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GERMAN POSTWAR FILMS

Life and Love in the Ruins

Edited by
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and
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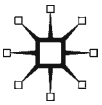

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2008 978-0-230-60825-2

First published in 2008 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN 978-1-349-37504-2 ISBN 978-0-230-61697-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230616974

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

German postwar films : life and love in the ruins / edited by Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch.
p. cm.—(Studies in European culture and history)
1. Rubble films—Germany—History and criticism. I. Wilms, Wilfried. II. Rasch, William, 1949–

PN1995.9.R83G47 2008
791.430943'09045—dc22 2008007997

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2008

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction: Looking Again at the Rubble

William Rasch

In 1952, at the beginning of West Germany's much praised *and* much maligned *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle), Heinrich Böll looked back fondly and defensively at the literature written during the years immediately following World War II. *Trümmerliteratur* (rubble literature) it was called, *Kriegsliteratur* (war literature), *Heimkehrerliteratur* ("coming home" literature, to evoke the title of a Vietnam War era film of a similar nature), and disparagingly so; but Böll wished to wear these labels, especially *Trümmer*, as a badge of honor. Why? Because, he wrote, "in truth, the people about whom we wrote lived in rubble, emerged from the war damaged, men and women to an equal degree, and children too. And they had a keen vision: they saw things" (339). Writers, Böll contended, identified with the rabble from the rubble, with the black-market profiteers and their victims alike, the refugees and all those who were homeless, in short, with an entire generation who miraculously found their way back from a war that seemed like it would never end. And so the writers of *Trümmerliteratur* wrote, without blinders, about what they saw, or rather, about what that damaged war generation saw.

Böll gives examples. He invites us to assume that the eyes of a writer spy a man in a cellar, a baker in the early hours of the morning making bread. This man smokes cigarettes, goes to the movies, has lost a son in Russia who is buried 3000 kilometers away in a grave that has been leveled and ploughed under, adorned with no cross or reminder of his existence. All this—the man's daily pleasures and his lingering pain—belongs to the vision of the baker in the cellar. And the same goes for the young woman we happen upon in the factory who makes buttons for our clothes. She

smokes too, wears lipstick and also goes to movies, and can on occasion be seen walking with a young man who repairs cars. But what an author who has eyes to see must also notice is the fact that her mother lies buried in a city under a pile of unmarked rubble also slated eventually to be cleared away. Once a year this young woman places flowers on the pile of concrete and mortar that stands in for her mother's tombstone (341–42).

All around these individual scenes the author who has eyes to see also finds new buildings going up, but they look like mere facades to him, stage scenery; and the people in them do not really live there, they are merely sheltered, stored, administered. To see these things should be the task of the writer, Böll notes. Like Balzac, like Dickens, recording the reality that lies before one is to be preferred over the manufacture of false idylls, the facades of literature that hide reality from our eyes and our consciousness. The name of Homer, Böll concludes, is revered throughout Western culture. "Homer is the father of the European epic, but Homer narrated the Trojan War, the destruction of Troy, and the homecoming [*Heimkehr*] of Odysseus—war literature, rubble literature, literature of the returning soldier. We have no reason to be ashamed of these terms" (343).

What Böll says of rubble literature could also be said of the films of that time. Made under trying conditions, subject to Allied censorship, and executed with a minimum of resources, these films too dealt with the ever-present effects of the war and its aftermath in the ruins of Germany's major cities, especially Berlin. Like Böll and his fellow authors, German (and Italian, American, and British) filmmakers looked around and saw people trying to survive in a present that was burdened by the past and not yet redeemed by the promise of a better future. The cast of characters—returning soldiers and those at home with memories of soldiers who would never return—and the scenery—rubble—were the same. And like Böll and his fellow authors, these filmmakers soon saw that once a possible political and economic future appeared on the horizon in the form of currency reform and state formation, rubble had to be cleared from the screen as fast as it was cleared from the streets. Yet they too felt they had no reason to be ashamed.

