

2 Bombardment

George Grosz (1893–1959) was born in Berlin, a city that Allied bombardment during World War II turned largely into a pile of rubble. Before the First World War, Grosz studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in Dresden, which was completely destroyed during the famous British-American air raid on 13–14 February 1945. He himself had experienced the terror of artillery shelling in the trenches of the Great War. He had enlisted into the military in November 1914, but war broke him psychologically. After six months, doctors determined he was unfit for service, as a result of shell shock,³²⁶ and he was demobilized. While recovering, Grosz completed a lithograph entitled “Das Attentat,” in which he depicted his traumatic experiences on the front in an urban landscape. The work illustrates the effects of a bomb, dropped from the air, exploding with great violence in the middle of a city; building structures are destroyed, all existing forms are torn apart. After the explosion, the city – indeed, the entire world – is plunged into chaos. Grosz’s lithograph captures the abruptness, the immediacy, the totality of destruction caused by a bomb thrown from an airplane, dropped straight from the sky like lightning – that is, something irreversible and final, against which there is no way to defend oneself.

After recovering, Grosz returned to his unit in January 1917. But shortly thereafter, his depression having returned, he was placed in a hospital for the psychologically ill, where he experienced repeated emotional breakdowns, he was tormented by nightmares and hallucinations. In this period he painted “Die Explosion,” imagery that testifies to the creator’s psychological destruction, but one that also serves as an allegory for global destruction. It is significant that Grosz, in order to express such content, returned once again to the experience of bombardment and he located that experience in an urban space. He showed a city that had been broken into pieces by an explosion and was falling to the surface of the earth. In Grosz’s painting, the bomb not only destroys a city, it annihilates the world, whose forms are thrust into the chaos

326 The term “shell shock” was used for the first time by Professor Charles Myers in 1915 in the periodical *The Lancet*. Myers – editor of *The British Journal of Psychology* – was assigned to the Royal Army Medical Corps at the rank of captain, where his focus was traumatized soldiers from the trenches. See W. Holden, *Shell Shock* (London 1998), 17.

of war. The bomb draws a thick line directly through the order of things as previously known; nothing will be like it used to be, before the war, before the bomb.

During the Spanish Civil War, on 26 April 1937, a special Luftwaffe unit handed over to General Franco by Hermann Göring bombed the Basque town of Guernica. With these events in mind, Picasso painted his famous work “Guernica,” which was exhibited that same year at the Pavilion of the Republic at the Paris International Exposition. Picasso’s “Guernica” is not a painting that chronicles a historical event; it does not present the bombing, but rather penetrates into its essence. The bombardment of a city becomes a universal symbol; a criminal air raid leads to new and hitherto unknown experiences with the sudden, violent and almost complete destruction of a local community and the urban space that that community had cultivated for centuries. The Cubist dismemberment in the painting captures the effect of the city’s fabric having been pulled apart, the bodies of its residents rent to pieces as a result of the explosion. As presented in the painting, reality is distorted. The attack on the city happened on a sunny afternoon, but the painting is dominated by darkness, and the sun has been changed into an electric bulb. That which is cold and callous serves as a symbol for an indifferent world. The painting contains no crowd consumed by the panic that contemporaneous reports described. There are only the figures of four women immobilized in an ecstatic scream, one of them with a dead baby in her arms; a knight’s monument is knocked down; there is a bull, a bird, and a horse head with an open mouth that dominates the entire group. Characteristically, there is no image of the perpetrator. Those who are sowing destruction remain invisible, they are beyond the world subject to destruction, in a literal sense above it, which allowed the artist to avoid political actualization or ideological instrumentalization. What remains is a work that is a universal icon of human tragedy.³²⁷

Grosz and Picasso’s imagery depicts the basic components of bombardment as a limit experience: the all-powerful strength of destruction, its speed and violence, its complete and irreversible character, the defenselessness. Bombardment gives rise to the horror of changed reality. Nothing is, and nothing can ever be, like it used to be. The key quality of that experience is ambivalence, the collision of “horror and beauty,” the experience of the *mysterium tremendum*.

327 See R. Arnheim, *The Genesis of a Painting. Picasso’s Guernica* (Berkeley 1973).

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Bombardment and the “Morale of the Civilian Population”

The Target: Civilian Morale

The first known case of the use of air power for bombardment came during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–1912. The Italians carried out several dozen air attacks on Tripoli and Arab villages in Libya in connection with a campaign to annex the Turkish provinces of Northern Africa. The first bomb exploded on 1 November at an oasis near Tripoli. An air force communique stated that the bombs had had “a wonderful effect on the morale of the Arabs.” British newspapers wrote about the shameless and merciless slaughter of civilians: women, children, and old people.³²⁸

In 1912 a certain German naval officer designed the first plan for the bombardment of England. Massive air attacks were to damage not only the enemy’s material potential, but also its civilian morale. Two basic goals of future air offenses emerge from this project: to cause widespread material losses and to sow terror within the civilian population, which would weaken morale and undermine the will to resist. These goals for bombardment have remained a part of strategic thinking until today, the only variable being which is given greater emphasis, material loss or civilian morale.³²⁹

During the First World War, aerial bombardment became an integral part of military strategy. In January 1915, the Germans began using zeppelins to carry night bombardments of industrial targets in England. Bombs were sometimes dropped outside of the target area. Though these were not intended in principle to be mass bombardments – that is, bombardments intended to strike military, industrial and civilian targets indiscriminately – civilians in residential areas nonetheless fell victim to the falling bombs. Actual practice showed that such attacks had a ruinous influence on the morale of civilian populations: people panic and chaos ensues. From the middle of 1917 the Germans carried out daily attacks, using Gotha biplane bombers, on southern England and London, where they claimed their greatest number of victims.

On 30 June 1917, *Frankfurter Zeitung* published a report from one of those who had participated in the first day of the bombing of London. We find in this

328 Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (The New Press, 2001), 33 (§ 78); S. A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II. The British Bombing of German Cities* (New York 1997), 1–2.

329 See M. Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg. Allied Bomber Forces against a German City in 1943* (London 1984), 15.

report no description of the kind of sea of flames that would characterize stories provided by bomber pilots during the Second World War, but the author of this report expressed clear satisfaction with the results of having dropped bombs in the very heart of England.

There, below us, a sea of London homes was surprisingly visible. Now, calmly and deliberately, we move forward, away from the suburbs, we must strike at the center. Focus on nothing but the target. Here is the Tower Bridge, The Tower, Liverpool Station, the Bank of England, Admiralty House, dazzling ships on the Thames – everything below us. I wave my hand to the commander, and I take the viewing mechanism in my hand – streets and buildings move slowly through the circle. The time has come. I press the lever with brief intervals, releasing the bombs, and in suspense I track the course of the projectile! There is an entire swarm of them. One after the other heavy bombs detonate in the heart of England ... the group turns, a last look at the city. Goodbye!³³⁰

Using zeppelins, the English carried out a series of attacks on military targets in Germany, and the French bombed German cities as revenge for the German bombardment of Paris and other French cities. But it was the Germans who played the leading role in aerial bombing in the First World War. That having been said, one should keep in mind that the total number of those killed as the result of German bombardment of England during the First World War was 1,400, which was a small fraction of those killed every day on the Western Front.³³¹

German bombardment was met with almost universal condemnation as an “act of barbarism.” Only Lord Montagu dared to make the claim that industrial London, where arms factories were located, was a justified target for air attacks.³³² But it was not about weapons factories, but about the population’s morale. Winston Churchill, who had recently been named Minister of Munitions, stated in October 1917, after a German air attack that killed 33 Londoners: “It is improbable that any terrorization of the civil population which could be achieved by air attack would compel the government of a great nation to surrender.”³³³ It is worth remembering these words, because during the Second World War the British Bomber Command, in carrying out the strategic bombardment of Germany, would act contrary to the above-stated belief.

Just after the Great War ended, some demanded that the German pilots who had bombed London be brought before a court on charges of war crimes. At the

330 See J. Piekalkiewicz, *Kalendarium wydarzeń II wojny światowej*, trans. P. Seydak et al., 2nd edition (Janki k. Warszawy 1999), 522.

331 Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 41-42 (§ 100).

332 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 16.

333 Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II*, 46.

time, the British Air Ministry secretly opposed this idea, arguing that such a trial would be tantamount to placing a noose around the necks of British airmen in any future war. Interestingly, along with this argument, British officials indicated the goal that air attacks on German towns would have had, namely "to weaken the morale of the civilian inhabitants (and thereby their 'will to win') by persistent bomb attacks which would both destroy life (civilian and otherwise) and should, if possible, originate a conflagration which should reduce to ashes the whole town."³³⁴ Such was the secret view expressed by the heads of the British air force at the end of 1918. Publicly, however, they were saying something quite different. In light of accusations about the "barbarity" of German air attacks on civilian populations, they emphasized the need to legally limit aerial bombardment to military targets, conveniently avoiding the fact that, given the technology of the day, it was practically impossible to conduct an air war and still respect such limitations.

The Hague Convention of 1907 prohibited the bombardment of "undefended ports, towns, and villages." The Treaty of Washington (1922) prohibited bombing as a way of terrorizing civilian populations. That prohibition was not added to the Geneva Convention, but the international community universally accepted the principle that bombardment, as an act of terror directed against civilian populations, was unacceptable. In 1924 a commission on international law in The Hague worked out two positions. While the British wanted to limit bombardment to "military installations," the Americans wanted to limit it to the area around the battle. The final compromise was based on the British proposal: wherever a military installation is located such that it cannot be bombed without simultaneously bombing the civilian population, then it cannot be bombed at all.³³⁵

Limitations placed on aerial bombardment during the First World War managed to reveal the fundamental issues involved here, issues that would characterize bombardment during the Second World War: unavoidable losses sustained by civilian populations in attacks directed against industrial targets; the destructive influence of air attacks on the morale of civilian populations; and the associated conclusion that, under sufficient pressure, a people can succumb.³³⁶ Bombardment during the First World War had only a slight influence on the results of the war, but it was precisely at that time that the dream was born

334 Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 40 (§ 96).

335 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 19.

336 *Ibid.*, 17-18.

of a powerful and modern air force and large and strategic bombing attacks that would quickly decide the course of a future war.

The foundation for this dream was set in the interwar period by two people: Giulio Douhet – the Italian general who led the first bombardments of Libya in 1911, commander of the first Italian air squadrons in 1912–1915 – and the English general Sir Hugh Trenchard – commander of the Royal Flying Corp in France during the First World War, which under his leadership became the Royal Air Force, or RAF. For both of these men, the central focus of attention was “civilian morale.”³³⁷

Douhet was the first theoretician of strategic bombing. In 1921 he published a book under the title *The Command of the Air*, in which Douhet analyzed how bombing could play a significant role in the process of disorganizing and degrading the enemy’s military potential. In Douhet’s view, mass bombing of population centers could break citizens’ morale and could, in effect, lead a tormented and terrorized nation – deprived of shelter and lacking food and effective assistance – to turn against its government and force that government to end the war. Douhet wrote:

Take the centre of a large city and imagine what would happen among the civilian population during a single attack by a single bombing unit. I have no doubt that its impact on the people would be terrible. [...] What civil or military authority could keep order, public services functioning, and production going under such a threat? [...] A complete breakdown of the social structure cannot but take place in a country subjected to this kind of merciless pounding from the air. The time would soon come when, to put an end to horror and suffering, the people themselves, driven by the instinct of self-preservation, would rise up and demand an end to the war.³³⁸

His theories were later adopted and applied in practice by the world’s military powers, above all by the Bomber Command led by Artur Harris, who would become Air Chief Marshal and, as of February 1942, Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command and creator of the strategy to carpet bomb Germany. Douhet is the spiritual father of the huge bombardments of the Second World War that destroyed Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo.

337 For more on Douhet and Trenchard’s theories, see *ibid.*, 18–19; R. Neillands, *The Bomber War. The Allied Air Offensive against Nazi Germany* (New York, 2005), 13–25; J. Friedrich, *The Fire. The Bombing of Germany 1940–1945*, trans. A. Brown (New York, 2008), 54–57. A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities. The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* (New York 2006), 129–135.

338 See Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 130–131.

According to Trenchard, who had an enormous influence on the shaping of doctrines that guided the British air force, aerial bombing could be used most effectively to attack the enemy’s morale, which meant in practice striking at civilian populations, which is why he pushed so hard for the expansion of offensive air power and the reduction of defensive forces. He harbored the belief that a future war could be won by “causing such a moral effect among the enemy’s civilian population that its government will be forced to start peace talks.” At the heart of this theory was the belief that it would be easier to destroy the will to resist on the part of industrial workers in munitions factories than it would be to destroy the material foundation of a nation’s defense. Trenchard claimed that the “moral effect” of bombing was twenty times more effective in weakening the enemy than material losses; it was incomparably more powerful than destruction itself. A country could win a war without having to deploy a huge army and could thus keep its own losses to a minimum.

The term “civilian morale,” which bombing was supposed to “weaken,” “erode,” “undermine,” or absolutely “destroy,” has had great longevity. Indeed, one might say that it became – on an equal footing with arms factories and transport hubs – a target of planned air raids. While specialists in international law discussed the need to draw a clear distinction between soldiers and civilians, between military and civilian facilities, the hard voice of strategists – for whom civilian morale was simply another military target – grew more resonant.

Bombardment in the Second World War

In the period between the First and Second World Wars, bombers were used in local conflicts. For example in 1919, during the Third Afghan War, British bomber divisions under the command of Arthur Harris bombed Jalalabad and Kabul. In 1925, during the Rif War between Spain (and France) and Morocco, the town of Sheshuan in the picturesque mountain region of Rif was bombed by Spanish and French air forces in an act of vengeance for the horrible treatment of prisoners. One can see in the bombardment of Sheshuan a prototype for later terroristic air attacks on civilian populations.³³⁹ In 1936, the Italians bombed

339 See *ibid.*, 51 (§ 122). A book that appeared two years after this event accused a squadron of volunteer American pilots and the French Air Corps of the criminal massacre of defenseless citizens (at the time of the bombing, there were no soldiers or military facilities in the town). See W. B. Harris, *France, Spain and the Rif* (London 1927), 300.

Addis Abeba several times during the war in Ethiopia, and in 1937 the German Condor Legion carried out the devastating air raid on Guernica.

The art of bombing – perfected over the years and supported by improved bombers and an ever deadlier arsenal of bombs – fully demonstrated its destructive potential in the Second World War. The airplane, that symbol of modern times lifting toward heaven the Christ-airman of Apollinaire's "Zone"³⁴⁰ and returning him to earth as the "new Christ" – Lindbergh³⁴¹ – manifests itself as a machine bringing mass death and destruction. Tossing bombs from airplanes had turned Sheshuan and Guernica into rubble, creating at the same time a new kind of urban landscape. Soon Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry, London, Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki would themselves experience bombardment and the horrifying vision of ruins.

Preliminary Stage

Bombardment during the Second World War developed in several stages.³⁴² The period between September 1939 and May 1940 was the preliminary stage. The air war started against Poland. The first city bombed in this war was Wieluń. On 1 September, at 4:40 a.m., planes from the Luftwaffe's Immelmann Sturzkampfgeschwader (dive bomber-wing) 76, under the command of Walter Siegel, appeared in the skies over Wieluń. The first target of this air attack was the Wieluń hospital. The bombardment demolished about 75 % of the city, and

340 J. Kwiatkowski points out that the vision in the above-mentioned "Zone" of the Ascension and the Christ-airman, to which the twentieth century was compared, was inspired by, among other things, "paintings by German primitivists in a museum in Cologne. These paintings present Christ on a cross suspended in the air by wings." G. Apollinaire, *Wybór poezji*, ed. J. Kwiatkowski (Wrocław 1975), footnote on pp. 39–40.

