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The Natural History of Rape

Berlin is in flames

20 April 1945. In a notebook she found in the attic apartment to which she moved after her house was bombed out, an anonymous woman in Berlin wrote: 'I can't really call it a home; I no longer have a home. Not that the furnished room I was bombed out of was really mine either' (p. 2).¹ Her diary was published in 1953 under the title *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City – A Diary*, but soon after it disappeared from the shelves. The diary was re-published only in 2003, after the author's death.

Two days after the anonymous woman's April 1945 entry, Marguerite Duras, still unaware of the fate of her husband, Robert Antelme, for whom she had been waiting in Paris ever since he was deported for his part in the resistance, wrote in her diary: '...there have been twenty-seven air raid alerts in Berlin in the last twenty-four hours.' [Fig. 1] In sharp contrast to the celebration of destruction implied in news reports that made declarations like 'Germany has been beaten to a pulp', Duras writes in her diary: 'Berlin is in flames. Millions of civilians are fleeing' and 'millions of men are awaiting the final consummation'.

We shall never forgive

Rather than following the call implied in Charles de Gaulle's declaration, 'the days of weeping are over, the days of glory have returned', the French writer used her diary to make these words sound like 'criminal words'. 'We shall never forgive', she states, using a non-patriotic *we* that consists of those fellow citizens who resist the national training of their senses vis-à-vis disasters inflicted upon others and who insist on caring for others regardless of their national identity in the map of war. She continues, 'at this moment the people are paying. He doesn't notice. The people are made for paying. Berlin is burning. The German people are paying. That's normal. The people, a generality' (Duras, 2006, p. 130). She is not denying

forgiveness to individuals who were born to a nation whose regime mobilized everyone into becoming a perpetrator when she writes, 'we shall never forgive'. She makes this clear when she sides with a freed French prisoner who had brought to Paris a German orphan, and who, despite people's apprehension, 'was arrogating to himself the right to forgive, to absolve, already'. It is instead the statesmen, including those of the Allied powers, whose priorities were always free of concern for the people, or were even directed against the people identified as a danger, as the French president implied when he claimed 'the dictatorship of popular sovereignty entails risks that must be tempered by the responsibility of one man' (Duras, 2006, p. 130), to whom Duras denies forgiveness. 'No national day for the dead deportees', she writes with fury regarding the national day of mourning de Gaulle declared after the death of Roosevelt. De Gaulle's main concern, Duras contends, was the size, wealth and power of France's overseas territories: he 'has always put his North African Front before his political deportees', she wrote. [Fig. 2] Indeed, one month later, on 8 May 1945, the massacre of tens of thousands Algerians at Sétif and Guelma would make it even de Gaulle's priorities even clearer. For him, governed peoples with political aspirations were no more than a military front. Given this history, one is tempted to reverse de Gaulle's claim and ask, has he ever thought about the danger to which people are exposed by the dictatorship of statesmen?

Tormented by the bellicose language disseminated by the media – often a verbatim repetition of the language of military and political leaders who were violently crafting a new world order as a promise of liberation from the totalitarian one – Duras filled her diary with mesmerizing cries like 'Berlin is burning' and concrete descriptions such as 'there are still some people alive there'. [Fig. 3, 4 and 5] German cities were systematically demolished, but as Duras wrote, it was not simply architecture that was destroyed but the fabric of life, as people were still living there. Taken from the position of those who dropped the bombs, photos featured aerial patterns of destruction. She didn't have to view photographs of corpses in order to defamiliarize the media

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



rhetoric and side with the people. Those who survived the aerial bombing, mostly women, went through another type of violence, from the land this time. Neither fleeing nor staying home would guarantee protection from rape. A popular axiom held that Germans had to pay for the crimes of the Nazis, and women, for their part in the new world order, had to relearn the lesson of rule by men, regardless of the regime to which these men belonged. The possibility that, in the political vacuum created by destruction, women suspected the same old order hidden beneath the guise of the new order, and would establish another polity amid the ruins, had to be eradicated.

No longer being governed

[Fig.6] On 21 April, just before the rape of women became a plague in Berlin, the anonymous woman wrote in her diary:

We are no longer being governed. And still, everywhere you look, in every basement, some kind of order always emerges. The forces of order prevail in this basement as well, a spirit that regulates, organizes, commands. It has to be in our nature. People must have functioned that way as far back as the Stone Age. Hard instinct, a mechanism for preservation of the species. With animals they say it's always the males, the lead bull, the lead stallion. But in our basement lead mares would be closer to the truth. (p. 13)

This would not last for long. Already in 1941, by composing the Atlantic Charter, the Allies guaranteed that their imperial power would continue to rule the world. There was no question that political formations other than those based on a body politic composed of differentially governed segments of populations would be permitted. The process of ending the Second World War involved transforming imperial leaders into rescuers whose violence, protected with impunity by the international laws and treaties that they crafted, enabled them to posit their power as the sole alternative to totalitarian regimes like those of Germany and Japan.