Barely two decades later, the generation of former rubble children begged to differ. Well, they didn't actually beg, they spat out their disagreement, their contempt, their disgust. No longer interested in what the war generation saw, they fixated on what that generation should have seen but did not. That baker, for instance. How did he get his first bakery? Had it once been owned by a Jew before 1938? And what might his son have done in Russia before he was killed—or that factory worker's boyfriend? And is that young woman herself as innocent as her lipstick and chaste walks would lead us to believe? Not to mention her mother, who

probably died trying to save her fur coat or *Biedermeier* furniture! These would be the questions the "'68ers" would have asked and are the questions we still ask today. Indeed, we have learned to ask them not only of the characters the authors observe—ever so partially, we suspect—but of the authors themselves. Böll wrote of his war experiences in fictional form. And we have his wartime letters home. But did he write about everything he saw? We know now that even the self-styled paragon of virtue Günther Grass didn't. We have learned to imagine the worst; indeed, we *love* to imagine the worst. It is in our blood. Our reading of Germans reading their past—especially, in the 1940s and 1950s, their immediate past—has become an enactment of the classical hermeneutical trope of understanding authors better than they understood themselves. Only now it is not so much a question of knowledge, but of *Gesinnung* or moral outlook. Armed with our historical knowledge of the Third Reich, we are confident that we know what the war generation knew, or should have known; thus we know what they should have seen, should have said, should have felt, should have done. And when they do not see what we see, we find them wanting. It is as if their eyesight were not as keen as Böll assumed because a mote, nay, an immoral beam obstructed their view.

In his indispensable study of German rubble films—the immediate postwar genre to which the present collection of essays is devoted—Robert Shandley writes: "The rubble films' treatment of the past is far from morally satisfying to today's viewers." This assertion sets the tone for his book. Viewers of rubble films are asked to stand in moral judgment of them, as if it goes without saying that our prime duty as examiners of literary or visual texts is to act as judge, jury, and, ideally, executioner. Aesthetic categories—which, in their own way, might lead one to find many of these films inferior, especially when compared, say, to the neorealism of Rossellini—are subordinated to a catalog of typical German sins. "These films," Shandley notes, "only rarely confront the institutions, traditions, and assumptions that led to the catastrophe that was postwar Europe. At best, they mention them; at worst, they lie about them." He goes on: "Most of the films treat the question of guilt as just one problem among many in the postwar period. Worse yet, the rubble films often conflate the wrongs committed during the Third Reich with the Germans' own postwar suffering." Finally, the filmmakers were "so emotionally involved in the hardships of life in postwar Germany that they were largely blind to other concerns such as personal or collective responsibility for the crimes of the war" (4–5). Certainly, when described in this way (and one may leave aside for the moment the accuracy of Shandley's characterization), these films *are* "far from morally satisfying to today's viewers," or at least to the way today's viewers have been trained to view such German cultural

productions. In fact, one wonders whether the claim is not somehow tautological. Today's viewers know that Germans in 1945 were supposed to hold clear and unequivocal positions about their unique guilt and deserved suffering, positions identical to those held by the Allies who conquered them,[1] and today's viewers know this because of a 60-year discourse of postwar Germans' singular moral failings. In a sense, rubble films, like all other postwar German cultural products, are *by definition* morally unsatisfying. One approaches them largely to confirm their status as documents of German moral failings. They attest to what we already know, to what we have always known. To watch them, actually *watch* them, would seem to be superfluous.

But watching the German and non-German films set in the destroyed cities of late 1940s Germany can be instructive, even enjoyable, in a variety of ways. They need not simply serve as lessons that give rise to Sunday sermons. It may indeed be true that rubble films were "largely blind" to what concerns today's viewers. Nevertheless, what concerned the editors of this volume and thus motivated this collection of essays is a different, if related, question: To what in these films are today's viewers largely blind? What, in other words, does the all too familiar story of German evasion, silence, and moral blindness hide from *our* sight, no matter how pure our moral pedigree may be? We asked well-established and up-and-coming scholars in German and film studies to look again at the films of the 1940s and tell us what they saw. This volume is a result of that invitation and, we hope, a partial answer to our guiding question.

We know we cannot claim to be the *Stunde Null* (year zero) of *Stunde Null* scholarship. There is no clean slate, no pristine vision of the past. Nor do the authors represented in this volume wish to claim moral or political neutrality. That would be absurd. We have all either gone through or arrived upon the scene after the moral purgatory of the 1960s. We are all "'68ers" or their heirs. While some of us have made the long march through the institutions and thus have helped shape the following generation, others were born after the Eichmann trials and the mythical month of May, 1968. We all are saturated by the language and the outlook given such emphatic voice in Shandley's introduction. We do not wish to renounce what we have learned, nor can we deny that much in postwar German films may embarrass us because of our moral and political training. Nevertheless, we feel that these films deserve another and a sympathetic look. We are curious and we feel that curiosity—intellectual, aesthetic, even moral curiosity—ought to have its moment in the scholarly sun too. We are curious about Böll's baker and factory worker, as well as the butcher and the candlestick maker, the widow and amputee, the refugee and survivor of concentration camps, the former Nazi and anti-Nazi Germans.

