Looking and Seeing: Photographs of Germans after the Second World War.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in

Media and Cultural Studies

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Abstract

This thesis carried out a comparison of the photography of post-war Germany by Margaret Bourke-White and Tony Vaccaro. This was done in an attempt to assess the differences in approaches to the subject of post-war Germany and German. Representations of affected populations in this historical period have been described by theorists as sometimes being caught in a reductive narrative which avoids looking at the complexities that existed. This project will contrast the work of Bourke-White, representing a reductive approach to this subject and the work of Tony Vaccaro who represents a more open approach. This project was carried out using a framework of sociological approaches of the Holocaust, theories of photography, analyses of the treatment of World War II, the Holocaust and its aftermath in photography and through research of the photographs and publications of both Bourke-White and Vaccaro. I found that there were significant differences to the photographers’ approaches to the subject of Germany and the Germans in the post-war era and that these resulted in markedly different accounts of the same subject. I hope that this thesis’ consideration of these works will go some way to further open up the discussion of the complex realities of all of those affected by World War II and the Holocaust and their aftermath.
Introduction

From 1945 onwards, there was a desire for a clear narrative of the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust. This desire led to the emergence of simplified narratives in which there were unambiguous distinctions between the good and the bad, the righteous and the immoral. These simplified narratives gave rise to stereotypical representations of victims of the Holocaust, the post-war German population and the Allied forces. These representations are sometimes challenged when more details of the experiences of these populations come to light. The role of photographs and photographic evidence in presenting the truths of other experiences has been a central one in this discourse.

In this thesis, I intend to contrast the representations of post-war Germans and Germany of two photographers; Margaret Bourke-White; whose work has been said to represent an oversimplified picture of the post-war Germans, and Tony Vaccaro; whose work presents a more complex version of their experiences. These two particular photographers are interesting in that they were both working in Germany at war’s end, photographing the same subject; Germany and its inhabitants. Each had come to this point by completely different routes, and their work represents very distinct perspectives, arguably as a result of these different journeys.

In looking at this period and the treatment of Germans in photographs, the question of knowledge of the Holocaust among ordinary Germans, and the resulting question of collective guilt were ones which arose again and again. Even contemporary writings hold conflicting perspectives on the issue. Some research suggests that between one third and half of the German population knew about the mass-murder of the Jews (Johnson & Reuband, 2005 cited in Pine, 2006), while other theorists contend that the assertion that Germans “must all have known” must
remain speculative (Barnouw, 1996, p. 3). Even those who agree that knowledge of the Holocaust was widespread may not agree that this means that all Germans of the time should share guilt and responsibility, or that they must be defined as essentially “bad” (Johnson & Reuband, 2005 cited in Pine, 2006).

The key texts that have contributed to this study include Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1979). As part of her discussion of photography, Sonntag describes its role in furnishing evidence: “Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph” (p. 5). Photographs encourage us to believe the “incontrovertible proof” of an event” (ibid.). Sonntag describes how photographic evidence of an event cannot take place until the event has been “named and characterised”. She further proposes that an appropriate political consciousness must exist before the audience of a photograph can be “affected morally” by it. As part of this discussion, she describes discovering photographs of concentration camps in a bookshop in Santa Monica in July 1945:

> Nothing I had seen, in photographs or in real life - ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously (…) When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.

(Sontag, 1979, p. 20)

Sontag considers the waning of the effect of atrocity photographs as they become more familiar – “the shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings” (ibid.)

Another key text was *Modernity and the Holocaust*, by Zygmunt Bauman (1989). Bauman considers the approach to attempting to understand the Holocaust in various disciplines; history, theology and sociology. He identifies a tendency in in sociology to see the Holocaust as an aberration, a moment of madness in an otherwise sane history of Western civilization. While
Bauman’s main discussion is part of a broader critique of Modernity and the conditions it created in which the Holocaust was able to happen, he raises some points which are very relevant to the development of this thesis. Firstly he identifies the way in which many of us understand the events of World War II and the Holocaust in extremely simplified terms:

A world split into mad murderers and helpless victims (…) The rest of the world could only watch, bewildered and agonised, knowing that only the final victory of the allied armies would bring an end to human suffering.

(ibid. p. vii)

Bauman, citing Roskies (1984) also draws attention to the formation of archetypal versions of the Holocaust in which the story takes on “specific contours. The Jewish dead were absolutely good, the Nazis and their collaborators were absolutely evil” (ibid. p. ix). Writing about the notion of German guilt, he puts forward the idea that by allocating guilt to the Germans, other possible causes of the Holocaust are not explored\(^1\) (ibid. p. xii). He also draws attention to the deep complexities of dealing with the moral issues raised by the question of the “gentile neighbours” failing to save their Jewish neighbours or the hierarchies that existed within Jewish ghettos (ibid. 204).

