

Emplotting the Air War: Jörg Friedrich's *Brandstätten* (2003)

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Introduction

When Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* (2002; translated as *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945*, 2006) appeared on the scene, it added fuel to a widespread debate concerning the place of the suffering of German civilians during WWII in historiography and literature. One year later, the debate down to a simmer, Friedrich released his visual counterpart to *Der Brand*, *Brandstätten* (2003). Like its historiographical predecessor, *Brandstätten* (which will serve as the main subject of analysis) also attempts to find a means of representing German suffering—in this case, in the form of a photo book.

The issues at stake in the controversy unleashed upon the publication of *Der Brand* continue to be relevant to the context of *Brandstätten*, which reads – in tone, perspective and scope – as a textual-pictorial extension of *Der Brand*. Though no one could argue with the necessity of a historical treatment of the experience of German air raid victims, aspects of Friedrich's methodology, content, and style provoked heavy criticism. Given the perpetuation of these elements in *Brandstätten*, a brief outline of the debate about *Der Brand* is warranted.¹

Critics of *Der Brand* express worry that the book gives way to revisionist tendencies. The major cause for this concern is the lack of historical context. The Holocaust, the development of the war overall, the reasons for the implementation of area bombing, Hitler's aerial aggression – all of these factors appear anecdotally, the stuff of footnotes in comparison to the space given to the in-depth descriptions of the Allied bombings. This lack of context has its consequences. For historian Horst Boog, the isolation of the air war undermines Friedrich's argument: had Friedrich actually situated his book in the greater context of the war, Boog claims, he would have discovered quickly the unsustainability of his thesis: “die Behauptung, Engländer und Amerikaner hätten die systematische Vernichtung der deutschen Zivilbevölkerung in den Städten von vornherein geplant und dann durchgeführt” (133).² This lack of context also quickly leads Friedrich's reviewers to the conclusion that his account of the air war attempts to balance out German crimes with German suffering – a perpetuation of the myth of the German as *Opfer*.³ Nevertheless, as Peter Schneider warns:

“[...] wer Jörg Friedrich deswegen gleich als Geschichtsrevisionisten abstempelt, macht es sich zu leicht und weicht der Frage aus, die dessen Buch einkreist: Ist ein Kriegsverbrechen dann legitimiert, wenn es die Antwort auf einen faschistischen Angreifer ist, der die Logik der Vernichtung mit allen erdenklichen und unausdenklichen Kriegsverbrechen erst in Gang gesetzt hat?“ (161)

This question leads us from criticism of one man’s presentation of history to one of the broader discussions initiated by the book, namely that of the legitimacy of certain forms of warfare such as aerial city bombing.

Despite only briefly mentioning the Holocaust explicitly as part of the historical context in which the air war took place, Friedrich’s reviewers criticized his use of terms typically associated with victims of the Holocaust to describe those of the air war.⁴ According to reviewers such as Willi Wehler and Horst Boog, such “undisziplinierte Sprache” (Wehler 43) has the potential to stir *ressentiment*, extreme emotions, and revisionism, particularly because the author does not unpack these terms critically. In semantically equating the Holocaust and the air war, Friedrich again provokes the claim that his book slips into historical revisionism.

Finally, Friedrich’s *Der Brand* addresses what has been perceived as a void, a silence, or willful amnesia concerning the suffering of Germans during the air war. Friedrich in particular sees his work as answering a demand for information about the air war that “die akademische Geschichtsforschung [...] beharrlich ignoriert hat” (“Von guten Massakern und bösen Massakern”). In claiming to have written “das erste Buch [...], dass sich den Bombenangriffen auf Deutschland und damit dem größten Schlachtfeld des Zweiten Weltkrieges zuwendet,” however, Friedrich neglects the very academic sources he relied on to produce *Der Brand*: the works of Horst Boog, Olaf Groehler, and David Irving, among others. Though several of Friedrich’s reviewers agree with the existence of a taboo,⁵ as Robert G. Moeller and Bas von Benda-Beckmann illustrate, citing examples of historical treatises, statements by public figures, and the efforts of organizations for the exiles or victims of the air war, a historical treatment of the air war may in no way be considered a taboo-breaking enterprise.⁶ In insisting that he is breaking a taboo, Friedrich clears space for the establishment of his own model of interpretation as the standard. This project tends to undermine the earlier attempts of others to address the subject – something accomplished either through sheer elision or perhaps a systematic argument disassembling the legitimacy of earlier representations. In taking an ambivalent stance toward previous air war historiography, Friedrich quietly recycles older narratives and integrates them into his own nuanced version, which he frames as a novelty.

Brandstätten

These issues are important to consider, as *Brandstätten* reinforces an interpretation of the air war that is both explicit and implicit in *Der Brand*. Considered together, the works constitute a piece of modernist historiography, offering a multitude of perspectives (air, ground, strategy, literary description, quotes, photographic montage) and undigested, raw information. While *Der Brand* is (generally considered to be) a work of historiographical prose,⁷ *Brandstätten* is a photo book, consisting of archival photographs, literary quotes, and statistics, as well as quotes from eyewitnesses, political leaders, and Nazi propaganda. Though montage serves as the ruling

structural component, Friedrich has divided *Brandstätten* into 10 chapters, each of which bears a thematic title and is introduced by a short exposé of 1-2 pages.⁸ These chapter introductions punctuate the montage (which constitutes the chapters themselves) and place it in an interpretive framework and a general historical context relating to the air war—though, as reviewers have noted, Friedrich neglects to situate the air war among other aspects of World War II. Through these blocks of text, Friedrich's presence as historian (i.e., authoritative narrator) comes to the fore. Here, the narrator presents his own voice/interpretation by contextualizing what follows in an interpretive framework. The historical documents (quotes, photographs) that follow reinforce and legitimate the claims of the narrator.