341 The moment that Lindbergh landed in Paris on 21 May 1927 was described like this: "a small white hawk of a plane swoops hawk-like down and across the field – Cēs lui, Lindbergh, LINDBERGH! and there is pandemonium wild animals let loose and a stampede towards the plane [...] running people ahead running people all around us running [...] and it seems as if all the hands in the world are touching or trying to touch the new Christ and that the new Cross is the Plane [...]." See Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 243.

342 The secondary literature on this topic is deep. The works that I have used, those mainly of English and German historians, are cited in the footnotes below. The latest synthesis on a Polish foundation is an article by M. Andrzejewski, "Bombardowanie niemieckich miast w latach II wojny światowej przez brytyjskie i amerykańskie lotnictwo. Zarys problematyki," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 4 (2007).

about 1,200 residents lost their lives. Wieluń's historic city center saw the greatest destruction. This was the war's first terroristic air attack against a civilian population; at the time of the bombing, there were no Polish Army units stationed in or around the city.³⁴³ On 25 September the Germans carried out a massive all-day ground and air attack on Warsaw – an air raid on the city that, at the time, was the largest in history.³⁴⁴ Burning Warsaw had to capitulate. The initial stage ended on 14 May 1940 with the bombing of Rotterdam. The city center was destroyed, and streams of burning oil flowed from a damaged margarine factory. After the September air raids on Warsaw, the British treated the bombardment of Rotterdam as a new example of the brutality of German air power, while the British air force was rather cautious in its approach, limiting itself to dropping propaganda leaflets on German territory. Sir Arthur Harris later joked that the only thing that was achieved at the time was to increase the supply of toilet paper on the continent.³⁴⁵

First Stage: From May 1940 to November 1941

The first stage of bombing lasted from May 1940 to November 1941. In this stage the British bombed military targets along with selected cities. Special instructions from the War Cabinet in June 1940 expressed "a distinct concern"

343 See J. Trenkner, "Wieluń, czwarta czterdzieści," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 29 August 2008; *Wieluń 1 IX 1939*, eds. J. Żelazko, A. Ossowski (Łódź 2009).

344 On "black Monday," 25 September 1939, the Germans dropped 560 tons of explosive bombs and 72 tons of incendiary bombs on Warsaw. For the first time they used 1,000 kilogram bombs. A total of 1,455 tons of bombs were dropped on Cologne during the air raid of 30-31 May 1942; the size of the explosive bombs ranged from 1,800 kilogram explosive bombs and not quite 2 kilogram incendiary bombs. During "Operation Gomorrah," nearly 9,000 tons of bombs were dropped on Hamburg – that is, more than 14 times more than on Warsaw on "black Monday." During the famous air raid on Dresden on 13-14 February 1945, the English and Americans dropped around 4,500 tons of explosive bombs (weighing between 1,800 and 3,500 kilograms) and incendiary bombs. T. Szarota, "Naloty na Warszawę podczas II wojny światowej," *Kronika Warszawy* 3/4 (1993), 18; J. Piekalkiewicz, op. cit., 662-663, 1034-1035; R. H. Bailey and the editorial team of Time-Life Books, *Wojna nad Europą*, trans. S. Kędzierski (Warszawa 2000), 60-61; Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945* (Harper Perennial, 2005), 124. In his monograph (*The Battle of Hamburg*, 322), Middlebrook claims that 8,344 tons of bombs were dropped on Hamburg (4,243 tons of explosive bombs, and 4,101 of incendiary bombs).

345 See S. A. Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II*, 9.

that, in conducting air attacks, “any unnecessary harm to enemy civilians” had to be avoided.³⁴⁶

In July 1940 the Luftwaffe launched the “Battle of Britain” and German bombs began to kill English civilians. London fell victim to air raids many times (the largest bombardment came on the night of 10–11 May 1941), but the most famous bombardment of this period, one which achieved the rank of a symbol, was the air attack on Coventry on the night of 14–15 November 1940 that the Germans code-named “Moonlight Sonata.” Compared with later air raids, the number of victims is not very impressive: 568 killed (that is, victims counted in the morgue and whose bodies were identified) and 1,256 injured. The Coventry Cathedral sustained massive damage, and the overall losses were so spectacular that Goebbels coined the term to “Coventry-ize,” or to completely ruin.

On a certain evening in 1940 at the height of the air battle over England, Hitler painted an apocalyptic picture of London to his guests assembled for an evening meal. In his memoirs, Albert Speer described the dictator’s frenetic speech. It was then that Hitler prophesied London’s fate, which would be Dresden’s fate five years later: a gigantic firestorm consuming the entire city.

Have you ever looked at a map of London? It is so closely built up that one source of fire alone would suffice to destroy the whole city, as happened once before, two hundred years ago [the Great Fire of London, which destroyed as much as 80 % of the city, broke out in 1666 – J. L.]. Göring wants to use innumerable incendiary bombs of an altogether new type to create sources of fire in all parts of London. Fires everywhere. Thousands of them. Then they’ll unite in one gigantic area conflagration. Göring has the right idea. Explosive bombs don’t work, but it can be done with incendiary bombs. What use will their fire department be once that really starts!³⁴⁷

For the British, the air raids on Coventry were not only a shock; they also marked a turning point in the social mood. From that point on, the RAF intensified its attacks on German cities. The British air force’s obligation to follow a prohibition on the intentional attack of civilian targets and instructions to avoid unnecessary harm to enemy populations would soon be undermined by Churchill himself. The logic of retaliatory action would begin to take over: an air raid on Berlin in retaliation for the bombing of London; an air raid on Mannheim in retaliation for the bombing of Coventry.³⁴⁸ The escalation of bombardment thus found its

346 Ibid., 10.

347 Taylor, *Dresden*, 124.

348 See T. Lewis, *Moonlight Sonata. The Coventry Blitz, 14/15 November 1940* (Coventry 1990).

justification: it was the Nazis who first bombed civilians in Warsaw, Rotterdam, London and other English cities, and we have a right to respond in kind.

In July 1941, Churchill said:

If tonight the people of London were asked to cast their votes whether a convention should be entered into to stop the bombing of all cities, the overwhelming majority would cry, "No, we will mete out to the Germans the measure, and more than the measure, that they have meted out to us."³⁴⁹

The Prime Minister's words were welcomed by Londoners. Recalling the German air raids on London in his memoirs published two years after the war, Arthur Harris admitted that he had felt a desire for revenge. Turning his gaze from the fires, he said to the chief of the Air Staff accompanying him: "Well, they are sowing the wind." To which the chief responded: "[...] the enemy would get the same and more of it."³⁵⁰

But the air battle over England showed that bombing did not cause the panic and disorder that might have been expected. On the contrary, the air raid over London on the night of 10–11 May 1941, which according to some sources took 3,000 lives and according to others 1,500 lives,³⁵¹ indicated that residents of the capital city, along with the rescue services, were well prepared, and courageous. A surprising aspect of the Blitz experience was thus the discovery that, after the first shock, a well-organized civilian population was able to adapt to mass bombardment, and could maintain high morale even under very difficult conditions and in the face of tragic losses.³⁵²

Second Stage: From February 1942 to the Middle of 1944

The second stage ran from February 1942 to the middle of 1944. British strategy was at an important threshold. The turning point was directive no. 22 issued by the War Cabinet on 14 February 1942. Air raids were to serve as a substitute for a second front in support of Russia in the war against Germany. The directive also elaborated on the goals and effects of aerial attacks:

A review has been made ... and it has been decided that the primary object of your operations should now be focused on the morale of the enemy civilian population and, in particular, of the industrial workers.³⁵³

349 J. Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London 2001), 82.

350 Taylor, *Dresden*, 125.

351 See also J. Piekalkiewicz, op. cit., 472, and J. Mack and S. Humphries, *London at War. The Making of Modern London 1939-1945* (London 1985), 96–97.

352 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 22.

353 Ibid., 24.

In order to realize these goals, a new method for bombing was developed, so-called area bombing. Air Marshal Arthur Harris became head of Bomber Command.

Churchill agreed to mass bombing raids on German cities, and on the night of 28–29 March 1942 an air attack was carried out on Lübeck in which a new kind of incendiary bomb was used for the first time, which meant that the fire-storm phase of the war had been entered, marked by the intentional terrorization of civilian populations. The night bombing of Cologne on 30–31 May 1942 involved the first application of a new method: a “raid by a thousand bombers” using a combination of explosive and incendiary bombs.

In August 1942 Churchill traveled to Moscow where, in a conversation with Stalin, he explained that the western allies were not yet able to open a second front in Europe, but that Great Britain would carry out intensive bombardment of Germany. Stalin praised this idea and emphasized that both German buildings and factories should be destroyed. The British Prime Minister agreed completely, stating that “civil morale was a military objective, but the bombing of working men’s houses came as a by-product of near-misses on factories.”³⁵⁴

An increasing number of German cities came under Allied bomb attacks (as of June 1942, the Americans participated in air operations over Germany). Without a doubt, the culmination of events in this stage was “Operation Gomorrah” – that is, the British and American carpet bombing of Hamburg between 24 July and 2 August 1943 (The RAF bombed at night, the U.S. Air Force during the day). This series of bombardments exemplified the new phenomenon of the so-called firestorm. Roofs were destroyed by explosive bombs, which prepared the ground for incendiary bombs. Dropped in huge numbers, these bombs ignited fires throughout a city that cannot be battled. The fires spread quickly and turn into a single sea of flames. Extremely high temperatures draw in colder air from all levels of the atmosphere, which creates a kind of tornado – winds of great force rage through the burning city, carrying with them people, trees and rubble, igniting new fires. The number of victims in the Hamburg bombardment has been estimated at around 45,000.³⁵⁵ After Hamburg, it was Berlin’s turn. The “Battle of Berlin” began with systematic carpet bombing on 22 November 1943.

354 Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 72. Glover cites a report by Averell Harriman, President Roosevelt’s emissary for talks with Stalin.

355 For comparison, it is important to remember that all of the German air raids on Great Britain during the Second World War killed 51,509 civilians (Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 328).

At the beginning of November 1943, a report from the RAF Air Intelligence Department suggested that the Germans had been broken by the massive air raids on cities:

The full effects of air attack since the devastation of Hamburg have become known in all parts of the country [...] the general attitude is approaching one of peace at any price and the avoidance of wholesale destruction of further cities in Germany.³⁵⁶

But as it would turn out, and as is often the case with intelligence reports, the contents of this report deviated far from reality.

Third Stage: From the Summer of 1944 to War's End

The third stage of bombardment lasted from the summer of 1944 through the end of the war. The Allies had gained complete control over the skies, and after the invasion of Normandy they could make use of air bases in France, which made daily precision bombing possible. At this time, two concepts collide with one another: on the one hand, the concentration of air raids on industrial targets and the transport system and, on the other hand, the plan pushed by Air Marshal Harris to continue the carpet bombing of German cities. The following argumentation was used to support the second concept: first – it would save the lives of Allied soldiers by emphasizing air operations and reducing the deployment of land troops (an argument like “a life for a life”); second – it would bring about the final destruction of German industry; and third and finally – it would break the morale of the civilian population.³⁵⁷

In this stage of the air war, the Germans were making use of their “miracle weapon,” the V-2 rocket. By the end of March 1945, 1,115 V-2 rockets had fallen on England (517 of them on London), killing 2,724. The effect was tiny compared to the air raid over Dresden carried out in a combined effort by the RAF and the U.S. Air Force on 13–14 February 1945. Smaller attacks continued over the course of the next ten days, and the Americans launched the last raid on 2 March, but the first strike had already turned the city into rubble. According to the most recent estimates, the immense firestorm claimed between 35,000 and 40,000 victims and destroyed about 85 % of the city.³⁵⁸

356 Robin Neillands, *The Bomber War: The Allied Air Offensive Against Nazi Germany* (Penguin, 2001), 281.

357 See Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 73-75.

358 See Sebastian Cox, “The Dresden Raids: Why and How,” in Paul Addison, Jeremy A. Crang, eds., *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945* (Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 51, 57.

Dresden had become a bargaining chip in great power politics, part of Churchill's preparation for his trip to the Crimea. During the Yalta Conference, the Prime Minister intended to offer Stalin military support for the Soviet offensive launched in January 1945. He thus pressured the RAF to make a spectacular move in support of actions on the Eastern Front. In his analysis of priority bombing targets – fuel installations, submarine bases, and weapons factories – Sir Charles Portal, the Chief of the Air Staff, called for the massive bombardment of Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz, stating that “a severe blitz will not only cause confusion in the evacuation from the East but will also hamper the movement of troops from the West.”³⁵⁹ In the evening of 25 January, Churchill had a telephone conversation with his Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair. He demanded information about what plans the Bomber Command “might have for basting the Germans in their retreat from Breslau.”³⁶⁰ One could interpret this as “tanning the Germans’ hide (to ‘give them a bruising,’ or to ‘punch them’) during their retreat from Breslau.” But the verb “to baste,” of course, has three meanings: 1) to sew temporarily; 2) to moisten meat while cooking, with its own drippings, as in “to roast in its own drippings”; and 3) to beat with a stick, to thrash, as with a cudgel. In light of what was about to happen in Dresden, use of the culinary definition indicating roasted meat would be both amusing and terrifying.

The Yalta Conference began on 4 February 1945. Though the general idea to support the Soviet offensive on the Eastern Front through intensive bombardment had been worked out in London, it was the Russians who pushed for the bombing of Dresden, which was regarded as a key transport hub. One member of the British delegation, who worked as a translator between the Prime Minister and the Russians, stated that Stalin wanted to paralyze German transport and hinder the organization of an effective defense. From that moment, the fate of the “Florence on the Elbe” was a political matter of the greatest importance, given that it lay in the sphere of interests of the three great powers. Some historians have speculated that the destruction of Dresden was but a show of strength by the western Allies. Negotiating with Stalin, Churchill wanted to make sure he had the dictator’s respect. Did he already realize that the Soviets understood only the argument of power? One way or the other, the decision was made at the highest level. Now, they only needed favorable weather – a bright moon, a cloudless sky. The Yalta Conference ended on Sunday, 11 February. The first wave

359 Addison, *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden*, 25.

360 Taylor, *Dresden*, 210.

of bombing started on Tuesday, 13 February, at 10:03 pm and lasted until 10:25 pm, and the second wave started at 01:45 a.m. the next day. In the morning of 14 February, American bombers appeared over the city to carry out the third attack. Dresden was burning. It was Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent.³⁶¹

By the end of 1944, it had become clear, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the results of the air offensive against German cities was paradoxical. Carried out in order to “undermine and break civilian morale,” the air raids had not fulfilled expectations. Reports that residents of German cities, inundated by bombs, had been broken in spirit and were ready to deny the Führer their obedience turned out to be – to put it delicately – overly optimistic. The main press organ of the Office of Information and Propaganda of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa – AK) High Command, *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, reported on 4 May 1944:

The Germans are starting to feel as if they allowed themselves to be drawn into a blind alley by their “genius” leader, into a situation from which there is no escape! [...] Falling spirits among the Germans. According to a great deal of reliable information, the current German mood can be thus described: 1) armies battling on the Eastern Front are increasingly discouraged and doubting in victory, 2) just behind the front the mood is entirely bad, both in the army and within German society, 3) in the Reich under the influence of catastrophic bombardment, and given serious food shortages and other shortages of many kinds, along with war exhaustion, the mood among the German people is very low, clearly close to collapse and panic. After the last huge air attack on Berlin, 400 people were shot for “defeatism.” The “Heil Hitler” greeting in the Reich is no longer used, at least they are using only “Heil.”³⁶²

In his diary, Victor Klemperer described the mood among German civilians entirely differently. On Monday, 1 May 1944, three days before the above-cited article appeared in the *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, the diarist recorded the story of a young girl who had arrived in Dresden from Berlin:

What she reported from Berlin shook me, because it *confirmed* what Goebbels repeatedly emphasizes. The Berliners are quite used to the raids [...]. Serious destruction on every street, loss of life everywhere, but in general the people’s mood is good, humorous, prepared to see it through. Special rations and fear help things along, there’s grumbling here and there, but on the whole people carry on with self-confident Berlin wit and cockiness. No one is expecting imminent defeat; some say the war will last another two

361 On the origins of the bombardment of Dresden, see F. Taylor, “Thunderclap and Yalta,” in Taylor, *Dresden*, 179-192; S. Cox, op. cit., 18-61; D. Irving, “Thunderclap” in *Apocalypse 1945: The Destruction of Dresden* (Focal Point Publications, 2007), 90-108.