The next key work in the development of this thesis, was the documentary BBC television series; the *Genius of Photography* (2007). The third episode in the series, *Right Place, Right Time*, provides a comprehensive overview of WW2 photography. It introduces Vaccaro as a war photographer and shows his unusual position as a soldier with a camera in contrast to war photojournalists like Robert Capa. It is here that we get an introduction to Vaccaro’s ideas about war, in an interview for the series, he disagrees with Robert Capa’s notion that war was romantic – saying “Bob, you are dead wrong”.

\(^1\) Bauman’s broader discussion is an analysis of the conditions of Modernity and the ways in which they allowed the Holocaust to be carried out as it was.
This documentary introduces themes of censorship and the shaping of the stories of war. It raises questions of the other, less well known stories of the oppression of the Jewish people. Henryk Ross’ images of life in the Jewish ghetto reveal some uncomfortable truths, an issue raised by Bauman, and one that we will return to later in this chapter.

A 2002 article by Siobhan Kattago; *The "Ethics of Seeing" Photographs of Germany at War's End* was extremely useful in its drawing attention to how our perceptions of the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust have been shaped by the documenting of these events by photojournalists. Kattago, citing Saul Friedlander (1992, 1993), again raises the subject of reductive definitions of Jew and Nazi, representing “good” and “evil” - this time as it relates to the photographic representation of these groups and further, how this reduction of complexity has influenced representations of the events of World War II and the Holocaust. Kattago introduces two books, both of which were also useful resources:

The first of these, *Dagmar Barnouw's Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (1996), is a study primarily of representations of the German people. She argues that the aim of much of the Allied reporting on the plight of the Germans was either to disregard the German experience of “total war”, or to demonstrate that they had brought any suffering they experienced upon themselves through their support of the Nazi regime and their government’s expansionist policies (ibid, xi). Barnouw also argues that photographic evidence of Nazi concentration camps which emerged during and after 1945 “validated the war on Germany more effectively than any other evidence” (Roeder, 1995, p 127 cited in Barnouw, 1996, p. 91). Barnouw raises questions about the assumption of the collective guilt of the Germans and considers the role that this assumption played in their representation in photography. She is particularly critical of the work of Margaret Bourke-White, contrasting her approach to suffering and destruction in post-war Germans with
those of other photographers, both Allied and German. She draws attention to the instructive
captions of Bourke-Whites images – an issue we will address in more detail when looking at
Bourke-White’s book.

In her essay, Kattago also introduces Barbie Zelizer’s *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust
Memory through the Camera’s Eye* (1998). *Remembering to Forget* also gives an excellent
background to the development of photography and photojournalism and the establishment of
protocols for captions, accreditation and publishing photographs in the news media during the
war years of the 1930s and 40s (pp. 24-28). Taking a starting point from Sontag’s observations
about the loss of impact of images as they become more familiar, Zelizer examines the ways in
which images of the Holocaust have been “recycled”, and have been central in shaping a shared
cultural memory of this event (pp 12-13). She points out that from early on, the news media used
the same photographs of the atrocities repeatedly, the same image of survivors, for example
would appear again in a different paper, perhaps cropped differently, days or weeks after they
were first published. She shows that images of atrocity were presented differently than were
news reports: where written reports were focused on detailed accounts of particular camps, “An
individual photo’s status as evidence mattered less than the ability to simply document what the
Nazis had done” (p. 94).

Finally, we come to the two books that are most central to this thesis, Margaret Bourke-White’s
*Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly: A Report on the Collapse of Hitler's Thousand Years*, published
These works and the photographers will be discussed in more detail later on, but I will briefly
outline and contrast the approaches of their books here.
Bourke-White describes *Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly* in its foreword as “a description of Germany as [she] saw it in defeat and collapse” and advises the reader that her intention was to give a candid picture of what she saw, rather than suggest solutions to the problems she found there “If the book helps the reader to conclusions of his own, it will have repaid the work that went into it” (Bourke-White, 1949, Foreword). This wish that the reader would reach his own conclusions is contradicted somewhat by Bourke-White’s text and the captions of her photographs, which often take an instructive tone, advising the audience not only what the picture is of, but also how it should be understood. In this foreword, she thanks Edward Stanley of Life for his work on her text and the “fine captions”, indicating that although she may not have written them herself, she agrees with their sentiments.

From early on, Bourke-White’s photographs set out to distinguish “good” and “bad” Germans one from another. The first picture section in her book is a series of portraits of Germans, some who had been involved in or were supporters of the Nazi regime and others who had been involved anti-Nazi movements and organisations. Ostensibly, the idea is that the audience should be able to distinguish between the “good” and the “bad” Germans, but this is an impossible task without referring to the captions on each photograph. This theme is one which is carried throughout the book.