In *Brandstätten*, the literary quotes, statistics, and photos depicting aspects of life before, during, and after the bombings reinforce a much more conservative interpretation of the air war in which the resilience of the German spirit triumphs in the face of the catastrophic loss of what Friedrich calls “die materielle Spur der Damaligen” (7).⁹ Friedrich presents the reader with two protagonists: German culture and the German people. German cultural heritage, in Friedrich's formulation, is itself reified in the face of the very cities that the air raids destroyed. As he eulogizes in the introduction to the first chapter, *Früher*:

Die Städte haben sich nicht verändert, das tun sie ständig; es sind andere. Dabei mag die Güte der Architektur und Wohnlichkeit dahinstehen. Der ästhetische Unterschied ist eigentlich ein Charakterwechsel. Die Widerspiegelung der historischen Ferne fehlt, die steinerne Consecutio temporum, Weggenossenschaft der Zeiten. (7)

In the same introduction, Friedrich identifies these two protagonists as he considers the weight of their loss: “Der Verlust von fünfzig bis neunzig Prozent ihrer historischen Bausubstanz ist von anderer Art als die Kostbarkeit des Menschen, gehört aber untrennbar zu ihm” (7). Though here Friedrich identifies them as distinct but “unzertrennbar,” he nevertheless emplots the cities (embodiments of historical architecture and cultural artifacts) differently than the German people (conceived according to the idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft*): the former takes the shape of a Tragedy, the latter that of a Romance. Drawing from Hayden White's work on historical narrative and figuralism, I will conduct a close reading of *Brandstätten* and the narrative strategies Friedrich uses in order to emplot the air war according to his own particular, even if not entirely novel, story arc. Specifically, Friedrich employs montage, chronological-thematic ordering, as well as what Michael André Bernstein calls “backshadowing,” in order to doubly emplot the air war according to Tragic and Romantic story types.

Romance and Tragedy

Though the text contains two rather distinct figures with their respective emplotments, both trajectories coincide obliquely in the conclusion of the narrative. In the Tragic mode in *Brandstätten*, the hero (in this case, German culture as manifested visually in German architecture) experiences the air war as a trial which culminates in loss and in a set of new limitations. The hero must learn to work within the limitations of the world, that is, to preserve what remains and to rebuild. The Romance unfolds around the figure of the German people as a veritable *Volksgemeinschaft*, a concept widely evoked in the language of the Third Reich to define the German people as a cohesive community set apart from ‘others’. The German people

as hero therefore comes to a deeper, fuller self-knowledge and, in the end, triumphs over evil.¹⁰ This triumph, however, is envisioned as a matter of death and resurrection in a new life.¹¹

In the book's concluding chapters, *Partei* and *Heute*, both heroes intertwine: the story of loss meets the story of the community. And while the mythical *Volksgemeinschaft* has been working together in the face of tribulation, the chapter *Partei* metaphorically lays it to rest along with the Nazi party. The representation of the Romantic figure of the *Volksgemeinschaft* proves to be untenable in the post-war period and ends with the burial of air raid victims whose caskets are draped with Nazi flags. Thus, in the conclusion, the Romantic figure exists only by association: the *Trümmerfrauen* of the chapter *Trümmerleben*, for example, rebuild the cities we see in *Heute*, but these women themselves are absent. Both Tragic and Romantic hero are resurrected in the postwar period, albeit in very different forms. The *Volksgemeinschaft* has dissolved; instead, the streets are populated with Germans: free from swastikas and clad in bellbottoms. The city on the other hand rises in fresh stucco, with cleaner lines and wider streets—but, as Friedrich pairs reconstructed buildings with their prewar models, or depictions of these buildings in their destroyed states, these new buildings are shrouded in an aura of loss.

Strategies: Montage

Consisting of a collage of archival photographs with informational captions, quotes, commentary, and statistics, the montage both constitutes and simultaneously obscures the shape of these Romantic and Tragic stories. As Susan Sontag explains: “A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck. [...] A photograph could also be described as a quotation, which makes a book of photographs like a book of quotations” (*On Photography* 71). Photographs are vulnerable to all kinds of meaning-making projects. The captions the writer affixes to the photograph could very well explain or misinterpret the context or even the subject of a photograph. In his *Editorial*, located at the end of the book, Friedrich calls the *Montagetext* “Kommentar,”¹² an indirect admission of the ambiguity the form of montage can provide. As reviewers of the work, such as Julius H. Schoeps, have claimed, Friedrich often fails to provide the specific historical context of his photos and quotes (for example, many quotes from eyewitnesses are both unattributed and undated).¹³ Without the proper context, the collusions of text and photo at times lead the reader to historically or causally false assumptions. No photo, of course, truly speaks for itself.

