

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

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War Primer 2 is a limited edition book that physically inhabits the pages of Bertolt Brecht's remarkable publication *War Primer* (Libris, 1998). The original was published in German in 1955 under the title *Kriegsfibel*.

War Primer 2 was published by MACK in 2011 and sold out immediately. While *War Primer* was concerned with images of the Second World War, *War Primer 2* updates Brecht's piece with images of the conflict generated by both sides of the so-called "War on Terror".

War Primer 2 was produced in the artists' studio in a limited edition of 100 copies, applying silkscreen and offset printed images to 100 copies of a 1998 edition (Libris, London) of Bertolt Brecht's 1955 *War Primer*. This digital version combines critical and academic essays about *War Primer* with a screen based rendition of the artist's book.

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Bertolt Brecht WAS PRIMER
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Bertolt Brecht
Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

WAR PRIMER 2

Translated and edited with an afterword and notes by John Willett

MACK

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The publishers are grateful.

**Collaborators: Giulia Astesani,
Natalia Grabowska, Piero Martinello,
Chloe Rafferty and Sam Skinner.**

Thank you Dr. Wizisla.

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**Don't start from the good old things,
but the bad new ones - BB**



Like one who dreams the road ahead is steep
I know the way Fate has prescribed for us
That narrow way towards a precipice.
Just follow. I can find it in my sleep.



'What's that you're making, brothers?' 'Iron waggons.'
'And what about those great steel plates you're lifting?'
'They're for the guns that blast the iron to pieces.'
'And what's it all for, brothers?' 'It's our living.'



Women are bathing on the Spanish coast.
They climb up from the seashore to the cliffs
And often find black oil on arm and breast.
The only traces left of sunken ships.

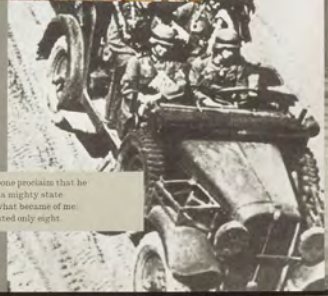


THE CAPTIVITY. General Juan Yagüe, kneeling before his
troops, at an apartment near to Barcelona's Plaza de

Cataluña. In background is the Hotel Colón, whose tower
is now open to the public below, at lower right. Behind

Yagüe are Generals Martín Arce, Barón, Yagüe, Yagüe
and Salazar, moved off to their quarters in the hotel.

The bells are pealing and the guns saluting
Now thank we God who told us to enlist
And gave us rifles to be used for shooting
The mob is vulgar. God is a Fascist.



Suppose you hear someone proclaim that he
Invaded and destroyed a mighty state.
In eighteen days, ask what became of me:
For I was there, and lasted only eight.

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Great fires are blazing in the Arctic regions
In lovely fjords the clamour's at its height
'Say, fishermen, who launched those deadly legions?'
Our great Protector, protected by the night.



Eight thousand strong we lie in the Skagerrak.
Packed into cattleboats we crossed the sea.
Fisherman, when fish have filled your net
Remember us, and let just one swim free.



German assault troops, here emerging from beneath railroad cars to attack the Albert Canal line, were young, tough and disciplined. In all, there were 240 divisions of them. But

despite the world's idea that the conquest was merely by planes and tanks, it actually depended on the old-fashioned tactic of a superior mass of firepower at the decisive point.

Before you join the great assault I see
You peer around to spot the enemy
Was that the French? Or your own sergeant who
Was lurking there to keep his eye on you?



Unblock the streets to clear the invader's way!
This city's dead, there's nothing left to loot.
There's never been such order in Rodina.
Now order reigns. Its reign is absolute.



May he die like a dog. That's my last wish.
He was the arch-enemy. Believe me, I speak true.
And I am free to speak: where I am now
Only the Loire and one lone cricket know.

Spying has come to Paris. Here we see one of our most typical signs - fishing along the
 banks of the Seine has begun in earnest. Thus too there are some indications that even
 a down sign of the food shortage.



Here in the heart of Paris you can see us
 Trying to outwit a sneaky little fish.
 From which we hope to make a sausage dish.
 Victims of Hitler and of our own leaders.

The Germans were 'kind' to the Frenchman. They blindfolded him before he was shot.



The Germans were 'kind' to this Frenchman. They blindfolded him before he was shot.

And so we put him up against a wall.
A mother's son, a man like we had been
And shot him dead. And then to show you all
What came of him, we photographed the scene.



Bradley Manning was forced to sleep naked in his cell, according to his lawyers.

ADEN TROCHTBRANDER (living center) behind the locked wire in the brickyard concentration camp. This leftmost unpublicized picture was smuggled out of prison by Mr. Trochtrander.

It's true he was their enemy's enemy
Yet one thing they could not forgive: that he
Was enemy to his own government.
Lock up the rebel. Throw away the key.



The people hate them more than a foreign foe
Shitting themselves, they balance on the fence
And fear Germany less than they fear the French.
Be ruled by Germans? Yes. Ruled by the people? No.

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Gang law is something I can understand.
With man-eaters I've excellent relations.
I've had the killers feeding from my hand.
I am the man to save civilization.



It's we who fly above your city, woman
Now trembling for your children. From up here
We've fixed our sights on you and them as targets.
If you ask why, the answer is: from fear.

The City Today During the blitz the City of London was reduced to a ruin. This view was taken from St Paul's.

City av i dag



Torpå Kälache - After



Here's how I look. Some men betrayed their duty
And flew a course that differed from the map.
Hoping to act as fence, I was the booty.
Let's call my fate a technical mishap.

Liverpool harbor, England's second biggest, is well known to be the target of many German aerial bombardments and took many direct hits. This photograph gives a close glimpse of the harbour - the smoke at the top shows that it has just been visited by German bombers.



Hamnen i Liverpool, Englands näst största, har som bekant varit föremål för flera tyska bombträffar och härvid blivit utsatt för många träffar. Här se vi en vacker bild från hamnen och eldsvådorna i bakgrunden utvisar, att hamnanläggningarna nyligen haft kännning av de tyska bomberna.

I am a city still, but soon I shan't be
Where generations used to live and die
Before those deadly birds flew in to haunt me.
One thousand years to build. A fortnight to destroy.



The 'flying sharks' that was the name we boasted.
Along the crowded coastlines we went flying
With sharks' teeth painted on our fighter-bombers
All of us sure for once that we weren't lying.

"Bombs Away" shows the observer as he celebrates a successful drop.



„Die hat hingehauen.“ Der Beobachter, der seinen die Abwurf-
sicherung eingeworfen hat, freut sich über den Erfolg seines Bombenfalls.

You're looking at a bastard, and a poor one!
Taught at news of other men's distress
A corset salesman formerly, from Nürnberg
A dealer now in death and wretchedness.



There was a time of underneath and over
When mankind was master of the air. And so
While some were flying high, the rest took cover
Which didn't stop them dying down below.

New Sources of Income Thanks to the bombing, London's poor have found a new source of income. Choppers gather round the ruins of underground stations which serve as air raid shelters. They have covered places in the shelters and laid them out, with bedding, when there is no rain. Our picture shows a group of passengers with mattresses and blankets curled in groups.

Ny födkrok



De fattiga i London ha genom bombarderna fått en ny födkrok. Ungdomar se både könen samla kring nedgångarna till den underjordiska försägens stationer — som lokalt anlände som skyddaren under bombarderna. De ha de "kameras" plats där var, dels kring de singlärar av kända spelare och till de "kameras" skyddarstationerna till följande de skolor ger. Här ses en samling ungdomar med tullen och dyran i borseggar vilka anlita som transportmedel.

Far odds than their bombers is the hunger
That they've unleashed on us. And to survive
We have to earn the cash to buy provisions
So, for survival, gamble with our lives.



A cloud of smoke told us that they were here.
 They were the sons of fire, not of the light.
 They came from where? They came out of the darkness.
 Where did they go? Into eternal night.

Searchlight display We reproduce a picture from Associated Press, Berlin, showing a German fighter plane caught in English searchlights.

Strålkastarspel



Vi återge här en bild från Associated Press, Berlin, framställande ett tyskt stridsplan, utslätt för engelska „strålkastarbuterierns“ eld.

What you see here, caught in your night defences
These steel and glass cocoons for killing people
With tons of bombs, are just the consequences
For all, and not the causes of the evil.

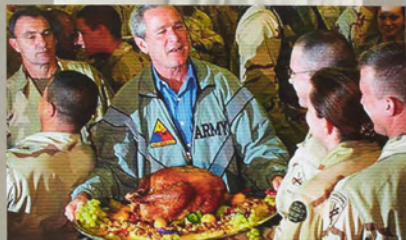
British Bombers over Berlin In late summer 1940 the RAF mounted several raids on Hamburg, Bremen and other major German towns of industrial and military importance. The British bombed Berlin for the first time on 19/20 September. The picture depicts a house in Berlin hit by a British raid.



BRITTISKA BOMBER ÖVER BERLIN

Under sommaren följde det brittiska flyget åtskilliga gånger mot Hamburg, Bremen och andra större städer under en industriell och militär betydelse. Över Berlin lättes bombas för första gången under natten 19/20 september. Bilden visar ett hus i Berlin, som har blivit förstört av bombningen.

Stop searching, woman: you will never find them
But, woman, don't accept that Fate is to blame—
Those murky forces, woman, that torment you
Have each of them a face, a shadow and a name.



You see me here, eating a simple stew
Me, slave to no desire, except for one:
World-conquest. That is all I want. From you
I have but one request: give me your sons.



Suffer the old women to come unto me
That they may glimpse, before their graves close o'er them
The man their sons obeyed so faithfully
As long as he had graves left open for them.

On 10 December Hitler gave one of his big speeches in an arena factory near Berlin. Our picture shows the Chancellor and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces on the podium, to his left the leader of the Labour Front, Dr Robert Ley, and Propaganda Minister Dr Goebbels.



Promising Socialism, there he stands
Listen: a New Age will be proclaimed.
Behind him, see the work of your own hands:
Great cannon, silent. And at you they're aimed



The soldier I, who helped the Junker swim
To get back in their seat, I'd no excuse
But let them buy me for a princely sum
From paupers' savings. And escaped the noose.



I am the butcher-clown in this concern.
 The Iron Hermann, every time a winner.
 A Reich Marshal, policeman and thief in turn.
 Give me your hand. But, first, best count your fingers.



I am 'the doctor'. I doctor what gets printed.
It may be your world, but I have my say.
So what? Its history gets reinvented.
Even my club foot seems a fake today.



'Joseph, I'm told you're saying it's a fact
I loot things' - 'Hermann, looting's not for you.
Who'd grudge you what you want? They'd have more tact.
And if I said it, who'd believe it's true?'



O swan song! Never seek to question me!
O pilgrims' choir! O fiery-magic track!
Song of the Rhine gold on an empty belly!
That's what I'd call the Bayreuth Republic.



Here's this stone horse outside the Chanellery
Who gazes glumly at the gloomy future.
'What's wrong then, horse?' 'My Leader had me try
His eight-year treatment, and I feel no better.

German Churches on Wheels. The Catholic Church has 28 Berlin, Wednesday
According to reports from Catholic circles, the Catholic Church now has 28 churches
on wheels. These consist of little chapels mounted on motor vehicles so that none can be
offered to interest and manoeuvre villages. A further dozen of these mobile churches
are in order, so much - among others - remote army barracks. In general, the pope
himself drives his own mobile church.



A happy headline: God is on the move!
Hitler pushed on, and God could not keep up.
Well, such is war, let's hope God doesn't lose.
Should he too find his oil's about to stop.



Ten countries lie prostrate beneath my tread
My own among them. And the bloody trace
Left by my host has turned the country red
From Mülheim an der Ruhr to Kirkennes.



O brothers, see the distant Caucasus.
A Swabian peasant's son. I lie below
Killed when a Russian peasant fired on us.
I met defeat in Swabia years ago.



'What brought you two to North Cape?' - 'A command.'
 'Don't you feel cold?' 'Chilled to the bone are we.'
 'When will you two go home?' 'When this snow ends.'
 'And how long will it snow?' 'Eternally'.



But when we sighted the red walls of Moscow
People appeared from farm and factory
And they repelled us in the name of every people
Even the people back in Germany.

Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, 31, and a Prussian, helped conquer Poland, France and the Soviet Caucasus.

Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, 37, Bavarian brewer's son, commanded air corps in Spain, Poland, Lowlands, France, Battle of Britain.

Field Marshal Kurt von Rundstedt, 68, plumed and carried through famous breakthrough at Sedan, later lost independence clause.

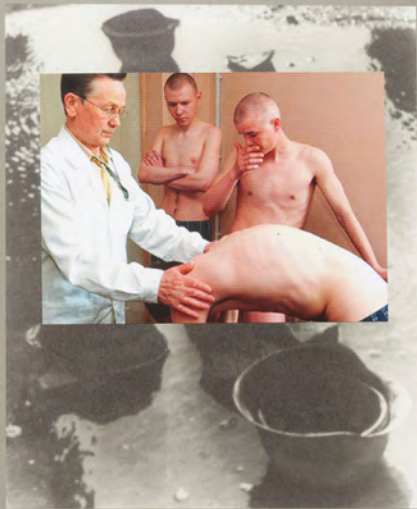
Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, 50, is striking, hard-hitting commander of the German Afrika Corps in Battle of Egypt.

General Heinz Guderian, 56, a Prussian, had brilliant tank successes in Poland and France, commanded Panzer Division from a plane.

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, 62, steady Bavarian master of mobility, knifed through Poland and France.



Here are six murderers. Now don't turn away
And don't just nod and murmur 'That's the truth'.
Showing them up has cost us to this day
Fifty great cities and most of our youth.



Look at the helmets of the vanquished! Yet
Surely the moment when we came undone
Was not when they were smitten from our heads
But when we first agreed to put them on.



When the "Fox of the Desert," German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (left) drank this premature toast, his Afrika Korps was still "unbeatable."

Here's to the Fatherland with all its Junkers!
The German sahn, plus its dividends!
The German People, armed and in its bunkers!
The great Mischelade - Cheers! - of foes and friends!

But in his recent flight across Libya, Rommel left behind many of his battered forces. From Allied attack this German vainly dived for cover.



O thrill of marching bands and buzzers flying!
Teutonic myth of swastika-crusaders dying!
Till all objectives were reduced to one:
To find yourself some cover. There was none.



Our masters fight to have you, lovely creature
They race to seize you in their landing course
Each feels most fit to bleed you white in future
Most justified in taking you by force.

Statements at work. Chairman Sol Bloom of the House Foreign Affairs Committee
debates with isolationist Hobbes Tuckman. Behind them: Hamilton Fish.



EDWIN AT WORK: CHAIRMAN SOL BLOOM OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE DEBATES WITH ISOLATIONIST HOBBS TUCKMAN. BEHIND THE

Behold us here, antagonists. See how
Each angry look is like a poisoned dagger.
A world of difference lies between us now.
The quarrel is: whose share's to be the bigger



Here's what we sent, we people of Spokane
With a brassiere to help support our Congress
In gratitude for their devoted service.
They asked for it. They'll know just what we mean.



Jane Wyman shows her medals, advising an R.A.F. 'bitch' dress designed by a Hollywood person who says girls should go military in a business way. There are reproductions of old war medals and were not pinned on Jane for anything she did.



*A breast curves through her military cut
Her parts are hung with old war decorations.
It's Hollywood v. Hitler. Now we've got
Semen for blood, and pus for perspiration.*



O voice of sorrow from the double choir
Of gunmen and the victims of the gun!
The Son of Heaven needed Singapore
And no one but yourself needed your son.



An American and the Jap he killed. It's Wally Wakeman saying: "I was walking down the trail when I saw two fellows talking. They grinned and I grinned. One pulled a gun. I pulled mine. I killed him. It was just like in the movies."

We saw each other - it happened very fast -
I smiled, and both of them smiled back at me.
And so at first we stood and smiled, all three.
One pulled his gun. And then I shot him dead.



So you may have what you've been pining for
This sexy earnest might bring satisfaction.
A pin-up for your tent on distant shores!
They say such pictures reuse the dead to action!

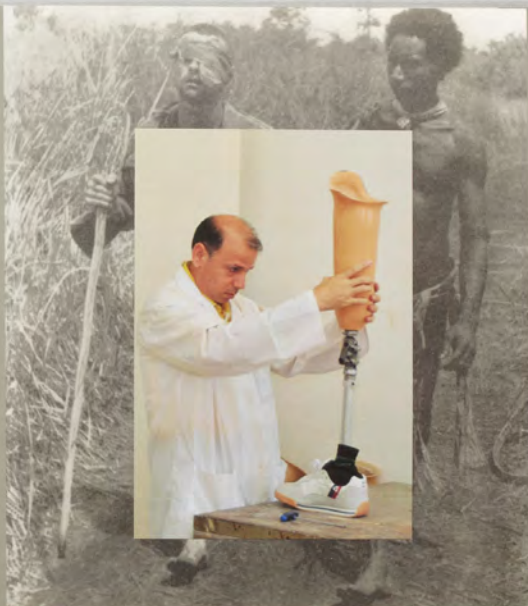
Woman of Thailand (Shin) puts out of a crude bomb shelter in Sukkum as
American bomber from French Indo China come to back border town.



WOMAN OF THAILAND (SHIN) PUTS OUT OF A CRUDE BOMB SHELTER IN SUKKUM AS AMERICAN BOMBER FROM FRENCH INDO-CHINA COME TO BACK BORDER TOWN.

Hoping to keep concealed throughout the fighting
While would be rulers wrestled in the air
The frightened people looked for holes to hide in
And watched their masters battling from down there.

Back from the battlefield near Buna in New Guinea comes a blinded Australian
infantryman helped by a kindly Papuan native. Both men are war-torn.



BACK FROM THE BATTLEFIELD NEAR BUNA IN NEW GUINEA COMES A BLINDED AUSTRALIAN INFANTRYMAN HELPED BY A KINDLY PAPUAN NATIVE BOTH MEN ARE WAR-TORN

And when the bitter fight grew less intense
The man who helped me back was kind to me
And in his silence I began to sense
No understanding, but some sympathy.

A Japanese soldier's skull is propped up
on a burned-out Jap tank by U.S. troops.
Fire destroyed the rest of the cargo.



Alas, poor Yorick of the burnt-out tank!
Upon an axle-shaft your head is set.
Your death by fire was for the Domei Bank
To whom your parents still remain in debt.

A LINE OF CRUDE CROSSES MARKS AMERICAN
GRAVES NEAR BUNA. A GRAVE REGISTRAR'S
GLOVE ACCIDENTALLY POINTS TOWARD THE SKY



In school we learned of an Avenger who
Would punish all injustice here on earth.
We went to kill, and met with Death. Now you
Must punish those whose orders sent us forth.



"This is a rough game we're playing, little fellow, and you wouldn't like it."
The Yankee soldier removes a Japanese baby to safety.

Best take your enemy's little lost brother
Out of the battle line that you've defended.
That he and your son live to tell each other
Just how it was that wars like this were ended.

Continued. British aircraft carrier under olive trees.
Warships polishing torpedo cylinders.

tycke bombarna glände under skivriden för att inte



O olive tree, spreading your kindly leaves
To screen my brother's killers from the sun.
You're like those women stooping, heads in scarves
To shape torpedoes for the common man.

An American soldier stands over a dying Jap who he has just been forced to shoot. The Jap had been hiding in the landing barges, shooting at US troops.



AN AMERICAN SOLDIER STANDS OVER A DYING JAP WHOSE HE HAS JUST BEEN FORCED TO SHOOT. THE JAP HAD BEEN HIDING IN THE LANDING BARGE, SHOOTING AT U.S. TROOPS.

And with their blood they were to colour red
A shore that neither owned. I hear it said
That they were forced to kill each other. True.
My only question is: who forced them to?



REFUGEES WITHOUT REFUGE :

This Jewish mother and child were picked out of the sea, along with 180 others who sought refuge in Palestine. But 200 were drowned when the Salutar crashed on the rocky coast of Turkey. And the Salutar wasn't the first. The *Rose* capsized with 171 aboard. The *Fenichel* sankered on an sho off Italy with 300. The *Janke* was forced to sail from Palestine with 100 and the *Mida* with 710. Then there is the *Olympia* of the 300 Jews on a ship for four months,

drowned from port to port. They come from all over Europe, packed like cattle in unseaworthy vessels. Where can they go, these 7,000,000 European Jews? Palestine's quota is 12,000 a year. The immigrants and rabbis have carry a new kind of cargo—a new kind of human being. Last year 50,000 were smuggled into Palestine. But what of the 7,000,000? The baby can gaily with his father for he is home in his mother's arms. He doesn't know his father was drowned in the Sea of Marmara. Only his mother knows the double-death of drowning in sight of shore.

And many of us drowned just off the beaches.
The long night passed, the sky began to clear
If they but knew, we said, they'd come and seek us.
That they did know, we still were unaware.



"The Germans went that way" says a Sicilian peasant to First Division's Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Alas, our cowards have fallen out:
Over our country, waterless and blighted
Three foreign armies now are in dispute.
Only against us are all three united.



"Restoring the normal flow of life"—AMG officers sell American flour to Italian civilians.

We bring you flour, and a refurbished king!
Accept the flour and you must take the monarch.
Those who find licking boots is not their thing
Will have to settle for an empty stomach.



IN STANFORD GENERAL HOSPITAL, COLLESTON, S. C., A YOUNG JAPANESE-AMERICAN BOY, BLINDFOLDED IN ITALY BY THE ARROWHEAD OF THE VALTORNIA RIVER, EYE PATIENTLY IN BED

Black out all towns, the sea, the starry heaven.
He'll glimpse no wife, nor ever yet a son.
Black out the morning skies, the clouds at even
Above Japan - and over Oregon.



Unmarked bodies. The bodies were in the field and getting the attention of the photographer. The soldier who brought them there was not interested in the photos. When some people in 2012 showed him he had scored a high tag in the end, some of them he knew he had. Some of the pictures show him looking through a camera, looking at the camera in the right.

Those you see lying here, buried in mud
 As if they lay already in their grave
 They're merely sleeping; are not really dead
 Yet, not asleep, would still not be awake



A summer day was dawning near Cherbourg
A man from Maine came crawling up the sand
Supposedly against men from the Ruhr
In fact against the men of Stalingrad.