The tone of Tony Vaccaro’s book, *Entering Germany 1944-1949*, is markedly different. While it includes text covering his biography and some stories of his experiences during and after the war, it is primarily a photo-book. Vaccaro’s views of the Germans are less black and white than Bourke-White’s. Perhaps his more sympathetic approach was borne out of his experiences as a soldier. He did not photograph the concentration camps as Bourke White had done, but he had experienced combat and witnessed the atrocities of war first-hand.
In contrast to Bourke-White, Vaccaro’s style is more observant than instructive; his images invite the audience to share his point of view, rather than telling us what to see. It is worth noting that Vaccaro remained in Germany for a much longer period than Bourke-White. She had left Germany in 1945 and had already published her book by 1946. Vaccaro remained in Germany until 1949, working as a civilian photographer after he left the army, working on building a portfolio with the intention of applying for work as a photographer after he returned home to New York. Perhaps the fact Vaccaro’s book was not published until 2001, was a factor in its tone. Had it been published at a time closer to the events of World War II and the Holocaust, the audience may not have been ready for this more sympathetic representation of the Germans.
One of the archetypes in the simplified story of the Holocaust is that of the “absolutely good” Jewish victims. Photographs taken in the Nazi ghetto of Łódź in Poland by Jewish photographer Henrych Ross, present us with a disturbing picture of more complex reality. Ross was an official ghetto photographer and was a resident there for four years. Ross’ unofficial images include moving shots of everyday life in the ghetto; social events and gatherings, new-born babies and kissing couples, (Boot, 2007, Caujolle, n.d.). He also secretly documented the work of the Jewish police in the ghetto. One image shows Jewish policemen preventing sick and elderly Jews trying to escape from the Łódź ghetto hospital, where they knew they were being rounded up for deportation to death camps at Chelmno or Auschwitz (Rodley & Lee, 2007). Such images present a challenge to more stereotypical representations of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust as identified by Friedlander (cited in Kattago, 2002) and others (Bauman, 1989).
Another dominant archetype in the narrative of World War II was that of the absolute moral victory of the Allied forces (Barnouw, 1996, p. xi). Presenting a challenge to this moral position are images of emaciated German prisoners of war, bearing signs of beatings and starvation in British custody. In December 2005, *The Guardian* newspaper managed to secure the release of a report prepared by former Scotland Yard detective, Tom Hayward into the maltreatment of Germans prisoners held at Bad Nenndorf, near Hanover (Cobain, 2006). During 1946, a number of prisoners “ended up in nearby hospitals malnourished, dirty and with severe injuries and in January 1947, two of them even died after arriving at a hospital near Bremen” (Tobia, 2013, p. 121). The incidents were investigated by a former Scotland Yard detective, and a report on the starvation and torture of prisoners was produced. The personnel involved were court martialled, and the prison doctor was convicted and dismissed from the army. The report, however, was suppressed by the British authorities until it was released in 2005. Even at that stage, many photographs of the prisoners were removed from the report: “It took *The Guardian* over six months to obtain the release of the photographs because they ‘were removed before the Foreign Office released the report’, apparently because the Ministry of Defence did not wish them published” (Tobia, 2013, p. 128). The reluctance of the authorities to release the photographs in particular indicates their awareness of the potential impact of photographic evidence on public opinion.
Chapter 2: Differing Perspectives

*Margaret Bourke-White: Photographing German Guilt*

Born in 1905 and a native of the Bronx, New York, Margaret Bourke-White was already an established photographer and photojournalist by the time she was sent on assignment by Life magazine to document the collapse of Germany in 1945. The start of her photographic career was in architectural and industrial photography, and her photographs of the building of the Fort Peck Dam in 1936 were featured on the first ever cover of Life magazine (LIFE, n.d.).

Bourke-Whites conviction that the Germans had knowledge of the atrocities carried out in their name was one of the most influential factors in Bourke-White’s subsequent photography of German people. She held the strong belief that the Germans had brought any suffering they experienced after the war upon themselves. Her photography and her narrative in *Dear
Fatherland, Rest Quietly, published in 1946, consistently attempts to identify and distinguish between “good” and “bad” Germans – those who she suspected of Nazi sympathies or who she felt had just gone along with the system were evil, or at best, immoral. Any person who had resisted or who had suffered under the regime was, according to her, a sympathetic figure. Of course her perspective understandable, particularly when faced with the evidence of the Holocaust, but it can be said to reflect – or perhaps was a forerunner of the simplified narrative of the Holocaust that Bauman calls into question and recommends we re-examine (1989, pp. vii-x).