The very concept of the *Montagetext* in itself indicates that the construction is something to be read and interpreted. Rather than a presentation of raw fact, the *Montagetext* is, as Friedrich describes it, commentary—but also argument. Montage, particularly in the first half of the 20th century, was a political tool of both the left and the right.¹⁴ In the leftist modernist tradition, montage is often utilized self-consciously, exposing untruths as it unfolds. Friedrich instead operates more in the conservative tradition of Ernst Jünger, utilizing the collage of image and text to cement the image into a context and interpretation determined by the author.¹⁵ Rather than call explicit attention to the artifice of the work, the compositions in *Brandstätten* reinforce the truth claims of the documents, which in turn reinforce the narrator's claims in the introductory passages. The photographs are clear reproductions of historical documents organized to portray a sense of order and authority. Through this insistence on clarity and order, Friedrich effectively stages the photographs as documents having access to historical truth – even as they form a kind

of programmatic, argumentative “commentary” on the air war. The lack of context so criticized in Friedrich’s use of the photographs is an essential part of the staging of these photographs as evidence in the service of a particular argument and interpretation of the air war.

The work engages in a kind of *paralepsis*: through montage, it neither does nor has to pronounce conclusive terms such as *Kriegsverbrecher* or *Holocaust*. The historical conclusions it presents are circuitous and unnamed, but they lead the reader to the very threshold of the words. Friedrich makes this elusive stance clear in a 2002 interview with *Die Welt*:

Die Bewohner der Blindenanstalt in der Oranienstraße in Berlin-Kreuzberg haben den Krieg nicht angefangen; ich weiß nicht, ob sie ihn unterstützt haben. Jedenfalls sind sie nicht die Adressaten, um ihn zu beenden. Ist die Bestrafung der Blinden in der Oranienstraße eine Folge der Aggression Hitlers? Natürlich. Ist sie eine militärisch sinnvolle Antwort? Mit Sicherheit nein. Ist es ein Kriegsverbrechen? Das lasse ich offen. Churchill selber war der Ansicht, ein Kriegsverbrecher zu werden, wenn er den Krieg verliert. Da er den Krieg gewonnen hat, ist er offenbar kein Kriegsverbrecher. (“Ein Kriegsverbrechen?”)

One could only say that Friedrich judges Churchill to be a war criminal through reading his irony and carrying out his logic to its end (but for all intents and purposes, unstated) conclusions. Friedrich engages in a similar practice in the construction of his narrative montage, though less overtly so than in this interview example. Though the citizens huddled in the bunkers or handing out food are never labeled as being members of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, the images Friedrich selects and the way in which he arranges them substantiate the existence of a Romantic German community, cohesive and optimistic despite destruction from above.

In addition to leading the reader up to the point of a particular conclusion through the rhetoric of *paralepsis*, the lack of overall context and the montage of particular quotes and photos at times may lead the reader to inaccurate assumptions. The following example is an uncharacteristic moment in which the fate of others, specifically concentration camp prisoners, is portrayed tragically. The instance highlights the cruel impartiality of Allied bombing raids, thus confirming Friedrich’s critique of the Allied bombings: that they punished Nazis, civilians, and victims of Nazi aggression alike.

In the chapter *Trümmer*, Friedrich pairs a picture of the “Tenderhalle der Weserwerft, Arbeitsplatz von 1500 Häftlingen des KZ Neuengamme” (177) in Bremen 1945 with a quote from a British flyer dated September 1944. The quote from the flyer reads: “>Deutsche Arbeiter! Verlaßt bei der ersten günstigen Gelegenheit Eure Arbeitsstellen!<” (177). The reader has no indication as to where the flyers were dropped or whether they were effective. The photo depicts the destroyed workplace of prisoners who were not necessarily German workers. Nevertheless, the composition establishes the connection between enemy warning and the destruction of (prisoner) work areas. Through this connection the reader can only question whether the prisoners/workers were able to escape in time. This particular montage prompts the reader to make connections between different times, spaces, and addresses in the service of a particular argument.

Furthermore, this British flyer example illustrates how Friedrich's use of montage often propels a reductionist victim/perpetrator dichotomy. This sort of account, according to Bas Benda-Beckmann, parallels West German accounts of the 1950s and 1960s. Though Benda-Beckmann specifically refers to *Der Brand* in his analysis, similar tendencies are perpetuated in *Brandstätten*. Benda-Beckmann writes:

Like Hans Rumpf, Eberhard Spetzler and David Irving, Friedrich regarded the air war as a completely senseless act of terror against innocent civilians. Friedrich too created a schematic juxtaposition of victims and perpetrators, which was even more emphasized by his stylistic use of universalizing categories such as 'the bombardier' on the one side and 'the exterminated' on the other. As a consequence the Germans appear as sole subjects of annihilation and terror and therefore as a collective of victims, unwillingly drawn into the war. (280)

Considered against the greater context of *Brandstätten*, the depiction of the ruined prisoner work area constitutes a notable exception to the portrayal of the Germans as the sole victims. Though he insists that he draws no conclusions, Friedrich, like earlier accounts of the air war, "[...] traced the origins of the terror bombing to the highly personalized role of certain British military leaders" (Benda-Beckmann 281).

Although the text introducing the chapter *Angriff* acknowledges both the calculated military planning involved in achieving maximum damage as well as the high mortality rate of the bomber crews ("Das Leben ist in Bombern weitaus gefährlicher als am Boden. Goebbels nennt sie ›fliegende Särge‹" [39]), the chapter opens with a stark portrayal, not of the bomber crews, but of the military leaders involved in planning and organizing the air raids. Again, though he does not say explicitly that Churchill, Sir Arthur Harris, and Sir Charles Portal are war criminals, Friedrich's montage guides the reader to interpret them as such.



(Left) Figure 1A. Jörg Friedrich, *Brandstätten* (2003), 40. (Right) Figure 1B. Jörg Friedrich, *Brandstätten* (2003), 41.