362 “Biuletyn Informacyjny.” Część III. Przedruk rocznika 1944. Konspiracja,” *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy*, rok IV (LV), nr specjalny 3 (200) (Warszawa 2003), 1985.

years, others, that the decisive *German* “retribution” is at hand. [...] The girl works in some Berlin factory, so hears this and that. Therefore the regime has no need to fear internal collapse or revolt. And on this point Goebbels is undoubtedly correct: As a means of bringing pressure to bear on morale the air offensive is a failure.³⁶³

Bombing and Morality

The Germans, tormented by bombardment, did not fall into despair, and did not collapse into chaos. They also showed no great sign of rebellion against authority. Indeed, what they showed was a certain “fighting spirit” and a sense of humor. The vast destruction and personal misery did not lead them to revolutionary action, but rather pushed them into apathy. Shocked by the loss of relatives, homeless, bereft of their possessions built up over a lifetime, the Germans sought what was most elemental, what secured basic needs. The tragedy of bombardment forced them into even closer cooperation with the regime. Able to rely only on the state for help, they became absolutely dependent on it.

In addition, air raids over the city caused no great damage to the German armaments industry. The true catastrophe for Germans came as result of the precision bombing raids on selected fuel facilities and transportation lines. But such raids were not carried out with sufficient intensity and consistency. Albert Speer, Hitler’s Minister of Armaments and War Production, admitted in his memoirs:

Actually, as I had earlier recognized, the war could largely have been decided in 1943 if instead of vast but pointless area bombing, the planes had concentrated on the centers of armaments production.³⁶⁴

Any attempt to evaluate Churchill’s stance toward the bombing offensive against German cities has to confront the ambiguities, even contradictions, contained in his own statements on the subject. One can lay out a series of statements energetically supporting the air raids and expressing faith in their effectiveness, but one can also cite statements indicating skepticism and outright criticism.

No doubt, Churchill’s views evolved. In 1935 he expressed outrage that “it is only in the twentieth century that this hateful condition of inducing nations to surrender by massacring women and children has gained acceptance.”³⁶⁵

363 Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness 1942-1945: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, trans. Martin Chalmers (Modern Library, 2001), 311.

364 Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Simon & Schuster, 1970), 280.

365 This quote of Churchill, along with the others below, can all be found in Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II*, 20, 44-47.

However, in July 1940, as Prime Minister of His Majesty’s Government at the start of the Battle of Britain, Churchill stated that bombing was not subject to moral judgment, but rather could be evaluated only in terms of its effectiveness.

[...] when I look around to see how we can win the war I see that there is only one sure path. We have no Continental Army which can defeat the German military power. The blockade is broken [...]. But there is one thing that will bring him back and bring him down, and that is an absolutely devastating, *exterminating* attack by very heavy bombers from this country upon the Nazi homeland. We must be able to overwhelm him by this means, without which I do not see a way through.

When Conservative MP Robert Cary called on the Prime Minister to order the approval of a full-scale bombing operation against German cities in retaliation for German bombardment, Churchill’s response was ambiguous. In a conversation on 17 October 1940, he at first categorically rejected the suggestion:

My dear sir, this is a military and not a civilian war. You and others may desire to kill women and children. We desire (and have succeeded in our desire) to destroy German military objectives.

But then, as if to contradict himself, he added: “I quite appreciate your point. But my motto is ‘Business before Pleasure.’”

From February 1942 to the spring of 1945 – that is, in the period in which the air offensive reached its peak – Churchill’s statements contained not the slightest allusion to the moral implications of the air raids. In response to the words of one of his closest advisors, namely that “[...] as time went on, and the accumulated horrors of the war hardened all our hearts, he [Churchill] grew indifferent to the sufferings of the German cities,” Churchill stated:

[...] it is absurd to consider morality on this topic In the last war the bombing of open cities was regarded as forbidden. Now everybody does it as a matter of course. It is simply a question of fashion changing as she does between long and short skirts for women.

After the attack on Dresden, in a letter to the Chief of the Air Staff, Churchill changed his stance and expressly criticized air bombardment.

It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing terror, *though under other pretexts*, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. [...] The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing. I am of the opinion that military objectives must henceforward be more strictly studied in our own interests rather than that of the enemy.

But just after the war he reportedly said the following to one of the Bomber Command officers: "We should never allow ourselves to apologize for what we did to Germany."

According to the logic of modern total warfare, which blurs the boundaries between the battlefield and the home front, the bombardment of cities was aimed at that which – it would seem – was beyond the reach of the direct conflict, and which was not vulnerable during conventional battles waged between opposing armies. Bombardment annulled the concept of a front line; it redefined the concept of battlefield; and it thus struck at common people and their very existence, at their bodies and spirits – at their morale.

But morale was not so easily weakened, broken, or destroyed, as proven by the civilian populations of Warsaw, London, and other cities demolished by German bombs. Did the Allied air offensive against German cities bring the predicted results? To be sure, many people were killed and an enormous number of structures of great historical and cultural value were destroyed. But there is reason to doubt that bombing contributed to an early end to the war. Were German civilians, tormented and down on their knees, in a position to have any influence over the matter?

The Experience of Bombardment

Total War

Bombardment is the climactic moment of total war. Here, I evoke the concept of totality in three contexts: 1. the history of military action; 2. the concept of total war as enunciated by Erich Ludendorff in his work *Der Totaler Krieg* (1935) and as proclaimed by Joseph Goebbels in his famous speech at Berlin's Sportpalast on 18 February 1943; and 3. a definition of the nature of experiences triggered by bombing and thus involving the psychology of war.

The Third Punic War led to the three-year siege of Carthage. The Roman army under Scipio Aemilianus took the city in 146 BCE. As a result of the battle, hunger and disease, 90 % of Carthaginians were killed and the rest were sold into slavery. Carthage was completely destroyed, ploughed over, and sown with salt, which was supposed to complete the work of destruction and render the land on which the city had been built barren and empty for ages. The destruction of the Phoenician city is an excellent example of a total war waged between civilized nations before the era of modern means of mass destruction. Gwynne Dyer was correct in claiming that, had an atomic bomb been dropped on Carthage, the agony of the Carthaginians would have been

shorter but the result would have been little different than what the Romans achieved.³⁶⁶

Captain Peter Strasser, head of the German navy's airship division, who during the First World War directed the air bombing campaign on English cities (and on Paris and Antwerp), had no doubt about the nature of modern warfare. In a letter to his mother, he wrote:

We who strike the enemy where his heart beats have been slandered as 'baby-killers' and 'murderers of women.' [...] What we do is repugnant to us too, but necessary. Very necessary. Nowadays there is no such animal as a non-combatant; modern warfare is total warfare. A soldier cannot function at the front without the factory worker, the farmer and all the other providers behind him.³⁶⁷

Strasser was one of those who promoted total war in its modern understanding: war calculated to destroy not just the enemy's armed forces, but also its material assets and home front support; war carried out through the use of all available means, contrary to legal and moral limitations. But the German airship commander did not have a chance to experience for himself the effects of total war at its peak. He did not see Warsaw ruined by German bombs, nor Hamburg and Dresden burned to the ground in firestorms ignited by Allied carpet bombing. On 6 August 1918, during a night raid, Strasser's airship was shot down over England and crashed on the Norfolk coast.

Carpet bombing cities is considered to be the final stage of aggression to which the brutal logic of total war inevitably leads. We can identify three of its key elements: harnessing the entire population of a belligerent country with the war effort; access to the resources that such a universal mobilization makes possible; and finally, access to military technology capable of mass destruction.³⁶⁸

In 1935, General Ludendorff wrote that a future war would take on the character of total war. What he had in mind was the need for absolute and universal mobilization, for a country's military needs, of its entire social, industrial and political potential, which means that everyone – soldiers and civilians, adults and children, women and men – have to be, one way or another, engaged in military activity. The consequences of total war thus conceived for civilian populations are obvious – they become a target of the enemy's armed attacks. In any conventional war, there is no way to avoid civilian victims, but total war assumes a fundamental re-orientation: the immunity of the civilian population is put into

366 See Gwynne Dyer, *War: The Lethal Custom* (Basic Book, 2006), 188.

367 *Ibid.*, 262-263.

368 *Ibid.*, 188.

question – whether *de jure* or *de facto* – and the borders between battlefield and home front are obliterated. That having been said, total war, as Ludendorff conceived it, is not the same as genocide. The killing of civilians remains a means to an end, not the end itself.³⁶⁹

Goebbels' speech on 18 February 1943 was delivered at a turning point in the war. Hitler's Propaganda Ministry had declared total war just after the final capitulation of Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus and his 6th Army at Stalingrad. Around 364,000 German soldiers died in battle or as the result of hunger or disease, and around 100,000 soldiers were captured, almost none of whom survived. After the defeat at El Alamein in November 1942, the Afrika Korps under General Erwin Rommel – the legendary “Desert Fox” – was in full retreat, and Rommel himself was evacuated from Tunisia in March 1943. According to some historians, these two battles contributed most to the final defeat of Nazi Germany. From that point forward, it could only get worse. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 the Allies made the decision to invade Italy, and in July they landed on Sicily, which led to Mussolini's fall and arrest. At Casablanca, Roosevelt and Churchill also demanded the unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers, which fed perfectly into Hitler's paranoid mentality: he could either achieve absolute victory and rule the world, or he could suffer absolute defeat and take the world down with him. There was no third option; compromise was not possible. At this time – Ian Kershaw has argued – only a few of the Führer's closest associates were still able to believe in victory. Decisions made at Casablanca confirmed Hitler's belief that his uncompromising stance was justified. In February 1943, in conversations with Nazi Party leaders, Hitler pointed to the demand for “unconditional surrender” as proof that any effort to negotiate peace was pointless, and that he himself no longer felt any obligation to negotiate. Kershaw concluded: “The road to destruction was opening up ever more plainly. For Hitler, closing off escape routes had distinct advantages. Fear of destruction was a strong motivator.”³⁷⁰

Goebbels' speech portrayed the Hitler regime, plagued by defeat and weakening day by day, as a great power burdened with the sacred obligation to hold back and defeat the Bolshevik onslaught threatening the foundations of Western civilization. Europe was in terrible danger and could be saved only through the greatest mobilization of all forces at the disposal of the Thousand-Year Reich.

369 For more on Ludendorff's concept and its consequences, see Hew Strachan, “Strategic Bombing and the Question of Civilian Casualties up to 1945,” in *Firestorm*, op. cit.

370 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945* (Norton & Company, 2001), 577.

The German people's trust in the Führer – Goebbels claimed – was unlimited, and it was Hitler who would lead them to “final total victory.” What was required at that moment was total war. Germans had to freely give up what theretofore had been their standard of living in order to support the Reich's war effort as quickly and conspicuously as possible. Goebbels continued:

The total war effort has become a matter of the entire German people. No one has any excuse for ignoring its demands. A storm of applause greeted my call on 30 January for total war. I can therefore assure you that the leadership's measures are in full agreement with the desires of the German people at home and at the front. The people are willing to bear any burden, even the heaviest, to make any sacrifice, if it leads to the great goal of victory.³⁷¹

The Propaganda Minister rose to the heights of oratorical artistry. Over the course of two hours, he brought the auditorium of 14,000 carefully selected spectators to a white heat. They jumped from their seats, interrupting the speaker more than 20 times with applause and cheers. The hysteria reached a peak near the end of Goebbels' speech when he shouted from the podium 10 rhetorical questions. “The English maintain that the German people has lost faith in victory. I ask you: Do you believe with the Führer and us in the final total victory of the German people?” The audience responded with thunderous confirmation. “The English maintain that the German people are resisting the government's total war measures. It does not want total war, but capitulation!” The hall resounded with the cry: “Never! Never! Never!” The speaker now asked: “Do you want total war? If necessary, do you want a war more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today?” The spectacle ended with the singing of the national anthem “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” and the Nazi Party anthem the “Horst-Wessel-Lied,” and with the chant: “The great German Führer Adolf Hitler, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!”

Without extraordinary measures, Germany was in no position to carry on with the war, which meant the need to open the “internal front” and throw civilians into the wheels of the war machine. Goebbels was seeking approval for a total war that Germany could no longer win. And he gained this approval from his fanatical party comrades, who with a thunderous “yes” expressed their agreement to self-destruction. This incredible policy, supported by draconian measures of repression against the German people themselves, delayed the fall

371 For the full text of Goebbels' speech in English, including the quote above and those below, see: <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archiv/goeb36.htm> (accessed 7 January 2018)

of the Nazi regime by two years and would lead to the senseless prolongation of battles that the Germans had not the slightest chance of winning, battles carried out on Hitler's orders to fight "to the last drop of blood."³⁷²

The idea of total war, called forth during Goebbels' frenetic speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin, hung a death sentence over the heads of hundreds of thousands of "common Germans," one that would be carried out with ruthless effectiveness by British and American bombers. Historians have calculated that, as a result of the Allied bombing offensive against German cities during the Second World War, between 305,000 (American estimates) and 593,000 (according to the Federal Bureau of Statistics in Wiesbaden) civilians died.³⁷³

Bombardment understood as a total and all-encompassing experience involves, without exception, perpetrators and victims, people and things, body and soul. The materiality of bombardment is compelling, it attacks the senses: the agonizing roar of explosions; buildings crumbling under the falling bombs; fires consuming entire neighborhoods and cities; stacks of corpses growing in the streets, squares, and basements; victims torn to pieces, burned to ashes, choked by carbon monoxide. The city trembles, rattled by explosions. People also tremble, wracked with fear, which cannot be controlled. Intolerable levels of stress can either cause apathy or lead to feverish activity. But a mortal fear of death is not the exclusive domain of those on whom bombs fall. It also grips the pilots who drop those bombs. Alongside accounts provided by residents of bombed cities, we find pilots' accounts and military medical reports describing the psychological disorders, caused by combat stress, which inflicted members of bomber crews. The totality of bombardment is reflected in all such accounts.³⁷⁴ Terror grips everyone: perpetrators and victims.

372 Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945*, 558-562.

373 See Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 77. Most often, the number of victims of Allied bombing is estimated to have been around a half million, and seriously injured around a million (Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 22; Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower in World War II*, 46). A. C. Grayling has estimated the number of civilians killed at between 305,000 and 500,000, and the number of injured around 780,000 (see Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 104).

374 Two American psychiatrists, R. R. Grinker, who served in the army as a colonel, and J. P. Spiegel, who served as a major, conducted research among airmen in the U.S. Air Force fighting in North Africa. They published their medical report in 1945 under the title *Men Under Stress*. Upon its publication, the prestigious *Science* (8 June 1945) welcomed the book as transformative. Even today, the work is considered a great achievement in psychology and the study of air war, and it is often cited in psychological works on military activities and on posttraumatic stress caused by air war experiences (e.g.