What movies did they watch and what of themselves or others did they see in these movies? Are there truths about total war—and it seems we have only total wars anymore—in these movies that we have lost sight of? Are there aesthetic solutions to the vexed problem of the representation of destruction, annihilation, and suffering that we might rediscover? Where does humor and parody fit? What role does genre play? Is it appropriate, effective, enlightening to broach the question of persecution using the techniques of film noir? What similarities are revealed when one actually engages in comparative analyses? Was the bombing war urban renewal by another name? Can one, as former president Bill Clinton is famous for saying, "feel your pain," or is pain—intense hunger, cold, injury, mental disorientation, and insanity—like politics itself only local?

We are not as sure as some are of the answers to these and a host of other questions that could be raised. But we believe that if we're attentive to what Böll's baker and button maker saw when they slipped into the darkness to look at that always fascinating play of shadows and light projected on wall, bed sheet, or "silver screen" during the second half of the 1940s, we just might learn something we didn't already know.

Note

1. Some Germans now like to claim they were "liberated" by the Allies. The Allies were proud of their liberation of France, Holland, Belgium, Poland, and other European territories overrun by the Germans; but they took even greater pride in their conquest of Germany, and rightly so. It was a tremendous military, logistical, and public relations feat. Given the litany of failures by the former Allies since 1945, one should not trivialize this accomplishment with phony language.

Chapter One
"...When Everything Falls to Pieces"—Rubble in German Films before the Rubble Films

Erhard Schütz

Rubble must be a dramatic argument, final and without concession, otherwise it becomes mere decoration, and then it is nothing but unenlightening and oppressive.[1]

Rubble in Those Days

When the catch word "contemporary film" was heard in those years automatic associations arose: rubble, bunkers, everything demolished, but then, all at once, heave-ho!, construction, democracy, renewal…The performers: well-known stars, who took pains to look as shabby and [yet] as renewed as possible. The offspring: rare and weak. A new cliché. Soon no one wanted to see this anymore.

Thus, influential film critic Gunter Groll was already looking back in 1950 on "those days" that had hardly passed.[2] Even if W.G. Sebald's speculations and Jörg Friedrich's problematic docu-epic *Der Brand* have since initiated an enduring and intense obsession with the postwar era inside and outside the rubble, the postwar Germans'contact to a life in and under the rubble remains quite remarkable. The rubble was incorporated into everyday life, quickly announcing itself as normalcy, and it disappeared from public perception while continuing to be fully conspicuous. This

applies not just to the general but to the immediate environment that was perceived as wretched and ruined in the immediate postwar era:

> Good God! How bad misery can be! Sometimes when one is going through the streets, one is hardly able to look at the wretchedness. Between the smart American uniforms, the well nourished figures of our occupying powers, the first German soldiers, prisoners of war, reappear, ragged and haggard, shyly looking around like guilty sinners [...] As strolling ruins they stumble about, legless and armless, diseased, abandoned, lost.[3]

Rubble appeared as normalcy in everyday life; in film, however, it quickly became an anomaly. Even when a critic gushes about *In jenen Tagen*—"Igor Oberberg's camera is superb. It knows the beauty of idylls past, and presents Hamburg's authentic backdrop of rubble, before which a large part of the shoot took place, with an audacious severity. Without any sort of set construction, with a minimum of technical resources."[4]—it is precisely the absence of set construction and minimum of technical resources that makes rubble's disappearance from films most understandable. The disappearance is not due so much to a specific disposition of the audience, but simply to the push of producers to work again in the accustomed opulent, artificial, that is, perfectly controllable ambience as soon as possible. Decidedly, more noteworthy is the way the bombing war and rubble were handled during the war, when the line from the infamous SA song "[...] When everything falls to pieces [...]" started proving true. This treatment will be pursued here.