On the left side of the spread, two photos of equal size and, implicitly, importance are each accompanied by one quote located in the right margin (Figure 1A). The quotes are short, ruthless, and cold in content. The more complex of the two is cited in German, the second in the English original. Though quote and photograph are severed from their original contexts, Sir Charles Portal appears to be explaining with the visual aid of a document that “[e]s ist klar, daß die Zielpunkte die Siedlungsgebiete sein werden” (40) to the two officers flanking him. The second quote, “I kill thousands of people every night,” though unattributed, becomes part of the story of the “Pilotenbericht” documented in the accompanying photograph. Regardless of who uttered these words, the quotes animate the photograph and draw it into the drama of the ‘perpetrators.’

On the right side of the spread, a large photo of Churchill and other officers inspecting a Halifax Bomber MK III accompanies a quote ordering “Maximum use of fire” (Figure 1B). Though unattributed yet again, the placement of the quote links it with Churchill, the most prominent figure in the photograph. Whereas this photo occupies half the page, a smaller photo, a quarter of the size of the Churchill photo, depicts an RAF bomber crew. The ratio of the two photographs illustrates the extent to which Friedrich places greater (moral) weight on the British officials. Whereas the quotes attributed to the officials paint them as war criminals, Friedrich treats the bomber pilots themselves with more sympathy, giving space to their fears and vulnerability: “>We all prayed a lot. I didn’t pray for myself. I just prayed, I wouldn’t make a mistake.< (Squadron Commander und Schauspieler James Stewart)” (44).¹⁶ Yet again, with the dubious David Irving as the foremost example, Benda-Beckmann claims that German historians’

scramble to cite a British scholar had its precedent during the war:

The Nazi pamphlets which had collected documents on the air war had often included quotes from British critics or neutral press which denounced the Allied air war. Several propaganda pamphlets consisted of a collage of quotes which either illustrated British brutality or protested against it. (88)

While neglecting the language of British protest, Friedrich clearly propagates the rhetorical strategy of citing brutal rhetoric from the British, thereby linking his history of the air war with a questionable tradition of air war interpretation.

Though Friedrich does invoke the tragic image of the Germans as victims, overall, the Germans (both as soldiers and as civilians) emerge as being stronger than victims: triumphant in the face of all. The chapter *Abwehr*, for example, opens with four photos. The two on the right side of the spread feature the heroic silhouette of a pilot working on *Nachtjäger Messerschmitt BF 109* as well as a close-up of an air gunner through his scope. This full-frontal close-up of the German air gunner is charming, but focused as he concentrates on the crosshairs. In comparison to the mug shots of the Allied POWs on the final page of the preceding chapter, this air gunner is decidedly in the superior position. The heroic photos of the German bomber crews are accompanied by Friedrich's admonition: the *Jäger* shoots down the bombers, but with the advent of *Begleitjäger*: "wendete sich das Los. Die deutschen Jäger wurden Gejagte" (63). Any possible tragic irony contained in this statement is buried under the monumental weight of such heroic depictions. Rather than Tragic irony, the photos assume a Romantic aura: heroism and perseverance in the face of poor odds.

This same heroic portrayal extends to the civilians as well. On the left side of one spread, three photos illustrate soldiers and civilians working together to extinguish fires; on the right side, a group in uniform poses—some of the individuals are even smiling—at the end of a decimated hallway in the *Marienhospital* in Cologne. The quote: "Wir haben unsere Posten gehalten, bis die Hitze unerträglich wurde" (73), accompanies these photos. Thus civilians and military members are depicted as hardworking, diligent, dedicated and cooperative. Benda-Beckmann notes that such portrayals of citizens and police officers acting heroically to save others during the air raids constitutes another typical formulation the understanding of the German word *Opfer* as both victim and sacrifice. In such accounts, *Opfer* specifically connotes heroic sacrifice. Benda-Beckmann cites an example of such anecdotes from Axel Rodenberger's *Der Tod von Dresden* (1951) in order to illustrate the presence of such a romantic understanding of Germans as *Opfer* in the context of the air raids.¹⁷ As Friedrich's montage similarly illustrates, the experience of suffering creates the possibility for the Romantic figure, in this case the German people, to triumph and come to a greater self-understanding.



Figure 2. Jörg Friedrich, *Brandstätten* (2003), 106.

Yet Friedrich does not forsake images and stories of suffering in order to promulgate the meaning of *Opfer* as sacrifice. He maintains the ambivalence. Friedrich creates a mini narrative of loss through the montage of two photos and a quote (Figure 2). Both of these photos contain text themselves. The top photo depicts rubble; on the steel skeletal remains of a wall, someone has affixed a sign: “Diese Schadensstelle ist nach Verschlüteten durchsucht.” The quote from a chief of police, occupying a position adjacent to both photos, testifies to the smell of death and disease: “Über allem ein pestilenzartiger Geruch” (106). Both of these elements seem to answer the question scribbled on the wall of the bombed-out building in the second picture: “Wo ist meine Mutter?” A soldier has scribbled this message, along with his rank, name and contact information. Though the captions on the photos identify them as originating in different cities (Kassel and Hamburg, respectively), Friedrich has arranged them as if they formed part of a dialogue, a question-and-answer revealing human loss amidst architectural ruins.