Every participant in such an event plays his role and takes his own proper place. Bombardment is carried out in three areas, which can be presented in vertical order, along the flight of a falling bomb, from top to bottom. On the first level, in the air high “above earth,” there are the bomber pilots, who look from above at the bombed city. Below is the “earth,” where civilians are moving about amidst troops manning anti-aircraft guns and members of fire brigades and other emergency services. The city is burning and collapsing around them. Their behavior indicates movement: panic, disorderly escape, desperate rescue attempts. And then there is the third level: “underground” – that is, the anti-aircraft shelters and bunkers, tunnels and canals, and finally common cellars. People hidden there experience bombardment as if from the inside, from the depths. The feverish movement typical of existence on the surface of the earth changes into immobility, apathy, people waiting for a bomb that will bury them alive under the rubble, or will ignite a fire that changes their shelter into a furnace filled with poisonous gases.

The Speed and Completeness of Destruction

The complete annihilation of a city is by no means an invention of twentieth-century warfare. On the contrary. The city destroyed by invaders such that no stone is left on top of another, or crushed by the kind of natural disaster or divine anger that sweeps it from the face of the earth, is in fact an archetypal image in culture. The ruins of Homeric Troy, plundered and destroyed by the Greeks, were found centuries later by Heinrich Schliemann. Babylon was destroyed many times. It seems that the Assyrian King Sennacherib drew a line through that city’s existence finally in 689 BCE. But in 612 BCE the Medes and the Babylonians devastated the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh, and the great builder Nebuchadnezzar II lifted the city back up from the depths, making it the largest city in the ancient world. In 587 (or 586) BCE, that same ruler demolished Jerusalem and took those who had survived the slaughter into

J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* [London 2000], 29, 142–145). RAF pilots were haunted by depression and fear and could be deemed by their commanders to be “LMF” (Lacking in Moral Fibre) – in other words, cowards. Losses within the Bomber Command under Sir A. Harris were huge, reaching 50 %. At a certain point in the war, the chances of survival in the first tour of raids, which consisted of a standard 30 operations, was only 17 %, and those chances dropped drastically to 2.5 % in the second tour. Among the 125,000 pilots who served in the Bomber Command, at least 6,250 had confirmed signs of combat depression. See W. Holden, op. cit., 104–113.

captivity in Babylon. This event became the model for lamentation over an annihilated city, which Jeremiah compared to a broken clay pot.³⁷⁵ In 146 BCE the above-mentioned Scipio Aemilianus razed Carthage to the ground. Vesuvius buried Pompeii and Herculaneum in lava and ash in AD 79, though it is difficult to know when fire and brimstone consumed biblical Sodom and Gomorrah.

And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace' (Genesis 19:28).

No doubt these archetypes set the framework for the experience of bombardment in the twentieth century. How else are we to interpret the fact that the bombing campaign over Hamburg was called "Operation Gomorrah?"

The modern element that bombardment brought to destruction rests in technology, which involves both the tools themselves and the effectiveness of their use. An airplane is able to master space and lift itself toward the skies, freely crossing previously impassable borders. The bombs it drops pierce through the ceilings of multi-storied apartment buildings, turning whole neighborhoods into rubble, leaving behind only fire and death.

Bombardment destroys a city in a modern way – that is, methodically, planned, and quickly. Very quickly. Five hours of mass bombing over Hamburg was enough to ignite a firestorm that completely altered the city's appearance and represented a turning point in its multi-century history. Ernst Heinrich, Prince of Saxony, watched the bombing of Dresden from a nearby hill, mourning the loss, in one night, of his family's possessions:

The entire city was a sea of flame. This was the end! Glorious Dresden was burning, our Florence on the Elbe, in which my family had resided for almost four hundred years. The art and tradition and beauty of centuries had been destroyed in a single night! I stood as if turned to stone.³⁷⁶

The unbearable speed of destruction caused by bombing could serve as a pretext for reflection on the insignificance of one's own existence compared to the fathomless beauty of nature, which gives true solace. In 1943, during the Allied bombing of Budapest, Sándor Márai wrote:

375 "And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again" (Jeremiah 19:11).

376 Frederick Taylor, *Dresden*, 361.

At the end of the fourth year of war, when over the course of twenty-four hours the city in which I live could be destroyed, and many things could be lost to which I am attached, and during which I myself could die, I feel a peace that I have rarely felt in life. I am calm and almost content; I am working and I do only what I want; I want nothing from the world, I am jealous of no one ... I am pleased by the beautiful weather, a bowl of raspberries, a meaningful sentence in a book.³⁷⁷

Márai's contemplative mood could not have been shared by those who found themselves in the eye of the hurricane – on the streets of Budapest as it was being bombed. Built up through the centuries from wood, stone and brick; growing roots in the depths of culture; and bound in an inseparable way, it would seem, with the lives of generations of its residents – the city in a moment fell like a house of cards. Significantly, a certain baker used just such a metaphor to describe Guernica, which became the prototype of a city destroyed in modern fashion:

A row of bombs fell along the street. One after another, in a line, like a pack of cards, the houses began to collapse. I saw them sway and fall with a roar that I could hear even above the sound of the planes. [...] All the explosions fused together.³⁷⁸

Terrible confusion reigned in a bombed city. Everything – people, houses, streets – spun like mad in an infernal vortex. Everything was in movement: residents trying to save themselves in a chaotic escape; rubble and glass flying through the air; bombs, with their screeching whistle, fell from the sky. Maria Rosenberg found herself in Dresden as it was being bombed. At the last moment she escaped from a collapsing building and fell in the street, engulfed by flames. She felt like she had been tossed into a “witches’ cauldron”:

Burning curtain material was flying towards us and glowing pieces of wood came flying down on us from above; also bits of windowpanes. One had the feeling everywhere of walking only on broken glass. It was as if fire was poured from the sky. [...] As my sister knew the city, she managed to find ways out of this “witches’ cauldron”.³⁷⁹

The violence, speed, and completeness of the destruction took on an apocalyptic dimension. A nurse from a military hospital in Dresden was sucked into the monstrous confusion of the dying city:

377 Sándor Márai, *Dziennik (fragments)*, trans. T. Wornowska (Warszawa 2004), 16.

378 See A. Arazamagni's account in Gordon Thomas, Max Morgan-Witts, *The Day Guernica Died* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 259.

379 See Rosenberg's account in Alexander McKee, *Dresden 1945: The Devil's Tinderbox* (London: Souvenir Press), 169.

There was crashing and thundering, whistling and howling. The walls trembled, swayed by the impact of the bombs. This is the end, we thought. How long it lasted, don't ask me. Minutes? It appeared to be hours.³⁸⁰

And here is how Sabina Dłużniewska, a nurse at a hospital on the grounds of the University of Warsaw, described the bombing on Monday, 25 September 1939:

I saw the bombers approaching high above Warsaw. It was incredible. A swarm, a herd of airplanes. Hundreds. The sky was darkened. What is this? An earthquake? Only one thought: It's all over. (...) Without end, eleven hours, every second the whir, whistle, rumble, and roar. Thick dust, the earth shakes, the walls shook. (...) among the incredible flashes of light, against the background of a whirl of sparks, branches, leaves and clouds of ashes, I saw a person running toward us (...). Who it was who jumped first from the hall into this terrible confusion, I do not know. The earth rocked under our feet. People stumbled through the whirling debris, or they simply ran.³⁸¹

The scene of Warsaw being bombed resembled the end of the world. Ludwik Hirszfeld described his experiences during “bloody Monday” by writing: “This is probably what the world's end will look like.”³⁸² Ferdynand Goetel recalled the bombing of Warsaw in a similar way:

Hundreds of explosive bombs and tens of thousands of incendiary bombs fell on Warsaw. A dry gale ripped through the night and threw flames across the entire neighborhood. It was the first vision of the end of the world that Warsaw would experience.³⁸³

And Zygmunt Zaremba:

Entire blocks of houses and neighborhoods succumbed to the firestorm. The city was overtaken by a cloud of smoke and ash, blocking out the sun. The subdued light contributed to the eerie ambience of the end of the world.³⁸⁴

In search of the best form of expression for the entire “magnitude of destruction,” Chaim Kaplan evoked the pathos of biblical language: “Beautiful Warsaw – city of royal glory, queen of cities – has been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.”³⁸⁵

380 See Annemarie Waehmann's account in *ibid.*, 150.

381 S. Dłużniewska, *Pamiętnik warszawski* (Warszawa 1965), 77–79.

382 L. Hirszfeld, *Historia jednego życia* (Warszawa 1989), 222.

383 F. Goetel, *op. cit.*, 13.

384 Zaremba, *Wojna i konspiracja*, 110.

385 Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, 38 (entry dated 29 September 1939). J. Świąch indicates that, particularly in the poetry of T. Gajcy (“Trójgłos,” “Rapsod o Warszawie,” “Widma”), we see the vision of a city on the verge of apocalypse. In the opening poem *Widma*, one can discern in the apocalyptic scenery of *urbs devastata* references to the siege of Warsaw, bombardment and the image of a destroyed city after capitulation. See

The Moment of (Macabre) Transformation

The macabre transformation under discussion here has two aspects: dynamic (which manifests itself during the act of bombardment itself) and static (which characterizes the effects or product of bombardment – that is, ruins and charred remains). In the first case, we observe the violent metamorphosis while it is happening; forms yield to radical change before our very eyes. That which was permanent and durable, falls apart; that which had an established shape, succumbs to decomposition. The second case involves changes that have already taken place, frozen in forms that are terribly altered, strange, foreign, somehow mutated. What will be of interest to me below is only the dynamic aspect of this macabre transformation.

A city collapses and loses its previous form not at all as a result of some kind of impulsive destructive action, but rather as a scrupulously developed method of action. The strength of a powerful explosive bomb brings down walls, smashes roofs and windows, and prepares the way for a rain of smaller incendiary bombs, which fall on the thus exposed city, igniting fires. Bombs that shatter buildings and fires that consume the city – these are the two fundamental factors in the macabre transformation. In the work of destruction, two powers participate: explosion and fire.

Juan Silliaco, a fireman in Guernica, witnessed an event in 1937 that contained within itself the threat of something extraordinary, unprecedented: a bomb had struck an apartment building, burying people under rubble who had no chance to survive. The shell did not even need to explode in order to alter the building into a shapeless heap of debris. The tragedy was that Guernica was one of the first cities to be caught up in a terrible metamorphosis for which it was in no way – militarily or mentally – prepared. Soon, residents of other cities would experience a similar shock, over and over again, and accounts of buildings collapsing under falling bombs would become, in a sense, routine in bombing narratives. But let us remain in Guernica and quote a passage from a prototype account:

There were many buildings [...] which as a result of a direct hit had totally collapsed in a heap of rubble. [...] It had once been a rooming house, four floors high, filled with refugees. A bomb had penetrated the roof and plunged through to the ground floor. It had failed to explode, but the sheer force of its passage through the poorly built building

“Stolica” in *Pieśń niepodległa. Model poezji konspiracyjnej 1939-1945* (Warszawa 1982), 120–122.

had collapsed the inner supports. The upper floors had caved in, sending ceilings down on floors, floors down on ceilings. The building had been reduced to half its normal height.³⁸⁶

An explosion effectively changes the outline of a city; in a sense, it redraws the city. Particular buildings and, indeed, the entire urban landscape are altered beyond recognition. Stating the nature of this terrible transformation (beyond a realization of the scale of the death and material destruction) is an essential component of the experience of bombardment. King George VI, who visited Coventry immediately after the bombing as the city was still smoldering, wrote in his diary under the date 16 November 1940: "I walked amidst the destruction. People on the street could not grasp where they were, nothing was recognizable."³⁸⁷

In a city that has been bombed and is engulfed in a firestorm, everything burns. Hermann Kröger, a fireman in the Hamburg rescue brigade, wrote: "Suddenly, there came a rain of fire from heaven [...]. The air was actually filled with fire."³⁸⁸ Fires merge into one gigantic sea of flame: "There was a fire-storm out there," Kurt Vonnegut wrote. "Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything organic, everything that would burn."³⁸⁹ In Józef Mackiewicz's work on the bombing of Dresden, we also read of a sea of flames.³⁹⁰

The fury of the attack and the scale of the destruction caused by bombardment demanded particular expression, one that would often search for references in imagery from hell. There are many examples, though most of them do not reach beyond worn-out stylistic formulas.³⁹¹ But there are accounts that expose the infernal terror. Warsaw, Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, and finally Hiroshima – it is there where true hell was unleashed.

386 See Thomas, *The Day Guernica Died*, 252-253.

387 T. Lewis, *Moonlight Sonata*, 165.

388 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 257-258.

389 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five: A Novel* (Dial Press Trade Paperback; Reissue edition, 1999), 224.

390 "Streets are burning. Fire has consumed everything. The entire city has drowned in a sea of fire." J. Mackiewicz, *Sprawa pułkownika Miasojedowa* (London 1989), 651.

391 In one particular volume, *Cywilna obrona Warszawy we wrześniu 1939 r. Dokumenty, materiały prasowe, wspomnienia i relacje* (eds. L. Dobroszycki, M. Drozdowski, M. Getter, A. Słomczyński (Warszawa 1964), we find such phrases as "true hell" (p. 144); "unleashed hell" (p. 296, p. 334); "a raging day of hell" (p. 336); "hell on earth" (p. 338); all referring to a single day of the siege, about which one of the authors wrote: "For Warsaw, 25 September was a thoroughly hellish day." (p. 320).

Ludwik Landau, describing Czacki Street burning during the air raid over Warsaw on “black Monday,” drew a comparison with a fiery furnace from which there is no escape:

During a fire, it was improbable that one could have escaped this street, with its several dozen buildings and closed in between two other streets; fire, raging on both sides of the street, opened a vault of flames, under which people ran, consumed by fear [...]. People felt sentenced to imminent death; people reportedly fell to their knees and began to pray.³⁹²

Sabina Dłużniewska, who during that bombing found herself on the campus of the University of Warsaw, described a gloomy cellar at the Law Department, filled with people moaning in delirium alongside people dying from their wounds, as hellish.

It was dusk, but we could see the courtyard from the light of the fires. [...] It was no longer possible to work in the operating room. Ola Wróblewska said: “Come look at hell,” and she led me to the Law Department building. There in the basement were the injured, laying on the bare floor, closely, one after the other. The air was horrible. Tropical heat. The huge basement was poorly lit by a couple candles. Hundreds of people muttering in delirium. The foul smell made it difficult to breathe. [...] No one had removed the corpses away from the living.³⁹³

In an account written during his time in German captivity, Colonel Stanisław Rola-Arciszewski presented the day of 25 September as “hell unleashed.”