Welcome! But can we really count on you?
Of course there's courage in provocation.
Think of that gent - he'd an umbrella too -
Who wanted Hitler first to beat the Russian



A German Landser—

Armoured Truck

—And his Russian counterpart

The New York Times

Here are two brothers, brought in armoured trucks
To quarrel over the one brother's land!
So cruelly the tamed elephant attacks
His beether, the unbroken elephant.

Blinded German soldier in a Moscow hospital.



Near Moscow, man, they stripped you of your sight.
Poor blinded man, you now know what wars mean.
Your great Misleader lost the Moscow fight.
Suppose he'd won, you still would not have seen.



The End . . . Corporal Georg Kreuzberg (With Infantry Division) was found like this by Russian troops on the battlefield of Orel. He had gone mad.



Das Ende...

Unteroffizier Georg Kreuzberg (Hk. I. D.) wurde von russischen Truppen auf dem Schlachtfeld von Orel in dieser Stellung angetroffen. Er ist gemütsgekränkt.

I'm left to sit here holding my poor head.
Now the Mosleader's fleeing from his troubles.
The cock that crows on all the corn he's fed.
They'll go up in bubbles.



Much must survive, and much must be forgot.
Much wisdom's needed where there's not much food.
Much must take place, and much had better not.
Before she knows she's lost that horse for good.



I say all pity, woman, is a fraud
Unless that pity turns into red rage
Which will not rest until the ancient thorn
Is drawn at last from deep in mankind's flesh.

Return to Homesites



It seems to me that I'd destroyed your home
Because it was my brother, curse the day!
There was no brighter hour than when I learned
You'd conquered him and driven him away.



These are our children. Stunned and bloody-faced
 Out of a frozen Panzer see them creep
 Even the vicious wolf must have a place
 To hide in. Warm them, they are getting numb.



Holding a child, and with your rifle grounded,
Reaking your life on the new life you're building.
Let's see you, once this bloody war is ended,
Surrounded by a crowd of German children.

Greek boy smiles with hunger in a grim reminder that one third of Athens' children died of starvation, nine out of ten warships were dying. Conditions were so terrible that the United Nations allow Greek relief to pass through the blockade.

Russian children are among those who have suffered most at the hands of the Nazis. Besides witnessing the rape of their home towns, many have been wounded in battles which rage like giant fire across the devastated Russian plains.

A Sicilian lad who saw his parents killed by German tanks, like other terrified young Italians, that war has blotted out his coin. He will learn that Allied Command needs such signatures as children telling the world in the night of mass.

French children - Italian birth often standing silently in school yards at minute gaps, seeing the stones in search of bones - are too tired and hungry to play normally or remember their business. Tachinotism is steadily on the increase.



Greek boy smiles with hunger in a grim reminder that one third of Athens' children died of starvation, nine out of ten warships were dying. Conditions were so terrible that the United Nations allow Greek relief to pass through the blockade.



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You, in your tanks and bombers, mighty warriors
You that in Algiers sweat, in Lapland freeze
In scores of battles you have been victorious
See whom you've conquered. Hail your victories!



Worn out by battle, if you only had
Sufficient strength now for yourselves to fight
The world, in death and birth pangs, would be glad
It took the pains that led to your defeat.



Here are the cities in which once our "Hinter"
Avalamed our war machine as it paraded
But these are nothing to the thousand miles
Of foreign cities that it devastated.

Returning to a changed world French soldiers, released after five years of captivity, march down a road in Germany on the first leg of their journey home.



Homecomers back from inhumanity
Tell those at home of life among a folk
That tamely bowed its head beneath the yoke
And don't assume that you are truly free.

Campaigning for the Labor Party. Burns speaks from the protestation platform like these old carts. He ran for Parliament twice before he was elected from a London division in 1980. Although he is only 5'6", 5'10" tall, Burns gives an impressive platform, not that he has to watch his weight. He used to weigh 350 lb., now weighs 300.



Campaigning for the Labor Party. Burns speaks from protestation platforms like these old carts. He ran for Parliament twice before he was elected from a London division in 1980. Although he is only 5'6", 5'10" tall, Burns gives an impressive platform, not that he has to watch his weight. He used to weigh 350 lb., now weighs 300.

This fat man wants a job. I beg you all
To vote for him, he speaks for common sense!
But vote him up that tree, where he'll stand tall -
Not for a job, and not at your expense.



Outside the City Hall, beaten and bloody
A GI rescued me. He was my friend
And showed more courage there than anybody
At Kinko or Bataan or the Ardennes.



I hear the men of Downing Street accuse you
Saying you stuck it out, so it's your fault.
They may be right, but when did they last choose to
Chide people's strange reluctance to revolt?



I thought I knew you, and I think so yet
 And I'm not one of those that blindly praise
 I say you're good for more than blind world-conquest
 In servitude as slave-driver or slave.



That's how the world was going to be run!
The other nations mastered him, except
(In case you think the battle has been won) -
The womb is fertile still from which that crept.

Addendum

82



I was the bloodhound, brothers. That's the name
I gave myself, the working people's son.
They recognised it, then the Nazis came
And housed and pensioned me for what I'd done



STAMP OF APPROVAL —
Bunny Waters, bathing beauty, decided on this
unique method of selling
Defense Stamps to passen-
gers on train out of New York.

If we can have the right to touch her up
She'll find that we are quite prepared to spend
From our own pocket or some other chap's.
That's how it started. Now's it going to end?

From the 'Peace Primer'

54



You women back in Pittsburg and Texas
Did you really want your sons to look that way?
You know those sons are being sent to us -
Are we to be attacked by beasts of prey?



Never forget that men like you got hurt
So you might sit there, not the other lot.
And now don't hide your head, and don't desert
But learn to learn, and try to learn for what.

Notes

1. Donald Rumsfeld riding a unicycle.
<http://www.unicyclist.org/cont/pics.cfm>
2. A billet of highly enriched uranium recovered from scrap processed at the Y-12 Facility in Oak Ridge, TN, USA.
<http://chemistry.about.com/od/chemistryglossary/g/Enriched-Uranium-Definition.htm>
3. A sunbathing tourist comes to the aid of one of 46 would-be immigrants on La Tejita Beach on the Spanish Canary Island of Tenerife, Thursday Aug. 3, 2006, after the boat they were in ran aground. (photo Arturo Rodriguez)
<http://www.fohguild.org/forums/screenshots/10545-funny-strange-random-pics-2372.html>
4. <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=15068>
5. This is one of over 200 photos released by the Pentagon under a Freedom of Information Act request filed by University of Delaware professor, Ralph Begleiter. (photo Bob Karp)
<http://afeatheradrift.wordpress.com/category/warmilitary/afghanistan/>
6. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpuKw6jZyO4&feature=related>

7. BMW in the pool at Garden Health and Fitness, http://acidcow.com/pics/3477-oops_or_shit_happens_64_pics.html
8. U.S. troops powered their way into the center of the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, overwhelming small bands of guerrillas with massive force, and using loudspeakers to try to lure militants onto the streets. (photo Marco Di Lauro)
9. An Israeli Merkava tank patrols the West Bank town of Jenin, April 9, 2002 during its 'Defensive Shield' operation.
10. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton along with members of the national security team, as they receive an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House May 1, 2011
11. While fly fishing in Baghdad, Joel Stewart saw a need and filled it, big time. Thanks to his efforts and those of others over several years, U.S. soldiers at Baghdad's Camp Victory have enjoyed fishing in lakes surrounding

- what used to be Saddam Hussein's palaces. Stewart recently founded the Baghdad Fishing Club to include fly fishers and spinning gear aficionados. Although no longer deployed in Iraq, Stewart continues to spearhead the club and is on active duty with the U.S. Navy back in San Diego, CA.
- <http://ronmajberg.squarespace.com/journal/>
12. Following the routine Army procedure required after every battlefield death, the soldiers cut off the dead boy's clothes and stripped him naked to check for identifying tattoos. Here they are shown scanning his iris and fingerprints, using a portable biometric scanner.
 13. Bradley Manning, the US intelligence analyst accused of leaking secrets to WikiLeaks, has been found competent to stand trial.
 14. Video image released by Iraqi state television shows Saddam Hussein's guards wearing ski masks and placing a noose around the deposed leader's neck moments before his execution.

- <http://www.forrestmarketing.com/worldtradecenters/attack.html>
24. In this Sept. 11, 2001 file photo provided by the Portland Police Department, two men identified by authorities as suspected hijackers Mohamed Atta, right, and Abdulaziz Alomari, center, pass through airport security, in Portland, Maine.
- <http://husseinandterror.com/>
25. December 9th, 2003.
- <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=9225>
26. George Bush serves a Thanksgiving turkey to US troops stationed in Baghdad in 2003.
- <http://www.mediawench.com/2003/week47.html> (photo Tim Sloan)
27. Israeli soldiers mourn the death of fellow soldier Alex Mashavisky at his funeral in Beersheba on Wednesday, the day after Mr. Mashavisky was killed during Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip. (photo Eric Gaillard)
- <http://www.arabnewsblog.net/2010/05/06/syrian-m-600s-are-the-true-threat-hezbollah-poses-to-israel-while-israels-missile-defense-systems-are-far-from-adequate/>
28. http://israelsoccupation.blogspot.com/2010/11/01_archive.html
29. Public executions are still a fact of life in some countries today. Here the onlookers captured the execution on their mobile phones and cameras.

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5790544,00.html>

30. He can play table tennis, shake someone's hand or pick up a paper cup and drink out of it without crushing it or spilling all the contents. Adapt and overcome is the name of the game. It's just something that happened, said Elias, a Fort Benning, Ga., drill sergeant, who lost his right hand in a training accident on June 30, 2009. He can tie a bow or his shoelaces.
- AFTERWORD**
- <http://www.army.mil/article/32595/>
31. As news spread across the world of Iran's provocative missile tests, so did an image of four missiles heading skyward in unison. Unfortunately, it appeared to contain one too many missiles, a point that had not emerged before the photo was used on the front pages of The Los Angeles Times and several other major newspapers.
- <http://scrapetv.com/News/News%20Pages/Everyone%20Else/pages-9/Iran-to-produce-nuclear-weapon-within-two-months-Scrape-TV-The-World-on-your-side.html>
32. <http://thehive.com/2009/10/15/tricky-perfect-angle-photography/>
33. Jerri Churchill runs with her American flag to greet her neighbor Lieutenant Colonel Pete Byrne who had just returned to his Parker home after flying F-16s in the Iraq war. Byrne,

- an American Airlines pilot, had been mobilized with the 120th Tactical Air Command on February 4th 2003. He returned home today, April 30, 2003 to Buckley Air Force Base with 15 other pilots. Churchill's children play frequently with Byrne's two sons. (photo Cyrus McCrimmo)
- <http://www.livelypic.com/iradi-american-war-destructive-heart-breaking.html>
34. Did you ever wonder what happened to Saddam Hussein's Arabian horses? (photo Christoph Bangert)
- <http://militarylife101.tumblr.com/page/3>
35. BASRAH, Iraq — Capt. Harold B. Bender, deputy division chaplain for the 36th Infantry Division, baptizes Spc. James A. Holmes, a trumpet player with the 36th Inf. Div. band. Holmes, a native of Dothan, Ala., a member of the Alabama Army National Guard's 151st Army Band who volunteered to deploy with the 36th for Operation New Dawn. (photo by Sgt. David A. Bryant, 36th Infantry Division, U.S. Div. South Public Affairs Office)
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mnfiraq/5703343411/in/photostream>
36. U.S. Army Third Infantry Division Sgt. Roscoe Archer of Fort Stewart, GA catches a nap on a couch in the Republican Presidential Palace. The compound is now guarded and has been secured by the U.S. military. (photo Mario Tama)
- <http://defenceforumindia.com/military-multimedia/9130-seven-years-war-iraq.html>
37. The burning of Um Ziefa in Darfur, Sudan. December 12, 2004 (photo Brian Steidle)
- <http://jsipivey.wikispaces.com/Compare+and+contrast+the+Holocaust+and+the+genocide+in+Darfur%3F%3B>
38. U.S. Army soldiers with Task Force Thor Route Clearance Patrol from 23rd Engineering Company; Airborne detonate an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that they discovered during a day-long route clearance mission July 7, 2010 near Khakriz, Afghanistan. (photo Justin Sullivan)
- <http://worthsomewords.blogspotcom/2011/05/photos-from-afghanistan.html>
39. Benghazi, Libya, June 2, 2011 Libyan volunteers practice shooting stances during a military training course in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi. According to rebel authorities, after three weeks of intense training, these volunteers will be ready to fight against forces loyal to Libyan leader Mummur Gaddafi. (photo Rodrigo Abd)
- <http://zamannews.ir/View.aspx?ID=900318013>
40. <http://www.prisonplanet.com/articles/february2006/040206criminaldesperation>
41. A doctor examines recruits at a local conscription center in Novosibirsk.

- http://www.rferl.org/content/Activists_Concerned_Over_Treatment_Of_Conscripts_In_Russian_Army/2058169.html
42. **A Palestinian killed by Israeli Occupation Soldiers used as a trophy.**
<http://mondoweiss.net/2009/02/ac-writes-in-todays-haaretz-amira-hass-documents-the-israeli-armys-use-of-palestinians-as-unwilling-human-shields-in-raids-i.html>
43. **Worn-out civilian shoes of dead Iraqi soldiers tell the story of an ill-equipped army in a David-and-Goliath battle for their lives. (photo David Leeson)**
<http://www.docudharma.com/diary/1327/>
44. **Fabienne Cherisma, a 15-year-old girl shot by police in the wake of the earthquake in Haiti for looting two plastic chairs and three framed pictures: (photo Nathan Weber)**
<http://prisonphotography.wordpress.com/tag/haiti/> <http://ed-yu.com/blog/2011/06/cherisma-pornography/>
45. <http://mostaqueali.blogspot.com/2009/02/ahmedinejad-jew.html>
46. **U.S. soldiers haul a refrigerator as they prepare to leave their base in Samarra, Iraq. (photo Mohammed)**
http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2010/06/22/2010-06-22_looking_to_buy_a_used_toilet_try_a_garage_sale_in_iraq_withdrawal_spawns_sales_o.html

47. <http://www.damnlol.com/and-we-have-lift-off-3768.html>
48. **In November 2004, Stefan Zaklin, a photographer then working for the European Pressphoto Agency, was embedded with a United States Army company. Mr. Zaklin photographed this soldier, who was shot and killed in Falluja, in a house used as a base by insurgents. The photograph ran in several European publications, and Mr. Zaklin was immediately banned from working with the unit.**
<http://yournewreality.blogspot.com/2008/07/war-dead-americans-above-two-images-are.html>
49. **This photo from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq is taken from a presentation by Philip Zimbardo on how ordinary people can, under the right circumstances, become evil.**
<http://technocult.net/archives/2008/02/28/good-people-do-bad-things/>
50. **An unidentified detainee standing on a box with a bag on his head and wires attached to him in late 2003 at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. The image came back to haunt the U.S. in June 2006 when it and similar images of U.S. troops ill-treating prisoners were broadcast by Australian television network SBS**
<http://www.nxtnews.com/worlds-most->

- shocking-pictures-ever/
51. Samir, a 34-year-old Iraqi-American, the U.S.S.F. interpreter who helped find Saddam Hussein and pull him from his hideaway 13 December 2003 <http://www.newsshit.com/saddam-hussein-capture-photos/>
 52. Technician Nabil Farah adjusts an artificial leg. (photo Emad Badwan) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/76819982@N00/>
 53. A German soldier playing with human skulls in Afghanistan. <http://forums.canadiancontent.net/international-politics/52053-photos-show-german-soldiers-afghanistan.html>
 54. A Pakistani woman poses for a picture with her daughter in front of the final hiding place of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad on May 5, 2011. Pakistan faces the prospect of Osama bin Laden's final hiding place becoming a shrine or macabre tourist spot unless the military destroys a compound attracting hundreds of visitors a day. (photo Asif Hassan) <http://www.greenvillepost.com/2011/05/14/obama-bin-laden-kill-site-shrine/>
 55. A photograph of PFC Joseph Dwyer in Iraq made him an American hero, but five years after returning home, mental combat wounds drove him to his death. He is not alone. In

- 2009, more than twice as many soldiers died by their own hands than were killed by the enemy in Iraq. But new types of therapy are giving others the chance for the peace he never had. (photo Warren Zinn) <http://www.iraqwarheroes.com/dwyer.htm>
56. <http://trendland.net/2009/06/20/state-of-emergency-by-steven-meisel/>
 57. <http://barenakedislam.wordpress.com/2011/08/11/sooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo/>
 58. It seems these days that the best way to get out of Guantanamo - other than to die - is to plead guilty to charges. Hajjar says. <http://www.sodahead.com/united-states/george-w-bush-still-backs-waterboarding/question-1045181/>
 59. Afghanistan Pakistan border Kandahar eastern. <http://www.afghanistanonlineforums.com/cgi-bin/yabb2/YaBB.pl?num=1171063315>
 60. Pakistani flood survivors try to catch food bags from an army helicopter in Lal Pir on August 7, 2010. Pakistan raced to evacuate families threatened with fresh floods, as heavy rains worsened the disaster in its second week, with up to 15 million people already affected. (photo Arif Ali) <http://fellowshipofminds.wordpress.com/2010/08/27/pakistanis-taliban-vows-to-kidnap-foreign-flood-aid-workers/>

61. John Walker Lindh, dubbed **The American Taliban**, following his capture by US troops in December 2001. <http://oppugno.com/blog/2011/07/10/father-of-american-taliban-john-walker-lindh-explains-why-his-son-is-an-innocent-victim-of-americas-war-on-terror/>
62. Palestinian mourners use their mobile phones to take pictures during the funeral of Mosub Daana, who was shot and killed by Israeli troops during clashes at a rally by Hamas supporters against Israel's military operation in Gaza, in the West city of Hebron, Friday Jan. 16, 2009. (photo Nasser Shiyoukhi) <http://www.faringa.net/posts/imagenes/6418785.R/La-Decada-en-73-Imagenes.html>
63. <http://?>
64. U.S. President George W. Bush holds onto his umbrella during a rainstorm. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-06/02/content_1503637.htm
65. A Haitian suspected of being a multiple assassin for former President Aristide's Lavalas party is controlled by another man. (photo Daniel Aguilar) <http://manyexcellence.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=11994>
66. Killed during a thwarted bank heist, the eyes of the would-be robber are closed one last time. Later, he was moved into a Baghdad

- street where he was made a public example. "This is what happens when you steal," said one man; (photo David Leeson) <http://neovitruvian.wordpress.com/category/wikileaks/page/2/>
67. The pictures, published by the Israeli human rights group, Breaking the Silence, on the internet social hub of Facebook on Tuesday, also showed the Israeli soldiers wearing smiles in cases, while striking a figure beside bound and blindfolded Palestinian prisoners, some of them dead. Israeli website Ynetnews reported. <http://www.islamtimes.org/vdcjmet.uqex8z29fu.html>
68. <http://nobloodforhubris.blogspot.com/2007/02/big-dick-caught-with-pants-down-time-to.html> (photo David Leeson)
69. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbe_gXam19E&feature=related
70. <http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/blsmuggled2.htm>
71. The 7/7 bombers caught on CCTV at Luton railway station, 7.21 am, July 7, 2005—the morning of the bombings. Left to right: Hasib Hussain, Germaine Lindsay, Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer. <http://www.betterparenting.com/10-halloween-costumes-you-should-never-let-your-kids-wear/>
73. Operation Life for Israel is helping preserve

- the sanctity of life in Israel by aiding child terror victims and Israel's unborn:
- <http://www.thejerusalemconnection.us/projects/operation-life-for-israel-project.html>
74. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPPzVn2hVkl&feature=related&skipcontrinter=1>
75. Smoke pours from the upper levels of the World Trade Center's north tower, as those fleeing the fires fall to their death. (photo David Surowiecki)
- http://lovehatesmisery.blogspot.com/2011_05_01_archive.html
76. Pfc. Lynndie England is seen holding a leash attached to a detainee in late 2003 at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, Iraq.
- http://www.historyguy.com/iraq_war_links_prisoners.html
77. <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=257223258837>
78. In this February 2002 photo, a detainee from Afghanistan is carried on a stretcher before being interrogated by military officials at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. (photo Lynne Sladky)
- <http://transitionculture.org/2006/05/31/sending-seeds-to-guantanemo/>
79. <http://www.countercurrents.org/pmonitor140510.htm>
80. <http://www.onejerusalem.com/2008/03/24/a-new-israeli-comedy-about-suicide-bombers/>
- http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/08/suicide_bombers_f/
- <http://www.thewho.net/linenotes/EndlessWire.html>
- <http://truckandbarter.com/2006/04/the-psychology.html>
81. A young Israeli neo-Nazi points at a religious Jewish man, as if to shoot him at a shopping mall. Israeli police later broke up a neo-Nazi group and arrested members.
- <http://www.commondreams.org/further/2010/08/02-2>
82. <http://www.themagazine.com/newyork/dick-chenev-needs-more-ass-play/Content?oid=1176731>
83. <http://photossexe.canalblog.com/>
84. A Navy Clearance Diver in a Bomb Disposal Suit shakes a child's hand and says hello during the HMAS Stirling open day. (photo Jarrad Olfie)
- <http://www.defence.gov.au/news/navynews/editions/5001/gangway.htm>
85. <http://cutedeadguys.net/showthread.php?13307-Nick-Berg>

My spoon was lifted when the bomb came down
That left no fact, no hand, no spoon to hold.
One hundred thousand died in my hometown.
This came to pass before my soup was cold.

We are lucky to have had her patient and self-effacing collaboration.

For material in the present *Afterword* and the *Notes* (pp. i–vi) we are much indebted to the German poet Günter Konert, who was largely responsible for the original English-language publication a decade after the fall of the Third Reich. Some of his 'late thoughts' about his friend Brecht can be found in the same *Brecht Yearbook*, and we owe to him a first-hand insight into the problems of producing a book that was so hard to reconcile with the Stalinist doctrine of Socialist Realism. Documentary evidence of the difficulties put in its way by the politsburo has also been generously supplied by the Bertolt-Brecht Archiv in Berlin under its director Edmund Wirsing, who has helped and encouraged us throughout. Thanks are also due to Gunn Brønne who located the original use of many of the photographs in Scandinavian and UN newspapers and magazines. We must now hope that these and other supporters of this relatively little-known Brecht work will be happy at the result of its introduction to the English-speaking world. One hundred years since the poet's birth, half a century since the end of our war.