For the chapter *Trümmer* Friedrich develops a particular trope. On three occasions, he creates spreads consisting of four photos; a single quote, broken into four pieces, links all four photos together. Ellipses lead the reader to the next photo, to the continuation of the thought. In the first occurrence of the trope, Friedrich quotes an excerpt of Gottfried Benn’s poem “Zerstörungen,” in the second, an unattributed civilian’s description of the devastation of his/her apartment, and in the third, an order from the *Gebietsführer* in Köln-Aachen at the close of 1944.¹⁸ These ensembles, inserted at ten-page intervals, progress from elegy, to evidence of hardworking women in the face of a “Wüstenei” (183) (image of the domestic *Trümmerfrauen*), to a reiteration of the will of the German people in the face of the ruins of their cities. With propagandistic strength, the order cited in the third set of photos articulates the story that Friedrich’s book suggests: “Jedes Dorf, jede Stadt und jedes Geschäft... / muss eine einzige Festung werden. / Dann mag der Feind kommen, / an unserem Willen muss er zerbrechen”

(192-193). This tension between the Allied aim to break German morale and the images/quotes demonstrating German resiliency is recycled, not only from the mouths of Nazi officials, but from older historiography as well. While the use of direct quotes such as these may invite criticism in itself, the quote in this particular instance is all the more troubling because it affirms and articulates the very narrative he is constructing through photographic and textual montage. In veiling the exact sources of most of the photographs (Friedrich lists page numbers along with the archives from which he retrieved the photographs, but specifies neither photographer, affiliations nor the circumstances that engendered their production), Friedrich clearly reproduces Nazi photography without providing a context. In treating the photograph as an authoritative document, he does not put that propagandistic or genocidal gaze into question: he simply reproduces it.

Friedrich's use of montage is artful even as it attempts to disguise the reality of its own artifice. He treats photograph and quote as documents of truth and relies on their authority to support his own claims. The artifice lies not simply in the use of montage, but in his dubious use of the document to support his emplotment of the air war. Photographs do not simply speak for themselves, but are grafted into a particular story through the selective use of situative information (places, dates) and quotes. Even if quote and image are not historically linked, Friedrich creates his spreads such as to link one to the other syntactically, in order to create a coherent story in which the British officials are the perpetrators and the *Volksgemeinschaft* is heroic.

Structural and Temporal Ordering

The (photographic and written) quotes are the lexical elements, the building blocks of the narrative. While Friedrich's montage provides one level of provisional ordering, the chapter divisions provide a second, greater ordering. The chapters are divided not only according to theme, but chronology as well. The first and last chapters (*Früher* and *Heute*) indicate the temporal constraints of the narrative. As vague as these demarcations are, this *Früher* is treated as a symbolic entity; *Früher*, of course, is relative to the air war. *Heute* demarcates the postwar period. It is the present, but conceived of as its own entity as well: a present that is future to the air war. Within the brackets of *Früher* and *Heute*, Friedrich treats the whole of the air war—but as if it were a single air raid, a single event.¹⁹ The course of his narration adheres to causality according to a Mechanistic kind of historical interpretation:²⁰ pictures of planes lead to pictures of bombs, which lead to pictures of bombs falling, to burning houses, and so on.

At the end of *Angriff*, for example, nighttime photos of burning buildings cede to photos of destroyed Allied planes, the twisted corpse of a British bomber pilot, and mug shots of Allied POWs. Here, Friedrich intertwines cause and effect: offense and defense are simultaneous. This particular montage creates a thematic transition to *Abwehr*, i.e., the cause of the destroyed planes. Friedrich's commentary on the first page of the chapter reaches back in time to acknowledge that aerial bombardment of cities began with the Germans,²¹ but the photos also accomplish a double feat by linking cause to the 'effect' seen in the previous chapter. Though the final montage of *Angriff* and the first montage of *Abwehr*, Friedrich ties together two aspects of the air war which occur simultaneously, even as he arranges the chapters themselves causally (first an attack, then a defense).

As discussed previously, this particular collage illustrates the triumph of German spirit and the greater *Volksgemeinschaft*: the heroic photos of German bomber pilots provide a stark ideological contrast to the defeated depiction of the Allied POWs in the preceding pages. Friedrich is able to achieve this coalescence of the hundreds of air raids into a conglomerate representation of the air war through montage. In the case of the spread containing the soldier's question ("Wo ist meine Mutter?"), Friedrich collapses the effects of the air raids on Kassel and Hamburg so as to create one representative story of lost relatives, hopelessness, and the prevalence of death. Disparate places and times coalesce on the page. The resulting story, a construction, becomes coded as a condition of the air war.

In treating the entirety of the air war as a montage of a single air raid, Friedrich manages to dislodge the air war from its context (e.g., other fronts and the Holocaust). Friedrich neglects to delve into the *Ur-Ursache*: why the British and Americans were bombing the Germans in the first place. Though he does admit that the Germans first bombed civilians in Rotterdam, Wieluń, and Warsaw,²² he offers very little space to this relationship, as well as the greater, and perhaps more important, context of World War II. In omitting this context and an exploration of the causes which led to the air war itself, Friedrich engages only limitedly in Mechanistic historical interpretation. Just as the air war is reduced to a single air raid, the search for causally-based historical truth is reductionist, that is, metonymical, as well.

As such, *Brandstätten* contains only sparse references to the Holocaust or to other instances of German aggression. As far as the visual component is concerned, there are no Jews in Germany. The sole photograph depicting Jews specifically is in a wine shop air raid shelter in London.²³ KZ-prisoners appear occasionally as well in their work to help clear undetonated bombs, rubble, and corpses. In the introduction to the chapter *Bergung*, Friedrich explains that in order to bear this gruesome, horrifying work, the POWs and forced laborers "werden [...] alkoholisiert" (96). This same protocol was also valid for the *Sonderkommando* and *Einsatzgruppen* – individuals who did not simply clear away remains (like those prisoners depicted in *Brandstätten*), but served as agents of death as well. This is not the only example in which Friedrich draws a direct parallel illustrating the extent to which the horrors of the air war and of the Holocaust are comparable.