Hearing the daily bombing reports in April '45, Duras clung onto an image that had been etched into her mind months earlier: 'I think of the German mother of the little sixteen-year-old soldier who lay dying on 17 August 1944, alone on the heap of stones on the Quai des Arts.' Could she have known that this same German mother or her female relatives would become victims of mass rape? I assume not. Had she stumbled upon this fact, she would have decried it in her diary just as she mourned a dead German soldier or the French women whose clothes were torn and hair shaved as public punishment for their relationships with German soldiers. These images informed portions of her script for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in which the trope of national loyalty is questioned and depicted as an imperial tool for mobilizing people to partake in violence against their fellow citizens. Duras's script addresses these legitimations of violence and radically defies the differentiation between legitimate and illegitimate violence that the Allies imposed from above through globally-orchestrated visual literacy classes in human rights. Duras is preoccupied with instantiations of systemic violence that are perpetrated against people overtly and publicly and still not seen as violence. This cannot be explained by policies of censorship, though the Allies used these too, for example, by forbidding photography in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the American occupation of Japan. However, it is obvious that such a large-scale catastrophe cannot be concealed, only conflated with something else. Visual records of the cruel erasure of Japanese cities and their populations were featured in *Life* magazine. The destruction of a city and its habitants was not censored. Photos of cities before and after their devastation were classified as visual markers of a mission accomplished with an article titled, 'The War Ends: Burst of Atomic Bomb Brings Swift Surrender of Japanese'. The stable national divisions that define enmity and facilitate the transition from violence into a pursuit of ends is destabilized, and the ground of national belonging trembles in Duras's script and Alain Resnais'

[illegible]

Fig. 6: Passing the buckets, 4-11-1945, vintage press print.

Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



film. [Fig. 7 and 8] The same events appeared for what they were: violence without distance, masquerade or mercy for either the victims or the perpetrators. This informative and intimate portrayal of what remains out there, in the open, when the 'mission is accomplished', provides a solid example of the rejection of the policy of censorship imposed by the perpetrators as a factual description of what could be seen from a catastrophe on such a scale. Such factuality is often enchanted by the imaginary effect of censorship rather than revealing its fictionality. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* also deliberately refrains from letting such large-scale violence overshadow the personal – though no less political – violence suffered by individual women like the film's protagonist, who was engaged in a nationally forbidden love story. The film suggests that it is precisely in Hiroshima, a city whose entire population was made permissible to punish, that a French woman can articulate the harm she experienced in the French city Nevers, where she herself belonged to a segment of the population that was made permissible to punish.

Photographic records

[Fig. 9] Did Duras physically encounter a shorn woman or a dead German soldier? Her state of mind after the liberation of Paris, while she was still awaiting the return of the deportees, suggests it is unlikely she roamed around the city and saw such public sights. Photographic records, however, were available. [Fig. 10 and 11] She should have known this 1944 photograph of an unidentified soldier's corpse in Strasbourg. It was taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson, with Duras, was involved with the journal *Libres*, a publication dedicated to the liberation of prisoners of war and deportees. The dead body was left on the dock uncovered and exposed to the occasional camera – an unlikely situation for a French soldier. Since it was her aim to radically revise the repertoire of images depicting the catastrophe of the Second World War by incorporating what was purposefully left out of it, Duras would probably not have skipped over images showing the systemic and

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 7 and 8: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (script: Marguerite Duras, Director: Alain Resnais, film stills).

Fig. 9: 'Shorn women / France / 1945,' screen shot of Google search.

Fig. 10: Dead soldier, based on Henri Cartier-Bresson's photograph.

Fig. 11: *Tracing* - Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Fig. 12: Untaken photographs of rape, photographers at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, May, 1945.

ubiquitous rape of German women (or that of French women during the liberation, which also occurred, albeit on a smaller scale) had any been available.²

Placeholders in a photographic archive

[Fig. 12] Over the course of several weeks, anywhere between a few hundred thousand and two million German women were raped, often in urban spaces where cameras were certainly present, as documented by the careful recording of the destruction of buildings in numerous trophy photographs. Destroyed cities were quickly crowded with photographers, some of whom acted as if nothing could stop them as they journeyed through the destruction, seeking out sights that constituted prime objects for the photographic gaze. The presence of rape, including both what preceded and followed the physical violence, did not require any special haste to detect. It was ubiquitous, but still, it did not appear as a prime object for the gaze of these photographers in the way the large-scale destruction of cities did. In the centre of this photograph, we can see a photographer holding his camera ready in his left hand; but in a broader sense, we also discern an interest in the photographer as a figure who is always ready, as this same photographer becomes the subject of another photograph being taken by the photographer featured to the right. This attention to the presence of photographers in zones of war and violence is, of course, reinforced by still another photographer, the one who took the photograph that pictures these two photographers in front of a tank and the destroyed Brandenburg Gate. But in the context of the alleged absence of photographs of rape, we can look at this photograph slightly differently and ask: where are the photographs of rape that these photographers could have been taking in a city plagued with rape? Did they not witness these rapes first-hand, or did they choose not to use their cameras when women were raped in front of their eyes? Until the moment we encounter a 'photograph of rape' in postwar Berlin, we can use this photograph as a placeholder for a photographic archive in formation, and relate to it

as a particular species: the *untaken photograph of rape*, the *inaccessible photograph of rape* or the as yet *unacknowledged photograph of rape*, depending on the circumstances under which the photographs were – or were not – taken, given or disseminated, and on our position as spectator. For now, this placeholder can be named an *untaken photograph of rape*.

Photos of rape?