BRECHT'S WAR: A CHRONOLOGY

Prelude

The Brechts had been living as exiles in Denmark since the end of 1933, the year in which Hitler came to power in Germany. In 1935 the Nuremberg Race Laws marked the beginning of official anti-semitism in Hitler's newly-instituted Third Reich. (Brecht was not Jewish, but his wife Helene Weigel was.) The Communist International decided to join forces with the Socialists and any others prepared to resist German and Italian Fascism; the result was Popular Front governments in France and Spain. The Spanish Civil War started in summer 1936 as a revolt against the second of those by the Spanish army under General Franco. As links between Germany, Italy and the Spanish rebels became closer, with Japan as an anti-Communist ally, Stalin in Russia launched a massive purge of his Communist Party, during which a number of German exiles were banished to camps or killed.

By early 1937 Brecht had written most of his earlier (unrhymed, unillustrated) 'German War Primer' poems, which were included in his book of *Sixtyburg Poems* the following year, along with the 'German Satires', the literary sonnets and such longer items as 'Spring 1938', the Lao-tse poem and 'To Those Born Later'.

In 1938 Hitler annexed Austria and the German-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia. The rest of that country fell to him in spring 1939. Europe, including Britain, began last-minute preparations for war.

The Brechts had two children in exile with them, a son in his teens and a daughter not quite ten. The household included his Berlin secretary/assistant Margarete Stiefen and on leaving Scandinavia was joined by his Danish mistress Ruth Berke.

The War Years

1939 Photograph nos 4, 31

- 23 April *The Brechts leave Denmark for Sweden.*
- 28 May The fall of Madrid marks the defeat of the Spanish Republic, ending the Civil War.
- 21 August Nazi-Soviet Pact signed in Moscow.
- 1-3 September Germany invades Poland. Britain and France declare war. Start of the Second World War.
- 17 September Russians invade Poland too. Partition of Poland follows.
- By 27 September *Brecht has started writing Mother Courage.*
- 3 to 11 November Following that, *Brecht writes 'The Trial of Lucile for radio.'*
- 30 November Russians invade Finland.

1940, first half Photograph nos 1, 5, 6, 12

- 12 March Finnish-Russian peace settlement.
- 9 April Germany invades Norway and Denmark.
- (mid-April) *Brechts move to Finland.*
- May *Brecht invited to teach at the New School of Social Research, New York.*
- 10 May Germans launch blitzkrieg through the Low Countries into France. Churchill succeeds Chamberlain as Prime Minister.
- 20 May British army starts evacuation (at Dunkirk).
- mid-June Mussolini declares war. Germans take Paris. French surrender, form new puppet state ruled by Pétain and Laval from Vichy.
- by end of June *Brecht completes 'The Good Person of Szechwan.'*

1940, second half Photograph nos 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 16-19, 21-23, 25, 28, 34, 36, 44, 56

- The Brechts stay till early October with Hella Wanderski at her country house.*
- 9 July Luftwaffe bombardment of Britain, climax of day raids in mid-August, followed by night-time Blitz on London.
- 27 August *Brecht hears that his old friend the author Leon Feuchtwanger has escaped from French incarceration via Portugal to the U.S.*
- September Writing *Pantula* with Wanderski.
- December British 8th Army advances into Libya, reaching Benghazi by 6 February.

1941 Photograph nos 13, 44, 33, 37, 66

- February German forces under *Luft* in Ruessell/Larvies in Libya.
- 10 March-12 April *Brecht writing 'The Remains Remains of Remains.'*
- 9 April Mother Courage premier in musical Zurich.
- 7 April Rommel's Afrika Korps pushes British back to Tobruk.
- 13 May *The Brechts leave Helsinki for Moscow, where they take the Trans-Siberian railway on 20 May, leaving Margarete Stiefen in hospital.*
- 4 June Death of Stiefen from TB.
- 13 June *The Brechts sail from Vladivostok on a Swedish ship, arriving in Los Angeles on 25 July.*
- 22 June Germans invade USSR, Finland and Hungary join them.
- 27 July Japanese land in India-China.
- by mid-October Germans are besieged from Moscow and besieging Leningrad.
- November *Now settled in Santa Monica, Brecht writes 'The Children's Crusade'. Rejoice!* (but Fritz Kautner gives reading of the earlier 'German War Prisoner' epigram).
- 7 December Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, bringing the USA into the war.
- November-December Russians beat off attacks on Moscow.
- 25 December Surrender of Hong Kong to the Japanese.

1942 Photograph nos 47, 60. Brecht includes 40, 46, 48 and 50 in his *Journal*

- January *Brecht writes 'To the German Soldiers in the East'.*
- (12 February) Singapore surrenders to Japanese.
- 9 April Indonesians (in the Philippines).
- 20 April *Heaven Under arrest from New York.*
- May *Ruth Berke moves to New York to work for the Office of War Information.*
- 4 and May-mid December *Brecht writing on Fritz Lang's film Langenstein. Also he about the assassination of Reinhold Heidegger in Prague.*
- 1 June Heavens bombing of Cologne initiates 8 or 10 raids on German towns.
- end October Americans land in Algeria. 8th Army's defeat of Rommel at El Alamein leads to his withdrawal from Libya by February.
- November *Brecht and Feuchtwanger start work on 'The Vision of Simon Machard.'*
- 10 November German defeat at Stalingrad leads to General Paulus's surrender in January.

1943 Photograph nos 37, 40, 50, 52, 55, 57-59, 75, 78, 80

- 4 February Good Person of Szechwan premier in Zurich.
- 12 February *Brecht joins Brecht in New York for three months.*

- 6 March Brecht evening at Princeton's New School theatre starts Brecht's collaboration with a new company, First Drama.
- 29 March 8th Army bypasses March 1 Line (on Southern Tunisia) and advances into Tunisia.
- 29 April Waratah photo-montage.
- 24 April Brecht evening at Hedrick Theatre on East 112th Street, New York, with reading of epigrams and projections from his Contemporary Picture Book.
- 12 May German army in Tunisia surrenders.
- 26 May Brecht back in Santa Monica; arrives Schwab in the Second World War.
- 26 June Hamburg largely destroyed by bombing.
- 26 June U.S. lands in New Guinea.
- 16 July British and Americans land in Sicily. A fortnight later Mussolini falls.
- 7 September Allies invade Italy; whose government surrenders. Naples is taken on the 30th.
- 9 September Gollub's first version (3 poems) in Zurich.
- 12 November Brecht signs Brechtian New York for four months.
- 14 December He writes to Auden proposing collaboration on Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, on whose adaptation and translation he has been working with H. R. Hays.

1944 Photograph nos. 30-64, 74, 78

Epigrams ascribed to this year comprise those which Brecht wrote to accompany most of the photos so far listed, plus 9, 11, 12, 14, 26, 30, 35, 39, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 57, 68, 73, 75, 76, and 81 for which dates of the photographs are more uncertain.

- 20 January 2,500-ton bombs raid on Berlin.
- February-June First publication of three epigrams (nos 75, 77 and 78) in the Austrian American Tribune (New York).
- mid-March Brecht returns to Santa Monica and starts work on The Caucasian Chalk Circle. First version finished by 3 June.
- 4 June Fall of Rome.
- 6 June D-Day. Allied landings in Lower Normandy.
- 20 June Brecht has started adding to the epigrams. There are now 107 of them.
- end of July Dennis in Santa Monica writing some of the epigrams as part of his German, Masters.
- 30 July Cassin Standardberg tries to blow up Hitler. The Russian enter Poland and take Moscow (30th). Warsaw Rising (1 August) is not supported by the Russians.
- 25 August Allies recapture Paris.
- 1 September Brecht completes revision of Caucasian Chalk Circle.
- early September Brecht and Gollub's first visit with Ruth Berlau, who remains in Los Angeles all the following spring.

- 14 November Allies take Strasbourg.
- December Berlin has been studying photography and now makes picture photos of Brecht's poems, including the War Primer. Brecht starts work with Charlie Laughon on translation and adaptation of Gollub's.

1945 Photograph nos. 33, 43, 96, 98

- 3 January With the defeat of the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) the war in the West is nearly over.
- 29 January Russian plays Brecht in one of his epigram settings at the piano.
- 12 April Death of Roosevelt.
- 30 April Hitler's suicide in Berlin.
- 8 May Surrender of the German armed forces.
- 22 May Brecht in New York, signs Berlin, I Want to Help production three of Prisoners of the Master Race (adapted from his Fate and Misery of the Third Reich).
- 18 July Return to Santa Monica and work with Laughon.
- 6 August The first atom bomb destroys Hiroshima.
- 14 August Japan surrenders. End of the Second World War.

Aftermath

At the end of 1945 Ruth Berlau had had breakdown in New York, and was taken to Amityville hospital for electric shock treatment. By that time the work with Laughon on Gollub's was finished, and he and Brecht were pursuing various possibilities of production. Influenza prevented Brecht from getting to New York before February, but then in March Berlau was released into his care, and he brought her back to Santa Monica in May. For the next year and a half, in addition to planning his return to Germany, he was concerned mainly with the American productions of *The Duchess of Malfi* (September-October 1946) and *Gollub's* (May-July 1947), not to mention the beginnings of the Truman administration's Santa Monica witch hunt via the 101 and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Before he left for Europe at the end of October 1947 Brecht deposited microfilm copies of a number of his works, published and unpublished, in the New York Public Library.

The War Primer was now in effect finished and would be ready for submission to publishers as soon as Brecht, with Berlau as agent for it, had found his footing back in a German-speaking country. This was at first Switzerland, then, from 1949 on, the Soviet-controlled portion of Germany itself. The war was over. Like the soldiers in no. 71, it had gone cold.

CONCORDANCE

The sequence of photo-epigrams in this edition differs from the German edition (see Afterword, p. xviii). The following concordance shows to which number in the second (1994) German edition the numbering in this edition corresponds. Numbers 1 through 14 are in the same order and position.

<i>This edition</i>	<i>German 1994 edition</i>	<i>This edition</i>	<i>German 1994 edition</i>
13	38	53	44
16	15	54	43
17	16	55	46
18	17	56	71
19	82	57	47
20	18	58	48
21	19	59	49
22	20	60	50
23	21	61	51
24	86	62	52
25	22	63	53
26	81	64	80
27	84	65	55
28	23	66	56
29	70	67	45
30	71	68	74
31	26	69	59
32	27	70	86
33	28	71	61
34	29	72	62
35	31	73	63
36	32	74	64
37	33	75	65
38	34	76	66
39	54	77	78
40	30	78	75
41	57	79	67
42	35	80	68
43	36	81	69
44	37	82	24
45	85	83	87
46	79	84	88
47	77	85	<i>back of jacket</i>
48	39		
49	40		
50	41		
51	42		
52	43		

Now 25, 73, 76 and 81 in the German edition involve alternative photographs to epigrams 15, 30 and 43 in this edition.

Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties

Bertolt Brecht
1935

Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the *courage* to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the *keenness* to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the *skill* to manipulate it as a weapon; the *judgment* to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the *cunning* to spread the truth among such persons. These are formidable problems for writers living under Fascism, but they exist also for those writers who have fled or been exiled; they exist even for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails.

1. The Courage to Write the Truth

It seems obvious that whoever writes should write the truth in the sense that he ought not to suppress or conceal truth or write something deliberately untrue. He ought not to cringe before the powerful, nor betray the weak. It is, of course, very hard not to cringe before the powerful, and it is highly advantageous to betray the weak. To displease the possessors means to become one of the dispossessed. To renounce payment for work may be the equivalent of giving up the work, and to decline fame when it is offered by the mighty may mean to decline it forever. This takes courage.

Times of extreme oppression are usually times when there is much talk about high and lofty matters. At such times it takes courage to write of low and ignoble matters such as food and shelter for workers; it takes courage when everyone else is ranting about the vital importance of sacrifice. When all sorts of honors are showered upon the peasants it takes courage to speak of machines and good stock feeds which would lighten their honorable labor. When every radio station is blaring that a man without knowledge or education is better than one who has studied, it takes courage to ask: better for whom? When all the talk is of perfect and imperfect races, it takes courage to ask whether it not hunger and ignorance and war that produce deformities.

And it also takes courage to tell the truth about oneself, about one's own defeat. Many of the persecuted lose their capacity for seeing their own mistakes. It seems to them that the persecution itself is the greatest injustice. The persecutors are wicked simply because they persecute; the persecuted suffer because of their goodness. But this goodness has been beaten, defeated, suppressed; it was therefore a weak goodness, a bad, indefensible, unreliable goodness. For it will not do to grant that goodness must be weak as rain must be wet. *It takes courage to say that the good were defeated not because they were good, but because they were weak.*

Naturally, in the struggle with falsehood we must write the truth, and this truth must not be a lofty and ambiguous generality. When it is said of someone, "He spoke the truth," this implies that some people or many people or least one person said something unlike the truth – a lie or a generality – but he spoke the truth, he said something practical, factual, undeniable, something to the point.

It takes little courage to mutter a general complaint, in a part of the world where complaining is still permitted, about the wickedness of the world and the triumph of

barbarism, or to cry boldly that the victory of the human spirit is assured. There are many who pretend that cannons are aimed at them when in reality they are the target merely of opera glasses. They shout their generalized demands to a world of friends and harmless persons. They insist upon a generalized justice for which they have never done anything; they ask for generalized freedom and demand a share of the booty which they have long since enjoyed. They think that truth is only what sounds nice. If truth should prove to be something statistical, dry, or factual, something difficult to find and requiring study, they do not recognize it as truth; it does not intoxicate them. They possess only the external demeanor of truth-tellers. The trouble with them is: *they do not know the truth.*

2. The Keeness to Recognize the Truth

Since it is hard to write the truth because truth is everywhere suppressed, it seems to most people to be a question of character whether the truth is written or not written. They believe that courage alone suffices. They forget the second obstacle: the difficulty *finding* the truth. It is impossible to assert that the truth is easily ascertained.

First of all we strike trouble in determining *what* truth is worth the telling. For example, before the eyes of the whole world one great civilized nation after the other falls into barbarism. Moreover, everyone knows that the domestic war which is being waged by the most ghastly methods can at any moment be converted into a foreign war which may well leave our continent a heap of ruins. This, undoubtedly, is one truth, but there are others. Thus, for example, it is not untrue that chairs have seats and that rain falls downward. Many poets write truths of this sort. They are like a painter adorning the walls of a sinking ship with a still life. Our first difficulty does not trouble them and their consciences are clear. Those in power cannot corrupt them, but neither are they disturbed by the cries of

the oppressed; they go on painting. The senselessness of their behavior engenders in them a “profound” pessimism which they sell at good prices; yet such pessimism would be more fitting in one who observes these masters and their sales. At the same time it is not easy to realize that their truths are truths about chairs or rain; they usually sound like truths about important things. But on closer examination it is possible to see that they say merely: a chair is a chair; and: no one can prevent the rain from falling down.

They do not discover the truths that are worth writing about. On the other hand, there are some who deal only with the most urgent tasks, who embrace poverty and do not fear rulers, and who nevertheless cannot find the truth. These lack knowledge. They are full of ancient superstitions, with notorious prejudices that in bygone days were often put into beautiful words. The world is too complicated for them; they do not know the facts; they do not perceive relationships. In addition to temperament, knowledge, which can be acquired, and methods, which can be learned, are needed. What is necessary for all writers in this age of perplexity and lightening change is a knowledge of the materialistic dialectic of economy and history. This knowledge can be acquired from books and from practical instruction, if the necessary diligence is applied. Many truths can be discovered in simpler fashion, or at least portions of truths, or facts that lead to the discovery of truths. Method is good in all inquiry, but it is possible to make discoveries without using any method—indeed, even without inquiry. But by such a casual procedure one does not come to the kind of presentation of truth which will enable men to act on the basis of that presentations. People who merely record little facts are not able to arrange the things of the world so that they can be easily controlled. Yet truth has this function alone and no other. Such people cannot cope with the requirement that they write the truth.

If a person is ready to write the truth and able to recognize it, there remain three more difficulties.

3. The Skill to Manipulate the Truth as a Weapon

The truth must be spoken with a view to the results it will produce in the sphere of action. As a specimen of a truth from which no results, or the wrong ones, follow, we can cite the widespread view that bad conditions prevail in a number of countries as a result of barbarism. In this view, Fascism is a wave of barbarism which has descended upon some countries with the elemental force of a natural phenomenon.

According to this view, Fascism is a new, third power beside (and above) capitalism and socialism; not only the socialist movement but capitalism as well might have survived without the intervention of Fascism. And so on. This is, of course, a Fascist claim; to accede to it is a capitulation to Fascism. Fascism is a historic phase of capitalism; in this sense it is something new and at the same time old. In Fascist countries capitalism continues to exist, but only in the form of Fascism; and *Fascism can be combated as capitalism alone, as the nakedest, most shameless, most oppressive, and most treacherous form of capitalism.*

But how can anyone tell the truth about Fascism, unless he is willing to speak out against capitalism, which brings it forth? What will be the practical results of such truth?

Those who are against Fascism without being against capitalism, who lament over the barbarism that comes out of barbarism, are like people who wish to eat their veal without slaughtering the calf. They are willing to eat the calf, but they dislike the sight of blood. They are easily satisfied if the butcher washes his hands before weighing the meat. They are not against the property relations which engender barbarism; they

are only against barbarism itself. They raise their voices against barbarism, and they do so in countries where precisely the same property relations prevail, but where the butchers wash their hands before weighing the meat.

Outcries against barbarous measures may be effective as long as the listeners believe that such measures are out of the question in their own countries. Certain countries are still able to maintain their property relations by methods that appear less violent than those used in other countries. Democracy still serves in these countries to achieve the results for which violence is needed in others, namely, to guarantee private ownership of the means of production. The private monopoly of factories, mines, and land creates barbarous conditions everywhere, but in some places these conditions do not so forcibly strike the eye. Barbarism strikes the eye only when it happens that monopoly can be protected only by open violence.

Some countries, which do not yet find it necessary to defend their barbarous monopolies by dispensing with the formal guarantees of a constitutional state, as well as with such amenities as art, philosophy, and literature, are particularly eager to listen to visitors who abuse their native lands because those amenities are denied there. They gladly listen because they hope to derive from what they hear advantages in future wars. Shall we say that they have recognized the truth who, for example, loudly demand an unrelenting struggle against Germany "because that country is now the true home of Evil in our day, the partner of hell, the abode of the Antichrist"? We should rather say that these are foolish and dangerous people. For the conclusion to be drawn from this nonsense is that since poison gas and bombs do not pick out the guilty, Germany must be exterminated—the whole country and all its people.

The man who does not know the truth expresses himself in lofty, general, and imprecise terms. He shouts about "the" German, he complains about Evil in general, and whoever hears him cannot make out what to do. Shall he decide not to be a German? Will hell vanish if he himself is good? The silly talk about the barbarism that comes out of barbarism is also of this kind. The source of barbarism is barbarism, and it is combated by culture, which comes from education. All this is put in general terms; it is not meant to be a guide to action and is in reality addressed to no one.

Such vague descriptions point to only a few links in the chain of causes. Their obscurantism conceals the real forces making for disaster. If light be thrown on the matter it promptly appears that disasters are caused by certain men. For we live in a time when the fate of man is determined by men.

Fascism is not a natural disaster which can be understood simply in terms of "human nature." But even when we are dealing with natural catastrophes, there are ways to portray them which are worthy of human beings because they appeal to man's fighting spirit.

After a great earthquake that destroyed Yokohama, many American magazines published photographs showing a heap of ruins. The captions read: STEEL STOOD. And, to be sure, though one might see only ruins at first glance, the eye swiftly discerned, after noting the caption, that a few tall buildings had remained standing. Among the multitudinous descriptions that can be given of an earthquake, those drawn up by construction engineers concerning the shifts in the ground, the force of stresses, the best developed, etc., are of the greatest importance, for they lead to future construction which will withstand earthquakes. If anyone wishes to describe Fascism and war, great disasters which are not natural catastrophes, he must do so

in terms of a practical truth. He must show that these disasters are launched by the possessing classes to control the vast numbers of workers who do not own the means of production.

If one wishes successfully to write the truth about evil conditions, one must write it so that its avertible causes can be identified. If the preventable causes can be identified, the evil conditions can be fought.

4. The Judgment to Select Those in Whose Hands the Truth Will Be Effective

The century-old custom of trade in critical and descriptive writing and the fact that the writer has been relieved of concern for the destination of what he has written have caused him to labor under a false impression. He believes that his customer or employer, the middleman, passes on what he has written to everyone. The writer thinks: I have spoken and those who wish to hear will hear me. In reality he has spoken and those who are able to pay hear him. A great deal, though still too little, has been said about his; I merely want to emphasize that "writing for someone" has been transformed into merely "writing." But the truth cannot merely be written; it must be written *for someone*, someone who can do something with it. The process of recognizing truth is the same for writers and readers. In order to say good things, one's hearing must be good and one must hear good things. The truth must be spoke deliberately and listened to deliberately. And for us writers it is important to whom we tell the truth and who tells it to us.

We must tell the truth about evil conditions to those for whom the conditions are worst, and we must also learn the truth from them. We must address not only people

who hold certain views, but people who, because of their situation, should hold these views. And the audience is continually changing. Even the hangmen can be addressed when the payment for hanging stops, or when the work becomes too dangerous. The Bavarian peasants were against every kind of revolution, but when the war went on too long and the sons who came home found no room on their farms, it was possible to win them over to revolution.

It is important for the writer to strike the true note of truth. Ordinarily, what we hear is a very gentle, melancholy tone, the tone of people who would not hurt a fly. Hearing this one, the wretched become more wretched. Those who use it may not be foes, but they are certainly not allies. The truth is belligerent; it strikes out not only against falsehood, but against particular people who spread falsehood.