Bourke-White was the first foreign photographer to be given unlimited access to the Soviet Union, and travelled there to document the process of industrialisation in the 1930s. It was here also that her turn toward social documentary began. Her first book of photographs was the result of a shared project with her future husband, Erskine Caldwell: You Have Seen Their Faces, a photographic study of sharecroppers in the southern states of America was published in 1937. The couple married in 1939, and published two further books together; North of the Danube (1939), an exploration of Czechoslovakia just before and at the beginning of the Nazi annexation of Sudetenland in 1938; and Say, Is This the U.S.A. (1941), which looked at industrialisation in the United States. The couple travelled to the Soviet Union again together in 1941 and were there during the Battle of Moscow which Bourke-White photographed. On their return to New York, Bourke-White was called away again on assignment with Life, this time to England, to photograph American planes headed to war. The couple separated later that year. (Oden, 2004).

She had two more books published before she travelled to Germany, Shooting the Russian War (1942) and They Called it "Purple Heart Valley" (1944) covering the Italian campaign.
Though Bourke-White had already witnessed German aggression in Czechoslovakia and in Moscow, nothing could have prepared her for the scenes she captured at the newly liberated concentration camps. In April 1945, she was present at the camp at Buchenwald to photograph the evidence of the horrors that had occurred there. Her photographs of the camp are chilling. Crematory furnaces used to burn the bodies of inmates, rows of emaciated faces behind barbed wire, and starved bodies crammed into dark rooms, stacks of corpses which had built up as the camp had run out of coal for the furnaces (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 3). So shocked was Bourke-White, she describes using her camera as “almost a relief; it interposed a slight barrier between myself and the white horror in front of me” (Bourke-White, 1946, p. 73). She was also there to photograph the several hundred German citizens of nearby Weimar who had been ordered to come and witness the terrible evidence. Describing the reactions of the Germans to what they saw she writes:

Women fainted or wept. Men covered their faces and turned their heads away. It was when the civilians began repeating, “We didn’t know! We didn’t know!” that the ex-prisoners were carried away with wrath.

“You did know” they shouted. “Side by side we worked with you in the factories. At the risk of our lives we told you. But you did nothing”

Of course they knew, as did almost all Germans.

(Bourke-White, Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly: A Report on the Collapse of Hitler's Thousand Years, 1946, p. 74)

One of the most striking images from this visit of the Germans to Buchenwald is one in which, guided by G.I.s in helmets, a line of four Weimar citizens cross the courtyard of the camp. To their left is a mound of bodies, skeletal, naked, legs and heads lie bundled together. The visitors are averting their gaze, turning their heads to the right. The first in the line is a young woman.
Her left hand is raised, shielding her eyes from the horrific sight. She carries an overcoat over her right arm, a detail which adds to the stark contrast between the groups in the photograph. The caption on the photograph reads: “Fraulein, you who cannot bear to look, did you agree about the Jews? Will you tell your children that the Fuhrer was good at heart?” (Figure 2.2).
Tony Vaccaro’s journey to photographing post-war Germany was completely different to that of Margaret Bourke-White. Vaccaro was born to Italian parents in Pennsylvania in 1922. His childhood and teenage years were disrupted; he lost both parents at a young age and was sent, along with his sisters, to live with relatives in Italy where he stayed until he was seventeen. He then returned to America to an aunt living in New York. Vaccaro was introduced to photography in the High school he attended and began photographing events at the school and around his hometown. In 1942, Vaccaro purchased his first camera. A year later, he was drafted into the US
army and in 1944, was sent to fight as a member of the 83rd Infantry Division. He was 22 years old.

Throughout his years in combat, Vaccaro captured countless images of dead and dying soldiers. The Allied soldiers he photographed were not anonymous dead soldiers, but men whom he would often have known personally. He describes seeing “right in front of me…bullets through friends” (Ormond, 2012). One of his most famous images from the war is *White Death - Requiem for a dead soldier*, (Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 4-5). The image is of a dead soldier, still in his helmet and uniform, lying face down, partially covered with snow. The image is beautiful and haunting. It was, as Vaccaro describes it, taken as a “photo-requiem”, an attempt to symbolise the “beauty of death”, and “in honour all of the dead war soldiers of the world” (USAHEC, 2009).

His work of the time included what he calls “the worst scene possible” a German female soldier, left in a gutter in a town near Berlin, “lying on her back, with her skirt pulled above her waist, panties torn, knees apart and a knife stuck in her body” (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 42). Vaccaro gives another moving account of coming into contact with a female German soldier at Gey in the Rhineland. As his battalion approached, they came under heavy fire from a house in the town, and returned fire, concentrating their efforts on that house. When battle was over, Vaccaro describes entering the house to find a table set with breakfast for one, untouched.