As in *Der Brand*, Friedrich uses terms and metaphors that not only echo images of the Holocaust, but the kind of discourse the Nazis used with respect to the Holocaust and its victims as well. For example, a photo spread in the same chapter presents two photographs, each of which depicts single corpses; the bodies occupy the middle of the frame. While the photo on the right bears no description except "Kassel, Oktober 1943" (109), the photo on the left depicts a woman lying face down—except she has no face; her legs are akimbo, arms bent under the torso. The caption reads: "Wie Puppen / Unbekannter Ort" (108).²⁴ Giorgio Agamben explains that SS guards called the dead bodies in the camps *Figuren*, figures or dolls, but never "corpses,"²⁵ depriving victims of their humanity even in death. The air raid victim in the photo is completely anonymous: unknown place, unknown time, unknown woman—without a face. But with this quote, she, as a corpse, has become associated, if not coarsely equated, with the corpses of those who had been gassed in the Nazi extermination camps. The anonymity of the subject in the photo

and the *Puppe* description come together to form an implicit argument: that the victims of the air war are akin to the victims of the Nazi death camps. Friedrich had also made this argument in *Der Brand*, and was criticized heavily for doing so; and while it is subtler, obscured by the splicing together of photo and text, it is clear that Friedrich has not abandoned the temptation to equate the victims of the Holocaust and of the air war.

Though Friedrich draws these parallels—thereby obliquely referencing the Holocaust itself—in treating the air war as if it were a single air raid, he isolates his narrative from the Holocaust (though one could easily argue that the many stories and experiences that add up to the event called the Holocaust really do belong to the *event* of the air war). In addition to the narrowed thematic-chronological structure of the book, the development of German culture and the German people (*Zivil-* or *Volksgemeinschaft*) as protagonists thus precludes the experiences of those who are not considered part of the ‘German people’: the prisoners, Jews and other persecuted minorities. As the previous examples illustrate, this development even involves the appropriation of terms associated with the suffering of ‘others’ during the war.

Backshadowing

In addition to his treatment of the air war as a single air raid, Friedrich’s causally linked, chronological ordering facilitates his use of what Michael André Bernstein calls *backshadowing*. Backshadowing, according to Bernstein, “is a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*” (16). The backshadowing Friedrich employs, moreover, directs the reader toward a Romantic and Tragic interpretation of the air war. As both Hayden White and Bernstein affirm, historical events are neither inherently Romantic nor Tragic. As Bernstein says, “tragedy,” and implicitly, romance, “is created by the ways in which that choice is represented, refigured, and recounted to others. The tragic is a mode of comprehending and giving form to events as a narrative; it is not a mode of existence as such” (11). Additionally, backshadowing lends the events an air of inevitability, as if the events which transpired were the only events possible. It encloses the book in its own system of interpretation that contains and identifies the lexical tools needed for creating meaning.

Though Bernstein suggests that this mode of reading may have the effect of propelling the reader into a position cognitively and even perhaps morally superior to that of those depicted historical subjects, Friedrich’s use of backshadowing casts these subjects in an aura of Tragedy and Romance. The Tragic figure, German culture, cannot “know better.” The German people, under Friedrich’s hand, are not helpless victims, but a community that fights, protects, and serves. The text creates an aura of impending, unavoidable cultural loss in the first chapter. As in *Früher*, the images are already marked temporally in relation to the coming destruction. Friedrich covers the images of towns and cities in a blanket of melancholia, urging the reader, through his pairing of quotes and images, to perceive the photos as evidence of a world and a culture lost and destroyed. A quote by Ricarda Huch, only a fragment itself, marks the coming destruction as an inevitability. Couched in the corner formed by photographs of Braunschweig’s *Alte Waage* and a building in Hildesheim, Ricarda Huch pronounces: “—des Volkes liebstes Material, das Holz” (29). The intricate designs on the wooden façade of the *Alte Waage* and the

exposed wooden crossbeams of the quaint Hildesheimer “*Umgestülpter Zuckerhut*” take on new meaning. Though the photos’ very position in the narrative marks them as bound for destruction, Huch’s quote makes the reader conscious of the building material and of the portentous predilection for flammable wood. Friedrich thereby implies that the potential for its own destruction is inherent in German architectural tradition. The cities could only burn so well because of this predilection, and because of the compact living quarters and narrow streets (the latter are also heavily featured among the curated photographs). It is, Friedrich suggests, as if these buildings were constructed with their own destruction in mind.

The transition from *Früher* to *Angriff* depends on the reader’s present knowledge projected onto the images. The final images of the first chapter are not chronological, though the last two photos are of Nazi flags and a Nazi march.²⁶ Not all of the photos are dated; those that are, however, make clear that Friedrich is not ordering the photos according to a straightforward, historical chronology, but according to the greater structure, that is, the air raid plot. Thus, a photo of Braunschweig’s *Gewandhaus* dates from 1930, and the next labeled photo, that of Aachen’s *Marienkirche*, dates from 1900. A Düsseldorf *Ehrenhof* photo dates from 1937 and the two final photos, adorned with the unmistakable regalia of the Nazi party, remain undated. This sequence not only underscores the greater importance of his constructed chronology, but indicates that these photos, regardless of when they were taken with respect to one another, all constitute objects from the *past*, a past which is prewar, and largely pre-Nazi, somehow pure – associated with the German literary tradition and with *Stadtrechte*²⁷ rather than documenting the variety and the specificity of these various points in the past. At the very end of the chapter, Friedrich inserts a quote from Goebbel’s diaries beneath a photo of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg:

“Mittags gibt der Führer Befehl zum Angriff in der Nacht gegen 5 Uhr. Es scheint, daß damit die Würfel endgültig gefallen sind. Göring ist noch skeptisch. Der Führer glaubt noch nicht daran, daß England eingreifen wird. Das kann im Augenblick niemand sagen” (Goebbels, Tagebuch, 1.9.1939). (Friedrich 37)

The insertion of this quote amidst the accumulating images of Nazi Germany at the end of the first chapter creates dramatic tension that is absolutely dependent upon the reader’s privileged position as someone who already knows the historical story and what is to come.