5. The Cunning to Spread the Truth Among the Many

Many people, proud that they possess the courage necessary for the truth, happy that they have succeeded in finding it, perhaps fatigued by the labor necessary to put it into workable form and impatient that it should be grasped by those whose interests they are espousing, consider it superfluous to apply any special cunning in spreading the truth. For this reason they often sacrifice the whole effectiveness of their work. At all times cunning has been employed to spread the truth, whenever truth was suppressed or concealed. Confucius falsified an old, patriotic historical calendar. He changed certain words. Where the calendar read "The ruler of Hun had the philosopher Wan killed because he said so and so," Confucius replaced *killed* by *murdered*. If the calendar said that tyrant so and so *died by assassination*, he substituted *was executed*. In this manner Confucius opened the way for a fresh interpretation of history.

In our times anyone who says *population* in place of *people* or *race*, and *privately owned land* in place of *soil*, is by that simple act withdrawing his support from a great many lies. He is taking away from these words their rotten, mystical implications. The word *people* (*Volk*) implies a certain unity and certain common interests; it should therefor be used only when we are speaking of a number of peoples, for then alone is anything like community of interest conceivable. The population of a given territory may have a good many different and even opposed interests—and this is a truth that is being suppressed. In like manner, whoever speaks of *soil* and describes vividly the effect of plowed fields upon nose and eyes, stressing the smell and the color of earth, is supporting the rulers' lies. For the fertility of the soil is not the question, nor men's love for the soil, nor their industry in working it; what is of prime importance is the price of grain and the price of labor. Those who extract profits from the soil are not the same people who extract grain from it, and the earthy smell of a turned furrow is unknown on the produce exchanges. The latter have another smell entirely. *Privately owned land* is the right expressing; it affords less opportunity for deception.

Where oppression exists, the word *obedience* should be employed instead of *discipline*, for discipline can be self-imposed and therefore has something noble in its character that obedience lacks. And a better word than *honor* is *human dignity*; the latter tends to keep the individual in mind. We all know very well what sort of scoundrels thrust themselves forward, clamoring to defend the honor of a people. And how generously they distribute honors to the starvelings who feed them. Confucius' sort of cunning is still valid today. Thomas Moore in his *Utopia* described a country in which just conditions prevailed. It was a country very different from the England in which he lived, but it resembled that England very closely, except for the conditions of life.

Lenin wished to describe exploitation and oppression on Sakhalin Island, but it was necessary for him to beware of the Czarist police. In place of Russia he put Japan, and in place of Sakhalin, Korea. The methods of the Japanese bourgeoisie reminded all his readers of the Russian bourgeoisie and Sakhalin, but the pamphlet was not blamed because Russia was hostile to Japan. Many things that cannot be said in Germany about Germany can be said about Austria.

There are many cunning devices by which a suspicious State can be hoodwinked.

Voltaire combated the Church doctrine of miracles by writing a gallant poem about the Maid of Orleans. He described the miracles that undoubtedly must have taken place in order that Joan of Arc should remain a virgin in the midst of an army of men, a court of aristocrats, and a host of monks. By the elegance of his style, and by describing erotic adventures such as characterized the luxurious life of the ruling class, he threw discredit upon a religion which provided them with the means to pursue a loose life. He even made it possible for his works, in illegal ways, to reach those for whom they were intended. Those among his readers who held power promoted or tolerated the spread of his writings. By so doing, they were withdrawing support from the police who defended their own pleasures. Another example: the great Lucretius expressly says that one of the chief encouragements to the spread of Epicurian atheism was the beauty of his verses.

It is indeed the case that the high literary level of a given statement can afford it protection. Often, however, it also arouses suspicion. In such case it may be necessary to lower it deliberately. This happens, for example, when descriptions of evil conditions are inconspicuously smuggled into the despised form of a detective story. Such

descriptions would justify a detective story. The great Shakespeare deliberately lowered the level of his work for reasons of far less importance. In the scene in which Coriolanus' mother confronts her son, who is departing for his native city, Shakespeare deliberately makes her speech to the son very weak. It was inopportune for Shakespeare to have Coriolanus restrained by good reasons from carrying out his plan; it was necessary to have him yield to old habit with a certain sluggishness.

Shakespeare also provides a model of cunning utilized in the spread of truth: this is Antony's speech over Caesar's body. Antony continually emphasizes that Brutus is an honorable man, but he also describes the deed, and this description of the deed is more impressive than the description of the doer. The orator thus permits himself to be overwhelmed by the facts; he lets them speak for themselves.

An Egyptian poet who lived four thousand years ago employed a similar method. That was a time of great class struggles. The class that had hitherto ruled was defending itself with difficulty against its great opponent, that part of the population which had hitherto served it. In the poem a wise man appears at the ruler's court and calls for struggle against the internal enemy. He presents a long and impressive description of the disorders that have arisen from the uprising of the lower classes. This description reads as follows:

So it is: the nobles lament and the servants rejoice. Every city says: Let us drive the strong from out of our midst. The offices are broken open and the documents removed. The slaves are becoming masters.

So it is: the son of a well-born man can no longer be recognized.

The mistress's child becomes her slave girl's son.

So it is: The burghers have been bound to the millstones. Those who never saw the day have gone out into the light.

So it is: The ebony poor boxes are being broken up; the noble sesban wood is cut up into beds.

Behold, the capital city has collapsed in an hour.

Behold, the poor of the land have become rich.

Behold, he who had not bread now possesses a barn; his granary is filled with the possessions of another.

Behold, it is good for a man when he may eat his food.

Behold, he who had no corn now possesses barns; those who accepted the largesse of corn now distribute it.

Behold, he who had not a yoke of oxen now possesses herds; he who could not obtain beasts of burden now possesses herds of neat cattle.

Behold, he who could build no hut for himself now possesses four strong walls.

Behold, the ministers seek shelter in the granary, and he who was scarcely permitted to sleep atop the wall now possesses a bed.

Behold, he who could not build himself a rowboat now possesses ships; when their owner looks upon the ships, he finds they are no longer his.

Behold, those who had clothes are now dressed in rags and he who wove nothing for himself now possesses the finest linen.

The rich man goes thirsty to bed, and he who once begged him for lees now has strong beer.

Behold, he who understood nothing of music now owns a harp; he to whom no one sang now praises the music.

Behold, he who slept alone for lack of a wife, now has women; those who looked at their faces in the water now possess mirrors.

Behold, the highest in the land run about without finding employment. Nothing is reported to the great any longer. He who once was a messenger now sends forth others to carry his messages. . .

Behold five men whom their master sent out. They say: go forth yourself; we have arrived.

It is significant that this is the description of a kind of disorder that must seem very desirable to the oppressed. And yet the poet's intention is not transparent. He expressly condemns these conditions, though he condemns them poorly. . .

Jonathan Swift, in his famous pamphlet, suggested that the land could be restored to prosperity by slaughtering the children of the poor and selling them for meat. He presented exact calculations showing what economies could be effected if the governing classes stopped at nothing.

Swift feigned innocence. He defended a way of thinking which he hated intensely with a great deal of ardor and thoroughness, taking as his theme a question that plainly exposed to everyone the cruelty of that way of thinking. Anyone could be cleverer than Swift, or at any rate more humane—especially those who had hitherto not troubled to consider what were the logical conclusions of the views they held.

Propaganda that stimulates thinking, in no matter what field, is useful to the cause of the oppressed. Such propaganda is very much needed. Under governments which serve to promote exploitation, thought is considered base.

Anything that serves those who are oppressed is considered base. It is base to be constantly concerned about getting enough to eat; it is base to reject honors offered to the defenders of a country in which those defenders go hungry; base to doubt the Leader when his leadership leads to misfortunes; base to be reluctant to do work that does not feed the worker; base to revolt against the compulsion to commit senseless acts; base to be indifferent to a family which can no longer be helped by any amount of concern. The starving are reviled as voracious wolves who have nothing to defend; those who doubt their oppressors are accused of doubting their own strength; those

who demand pay for their labor are denounced as idlers. Under such governments thinking in general is considered base and falls into disrepute. Thinking is no longer taught anywhere, and wherever it does emerge, it is persecuted.

Nevertheless, certain fields always exist in which it is possible to call attention to triumphs of thought without fear of punishment. These are the fields in which the dictatorships have need of thinking. For example, it is possible to refer to the triumphs of thought in fields of military science and technology. Even such matters as stretching wool supplies by proper organization, or inventing ersatz materials, require thinking. Adulteration of foods, training the youth for war—all such things require thinking; and in reference to such matters the process of thought can be described. Praise of war, the automatic goal of such thinking, can be cunningly avoided, and in this way the thought that arises from the question of how a war can best be waged can be made to lead to another question—whether the war has any sense. Thought can then be applied to the further question: how can a senseless war be averted?

Naturally, this question can scarcely be asked openly. Such being the case, cannot the thinking we have stimulated be made use of? That is, can it be framed so that it leads to action? It can.

In order that the oppression of one (the larger) part of the population by another (the smaller) part should continue in such a time as ours, a certain attitude of the population is necessary, and this attitude must pervade all fields. A discovery in the field of zoology, like that of the Englishman Darwin, might suddenly endanger exploitation. And yet, for a time the Church alone was alarmed; the people noticed nothing amiss. The researches of physicists in recent years have led to consequences in the field of logic which might well endanger a number of the dogmas that keep oppression going.

Hegel, the philosopher of the Prussian State, who dealt with complex investigations in the field of logic, suggested to Marx and Lenin, the classic exponents of the proletarian revolution, methods of inestimable value. The development of the sciences is interrelated, but uneven, and the State is never able to keep its eye on everything. The advance guard of truth can select battle positions which are relatively unwatched. What counts is that the right sort of thinking be taught, a kind of thinking that investigates the transitory and changeable aspect of all things and processes. Rulers have an intense dislike for significant changes. They would like to see everything remain the same—for a thousand years, if possible. They would love it if sun and moon stood still. Then no one would grow hungry any more, no one would want his supper. When the rulers have fired a shot, they do not want the enemy to be able to shoot; theirs must be the last shot. A way of thinking that stresses change is a good way to encourage the oppressed.

Another idea with which the victors can be confronted is that in everything and in every condition, a contradiction appears and grows. Such a view (that of dialectics, of the doctrine that all things flow and change) can be inculcated in realms that for a time escape the notice of the rulers. It can be employed in biology or chemistry, for example. But it can also be indicated by describing the fate of a family, and here too it need not arouse too much attention. The dependence of everything upon many factors which are constantly changing is an idea dangerous to dictators, and this idea can appear in many guises without giving the police anything to put their finger on. A complete description of all the processes and circumstances encountered by a man who opens a tobacco shop can strike a blow against dictatorship. Anyone who reflects upon this will soon see why. Governments which lead the masses into misery must guard against the masses' thinking about government while they are miserable. Such governments talk a great deal about Fate. It is Fate, not they, which is to blame for all

distress. Anyone who investigates the cause of the distress is arrested before he hits on the fact that the government is to blame. But it is possible to offer a general opposition to all this nonsense about Fate; it can be shown that Man's Fate is made by men.

This is another thing that can be done in various ways. For example, one might tell the story of a peasant farm—a farm in Iceland, let us say. The whole village is talking about the curse that hovers over this farm. One peasant woman threw herself down a well; the peasant owner hanged himself. One day a marriage takes place between the peasant's son and a girl whose dowry is several acres of good land. The curse seems to lift from the farm. The village is divided in its judgment of the cause of this fortunate turn of events. Some ascribe it to the sunny disposition of the peasant's young son, others to the new fields which the young wife added to the farm, and which have now made it large enough to provide a livelihood.

But even in a poem which simply describes a landscape something can be achieved, if the things created by men are incorporated into the landscape. Cunning is necessary to spread the truth.

Summary

The great truth of our time is that our continent is giving way to barbarism because private ownership of the means of production is being maintained by violence. Merely to recognize this truth is not sufficient, but should it not be recognized, no other truth of importance can be discovered. Of what use is it to write something courageous which shows that the condition into which we are falling is barbarous (which is true) if it is not clear why we are falling into this condition? We must say that torture is used

in order to preserve property relations. To be sure, when we say this we lose a great many friends who are against torture only because they think property relations can be upheld without torture, which is untrue.

We must tell the truth about the barbarous conditions in our country in order that the thing should be done which will put an end to them—the thing, namely, which will change property relations.

Furthermore, we must tell this truth to those who suffer most from existing property relations and who have the greatest interest in their being changed—the workers and those whom we can induce to be their allies because they too have really no control of the means of production even if they do share in the profits.

And we must proceed cunningly.

All these five difficulties must be overcome at one and the same time, for we cannot discover the truth about barbarous conditions without thinking of those who suffer from them; cannot proceed unless we shake off every trace of cowardice; and when we seek to discern the true state of affairs in regard to those who are ready to use the knowledge we give them, we must also consider the necessity of offering them the truth in such a manner that it will be a weapon in their hands, and at the same time we must do it so cunningly that the enemy will not discover and hinder our offer of the truth.

That is what is required of a writer when he is asked to write the truth.

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Holding Fast to Ruins: The Air War in Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*

Jennifer Bajorek

*This essay interrogates received notions about the relationship between aesthetics and politics through readings of two montages from Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's as well as Brecht's own ideas about the representational limits of the photographic image, it suggests that these limits are connected in an essential way with what Brecht's text endeavors to teach or show. In exploring these lessons, the essay also develops connections between history, allegory, and photography, suggesting that these connections come into play in exemplary ways in the *Kriegsfibel*'s treatment of the air war.*

"Sie sahen nicht . . . daß die Menschen aus dem Krieg nichts lernen".

Bertolt Brecht¹

It is a well-known fact of aesthetic and media theory after Walter Benjamin that the work of art, in the era of its technical reproducibility, ceases to be founded on the principle of the work as a unique and self-identical instance and opens instead onto a fundamentally *political* aesthetic praxis.² Disseminated, nomadic, and seemingly horizontal in its recourse to a temporality of infinite repeatability, this new "foundation" of art is in truth rigorously vertical, shot through with the restless punctuality of the *Augenblick* or instant. The artwork is, as a result, utterly ungrounded and pierces

the sedimented layers of history wherever it falls. Unless in so falling upon history, in finding history sedimented, waiting to be pierced, the technically reproducible artwork actually produces history otherwise. It is at the very least clear that for Benjamin (and judging not only from the themes of his late writings) this newly political foundation of art will correspond to a new theory of history, one that breaks in a radical way with the very principles of uniqueness and self-identity, of aesthetic objects as well as therefore of aesthetic subjects, which in the era of technical reproducibility we are forced more explicitly than ever to give up.

Thus the *Kunstwerk* essay seeks both to historicize the idea that “[T]he work of art has in principle always been reproducible”,³ and, in tracking the historical mutation of this principle, to sketch the ways the technically reproducible artwork can give rise to “the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art”.⁴ The essay also seeks to illuminate an essential connection between the artwork and man’s ability to “capture” or “seize” the past (*die Vergangenheit festzuhalten*), as Benjamin puts it in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, in the form of an image which “flashes up in the moment of its recognizability”, after which it will not be seen again. If indeed it ever is seen. For the very conditions of the image’s visibility are themselves for Benjamin totally in history, exposing themselves only in, or as, a “moment of danger”. As he famously writes in the late text on history: “The true image of the past flits by”.⁵

The danger of the lightning flash – the possibility, at bottom, that we have only one chance to recognize the past (hence the “spark of hope”,⁶ but also the emergency, that always passes for the past in Benjamin) – ensures that the revolutionary politics which Benjamin seems almost to want to lay out as a program, in art or by means of art, in the *Kunstwerk* essay will remain radically inassimilable to any such advance programming. The aesthetics, in a word, keep the politics from being easy. Threatening

to disappear as much as to appear, the notion of the past-as-image developed by Benjamin gives both history and revolution its chance. It also ensures that communism – which Benjamin promises will respond to fascism’s “aestheticization of politics” with a “politicization of art” – will remain on the side of a technical rather than a natural way of seeing, a technical rather than a natural optics. This link between communism and a specifically technical optics becomes still clearer in a remark the critic makes in a footnote at the essay’s end: “Mass movements, *and above all war*, are a form of human behavior especially suited to the camera” (my emphasis).⁷ That communism is, through its special relationship to the camera, also linked to war is a lingering and highly ambivalent consequence of Benjamin’s thought.

Some of the most compelling critical work on Benjamin in recent decades has begun to explore this aesthetico-political theory of history – what it might look like, what it will never look like, and what it puts at stake – in light of its articulation with and through an insistent reflection on the image. More specifically, this work has focused on the articulation of Benjamin’s theory of history with and through the twin concepts of allegory and photography.⁸ But it remains to be asked: How might this theory of history, corresponding to this new foundation of art in politics, actually inform our reading of a photograph?

The Textbook Example

Bertolt Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel*, or *War Primer*, takes as its framing gesture and most fundamental premise the idea that there is a connection between what the photographic image has to show or teach us and the limits of what there is to learn – if, that is, there is anything to learn – from war. Ruth Berlau, who was not only Brecht’s collaborator

and lover but also his editor when the *War Primer* was finally published in 1955 (one year before his death and 16 years after he started work on the project), suggests in her preface that Brecht conceived of the book first and foremost as a kind of “vision primer”, in which he would pursue an “education of vision” through the medium of the war photograph. Berlau writes:

This book aims to teach the art of reading images. Because it is, for the untrained, as hard to read an image as any hieroglyphics. The great ignorance about social relations, which capitalism painstakingly and brutally maintains, turns the thousands of photos in the illustrated magazines into true hieroglyphic tablets, indecipherable to the unsuspecting reader.⁹

Brecht began work on the book in the years leading up to the war, when he and his wife, Helene Weigel, who was Jewish, were already in exile (first in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, then in New York and Santa Monica). The work was “finished” in 1945, in the sense that the last photographs date from that year. Presenting photographic images clipped from newspapers and magazines together with rhymed quatrains written by Brecht, the *War Primer* takes as its topic the war in Europe, as it were from A to Z: from the production process of weapons to the bodies of the dead, from the beaches of Cherbourg to the bombed-out ruins of European capitals, from Adolf Hitler gesticulating at the podium to Jane Wyman “showing her medals” in Hollywood. A little-known work that has garnered comparatively little critical attention¹⁰ (one scholar has called it “*ein Stiefkind der Forschung*”¹¹), the book appears to have suffered, both in the years leading up to and for many years following its publication, from the perception that it was “too broadly pacifist in its opposition to the war”.¹² This and other negative editorial comments that Brecht received in the nearly eight years that it

took him to get the book published in East Germany have generally been interpreted as meaning that the *War Primer* was insufficiently anti-American in its positions.¹³ It was not until 1978, when the leftist West German press *Zweitausendeins* issued a reprint of the original Eulenspiegel edition, that the work acquired a certain cult status in the context of the West German peace movement.¹⁴

Berlau's preface has the virtue of redeeming the *War Primer* for Brecht's communist politics, in regard to which the project may indeed have seemed heretical, especially when we recall his famous 1931 indictment of photography as a tool of bourgeois ideology:

The tremendous development of photojournalism has contributed practically nothing to the revelation of the truth about the conditions in this world. On the contrary, photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon *against* the truth. The vast amount of pictured material that is being disgorged daily by the press and that seems to have the character of truth serves in reality only to obscure the facts. The camera is just as capable of lying as is the typewriter. The task of the *A-I-Z* (*Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung aller Länder* [a popular workers' periodical]) . . . is to restore the truth.¹⁵

But the *War Primer* stands in a peculiar position with respect to this longed-for vindication of photography as a weapon of class struggle. Indeed, the whole project seems too smart to buy into this restorative notion of truth and is even designed to critique or expose as ideological this belief in the possibility of overcoming ideology ("obscured" facts and "seeming" truth) by means of the camera. For the *War Primer* substitutes a highly mediated understanding of truth in the place of any possible restoration or overcoming, asking what we learn, precisely not "from war", but from photographs of it.

In this regard, Brecht's text anticipates the move of later theorists of wartime photography, who have often remarked that, when it comes to the facts of war, photographs can obscure as much as they reveal.¹⁶ Of course, after Barthes it is hard not to think that this observation actually holds for all photography, or better, for every photograph.¹⁷ The history of photography, in other words, cautions that it would be naive to grant wartime photography any true theoretical specificity regarding an obscurity that marks every photograph. And yet there seems to be a connection – the *War Primer* asserts it as a "textbook" one – between a general obscurity of photography and whatever it is we hope or expect to see in the so-called war photograph.

One way that the *War Primer* asserts this connection is at the level of its form. The book has been described as "an unusual mixture of a coffee-table book, a history book", and Brecht's "last great lyric publication",¹⁸ and the critics have not been able to agree as to whether it is principally a work of poetry or of photographs. Elisabeth Hauptmann, the editor of Brecht's complete works in German, describes the text as "a collection of photographs which the author cut out of newspapers and magazines and for each of which he composed a quatrain".¹⁹ John Willett, the text's English translator, calls it "a new kind of war poetry, [matching] epigrams in the lapidary tradition with photographs from the mass-circulation press".²⁰ Such disagreements are symptomatic and leave the question of the status of photography within the larger project unsettled. They do not so much address as ignore the true interest of the text's formal complexity and generic indefinition, which is the *textual* nature of the "confrontation between poem and photograph"²¹ and the referential dislocations it foregrounds.

Multimediativity is, we may therefore venture, more than just a formal question here, for it pushes us to think critically about the nature and the import of these dislocations. What is it that the *War Primer* wants to teach us about reading images that requires that

these images be “matched” with verbal inscriptions? No matter its form, its genre, or what we call it, Brecht’s text suggests that whatever truths it has to teach will be taught only by calling our attention to an essential lack or absence that becomes visible or legible in the so-called war photograph.

Flitting By

Two montages allow us to frame this lack with exceptional clarity.²² Both deal with the air war, or better, with images of its aftermath in the form of bombed-out ruins. The topos of the ruin is no accident. Between the piercing verticality of the aerial image and the questions Brecht raises in the quatrains there emerges an allegory of history that would be proper to the technically reproducible image. These are questions, primarily, about what becomes visible only in the instant of a blinding flash and what remains legible in its aftermath, suggesting that this allegory will be connected, in a special way, with ruins. The flash at issue here is, in a literal sense, the flash of bombs exploding but also, I will argue, of the light that inscribes the photograph.