On the right side of the wall was a picture of the Holy Virgin, and on the left, there was one of Hitler. I looked at the dead soldier on the floor and noticed something red under “his” helmet. I removed the helmet and there was the face of a beautiful young woman wearing red earrings

(Figure, 2.3, Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 42-43)
Vaccaro’s images of German soldiers in battle include one of a dying man who, having fallen from his tank, became covered in diesel and engulfed in flames (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 35). In the photograph, the soldiers form is partially blurred, possibly by the flames, or by his motion as he tries to smother them. The effect accents the vulnerability of the figure and emphasises the sense of this image having captured the final moments of this man’s life. Vaccaro’s description of his thought processes while capturing this image offer some insight into a mind which had become to some extent accustomed to the horror of war and to death. He describes standing over the soldier and hearing his final words “Mutter, Mutter (Mother)” and at the same time assessing his own position in order to capture the shot from the most effective angle: “I felt that the picture should be taken a little higher, and so I went on the tip of my toes (…) as I am there, and clicked, I hear bullets hitting the tank” (Rodley & Lee, 2007).

Vaccaro’s war time experience exposed him to consistent pain and death but also to acts of compassion on both sides. He describes the actions of a German officer who was shot on his way to helping an American soldier dying a slow and painful death in no-man’s land. The American soldier was crying for help for over half an hour and the German was making his way toward him, with a white handkerchief and a first-aid kit. The German had almost reached the dying man when he was shot dead. The wounded GI bled to death (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 36).

One group of Germans which Vaccaro captured are German veterans. He includes images of men returning from war and adjusting to civilian life, some having lost homes and families, others missing limbs or having lost their sight (Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 114, 120, 122-123) One of the most touching of these is his Return of the defeated soldier (Figure 2.4). Images of wounded German soldiers are largely missing from the work of Bourke-White.
The photographs that Vaccaro took during the war were captured from his position as a soldier with a camera, rather than a photojournalist with the forces. After the war had finished, Vaccaro stayed on in Germany as a civilian photographer, working for Weekend magazine, who sent him on assignments all over occupied Germany (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 190). His documentation of post-war Germany in *Entering Germany* was an account of the transformation of the Germans from “Nazism to democratic people, and as enemies that turned into friends” (USAHEC, 2009). Margaret Bourke-White, in contrast, was more cynical about the potential of the denazification process and the transformation of Germans: “By what naïve arrogance can we assume that the liberated will automatically and conveniently love and adopt the democratic way of life, simply because their liberators love it?” (Bourke-White, 1946, p. 10).
Chapter 3 Shared Themes

Germany’s Devastation

| Fig 3.1 Nuremberg. A few roads were bulldozed through for military use. The rest were footpaths twisting through the rubble, Margaret Bourke-White, 1945 | Fig 3.2 Woman who refused to leave her bombed-apartment, Tony Vaccaro, 1948 |

The heavy bombing of German cities by the Allies was a controversial move and a strategy which developed during the war. At the beginning of the war, the British strategy concentrated air attacks on economic and industrial centres, but saw the deliberate targeting of civilians and private property as illegal and unjustifiable. This position changed during the war, partly in response to a German attack on London in August 1940, and Allied air raids from then began to target cities. The strategy resulted in tens of thousands of civilian deaths and the almost complete destruction of cities including Berlin, Dresden and Hamburg (The Bombing Offensive, n.d.).

Margaret Bourke-White produced a series of aerial photographs of the ruined remains of German cities and centres of industry for photo essay for Life in 1945 entitled The Battered Face of Germany, (Bourke-White & Cosgrove, 1945). Her images leave us in no doubt as to the effectiveness of the Allied campaign. Cities like gothic Nuremburg, into which Hitler descended from the sky in the opening scenes of Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi propaganda film, Triumph of the Will (1935) appears as a rubble-filled wasteland. Any walls which remain standing are broken, windows missing (Figure 3.1). Images of a devastated Cologne which appear in Dear Fatherland (1946) taken within the city include only broken, blackened trees and silhouetted images of inhabitants amongst the remains. Where more identifiable figures appear in other images of Cologne, they are identified in the captions as either G.I.s attending mass celebrated by an
American priest in the remains of Cologne cathedral, or “a Nazi Banker” who “appraises collateral in Cologne” (1946, Section 4).

Dagmar Barnouw, critical of Bourke-White’s approach to post-war Germans and Germany describes the visual effect of her aerial photographs, as one which represented these bombed out cities as “clear but one dimensional shapes in visually exciting constellations that were light years away from all human fears and hopes” (1996, p. xii). The intention is to show the absolute defeat of Germany while avoiding revealing the reality of German suffering. Barnouw remarks that Bourke-White’s images of displaced people, taken at much closer range, at Anhalter Banhof in Berlin, attempt to achieve a similar distance from the plight of German citizens. She argues, however, that with these images, the attempt is less successful. Several of the series show people packed onto trains waiting to leave the station. People are seated on train roofs and clinging to the sides, finding spaces to wedge themselves onto the engine car. One image showing an older bearded man standing beside the train with a suitcase carries the caption “The old man could not find a place, and no one helped him” , another describes the Germans crowding into the station “quarrelling and chiselling amongst themselves, overcrowding the few trains” (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 7). For Barnouw, the effect is ambiguous, the photographs which captured the scenes at the station offer “more and different views than those indicated by the captions” (Barnouw, 1996, p. 91).