One of the most telling examples of this kind of forced, backshadowed reading involves two pictures, each depicting two sisters. On the left page, Friedrich includes a picture of a blond girl standing in utter agony and terror over the body of another girl of the same age. This second girl’s face is unrecognizable and partially caved-in. The caption tells us that these are two sisters in Warsaw following the German attack on September 25, 1939.²⁸ The photo on the opposite page, of the same size, also depicts two girls; they are tending to a garden. The girl on the left carries a pail; a slight smile crosses her face. The second girl concentrates on the flow of water from her watering can. The caption indicates that these two girls are also sisters and that one of them will die in an air raid: “Schwestern in Padeborn, Liselotte (r.) starb sechzehnjährig im Luftangriff vom 27.3.1945)” (143). This juxtaposition emphasizes not only Friedrich’s emphasis on backshadowed reading, lending a sense of doom and tragedy to the German girls’ narrative and by extension, that of the German narrative – but it also underscores the bounds of the story.

This is a story of German cultural loss and tragedy (in the dramatic sense), but also triumph. This juxtaposition of sisters is jarring because the picture of the two (nameless) Varsovian sisters is the only one in which someone is depicted in absolute agony – and the horrified girl is not German, she is Polish. Amidst the graphic photos of burnt corpses and twisted bodies, not one of the photographs shows the agony of the living in confrontation with death. Instead, the reader is greeted by the smiling faces of the community, of men and women who have come to provide food and medical aid to those who have suffered. Even though Friedrich forces the photograph of the Paderborn sisters into a tragic reading, he does not permit a pornographic gaze onto their visceral suffering. The reader must imagine.

As for the wider German community, Friedrich creates a Romance. It must be noted, however, that this story is itself bracketed by and intertwined with the Tragedy of loss. The Romance unfolds precisely during the chapters of crisis. German citizens, as noted, are portrayed heroically, rather than as victims. The photos in the bunker identify the victims, but they smile, sit together, and comfort one another. In the chapter *Bergung*, the photographs offer proof of hardworking Germans, of *Ordentlichkeit* amidst the rubble and the chaos. One spread in the chapter *Versorgung* displays neat stacks of numbered bricks. Parallel, on the next page, members of the SA carry boxes of glass-bottled beverages. They walk in a straight, single-file line. One man, in the center of the photograph, nods toward the camera, pipe between his lips. The man behind him shows a hint of a smile. In these photographs, the brown-shirted SA members are not thugs, but innocent helpers. The photos exhibit a sense of German will, endurance, and community. Again, few photos of Germans, if any, portray them as vexed or horribly distressed among the rubble. Rather, the reader has a sense of order and camaraderie.²⁹ Through these photographs, Friedrich constructs a story in which the German spirit triumphs in the form of a united *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Conclusion

Friedrich's *Der Brand* and *Brandstätten*, taken together as a piece of modernist historiography, constitute two related attempts to find a means of representing German suffering. Seemingly unperturbed by the criticism of reviewers of *Der Brand*, Friedrich's *Brandstätten* follows the same trajectory, raising the same questions about revisionism, semantics, and the necessity of historical context. *Brandstätten*, however, tells this familiar story in textual-visual form with the aid of literary quotes, eyewitnesses, key players, and archival photographs. In creating the montage of visual and written text, Friedrich has emplotted the air war dually according to older, more conservative interpretations: as a Tragedy of German culture and as a Romance of the German people as *Volksgemeinschaft*. Friedrich sutures together these two plot structures, creating a general narrative of the air war that is reductionist in its scope, and ideological in its aims.