There began an exceptional bombardment, unprecedented in history. As if hell had tossed up all its devils from the abyss. [...] On the streets, smoke like impenetrable fog. And German planes diving from above this fog, into this bubbling cauldron of dust, smoke and flames [...]. Warsaw is surrounded by horror.³⁹⁴

Let us quote from a testimony describing an air raid over Düsseldorf carried out by British bombers on 10 September 1942. Marii Schmitz, who survived the bombardment, wrote:

Fires raged for many hours, in the burning heat the winds grew to the strength of a hurricane. It seemed like the gates of hell had been opened. With the characteristic, monotone and almost pathetic rumble, all along the street, staircases, curtains, furniture turned into ashes and cinders. [...] Glowing ash rained down, sparks struck us in the face. The all-consuming fire boiled, hammered and crackled. The heat surrounded us with a power that was difficult to endure.³⁹⁵

392 Landau, op. cit., 16

393 S. Dłużniewska, *Pamiętnik warszawski*, wyd. 2 (Warszawa 1965), 79–80.

394 S. Rola-Arciszewski, op. cit., 326.

395 Quote from J. Piekalkiewicz, op. cit., 67.

Fire is a force of violent, unrestrained and all-encompassing transformation. We say that fire “consumes,” that it is insatiable, that it devours everything within its grasp, that it transforms everything into something unrecognizable. This transformation is destructive. Forests and steppes, cities and people are defenseless against it. Elias Canetti, to whose views I refer below, highlighted fire’s power of attraction, the magical influence that fires have on people.³⁹⁶ In his *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard began with a statement about its ambivalence:

If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. [...] Among all phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse.³⁹⁷

Ambivalence

So far, in the analysis of the experience of bombardment, such terms and phrases as “scenery,” “sight,” and “played out in front of one’s eyes” have appeared. And this is no coincidence, because bombardment contains within itself something of a spectacle, a gigantic para-theatrical spectacle, played out in natural locations. The difference between modern displays of “light and sound” and the spectacle of bombardment is – so to speak – ontological: reality vs. pretend; reality vs. fiction. That having been said, the phenomenon of bombardment is based on the effacement (at least to a certain degree) of the boundary between literality and that which is made-up or unreal, and on the commingling of two roles, two perspectives: viewer and (simultaneously) participant. Bomber pilots, and the city residents on whom the bombs fall, each fulfill the role that is assigned to them (one attacks, and the other defends himself from the attack); both the one and the other watch what plays out below or around them. Viewing, observing, watching the spectacle of bombardment – this is the state, the condition, that connects victim and perpetrator.

What we thus have here is a peculiar situation involving a “spectator in a theater.” I write *peculiar* because the paralyzing awareness of the genuineness of the observed event does not completely negate the feeling of its unrealism, its theatricality. Genuineness and unrealism even seem to coexist with one another, they complement one another – a fact that deepens the uncommon and inexpressible

396 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 77–78.

397 Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross (Beacon Press, 1987), 7.

nature of the entire experience. Paraphrasing such feelings, one could say that “what I am seeing is inconceivable,” or “what I am looking at cannot be true”- and yet it is true, it is really happening. To put it yet another way: the sight of the bombardment of a city is a spectacle, but the viewer knows – as in Cyprian Norwid’s *Marionetki* – that this theater is “*zyciem placony*” (paid for with life).

What do viewers – those who were the object of air raids, who came close to death, but who (by some miracle) escaped with their life – have to tell us? The following accounts were arranged chronologically, in the order of changing city-scenes.

Warsaw in September 1939. An employee in the Jewish Community observed an air raid, which was so awful, so amazing, so captivating:

The entire horizon was shrouded by columns of smoke and fire. Everything together had become one great and terrible glow. I stood for several moments as if bewitched by this terrible destructive power, it was so awful, so amazing that I ran back from this burning hell, stepping over corpses and rubble.³⁹⁸

Canterbury, 1 June 1942. Jack Waller, a 35-year-old bus driver, observed the city being consumed in flames – terrible and beautiful at the same time – as he contended with the feeling of impropriety:

I was standing between two small brick buildings. And so I was standing there looking at the flames. Fire gradually enveloped St. George’s Street, engulfing shop after shop. [...] As I was standing there, I thought, look at all the great clothing that is burning, all the cakes and shoes. That’s what I was thinking. The church spire at St. Gregory’s looked like a huge torch. It was wonderful, I mean it would have been a great view, if not for these tragic circumstances. It was really a beautiful view, the whole spire consumed in flames, everything was burning, and I’m one of the few who is witnessing it. Because no one was around, not another living soul.³⁹⁹

Ruth Taylor was 24-years-old when the bombs fell on Canterbury. She admitted that the view was “absolutely fantastic.”

Canterbury looked like a huge mass of flames, but it was absolutely fantastic what was happening at St. George’s Terrace, with the old tenement houses. It was one wall of fire, rising, as it seemed, straight to heaven. I’d never seen anything like it in my life.⁴⁰⁰

398 [author unknown], “Z notatek pracownika Gminy Żydowskiej w Warszawie,” *Biuletyn ŻIH*, 93 (1976), 100.

399 *Memories of the Blitz. The People’s Story of the Bombing of Canterbury, 1st June 1942*, compiled by A Pope (Canterbury 1992), 10.

400 *Ibid.*, 20.

Hamburg, 24 July-2 August 1943. A German soldier named Albert Hartung, at his post in an anti-aircraft battery and apparently embarrassed and helpless in the face of his contradictory feelings, described his impressions:

We were up on a hill at Neu-Wulmstorf, south of the city, and we had a panoramic view of the bombing. I know it sounds a bit silly now but it was a lovely view. We couldn't hear the bombs falling because there was a Flak battery firing nearby. We didn't see the effects of the bombs, only this marvelous fireworks display. I changed my mind when I saw the destruction a few days later.⁴⁰¹

The Warsaw Uprising. Leopold Buczkowski was battling in the district of Żoliborz, and during the battle he made entries into his diary. His entry dated 2 August 1944, about the bombardment and fires, turns into a Marian invocation, unusual in this context:

The German air force is above us several dozen times every day - they bomb without opposition, fires are raging! - Ave Maria! Today St. John's Cathedral collapsed! And other churches. Non licet! Ave!⁴⁰²

Leszek Prorok on the Soviet air raid on the Warsaw district of Praga on 10 September 1944 - a view worthy of a paint brush:

A Soviet air raid over Praga. The right bank of the Vistula is illuminated by lanterns on parachutes. Powerful detonations and air battles can be heard. The entire city is sitting on roofs and taking in this wonderful view, one that is worthy of the best paint brush.⁴⁰³

A hospital orderly named Wiesława Kamper from the Old City, the night before her evacuation through the sewers to Warsaw Śródmieście (Center), sat in the Market Square among the burning buildings, "strangely calm, numb. And I suddenly thought to myself that I am sitting like Nero before burning Rome and that I am watching the fire with pleasure."⁴⁰⁴ A moment later, she adds, with concern: "I was overcome with a mood that was inappropriate to the situation." This feeling of something "inappropriate" is testimony to the ambivalence of the experienced event.

401 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 154.

402 L. Buczkowski, "Powstanie na Żoliborzu" [dziennik powstańczy], *Regiony* 3/4 (1992), 3-4.

403 L. Prorok, "Notatnik powstańczy," in Prorok, *Kepi wojska francuskiego* (Warszawa 1973), 147.

404 Account by W. Kamper ("Sławka"). Quote from *Pelnić służbę... Z pamiętników i wspomnień harcerek Warszawy 1939-1945*, eds. A. Zawadzka, Z. Zawadzka (Warszawa 1983), 274.

Dresden, 13–14 February 1945. In her diary written just after the war, Gisela-Alexandra Moeltgen confessed that the monstrosity of Dresden was also impressive:

Out through the narrow cellar windows we went, flames whipping down the staircase, the whole building alight. It was a gruesome and at the same time impressive picture as one stepped out into the street. Flames, flames wherever one looked.⁴⁰⁵

Tokyo, 9 March 1945. Around midnight, American Superfortress bombers began dropping incendiary bombs on the city in such a way as to create a vast circle of fire. The night sky was lit by markers falling on parachutes which, at a predetermined altitude, exploded – like fireworks – throwing out a fountain of light illuminating the target. Robert Guillain, a French war correspondent, was in Tokyo at the time and also perceived the bombing as an impressive display:

All the Japanese in the gardens near mine were outdoors or peering up out of their holes, uttering cries of admiration – this was typically Japanese – at this grandiose, almost theatrical spectacle.⁴⁰⁶

Accounts provided by the pilots, the direct perpetrators of this infernal spectacle, resemble the victims' accounts. British bomber pilots, observing the sea of flames expanding below, wrote about "fantastic views" and a "wonderful, amazing spectacle," about terror and fascination. When a group of Lancasters flew over Dresden to drop their entire load of bombs, huge expanses of the city were already in flames. One of the navigators remembered:

[...] my skipper called me on this particular occasion to come and have a look. The sight was indeed fantastic. From some twenty thousand feet, Dresden was a city with every street etched in fire.⁴⁰⁷

From his plane, Flight Lieutenant A. Forsdike from the RAF 78 Bomber Squadron, looked down upon burning Hamburg. What is significant in his account is the mixture of horror and delight:

The burning of Hamburg that night was remarkable in that I saw not many fires, but one. Set in the darkness was a turbulent dome of bright red fire, lighted and ignited like the glowing heart of a vast brazier. I saw no streets, no outlines of buildings, only brighter fires which flared like yellow torches against a background of bright red ash. Above the city was a misty red haze. I looked down, fascinated but aghast, satisfied yet horrified.⁴⁰⁸

405 McKee, *Dresden 1945*, 153.

406 F. Guillain, *I Saw Tokyo Burning. An Eyewitness Narrative from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima* (Garden City 1981), 182.

407 D. Irving, op cit., 241.

408 Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 244.

Another pilot flying over Hamburg, Sergeant W. G. Lamb of the 460 Squadron, described his impressions in an almost identical way: "I was fascinated by the awesome and amazing spectacle. As far as I could see was one mass of fire."⁴⁰⁹

The sight of a burning city, collapsing under the burden of exploding bombs has a particular virtue, namely ambivalence: the intertwined features of terror and beauty, horror and fascination. What was written above about the dual nature of fire and its magical powers of attraction is highly useful here. Through its ambivalence, the experience of bombardment can be inscribed into the structure of the experience of *the sacred* – that is, what Rudolf Otto called *numinosum*, and Gerard van der Leeuw called power.⁴¹⁰ So conceived, one experiences the *sacred* simultaneously as dangerous and fascinating. Making use of Rudolf Otto's terminology, we would say that *numinosum* is contained within experience as a mystery that is both repulsive and appealing, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum*.⁴¹¹

Finally, let us turn to one more bombardment. Hiroshima, 6 August 1945, 08:45 in the morning. Instead of thousands of bombs falling on a city, only one bomb was dropped. Today we know that this was the beginning of a new era. But

409 Ibid.

410 See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*; Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*.

411 "The qualitative *content* of the numinous experience, to which 'the mysterious' stands as *form*, is in one of its aspects the element of daunting 'awfulness' and 'majesty', which has already been dealt with in detail; but it is clear that it has at the same time another aspect, in which it shows itself as something uniquely attractive and *fascinating*. These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts." A few lines later, Otto writes that "the 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him [...]" In explaining the difficulty involved in grasping the meaning of the Greek term *deinos* (that which is astounding, terrible), Otto indicates that "if we ask whence this difficulty arises, the answer is plain; it is because *deinós* is simply numinous (mostly of course at a lower level, in an arrested form, attenuated by rhetorical or poetic usage). Consequently, *deinós* is the equivalent of 'dirus' and 'tremendus'. It may be evil or imposing, potent and strange, queer and marvelous, horrifying and fascinating, divine and daemonic, and a source of 'energy'." (Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31, 39-40). Z. Benedyktowicz applied the concept apparatus of phenomenology to the basis of ethnology. In his study of that which is "other" in folk culture, he states that, in many respects, the relationship to others resembles the relationship to the sacred, and he points to similarities with many elements of the numinous experience, whose structure Otto examined. See Z. Benedyktowicz, *Portrety "obcego". Od stereotypu do symbolu* (Kraków, 2000).

on that August morning, could residents of Hiroshima possibly have been aware of this fact? They remembered the fiery destruction of Tokyo and other “conventional” bombardments, which were, for the people of Hiroshima, the closest comparative context. At the time, Michihiko Hachiya, director of a hospital located about 1,500 meters from the explosion’s epicenter, was maintaining a diary. He described his own observations and the experiences of others, including one Mr. Hashimoto:

It was an awful experience [...] I saw a huge cloud rise angrily over Hiroshima, and on both sides of the main cloud beautiful smaller clouds spread out like a golden screen. I have never seen anything so magnificent in my life! [...] That beautiful cloud! It was neither red nor yellow. Its beauty defies description.⁴¹²

Compared to accounts cited above on the bombardments in Europe, this anecdote is something absolutely extraordinary. In the mass imagination, Hiroshima – wiped from the face of the earth by the explosion of the first atom bomb – remains the embodiment of all that is monstrous about modern destruction. In his account, Mr. Hashimoto, who saw with his own eyes the mushroom cloud rise above the city, revealed the extraordinary nature of the experience of bombardment’s “holy terror” – the *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum*.

The (Re-)Construction of Memory

In 1945, Elias Canetti wrote:

Germany, destroyed earlier in the year as no land has ever been destroyed. And if it is possible to destroy *one* land in this way - how can Germany remain the only one? [...] The cities die, men hole up deeper.⁴¹³

What is happening today with memory extracted from the depths, with the past buried in rubble? What kind of future does that memory project? What role does it assign to the new generation? How does it shape the present in which we all live?

Of greatest interest to me are: the ways in which the experience of bombardment has been fixed in the memories of victims and perpetrators; the ways in which this experience appears in public discourse; how memory of the air raids has undergone metamorphosis; and the nature of the relationship between memory of the events and their present-day evocations. More succinctly: can

412 Michihiko Hachiya, *Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 161–162.

413 Elias Canetti, *The Human Province* (Seabury Press, 1978), 60.

we point to a certain strategy for remembering, to an attempt to instrumentalize memory?

Let us describe the basic stages in which Germans have reckoned with their past, attempted to create a new self-identity, over the course of the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the current century.⁴¹⁴

The first stage involved a “sudden return to reflections on guilt,” and is characterized by conflicts over the “Wehrmacht Crimes” exhibition (1995–2000), over Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996–1998), and over the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (1998–2000). A turning point came with the heated debate surrounding Martin Walser’s acceptance speech for the 1998 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. Many people received that speech as a manifesto for historical “normalization,” which – in a simplified version – can be thus paraphrased: enough of the instrumentalization of National Socialist history, particularly the Holocaust; enough of the masochistic remembrance of German crimes. Among other things, Walser said:

[...] when I am reproached every day in the media for this past, I notice that something inside me reacts against the permanent presentation of our disgrace. Instead of being thankful for this continuous presentation of our disgrace, I start to look away.⁴¹⁵

The second stage involved the “return to reflections on German victims.” In 1997, two American political scientists published a book under the title *Das deutsche Dilemma*, in which they claimed that Germans had stopped perceiving themselves only as perpetrators and increasingly viewed themselves as victims of the war. The Germans’ historical memory (including memory of the Holocaust),

414 I make use of the following works: W. Pięciak, *Niemiecka pamięć. Współczesne spory w Niemczech o miejsce III Rzeszy w historii, polityce i tożsamości (1989-2001)* (Kraków 2002); Pięciak, “Naród ofiar,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 August 2003; Pięciak, “Drezno, akt oskarżenia,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 22–23 lutego 2003; Pięciak, “Requiem dla miasta Drezna,” in Pięciak, *Jak obalano mur. Niemcy 1988-96* (Kraków 1996). *Spór o niemiecką pamięć. Debata Walser - Bubis*, intro. K. Woycicki, ed. P. Buras (Wrocław 1999).