The rapes in 1945 Berlin are discussed, though not in depth or at length, in quite a few historical accounts. There is no disagreement among researchers about the widespread occurrence of rape – only about the precise number of women who were violated. Many of the publications that mention the mass rape in Berlin include a small collection of photographs, from which rape is always absent. To ask where the photos of these rapes are, then, is not to search for evidence that women were systematically raped. Such evidence abounds. Instead, this is an onto-political question forced upon the photographic archive, defying the priority given to photographs as the primary outcome of the event of photography, and the sanctity accorded to the frame as the boundary that determines which photographic narratives can be written. These priorities and presumptions limit what can be learned from photographs to facts, those discrete units of information that, stripped bare, are sometimes used for summary accounts – as if the most important issue were whether ‘only’ 700,000 or 800,000 women were raped in Berlin – or, more often, are dismissed as not having anything to do with rape. When so many oral accounts from rape victims describe the destroyed urban fabric and the presence of armed soldiers in the streets as the arena of their rape, we cannot refrain from asking, how come none of these photos of destruction became associated with rape? What are the expectations implied by the dismissal of these photos – that only a photograph in which a rapist or a group of rapists are captured in the same frame with an attacked woman could be recognized as a ‘photograph of rape’?

Rather than endorsing the scarcity paradigm common to archival searches and expecting that, after seventy years, during which photos from this systemic violence of rape did not circulate, all of a sudden the archive will provide us with some rare, unseen images of torn bodies, and instead of inhabiting the imperial role of a discoverer of a large-scale and known catastrophe, I limit my study to available images. After all, the aim is not to endorse the known number of raped women with photos of their wounded bodies. When we speak about conditions of systemic violence, we should not look for photographs *of or about* systemic violence, but explore photographs *taken in* such zones of systemic violence. The places recorded in them are exactly the same places where rape took place: Maybe not on the third floor, but on the second; maybe not in the apartment on the right, but in this one on the left; Maybe only three soldiers and not four, and so on and so forth. The impossibility of stabilizing this kind of information, which may be crucial for individual cases, is counterbalanced by the possibility of exploring, through photographs, the destroyed urban spaces in which hundreds of thousands of women were held hostage, raped and ruled by produced food shortages as modes of politico-physical subjugation. The mass rape in Berlin not only should be reconstructed, it must also be understood as foundational to postwar democratic political regimes. In the following years, similar combinations of procedures – forcing people to leave their homes, destroying social fabrics, introducing food shortages and regulating provisions – were applied, and hundreds of thousands more women were raped, in other places, where new political regimes were imposed; and in those cases already researched, as well as those that have not yet come to light, the violence against women will be kept outside of the factual regime of photographic archives.

Photographs should not be thought of as raw archival material or positive facts whose intrinsic meaning as primary sources is to be spelled out through research. They should be read with and against other material, often considered ‘secondary’, and they deserve special attention since what they encapsulate is

always more than what those who produced them intended to record. If photographs are not associated with the rapes that often took place at the precise moments when they were taken, it is this dissociation that should be foregrounded and overcome. My assumption is based on rejecting the axiom according to which there are no images of rape, which relies on the reduction of photography to photographs and ignores the coexistence of cameras and rape in the same unit of time and space. Under an imperial scopic regime, 'what was there' is made equal to what made it into the frame. However, in zones of systemic and omnipresent violence of which *there are no photos at all*, ALL photos should be explored as photos of the very same violence. As with the rabbit-duck test, I propose to ask in which kinds of images this systemic rape is located, even if it remains somewhat elusive, and to attempt to bring rape to the surface of the photograph, side by side with other, more visible phenomena. Photos showing the massive destruction of built environments are my first sources in this effort. I started to read these perforated houses, heaps of torn walls, empty frames, uprooted doors, piles of rubble – all those elements that used to be pieces of homes – as the necessary spatial conditions under which a huge number of women could be transformed into an unprotected population prone to violation.

The right to be affected by violence and to challenge its imperial foundations

For different reasons, the presence of this systemic rape and its meanings in historical narratives, public discourse, policies concerning the redistribution of services and wealth, and the imagination of a different polity have been belittled. However, such a large-scale catastrophe cannot be completely erased from the annals; instead, it can be, and indeed was, prevented from playing a significant role in the political formations and imaginaries that would follow it.³ The responses to the publication of the anonymous diary in the mid-fifties, as well as the responses to Helke Sander's film *Liberators Take Liberties* in the mid-nineties, were virulent. In response to her critics,

the anonymous author of the diary asked her publisher not to reprint the text until after her death.⁴ The most persistent and vocal argument against those attempts to address this omnipresent rape as a significant event and study its structural political implications consists of a denial of the status of victim to German women. In her discussion of Sander's film, the historian Atina Grossmann, who identifies herself as a child of German-Jewish refugees, argues that 'we need to ask how the (eventually privately transmitted and publicly silenced) collective experience of rape of German women in the absence of (protective) German men insinuated itself into postwar Germans' view of themselves as primarily "victims" and not "agents" of National Socialism and war. The mass rape of 1945 inscribed indelibly in many German women's memory a sullen conviction of their own victimization and their superiority over the vanquisher who came to liberate them.'⁵ The tendency to transform people into tokens of their nation, and relate the violence to which they are exposed (or which they exercise) by the nation to which they belong (or do not belong) in the imperially partitioned map of the world didn't start with the Second World War, but was certainly one of its frightening successes. The massacre of as many as 45,000 Algerians in Sétif and Guelma on the day when the Second World War officially ended in Europe is a stunning example of the victory of the binary opposition created by the Allies to distinguish their mechanisms of violence against segments of populations from those used by other regimes they qualified as totalitarian. The spectacular violence of the Allies in the long and unnecessarily brutal process of ending the war consisted of several campaigns that were framed as steps toward that end but whose goal was in fact a different one: the imposition and reimposition of differential body politics all over the world. A differential body politic is a necessary condition to guarantee that violence will be unequally experienced by different segments of a population, and will either be acknowledged as violence or denied as such in correlation with who exercises it and against which population, or segment of a population, it is exercised.