Vaccaro’s images of Germany’s devastation also include several ruined cityscapes devoid of human figures, but he also captures contrasting portrayals of the lives of survivors amongst the ruins. One, taken in 1945 in Nuremberg, shows two women preparing food on a makeshift brick stove, while two little barefoot children and an older woman look on. In the background, a small group of people are loosely gathered, seemingly bewildered by their destroyed surroundings
(2001, p 79). Another, also taken in 1945 near Passau, is *People living in train cars* (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 126). The image is of a three train carriages, parked just beside a train track. The track is still being used for running trains; one can be seen chugging away from the scene. There are lines of washing hung out to dry on the side of the closest carriage to the camera, and between the carriages and the tracks, there are what seem to be two families. A group of young boys are grouped together on the track, two women seem busy at work, each at their own carriage, and there is a small girl in the middle of the group, dressed in shorts and very white socks, turned down to her shoes. The effect of this image is a sense of compassion for the families, and sympathy for their situation.

On the opposite page is a later image, taken in 1948, depicting the ruined shell of an apartment building. Through the gaps where there once were windows, the ruined walls opposite and the sky can be seen. Almost invisible until one realises she is there, an old woman sits in a chair on the first floor balcony. She is knitting, and appears absorbed in her work. Her tiny figure and her strangely familiar pose put her even more at odds with her surroundings. Beside her, through the empty doorway, the remains of her home can be seen. Exposed bricks and a huge gap of sky suggest that it no longer has a roof (Figure 3.2)

Vaccaro had travelled throughout Germany on his assignments, and had reached the conclusion that the Allied bombings of German cities were a disproportionate response to German aggression, a belief that made him feel ashamed of those actions. He describes discussing his thoughts with a young German-American who responded with a view that was widely held the time: “Remember, never feel sorry for the Germans. In life you reap what you sow. It was they who invented the air bombing of cities and elevated it to an art form with their Heinkels and Junkers on April 26, 1937, at Guernica” (ibid., p. 59).
Another post-war phenomenon that both Bourke-White and Vaccaro captured was the development of relationships between American G.I.s and young German women. Bourke-White remarks on the springing up of dancing classes around Berlin with the arrival of American and British soldiers in the city.

Bourke-White expresses cynicism about the relationships, observing that German mothers seemed anxious to push their daughters into relationships with G.I.s or British soldiers in the
hopes that they could marry their way out of a dark future in Germany. (Bourke-White, 1946, pp. 143-147). Bourke-White disapproved of these mothers, remarking that the only German mothers not trying to “push their daughters into fraternization” were those who had been involved in the resistance movement. Here again we see evidence of Bourke-Whites tendency to separate groups of Germans from one another and essentialise the differences between them. The eagerness of the “ordinary” German mothers for their daughters to become involved with Allied servicemen is evidence of their “collapsed morality” while the reluctance of those mothers who had been involved in the resistance for “push” their daughters into such “fraternisation” was, for her, clear evidence of their integrity:

It was no accident that these people who had shown strength of character in one direction should now show it in another. They had integrity. (…) it made me happy to find these few fine people who judged boy-friends for their daughters by some yardstick other than a chocolate bar

(Bourke-White, 1946, p. 148).

Looking at other photographs that Bourke-White has taken of “fraternising” couples, again, typically, it is her captions that give us the most insight into the message she intends us to take from it. One image of a young couple, seated close to one another, beneath a striped canvas awning. The caption reads: “Berlin: A study in fraternal technique. An opinion poll found that one in five U.S. soldiers thought the Nazis justified in starting the war”. (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 3). The inference is that these young German women are calculatedly introducing or justifying Nazi ideology to their boyfriends through their romantic relationships.

Directly opposite the photograph of the couple is a set of two images, both of a young woman sunbathing on top of a wall. She is in conversation with a young soldier. In the first image, the
two look down, smiling at the photographer. The second image is of the same couple, taken from a different angle. The woman’s face is not seen, but the man is looking at her with great attention. From this angle, the woman’s body is more visible. She is dressed in a two piece sunbathing suit. The caption on these images reads: “Yes, the fräuleins ended the war with their teeth in good condition, and these bodies have a sleek, American look. One could not find such good health in the girls of Poland, Holland or Greece.” (Figure 3.3). This attempt to remind the viewer that any health or good looks that German girls were lucky enough to possess came at the expense of neighbouring countries was a message that Bourke-White also wanted to remind American soldiers of: “Too often our soldiers forget that the clothes, soap, and food which produced this attractiveness had been looted from the other countries of Europe” (Bourke-White, 1946, p. 146).

Vaccaro had quite a different view on the relationships which developed between German girls and his fellow G.I.s:

At the beginning of the German Occupation, Americans were not permitted to fraternize with the Germans. But, it turned out to be the time when we really got to know each other: Forbid something and everybody wants it. German girls and American boys were no different. They wanted each other.