415 Translator’s note: The above text is my translation from the original German: “[...] wenn mir aber jeden Tag in den Medien diese Vergangenheit vorgehalten wird, merke ich, daß sich in mir etwas gegen diese Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande wehrt. Anstatt dankbar zu sein für die unaufhörliche Präsentation unserer Schande, fange ich an wegzuschauen.” Quoted in Rolf-Peter Janz, “Zum Tabu des Antisemitismus: Die Kontroversen um Martin Walser und Günther Grass,” *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik*: 7. Jahrgang, 2016, Issue 1, p. 49. See also M. Walser, “Przemyslenia przy pisaniu mowy na niedzielę,” in *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, 43.

which helped define the political culture of the Federal Republic of Germany before 1989, was disappearing because:

[...] the mechanisms of political legitimacy and collective identity will, in the future, assume different forms than in the “old” Federal Republic. To an ever greater degree, “historicized” crimes from the past take on new meanings; in particular guilt, shame, and a sense of responsibility, and thus emotional reactions, will gradually be replaced by purely intellectualized forms of reckoning with the past.⁴¹⁶

Wojciech Pięciak has summarized the thesis of *Das deutsche Dilemma* in this way: the two authors show that “political normalization” leads to “normalization of the past”; that the Germans have stopped viewing themselves as perpetrators alone, and increasingly regard themselves as victims of the war; that after the “historicization of Auschwitz,” the condition of victimhood becomes an equal element of German collective memory.⁴¹⁷ In March 1999, during the Kosovo War and the associated refugee crisis, German public opinion supported the case of the victims of ethnic cleansing and expressed empathy for those who had been “expelled.” A year earlier, discussion began over the creation in Berlin of a Center Against Expulsions (Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen). Public debate on this subject drew strength from Günther Grass’s *Crabwalk* (2002, English version 2002), which describes the tragedy experienced by German refugees and injured fleeing Prussia on board the *Gustloff*, which was torpedoed and sunk by a Soviet submarine in January 1945. In the *Gustloff* tragedy, 9,343 people died.

One distinct aspect of this second stage of debates over German memory involves the Allied bombing of German cities.

Accounts by Victims

Accounts by victims who survived the bombardment are striking. It is clear that their authors have grappled with descriptions of an experience that was without precedent. That having been said, many of them are not in a position to liberate themselves from worn-out conventions (“sea of flames,” “fiery rain”); from obsessive use of infernal imagery (“Dresden had been turned into hell”⁴¹⁸); from biblical comparisons or concepts that border on kitsch (“it was like ‘The Last

416 Quote from W. Pięciak, op. cit. 363.

417 Ibid.

418 See the account of G. Kühnemund, who at the time of the bombing was a fifteen-year-old member of the Hitlerjugend, in A. McKee, op. cit., 153.

Days of Pompeii’⁴¹⁹). For them, bombardment was not just something terrible and frightening, it was also surprising; hence, alongside terror, victims express feelings of a kind of amazement, disbelief.

Another typical feature of these accounts is the fragmentation of experience. We are often confronted with severe and brutal images, isolated from one another, and with stray scraps of observed situations. Hamburg: A completely naked woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy runs from the street, engulfed by flames, to the gate of a burning (but still standing) building. She falls to the sidewalk and bears her child.⁴²⁰ Dresden: A woman with a small child in her arms runs in panic through the firestorm, she trips and falls, losing her grip on the child. The bundle with the child flies straight into the fire, the mother frozen stiff on the sidewalk.⁴²¹ Dortmund: the Italian priest Giuseppe Barbero wrote about the devastation caused by the bombs among the prisoners of Stalag VI-D:

Our air was cut off and at the same moment our lungs were smothered and we were buried in dust. A shelter of the French and Serbs was utterly demolished. All that remained was a pile of flesh where you could make out only arms, legs, and ripped off heads. The Russians again suffered the greatest number of deaths, about two hundred.⁴²²

From among the macabre scenes, one can detect a series of repeating motifs; the motif that appears most often, and is offered up in a most literal way, is that of the path through the fire. Trute Koch, who was a fifteen-year-old girl at the time, wrote about her experience in Hamburg:

Mother wrapped me in wet sheets, kissed me, and said ‘Run!’ I hesitated at the door. In front of me I could see only fire – everything red, like the door to a furnace. An intense heat struck me. A burning beam fell in front of my feet. I shied back but, then, when I was ready to jump over it, it was whirled away by a ghostly hand. I ran out to the street. The sheets around me acted as sails and I had the feeling that I was being carried away by the storm.⁴²³

The Wehrmacht soldier Wilhelm Riecker wrote about the burning streets of Pforzheim, in which – during the bombardment through the night of 23–24 February 1925 – a third of the city’s 65,000 residents perished:

419 See the account of Frau Canzler, wife of a doctor at a Dresden hospital. Quoted from *ibid.*, 233.

420 See G. Musgrove, *op. cit.*, 83.

421 See McKee, *op. cit.*, 191.

422 Friedrich, *The Fire*, 137.

423 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 264.

They dunked blankets and towels in the bucket, wrapped them around themselves, and ran through the flames to the Enz River, where they doused themselves again with water, since the heat and flying sparks were incredible. Sedan Square converged the flames from all the streets leading into it and then let the scorching force escape toward the bridge. The flames shot over it into the city center and there the mushroom rose up steeply, drawing all the fire into its shaft. During this hour the radiant heat was so intense that people were jumping into the wintry cold river.⁴²⁴

The desperate escape from the flames into a river, reservoir, or canal often represented the only path to safety for residents of Hamburg and Dresden. But it was precisely in the freezing waters where many of them found their deaths: splitting their heads on the concrete walls of the reservoirs, drowning, or suffocating on smoke.

Another motif that repeatedly appears in accounts written by those who survived bombardment is the almost surreal annihilation of the Dresden zoo. The death of animals, mad with terror amidst the fiery streets, seems to turn Salvador Dali's vision of a burning giraffe into a nightmarish reality:

In the middle of the square was the round circus building; I believe there had been a special Carnival night performance. The building was burning fiercely, and was collapsing even as we watched. In a nearby street I saw a terrified group of dappled circus horses with brightly coloured trappings standing in a circle close to each other.⁴²⁵

The macabre image of a corpse welded into the heated-up asphalt also appears repeatedly in accounts. A certain woman from the Reich Labor Service, which was deployed to remove the corpses after the air raids in Dresden, remembered:

One shape I shall never forget was the remains of what had apparently been a mother and child. They had shriveled and charred into one piece, and had stuck rigidly to the asphalt. They had just been prised off it. The child must have been beneath its mother, because you could clearly see its outline, with its mother's arms clasped around it. [...] All across the city we could see the victims lying face down, literally glued to the asphalt, which had softened and melted in the enormous heat.⁴²⁶

Though they do not minimize the drastic nature of their experiences, survivors recalling an air raid after many years attempt to tame the chaos of those experiences; they try to narrate them "in order." Narrative organization is achieved here by imposing a pre-arranged strategy for recalling events onto traumatized memory.

424 Friedrich, *The Fire*, 91-93.

425 Irving, *Apocalypse 1945*, 182.

426 *Ibid.*, 211-212.

Alexander McKee quoted widely from Margaret Frezer's account written three years after the air raid on Dresden.⁴²⁷ She lived in the city's Old Town, and was not a Nazi enthusiast. In 1943, the Gestapo interrogated her for an entire day for having told a joke in a theater cloakroom. On the night of 13–14 February 1945 she found herself right in the middle of the firestorm that would devastate Dresden. She survived that infernal “witches’ cauldron,” as she called the burning city. Her account is the voice of one of thousands of residents whom Allied airmen could not reach from above. This moving testimony provides a record of an individual experience with bombardment in which the author never forswears that which is private in favor of the broader view of events. She represents only herself. She displays a limited and increasingly narrow field of vision; she describes the chaos of the world around her, which – in its unconstrained horror – defies description. Margaret Frezer is mercilessly matter-of-fact; she does not allow emotions to obscure the materiality of her imagery. She does not use shocking adjectives, and she does not obscure factual accounts with evaluative reflections. She tries to keep language as close as possible to things, in order to be able to lift and carry the burden of memory. Here, matter-of-factness (sometimes treated dispassionately, as if by a reporter, and sometimes revealing in its macabre literality) becomes an idiom for bombardment.

Perpetrators’ Accounts

What dominates accounts by the perpetrators – that is, British pilots dropping bombs on Dresden – are various strategies to justify the air raids and explain their pangs of conscience. These strategies are supported by three pillars, which can be called by three names: orders – war – and revenge.

If any of them expressed sympathy for the victims, it was clouded by a sense of higher necessity to which the pilot had to submit. “It was terrible,” one pilot said in a film documentary on the 50th anniversary of the bombing. “I looked down on that sea of flames and thought, how can people do this to other people. But we had to.” Another pilot added: “Sometimes you have to fight evil with evil. It is difficult, but it has to be this way.”⁴²⁸

A Lancaster bomb-aimer, recalling the first wave of bombing and the streets of Dresden below, wrote: “It was the only time I ever felt sorry for the Germans. But my sorrow lasted only for a few seconds; the job was to hit the enemy and to hit him very hard.”⁴²⁹

427 See McKee, *op. cit.*, s. 189–195.

428 Quote from W. Pięciak, *Requiem dla miasta Drezna*, *op. cit.*, 301–302.

429 Irving, *Apocalypse 1945*, 240.

The classic argument involves war, and one might add: total war, which justifies inflicting death on civilians, since one way or another they are tied to the enemy's military machine. One of the pilots bombing Dresden said:

I do not have a bad conscience [...]. I dropped bombs on civilians, but it was war: I was flying an airplane that was built by civilians, and those civilians down below could be the ones who put together the anti-aircraft gun that shot down my friends.⁴³⁰

Peter de Wesselow, squadron leader during the second wave of attacks, put together a many-layered system of argumentation. First – it was better to “preventively” kill German civilians, who are not “so completely innocent,” than to allow them to kill “completely innocent” (read: our) civilians. Second – though the fate of German civilians was tragic, they lived around transportation, industrial and military centers, which must be destroyed, since the war was ongoing. Third – as an argument *ex post*, the question of capitulation: the bombing of Dresden was a response to the fact that Germany had not capitulated, even in the face of obvious defeat. If Dresden's fate was worse than Hiroshima's, then why did the Germans not immediately capitulate like the Japanese?⁴³¹

Finally, the question of revenge for German crimes as a fundamental motivation for pilots' actions, and simultaneously as a kind of absolution. From this perspective, bombardment was a justified act, a kind of “payback.” Józef Zubrzycki, a Polish pilot in Division 300 taking part in the air raid over Dresden, put the matter this way:

You cannot pose such questions to airmen. About suffering and death. Because during flight one thinks in other categories. Down below is the enemy. That enemy attacked you, murdered your countrymen. Left your homeland in cinders. He is an occupier. Now you are fighting them. You look to see if the target is burning well. And you are happy when you see fire. One has to learn to think like a machine. And one can think only about two things: I am flying to carry out a task, and I have to return alive. You cannot think about anything else. Nerves and emotions can kill.⁴³²

One of the British pilots appearing in the 1995 anniversary documentary admitted:

If our boys up there had known then what we know today, about the Holocaust and other German crimes, they would have destroyed without hesitation not one Dresden, but a dozen.⁴³³

430 Quote from W. Pięciak, *Requiem dla miasta Drezna*, op. cit., 301.

431 See McKee, op. cit., s. 182.

432 Quote from M. Nocuj, W. Pięciak, “Musiałem myśleć jak maszyna,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 13 lutego 2005.

433 Quote from W. Pięciak, *Requiem dla miasta Drezna*, op. cit., 302.

Relatively rarely do we read about a pilot who spoke of the horror that came with sympathy for the victims, who wanted to look for no justification; or who even admitted to pangs of conscience or openly condemned the air raids. One member of a British bomber crew, as his plane was flying over the burning city, admitted:

The fantastic glow from two hundred miles away grew ever brighter as we moved in to the target. At twenty thousand feet we could see details in the unearthly blaze that had never been visible before. For the first time in many operations I felt sorry for the population below.⁴³⁴

Dresden was too peaceful for us. It would have been fair if we'd been fired at. To just fly over it without opposition felt like murder. I felt it was a cowardly war, that there were people down there who were defenseless. I always felt the same way about Dresden and I've never gone back on it. I can remember that raid, visually, as if it was yesterday. That wasn't so with other raids. I've forgotten them, they've all become blurred in my memory, so similar were they to each other – Hamburg, Cologne, Berlin. But I feel guilty about Dresden. You could have flown low over Dresden, which you couldn't do elsewhere. It struck me at the time, the thought of women and children down there. [...] I found myself making comments to the crew: "Oh God, those poor people." It was completely uncalled for.⁴³⁵

Observers

Air raids over German cities were treated like expected revenge. This payback militated against the Germans: they destroyed more and caused more harm. One author commented in an article for *Biuletyn Informacyjny* dated 15 July 1943:

The Germans, incensed by damage inflicted on the Cologne cathedral, have so far destroyed 800 churches in England alone, and two historic cathedrals in Canterbury and Exeter. And how many churches in other countries have the Germans destroyed?! And in Poland?! Hypocrites!⁴³⁶

Among people in German-occupied countries, bombardments triggered a basic sense of satisfaction and joy. In the context of the growing terror against Poles, Ludwik Landau – in his *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji* – wrote about what a "consolation" it was for dejected Varsovians to hear the news of the bombing of Berlin. This news was the "greatest, most anticipated 'attraction' for Warsaw."

434 Irving, *Apocalypse 1945*, 150.

435 McKee, op. cit., s. 222.

436 Quote from "‘Biuletyn Informacyjny.’ Część III. Przedruk rocznika 1944. Konspiracja," *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojсковy*, rok IV (LV), nr specjalny 3 (200) (Warszawa 2003), 1665.

Commenting on the first powerful wave of air raids that initiated the “air battle for Berlin,” Landau noted on 24 November 1943:

There was huge destruction and huge fires. The waterworks were destroyed and telephone connections with other cities were broken off. The radio station was damaged, etc. [A day later, Landau added:] And again one thing for consolation is the air raid over Berlin – or rather, air raids, because they come one after the other until people lose count. Berliners are not losing count. [...] It seems that the English are now doing to Berlin what they did to Hamburg. Are the Germans going to wait for the destruction of all of their great cities?⁴³⁷

From distant Palestine, Władysław Broniewski sent a poetic blessing to airmen bombing German cities:

<p>Bomby na Hamm, na Essen, na Berlin, na Kolonię! Za każdą bombą lecę sercem na spadochronie i błogosławię dymom, i błogosławię zgłiszczom. i aniołom-olbrzymom: niechaj lecą i niszczą! ...^a</p>	<p>Bombs on Hamm, on Essen, on Berlin, on Cologne! I'm flying behind every bomb With my heart on a parachute and I bless the smoke, and I bless the ruins. and angels-giants: let them fly and destroy! ...</p>
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^a Fragment of the poem “War Pictorial News,” from *Drzewo rozpaczające* (1945). Quote from W. Broniewski, *Wiersze i poematy* (Warszawa 1970), 123.

The mood on the streets of Warsaw was reflected in a carol from December 1943, printed in *Biuletyn Informacyjny*. It brings “cheerful news” about the fact that:

<p>Tysiąc bombowców Leci do Berlina! Berlin się pali, w gruzy się wali! [...] Ludzie się radują, Bimbrem się częstują, Końca wojny oczekują! ...</p>	<p>A thousand bombers are flying to Berlin! Berlin is burning, collapsing into rubble! [... and in response to all that] People rejoice, They pass around moonshine, Waiting for the war to end! ...</p>
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437 L. Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji*, vol. 1, lipiec 1943 - luty 1944 (Warszawa 1963), 426–427, 430.

The author who anonymously submitted this text for print attached a characteristic commentary. The carol was sung everywhere: in the alleyways, at churches, at tram stops. It was the voice of the people, “proud, rugged and tenacious, as proud, rugged and tenacious as Polish honor!” The laughter that this carol caused was “laughter through tears,” since the tormented people of Warsaw knew that “the bloody German beast’s end [is] near.” In an interesting way the pathetic rhetoric of suffering is embedded in a boisterous and picaresque tone. The Warsaw streets on which this carol was born were:

[...] soaked in the blood of insurgents and the blood of warriors. [...] Fluffy white snow falls onto the rubble of German-bombed Warsaw, onto the burned out streets, onto the apartment blocks blown to bits, and mixes with the martyred blood of [the city’s] hostages.⁴³⁸

In this way, the tragic fate of Warsaw, abused by its occupiers, provided the moral legitimacy for the logic of revenge.