Against this backdrop, Duras's insistence on not keeping permitted victims – that is, segments of the Allied populations, and entire populations of colonized or enemy nations – outside of the repertoire of Second World War images of violence is inseparable from her effort not to afford impunity to any perpetrators of violence.⁶ It is a call to face and acknowledge the place of violence in European imperial history, even as the Allies, while continuing to perpetrate violence, attempt to dissociate themselves from it and enjoy impunity by claiming to rescue victims from the violence of the others. 'We are of the same race as those who were burned in the crematoriums, those who were gassed at Maidanek', Duras writes in the relatively common idiom of the liberators identifying with victimized European citizens; but, soon after, she makes clear that this sentiment is not sufficient for Europeans to part from their imperial past as perpetrators: 'We're also of the same race as the Nazis.' Her insistence throughout the diary that we should not be *particularly* horrified by the Nazis' crimes is not to claim that these crimes are not horrifying. They are. But are they more horrifying than previous crimes committed under imperialism by those posing as rescuers? Duras is completely aware of the main feature of imperial crimes: their capacity not to appear as such. In 1940, at the Ministère des Colonies, as part of her first job after graduating from university, Duras co-authored (with Philippe Roques) the book *L'Empire Français*. It was only when (or perhaps it was why) she quit the job that she could view the data she gathered for the book through a different, non-imperial, lens. By including permitted victims and perpetrators with impunity in the Second World War's repertoire of violence, Duras insisted on her right to respond to and be affected by these crimes outside of the discursive regime of violence and human rights violations that differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate violence as it designates certain people as permitted victims and others as victims to be mourned, and divides perpetrators into those who must be punished and those who have impunity.

Questioning the origin and the end of the war

The imperial *origins* of this violence, as well as the anticipation that it would not cease with the declared end of the war, was the concern of another major female author who sought ways to account for the war without accepting the contours of the phenomenal field imposed by its engineers: Hannah Arendt. Locating the *Origins of Totalitarianism* in imperialism, the long-lasting enterprise of violence in the colonies, dominions, protectorates and mandates whose dismantling was not part of ending the mission of the Second World War, Arendt concludes her study with a prophetic warning: '...it may even be that the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form – though not necessarily the cruellest – only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past' (Arendt, 1975, p. 460). Following her multiple visits to postwar Germany since her forced departure in the mid-thirties, Arendt wrote a report in which the scope of the destruction of German cities and the violence exercised against the Germans (not without some criticism of the way they processed it) plays an important role. However, Arendt's report doesn't mention anything about the rape of German women. It is unlikely that she deliberately decided to omit such a large-scale phenomenon from her report – a genre carefully chosen for its particular traits – and it is more likely that during her visit the wounded presence of the rape of hundreds of thousands of women was already belittled. The project of reconstruction was already on its way. This semi disappearance, however, did not happen by itself.

No marks left on the historical timeline

Arendt first revisited Germany after the war's end in October 1950. Already in July 1945, the absence of rape was carefully constructed through tropes of substitution and displacement. Here is an urban trope of displacement. [Fig. 13] The chaotic, dilapidated environment that formed the arena of systemic rape had been remodelled and replaced by discrete destroyed objects on relatively cleansed

Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 13: 'Battered Berlin', 11 July 1945, international news photo, vintage press copy.

Fig. 14: Berlin - a city of the dead, 6-4-1945, international news photo, vintage press print.

sidewalks like the building in the photograph. On the back of the photo, which is titled 'Battered Berlin', one can read the way it was described by one of the workers of the agency that distributed it, perhaps even the photographer who took the image: '...this is one of the scenes presented to the eyes of the allied soldiers who entered war-shattered Berlin.' This sentence deserves attention. Rather than commenting on the city that is 'battered', the description focuses on the way it was *presented* to the eyes of Allied soldiers. Rather than displaying interest in the way people experienced life in their battered city, the photo caption assumes the manifest permission of those who destroyed the city to continue to seize, administer and view it, and to act as if they are not the destroyers but those who come to explore, assist and restore order. It is the use of violence that grants authority to take up certain positions, like that of the spectator inhabited by the Allies without remorse, even though they are not just spectators but those who occupy and dominate the city, and bear responsibility for the spectacle the city was forced to perform. In accordance with the familiar imperial protocol, the plight one perpetrates becomes one's trophy, an object of one's gaze. This is made possible since the plight of certain segments of body politics or entire populations do not etch historical time. No memorial dates exist, or even dates that are remembered by people other than the victims, dates in common that would make certain catastrophes tangible in time. 'I've lost all concept of time', anonymous wrote in a city from which all concept of space was already removed (p. 102). Thus, a photograph taken three months after the Allies entered the city, in which women are seen walking casually in the street, and not as if they had just seen their first daylight after being forced to live for weeks as 'cave dwellers', can be distributed as a representation of the scene the Allies first saw when they stopped bombing the city from above and entered it by foot. Weeks of terror simply do not exist in the timeline of the imperial powers' news desks; [Fig. 14] nor do they exist in this photo, taken in June 1945 and described as 'among the first pictures to show

Fig. 15



Остатки Третьего рейха после штурма
Берлин, апрель 1945 г.

