwar publications seldom used photographs of these people to tell their stories. One exception is the 1954 picture book, Jahre unseres Lebens. Deutsche Schicksalsbilder (Years of Our Lives. Pictures of the Fates of Germans) by the West German photographer, Hilmar Pabel which included a short sequence of photographs on the air war. During or immediately after Allied air attacks, Pabel had taken photographs of individual Germans. In the early 1950s, he returned to the locations of these wartime photos to find his original subjects. In two of the three cases, he actually showed these same people the pictures he had taken of them during the war. All of the subjects of Pabel’s photos were happy that they had survived but they also found it very difficult to believe that what the photos depicted had actually happened to them just a few years earlier. The message of this sequence of photographs is summarized by the captions which tell the story of a young girl rescued from an air-raid shelter (Figures 10-11). When Pabel finds her after the war, he is glad to learn that “the unbelievable is reality: the sobbing young girl... has become a young mother, who can today smile happily” (Figure 11). After Pabel took his wartime photograph, the young girl was reunited with her parents who had been buried in the rubble of the same bomb shelter. Their story is the subject of two other pictures in this sequence (Figures 8 and 9). The last part of the caption explaining Figure 11 assures us that “[s]he will certainly never forget the terrible days of her childhood—but the memory is no longer painful.”

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36. Ibid., 15.

37. See, for example, Jörn Glasenapp’s discussion of “Chargesheimer’s Spätwerk: Köln 5 Uhr 30 und Hannover” in Glasenapp, op. cit., 322-336.
Figure 8. The caption reads: “Did we really experience this? Here a woman is rescued from the ruins of a house that a bomb crushed like a box of matches. Who was this woman? Perhaps a mother—and where were her children? Back then, when I took this picture, I did not know anything about her. She was one of the millions of nameless victims of the air war. Perhaps, she had not even survived the next hour. And now I sat before her. For some time, I delayed showing her the frightful picture.”

Figure 9. The caption reads: “Oh, God—this woman on the stretcher, was that me? Shaken, the married couple looked at the pictures of a terrible time. “Do you know what, father? When they pulled me out, you were still down there…it was mid-night before they found you…”, and her eyes
filled with tears: her youngest child remained there, with seventeen others of the dead, underneath the rubble. How could she bear this pain? But life must go on, because there were two other children, who needed the father and the mother.”

Figure 10. “That is our girl, our Elly…” At that time (the woman’s) daughter was a child. A child, who trembled for the life of her mother: “No, no, I will not leave—my mother is definitely under there, Mum, Mum, where are you?” Helpless, the fourteen year-old clenched her fingers together. Her entire body was trembling. She was one of the very first to be rescued by the helpers from the collapsed cellar of her parents’ house”

Figure 11. Seven years later: “Unbelievable—that is supposed to be me?” the young woman asked and showed her husband the picture from back then…”

The story Pabel tells depends not only upon the pictures he took during the war but upon the material presence of these wartime photographs in the postwar encounters he documents
photographically. Pabel clearly assumed that the intervention in the present of visual artifacts from the past would allow these Germans to re-imagine what they had lived through, what it had felt like and meant. Yet this assumption was challenged at the outset by the reactions of the people to whom Pabel showed these photographs. Even though these were pictures from their own lives, the subjects reacted with disbelief. Could that really be me? Did this really happen? Did we (collectively, as Germans) really live through such horrible times? These reactions exhibit more than the normal sense of distance Germans might feel when they looked at photographs of themselves taken when they were much younger and looked quite different. The “estrangement effect” in this particular historical situation was probably extreme—because Germans were being asked to look back from the vantage point of a reconstructed Germany to a Germany in ruins. The further away from these ruins and the experience that had produced them, the more difficult it would become to imagine this past, even with the aid of photographs which showed that it had indeed “happened”. At the same time, documenting this estrangement reinforced the overall message of this picture sequence; this is a past that now seems very far away.

In Pabel’s picture sequence, the captions play a crucial, yet also contradictory role. On the one hand, the text supports the visual narrative, guiding the reader/viewer towards the “happy end” shown in the pictures of the parents who survived and were re-united with their child, Elly, who, by the 1950s had herself become a young, happy mother with her own small baby whose life is now so removed from wartime tragedy that she scarcely believes the photograph of her wartime self that Pabel shows her. Yet, the captions also give the reader other much-less comforting information which produces tension with the message of the pictures; we learn, for example, that although Elly survived, her youngest sibling and seventeen other people did not. These last comments draw attention to the Germans who had not survived the bombing war as did other photographs used in post-war publications, such as these three published, respectively, in a 1983 book on Bremen, a 1980 book on Pforzheim and a 1984 collection of photographs of Stuttgart.