But the “cheerful news” about bombardment was tainted by the bitter awareness that the joy and satisfaction offered by revenge was a blemish on the conscience and testimony to the moral corruption – for which (we might add) the enemy was to blame. We find such an attitude in the writings of Andrzej Bobkowski:

18.10.1942. The English are currently bombing Germany with two-ton bombs, but we also hear about four-ton bombs. The Germans call them “Bezirksbomben” because one of them can bring down an entire city district. One is happy like a child when one hears of such miracles. They brought such rubble upon us. And we are repaying them with their own “culture.”⁴³⁹

It was not just “carols about the bombing of Berlin” that circulated through occupied Warsaw, but also a poem by Leonia Jabłonkówna under the title *Modlitwa*. The author referred to the Christian command to love your enemy and to the warning to avoid the destructive power of hatred. Without forgetting the litany of disasters that had befallen the Polish people, she rejected the temptation for revenge and directed her plea toward God:

Zbaw, Panie, kobiety i dzieci	Lord, save the women and children
Z płonących pożarów Hamburga. ^a	From the burning fires of Hamburg.

^a L. Jabłonkówna, *Modlitwa*, “Prawda,” periodical of the Front Odrodzenia Polski, ed. Z. Kossak, issue for October-November 1943, quote from W. Bartoszewski, *1859 dni Warszawy* (Kraków 1974), 470–471.

438 *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, 23 December 1943, quote from *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, część III, op. cit., 1728-1729.

439 A. Bobkowski, *Szkice piórkiem* (Warszawa 1995), 33.

When the hail of bombs began to fall on German cities, staunch opponents of the air raids protested vehemently. They condemned bombing regardless of its strategic goals and in spite of the extraordinary military situation, and they treated them as operations that could not be justified, that were clearly evil, unprincipled, and barbaric. Georges Bell, the Anglican Bishop of Chichester, stated that the entire German nation could not be blamed for crimes committed by the Nazi leadership and could not be punished for them. He particularly opposed the air raids carried out over German cities, writing that:

[...] to bomb cities as cities, deliberately to attack civilians, quite irrespective of whether or not they are actively contributing to the war effort, is a wrong deed, whether done by the Nazi or by ourselves.⁴⁴⁰

The author of what was probably the most prominent antiwar pamphlet at the time was Vera Brittain, whose *Seed of Chaos*, published in London in 1944, was a powerful condemnation of Allied bombing. George Orwell was one person who aggressively criticized the work, but such critics did not yet know what would happen to Dresden on the night of 13–14 February 1945.⁴⁴¹

Traveling through Allied-occupied Germany in the autumn of 1945, Jerzy Stempowski wrote that German cities had been “razed,” and that the ruins of this new urban topography “looked like the remains of an ancient city.” In his *Dziennik podróży do Austrii i Niemiec*, he wrote that the indirect goal of bombardment was to threaten to strike at the heart of Germanic civilization, which could rise again after the war in a Rhenish, Bavarian, Hanseatic or Saxon version to replace the militarily defeated Prussian version. What would be necessary for such a renaissance was the will of the nation to root their thought in buildings and monuments. What would happen if that foundation were destroyed? Hence, the Allied threat:

[...] if you don't capitulate immediately, we will deprive you of your past, we will dump rubble in the path of your traditions and hopes. Today we know that neither the threat, nor the carrying out of that threat, brought the desired results, above all because Hitlerite Germany had no intention of protecting the past and tradition. Like Soviet

440 See Middlebrook, *The Battle of Hamburg*, 346.

441 On the moral attitudes of the British toward the bombardment of German cities, and on Vera Brittain and her work, see Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 179–208 (chapter entitled “Voices of Conscience”).

communism, National Socialism emerged from ahistorical currents and looked a thousand years into the future, without looking back.⁴⁴²

A half-year after the war ended, Stempowski was asking key questions about the influence of bombardment on Germany's future, on its internal development, and on the place it would take in Europe. He feared that the traumatic experiences associated with the air raids would push Germany "toward a new anti-historicism and a new variant of national communism."⁴⁴³

German Attitudes

Victor Klemperer noted that, in the face of Allied air raids, the Germans were finally beginning to be afraid, and he cited the reaction of Jews from Dresden to the sight of people fleeing Hamburg: "Now the Aryans know what we feel like when we are driven out in just such a state of nakedness!"⁴⁴⁴ A year before the destruction of Dresden, Klemperer added an entry to his journal stating that German fear of bombardment was in part the result of a bad conscience and feelings of guilt just then coming to the surface.

Today Frau Stühler for the first time heard someone say out loud in a queue of women that the Jews really had been treated too badly, they were "human beings, too" after all, and the attacks on Berlin and the destruction of Leipzig were retribution.⁴⁴⁵

But Klemperer was under no illusion: Goebbels' propaganda was effective, and the air raids – contrary to Allied expectations – were not weakening civilian morale, but strengthening it.

But the next and increasingly powerful bomb strikes left behind not just chaos and destruction, but also desperation and fear. An 18-year-old Günther Jäckel, who in 1944 had exchanged his Hitlerjugend uniform for a Luftwaffe uniform, was injured during the raid over Dresden and found himself in the crowd of refugees fleeing the city's smoldering ruins. He described the panicky flight: "Desperate people, ruthless people, women with baggage and children [...] loud and noisy and ruthless [...] there was already a feeling of collapse."⁴⁴⁶

442 J. Stempowski, *Od Berdyczowa do Lafitów*, ed. and intro. A. S. Kowalczyk (Wołowiec 2001), 117.

443 *Ibid.*, 118.

444 Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness 1942-1945*, 254.

445 *Ibid.*, 294.

446 Taylor, *Dresden*, 419.

Latent feelings of guilt and a desire for the war to end as quickly as possible yielded to loud expressions of condemnation of Allied barbarity and a lust for revenge.

It was only after the British bombing of Dresden that the injured Waffen-SS officer Claus von Fehrentheil, who lay in a military hospital in the city, became aware of the Geneva Convention, which – according the Fehrentheil – was respected by all countries, but which the English had turned into a farce. Some compared the attack on Dresden with English cruelty during the Boer War.⁴⁴⁷ Traveling in the summer of 1943 “through the burned out cities of western Germany, which formed a dark chain one after the other,” Ernst Jünger overheard:

[...] conversations among fellow passengers that strengthened this impression, conversations in which the sight of this world of rubble aroused the desire to produce even greater rubble; they hoped to see London soon in the same condition and muttered things about immense artillery batteries that were supposed to have been set up on the English Channel to shell that city.⁴⁴⁸

For Nazi elites, bombardment, particularly in its last stage, represented an extreme humiliation. Over and over again, Allied bombing compromised Göring and his bellicose declarations that he would never allow German cities to share the fate of Warsaw, Rotterdam, or London. Hitler took the destruction of Dresden hard. His personal doctor, Teodor Gilbert Morell, described the Führer’s emotional condition: “His morale is low; he seems to have lost faith, evidently on account of the Eastern Front situation and the air-raids on Dresden.” But Hitler’s melancholy, the uncontrolled trembling in both of his hands, his generally weakened condition, did not prevent him from roaring at the Gauleiters who had assembled at the Reichschancellery on 24 February – 10 days after the catastrophic bombardment: “Even if my whole left side were paralyzed I would still call on the German people again and again not to capitulate but to hold out to the very end.”⁴⁴⁹ After being informed of the Dresden bombing, Goebbels went crazy. His adjutant, Rudolf Semmler, described the Propaganda Minister’s reaction:

The tears came into his eyes with grief and rage and shock. Twenty minutes later I saw him again. He was still crying and looked a broken man. But then there came a passionate outburst of rage; his veins swelled and he became red as a lobster.⁴⁵⁰

447 See McKee, op. cit., s. 160.

448 Ernst Jünger, *Sämtliche Werke - Band 3: Tagebücher III: Strahlungen II* (Klett-Cotta 1978), 82. Translator’s note: The above text is my translation from the original German.

449 David Irving, *The Secret Diaries of Hitler’s Doctor* (Focal Point, 2009), 211.

450 Roger Manvell, Heinrich Fraenkel, *Doctor Goebbels: His Life and Death* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2010), 268.

Joseph Goebbels and Robert Ley, head of the German Labor Front, managed to get Hitler to agree to a drastic revenge operation. They proposed that Germany break with the Geneva Convention and execute tens of thousands of Allied prisoners of war, one for each German citizen killed in the air raids. Hitler liked this proposal and – as General Guderian recalled after the war – began to dwell on the Convention's effects on the German soldier's fighting spirit:

The soldiers on the Eastern Front fight far better. The reason they give in so easily in the west is simply the fault of that stupid Geneva Convention, which promises them good treatment as prisoners. We must scrap this idiotic convention.⁴⁵¹

But the Führer's advisors talked him out of taking this step, and the plan to take bloody revenge was not implemented.

Victor Klemperer – Józef Mackiewicz – Kurt Vonnegut

By bombing Dresden, destroying the city's historic substance, and killing its residents, the Allies contributed to the fact that Victor Klemperer managed to survive the Thousand-Year Reich. On Friday 16 February, the tenants of the "Jewish home" in which the Klemperers lived were to be definitely evicted. On Tuesday evening, 13 February, the first bombs fell on the city. In the wave of refugees fleeing from the east, Victor and Eva Klemperer made their way to the Bavarian countryside, where they were liberated by the Americans on 28 April 1945. The writer, along with his wife, began the strenuous march eastward and finally returned to the scorched remains of Dresden in June 1945. He remained in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany until his death in 1960. He died in Dresden. His analysis of Nazi code (*LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook*), a pioneering work that has become a foundation of the study of totalitarian language, was first published in 1947, east of the Elbe, and then again in East Berlin two years later, at the very moment when the Soviet occupation zone was being transformed into the German Democratic Republic (GDR). As one reviewer of the Polish translation of *LTI* wrote, Klemperer would soon become an important consultant on the GDR's project to create a new political code.⁴⁵² This would not be surprising, when we read, for example, one of the most amazing parts of *LTI* – Klemperer's comparative analysis of two metaphors, namely the famous verb *gleichschalten* and the less famous phrase *Ingenieur der Seele*. By way of conclusion, the author wrote: "*Gleichschalten* and *Ingenieur*

451 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1936-1945*, 779.

452 See B. Bakula, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1985), 428.

der Seele [engineer of the soul] – both are technical expressions, but whilst the German metaphor points to slavery, the Russian one points to freedom.⁴⁵³

The ingenious philological ear that allowed Klemperer to unmask Nazi language clearly failed the author of *LTI* when it came to the language of communist propaganda. But it is worth asking how this seasoned expert in the French Enlightenment, not to mention experienced diarist, handled the description of the bombing of Dresden, which he miraculously survived.

The entry involving the air raid is dated 22–24 February 1945 and was written in the village of Piskowitz,⁴⁵⁴ about 25 kilometers northwest of Dresden. The Klemperers found themselves there, with other refugees, illegally, having registered themselves as Protestants. That distance traveled of 25 kilometers was, for the Klemperers, like leaping over a deep and deadly abyss; it marked the beginning of a new period in their lives. And it is in part for this reason that Klemperer viewed the air raid from two conflicting perspectives: as an extreme experience with a deadly threat, and at the same time as an incredible opportunity to be rescued.

Klemperer's portrayal of the bombardment is orderly; he carefully marks off the events, situations, experiences in which he and his wife took part. It is the story of a private experience, but the diarist's perspective covers a broader area. We thus have a panoramic view of the Dresden Old City in flames, as viewed from the other side of the Elbe; we see crowds of people seeking protection at Brühl's Terrace along the river. But in his desire to give expression to the unprecedented experience of bombardment, Klemperer tried to maintain a cohesive narrative, and he was unable to liberate himself from conventional stylistics. "Fires were blazing"; "in the distance there was fire everywhere"; buildings "standing out like a torch" – all of this was a scenario in which one could liberate oneself from the Jewish stigma, which was just as lethal as Allied bombs. Klemperer scrupulously noted particular links in his rescue operation. He left home as a Jew wearing the Star of David, obediently asked the sentry if the alarm had been announced. He stepped down into a Jewish cellar, having been allowed entry into no other shelter. Later, he ran through the burning streets. "I had wrapped the woolen blanket [...] around head and shoulders, it also covered the star." Along with other Dresdeners he sought shelter along the banks of the Elbe, making his way to Brühl's Terrace where, he wrote, Jews were not allowed to enter. The next

453 Victor Klemperer, *Language of the Third Reich: LTI: Lingua Tertii Imperii* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 147.

454 All of the below quotes come from Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*, pp. 406–413.

morning he encountered an acquaintance, Herr Eisenmann, who was crying, but who “then [...] pulled himself together. We would have to try to find our own people, I would have to remove my star, just as he had already taken off his. Eva thereupon ripped the star from my coat with a pocketknife.” In this context Klemperer’s words – “our lives were saved and we were together” – take on a double meaning.

Józef Mackiewicz’s novel *Sprawa pułkownika Miasojedowa* (1962) ends with imagery of the bombing of Dresden. That event is but a single episode in the large work, though – it would seem – one hears in that episode not just the roar of bombs, but also the grim voice of historical irony. One of the main characters, the Pole Marian Szatkowski, has been exiled to Siberia during the First World War. There he marries Klara, the former wife of Colonel Miasojedow, who was falsely accused of spying for the Germans and executed. Together, they return to independent Poland, but in 1939 they have to flee from Soviet occupation. After numerous adventures and signing the Volksliste, they manage in 1945 to make their way to Dresden, where they make plans to cross over to Switzerland. Klara leaves for Vienna to obtain papers, while Szatkowski stays in the city and dies in the bombardment. The leisurely narrative, the classic formula of the Mackiewiczian epic, suddenly picks up pace in the Dresden episode, though the work maintains its internal discipline. Images proliferate that – as the author wrote – “one can compare with the specter of hell predicted by the prophets,” but what we have here is still realistic prose with such conventional phrases as: “The entire city was drowning in a sea of flames.”⁴⁵⁵

And yet the horror of the reality described in this novel cannot be expressed using traditional language. A longer passage from the work gives us an idea of what Mackiewicz’s style is driving at:

Having arrived with the crowds of those in flight, during the second air raid, toward the “Großer Garten,” he [Szatkowski] stood for a brief moment among the people under the trees. Soon a “carpet” of explosive bombs fell on them. His jacket was torn from his body, his shirt and tie flew away into the darkness and were hanging on a bush. His left hand was mashed into the bark of the plane tree. Part of his torso and his legs were in the next alley, mixed up with the flesh of strangers. But his head flew upward, so unfortunately that it was stuck between the branches of that plane tree, above the overhanging intestines of other people. - Unfortunately, because it later stunk terribly when the wind came from that side.

Almost all the crowns of the trees that were left in the park were hung with shreds of clothes, pieces of flesh and intestines, which were later removed partly with poles and

455 J. Mackiewicz, *Sprawa pułkownika Miasojedowa*, 652, 651.

ladders. But Szatkowski's head could not be reached. It was a disgusting sight. After two weeks, it was decided to cut down the old plane tree with a mechanical saw. But it turned out that no saw could take down a tree that has been so packed with steel shards. The saw's teeth dulled and then broke. It took a long time for the roots to be cut through and the tree toppled. Only then did one of the workers state that the head had been stuck so firmly because it had been driven into a sharp knot, like a skewer.