Käutner's *In jenen Tagen* can serve as a road sign: After the demonstrative exposition of the rubble landscape—in which both of the rubble people, war survivors, salvage a wrecked car, immediately paging through episode after episode of humane acts between 1933 and 1945 on the screen—it takes pretty long until ruins appear at all in the interior narrative, namely, only after the journey through the Russian snow. "I went underground, as it was called at the time," says the car and remains standing with a repainted license plate before the decorative rubble facades of Berlin. A bombing raid is signaled through sounds of explosion and the flak spotlight's fingers of light reflected in the windshield. With its new passengers, the car leaves the city, in order to represent in a Bethlehem-esque setting ass and ox in a stall with hay and straw and a presently unholy holy family. In the feature films before 1945, the German's own rubble and ruins also appeared very late in the game. Of course the ruins were already there before 1945—but as the rubble of others.

The Rubble of Others

If one follows the trail of stones in those days, then one must take into consideration that the process of destruction and ruination took place not

"suddenly" but bit by bit, initially just creeping along. It can be read not only from the observations of foreign correspondents,[5] but also in the diaries of the resident population, for example, in the notes of Ruth Andreas-Friedrich.[6]

Thus the war's first bomb siren on September 1, 1939, came across rather "embarrassingly and seemed to us nearly a disgrace." In return, the city now appears most romantic:

> On the way home we see stars over Berlin for the first time. Not sad and dim behind the brightly lighted advertisements, but rather sparkling in festive clarity. The moon casts a milky glow over the surfaces and steep roofs. Not one artificial ray of light intrudes on the streets. "The metropolis returns to nature," smiles Andrik. "One could almost become a romantic."

One year later Andreas-Friedrich will still note the number of alarms in the meantime, visibly unnerved by their seeming superfluity:

> Last night we had the thirty-eighth air raid alarm since the end of August. The most unpleasant thing about the nightly disruptions are the many hours lost They hardly ever let us out of the cellars in less than three or four hours. Only very rarely is there shooting. If the damage done doesn't increase in the future, we needn't worry ourselves seriously about this specter of the war.[7]

Of course, worry would soon arrive.

Early on, when Germany could believe it was on the way to the peaceful and comfortable modernity promised by the Nazis, one was already confronted with rubble, not only the rubble of the last war but also the ruins of the others' wars. It should not be overlooked that in the time before the beginning of the Second World War reports about air bombardments from numerous conflicts across the world—from Manchuria to Abyssinia, from Tangiers to Palestine—were present in the media, especially in illustrated journals and newsreels. Not to mention Spain, already subjected to the German Luftwaffe's involvement. And when one watches a film like Gustav Ucicky's 1933 *Flüchtlinge*, one finds impressive scenes of people marching through a demolished city landscape, which have a nearly documentary presence.

The population had been systematically engaged in the air defense since 1933. Air-defense exercises belonged to everyday life—in the schools and on the job, in the community and across the Reich. The press, newsreels, and educational films, even novels like Ernst Ohliger's *Bomben auf Kohlenstadt* (1935), propagated air defense. By 1936, the Reich Air Defense League [*Reichsluftschutzbund*], with over eight million members, was the largest nonmilitary organization in Germany.

A new twist emerged with Germany's decision to go to war. In addition to the news reels, the propagandistic "documentaries" and feature films now had to interpret the German war and make visible the victories and their consequences for the ostensible enemy. On April 6, 1940, Hans Bertram's *Feuertaufe* (Baptism of Fire) was presented for the first time as a documentary of the Poland Campaign and, at the same time, as an ode to the young Luftwaffe. Introduced with the reassuring authenticity "the shooting took place during combat operations. The images are authentic and simple. Hard and unrelenting like war itself." In addition, authenticated through a roster of war reporters who fell in the line of duty for "Folk and Fatherland," the film delivers a staccato of destruction in a "type of two-level narrative. Above are the Germans with their technology in orderly formations, below are the Poles in chaos."[8] It is a film of the Luftwaffe, its test case, indeed its very "baptism of fire." ME 111s and Stukas are relentlessly deployed and, right from the start, devotedly commented on: "The point of the German sword stabs deeply into Poland's heart." Meanwhile, it is emphasized that only "military targets" are at stake: "deployment routes, train lines, air fields, supply columns." The subsequent sequences illustrate this with aerial shots from a bird's eye view that alternate with oblique shots of planes next to each other: "Attention, deployment route! Clear the way!" Or: "Rail junction," "Ready. Go!" Hits are initially shown only from a bird's eye view and described: "In a storm of steel the concentrated force of German air power is unleashed. [...] Mission accomplished." Gradually the configuration begins to expand to animated map images or ground views of the air squadrons: "We are in enemy territory. We want to find out for once what an air attack looks like from the ground." Underscored with solemn music, accompanied by pithy sayings, a panorama of destruction is shown from the perspective of the ground. Then once more faux-Wagnerian music and sayings like "And now onward to wrack and ruin!"—"Bombs are raining from the heavens. A hail of steel."—Sequence after sequence of downright industrial-strength destruction: fly, drop, load, fly, drop. Now the field is expanded once again and civil damages are accounted for indirectly: "Through the devastated streets the wind carries fire from house to house."—Close-ups of burning facades, smoldering rubble, silhouettes of ruins. Smoke clouds. Again and again copious panning shots of the rubble. Of the images of burning houses, it is now said explicitly: "large cities and villages burned in battle or retreat. And of the houses, only the chimneys are still standing, like tombstones on a field of graves." The air attack on Warsaw forms the climax: "The drama of a city comes to an end. In the early morning, the bombardment begins." The image of the theater of war now transforms itself metaphorically as well. The scene becomes a spectacle of a divine