Fig. 16



146-3

FRAT AND FRATERNITY
N/119-2. GILES STAND UP IN THE
PARTICIPATION FROM THE
AS HE DOES NOT KNOW THE
IN GERMANY

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the widespread destruction suffered by the Germany capital city'. [Fig. 15] To each another, these women still seemed 'unbelievably different', 'unfamiliar, older, distraught' (p. 84), even at a time when some of the main arteries of the city were cleared of rubble, and differentiations between roads and sidewalks, private space and commons, locked indoors and open outdoors, made the street safe again for them. My working assumption is that when photos record the presence of well-dressed girls and women in open spaces, like in this 'Battered Berlin' photo, we should not forget to restore their temporality and to remind ourselves that these women are in a very early moment of experiencing anew the meaning of walking in their city without the threat of being violently captured and raped, or forced to choose a cruel deal of being provided with enough food to survive in exchange for their body and work. This is a photo of a city from which the omnipresent rape was wiped out in order to clear the way for its survivors to be shaped as consumers by the Marshall Plan devised for them.

A catastrophe so vast that no one could claim not to have seen or known

Even if the majority of rapes were perpetrated by Red Army soldiers, and in the Soviet zone, the tight daily cooperation among Allied forces makes them more than just beholders, and certainly responsible for the naturalization and decriminalization of this systemic violence. [Fig. 16 and 17] Rather than standing against this violence and using the term rape to name a crime, the occupying powers conflated violence with sex and love – a private matter with public violence – by using fraternization as an umbrella term through which to regulate the relation between men and women. This is encapsulated in this photo, dated negligently with just the year (1945), and titled, half-ironically, 'Frat-non-Frat', implying jokingly that there are forms of being with German women that are 'not-frat'. Thus, the U.S. army fraternization rules regarding contact with German women colonized the language in a

Fig. 17



reality of systemic rape, even if the G.I.s were responsible for 'only' 11,000 cases of rape.⁷ The somewhat ridiculous fraternization regulations became a common joke between men in the different parts of occupied Berlin, who competed with each other and were ready to learn from each other, as it is made clear they did with the photo's caption: 'G.I.s stand by to take a lesson in fraternization from one of their Russian allies as he goes out walking with a German Girl friend [*sic*] in Berlin.'

Restoring a timeline of rape

When the Allies walked into Berlin after heavily bombing it, smoke was often still hanging in the air, while the streets were carpeted with rubble, dead bodies of people and animals, and a few refugees on the run carrying small bundles. Though these elements gradually disappeared from the city, the degree of their presence in photographs can be used as a timeline of the rape that took place in this décor. Shortly after Allied troops entered the city, the screams of women being raped or resisting rape could be heard. This sound should be associated with images where the level of rubble and density of smoke are still high.

[Fig. 15] Of course, due to the way they have been technologically engineered, photographs are incapable of recording this sound. However, the fact that we view photographs without hearing the sounds that the photographer would have heard while taking the picture, or even a few minutes earlier or later, should not prevent us from imagining what those surrounding the frame of the photograph could have heard. When this photo, probably by an anonymous Russian infantry soldier was taken, women's screams were likely still audible. This is not a photo of a bombed city seen from above. Indeed, this essay refutes merely factual descriptions like 'bombed city', and attempts to make such classifications unavailable for simple reiteration. By 'simple reiteration', I mean accepting these classifications without criminalizing the prevalent speaking position of those who had the power to both destroy a fabric of life and promote the discursive matrix in which

Fig. 15: 'The capital of the Third Reich after the storm,' Berlin, unknown photographer, July 20, 1945.

Fig. 16: Frat and non-frat, Berlin, 1945.

Fig. 17: *Life* magazine.

such violence could be justified and made into fungible patterns removed from the historical timeline. In his book *On the Natural History of Destruction*, W. G. Sebald is guilty of such reiteration when he writes about the Allies' campaign of destruction, even as he laments the scarcity of accounts on this subject: 'Even in later years, when local and amateur war historians began documenting the fall of German cities, their studies did not alter the fact that the images of this horrifying chapter of our history have never really crossed the threshold of the national consciousness' (Sebald, 2004, p. 11). This 'national consciousness', no less a rhetorical product of imperialism than those 'battered cities', is comprised precisely of such images, and of their acceptability; hence it cannot be transgressed or altered by what is recorded in these images. A threshold can be crossed only when the violence documented in such photographs is reconstructed as universally unacceptable, no matter who the victims and who the perpetrators are, and no matter what the different justifications for this violence were. It is unlikely that Sebald, living in Germany, didn't know about the mass rape of German women in this mesmerizing décor of destruction, or about the controversy in Germany every time women sought to publicly raise the issue of those rapes and how they were silenced, as if the numerous children to whom they gave birth after these events simply did not exist.

