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DAVID F. CREW. *Bodies and Ruins: Imagining the Bombing of Germany, 1945 to the Present*. (Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany.) Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2017. Pp. xiv + 274. \$85.00.

Seldom has a book's title been so precise and suggestive at the same time. David F. Crew's engrossing new book, *Bodies and Ruins: Imagining the Bombing of Germany, 1945 to the Present*, examines images of the air war and their visual legacy in postwar Germany, focusing on two main themes: corpses and buildings. This is an insightful and necessary history of the pictorial repertoire that Germans have drawn on since the end of the Second World War. As Crew notes, his is by no means the first book on the cultural memory of the air war; a number of important case studies of particular cities have appeared over the last ten years. While these works have enormously enriched our understanding of the cultural impact of the bombing, it remains unclear to what extent the findings of local studies can be generalized. Crew aims to perform a double trick, transcending the case-study approach while studying local memory cultures. To this end, he undertakes an (almost) nation-wide survey of local publications, notably photo-books, published between the late 1940s and the early 2000s.

Crew calls his approach an "experiment in visual history" (9). While he points out that neuroscientists claim that crucial brain processes are nonverbal, Crew himself takes a more cautious "visual turn", stressing that photography was often framed by words. Not the visual image in isolation, but rather "the unpredictable relationship between visibility and textuality" (58) lies at the heart of this study. Crew engages with his main source material, that is, photographs of ruined buildings and mutilated bodies, in a sophisticated manner, yet conceding that it is difficult to state with certainty how the contemporaries would have seen and interpreted "shock images". Hence Crew studies the contexts within which photographs were reproduced in print: the compilers' introductions, the captions, and the sequence of images in picture books provide important clues as to how images might have been "read". Pictures were not left to speak for themselves, but embedded in texts. Paradoxically, these texts often stressed that the experience of the bombing was untellable in words alone – and yet, words often had to stand in for the photographs that could not be taken (for technical or political reasons). Picture books thus illustrate the limits of representation, both visual and textual.

Bodies and Ruins is organized in six chapters, combining chronology with thematic concerns. It begins with a survey of the narratives of the bombing war in local publications penned by municipal officials, firefighters or journalists between 1945 and the late 1980s. Crew argues that despite all local peculiarities, a master narrative emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s that "compressed" the whole Nazi past into the experience of the bombing. This German local narrative consisted of two strands: one depicted German civilians as innocent, suffering victims; the other praised the survivors' resilience, epitomized by postwar rebuilding. Generational and political change during the 1960s and 1980s notwithstanding, core features of this local narrative, Crew suggests, persisted until the end of the Cold War

and even beyond. While the opening chapter provides a skillful synthesis of earlier research and Crew's own findings, the next three chapters form the analytical core of the book. Here the author zooms in on different types of official and unauthorized photographs taken during the war, the visual repertoire and frames of postwar publications, and the representation of mortality and reconstruction in picture books. Crew stresses the absence of bodies from the visual memories fashioned by photographers and authors of local publications. During the war, the Nazis were reluctant to release images of the mutilated bodies of German civilians for propaganda purposes; after 1945, their use was "inhibited by visual associations with Allied photographs from the camps" (91). Instead, ruins became the main motive, serving as surrogates for (technically or culturally) impossible images of the bombs' impact on the built environment and on the human body. The "Germany" of the book's title refers essentially to West Germany. However, chapter 5 takes a detour into the GDR by exploring the iconic case of Dresden. This is a somewhat uneven chapter, though, with a great deal of contextual information crammed into it. Dresden became what Crew terms "a 'super-site' of German national memory after 1989" (11), and the final chapter moves forward to the present day, studying the explosion of images, "the multimedia bombing war", in documentary and feature film and on the Internet.

For a monograph that studies in depth picture *books*, surprisingly little consideration is given to the actual books. Books seem mere containers of figures and texts. But, surely, the commissioning, editing, marketing and distribution are not unimportant either. Consider two cases mentioned in *Body and Ruins* that can shed light on the role played by publishers. The introduction and later chapters discuss Hans Rumpf's *The Bombing of Germany* (1961, trans. 1963), including the American publisher's warning to readers. According to the bibliography, the German original was published by G. Stalling. Was this the same G. Stalling that had been a commemorative heavyweight during the inter-war years, publishing inter alia the Reichsarchiv's semi-official *Schlachten des Weltkrieges* series? A second case which would deserve further scrutiny is Richard Peter's bestselling *Dresden – eine Kamera klagt* (1950). Crew offers a nuanced interpretation of the photographer's visual strategies. However, the picture book's enduring success can also be attributed to its packaging and marketing. This was a picture book in which photographs were not simply framed by words, but also by a powerfully evocative dust-jacket design. To be sure, Crew defines his work as a visual history, not as a history of the book. Therefore, these minor reservations should in no way detract from Crew's achievement in exploring how Germans imagined the bombing from 1945 to the present through lenses which foregrounded bodies and ruins.

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