tribunal, the spectators gaze down on the stage from the loges of the gods: "After a few hours, a cloud of smoke drifts over the sea of houses like a gray-black curtain." Extended aerial shots of the burning city are explained by the "reason" for the bombing, that is, the "crime" that the open city had been turned into a fortress. Further flight with lofty, solemn music. Interchanging plumes of smoke and clouds, burning ground, Luftwaffe, ground, Luftwaffe, in constant alternation. In the pathos of sublime nature: "The sun stands glaringly on the white cumulus clouds, which, raised high by the burning heat to steep towers, loom like a gigantic mountain range. Below lies hell." The capitulation is illustrated through long ground shots panning over the destruction and images from a flight over the city: "Herr Chamberlain should accompany us on this flight." Further images of the destruction from the aerial view underscored with solemn music: Clouds of smoke, rubble, ruins. For seven entire minutes. In order, subsequently, to announce the continuation of the war as tribunal against England as well: "This is how it goes when the German Luftwaffe strikes. It also knows how to hit the guiltiest of the guilty as well." The film appears totally geared to the Luftwaffe, if need be in cooperation with the army. It is the violence of machinery that is staged here, an industrial annihilation complex. Hitler appears only briefly and hardly central in the inspection of the victory parade. In any event, Herman Göring, as the one responsible for the Luftwaffe, is allowed to look into the camera at the end and vaunt the Luftwaffe's heroic deeds, "which will be forever immortal." And announce that this Luftwaffe will also "meet, defeat and annihilate the enemy" in England and France. Thereupon, renewed ascent and flight, accompanied by the song: "Bomben auf Engelland" (Bombs over Angel-land).

This filmic crescendo of a first total destruction, amplified further through a lofty soundtrack, through an overly conspicuous backdrop of noise—of howling engines, MG-salvos, and soldier songs—had a thoroughly ambivalent effect. For instance, Joseph Goebbels noted on April 6, 1940: "The film comes across grandiose, but in its overreaching realism, somewhat grueling. In the end, a corresponding mood."[9] The mood, the SD (Security Service) report agreed, was markedly depressed in the female audience in particular.[10]

Hans Bertram delivered here the most expansive documentary depiction of the air war and its effects. Subsequent depictions would keep more to the proven model of the newsreels, paying closer attention to changes in tempo and phases of calm. With his very next feature film on the Poland campaign, *Kampfgeschwader Lützow* (Battle Squadron Lützow), Hans Bertram himself delivered a version that desisted from being massively overwhelming and was decelerated to a certain extent. The plot—the

rivalry of two buddy pilots over one woman—connects directly to the fighter pilot movie, *D III 88,* which he directed. And he drew his documentary material mainly from *Feuertaufe*. However, in this film, closer attention is paid to dialogue and humorous scenes to counterbalance the battle scenes. The propagandistic argumentation that the "Polish Campaign" dealt solely with the protection of the German people and the attack of military objectives is placed solely in the center.