The photos included in his book were never banned from circulation, nor were they unknown to Germans who collected and exchanged them in the form of postcards. The absence described by Sebald was always accompanied by an excess that renders Sebald's gesture of (re)printing these photos a reiteration and not a first exposure. Sebald elides the meaning of such a gesture, and negligently inhabits it by not letting these reprinted images be informed by the experiences of those for whom the destroyed cities were never separated from other aspects of the catastrophe they experienced and struggled to preserve. These reprinted images were never what the Allies wanted people to see in them: 'battered cities' or 'destroyed cities'. Sebald is attentive to the movement of refugees, 'numbering one

and a quarter million, dispersed all over the Reich, as far as its outer borders' (p. 29), but oblivious to what happened to them on the roads, in the woods, in the refuges they found in their homes or along the way in tattered buildings. When photos of catastrophe are not studied, but merely made into tokens of destruction, details like the density of smoke, the height of rubble and its position in the entrance to a building, women's grimaces, features and clothes are neglected, and appear as more of the same. When imperial violence is turned into ether, these details can be helpful in making it palpable again. After all, there are innumerable photographic records taken in imperial arenas of violence. Careful attention to smell, colour, sound and other tactile aspects is necessary to endow this etheric violence with material presence in photographic archives.

Visual documents of rape are not missing; this is just another cliché rooted in the imperial fusion of the perpetrators' points of view with neutral facts. Visual documents of violence perpetrated in the open are not missing; they should be located within available images falsely declared not to be images of rape, even though they were taken in the same place, and at the same time, as the rapes. With the help of the anonymous diary, not much is required in order to hear the convulsing voices of women while being raped. Since the ubiquitous rapes took place mainly within a few weeks, from the invasion of the city to the reconstruction of order through separations between inside/outside, private/public, work/non-work, road/pavement, entrance/exit and so on, I suggest replacing the vague temporal marker – the year 1945, written on the back of many of the photos and used in the titles of dozens of books published in the last decade alone – with a more precise timeline based on a careful reading of changes in the cityscape and its dwellers.

This is a photo of an arena of rape

Inserted in such a reconstructed timeline, this photo can no longer be read as another photo of destruction. *This is a photo of an*

Fig. 18



arena of rape. In these perforated and porous dwellings, women, children and the elderly lived with no windows, no doors, no water, no gas, no electricity and very little food. They moved from the upper floors to the basement and up again, depending on the data they could gather on the behaviour of their rapists. Some of the rapists, they learned, were too lazy to climb to the upper floors, especially when drunk; others felt less comfortable raping women in crowded places like basements, where, after the aerial bombing, people stayed since their apartments were inhabitable. Young girls in particular hid in closets and other less accessible parts of what was left of their or others' homes. 'Yes, girls are a commodity increasingly in short supply. Now everyone's ready when the men go on the hunt for women, so they lock up their girls, hide them in the crawl spaces, pack them off to secure apartments', anonymous writes (p. 95). Some of the women managed to reduce the number of men who raped them by making deals with individual soldiers, who would protect them from the others and, in exchange for access to these women's bodies, provide some food. 'The apartment is open to a few friends of the house, if that's what they can be called, as well as to the men Anatol brings from his platoon, and no one else. It seems that I really am taboo, at least for today' (p. 82) [Fig. 18]. The rubble that blocked buildings' entrances didn't stand in the way of those who came to rape women. On the contrary, the chase was part of the adventure: 'I draw back to the passage that leads to our basement, then sneak to the inner courtyard, but just when I think I've shaken him he's standing next to me, and slips into the basement along with me. He shines his flashlight on the faces, some forty people altogether, pausing each time he comes to a woman, letting the pool of light flicker for several seconds on her face' (pp. 48–9). Even though the buildings were not secure, women still preferred to stay in them rather than go outside and walk to their predators. The deserted street in this photo clearly indicates this. The road is already relatively cleared of rubble, and only two or three soldiers are seen on it.

Fig. 19

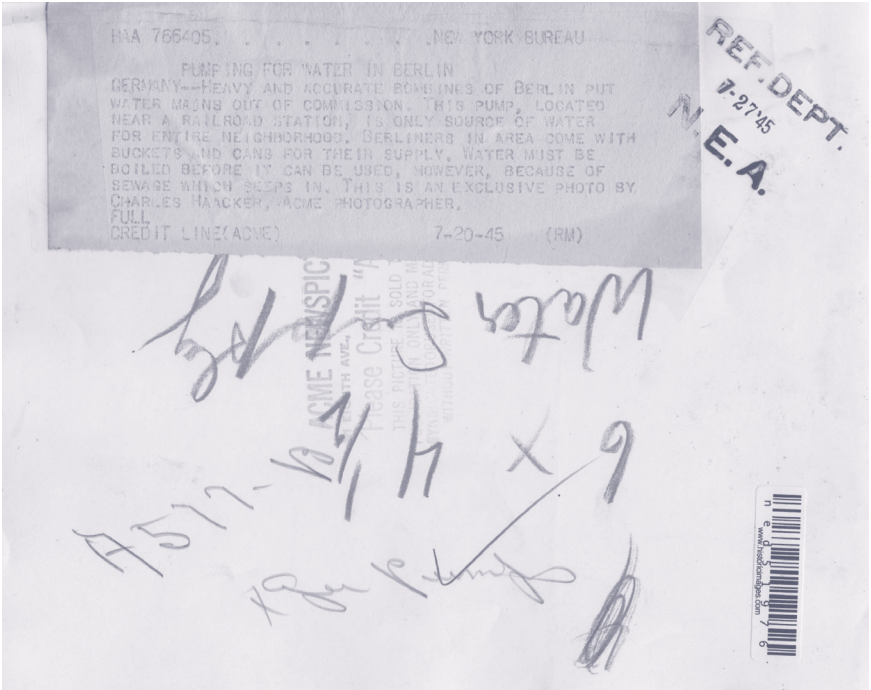


Fig. 19: Pumping for water, Berlin, July 1945, vintage press print.