The montage numbered 21 in the 1955 Eulenspiegel edition (23 in the English), presents an aerial photograph of unknown origin depicting the effects of bombing on oil installations and, under it, a quatrain dated October 6, 1940.²³ At the center of the image is a billowing column of smoke. The play of light on the smoke as it rises into the sky divides and organizes the image into three fields: the column, a darker field to the right, and a lighter field to the left, with the possible addition of a fourth field if we count the tightly packed geometrically aligned circles of the storage tanks from which the column rises. From top to bottom, the column is striated and produces an impression of movement – or better, from bottom to top, as the smoke traces the

reverse trajectory of the bombs. This impression of movement gives rise in its turn to a narrative effect, for it implies if not a cause and effect relation, then at the very least a movement between origin and end. Even as the eye is compelled to follow the smoke in a continuous skyward movement, it is compelled to look ever more closely at the smoke's earthly origin, in the sharply focused field of circles. This narrative effect is heightened by a second element of composition, which also complicates it: the fact that, by virtue of the camera angle or some trick of wind direction, or both, the smoke can be said to move both toward and away from the camera's "eye". It moves toward the eye insofar as that eye flies above the scene of its origin, as a result of aerial technique and in conformity with the illusion of aerial omniscience. At the same time, however, it moves away from the eye, or enough away from it, that the scene of the smoke's origin is left exposed. As is the camera.

In capturing this double movement, the photograph is able to say or show something about the conditions of its own visibility. On the one hand, to be sure, the photograph is just a photograph. For example, of a cloud of smoke and thus of a certain obscurity (smoke always obscures) or at least a tendency toward disappearance. (What is obscured can only appear negatively, by not appearing, in the photograph.) But it is also a photograph of a certain negation of obscurity, and therefore of light's appearance. The photograph could not be a photograph if its depiction of the smoke were not sufficiently limited to leave something, or things, exposed. This includes the light that is the condition of possibility of all seeing, photographic or other. Light is (among other things) seeing's minimal condition, and this photograph exposes us to this minimum, like every photograph.

Light, as condition of visibility, is likewise taken up by the quatrain that accompanies the photograph:

*Daß sie da waren, gab ein Rauch zu wissen:
Des Feuers Söhne, aber nicht des Lichts.
Und woher kamen sie? Aus Finsternissen.
Und wohin gingen sie von hier? Ins Nichts.*

A cloud of smoke told us that they were here.
They were the sons of fire, not of the light.
They came from where? They came out of the darkness.
Where did they go? Into eternal night.²⁴

On the one hand, the first line states exactly what we have just been seeing. The smoke functions as a sign, carrying the mind (if not the eye) forward and backward along a narrative (temporal) axis. It conveys knowledge or tells us something about what is no longer there. It is a trace of an event whose agent, once present, has fled. We may furthermore note that the quatrain not only repeats the photographic narrative about cause and effect, origin and end, but raises it to the level of the question: Who did this? Where are they now? Just because we do not see them does not mean that they were never there. The smoke says otherwise. It speaks of the bombs, the flash of fire, the explosion, as having once been present in the same way that the photograph shows these things: without actually showing them, or at least not their presence, and therefore, we might say, allegorically.

This could even be a definition of allegory: a figural or rhetorical movement whereby the fact of something's having-once-been-present is indicated only as its not-being-there-now. This is why Benjamin defines allegory, in *Zentralpark*, as an "extinguishing of appearances"²⁵ (*Auslöschung des Scheins*). In a strict and literal sense, Brecht's quatrain thematizes this figural or rhetorical negation or destruction of appearances

by thematizing the allegorical operation of the smoke. If we cannot see who did this, it is precisely not because they have been obscured by smoke. On the contrary, says the quatrain, it is smoke that gives them away: *“Daß sie da waren, gab ein Rauch zu wissen”*. The traces of their action, after the fact and in their absence, are our only link to their fugitive presence. The writing of these traces, which has less to do with an appearing to vision (and so with anything aesthetic in the strict sense) than with disappearing, is not just allegorical but photographic.

We may have the impression that the quatrain is able to say or “show” us the absence of these agents more immediately or clearly than the photograph ever will. (If there is one thing the photograph will never be able to show clearly, it is what does not appear before the camera). But this impression of referential superiority is more than matched by a different surplus of the photographic image: one having to do with us. For there is one thing that the quatrain does not touch on, which the photograph nonetheless presents as evidence: the fact that, on an inescapable level, our own agency is always implied or implicated in the photographed event. On an inescapable level, we may always know who did this because we are seeing, through the “eye” of the camera, the traces of an action of which “we” ourselves may always have been the agent. It may always have been us, from the moment that we “see” the traces of this action from the bomber’s perspective.

At stake here is not simply some formal quality of the aerial view, nor even any ethics or politics of the “logistics of perception”, at least insofar as these logistics have been too narrowly identified with the technics of the war machine,²⁶ but rather something like a rigorously photographic purview of the event. This purview inheres in the technics of photography and remains, for this very reason, ethically and politically ambivalent. In the case of the quatrain, we, as readers, are guilty only of ignorance – *“Und woher*

kamen sie? Und wohin gingen sie von hier”? As readers, we are in the dark with respect to these questions. Whether or not we might once have seen them, we are not there at the right time, and we don’t. In the case of the photograph, by contrast, as viewers, we are not and will never be as much in the dark as we would like. It may be the case that the gaze has always been guilty, but the point is that this guilt takes on new significance both with the technical development of photography and in wartime. The locus of the guilt, however, is less the photographic “eye” that has been prosthetically grafted onto the deadly weapon than the photographic “I” that comes into being only with this grafting, and which has interesting consequences for our understanding of the war photograph.

As Benjamin explains in the *Kunstwerk* essay, it is not even really photography or technical vision *per se* that implicates us in the event, but rather the history to which photography gives us access. “We” cannot “see” this history. No human eye could “see” its own implication in history and live to tell, that is, to record and transmit the image of what it saw of history to other eyes, without the mediation of the photograph. It is, in part, the forgetting of this mediation that Benjamin calls “fascism”:

“Fiat ars – pereat mundus”, says fascism, expecting from war, as Marinetti admits, the artistic gratification of a sense of perception altered by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *l’art pour l’art*. Humankind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. *Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism.*²⁷

Brecht's montage writes this history as a war history, and so writes about the same event in which fascist violence achieves its maximum by making the self-annihilation of humankind the object of a pleasurable looking. In contradistinction to fascism, however, "showing" this self-annihilation precisely without showing it, at the limits of what can be seen or shown. Through the allegorical operation of the smoke, the montage teaches that we would have no reason to look at the war photograph if the events it depicts were not, in some sense, precisely *not* meant for our eyes. Our blindness, therefore, does not get us off the hook but rather implicates us definitively. For, as the montage also teaches, we are implicated in the event of war precisely insofar as it is not something aesthetic, and will never adequately become the object of an aesthetic looking but rather only a photographic one.

Holding Fast

A second montage makes still clearer how the *War Primer* teaches against the praxis of fascist aestheticization, bearing witness instead to the politicization of art promised by Benjamin, or at least to one possible interpretation of this politicization.

In montage 22 in the 1955 Eulenspiegel edition (25 in the English), a photograph from an unidentified Swedish newspaper dated October 1940 is printed above a quatrain dated December 24, 1940.²⁸ The photograph depicts a human figure searching through the rubble of a building. A caption, in Swedish, is laid over the bottom lefthand corner: "*BRITISH BOMBERS OVER BERLIN*. In late summer 1940 the RAF mounted several raids on Hamburg, Bremen, and other major German towns of industrial and military importance. The British bombed Berlin for the first time on 10–11 September [1940]. The picture shows a house in Berlin after a British raid". The rest, as they say, is history.

The date of the first bombing raids over Berlin stands out in relation to the larger composition, calling our attention to the lack of another date, or to a lack of precision regarding this date: the date of this bombing. Was it the 10th? The 11th? Or some other date altogether? Even before we read the quatrain, the gap that opens between the caption and the photographic image suggests that the date stands in a highly mediated relation to the photographed event. This is counter to our expectations regarding a certain temporal or historical specificity of the photograph.²⁹ The date may change many data (for example, who has died or what has been lost and, in this sense, change the whole event), but it will never change the brute facts of the bombing: ruin, loss, the reduction of a house to rubble. This house. In a sense, the photograph is the mediation of this gap, which is in truth not just a gap between the caption and the image, but between this date and all the others, including our own.

The peculiar mechanism of this mediation is what becomes singularly legible in the human figure. For this figure, even if it is not given a date, is in a distinct sense given an *address* by the photograph. Even if this is not this woman's house,³⁰ she stands in for all the other figures, who have lived or died in all the other houses, which are furthermore no longer houses but rather, thanks to the bombing, precisely ruins. This was someone's house, the photograph tells us, even without the caption. But in order to tell us this, in order to make this figure stand in for all the others, this house for all the others, this photograph for all the others – without which substitution the *War Primer* could not be a textbook, a “primer” – the photograph must give this figure an address. On a surface level the caption seems to do this. It says: This was in Berlin. But on another level the photograph, as a photograph of ruins, had already given the house an address. It may be the case that not all bombs reach their destination (see, for example, montage 16/17, depicting London after the blitz). But it is also the case that to bomb something is to give it an address, to transform it into a target in order to destroy it.³¹

This is what Brecht's quatrain poetizes, addressing the problem of the bombers' absence (as in the previous montage), but also raising the question of a peculiarly photographic target or address:

*Such nicht mehr, Frau: du wirst sie nicht mehr finden!
Doch auch das Schicksal, Frau, beschuldige nicht!
Die dunkeln Mächte, Frau, die dich da schinden,
Sie haben Name, Anschrift und Gesicht.*

Stop searching, woman: you will never find them.
But, woman, don't accept that Fate is to blame.
Those murky forces, woman, that torment you
Have each of them a face, address and name.

The interest of the quatrain is not just that it thematizes this fugitive presence of the agents of the bombing (as in the previous montage: Stop searching! "*Du wirst sie nicht mehr finden!*" / You won't ever find them!"), but rather the way it gives rise to a disorienting futurity by thematizing the target or address. For the remaining lines suggest that, regardless of the fact that they are gone, lost to the camera, missing from the image, these agents too have been targeted: despite their invisibility or absence, they have, and will continue to have, this face, this name, this address. Addressing itself to this strange yoking of the visible and the invisible, the quatrain casts loss, absence, the fact of not-being-there in the present tense. That is to say, it casts all of these things in the present tense and, therefore, into the future, from the perspective of the events depicted in the photograph.

And what about the photograph's future? Is it possible to conceive of a corresponding casting-into-the-future in the case of the photograph? Does it even make sense to

speak of a futurity that would be properly photographic? What can the future have to do with ruins? Perhaps, with all this talk of dates and addresses, this is what Brecht's montage pushes us to ask. Among the fragments of letters in the signage that litters the ruins in the photograph, we find written (on the wall to the left, still intact): "–isse". The first letter appears to be there but illegible. It could be "wisse", to follow the grammar of the quatrain, but also what we might call the more general grammar of the *War Primer*. Stop searching and know, Brecht's text says, with this inscription repeated in every photograph. Stop searching for what you think you will find, and look at what I have to "show" instead, not in the light but in (its) ruins. And in ruins not least of all from the point of view of a certain interpretation of photography: one that would finally, simply, shed light on, in order to reveal or restore the truth. As Benjamin writes (also in *Zentralpark*): "Allegory holds fast to ruins (*hält an den Trümmern fest*)".³²

Whenever we speak (or fail to speak) of photography in the language of allegory – whenever we speak of the photograph at the very least as a bearer of history – we have already been engaged by this command. It attaches itself to the image and addresses itself to us. The command to look and, in looking otherwise, to know, not simply what is obscured and what is brought to light in a given image, but what can be known or brought to light only by virtue of remaining invisible, not aestheticizable. Look and don't know. Look and fail to see. Fail to see with your "own" eyes and see with another's instead.

This opening to alterity suggests that what becomes visible or legible in the war photograph can only from a very narrow point of view be understood as a lack. For from this lack emerges the possibility of a different future, a future which, as Benjamin suggested earlier, takes on new significance in the case of the war photograph. Either the photograph puts us into relation with its referent as a past event whose recording

and transmission “through history” to us depends on an act of simple retrospection, leaving all of the old histories intact (including the histories of violence and self-annihilation in which we are always implicated); or it puts us in relation to something else. Either the photograph gives us access to a past whose pastness is guaranteed, secure; or it gives us the event in some radically different way; in excess of the ordinary (ideo)logics of knowledge, time, and inspection; according to other conceptions of who sees and what comes to light; and with reference to a future that would, or at least could be, radically different from the past.

This opening to the future can be thought in connection with the moment when, for Benjamin, photography is torn from its bit part as the historical record of a past that would be purely and simply retrospective and becomes the index of a conception of history at once revolutionary and messianic. The photographic image bears us toward the future even as it inscribes us as (its) history, writing history on the lenses of our eyes or, better, through the shutters of our cameras. Our eyes, which, like the famous “angel of history” in Benjamin’s *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, we hold wide open, despite their blindness. Our cameras, which we must continue to let open. And then close.

I take this to be the *War Primer*’s lesson: not that we must keep our eyes open in the face of the growing mound of rubble, but that we must continue to take photographs. For the image that history gives us to recognize as its future may always not have flashed before us yet. Photography, like allegory, ensures the past its future by holding these ruins fast.

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Illustration No. 1. Aerial photograph of unknown origin depicting the effects of bombing on oil installations. Montage 21 in the 1955 Eulenspiegel edition (23 in the English). Photograph excerpted from Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*. Printed with kind permission of the Bertolt–Brecht–Archiv. Photographer and journal unknown



Illustration No. 2. Photograph from an unidentified Swedish newspaper dated October 1940, depicting a human figure searching through the rubble of a building. Montage 22 in the 1955 Eulenspiegel edition (25 in the English). Photograph excerpted from Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*. Printed with kind permission of the Bertolt–Brecht–Archiv. Photographer and journal unknown.

Footnotes

1. Bertolt Brecht: *Schriften zum Theater*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1964. Vol. 6. P. 161.
2. "An die Stelle ihrer Fundierung aufs Ritual hat ihre Fundierung auf eine andere Praxis zu treten: nämlich ihre Fundierung auf Politik [Instead of being founded on ritual, [art] is based on a different practice – politics]", *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Zweite Fassung*. Walter Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1989. Vol. 7. Part 1. P. 357; "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version". Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn. Walter Benjamin: *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935–1938*. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard UP 2002. P. 106. I quote from the second version of the essay, *passim*.
3. "Das Kunstwerk ist grundsätzlich immer reproduzierbar gewesen". Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 7(1). P. 351; *Selected Writings*. Vol. 3. P. 102.
4. "[Die im folgenden neu in die Kunsttheorie eingeführten Begriffe] sind zur Formulierung revolutionärer Forderungen in der Kunstpolitik brauchbar". Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 7(1). P. 350; *Selected Writings*. Vol. 3. P. 102.
5. "Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit huscht vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten"; "Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt nicht, es erkennen 'wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist'. Es heißt, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt". Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 1(2). P. 695; "On the Concept of History". Trans. Harry Zohn. *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*. P. 392. "Festhalten," it is worth noting, can mean not simply to "seize" or "hold fast," but to "capture," as when we speak of the capture of images. Thus Benjamin also writes, perfectly naturally, of capturing images in a camera, in *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*. "Männern, die unabhängig voneinander dem gleichen Ziele zustrebten: die Bilder in der camera obscura, die spätestens seit Leonardo bekannt waren, festzuhalten." Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 2(1). P. 368.

6. Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 1(2). P. 695; *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4. P. 392.
7. "Das heißt, daß Massenbewegungen, und an ihrer Spitze der Krieg, eine der Apparatur besonders entgegenkommende Form des menschlichen Verhaltens darstellen", Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 7(1). P. 382; *Selected Writings*. Vol. 3. P. 133. It is worth noting that Benjamin intensifies the pitch of the remark between the first and the second versions of the essay, substituting "above all war [und an ihrer Spitze der Krieg]" for "including war [und so auch der Krieg]".
8. See Eduardo Cadava: *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*. Princeton 1997; Beatrice Hanssen: *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1998; and Samuel Weber: "Mass Mediauras: Art, Aura, and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin". In Samuel Weber: *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*. Stanford: Stanford UP 1996.
9. "Dieses Buch will die Kunst lehren, Bilder zu lesen. Denn es ist dem Nichtgeschulten ebenso schwer, ein Bild zu lesen wie irgendwelche Hieroglyphen. Die große Unwissenheit über gesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge, die der Kapitalismus sorgsam und brutal aufrechterhämacht die Tausende von Fotos in den Illustrierten zu wahren Hieroglyphentafeln, unentziffbar dem nichtsahnenden Leser", Ruth Berlau, preface to Bertolt Brecht: *Kriegsfibel*. Berlin 1955. P. i.
10. For a review of the literature, see the foreword to Welf Kienast: *Kriegsfibelmodell: Autorschaft und 'kollektiver Schöpfungsprozess' in Brecht's Kriegsfibel*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 2001.
11. Jan Knopf, quoted in Kienast: *Kriegsfibelmodell*. P. 9.
12. For an illuminating account of Brecht's several failed attempts to get the book published, as well as his political difficulties in the GDR more generally, see John Willett's afterword to his English translation, in Bertolt Brecht: *War Primer*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. London: Libris 1998. The official is Kurt Pincus, quoted in Willett, afterword to Brecht: *War Primer*. P. xiii.
13. Willett, afterword to Brecht: *War Primer*. P. xiii.
14. Kienast: *Kriegsfibelmodell*. Pp. 8–9.
15. Quoted in Reinhold Grimm: "Marxist Emblems: Bertolt Brecht's War Primer". *Comparative Literature Studies* 12.2 (1975). P. 266.

16. Particularly where these facts are thought to have moral or ethical implications. See, for example, Bernd Hüppauf: "Modernism and the Photographic Representation of War and Destruction". In *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*. Ed. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman. Berkeley: University of California Press 1995. Pp. 94–124; and Dagmar Barnouw: *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP 1996.
17. It is worth recalling in this context that Barthes' formulation of a radically photographic singularity (the assertion that there is "no photography", only photographs, the discovery of the "punctum" and the peculiarly photographic relationship to death) comes into its own in an interpretation of a photograph by Alexander Gardner, who made his reputation as a photographer of the American Civil War. Roland Barthes: *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie*. Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile, Gallimard, Le Seuil 1980. Pp. 16, 148–51; Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang 1981. Pp. 5, 94–7.
18. Kienast: *Kriegsfibelmodell*. Pp. 296, 8, respectively.
19. Elisabeth Hauptmann. In *Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1967. Vol. 10. P. 25. Quoted in Grimm: "Marxist Emblems". P. 263.
20. Willett, afterword to Brecht: *War Primer*. P. vii.
21. Stefan Soldovieri. "War–Poetry, Photo(epi)grammetry: Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*". In *Bertolt Brecht: A Reference Companion*. Ed. Siegfried Mews. Westport/New York: Greenwood Press 1997. P. 139.
22. I use the term "montage" here for the sake of convenience and in order to skirt the whole huge debate over whether or not the compositions can be considered epigrams (and if so whether they are descended from the Greek versus the Renaissance or Baroque traditions, etc.). Brecht himself reportedly referred to the compositions as "photo–epigrams". Willett, afterword to Brecht: *War Primer*. P. x.
23. Willett gives the most comprehensive notes as to the sources of the photographs and dates of the poems in an addendum to his translation. Brecht: *War Primer*. P. iii.
24. I quote the text of the 1955 Eulenspiegel edition and Willett's English translations, *passim*.

25. Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 1(2). Pp. 669–70.
 26. Paul Virilio: *Guerre et cinéma*. Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile 1984; Paul Virilio: *War and Cinema*. Trans. Patrick Camiller. London and New York: Verso 1989.
 27. "'Fiat ars – pereat mundus' sagt der Faschismus und erwartet die künstlerische Befriedigung der von der Technik veränderten Sinneswahrnehmung, wie Marinetti bekennt, vom Kriege. Das ist offenbar die Vollendung des l'art pour l'art. Die Menschheit, die einst bei Homer ein Schauobjekt für die olympischen Götter war, ist es nun für sich selbst geworden. Ihre Selbstentfremdung hat jenen Grad erreicht, der sie ihre eigene Vernichtung als ästhetischen Genuß ersten Ranges erleben läßt. So steht es um die Ästhetisierung der Politik, welche der Faschismus betreibt", Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 7(1). Pp. 383–4; *Selected Writings*. Vol. 3. P. 122.
 28. Brecht: *War Primer*. P. iii.
 29. Barthes famously theorizes this overwhelming specificity via what he calls the "ça-à-été", "this-was", or "this-has-been". Barthes: *Camera Lucida. Passim*.
 30. Re the question of gender, it is difficult not to read (as does Brecht) the figure as feminine, although it would be interesting to think further about this. How/where is gender legible here? In the headscarf? The posture? The fact of being left behind in the domestic space? What, if anything, happens to the legibility of gender in a domestic space reduced to ruins?
 31. For a provocative treatment of this problem in light of our latest wars, see Samuel Weber: *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking*. New York: Fordham UP 2005.
- Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 1(2). P. 666.

Realism and Photography in Brecht's *War Primer*

Federica Chiocchetti

This essay will first consider Bertolt Brecht's theory of realism, in comparison with Georg Lukács, and will then explore it within the realm of photography, an art where, in my view, Brecht's discourse works very well. In particular, after an overview of his position in the dialectical relationship between photography and literature, I shall focus on his 1955 *Kriegsfibel* [*War Primer*], a unique work of art where he combines poetry and news photography, and creates what he calls *fotogramme*, photo-epigrams, to unmask the true nature of war in a capitalist society. The essay will seek to show how the *War Primer*, as a whole, eloquently epitomises Brecht's notion of realism, as the attempt to reveal "the causal complexes" of capitalist and bourgeois reality (Brecht 2007, p. 82). The last part of this work aims to explore how Brecht's concept of realism, particularly in the *War Primer*, together with his critique of a certain bourgeois and aesthetic use of photography, partially bears comparison with several crucial aspects of semiotics, the study of sign systems and "the first systematic theory of the ideology of photography" (Bate 2009, p. 30).¹ Considering Roland Barthes' work on news photographs during the 1960s, I shall seek to read particularly two *fotogramme* of the *War Primer* using some of the interpretive tools of Barthes' semiotics, such as the role of captions and the historical reading of images.