Right from the beginning the martial continuity is emphasized, when Colonel Mithoff, who is taking over Battle Squadron Lützow, remarks on his career: "World War, the Baltic, a bit of China, Spain and now Poland," all illustrated by an air attack on a Polish airfield or a dogfight with antiquated biplanes. However, that the Luftwaffe is here to protect "ethnic Germans," is expounded upon in particular. During the return flight two protagonists see how a group of ethnic Germans is being pursued and mishandled by Polish soldiers. "Here you intervene immediately and promise: 'In two days German troops will be here.' "

Another significant sequence shows four pilots, who, having made emergency landings, are trying to get back to a rail line. In the immediate vicinity a Stuka is flying a bombing mission over a bridge: "My good men. From below, the matter certainly can have a dark side!" What in *Feuertaufe*, through the intensity of the destruction's images, had led to the discomfort of the audience is here addressed and deflected through cheekiness.

For the French Campaign there is a pair of similar films, the documentary propaganda film *Sieg im Westen* and the propagandistic feature film *Stukas*. Since Sven Noldan's symbolically pregnant *Sieg im Westen,*[11] shown first on January 31, 1941, sets the Panzer attack as its center piece, the appearances of the Luftwaffe were reduced. Aside from this, however, the film has a different rhythm, because it begins with a particularly strong exposition of ideological justification. In addition, the insertion of didactic animated maps interrupts the flow again and again. For our context, two sequences are of main significance. The first is noteworthy through omission. Rotterdam appears through a map but not one word is wasted regarding the city's bombardment.

The second scene touches on a theme that has weighed heavily on the German Wehrmacht since the First World War, namely, the accusation of cultural barbarism, the destruction of hallowed cultural sites. Here too there is an immediate provocation: On November 14, 1940, during an air attack on the industrial city Coventry and its tightly integrated living and manufacturing areas, the medieval cathedral St. Michaels was also destroyed. Thus the counterargument now appears here propagandistically: Amidst organ music German soldiers reverently enter a cathedral. A German soldier devoutly plays the organ there. And images of Rouen are

explained in the following manner: "The exertions of German soldiers are successful in saving the magnificent cathedral from destruction."

Of particular symbolic power in this regard is a scene from *Wunschkonzert*, which premiered on December 30, 1940. In it a musically gifted soldier, who had been left behind, plays Bach's Toccata in D minor on a church organ, indicating the way back to his comrades who are lost in a minefield. Meanwhile the French do not shy from reducing the church to rubble. The musically gifted soldier dies, sacrificing himself for his comrades, but not without leaving behind a song as his legacy for the Wunschkonzert: "Gute Nacht, Mutter."

The feature film on the Western Campaign connects again to the overpowering dramaturgy of *Feuertaufe*. *Stukas*, by Karl Ritter, the most stalwart of Nazi directors, premiered on July 27, 1941, five days after the invasion of the Soviet Union began. In varying a single basic model, he almost completely abandons any conventional dramatic plot. Framed by opening and closing credits, the planes take off as the alarm sounds, close formation, intercut with the pilots in close-up, the Stukas tilt down, from their perspective the viewer sees the present target, until the plane climbs again. The detonation follows—usually from a ground perspective. Variations offer images of bombs being released from their racks or falling to the ground.[12] Only the targets change: port facilities and ships at Dunkirk, French positions, a rail bridge, tank formations, fleeing ground troops—in the meantime enemy planes, again and again. Thus the film presents itself as an experience of audiovisual intoxication with suggestively intensified repetition. Furthermore, here as in no other film, German casualties are shown. In sequence after sequence more and more comrades are lost—through crash landings, injury, and death. As with a running gag of the film—the cook always places an especially tasty delicacy in view right before the alarm is sounded—the comrades thus return, in person or in memory. At times lofty, while quoting Hölderlin's *Tod fürs Vaterland*: "Like young gods, one keeps them always in memory." At times intimate: "Children, you were away a long time. Now you are finally home again." Especially penetrating is the protracted sequence in which a hero who has become depressive is reanimated by a nurse with the aid of Wagner's music in Bayreuth. He is then conveyed to his squadron, choreographically reforming itself to the strains of Wagner, and flies with them against "Angel-land" at the end.

The Mood in Berlin

After the twenty-third alarm we climb together out of the cellar. This night the shooting was heavier than normal. "They are rehearsing," says Frank,

> indicating the red glow that colors the western sky. We go to him by the window. In the distance we hear the sirens of fire trucks. "I will obliterate their cities," Hitler had threatened, and began a month ago with Coventry. You call the total annihilation of a city "Coventri-fy." Bragging about coining the word and forgetting how brutally it can return against us one day. "They are rehearsing," says Frank once again. And like a shudder his words strike our hearts.