- ¹ The collection of articles in Lothar Kettenacker (ed.), *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-45* (2003) provides the basis for this discussion.
- ² Moreover, Boog finds Friedrich's work as historian to be "lückenhaft" - in several places in the bibliography one can see "hastiges, ungenaues Arbeiten" (132); in the text, facts are often exaggerated (132-133).
- ³ See Stargardt 62, Wehler 143, Giordano 168 for a discussion of the German *Opferrolle*.
- ⁴ In a *Zeit Online* article, Ullrich summarizes Friedrich's use of questionable diction in *Der Brand*: "Da ist von einem ‚Auftrag zur Massentötung‘ die Rede, von ‚Zivilmassakern‘, von einem ‚mongolischen Vernichtungsorkan‘ und ‚unerklärlicher Vernichtungstrunkenheit‘. Mehr noch: Indem der Autor Keller als ‚Krematorien‘, Bombenopfer als ‚Ausgerottete‘ und die Bomber Group Number 5 als ‚Einsatzgruppe‘ bezeichnet, rückt er den alliierten Luftkrieg semantisch in die Nähe des Holocaust."
- ⁵ For example, see contributions by Wehler and Schneider in *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-45* (2003).
- ⁶ For a possible explanation for the insistence on the existence of a taboo, see Moeller 115.
- ⁷ See Walser 128-129 and Boog 136 for discussion concerning the inability to properly classify the book.
- ⁸ The chapter titles are as follows: *Früher, Angriff, Abwehr, Zuflucht, Bergung, Versorgung, Trümmer, Trümmerleben, Partei, and Heute*.
- ⁹ Unless otherwise noted, citations attributed to Jörg Friedrich are from *Brandstätten. Der Anblick des Bombenkriegs* (München: Propyläen, 2003).
- ¹⁰ For Hayden White's definitions of Tragic and Romantic modes of emplotment, see White 8-11. I have capitalized the terms "Romance," "Tragedy" and "Mechanistic" in accordance with White's usage.
- ¹¹ Such treatments of both the destroyed *Kulturgüter* and the German people as a collective figure find their precedents in earlier historiographical works about the air war. Specific examples from Friedrich's text will illuminate these instances of overlap.
- ¹² "Was immer in Bildunterschriften in den Anführungszeichen direkter Rede steht, zitiert nicht Personen in und um den Bildraum, sondern ist ein Montagetext. Dasselbe gilt für die kursiv gesetzten Begleittexte. Der Montagetext ist Kommentar und steht in innerem thematischen Zusammenhang zum Bild. Dessen konkreter Inhalt erscheint daneben als Bildlegende in Großbuchstaben" (Friedrich 239).
- ¹³ "Doch man erfährt viel zu wenig über die gezeigten Dinge. Wann genau wurden die Fotos aufgenommen? Von wem? Handelt es sich um Amateur-Schnappschüsse oder um Propagandabilder? Was genau zeigen sie? Wie wurden sie überliefert? All das fehlt. Jörg Friedrichs Literaturzitate und Kurzerklärungen reichen überhaupt nicht aus" (Schoeps 1-2).
- ¹⁴ "The montage form not only sought to break apart bourgeois ideologies of family, state, and capitalism from the perspective of the left (as in the work of Hannah Höch, John Heartfield, or Alfred Döblin); it was also a form embraced by the modernist right, particularly by Ernst Jünger and other reactionary modernists interested in the use of new photographic technologies for right-wing criticisms of body, nation, and capitalism" (Presner 111).
- ¹⁵ Friedrich still works within the realm of Jüngerian totalization of the image, though, in comparison to the montage work in Ernst Jünger's *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges. Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* (1930), the montages within *Brandstätten* are definitively more complex, and differently motivated. Friedrich's careful construction of meaning is thus more obscured than Jünger's, who often pairs a photograph with a single explanatory caption such as "Eroberte Stellung. Die Zahl der im Stiche gelassenen Gewehre deutet die Stärke der Grabenbesetzung an" (75). For more on Ernst Jünger's photo books, see Isabela Capeloa Gil and Todd Samuel Presner.
- ¹⁶ As a second example: "›Man kann gar nichts daran machen, außer bei 30° unter Null da durch fliegen, mit dem Schweiß, der dir das Gesicht herunterläuft und mit den explodierenden Granaten, die die Maschine schaukeln wie ein Korke auf stürmischer See.‹ (US-Navigator)" (Friedrich 45).
- ¹⁷ See Benda-Beckmann 71.
- ¹⁸ See Friedrich 172-173, 182-183, and 192-193.
- ¹⁹ Ralph Giordano suggests that the title "‹Der Brand› suggeriert eine kriegshistorische Einmaligkeit, die es nicht gegeben hat" (167). It is worth noting that even though the title of Friedrich's follow-up book, *Brandstätten*, appears to correct this by asserting a plurality (*places* of fire), the actual narrative Friedrich creates does not.
- ²⁰ "The Mechanistic theory of explanation turns upon the search for the causal laws that determine the outcomes of processes discovered in the historical field" (White 17).
- ²¹ See Friedrich 62.
- ²² "Die Luftwaffe begann das Zivilbombardement mit Flächenangriffen auf Wielun (Polen) und der Brandlegung in

Warschau. Gegen England wurde seit 1939 auf Militäranlagen gezielt. Nach britischen Abwürfen auf Stadt- und Wohngebiete mit maximal 20 tödlichen Verlusten je Operation ordnete Hitler Vergeltungsangriffe auf London an” (Friedrich 62).

²³ See Friedrich 141.

²⁴ A second quote, more descriptive, occupies the bottom margin: “—sah ich überall Menschen liegen, ob immer tot, kann ich nicht sagen. Sie lagen immer mit dem Gesicht nach dem Boden gekehrt und hatten fast alle kein Zeug mehr an” (108).

²⁵ See Agamben 51.

²⁶ See Friedrich 36-37.

²⁷ See Friedrich 13 for an excerpt of the Augsburg municipal law (1276) and Friedrich 14 for an excerpt of Johann von Goethe’s essay *Von deutscher Baukunst*.

²⁸ See Friedrich 142.

²⁹ The photographs Richard Peter includes in *Dresden. Eine Kamera klagt an* (1950) create an alternate understanding of Germans during and after the bombings. Though Friedrich and Peter compiled their photo books with different goals in mind, it is important to note the existence of an air raid photography collection which does not yield a representation of the mythical *Volksgemeinschaft*. In Peter’s book, and the sections “Der Mensch nach der Zerstörung” and “Aufbau” in particular, the photos are more candid. Though the photos show people working together, and even displays neatly stacked rows of stones, no one appears to be posing for the camera – in fact, no one looks directly into the camera at all.

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