Alone between the sheets for the first time

On 9 May, anonymous wrote in her diary that she was 'alone between her sheets for the first time since 27 April (p. 155). The day before, with the help of some of their 'protectors', the women were able to block the entrance of the building with a kind of door, and with that, she writes, 'unless new troops are housed here, we begin a new life' (p. 147). With the door restored, even if in a very vulnerable way, there was some semblance of privacy, threshold, choice and order. Rapes didn't cease at this point in time, but with some signs of order and organization, their number and frequency diminished. [Fig. 19] After some doors to apartments were restored, it was time to clear the street entrances to buildings. Writing on the same morning, anonymous continues, 'some people equipped with heavy scoops called us down to the street, where we shovelled the pile of refuse on the corner' (p. 155). When this photo by the Russian soldier was taken, sometime after 20 April and not much earlier than the first week of May, rapes were still numerous.

What exactly is this photo? Who took it, and why? It doesn't seem like the dead corpse of the horse, still attached to the damaged carriage, attracted the photographer; nor did the scale of the destruction, as is clearly the case in the photo whose focus is a collapsed building. In this image, the photographer's gaze is closer and more intimate. The photo was not taken in order to show the house or the street. It seems more like an idiosyncratic souvenir that the photographer wanted to carry with him. He would have been familiar with this particular building: he probably knew how to get in and out of each of its holes and wanted to keep some memories of the many evenings and nights he spent there with one woman or maybe many, first having to 'grab her wrists', 'jerk her around the corridor', and 'pull her, hand on her throat, so she can no longer scream';⁸ and later providing some vodka, herring, candles and cigarettes after he raped her. At this point food rations were either non-existent or minimal enough to push women to choose a sort of rape-under-control

in the form of a sex-for-food exchange, in the place of other forms of rape. As anonymous writes: 'Physically I feel a little better, though, now that I am doing something, planning something, determined to be more than mere mute booty, a spoil of war' (p. 64). The photographer might be this guy, described by anonymous: '...for out of all the male beasts I've seen these past few days he's the most bearable, the best of the lot' (p. 116). There are no existing statistics, but many women preferred to shelter themselves from multiple gang rapes in these types of relationships. These men became friends, of sorts, welcomed insofar as they could prevent foreigners from intruding and raping the women more brutally. Even if Petka, Antol, the Major or Vanya did not take this particular photo, it was taken by another soldier from a threatening proximity to women who, at the very moment when the photo was taken, hide in houses that were violated.

Providential economy

Those who succeeded in avoiding rape, or its recurrence, found themselves outside of any of these providential economies. [Fig. 20] City dumping lots were rare places where they could find food. The black-market economy was manipulated to authorize certain people to provide women with food, and to ensure that women were not creating their own markets with their own rules. When anonymous met with her friend, this was their exchange: "How many times were you raped, Ilse?" "Four, and you?" "No idea, I had to work up the ranks from supply train to major" (p. 204). Under these conditions, four times could not have been enough for survival. Not much could be found in a nearby dumping lot either. Anonymous noted 'the people going hungry' in mid-May, after another friend of hers biked for two hours to ask for some food. 'She herself looks pitiful; a piece of bacon. Her legs are sticks and her knees jut out like gnarled bumps' (p. 140).

Let's go back to the photo of 'Battered Berlin'. The building in the background could be seen as a distinct object on a pedestal only due to the tedious labour that recovered the

Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



bright sidewalk from underneath the rubble. [Fig. 21] The numerous photos (now online) of pretty women cleaning, recycling blocks, removing rubble, passing buckets, holding hands and smiling to the camera should be located on the same timeline so as not to lose sight of how German women were treated – rubble-women, before they were transformed into rubble women, icons of the reconstruction of Germany by female labourers. On 22 May, anonymous writes, 'at around 2 p.m. we heard loud shouting from down on the street outside our house: all men and women capable of work and currently unemployed should report to the Rathaus [town hall] at once for labour duty' (p. 207). From then on, it is proposed that food be given in exchange for labour: '...word went around that we were to be fed' (p. 214). Does this mean that the rapes are over? Forced labour didn't put an end to rape, but marked a transition away from the rape-food economy: 'I am essentially living off my body, trading it for something to eat' (p. 116).

The women 'shovelled diligently', according to anonymous's description of the first work-day under Russian supervision. 'All of a sudden around ten o'clock we heard some shouting, and a Russian voice: "Woman, come! Woman, come! A command that's been all too popular. In a flash all the women disappeared, hiding behind doors, crawling under carts and piles of rubble, squatting to make themselves as small as possible' (p. 212).

[Fig. 22 and 23] After the 'end' of the war, food provisions and produced shortages were used in tandem as a form of rule in Germany. The regime of food shortage lasted only a few years, and it was not on the scale of the great famine produced in India at this time, but it struck chords with the way Europe treated its colonies, the feeling of being ruled as if they were the non-European subjects of colonies didn't escape people's minds: '...we are nothing but a colony, subject to their whims' (p. 245).⁹

Bodies, goods, food and political order. Needless to say, this 'plenty', provided in exchange for women's bodies, was inseparable from the economy of looting. This economy comprised both the overt and orchestrated

Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 20: Hunger, 10.23.45, vintage print photo.