This is from Andreas-Friedrich on December 16, 1940.[13] Her premonitions were not unwarranted. Yet while the air attacks and their effects continually intensified, people went about business as usual in Berlin. Yes, one even played with the bombardments in the relevant propaganda. In January 1941, *Signal*, the Wehrmacht's legendary illustrated magazine intended for foreign audiences, presented photos of houses in ruins and asked in three varied headings whether British bombs had hit here. Three times "no" and on the following page the riddle's solution—in the move to remodel Berlin into Germania the house of German Tourism is being built: "With undiminished energy work continues on the new shape of the Reich's capital in spite of the war."[14]

However, foreign correspondents increasingly noted a mood reversal. Thus Howard K. Smith recorded how with the war against the Soviet Union—and with the British bombs over Berlin—the habits of Berliners change. If before they were enthusiastic consumers of the newsreels, they are now weary of them, as well as propaganda films like *Kampfgeschwader Lützow* oder *Stukas*, and instead prefer "second-rate" comedies like *Der Gasmann*, starring Heinz Rühmann.[15] While newsreels and war films continued to present the rubble of others, there was still no rubble to been seen in the contemporary films about Berlin.

Georg Zoch's comedy, *Der dunkle Punkt*, (The Dark Point) first shown on October 26, 1940, takes place in a Berlin boarding house in 1939 during the first months of the war. Here, downplayed humorously, one learns of ration cards and coal scarcity, that private taxi rides are forbidden, and one experiences an intact sightseer's Berlin from a cozy horse-drawn coach, a perspective similar to the one Volker von Collande presented in his 1941 *Zwei in einer großen Stadt*. An unruly tenant is teasingly threatened with the concentration camp and the air-raid alarm is referred to merely as a "test alarm" to which people drum on sinks and bathtubs. The cellar corridor appears as burlesque chaos. The caretaker has confused the alarm date; the new "block supervisor" warns: "If it happens one more time I will have to report you."

Rolf Hansen's *Die große Liebe*, which premiered June 12, 1942, was one of the greatest film successes of those years. Goebbels praised it specifically because it succeeded "in incorporating a personal plot into the great events

of the war, and truly with great aptitude."[16] There is an air-raid alarm here as well. The film takes place in the time between March and July, 1941, and ends with the incursion into the Soviet Union. The alarm is now serious. Air warnings on the radio—"Radio Germany interrupts its program for the time being"—sink beneath the party racket. In front of the house people are surprised by the howling sirens. And so it comes to pass that the celebrated *Scala*-Star Hanna Holberg (Zarah Leander) and the ace pilot Paul Wendlandt (Rolf Hansen) get to have their one-night stand, and thereafter, through constant separation, their Great Love arises.[17]

Him: "Now you have to take me with you into the cellar."
Her: "Into the cellar with all the appalling people."

Quarreling household figures appear. A father holds a family roll call, some house residents promise themselves a cozy little chat in the air-raid shelter. Since Wendtlandt isn't allowed to take his little mascot, a young dog, into the shelter—"strict regulations"—they bring him into her apartment.

Her: "So. And now turn the light off."
Him: "Gladly. Why?"
Her: "Because I want to open the window. Say, are you sure you aren't really from the moon?"
Him: "Nah, not quite. But close."

A gaze out on the darkened city. On the horizon, the *Siegessäule* is discernible.

Him: "Gosh! Beautiful, isn't it?"
Her: "Like in a fairy tale."
Him: "No. Much better: Like in reality."
Her: "Well, that's why we need to go down in the cellar. Because in reality there's flak."
Him: "And in spite of that, reality is beautiful. Even when there's danger. Maybe because there's danger."

In the cellar now, where he is devotedly playing Parchese with her and a small boy, there is real coffee: "are we a people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) now or what?" And the notorious grumbler—with hat, bowtie, little beard, rimless glasses, and a hooked nose, sketched as an unfeeling intellectual—is unmasked.