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Figure 12. Bremen

Figure 13. Pforzheim. Rubble grave markers on the Hegelstrasse in the southern part of the city.
Photographs like these reminded the survivors and the post-war generations that the remains of many other Germans not recovered from the ruins still lay beneath the streets and the new buildings of post-war German cities. Reconstructed cities had been built on the bodies of the dead.

Gruesome “shock pictures” of mutilated or incinerated German bodies which compelled viewers directly to confront the suffering of those who had died in the bombing war also appeared in some postwar publications. Yet there was a risk in using these grisly images because they might remind Germans of other photographs of Jewish suffering and death which they had been trying to repress since 1945. Habbo Knoch argues that the German confrontation with Allied photos of the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945 imposed lasting after-effects upon the West German culture of remembering. The piles of bodies and half-dead inmates which the Allies had discovered became negative reference points against which “visual taboo zones” were constructed in the Federal Republic. Pictures of the ruins of German cities served as a visual antidote to the photographs of piles of dead bodies in the liberated concentration camps. Ruin pictures allowed German viewers to see themselves as victims and to avoid any direct engagement with the Nazi past.

Certain pictures of the Germans killed by the Allied bombing raids might, on the other hand, actually invite comparisons with images of murdered Jews; “photographs”, as Susan Sontag puts it, “echo photographs.” A photograph showing the...
cremation of German bomb victims in Dresden exhibited unsettling similarities to another picture of the burning of dead Jewish bodies in Auschwitz-Birkenau.  

Figure 15. Burning Corpses in Dresden after the Bombing.

43 For a detailed consideration of these and other clandestine photographs taken by Jewish workers in the crematorium Sonderkommando at Auschwitz-Birkenau see Georges Did-Hubermann, Bilder trotz allem (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007).

Post-war attitudes towards cremation suggest that it was quite possible for Germans to imagine such connections between the bodies of German bombing victims and piles of Jewish corpses. In the early 1950s, authorities in Berlin observed that many of the relatives of dead Germans were avoiding cremation; an East German official attributed this aversion to the “‘most insane beliefs’ …related to the ‘memory of the mass burnings in the concentration camps’.”

Conclusion

I began this paper by suggesting that the photographs used in postwar popular publications about the bombing war were supposed to help Germans mourn the destruction yet also celebrate the reconstruction of their cities. I want to end by examining three characteristics of photography as a medium which could complicate, even subvert this project. Anton Holzer suggests that photographs “record separate, small excerpts” from the past. Local publications tried to put these fragments of the past together in a sequence that would tell a coherent story. Showing photographs of historic buildings, then pictures of melancholy “premature ruins” and

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then, finally, the new buildings constructed after the war was supposed to move the reader visually (but also emotionally) from mourning to celebration. However, the power of individual images in such before-and-after sequences might threaten to unravel the visual narrative they were supposed collectively to construct. Ghostly pictures of die Alte Stadt before its destruction could haunt the minds of readers and create an “imaginary parallel reality” which made it hard for them to celebrate the new postwar future because they continued to mourn the loss of their city’s past. Perhaps this is why one local publication tried to reassure its readers in 1955 “that despite the great losses, the innermost essence of the city remains intact... a great deal of what connects us to the past was saved and what has been achieved in the ten years since the 22 March through the unbelievably tough, untiring work of reconstruction...is beginning to join the old with the new.” Still, the power of individual pictures could trap the viewer in a past moment of unmitigated, unredeemed violence and destruction which, in the instant of viewing, seemed all-too-present. Confronted with the desolation of ruins or the horror of mutilated or incinerated dead bodies, viewers might be overwhelmed and not know how or whether to move forward. The use of images demanded a very delicate balancing act—images should promote horror but not generate despair.

Secondly; changes in the ways that Germans dealt with the Nazi past, could significantly affect how they looked at photographs and which pictures they wanted to see. Until the early 1960s, local publications seldom included photographs which would have complicated the dominant narrative of German suffering. Readers were normally not allowed or encouraged to see the bombing as a result of the war that Hitler had started and that they had supported as long as Hitler was winning. Photographs of European cities bombed by the Germans, or of the suffering that Germans had inflicted upon others—Jews, concentration camp inmates, Russian POWs—were stranded on the periphery of contemporary visual representation in rare, critical publications such as Richard Errell’s Bilderbuch für Nachdenkliche (Picture Book for the Thoughtful, 1961). By the 1960s, however, it was becoming increasingly clear that the visual repertoire established in the 1950s no longer satisfied the visual needs and desires of younger Germans. New debates about the Nazi past and the return to public consciousness of the pictures of dead and dying Jews in the liberated concentration camps stimulated younger Germans’ desire to see beyond what the established visual canon allowed. Some local publications produced in this period reflect these new visual priorities. In 1965, for example, Armin Schmid’s book on the firebombing of Frankfurt became one of the first local publications to include any direct visual references to the persecution