The debate on realism within Marxist literary theorists is one of the most exciting moments of literary criticism as it allows us to grasp the nuanced core of the complex

and fascinating relationship between literature and politics in the 1930s. When Georg Lukács, one of the protagonists of the realist debate together with Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, accused modernist writers, among other things, of failing “to pierce the surface to discover the underlying essence, i.e. the real factors that relate their experience to the hidden social forces that produce them”, at first sight, he appears to share Brecht’s idea of realism as the way to unmask “the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power” (Lukács 2007 [1938], p. 36–7 and Brecht 2007, p. 82).² However, a closer look reveals the differences between Brecht and Lukács’ idea of realism. The latter strongly believed that uncovering “the hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society” led to “objective reality”, to the “correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence”, the “true significance” of phenomena. He praised the category of “totality”, as his quotation from Lenin unequivocally shows: “We shall never achieve this fully, but *insistence on all-round knowledge* will protect us from errors and inflexibility” (Lukács 2007, p. 33). Also, his idea of making the “soul of the masses”, “through the mediation of realist literature”, “receptive for an understanding of the great, progressive and democratic epochs of human history”, and to prepare the readers “to endorse the political slogans of the Popular Front”, is explicitly programmatic (*Ibid.*, p. 56). Brecht, on the contrary, – even though his 1938 writings against Lukács’ notion of realism were only published in 1967 – stressed the importance of the freedom of the artist to “employ his fantasy, his originality, his humour, his invention” to represent reality and to avoid “rigidly defined modes of narrative” (Brecht 2007, p. 82). For Brecht, realism “is not a mere question of form”, it is not exclusively “based on the form of a few bourgeois novels of the previous century”; realism can be found also in lyric poetry and drama (*Ibid.*, p. 70). In addition, he gives less importance to the concept of endurance in literature, and his notion of reality seems less rigid than Lukács’ one: reality changes rapidly before our eyes and therefore “a living and combative literature” is needed in order “to keep

step" with reality's fast development. To represent it, it must also change its "modes of representation" (*Ibid.*, p. 85 and 82). The key difference between the two however, is to be found in another work that Brecht wrote in 1931, *The Threepenny Lawsuit*, where, talking specifically about photography, he utters: "for some time reality has no longer been experienceable as a totality" (Quoted and translated in Long 2008, p.201). Finally, his direct experience with the workers, who were exposed to a few of his plays, allowed him to develop a notion of popular that, even though it has to mean "intelligible to the broad masses", and it has to "render reality to men in a form they can master", seems to place greater trust in ordinary people's openness and ability to understand "daring, unusual things" (*Ibid.*, p. 84).³

Perfectly in line with Brecht's interest for experimentation, the *War Primer*, with its daring mixture of two forms of art (rather than simply two different genres), offers a fascinating and sophisticated example of his interpretation of realism, as Ruth Berlau's words suggest, in the preface of the volume's first edition:

This book aims to teach the art of reading pictures. [...] The widespread ignorance of social relations that is carefully and brutally maintained by capitalism turns the thousands of photographs in illustrated magazines into true hieroglyphs that are indecipherable to the gullible [nichtsahnenden] reader.

(Translated and quoted in Brady 2006, p. 315 and Long 2008, p. 206)⁴

If we compare the word *hieroglyph*, together with the book's intention "to teach the art of reading pictures", with Brecht's definition of what realistic means, namely "unmasking the prevailing view of things", we can argue that this volume faithfully represents his

literary and photographic reflections. Indeed, the *Kriegsfibel*, in its goal to decipher the hidden and hieroglyphical mechanisms of capitalist society and the secrets of war, behind its “constantly changing face”, is Brecht’s antidote to the unreliability of bourgeois and aesthetic use of photography to portray reality (Brecht 1993, p. 319).⁵ Interestingly, Lukács also refers fleetingly to photography, when he reckons that “authentic ideological avant-garde” writers are better than a “successful photograph”, which “mirrors the original, [...] because they express the wealth and diversity of reality, reflecting forces as yet submerged beneath the surface” (Lukács 2007, p. 47 and 48, my italics). Even if the verb ‘to mirror’ might imply that Lukács considers photography a perfectly mimetical medium, it is difficult to infer this from only this short reference. However, he clearly claims the superiority of authentic ideological literature over photography, which could have an affinity with Brecht’s need and decision to add poetry to newspaper images, as a sign of profound incredulity towards the photographic medium, “which prefers means to ends, manner to matter” (Brady 1978, p. 271). In my view, the important passage below that Brecht wrote in 1931 to the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, to celebrate its ten years of existence, unmistakably shows this:

In the hands of the bourgeoisie photography has become a terrible weapon against truth. The innumerable images which the presses spit out every day appear to have the quality of truth on their side, but in fact they only serve to cover up the real facts.

(Quoted and translated in Brady 2006, p. 315, Long 2008, pp. 203–04 and Evans 2003, p. 5).

However, the passage continues with a sentence that complicates the discussion: “the camera can lie just as much as the typewriter”, which undeniably and metonymically equates the two arts’ potential falsehood and inadequacy to reproduce reality.⁶ The

same year however, in the *Threepenny Lawsuit*, he elaborated on this, in what was to become his most famous and quoted passage on the theory of photography. By stressing the inability of photography to portray any inner immaterial aspect of life, for example workers' toils, and also by arguing for the need of art, Brecht appears to re-establish a hierarchy between literature and photography in favour of the former. The passage reads:

The situation [in capitalist society as a whole] is now becoming so complex that a simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about reality itself. A photograph of a Krupp factory or the AEG says practically nothing about these institutions. Reality itself has shifted into the realm of the functional. The reification of human relationships, such as the factory, no longer betrays anything about these relationships. And so what we actually need is to 'construct something', something 'artificial' [or 'artistic'], 'posed'. What we therefore equally need is art. But the old concept of art based on experience is invalid. For whoever reproduces those aspects of reality that can be experienced does not reproduce reality. For some time reality has no longer been experienceable as a totality.

(Partially quoted in Benjamin 1980, pp. 213–14, and quoted and translated in Long 2008, p. 201)

In addition, we can infer Brecht's belief in the power of language and literature over photography, if we consider his encouragement of the use of captions to 'redeem' images, in his 1928 'Über Fotografie', later emphasized also by Benjamin, who in his 1930 'Short History of Photography' poses the question: "Will not captions become

the essential component of pictures?" (Long 2008, p. 204 and Benjamin 1980, p. 215). Even more important to understand the political potential of caption is Benjamin's 1934 essay 'The Author as Producer', where he praises photomontage's revolutionary nature, especially the works of the German artist John Heartfield for their political impact.⁷ His remarkable comment clearly demonstrates his view of language and literature as superior to photography in conveying a political message:

What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value.

(Benjamin 1998, p. 95)

To avoid all doubt, in 1955, the *War Primer* was published and Brecht's challenge to enlighten the reader, by controlling the power of certain photographs contained in capitalist illustrated mainstream press, "the achievement of this *Fibel*", was finally satisfied, employing a dialogical approach to reality, coherently with his 1938 theory of realism, as the selected *fotogramme* will further show (Kuhn 2008, p. 189). The photographs are mostly from Second World War, Nazi perpetrators, dead Japanese soldiers, Churchill and a few bombed British cities. Many pictures were published in American magazine *Life*, still in vogue today. The majority of German scholars saw in the *Kriegsfibel* a Marxist ideological critique of the war. Other scholars studied the influence that the Greek epigram had on the *War Primer*, in particular Oehler's translation that he received in 1940 (Brady 1978, p. 280). Among the English scholars Long, in his seminal recent essay, develops a new and convincing conclusion that rejects the thesis of a "univocal ideological" Marxist message conveyed by the volume (Long

2008, p. 221). In particular, although caption, and its etymological origin of seizure, aims to “limit meaning”, according to him, thanks to a plurality of voices both within the text and in the paratextual apparatus, which “contextualize and recontextualize the act of viewing”, we have a “multiplicity” of meaning (Long 2008, p. 206 and 218).

Now, I would like to go back to Ruth Berlau’s preface to the first edition of the volume, and to the idea of a *hieroglyphical* nature of news photography, and link Long’s multiplicity of meanings in the *War Primer* with Barthes’ idea of *polysemy* of images, which implies that “underlying their signifiers” they present “a ‘floating chain’ of signified” and that the reader is “able to choose some and ignore others”, as alluded to in his 1964 essay ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ (Barthes 1977, p. 39). In particular, by affixing quatrains to newspaper cuttings of mainstream press war images, Brecht rearranges the latter’s “photographic message”, tries to reduce their *polysemic* nature to a new and, according to many except for Long, revolutionary meaning. Whether univocally ideological or not, it is an attempt to political appropriation of visual meaning through poetry to unmask the true nature of war and oppression, coherently with Brecht’s concept of realism. In addition, I wish to suggest that it partially adumbrates certain aspects of the semiotic theory of photography.⁸

Is a picture of someone throwing a bomb an image of a ‘terrorist’ or ‘freedom fighter’? The same visual signifier can have different ‘polysemic’ linguistic signifieds, depending on the viewpoint where meaning is sometimes a political battle over the representation of the world.

(Bate 2009, p. 33)

For instance, how can we read Heartfield's image of the African lady wearing a dress decorated by swastikas, among the oldest and extremely powerful symbol, without any further information? It's Barthes himself to stress the importance of what he calls "the linguistic message", namely any text related to the image (Barthes 1977, p. 37). He points out that today it is "not very accurate to talk of a civilization of the image – we are still more than ever, a civilization of writing" (Barthes 1977, p. 38). In particular, he continues underlining that polysemy "poses a question of meaning" and that "in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds". Therefore, captions serve two main functions: "anchorage of all the possible meanings of the object" and "relay", as they allow me to focus not only "my gaze but also my understanding" (*Ibid.*, p. 39). Text, he proceeds, "directs the reader through the signified of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; [...] it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance" (*Ibid.*, p. 40). Anchorage is thus a control and has a "repressive" value, and – he concludes – "it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested" (*Ibid.*). In my view, it is surprising that he does not consider Brecht's *War Primer*, as the above passages seem to work perfectly for its scrutiny. However, if we agree with Long on the plurality of meaning offered by the volume, the *War Primer* becomes even more unique and in line with Brecht's notion of realism: it is a work of art specifically composed for viewer-reader reception's sake, to teach how to read images, but its power lies precisely in the fact that, the continuous "move back and forth between image and verse, where the latter attempts to shape the viewer response transforming it into the reader response", leaves the reader free to develop his own "signified" (Kuhn 2008, p. 189). Furthermore, Barthes' short essay on "Photography and Electoral appeal" is especially interesting and useful for the reading of certain portraits' *fotogramme* of the *War Primer*. In particular, according to Barthes "photography tends to spirit away 'politics' (that is to say a body of problems and solutions) to the advantage of a 'manner of being', a socio-

moral status". This view bears some affinities with Brecht's critique of photography, which "prefers means to ends, manner to matter" (Brady 1978, p. 271). The *War Primer*, with its witty verses, often built around the use of antitheses, attempts to unmask the vulnerable surface with which photography covers up social and political order. The photo-epigram n. 30 for example has many of the features I discussed before; the photo is from unknown sources, and does not appear in the German edition, the poem is attribute to 1944 and reads:

I am the butcher-clown in this concern.
The Iron Hermann, every time a winner
A Reich Marshal, policeman and thief in turn:
Give me your hand. But, first, best count your fingers.

The atmosphere of irony is created by the contrast between such an unusual, connoted and 'sweet' iconographical representation for a Nazi perpetrator, captured by the camera while he is playing with and fondly looking at a puppy (although it seems a tiger cub), and the aggressiveness of the verse "Give me your hand...". The image also reminds Barthes' comments on 'Photography and Electoral Appeal' and suggest a message like: "Even if I am one of Hitler's closest associates, *Look at me: I am like you*" (Barthes 1991, p. 91).

To defend his notion of realism against "formalistic prejudice", Brecht claimed that since "time flows on" and "reality changes", the concept of *popular* changes consequently, for "the people today are not what they were yesterday", therefore "new problems appear and demand new methods" in order to "render reality to men in a form they can master" (Brecht 2007, p. 81–2). If we relate these observations to Barthes' theory of 'the Photographic Message', where he concludes that "thanks to its code of

connotation the reading of the photograph is thus always historical" as it "depends on the reader's 'knowledge'", and its "cultural situation", it is interesting to explore how the reading of a few *fotogrammes* evolves over time (Barthes 1977, p. 28). Let us consider for instance the photo-epigram number 53 (63 in the English edition), where the newspaper cutting contains the (unattributed) photograph of Robert Capa, taken during the Allied landings on Omaha Beach, in Normandy on June 6, 1944.⁹ This image became one of the most famous photographs of what is now generally known as the D. Day and Robert Capa is now considered one of the greatest war photographers of our times, co-founder of Magnum Photo, so much so that the Overseas Press Club of America created a prize in his honour, the *Robert Capa Gold Medal*. The English translation of the epigram reads:

A summer day was dawning near Cherbourg
A man from Maine came crawling up the sand
Supposedly against men from the Ruhr
In fact against the men of Stalingrad.

Perfectly in harmony with Brecht's interpretation of realism, the poem seeks to "unmask the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power", namely the Allied and especially the Americans' fear of Communism ("A man from Maine"), which according to Brecht's words is "masked", and therefore less immediate to the reader, by their fear of nazism, as the antithesis between the words "supposedly" and "in fact" suggests (Brecht 2007, p. 82). This photo-epigram prompts many questions: How does history impact on this photo-epigram in terms of connotation? Could we say that a 1955 reader of the *War Primer* grasps the same inner aspects of reality as a contemporary one? I believe history impacts on what Eco calls the *codes of recognition*, which change according to the reader's knowledge: while for a 1955 reader it is an anonymous image,

and he or she cannot recognize what it is not part of his or her 'cultural situation', as it is yet to come, a contemporary reader with a basic knowledge of photography immediately identifies the image and his author. I believe in this photo-epigram we can observe a very interesting phenomenon: this time, in my view, the popularity of the image prevails over the text, in the readers' afterimage, a visual image that persists after the visual stimulus causing it has ceased to act.

Brecht created a new genre that one could call photo-poetry. The debate on the *War Primer* as a photo-book is still open and very diverse, as Adam Broomberg and Oliver Channarin's *War Primer 2* demonstrates. By inserting and juxtaposing images of conflict since 9/11 within Brecht's original edition, *War Primer 2* is an incredible attempt to show how war representation has changed over time but also, knowingly or unknowingly, it portrays the circularity of history, where war seems to be an unavoidable constant presence in human life. *War Primer 2* reflects the unequivocal hallmark that left this inexplicably neglected book (James 2011, pp. 18U27). Unfortunately it is the poetry aspect of Brecht's unique work of art that has been even more overlooked. I strongly believe the genre of photo-poetry needs to be re-introduced by contemporary artists and I will work on that.

Federica Chiocchetti, London 2012

Appendix



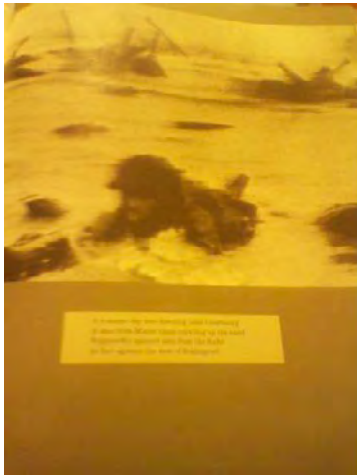
1. Tucholsky, Kurt, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, motiert von John Heartfield (Cover and 'Weiße Schmach in Afrika', p.72)



2. Tucholsky, Kurt, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, montiert von John Heartfield (vegetable) and Brecht's 'Sexy Carrot', *War Primer*



3. *Fotogramm 30* (English edition)



4. *Fotogramm 53* (63 in the English edition) and Robert Capa's famous D-Day photograph



5. Broomberg, Adam and Chanarin, Oliver, *War Primer 2*, limited edition of 100 copies, 100 pages, Original Bertolt Brecht hardback book (this edition published 1998) with text silkscreened into the book and 85 colour images tipped-in by hand (London: Mack, 2011)

Footnotes

1. In terms of artistic practice, as suggested by Ernest Schonfield, Brecht's *War Primer* bears greater comparison with the technique of *détournement*, developed by the Letterist movement founded in 1952 by Guy Debord, which later became known as Situationist International, and where artists, together with academics, gave new captions to found well-known images, to turn expressions of the capitalist system against itself.
2. Lukács also accused modernism of immediacy, one-dimensionality, incapability to create "prophetic figures" that "capture tendencies of development that only exist incipiently" and anticipate future developments, and tendency to "shatter all connection with the great and glorious past" (Lukács 2007, pp.38, 48 and 55). He considered the works of Balzac and Tolstoy, *inter alia*, true examples of good realism and models to follow for contemporary realist authors.
3. Lukács' sentence: "Through the medium of realist literature the soul of the masses is *made receptive* for an understanding of the great, progressive and democratic epochs of human history" partially suggests a more passive role for the reader (Lukács 2007, p. 56, my italics).
4. Surprisingly, although Ruth Berlau is mentioned in the afterword of the *War Primer's* English edition, her preface is not included. I had to combine Brady M. and Long's translations.
5. The word hieroglyph also recalls Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, as Long noticed (p. 206). Also, the word aesthetic refers to Brecht's (and Benjamin's) critique of New Objectivity photography, like the 1928 photobook *The World is Beautiful* by Albert Renger-Patzsch, which, by turning social inequalities such as "object poverty" "into an object of enjoyment", through its "modish" and "technically perfect" representation, is an "extreme example of what means to supply a production apparatus without changing it" (Benjamin 1998, p. 95, Kuhn 2008, p. 178 and Long 2008, pp. 202–03).
6. On the genealogy of the dialectical relationship between verbal and visual in Brecht see Brady, 1978.

7. I have included in the Appendix the cover of Heartfield and Tucholsky's famous book, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, together with what I find one of the most interesting photographs of the book, which will be useful to discuss the political role of captions: an African woman wearing a dress decorated with swastikas. Also, I believe Heartfield's work was somewhat influential to Brecht's photo-epigram, and Brecht's 'sexy carrot' (*fotogramm* 50 in the English edition) could be a tribute to Heartfield's less sexy vegetable (see Appendix 2).
8. I am aware that while Brecht and Barthes shared a similar critique of photography, the differences between the two authors are profoundly different. To the problem of press photography they clearly responded in a different way: while the poet composed the photo-epigrams and published the *Kriegsfibel* (not without initial difficulty to find a publisher), the Structuralist literary theorist produced *Mythologies*, precisely an orthodox structuralist analysis of modernity, as pointed out by Ernest Schonfield.
9. It seems strange that the same person that stressed the importance of copyright in the *Threepenny Lawsuit* reproduces in the *War Primer* a large amount of copyrighted photographs without recognition. See Giles 1997.

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A Spectre is leaving Europe: **Appropriation in a Post–communist photo–book**

David Evans

*Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa (A Spectre is leaving Europe)*¹ is a book published in Cologne in 1990 by the writer Heiner Müller (1929–1995) and the photographer Sibylle Bergemann (1941–2010). The title alludes caustically to the ominous boast of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that famously opens *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848: 'A spectre is haunting Europe – The spectre of Communism'.² Müller and Bergemann had both lived and worked in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and their book is a response to the rapid collapse of a staunchly pro–Soviet regime that began during fortieth birthday celebrations in 1989, and concluded with political unification with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in the following year. *A Spectre is leaving Europe* is my main case study in an essay about appropriation, Post–communism and the photo–book.

1

The photo–book, Post–communism and appropriation are all terms that require preliminary clarification. The noun appropriation means taking possession of something, usually without authority. It has been a constant in all forms of imperialism, from ancient times to date, and in all forms of society in which one group dispossesses another of the products of its labour. In the modern era, it can also be used to describe

the processes of de- and re-contextualization that informed the emergence of museums after 1789. The *Musée des Monuments Français*, for example, was opened in 1795 to provide a safe refuge for artefacts associated with the discredited *Ancien Régime* and Church, now stripped of their regal and divine attributes and re-presented as mere objects of art or historical documents. Similar developments took place across Europe and amounted to art's "*conceptual redefinition*".³

Appropriation can also be used in relation to a number of art activities across the last one hundred years or so that involved taking over real objects, including other works of art. Indicative examples include (photo) collage, (photo) montage, the found object and the readymade, all neologisms associated with the avant-garde groups that were particularly active in the early decades of the 20th Century; or assemblage, *décollage* and *détournement* from the mid-20th Century; and more recently, postproduction, re-mixing or sampling. The contexts continuously change, with earlier initiatives marked by the emergence of cinema and the illustrated press in the early 20th century, and the pervasive digital culture of the last two or three decades having a comparable impact on contemporary artwork. Yet there is continuity, too, as succeeding generations of artists develop their own version of what Louis Aragon called in 1930 a "personality of choice".⁴

An expansive notion of appropriation art could take on board the various examples sketched above from the late 18th Century to date. Yet its widespread use as a term by artists and critics is far more recent, primarily in connection with a small number of artists who came to prominence in New York in the late 1970s and 1980s and who were regularly referenced in ambitious debates around the Postmodern. The debates remain unresolved, but a radical – even revolutionary – *frisson* was initially generated by the frequent use of the word appropriation. The implication was that activities like

Richard Prince's re-photographing of Marlboro advertisements involved appropriating the appropriators, and was a sophisticated, cultural equivalent to colonial resistance, the occupation of land by peasants, or the takeover of factories by workers.⁵

Appropriation art is close to, but distinct from, the copy, the replica or the forgery.⁶ Copying was an essential element of academic art training from the 17th Century onwards, informed by the assumption that emulation of the masters of antiquity was the best way of gaining competence. During the same period, replication involved artists or supervised apprentices creating versions of a studio's popular work to satisfy the demand of more than one patron. In theory, at least, the copy and the replica can both be clearly differentiated from the fake or forgery, understood as an unauthorized work that aims to be recognized as an 'original'. In the 20th Century, famous forgers included Han van Meegeren, a Vermeer specialist, and Elmyr de Hory who copied numerous famous artists and provided the inspiration for the Orson Welles film *F for Fake* (1974). Copying, replicating or forging might seem apt terms to describe the re-photographing of reproductions of the thirties work of Walker Evans by Sherrie Levine. Unlike van Meegeren or de Hory, however, Levine draws attention to her actions and intentions with a title like *Untitled (After Walker Evans)* (1981) and the addition of her own name. Note also Eric Doeringer, whose series *Bootlegs* includes an inkjet print of an Evans photograph used by Levine with the title *Sherrie Levine (Walker Evans)* (2007), mischievously implying that Levine's questioning of Walker's authority has been a way of establishing her own.⁷ Many of the wilder claims relating to the activities of the New York appropriationists have now been abandoned or seriously modified. In addition, the term appropriation art is no longer centred on one American city around 1980, and regularly crops up in the writings on very diverse topics, including Feminism, Post-colonialism and Post-communism.⁸

Post-communism is another term that can give rise to confusion. Usually, it refers to those states that emerged after the implosion of the Soviet Union and its Central and East European satellites, as well as Yugoslavia, between 1989 and the early 1990s. It is also used to describe dissident currents within Communist states whose activities pre-dated formal collapse at the political level. Thus, the artists collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK), probably best known for its musical wing called *Laibach*, can be generally characterized as Post-communist.⁹ However, the NSK existed for around a decade before Slovenia broke away from Yugoslavia to become an early, internationally recognized, Post-communist state in 1990. Comparable distinctions are made within a Soviet context, so art theorist Boris Groys champions what he calls Moscow Conceptualism (for him, a major instance of cultural Post-communism that had been operating since the 1970s) yet the Soviet Union was only dissolved in December 1991.¹⁰ In both of my examples, then Post-communism can simultaneously refer to a dissident cultural phenomenon within a Communist state, and the political form that emerges after the disappearance of a Communist state.