There is only danger for the pilot, whom she visits at the end in a mountain military hospital, from where both gaze trustingly at a formation of planes. In the homeland, which profits romantically from the blackouts,

it is however not the bombs that are threatening, but merely flak shrapnel. A more realistic discussion of the bombing war's consequences will begin only in 1943, namely, in educational films.[18]

Desecration of Culture

On March 2, 1943 Andreas-Friedrich notes a

> massive attack on Berlin, the likes of which had not been seen until now. It is said that 160,000 people are homeless. The city is burning, as are all western and southern suburbs. The smoky air is sulfur-yellow. Hounded people stumble through the streets. With bundles, suitcases and housewares. Can't comprehend that someone has played them so foul—them of all people. From cause to effect is a long way. Only very few know how to go it. Hardly anyone understands that the consequence of today can be the provocation of yesterday. The provocation of Coventry, the provocation of Dunkirk, the provocation of Jewish atrocities, obliterating cities and concentration camps. The broom that sweeps Germany pure of the Jews, doesn't want to return to the corner. And the spirits that were conjured will not go away now.[19]

The ruins can no longer be overlooked. The allied air attacks come by day the same as by night. On Christmas of the same year Albert Speer's publicist and coworker, Gert H. Theunissen, announced that the "modern cities" should be rebuilt more broad-mindedly: "Certainly never before have the requirements for accomplishing the construction tasks been more favorable as they are in Germany today."[20]

At the same time, Goebbels commissioned a feature film about the destruction of Lübeck by British air attack on March 19, 1942, after having forbidden in October 1942 that "the old beautiful Lübeck be compared to today's demolished Lübeck," since the audience might be too deeply shaken.[21] First shown in Lübeck on July 6, 1944, *Die Degenhardts* was shot by Werner Klinger under the guidance of Ewald von Demandowsky, head of production at *Tobis,* who Goebbels, regardless of all Party factionalism, attested to being the "real Nazi" among the heads of production and the one who also "takes on political matters." Goebbels was satisfied with the result: "For the first time the theme of the air war is addressed here, and does so truthfully and in a very tactful and psychologically intelligent fashion."[22]

This film is completely tailored to the theme of cultural barbarism. The destruction of the Lübecker cathedral stands center stage—and once more the musically gifted German is among the protagonists. In this case it is the loyal civil servant Degenhardt, played by Heinrich George, and his music-making, deeply introspective family. The

sixty-fifth birthday of the patriarch on August 28, 1939—symbolic of the day on which 25 years earlier he received his "baptism of fire" in the Battle of Tannenberg—gives cause for an extended walk through the city, in order to demonstrate the medieval beauty of Lübeck. Picturesque corners, magnificent renaissance gables, the silhouette of the city from the river. Highlights are the church, the painting of the Dance of Death, and "one of the most beautiful organs." The son explains that it is 420 years old and Buxtehude played on it. Meaningful pause: "His pupil, Johann Sebastian Bach, was among the listeners." War has broken out. In the cathedral, civilians and military personnel listen to Haydns *Schöpfung* together. The camera pans over the organ and the Dance of the Death. Crossfade: flames and the burning rafters. Ruins. Voice-over: "1941 [sic!]. The Wehrmacht report announces. During the night of March 28–29 enemy planes dropped numerous explosive and incendiary bombs over a city on the coast of Northern Germany. Above all they decimated artistically prized structures, old churches and other cultural monuments." One sees streams of people moving past empty façades and rubble. In the cathedral, rubble everywhere. The organ is destroyed. A gaze upward through a gaping hole in the roof – into the heavens. The neatly arranged and Hollywood-esque hole in the church roof in *Mrs. Miniver*, a film that Goebbels had recommended to directors as the paradigm for perfect propaganda, attains here its forceful German replica. Through the destruction of their holiest cultural assets, the dispatch asserts, the Germans are bombed by the allies into a properly cohesive community. Thus, per crossfade, Father Degenhardt summons to visual memory all his children who are in military service: "But in our hearts they are all gathered. [...] And even if one of them takes leave from us forever, it is so ordained that another always grows in his place. And so should it be just this way in a great family. And so should it be even more in the greater family to which we belong."

By now one can discern a two-track strategy in film's propagandistic handling of the bombing war: On the "documentary" side, there is a narrative of a technical sportive enterprise, which, in the visually copious savoring of rubble production, is by no means portrayed only as a clinically precise action.[23] On the feature film side, there is the inversion of the charge of the culturally barbaric "Air Terror." While *Die Degenhardts* was playing in the Reich in 150 locations, in *Signal,* the reporter Benno Wundshammer described returning from the front to Berlin and how he saw there only "soot-blackened [...] ruins" instead of the previous brilliance: "It's as if you saw the scars of extreme suffering on the countenance of a loved one." After an emotional portrayal of painful losses, he asks: "What is to be made of this violent destruction of the middle class,