51. See Malte Thiessen, op.cit., 318.


of German Jews. Two photographs showed the deportation of Frankfurt Jews to Theresienstadt in the autumn of 1942.\textsuperscript{54}

![Deportation Photographs](image)


Schmid tried to control the effects of these two pictures. Acknowledging that the extermination of the Jewish citizens of Frankfurt was one of the “most terrible chapters” of the city’s history, he nevertheless placed most of the blame upon Nazi officials. The local Gauleiter Springer was depicted as a “fanatical Jew-hater” who delighted in beating up Jews—including women and children—as they were waiting at the Grossmarkthalle to be deported to the East.\textsuperscript{55}

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\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 117.
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citizens of Frankfurt do not seem, in Schmid’s story, to have been involved in the persecution of the Jews. Schmid insisted that many ordinary Germans continued to empathize with Frankfurt’s Jews, providing them with food and taking care of their valuables when they were deported so that these goods would not be confiscated by the Tax Office. He also claimed that ordinary Germans had employed Jews and Mischlinge in their businesses and hid them from the Gestapo; “for this, some of these brave citizens had to go to prison or a concentration camp.” 56 Yet, these claims would not have prevented some of Schmid’s readers from asking what had happened to these deported Jews after their photographs were taken, especially if these readers had already seen the pictures of mass shootings in the East published five years earlier in Gerhard Schoenberner’s The Yellow Star, the first and still the best known illustrated book on the destruction of the European Jews. 57

Looking at the photographs of concentration camp prisoners, foreign workers (Fremdarbeiter) and Hungarian Jewish women forced to clean up bomb damage that appeared in a 1983 book on Bremen, readers might also wonder what happened to these other victims of the war after 1945. 58 Had Soviet POWs and forced laborers been able, like the German subjects of Pabel’s picture sequence, to pick up the threads of their shattered lives and rebuild their families when they returned home? Or had Stalin’s secret police shipped them off to the Gulags or simply executed them when they were repatriated? 59 If the Hungarian Jews in these pictures had survived the war at all, did they return home only to find that all the other members of their extended families had been murdered? 60 Asking about the pain of others—pain frequently inflicted by Germans—might in turn lead the Germans who had been moved by these pictures to re-assess the meaning of the suffering that they, or their parents, had endured during the bombing war.

And yet (finally), knowing what happened after a photograph was taken might make it difficult to understand what the picture originally showed. When we look at photographs of Holocaust victims who are still alive in the Lodz ghetto, for example, we already know that they will soon be murdered. Ulrich Baer argues, however, that at the time these photographs were taken, most of the victims probably did not know their fate. Life in the ghetto was seen as a gamble with the future, a desperate attempt to stay alive long enough for the war to end, for the Red Army to arrive. 61 We know that this gamble would not succeed. The Jews in these photographs did not. This “tension between two temporal orders marked in every photograph” also structures our

56. Ibid., 118.


relationship to photographs of German cities devastated by Allied bombing. Looking at the “then” preserved in these photographs, from the vantage point of our “now”, we know that these “dead cities” would soon come back to life. However, the Germans pictured in these photographs did not know that the horror would end, that their cities would be rebuilt. Only in retrospect, from the comfortable vantage-point of the West German Economic Miracle (Wirtschaftswunder) has it been possible to integrate this unmitigated violence and destruction into a redemptive narrative in which the end of the war in May, 1945-Stunde Null- serves as the prelude to post-war reconstruction and renewal. In his novel, In der Erinnerung, Dieter Forte suggests another possibility. Living in the ruins of an unnamed German city at the end of the war, his characters have absolutely no sense of a future. For them, time stands still; “Zero hour, as everyone called it, no man’s time in no man’s land, was born out of people’s feeling that life was meaningless…In this shadowless landscape of stone nothing changed… One froze in summer as in winter, the body reacted differently than before.” Framing photographs in a narrative that ends with reconstruction and the Wirtschaftswunder can make it difficult for us to see that for the Germans who appear in these photographic images, 1945 may not have been the beginning of anything at all.

Figure 19. Searching for coal in a burnt-out slag heap, Bremen, Fall 1945

62. Ibid., 141.
64. Dieter Forte, In der Erinnerung.Roman (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 75.
65. Schmink-Gustavus, op.cit., 126.