And the third term that requires some initial commentary is the photo-book. Not all books of photographs are photo-books. The latter, it is widely assumed, refer to one or more printed volumes which foreground the work of a photographer who frequently takes an active part in the overall design. Such a description can be applied to most of the items in *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century*, the recent guide by Andrew Roth and others that helped launch the current enthusiasm for the photo-book as an object to be analyzed and collected.¹¹ Yet it is worth noting that this book also contains a number of publications in which a writer is also clearly credited. *La Banlieue de Paris* (Paris, 1949), for instance, is primarily photographs by Robert Doisneau with an introduction and captions by writer Blaise Cendrars whose better-known name dominates the cover. In contrast, writer James

Agee and photographer Walker Evans are given the same prominence on the cover of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston, 1941), as are Paul Éluard and Man Ray on the cover of *Facile* (Paris, 1935), a book combining poetry and photography.¹²

The name of Heiner Müller is more conspicuous than that of Sibylle Bergemann on the dust-jacket of *A Spectre is leaving Europe*. Yet the book is more than poems supplemented by photographs. Rather, it is a photo-book in which images and poems are given equal status, and in this respect is comparable to the otherwise very different *Facile*. It is a *Post-communist* photo-book in both senses of the term. That is, the critiques by Müller and Bergemann of 'Actually Existing Socialism'¹³ pre-date the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, but this particular book also deals with that collapse as recent history. And finally, it is a Post-communist photo-book as *appropriation* most obviously in the sense that Bergemann de- and re-contextualizes photographs that were originally made for the Party.

2

A Spectre is leaving Europe includes ten poems by Heiner Müller plus a suite of photographs by Sibylle Bergemann that officially record the creation and installation of what proved to be one of the last Communist monuments in Europe. In 1974, East German sculptor Ludwig Engelhardt received a commission to create a memorial spot for Marx and Engels in East Berlin that would have a sculpture of the two founders of Communism as its central focus, and in 1986 the Marx-Engels Forum was officially opened by the President and Party leader, Erich Honecker. (The statue is still standing, though the parliamentary building originally behind it, Erich Honecker, and the German Democratic Republic, are all long gone.)¹⁴

Sibylle Bergemann is a professional photographer, still active in East Berlin. She trained in the mid-sixties with the established photographer Arno Fischer whom she married in 1985. For several decades, Bergemann worked as a photojournalist and fashion photographer in the GDR, as well being hired for different types of Party work that included research trips abroad with her husband. In certain respects, then, she was a cultural worker above suspicion, specializing in a medium that was widely believed to be a minor, yet useful, art form. In general, the Party assumed that photography's "immediacy and its unique ability to appear factual" made it the perfect "didactic tool for imaging the utopian collective".¹⁵ In addition, Party leaders "manipulated the medium's special relationship with "reality" in order to imprison individualism" and they "surreptitiously used – and abused – the various definitions of photographic "truth" to build up their personal power".¹⁶ In short, Communist regimes like the GDR valued photography's reputation as hard evidence, making it the medium of preference for adding visual credibility to their various projects.

The Party's underestimation of the critical potential of photography also provided opportunities and recent commentators have been keen to identify Bergemann as a discreet dissident. Such a perspective informed her recent retrospective at the German Academy of the Arts, Berlin. The catalogue essay of Matthias Flügge, for example, associates her with the "subjective 'author' photography" that emerged in the GDR in the 1970s, and the photographs "demonstrate her ability to penetrate far below the polished surfaces of an apparently controlled, pseudo-egalitarian society".¹⁷ For Flügge, her "magnum opus" is the documentation of the Marx–Engels Forum: "images which showed what the end would be, right at the beginning"; "icons of futility".¹⁸ Appropriately, one of these 'icons' is used as the frontispiece for the catalogue – the photograph from 1984 of the half-built Marx–Engels monument, ambiguously tied down with ropes. The same image is also on

the cover of the catalogue for the major exhibition *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* (Los Angeles, 2009). The reason for this prominent position appears in a catalogue note by Jodi Kovach:

Sibylle Bergemann's photographs reveal another insidious side of the GDR, through her use of the uncanny. In one picture of the installation of the Marx–Engels monument in Berlin, Engels appears to hang facedown from a noose. In another shot showing a construction sight in Gummelin, the figures look like human bodies cut cleanly in half. Without knowledge of the dates these photographs were taken, one could readily presume that they are documents of Communist monuments being dismantled. But more importantly, the division of identity that they suggest still resonates today.¹⁹

Flügge and Kovach both suggest that the Party was getting more than it bargained for when it hired Bergemann. What it wanted was neutral documentation, and what it got was a photographic record permeated with unofficial ideas and sentiments that would now be termed Post–communist.

Bergemann did production shots for Heiner Müller, another critic from within, who was tolerated by the East German authorities because of his international reputation as a poet and playwright who had supposedly inherited the mantle of one of the GDR's cultural heroes, Bertolt Brecht.²⁰ Bergemann gave Müller a set of her photographs of the Marx–Engels project as a present, and one can assume that he would have instantly appreciated their sly dissidence. He had them lying around in his apartment for a few years and started to think about using them when Communist monuments throughout Central and Eastern Europe were being wrecked rather than erected.²¹

As Kovach notes, examining the photographs now, the viewer is drawn into a mental montage with post-1989 history as the activating element that unveils the pretensions of pre-1989 Communist ideology. Bergemann's new edit emphasizes this contrast. In general, the sequence proceeds chronologically from 1975 to 1986, but an obvious absence is a concluding image showing Honecker and associates officially unveiling the monument that had been a decade in the making. Instead, the only photograph showing the completed monument was taken in May 1990, between the opening of the Wall (November 1989) and formal re-unification (October 1990). (The choice of month is obviously an ironic reference to May Day that was an important date in the calendar of the former regime.) Significantly, this photograph opens the new sequence and depicts casually dressed tourists clambering over Marx and Engels for a souvenir snap. That is, the once feared founders of Communism have been reduced to tourist *kitsch*. Her new choice of concluding image is equally significant – an installation shot from 1986 that Kovach refers to above, in which Engels appears to be noosed.

The dust-jacket of the collaboration between Müller and Bergemann shows her now widely distributed photograph of the roped, half-built monument plus the title *A Spectre Is leaving Europe*. Together, image and text convey a straightforward, ironic message, but the dust-jacket is not a premonition of what is to follow. On the contrary, Müller's poems and Bergemann's simply captioned photographs occupy their own space, an extreme instance of what Brecht would have called a "separation of elements".²² What, then, are Müller's poems about? And how do they relate to the photographs? *An Explosion of a Memory* is the title of an earlier piece of writing that seems appropriate to describe poetry triggered by the events of 1989.²³ Take the opening poem:

Light rain is on the light dust
The willows of the inn-yard
Will be growing greener and greener,
But you, Sir, had better take wine ere your departure,
For you will have no friends about you
When you come to the gates of Go.

(Rihaku / Ezra Pound)²⁴

Müller translates into German a poem by Ezra Pound that he in turn had translated into English from the Chinese of the 8th Century court poet Rihaku, also known as Li Po or Li Bai. Müller clearly sees parallels between Pound's support for Italian Fascism and his own support for East German Communism, two examples of modern court poets supping with the devil and subsequently experiencing isolation and opprobrium. Müller's isolation is exacerbated by an awareness that disillusionment with Soviet-oriented Communism by no means involved endorsement of the Western alternative enthusiastically embraced by many of his fellow citizens in 1989:

On the tube I see my compatriots
With hands and feet vote against the truth
That forty years ago was my own
What grave will protect me from my youth?²⁵

His 'explosion' intertwines the personal, the political and the literary. Most books involving photography and poetry have some kind of dialogue between the two media but this not the case in *A Spectre is leaving Europe*. Here, words and appropriated images offer separate perspectives on the end of an era.

3

Another way of assessing *A Spectre is leaving Europe* is to compare it with an earlier photo-book by Bertolt Brecht that used a different type of appropriated source material. Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*) was originally published in East Berlin in 1955 and represents his most elaborate, practical engagement with photography.²⁶ The book is mainly a collection of photographs that Brecht clipped from newspapers and magazines during the Second World War to which he added his own captions in the form of four-line verses. The book's appearance in the mid-fifties is significant. Of course, it deals with the recent war from which the German Democratic Republic drew its legitimacy as the 'better' Germany, anti-Fascist and pro-Soviet. And it is by Brecht, consolidating the reputation of the GDR as the rightful heir of the progressive culture of Weimar Germany. In addition, it confirms that at this point anyway, there was some tolerance of inventive work with photographs. Indeed, Brecht's *War Primer* sits comfortably in any expansive history of appropriation art.

Primers are usually elementary textbooks for teaching children how to read, and *War Primer* is aimed at adults who wish to learn some fundamental lessons about modern warfare from a Marxist perspective. *War Primer* was edited by Ruth Berlau who also provided an introductory note that challenges the idea that the meaning of a press photograph is self-evident:

The great ignorance concerning social relations, an ignorance nursed carefully and brutally by capitalism, reduces thousands of photos in illustrated journals to hieroglyphs which are undecipherable for the unsuspecting reader.²⁷

War Primer was offered, therefore, as a practical manual with Brecht's epigrams demonstrating how to 'read' or 'translate' a press photograph. The implication is that press photographs can be a valuable source of knowledge and an aid to critical remembering, if they are correctly captioned.

War Primer was mainly put together in World War Two when Brecht was in exile and deprived of a regular theatre audience. It can be plausibly described as the continuation of epic theatre by other means. Take the *gest*.²⁸ For Brecht, the term refers encompasses all of the elements – a style of acting, costume, lighting and props, for instance – that cumulatively draw out the social significance of an action, and epic theatre proceeds through an accumulation of *gests*. As a theatre director, Brecht was able to construct his *gests*, but as a 'photo-epigrammist' he had to make do with appropriated press photographs that had *gestic* potential. A good example is a 'photo-epigram' originally made in 1940 involving a photograph of Hitler amiably shaking hands with an elderly woman. Where Brecht found this image is unknown but it was widely distributed in Germany in the mid-thirties as a sticker to be collected and inserted in an album devoted to Adolf Hitler.²⁹ This particular sticker was destined for a chapter in the album called 'Der Führer and das deutsche Volk', written by Dr Otto Dietrich, Press Chief of the Third Reich, with the caption 'Am Tage der Saarrückgliederung' (Day of the Return of the Saar) In 1935 a plebiscite took place in the Saarland and a majority voted for the restoration to Germany of a region that had been administered by the League of Nations since 1919. For Hitler, the plebiscite was the first victory in an ongoing campaign to reverse the Treaty of Versailles, and in the photograph *Führer and Volk* savour the moment. Brecht's epigram reads:

Suffer the old women to come unto me
That they may glimpse, before their graves close o'er them

The man their sons obeyed so faithfully
As long as he had graves still waiting for them.³⁰

Hitler's messianic pretensions are conveyed in the opening line that re-phrases the words of Jesus: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." (Mark 10:14) Unlike Jesus, Hitler can only greet mothers because their sons are elsewhere, fighting and dying to supposedly liberate Germany. In 1940 Brecht re-views an image of triumph from the mid-thirties and notes premonitions of tragedy: Hitler is now the ersatz saviour whose swastika armband is a perversion of the Christian cross; the older woman's black clothes become mourning shrouds; and the touch of the leader's hand is paltry consolation for the loss of a son. In short, the 'photo-epigram' reverses the original message.

The *fable*³¹ is another important dimension of epic theatre that informs *War Primer*. Brecht's plays avoid the suspense associated with much conventional drama. Instead, the audience is given the pleasure of assessing a new treatment of familiar material. *War Primer* attempts something comparable. It is taken for granted that the meaning of the recent past, especially the Second World War and its aftermath, is fiercely contested, and it encourages reflection on rival interpretations. One *fable* associated with the Federal Republic of Germany emphasized the war as a victory of democracy over National Socialism. Yet the triumphant revival and extension of the freedoms associated with the Weimar Republic after 1945 was compromised as long as the misnamed German Democratic Republic was under the control of a Soviet regime as authoritarian in its own way as the Third Reich. And another *fable* came from the GDR. This version stressed the role of the Soviet Union in defeating National Socialism. The latter was not an aberration. Rather it was a dictatorial response to capitalism in crisis, and potentially a new Hitler could emerge in the FRG if another economic crisis developed. Such a scenario was only unimaginable in those states that had gone

beyond capitalism: the Soviet Union and its allies. *War Primer* is a critique of the first fable, without being a straightforward endorsement of the second. Brecht's political sympathies are evident, but there are no glib answers. Rather, there are no winners and many losers in a *fable* that resists easy appropriation by either Germany.³²

Umfunktionierung (functional transformation) is another key aspect of epic theatre that is found in *War Primer*. Within theater, Brecht sought to overhaul an invention of the Ancient Greeks to create a relevant forum to "expose the present"³³ and in *War Primer* he aimed to "re-function" the epigram, also invented by the Ancient Greeks. For them, the epigram was a form of lapidary verse – concise and dignified, and to be inscribed on stone monuments, especially for funerary purposes. Brecht uses his epigrams as alternative captions to photographs that he clipped from the illustrated press, mainly during the Second World War. He called them 'photo-epigrams', a new hybrid that paradoxically linked a visual form associated with the ephemeral news media of the 20th Century and an ancient verse form intended to last for eternity. Indeed, if the choice of the epigram is meant to suggest ancient inscriptions, then the press photograph can be understood as equivalent to the ancient statue or building for which the epigram was originally intended. From this perspective, *War Primer* can be considered a series of portable monuments, flat memorials to the Second World War that are intended to aid critical remembrance.³⁴ Needless to say, Brecht's ideas about poor monuments never caught on, and the photographs of Bergemann show that the Party leadership continued to prefer monuments based on solid 19th Century precedents.

4

War Primer (1955) and *A Spectre is leaving Europe* (1990) frame the emergence and demise of the GDR and can be usefully compared. Consider the respective uses

of photography. Brecht selects imagery found in what he would have termed the bourgeois or capitalist press and 're-functions' them to draw out different, revolutionary messages. There are obvious affinities with, say, Heartfield's photomontages of the thirties that often involved 're-functioning' images from establishment picture agencies. But Brecht's 'photo-epigrams' should also be put in a wider frame that includes Eisenstein's films, Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas* and the picture editing of Georges Bataille for the journal *Documents*.³⁵ Within this context, *War Primer* is perhaps the last great achievement of a montage culture focusing on the photograph as historical document that emerged in the 1920s and was especially powerful in Central and Eastern Europe in the interwar years. Bergemann's later appropriations take for granted the thorough institutionalization by the GDR establishment of interwar revolutionary montage, and she attempts something very different. That is, her own photographs are 're-functioned' to emphasize a subtle critique that her Party patrons overlooked. More importantly, their new appearance in 1990 has them stripped of the authority associated with pro-Soviet Communism and makes them analogous to the artefacts of the *Ancien Régime* and Church that became re-defined as mere art objects in the early 19th Century.

The poetry in each book is also very different. *War Primer* is informed by Brecht's model of an epic theatre with a 'collection of people with a desire to improve the world, listening to a report about the world'.³⁶ Müller rejects this model, especially from the 1970s onwards. Instead, he is drawn to a theatre that permits a flow of memories, fantasies and illusions, without the constraints of officially-sanctioned, prescriptive blueprints, and a similar desire to resist interpretation permeates his poems for *A Spectre is leaving Europe*. These differences between the two poet-playwrights can be further clarified by examining their respective attitudes towards photography.

Berlau's description of the press photograph as a 'hieroglyph' in need of translation that precedes the first edition of *War Primer* re-echoes earlier remarks by Brecht. In 1930 he endorsed the Communist illustrated journal *A.I.Z.* (Heartfield's main platform in the 1930s) with the following statement:

The tremendous development of photojournalism has contributed practically nothing to the revelation of the truth about the conditions of this world. On the contrary, photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon against truth. The vast amount of picture material that is being disgorged daily by the press and that seems to have the character of truth serves in reality only to obscure the facts. The camera is just as capable of lying as is the typewriter. The task of the *A.I.Z.*, which is to restore the truth, is of paramount importance under these circumstances and it seems to me that it fulfills this purpose extremely well.³⁷

In the above, he is juxtaposing true and false photographs. But in another well-known quotation from 1930 he suggests that the false image can be made true with appropriate editing:

The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So

there is indeed 'something to construct', something 'artificial', 'invented'. Hence, there is in fact a need for art. But the old concept of art, derived from experience, is obsolete.³⁸

This statement has been interpreted in various ways, for instance, as an endorsement of photomontage, or the staged photograph, or seriality. In Brecht's case, though, the 'photo-epigram' can be considered his practical demonstration how to make the mute photograph 'speak' the truth.

Müller refers to this quotation in an interview from 1981:

Here realism doesn't work at all, only stylization works, because East Germany is not photographable – a variation of Brecht's remark that a photograph of the Krupp Works says nothing really about the Krupp Works.³⁹

Here, Müller's advocacy of 'stylization' seems close to Brecht's notion of the 'artificial' or 'invented' that are required to make naturalistic photography a critical medium. On other occasions, though, he simply rules out the possibility of photography being an aid to understanding the past:

I don't believe photography is an instrument of memory. Language is memory and images are not. Images are too abstract. That's their danger: you blot out memory with these kinds of images. You don't remember the image, you remember your reaction to it. Memory is work, it's not something you can contemplate.⁴⁰

Müller's scepticism about photography was obviously underpinned by his experience in an authoritarian regime that used the medium to record and encourage a bogus collectivist cultural heritage, as well as his awareness of how the complexity of collapse of the GDR became reduced to a small number of emblematic images circulated by news media around the world.

In *A Spectre is leaving Europe*, Müller wants to write about that which cannot be photographed, and Bergemann wants to draw out what was in her photographs all along but which her Party patrons failed to notice. Together, they offer complementary instances of what Groys has termed "privatization of the communist myth".⁴¹

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Footnotes

1. Heiner Müller and Sibylle Bergemann, *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990).
2. Manifesto of the Communist Party' in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (London Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 35.
3. Sven Lütticken, *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), p. 40.
4. Louis Aragon, 'The Challenge to Painting' (1930) in: David Evans, ed., *Appropriation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery / Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), p. 28.
5. For a comprehensive assessment of this moment see: Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).
6. The various terms are analyzed in depth in: Hillel Schwarz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996).

7. Both works were included in the stimulating exhibition *Seconde Main* (Paris: Le Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2010).
8. Evans (2009) is deliberately expansive, and includes a section on Post-communism.
9. Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).
10. Boris Groys, Max Hollein, Manuel Fontán del Junco, eds., *Total Enlightenment: Moscow Conceptual Art 1960–1990* (Ostfildern Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2008).
11. Andrew Roth et al, *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (New York: PPP Editions in association with Roth Horowitz LLC, 2001).
12. Roth (2001), pp. 86–87, 108–109 and 132–133.
13. The term is particularly associated with the East German dissident Rudolf Bahro. See: Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Socialism* (London: New Left Books, 1978).
14. Peter Voigt, 'Nachwort' in Müller and Bergemann (1990), np.
15. Karl Gernot Kuehn, *Caught: The Art of Photography in the German Democratic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. ix.
16. Kuehn (1997), p. ix–x.
17. Matthias Flügge, 'Sibylle Bergemann's Photographs' in: Sibylle Bergemann, *Photographien* (Heidelberg, Edition Braus, 2006), p. 14–15.
18. Flügge (2006), p. 15.
19. JK (Jodi Kovach) in: Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, eds, *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art / New York: Abrams, 2009), p. 344.
20. See, for example, *New German Critique 8* (Spring 1976), a special issue devoted to Brecht, Müller and their relations in theatre; and more recently, Jonathan Kalb, *The Theatre of Heiner Müller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
21. Conversation between Sibylle Bergemann and the author, Berlin, 1992.
22. In a note to accompany his opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, Brecht considers the different emphases of dramatic and epic theatre. In the latter, "the great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production ... can

- simply be by-passed by radically separating the elements." See: Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' (1930) in John Willett, ed. and translator, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 37. For a re-assessment of this notion, see: Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 70–78, 144–5.
23. Heiner Müller, *Explosion of a Memory: writings* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1989), edited and translated by Carl Weber.
 24. Müller and Bergemann (1990), np. I am using here Pound's version in English.
 25. 'SELBSTKRITIK' in Müller and Bergemann, op cit, np. I cite the English translation by Carl Weber: 'SELF-CRITIQUE' in Heiner Müller, *The Battle: plays, prose, poems* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1989), p. 176.
 26. Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfiabel* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1955). An English-language version finally appeared over forty years later: Bertolt Brecht, *War Primer* (London: Libris, 1998), translated and edited with an afterword and notes by John Willett.
 27. Ruth Berlau in *Brecht* (1955), np, my translation.
 28. For an overview of this notion, including problems of translation, see: Jameson (1998), pp. 99–105.
 29. *Adolf Hitler: Bilder aus dem Leben des Führers* (Altona-Bahrenfeld: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, 1936), p. 20.
 30. This early 'photo-epigram', date 15th October 1940, is in: Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955* (London: Methuen, 1993), translated by Hugh Rorrison, edited by John Willett, p. 106. It is not included in the 1955 edition of *Kriegsfiabel*, but appears in the English-language edition of 1998 as 'photo-epigram' 27. See note 26 above.
 31. See the discussion in Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' (1949) in Willett (1978), pp. 200–2.
 32. For further discussion on the two Germanys and their rival historical 'fables' see Gerd Knischewski and Ulla Spittler 'Memories of the Second World War and National Identity in Germany', in: Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, eds, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), pp. 239–254.
 33. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' in: Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, (London: NLB, 1973), edited and translated by Stanley Mitchell, p.100.