(Vaccaro, 2001, p. 107)

Vaccaro’s acceptance of relationships as a most natural and inevitable development is communicated in his photographs of courting couples. Some of his photographs of German girls and American G.I.s seem as if they could have been taken anywhere in the world, they have a snapshot like quality. One captures a G.I. flirting with a “fräulein”, crouched in front of her, he plays with her hand, while she looks coyly away. Another captures a young German woman on roller-skates, smoking a cigarette. Her American beau strolls beside her (Figure 3.4). The image, taken in Frankfurt in 1946, is an attractive one. The couple are young, healthy and attractive.
There is nothing in the frame, apart from the soldier’s uniform, to remind us that this is a “post-war” image.

Vaccaro’s later pictures of interactions between American soldiers and German women include an engagement party photograph (p. 161), in contrast to Bourke-White’s fearful and disapproving attitude to couples; Vaccaro’s feeling was that romantic relationships were evidence of a transforming Germany. His diary entry on leaving Germany reads: “The Occupation is a success; the Berlin airlift is a success; the Germans are friendly – plenty of war brides are going to the States” (ibid., p. 188).

Another interesting section of Vaccaro’s study on the interactions between German women and American men are his photographs of female strip-tease artists. Striptease at the Officer’s Club, Striptease showgirl dances for the Americans, 1948 (p. 186) captures a nude young woman, dressed only in her dancing shoes and with a feathered fascinator in her hair, in the middle of a dance routine. She is surrounded by her male audience who sit cross legged, and smiling. She is smiling broadly herself, making eye contact with one of the audience members, who is returning her gaze. The gentleman to his left is also smiling, his gaze directed to her groomed pubic hair. Vaccaro does not comment on these photographs, except to give the details of the dates and locations of the events.
Photographing Children: Hope for the Future

Fig. 11: *... someone must teach, and show the way*, Margaret Bourke-White, 1945

Fig. 12: *The German boy and the GI*, Tony Vaccaro, 1948

Seeing children as hope for the future of Germany was a perspective that both Bourke-White and Vaccaro shared. They both include portraits of children in their work, and each expresses their concern that this new generation will receive help and guidance.

For Bourke-White, the source of this guidance is a spiritual one: she includes a series of photographs of children making their first Communion at Höchst. As with so many of Bourke-White’s images of this period, instructions to the audience on how to view the image are given through the captions: beneath an image of a young girl carrying a small iron cast lamb towards the altar, the caption reads “The Lamb will lead…” On the opposite page is the image of a kindly
nun, head tilted forward, reading her prayer book, alongside two small cherubic-faced girls, wearing flower garlands on their heads and carrying posies of daisies. The caption on this image reads “Someone must teach, and show the way”. (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 5).

Not all of her images of children, however, are free from her distinctive method of contrasting categories of people against one other. Earlier in this section, she includes a photograph of the Stinnes family: mother, father and two small children. The family are photographed in their expensively furnished living room, Mr Stinnes stands to the right and Mrs Stinnes is seated to the left, with her son on her lap. Her daughter holds her hands and looks in the camera’s direction as she clambers towards her. The caption of this photograph informs us that Mr Stinnes was a coal baron, and “an underwriter of the Nazis”, and, as if concerned that we might forget the crimes of Germany while looking at this sweet family scene, reminds us that “Had the Nazis won, he would have taught these lovely children that it was right to torture Jews, and to make slaves of other nations.” The caption finishes with a question: “Who will teach them now, and what?” (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 5).

Immediately facing this image is a starkly contrasting one. A small boy of about six or seven stands looking into the camera with a dazed expression. The child appears exhausted, his mouth slightly open and his head tilted as if he struggles to remain upright. He is supported by a young man, dressed in the striped trousers of the prisoner camp uniform, who has placed his hand on the boy’s shoulder, and is leaning forward, looking down at the boy’s face. In the background are rows of barbed wire and the faces of four other prisoners look out toward the camera and the boy. The caption of the image spells out the comparison between this child’s experience and that of the Stinnes children captured in the preceding image:
This little boy in Germany missed the good things which came to Herr Stinnes’ children. If his mother dandled him on her knee, he has forgotten. But his life has been rich in experience. His home is Buchenwald, where the Nazis, whom intelligent Herr Stinnes helped to power, kept hundreds of children for medical experiments. (Bourke-White, 1946, Section 5)

While Vaccaro’s photographs of children typically lack the instructiveness of Bourke-White’s approach, he shared some of her concerns for the children of Germany, particularly their need for direction. Writing about German children during the post-war era he describes feeling that they seemed to be “very often left to fend for themselves”. He attempts to capture this sense of German children as “orphans of war” in a series of four portraits of very young children, two girls and two boys, aged possibly between four and six years old. Although the images all appear to have been taken in an urban environment, in each photograph the child appears to be entirely alone. Each one regards the camera warily and solemnly, the girls with slightly concerned expressions, the boys appearing a little more confrontational. (Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 22, 140-141).