"What a stubbborn head," the worker drawled, as he removed the stinking head in disgust.⁴⁵⁶

Two motifs in this passage function as a metonym for the experience of bombardment. One: the motif of body dismemberment that often emerges in victims' accounts. Bombs tear people into pieces, and witnesses see, with their own eyes, either the moment of such a death or its effects. The curate of the Würzburg cathedral observed, as prisoners were cleaning up the rubble after the air raid of 16 March 1945 and loading corpses into a truck: "It was a chaotic pile of human limbs, torsos, and heads."⁴⁵⁷ Second: the motif of explosions. Explosion is the essence of bombardment. The explosion of a bomb – hundreds and thousands of bombs – puts a definitive end to previously existing forms of reality. This is the violent decomposition of the world that Grosz and Picasso, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, portrayed in their works. The description of bombardment in *Sprawa pułkownika Miasojedowa* has a particular dramaturgy. In its finale, the work moves from a wide and panoramic view to a close-up, to macabre detail. The narrative, which is not without pathos and stylistic clichés, accelerates violently and changes its tone. At its culmination, there emerges an aesthetic dissonance: horror is detracted by triviality, the nightmare is lined with unexpected comedy. Here, the removal of the mass of corpses lying in ruins – terrible work, which was often done by prisoners of war – is turned into a story filled with black humor about how further adversity is overcome. Mackiewicz resorted to descriptions of the grotesque macabre, which – in his novel – becomes an idiom for bombardment.

The legend of the Dresden bombing was consolidated by Kurt Vonnegut's famous novel and antiwar manifesto, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The work has not only come out in many editions, but it was also adapted for the big screen. The film, based on a screenplay by Stephen Geller and directed by George Roy Hill, came out in 1972. In 1996, presumably on the wave of commemorations surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Dresden, the novel was brought to the stage in a play directed by Eric Simonson, which premiered at

456 Ibid., 657-658.

457 Friedrich, *The Fire*, 273.

the Steppenwolf Theater Company in Chicago. In the same year, an opera was produced based on *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the libretto and music for which were written by Hans-Jürgen von Bose. Its premiere opened the annual Opera Festival in Munich.

Vonnegut, as an American prisoner of war, survived the destruction of Dresden, and in *Slaughterhouse-Five* he attempted to give expression to his incommunicable experience. At the novel's center was not so much the presented world, but the possibility of its presentation. Not the phenomenon of the city's annihilation, but rather the phenomenon of describing annihilation. This "famous novel about Dresden," which in the end there was no way to write, is:

[...] so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds [...]. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like "Poo-tee-weet?"⁴⁵⁸

For Vonnegut, the idiom of the air raid is thus babble, the destruction of a hero "unstuck in time," the destruction of narrative logic, the destruction of novelistic space and time.

Timothy Garton Ash and Kevin Alfred Strom

In 1980 Timothy Garton Ash (born 1955), the English historian and publicist, made a trip to the GDR. He was in Dresden for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the air raids. In his work entitled *Niemieckość NRD* (The Germanness of the GDR, published in Poland by the underground "Krağ" press), Ash pointed to a kind of fracture in the German memory about Dresden – two anniversary ceremonies: one official, one unofficial. But what is most important are his personal reflections. Ash situated himself beyond (or above) the bookkeeping by which grievances and payback are counted; beyond conventional arguments about the need to carry out orders, about the pressing war situation; beyond explanations for the infliction of a concrete evil through the use of abstract formulas about the insanity of twentieth-century totalitarianisms, about the perversions of fascism or imperialism, or about the innate human tendency to destroy. It was also not enough for him to rest on the fact that he had the good fortune of being born later. For Ash, Dresden is a matter of personal responsibility. "If I identify with my nation," he writes, "then I identify also with its entire past, good and bad."⁴⁵⁹

458 Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 24.

459 Quote from W. Pięciak, *Requiem dla miasta Drezna*, op. cit., 302.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Dresden, Kevin Alfred Strom delivered a radio address entitled “Dresden: a Real Holocaust.” In 1982, Strom joined the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi organization active in the United States (so-called “white nationalists”). In April 2005, he set up his own organization called the National Vanguard. Let us extract from Strom’s address the basic principles on which the memory of Dresden is molded, one of which is no doubt the “principle of hyperbole.” The day of 13 February is the most somber anniversary in all of Western civilization. The principle of hyperbole is subordinate to the topos of the “huge number of victims” (though the matter of the victim count has its own separate history, one that is worth telling). Strom tosses around the highest possible number – 300,000 – according to the “more is better” rule. The principle of “innocent and defenseless” builds a black-and-white divide between the immaculate victims and the bestial executioners. The phrase “delicate Chinese porcelain” is a kind of metonym for Dresden – a defenseless city from which anti-aircraft weaponry had been withdrawn; a city of old people, women, children, refugees and the injured; a city of hospitals, museums, theaters and artworks; an innocent city that had no military targets and was in no way connected to Germany’s war machine; a city whose factories produced only tooth paste and baby powder, and not mustard gas. Strom also applied the principle of linguistic substitution. When talking about German suffering and German victims, he uses the language commonly used in relation to the victims of German atrocities and crimes, above all the language used to describe the Holocaust. In this, Strom has many imitators. Finally, Strom rises to the summit of historiosophic reflection by reaching for the principle of the conspiracy theory of history, through which the true reasons behind the annihilation of Dresden emerge. Thus, the destruction of the “Florence on the Elbe” was the result of a conspiracy against the white race and Western civilization led by such traitors as Churchill, Roosevelt and their communist allies.⁴⁶⁰

Winfried Georg Sebald – Jörg Friedrich – Frederick Taylor

Winfried Georg Sebald, the famous German writer who died in 2001, could have remembered neither the war nor the bombardment. He was 10 months old when Dresden and its inhabitants were incinerated in the firestorm. But it was Sebald who brought about the return to German consciousness of the memory (still unreconciled at the end of the twentieth century) of the bombings and their German victims.

460 See <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/war/dresden4.htm> (accessed 25 May 2008).

In the autumn of 1997 Sebald delivered a series of lectures in Zürich, which were published in Munich two years later under the title *Luftkrieg und Literatur*.⁴⁶¹ His starting point was the claim that the Allied carpet bombing of German cities, even though it was a horrible experience for millions of Germans and left scars that are visible still today, was obscured and repressed; it became a taboo subject. The postwar period was marked by individual and collective amnesia, and social rebirth in the postwar era meant driving certain events into oblivion. Bombardment – that enormous collective limit experience (as Sebald called it) – was absent in the public discourse, in historiography, in family memory. Sebald dedicated most of his lectures to a discussion of the “literature of bombardment,” which existed somewhere on the margins, and which – with a few exceptions (such as Heinrich Böll’s novel *Der Engel schwieg*, or *The Silent Angel*, which was written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but was published only in 1992) – is of meager value.

Sebald’s book marked the beginning of an entire process by which past experiences were liberated from a psychological blockade and political correctness, which led to the reconstruction of national memory. But the author himself had doubts that memories of bombardment should in fact be used to create a new identity for the Federal Republic. While admitting that Germany had to remember these events, Sebald raised the fundamental question: was this memory to be about the horrors of the catastrophic Third Reich, or about the nostalgic recollection of wrongs committed by the world on Germany? At the end, Sebald remembered the fates of Guernica, Warsaw, and Rotterdam, and he placed great emphasis on the fact that it had been Germany that provoked the catastrophe on German cities. Sebald not only raised great interest in the subject of the air raids, he also showed how the scarred German memory could grapple with the experience of bombardment. Reaction to his lectures left no doubt that there was a growing need to recognize the victims of the Second World War in Germany.

In 2002, Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* was published.⁴⁶² This book has been extraordinarily important in the German debate on the shape that memory of the bombings has taken. The name and surname that appear on the cover of *Der Brand* is the pseudonym for Friedrich

461 For the English-language version, see W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. A. Bell (New York 2003).

462 For the English-language version, see J. Friedrich, *The Fire. The Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945*, trans. A. Brown (New York 2006).

Krabbe, who – like Sebald – was born just shortly before the destruction of Dresden. His sister, Hanna Krabbe, a terrorist in the left-wing Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), was sentenced to life in prison for her participation in an attack on the West German embassy in Stockholm in the spring of 1975 (she was released conditionally in 1996). In his youth, Krabbe was a Trotskyite actively involved in the revolt of 1968. He also participated in anti-Vietnam War protests. Later he wrote about the Nuremberg trials and the careers of former Nazis in West Germany. Known for his antiwar and anti-Nazi attitudes, he tends today to treat the de-nazification process as a political purge that violated Germany's sovereignty and had no basis in international law.⁴⁶³ Currently he is widely considered a “historian-revisionist,” a label he gladly accepts. He would most like to be viewed as a person who breaks taboos, a knight fighting for the truth, a conqueror of myths, an iconoclast,⁴⁶⁴ though in one interview he called himself an independent scholar and emphasized that *Der Brand* is “pure description [...] There's nothing about war crimes. I'm a historian, not a judge.”⁴⁶⁵

This epic tale of the bombardment of German cities plays itself out in seven scenes. One after the other, the author describes the weapons that the Allies used; the strategies they employed in the air raids; the cities and their rich historical heritage that were the object of those raids; methods of defense used against the bombs; collective experiences; individual experiences; and finally, the ruins – that is, stones that speak. *Der Brand* is not a book written *sine ira et studio*, and its emotional temperature, its suspenseful narrative, and its emphasis on concrete individual experiences resembles the style of Goldhagen's more famous book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. But if Goldhagen excessively and ahistorically accused “ordinary Germans” of eliminationist antisemitism, then Jörg Friedrich, in an equally excessive and ahistorical way, accused Churchill and Roosevelt of carrying out genocide on the German nation. In any case, Friedrich brought about a spectacular reorientation of the historical discourse on bombardment, his declared goal being to “describe the forms of suffering” inflicted by Allied air raids on German civilians, in both cities and the countryside.

The language that Friedrich used in *Der Brand* is significant; in the book, he performed a creative stunt that resembles the one mentioned earlier in our brief analysis of the neo-Nazi Kevin Alfred Strom's address and involves the principle of linguistic substitution. Friedrich transferred words and phrases used to describe

463 See L. Harding, “Germany's Forgotten Victims,” *The Guardian*, 22 October 2003.

464 See I. Buruma, [review of *Der Brand*], *The Guardian*, 22 November 2002.

465 See conversation with R. Bernstein, *New York Times*, 15 March 2003.

the reality of the Holocaust, words and phrases associated with the Holocaust in the social consciousness, to the reality of bombardment. For example, he wrote that cellars in burning Pforzheim “worked like crematoria”; that in Hamburg, “after a while, the cellars started absorbing the external heat and functioned like crematoria,” having filled up with combustion gases; and in Dresden, “the tightness of space, heat accumulation, combustion gases, lack of oxygen, and the draft in the cellars all contributed to making the closest escape route into a crematorium.”⁴⁶⁶ The heat from the burning buildings and the resulting poisonous gases “turned the shelters into execution sites,”⁴⁶⁷ and it was British and American pilots who carried out these executions from the air. The logic of carpet bombing “was geared toward inescapable mass extermination.”⁴⁶⁸ The RAF’s No. 5 Bomber Group was described as the “RAF elite” named the “Mass Destruction Group.”⁴⁶⁹ In the German language, such a label sounds more than synonymous with *Einsatzgruppe*, a term which every person with a basic knowledge of the history of the Second World War cannot help but associate with the motorized SS units that followed the Wehrmacht into Russia in the summer of 1941, where they committed mass murder on “Jews and communists.” The *Einsatzgruppen* were “responsible for more than 2 million deaths, one of the greatest orgies of mass killing in the history of mankind.”⁴⁷⁰

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Dresden air raids Jörg Friedrich published an article in *Die Welt* (10 February 2005) under the title “Mongolensturm des Abendlandes,” in which he treated the destruction of Dresden and Hiroshima as the beginning of the “cold war.” A few days before the bombardment of Dresden, at the Yalta Conference, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt had divided up postwar Europe. The Big Three peace conference at Potsdam (with Truman replacing Roosevelt, who had died several months earlier) came to a close exactly four days before an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The bombardment of those two cities, which brought in their wake such apocalyptic consequences, was – Friedrich claimed – a demonstration of British and American power against Russia, which would soon change from an ally into an opponent. Friedrich called what happened to Dresden and Hiroshima “a theater of slaughter, in which there was no way to distinguish between enemy and ally.”

466 Friedrich, *The Fire*, 93, 166, 340.

467 Ibid., 313.

468 Ibid., 314.

469 Ibid., 306.

470 Michael Robert Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (University Press of New England, 1987), 39.

One of the most recent monographs on the bombing of Dresden is Frederick Taylor's *Dresden. Tuesday, 13 February 1945* (2004).⁴⁷¹ Taylor not only made use of a wide variety of sources, and not only carefully arranged the facts and contexts of that event, he also deconstructed the legend of Dresden that had been fixed in historiography and in collective memory. Let me refer to just two examples.

Taylor confronted the myth of the "massacre on the Elbe meadows." In David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden* (1963) we find, for example, drastic descriptions and accounts from eye-witnesses, who talk about American planes diving close to the ground and strafing defenseless civilians fleeing Dresden in flames. But there was no premeditated mass attack on those who had survived the bombardment; such an attack cannot be confirmed by the historical evidence. That having been said, the Americans carried out a third wave of bombing and it is not impossible that, after the attack on the city, individual fighter planes reduced their altitude and, flying low over the city, perhaps fired their onboard weapons. In any case, before midday on 14 February, Dresdeners died from bombs, not bullets.⁴⁷²

Taylor devoted an entire appendix to "counting the dead." From the very beginning, the number of victims was a matter of macabre statistical manipulation. The astronomical number of 350,000–400,000 fabricated by Goebbels' propaganda machine can be found in a book published in West Germany in 1955, Axel Rodenberger's *Der Tod von Dresden*. The very same unrealistic estimate was repeated uncritically in Mackiewicz's *Sprawa pułkownika Miasojedowa*. In his work published in East Berlin, *Die unbesiegbare Stadt* (1955), the communist politician Max Seydewitz wrote about 35,000 victims. David Irving, in his book *The Destruction of Dresden*, stated that the most probable number was 135,000. Taylor pointed out that recent scholarship accepts that the most reliable estimates run from a minimum of 25,000 to a maximum of 40,000 killed.⁴⁷³

471 In 2006 Pimlico published a collection of essays under the title *Firestorm. The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, edited by P. Addison and J. Crang. Ten authors discuss, one by one, the history of strategic bombing until 1945, the political and military genesis of the bombing of Dresden, the air raids themselves, the testimony of Victor Klemperer, military reactions to the air raids and the postwar debate about the bombing, reflections on the reconstruction of the historic city, the bombardment of Dresden from the point of view of ethics and war, and war crimes. The classic work on the subject remains Götz Bergander's *Dresden im Luftkrieg: Vorgeschichte, Zerstörung, Folgen*, 2nd updated edition (Weimar 1994) (1st edition, 1977).

472 See F. Taylor, *Dresden*, op. cit., 429–442.

473 *Ibid.*, 443–448.

During the Second World War, the city in which the greatest number of inhabitants died as the result of a conventional air attack was Tokyo, bombed by the Americans on the night of 9–10 March 1945. The number of victims is currently estimated at around 100,000.⁴⁷⁴ But in the collective imagination, the symbol of the total annihilation of a city in modern times were the American atomic bomb explosions on 6 August 1945 over Hiroshima and three days later over Nagasaki.

474 R. Guillain reports that after the war, Japanese sources counted 197,000 dead. See R. Guillain, *op. cit.*, 187. On the sixtieth anniversary of the air raid on Tokyo the commonly accepted number of victims was around 100,000. See M. Fujimoto, “The Great Tokyo Raid: ‘Scorched and Boiled and Baked to Death,’” *The Japan Times*, 13 March 2005.

Part II