Fig. 21: Woman posing in ruined building.

Fig. 22: Demonstration and hunger march, Hamburg, 150,000 assembled, May 1945.

Fig. 23: 'German Workers Protest Food Shortage,' 3 April, 47, international news photos.

Fig. 24: 'Civilians Loot Liqueur Warehouse,' 18 April, 1945, ACME, vintage press print.

Fig. 25: Black Market, Berlin, 1945, Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin.

looting of the Allies, who confiscated whatever they needed, and more sporadic, survivalist theft by women, which was tolerated by individual soldiers. 'People no longer feel so closely tied to things; they no longer distinguish clearly between their own property and that of others' (p. 3). Chaos and anarchy filled the governmental vacuum left by the dismantling of the Nazi state that had started a few days before the conquest of Berlin by the Allies and Hitler's suicide. [Fig. 24] Look at this moment of joy when a stock of liquor was found. Rather than sharing it clandestinely among a handful of people who would accumulate the surplus, they share it with all who share their misery, and celebrate their opportunity to provide for themselves without having to give their bodies in exchange. [Fig. 25] Look at these joyful women when they try on a stash of found hats. [Fig. 26] At this point they are in the woods, running away, hiding. In a few weeks, when women will be back on the streets, 'hustling and bustling about', anonymous will write in her diary: 'I even spotted one woman wearing a hat, the first I think I've seen in a long time' (p. 194).

At a certain point, with the introduction of forced labour, the soldiers were done with their job and with the looting that made them providers of life of plenty. A clearer distinction was introduced between permitted looting – implemented from above as policy – and forbidden looting, including other forms of trading food, mainly through black markets initiated by citizens outside of the governing apparatuses. Through food shortages, the new regime sought to obtain acknowledgement: 'We're being governed again; those in power are providing for us' (p. 194). [See Fig. 22 and 23] It didn't work without many protests and strikes, including hunger strikes, which lasted for a couple of years in all the occupied zones of Berlin. [Fig. 27 and 28] 'To alleviate the scarcity of food in the German capital, American, British and Canadian army trucks have been bringing potatoes and other hard-to-get commodities into the city', reads the caption of a photo distributed by an American agency. A caption on the back of a photo 'radioed

Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



from Moscow' reads: 'Russians bring food to battered Berlin to feed the hungry, war-battered citizens of Berlin. Sacks piled up in foreground contain flour and sugar. It will be distributed to Berlin stores and thence redistributed to the public.' When both photos are put side by side, a more complete picture emerges. The division of labour is not between East and West, but between men in uniform and women in dresses. The men provide the food while the women stand in line, grateful for not being left to starve.

New world order

Curfews, raids, body searches and arrests were pursued daily. I propose to see the imprint of patriarchal order on women's bodies during the final stages of war, and the implementation of a 'new world order' after its end, as inseparable from the processes of naturalizing imperial bodies of governance as a neutral political language comprised of unqualified terms – sovereignty, citizenship, peace, war and the like.¹⁰ International law was codified and standardized to endorse these concepts and structures as incarnations of transcendental political categories, culminating with the creation of the U.N. as an apparatus that contains imperial violence within the realm of law and order. On this I'll dwell on a different occasion.

Fig. 26: 'Eastern Bonnet for Free,' 4 July, 1945, ACME, vintage press print.

Fig. 27: 'Russians Bring Food to Battered Berlin,' 18 May 1945, International News Photos, press copy.

Fig. 28: 'Potato Queue in Berlin,' 9 August, 1945, ACME.

1. All unidentified quotations from now on are taken from *A Woman in Berlin*.
2. For a history focused on sexual violence in France during the war, see Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*. The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
3. The rapes, writes Atina Grossmann, 'became an official problem located in the public sphere because they had social health and population political consequences that required medical intervention: venereal disease and pregnancy. They were immediately coded as public issues, not as an experience of violent sexual assault, but as a social and medical problem that needed to be resolved.' See: Atina Grossman, 'A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers', *October 72*, Spring 1995; *Berlin 1945: War and Rape 'Liberators Take Liberties'*, p. 49.
4. On the extraction of the book from the market and its later publication, see the editor's preface to the newest edition: Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Forward', in *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City – A Diary*. Picador, 2000.
5. Atina Grossmann, 'A Question of Silence', p. 48.
6. Robert H. Jackson, the American prosecutor in the Nuremberg Trial (1945), writes: 'All [the Allies] agreed that the crimes to be tried at Nuremberg should be Nazi crimes and only Nazi crimes – not, that is, crimes that might have been committed by the Allies.' See: Robert H. Jackson, 'Report to the President', in *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46: A Documentary History*, Michael R. Marrus (ed.). Bedford/St Martin's, 1997, p. 45.
7. See: J. Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
8. These descriptions in the diary use first-person pronouns in each instance where I have used the third person (p. 53).
9. Here is a short history of the different phases of food provisions during a few weeks in Berlin:

 '...the major promised in parting that he would take care of me, bring me something to eat... This is definitely a different life from my hungry existence in the attic, where everything had been stripped bare and eaten. First we had the end of the German rations, then what I managed to steal – the loot from the police barracks, the potatoes. Next we had everything that Anatol and his men left... And the two cans of meat from the white hands of Stepan-Alyosha. A life of plenty' (p. 106).
10. On the rape of Palestinian women by Jewish soldiers, see: Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. Verso, 2012. See specifically Chapter Four, 'Civil Uses of Photography'.

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