In another photograph, Vaccaro captures a boy of about nine of ten. Behind the boy are the ruins of bombed out buildings. The child is shabbily dressed, but is beaming into the camera, revealing a chipped front tooth. He holds three loaves of bread in his arms. Vaccaro comments on the photograph “At first this boy was as serious as any other young man. However as soon as he took the three loaves of bread he had purchased into his arms, he suddenly became one big smile” (Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 128-129). Where Bourke-White emphasises the security of German children as contrasted against the insecurity and the horrific life experiences of child prisoners,
Vaccaro sees German children as also being vulnerable and in need of protection as well as instruction.\(^2\)

Vaccaro expressed a particular concern at the lack of male role models for boys, “Their fathers and other male relatives had been killed, maimed or were still being held prisoner in the Soviet Union. (...) It was a perfect scenario for an entire schizophrenic or depressed state in the male line of future generations” (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 22). Vaccaro’s photographs of children include a series of images of German children being introduced to American sports by G.I.s. Smiling German children hold baseball bats and teenagers earnestly listen to the instructions of G.I.s. In another image, a child waits to be thrown a football by a soldier, while his playmates look on intently (Vaccaro, 2001, pp. 94-95). Another of his images, one which echoes Ross’ 1943 photograph of a Jewish child dressed up as a ghetto policeman and playing at arresting his playmate, is of two boys dressed up as US Navy men (p. 98). His concerns about these German boys, and perhaps also a hope that American soldiers in Germany might act as positive role-models in their lives is eloquently expressed in his poignant image *The German boy and the GI*. A young boy stands next to a G.I. who is looking to his right and out of the shot. The G.I. has taken up a relaxed but firm position, his feet are apart, planted firmly into the ground. His hands are in his pockets. The boy is mirroring his stance, hands in his own pockets, and has his head turned towards the soldier, closely regarding the man’s movements (Vaccaro, 2001, p. 99). There is, perhaps, another dimension to this image, that of the role of the Occupying forces in the development of the brand new German nation.

\(^2\) This concern about the lack of positive role models for young boys in the post-war years echoes the work of another Italian, filmmaker Roberto Rossellini. In *Germany year zero*, Rossellini considers the complexity of the German post-war experience and draws attention to the vulnerability of German children, particularly boys. (Rossellini, 1948)
Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I identified a number of theorists who have dealt with the problem of stereotyping and reductive understandings of the events of the Holocaust and the Second World War. These theorists identified the creation of archetypal images, for example, the absolutely “good” victims of the Holocaust, and the irreproachably moral victorious allied forces. There is a general agreement that these stereotypes are unhelpful in gaining a deeper understanding in the real causes and experiences of the war and the Holocaust.

These stereotypes are challenged when more complex accounts of experience come to light. As with the examples I used of Henryk Ross’ experiences in the Łódź ghetto, and the archival photographs of starved German prisoners of war, when the accounts are accompanied by photographs, these accounts are given more weight. As Susan Sontag states “photographs furnish evidence” (1979, 5).

One of the dominant stereotypes in narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust was the characterisation of the German people as deserving of the suffering they had brought upon themselves by their support of a dangerous government, and as guilty of the atrocities of the Holocaust. These issues must, understandably, form part of the discussion of these events. To define the German population by these factors only, is to ignore the complexity and the diversity of their experiences.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have used the work of Margaret Bourke-White as representing a reductive approach to post-war Germans. Bourke-White was convinced that there was widespread knowledge of Nazi death camps in Germany and that post-war Germans were
unsympathetic figures, having supported their government’s invasion and oppression of neighbouring nations.

In contrast to this approach, is Tony Vaccaro’s account of Germans and post-war Germany. Vaccaro provides visual detail that Bourke-White does not. The German veterans he photographs are sympathetic figures. The ruins that he documents show families living among the ruins. His pictures of German women dating American soldiers are presented as evidence that Germany is changing, developing, being transformed into a democratic nation. His images of children emphasise the role of Americans in the development of the infant German nation.

Perhaps the most useful way to look at these seemingly conflicting accounts is to see them as chapters in a book, rather than as thesis and anti-thesis. These stories of post-war Germany may complement each other; each offers something that the other lacks. Vaccaro’s hopeful and positive account of Germany is an attractive one, but he does not deal with any issues raised by the Holocaust. Bourke-White’s negative and judgmental approach is hard to identify with, but she asks difficult questions about knowledge of and responsibility for the Holocaust. Conversely, Vaccaro deals with first hand experiences of war as it affected both allied and German soldiers and the effects of war on Germany’s citizens with a compassion that Bourke-White lacks. Both approaches are useful in forming a fuller picture of the very complex experiences in post-war Germany.
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