34. See David Evans, 'Brecht's War Primer: the 'photo-epigram' as poor monument', *Afterimage* 30:5 (March–April 2003), pp. 8–9.
35. This broader frame is emphasized in Georges Didi–Huberman, 'Bertolt Brecht ABC de la guerre, 1955', *Un Numéro de Choix, artpress Trimestriel* no 5 (May–July 2007), included in Evans (2009) as 'Modest Masterpiece: Brecht's War Primer (1955)', pp. 32–4.
36. Brecht (1993), p. 207.
37. Cited in: Heinz Willmann, *Geschichte der Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung 1921–1938* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975), p. 125.
38. Cited in: Marc Silberman, ed. and translator, *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio* (London: Methuen, 2000), pp. 164–5.
39. Heiner Müller, 'Intelligence without Experience: interview with Harun Farocki' (1981) in Heiner Müller, *Germania* (New York: Semiotexte(e), 1990), p. 161.
40. Sylvère Lotringer and Heiner Müller, 'Introduction' (1989) in Müller (1990), p. 79.
41. Boris Groys and John–Paul Stonard, 'Boris Groys in Conversation', *Immediations* No. 4 (London: 2007), p. 137.

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Brecht's War Primer: the "photo-epigram" as poor monument

David Evans

Kriegsfibel (literally, *War Primer*) is a collection of what Bertolt Brecht called "photo-epigrams" – four line verses captioning photographs clipped from newspapers and magazines. They were mainly composed during World War II, while Brecht was living in Scandinavia and the United States as an exile from Nazi Germany. Edited by his Danish collaborator, Ruth Berlau, they were finally published as a book in 1955 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Brecht's home base from 1949 until his death in 1956. Astonishingly, an English language edition only appeared in 1998.¹ This book merits attention for two reasons: first, it represents Brecht's most sustained, practical engagement with photography and second, it was notably absent in the discussions about Brecht and photography which reached their apogee in the 1970s, in Britain at least.

The title, *War Primer*, deliberately recalls the textbooks used to teach elementary school children how to read. Brecht's "primer" also has a didactic function, but aims to teach visual literacy to adults. In her introductory note, Berlau challenges the idea that the meaning of a press photograph is self-evident: "The great ignorance concerning social relations, an ignorance nursed carefully and brutally by capitalism, reduces thousands of photos in illustrated journals to hieroglyphs which are undecipherable for the unsuspecting reader".² Like an ancient hieroglyph, the press photograph is "undecipherable" for anyone who lacks the appropriate training. Brecht's book is

offered, therefore, as a practical manual, demonstrating how to “read” or “translate” press photographs. At the same time, it seeks to provide some basic lessons about the nature of modern warfare.

The place and date of publication (the GDR, 1955) is significant. Attempts to publish the book in the early 1950s had run into difficulties, ultimately related to global politics. The start of the Cold War had encouraged the Soviet Union to maintain a tight grip on its satellites in Central and Eastern Europe, including the GDR. Culturally, this meant the strict imposition of Socialist Realism, and it was now reduced to a crude checklist which allowed any cultural artifact to be categorized as progressive or reactionary. Initially, *War Primer* posed problems for cultural inspectors. Most obviously because it does not present World War II as a modern morality tale whose conclusion confirms the superiority of the Soviet system. Yet by the mid-1950s the situation was more favorable for Brecht’s book. The Cold War was not over but a temporary lessening of international tensions was discernible, registered by the meeting of Soviet and Western leaders at the Geneva Summit Conference in July, 1955. Socialist Realism was not abandoned, but it was less rigidly defined. This was the moment when the project developed in World War II could finally be published as a book.

While working on *War Primer* in the early 1940s, Brecht kept workbooks that also contained press photographs, including early examples of the “photo-epigrams.” This material became part of the *Arbeitsjournal*,³ published in English as *Journals 1934–1955*.⁴ In a rare English-language review of the original German edition, John Brady notes that Brecht appears to be using the illustrated press as raw data for the ongoing training of an epic dramatist in exile, who was deprived of a regular theater audience.⁵ *War Primer*, too, can be approached as a continuation of epic theater by other means.

The Gest

For Brecht, the gest has a restrictive and an expansive meaning. Restrictively, it refers to an approach to acting which assumes that an understanding of the world comes from the observation of human behavior. The epic actor uses gestures, but not every gesture constitutes a gest. "Only when the strutting takes place over corpses do we get the social gest of Fascism" notes Brecht.⁶ In other words, the gest always aims to foreground the social significance of an action. Expansively, the gest refers to the complete scene within which every component – costume, lighting, props, scenery – contribute to elicit the social theme. Epic theater proceeds through an accumulation of gests, resulting in a calculated jerkiness. Thus, for Walter Benjamin, Brecht's theater "proceeds by fits and starts, in a manner comparable to the images on a film strip".⁷

There are affinities between epic theater and cinema, but Brecht is also drawing on older traditions, explored in Barthes' essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein".⁸ For Barthes, the gest reworks the idea of the "pregnant moment" which is closely related to an earlier formulation of the "perfect instant". Diderot draws attention to the similarities between theater and painting. The rectangular theater stage is compared to the picture frame, and the succession of theater scenes are related to a series of pictures. For Diderot, the ideal theater scene or painting is a tableau which conveys a clear didactic message. This is to be achieved through a composition which gives maximum emphasis to the "perfect instant" – a significant moment which condenses past, present and future. The ideal play or exhibition of paintings is an accumulation of tableaux. Within painting, Diderot's role model is Jean-Baptiste Greuze who specialized in scenes from middle class life like *The Return of the Prodigal Son* ("Morality in paint" according to Diderot). Brecht abandons this Christian morality but retains a commitment to the tableau or gest as an appropriate means for teaching his audience about "the scientific age."

As a theatre director, Brecht was able to construct his geste. As a “photo–epigrammist”, he had to make do with found imagery which had “gestic” potential.

The *Journals* contain early instances of Brecht working on press photographs that caught his eye. In 1940 Brecht saved an image from a National Socialist publication that shows Hitler’s Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, taking leave of Mussolini. He commented sardonically, “What a wealth of material for the theatre there is in the fascist illustrated weeklies. These poseurs understand the art of epic theatre, giving banal events a touch of the historic.”⁹

Another press cutting in the *Journals* features the British Viceroy and his entourage in New Delhi, capital of the British Raj. Taken in 1942, the image captures the pomp and ceremony of imperial business as usual. Yet the Japanese had already invaded Burma, precipitating a train of events that rapidly led to the end of the British Empire. Laconically, Brecht observed that “war, the great dialectician, puts every organ to the test.”¹⁰ His caption efficiently converts a routine image of empire and ornament into a confirmation of the fragility and transience of all forms of political domination. Imperial gestures become part of a geste.

A similar “gestic” approach to photography also informs the “photo–epigrams.” One example included in the *Journals* shows a newspaper photograph of Hitler amiably shaking hands with an older woman. The accompanying poem reads:

Suffer the old women to come unto me
That they may glimpse, before their graves close o’er them
The man their sons obeyed so faithfully
As long as he had graves still waiting for them.¹¹

The poem represents Hitler's private thoughts. His messianic pretensions are conveyed in the opening line which rephrase the words of Jesus in Mark 10:14, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Unlike Jesus, Hitler can only greet mothers because their sons are elsewhere, fighting and dying to supposedly liberate Germany. Through the epigram, a routine publicity shot becomes a *gest*. Hitler is now the ersatz savior whose swastika armband is a perversion of the Christian cross, the older woman's black clothes become mourning shrouds and the touch of the leader's hand is paltry consolation for the loss of a son.

The Fable

Brecht's epic theater presents a "fable" or "story." The intention is to offer a version of familiar material that an audience could relate to, other versions allowing the audience to identify the particularity of an "epic" approach. Instead of the suspense associated with much conventional drama, Brecht's plays offer the pleasures of comparative assessment. *War Primer* is also a "fable," seeking a critical reader who can recognize that the meaning of the past, including the recent past, is fiercely contested. Brecht's book offers one perspective. It assumes the existence of others and invites critical comparison, most notably with the rival "fables" about World War II that came from two antagonistic Germanys.¹²

In 1949, two German states were founded. The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was oriented towards the U.S. and its allies in Western Europe. The German Democratic Republic (East Germany) was under Soviet influence. Containment of Germany had been a major concern of the allies meeting in Potsdam in 1945, however, the formal division of Germany into two states registered the ways in which attempts

to create a postwar order merged into what became known as the Cold War. The term was first used in 1947 to describe the emerging tensions between the former allies of World War II. The Soviet Union confronted the U.S., and each power laid claim to a different part of the former German enemy.

The origins of the two Germanys ensured the interpretations of World War II became an important factor in their ideological rivalry from an early date. The inauguration of commemorative days was complemented by exhibitions, monuments and school curricula. Cumulatively, the two German states sought legitimation with rival histories and, ultimately, rival political theories. What was National Socialism? What was Communism? What was representative democracy? How were these different state forms related? The two Germanys asked the same questions but offered divergent answers. West Germany Stressed its democratic constitution and political institutions, bringing it in line with Western partners like the U.S. National Socialism was treated as a regrettable antidemocratic aberration that terminated in 1945 Defeated, it posed no threat to the revival and extension of the Weimar experiment. Rather, the danger came from Soviet Communism. Not only had this authoritarian infamy outlived National Socialism to which it was comparable, but it now menacingly occupied German territory via its equally authoritarian puppet, the misnamed German Democratic Republic.

East Germany rejected this “fable.” National Socialism was treated as a dictatorial response to capitalism in crisis in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Capitalism still existed in West Germany in the 1950s, but, potentially, another economic crisis could cause West Germany to abandort its democratic facade and welcome a new Hitler. Such a seenario was only unimaginable in those states that had gone beyond capitalism: the Soviet Union and its allies. Under Communism, public planning and collectivization created an equitable economic infrastructure. For the first time in human history,

popular sovereignty had a material basis. In this respect, the soviet system was an advance on those so-called representative democracies (like West Germany or the U.S.) that in reality, merely represented the interests of the dominant economic groups. Communism, rather than bourgeois democracy, represented the surest defense against its reawakening.

War Primer was first submitted to an East German publisher in 1949, but various objections delayed its appearance until 1955. In the tense, early years of the Cold War, even orthodoxy caused problems. One disputed "photo-epigram" deals with the National Socialists' invasion of the Soviet Union. Brecht's starting point is an American press cutting in which a photographic portrait of a German soldier is placed next to that of his Soviet counterpart. The similarities of subject matter, size and composition create a mirror image, implying that the invading Wehrmacht and the defending Red Army are somehow compatible. Under the images, Brecht comments:

Here are two brothers, brought in armoured trucks
To quarrel over one brother's land!
So cruelly the tamed elephant attacks
His brother, the unbroken elephant.¹³

Brecht's text is not a frontal attack on the disingenuousness of an anonymous picture editor. Rather, the mirror image becomes a starting point for a fable concerning two elephant brothers with radically different characters. Instead of "the reductive weapons of demystification," the poem deploys "caresses" and "amplifications", Barthes's terms to characterize what he considers an admirable and distinctive feature of Brecht's Marxist criticism.¹⁴ The end result is an oblique, but unambiguous, "photo-epigram" about Wehrmacht aggression and Red Army resistance. However, the

qualities admired by Barthes were lost on East German officialdom. In this case, there was objection to the two photographs that “sweep under the mat the significance of the Soviet Union’s Great Patriotic War.”¹⁵

Soviet triumphalism is absent in Brecht’s book. There are no winners and many losers in a “fable” which resists easy appropriation by any actually existing state, including the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the “fable” of *War Primer* poses two difficult questions. First, what are the social forces that unleash two world wars in which over half of the roughly fifty million fatalities in the second are civilians? Second, what form of social co-operation is required to prevent a third? Brecht’s political sympathies are evident, but there are no glib answers.

Functional Transformation

For Brecht, the tale told cannot be divorced from the means of telling. Hence his preoccupation with the *Umfunktionierung* – or “functional transformation” – of artistic methods of production, distribution and consumption. Within theater, his achievement is to overhaul an invention of the Ancient Greeks to create a relevant forum to “expose the present.”¹⁶ A comparable achievement in *War Primer* is to “re-function” the epigram, also invented by the Ancient Greeks, and the modern press photograph.

Today an epigram is generally defined as any short poem with a witty ending. However, its meaning was more specialized for the Ancient Greeks who viewed it as the appropriate form of poetry to be inscribed on stone monuments, especially for funerary purposes. To be successful, it had to be concise, dignified and durable; in short, lapidary (from the Latin lapis, stone). This is the adjective acutely chosen by

Walter Benjamin to characterize the style of an earlier series of Brecht poems (without photographs) called *German War Primer*. Benjamin compares the poems to ancient inscriptions, brief and intended for the instruction of future generations.¹⁷ He died in 1940, before Brecht resumed work on a revised *War Primer*. Nevertheless, he had correctly identified Brecht's interest in commemorating modern warfare with a form of public verse that drew on ancient precedents.

The most obvious difference between *German War Primer* and *War Primer* is the coupling of epigrams with press photographs in the latter. A starting point for assessing Brecht's views on the illustrated press is a congratulatory message which was published in the Communist *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* in 1931, to celebrate its ten years of existence. According to Brecht.

The tremendous development of photojournalism has contributed practically nothing to the revelation of the truth about the conditions of this world. On the contrary, photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon against truth. The vast amount of picture material that is being disgorged daily by the press and that seems to have the character of truth serves in reality only to obscure the facts. The camera is just as capable of lying as is the typewriter. The task of the A.I.Z., which is to restore the truth, is of paramount importance under these circumstances and it seems to me that it fulfils this purpose extremely well.¹⁸

A.I.Z. sought to encourage contributions from worker photographers. In practice, their efforts were insufficient, and the magazine had to rely on the same picture agencies as the establishment press. Brecht was faced with a comparable challenge. He, too, sought to elicit meanings from material appropriated from publications that rarely shared his political perspective.

War Primer can be understood as the “functional transformation” of mainstream press photographs through the addition of alternative captions, informed by Brecht’s revolutionary politics. But it is more. If the choice of the epigram is meant to suggest ancient inscriptions, then the press photograph can be understood as equivalent to the ancient statue or building for which the epigram was originally intended. That is, *War Primer* is a series of portable monuments, flat memorials to World War II. They register Brecht’s response to two recent phenomena: the proliferation of monuments to commemorate an earlier world war and the rapid development of mass media, both occurring in the 1920s.

World War I had inspired more monuments than any other event in human history. In Britain alone over 36,000 monuments were built and the number was even greater in France and Germany. Quantity was not the sole distinguishing feature. Only a minority of the monuments were devoted to the military leaders. The vast majority, to be found in prominent positions in towns and hamlets across Europe, commemorated the ordinary soldier who had lost his life. The latter were generally the result of small-scale initiatives. Local veterans, the bereaved and dignitaries like priests and politicians took collective responsibility for the whole project, from fund raising to construction, unveiling and maintenance. Such details are of profound significance, revealing elements of democratic participation that mark a decisive break in the history of monuments. State-sponsored, national monuments also registered the originality of World War I as a war of the masses. Even though monuments devoted to war leaders were not entirely ignored, they were overshadowed by attempts to commemorate the “unknown soldier,” as in Lutyen’s Cenotaph (literally “empty tomb”) in Whitehall, London.¹⁹

The proliferation of war memorials in the 1920s coincided with an unprecedented expansion of modern, mass communications. Cinemas, the illustrated press,

advertising hoardings, electronic signs and elaborate shop window displays were to become common features of everyday life across Europe. How could the monument, a form adapted from the age of absolutism, and ultimately antiquity, compete with these novelties? For the Austrian novelist Robert Musil, monuments are “conspicuously inconspicuous” and would only cease to be “invisible” were their creators to adapt the attention-grabbing techniques of modern advertising.²⁰ The redundancy of existing monuments is also implied in the works of German critic Siegfried Krakauer. Writing about the illustrated press in the 1920s, Krakauer notes its stress on topicality. He concludes that “the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory” and that ultimately the appetite for this type of publication is related to the fear of death:

What the photographs, by their sheer accumulation, attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has become entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it.²¹

That is, the illustrated press encourages the very amnesia which war memorials are intended to combat. Unhappy the land that needs monuments and Brecht’s dissatisfaction with them is conveyed in the poem “The Carpet-Weavers of Kuyan-Bulak Honor Lenin.” The poor artisans from a small town in Turkestan wished to honor the deceased Soviet leader. Initially they planned to erect a plaster bust, but eventually, they decided to use the money to buy petroleum to treat a local mosquito-infected swamp:

So they helped themselves by honoring Lenin, and
Honored him by helping themselves, and thus
Had understood him well.²²

War Primer can be understood as an homage to a leader who had little time for traditional monuments. In Brecht's project there are no heroes, no statues, no stone, no bronze, nor even the impermanent plaster favored by Lenin for an abandoned series of temporary monuments to teach revolutionary, proletarian civics. Instead, he uses paper images cut out of newspapers and magazines. For Krakauer, such photographic ephemera are an aid to forgetting. For Brecht, however, they have a potential use value. Combined with his epigrams, the carefully selected images become poor monuments, an aid to critical remembering.

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Footnotes

1. Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1955); Brecht, *War Primer* (London: Libris, 1998).
2. Ruth Berlau, "Preface" In: *Kriegsfibel* op cit, no page number. (This text is omitted in the English-language version.)
3. Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp verlag. 1973).
4. Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955* (London: Methuen, 1993).
5. P.V. Brady, "From Cave-Painting to 'Fotogramm': Brecht, Photography and the *Arbeitsjournal*", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 14:3, July 1978, pages 270–282.
6. Bertolt Brecht, "On Gestic Music" in: John Willett, ed; *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1964), page 105.
7. Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]" in Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London NLB, 1973), page 21.
8. Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" in: Barthes, *Image–Music–Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), pages 69–78. It is worth noting that Barthes' concluding

remarks on a new type of are beyond the tableau are interesting, but not relevant to the discussion here.

9. *Journals*, op cit, pages 103–4.
10. *Journals*, op cit, page 206.
11. *Journals*, op cit, page 106; *War Primer*, op cit, photo–epigram 27. (the translation in *War Primer* is marginally different.)
12. For further discussion on the two Germanys and their rival histories see Gerd Knlschewski and Ulla Spittler, “Memories of the Second World War and National Identity in Germany”, in: Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, eds, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), pages 239–254.
13. *War Primer*. op cit, photo–epigram 65.
14. Roland Barthes, “Brecht and Discourse: A Contribution to the Study of Discursivity” in: Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: university of California Press, 1989), page 216.
15. Cited in John Willett’s “Afterword” to *War Primer*, op cit, page 13. Willett’s “Afterword” and “Notes” on individual photo–epigrams are rich sources of information.
16. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” in: Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, op cit, page 100.
17. Walter Benjamin, “Commentaries on Poems by Brecht” in: Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, op cit, pages 64–66.
18. Cited in: Heinz Willmann, *Geschichte der Arbeiter–Illustrierte Zeitung 1921–1938* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975), page 125.
19. For further information, see: Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870–1997* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998). especially pages 77–92.
20. Robert Musil, “Monuments” in: Musil, Posthumous, *Papers of a Living Author* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pages 61–64.
21. Siegfried Krakauer, “Photography” in: Krakauer, *The Mass Ornament: Welmar Essays* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), page 58. Bertolt Brecht, “The Carpet Weavers of Kuyan–Bulak Honor Lenin” in: Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956* (London: Methuen, 1976), page 175.

21st Century Socialism: Brecht's *War Primer*

Simon Korner

The great poet and playwright Bertold Brecht added four-line epigrams to images from mass-circulation magazines, in order to analyse and expose the brutal workings of capitalism.

In 1947, Bertolt Brecht, aged forty-nine, left the US, where he'd lived during the latter part of the war as a refugee. Two years later, after a period in Switzerland, he settled in the newly established socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), where the *War Primer* was published in 1955. Brecht, by then a major cultural figure in the GDR, director of the Berliner Ensemble theatre, died the following year.

Brecht is known in the UK mostly for his great "teaching" plays (Lehrstücke), such as *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Good Person of Sechuan*, and for his musical *The Threepenny Opera*, written in collaboration with composer Kurt Weill. Less well known are his poems, his critical essays on theatre and realism, his film *Kuhle Wampe* and his *War Primer*. *War Primer*, which wasn't published in English until 1998, is a book of what Brecht called "photo-epigrams", photographs from wartime mass-circulation magazines, mostly from Life, each picture accompanied by a 4-line, rhyming epigram, or short poem, commenting on the photo.

For Brecht, “photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie [was] a terrible weapon against truth”. In *War Primer*, he transformed the epigram – a form of classical Greek poem whose main use was for engravings on stone monuments, hence its brevity – into a kind of caption, reinterpreting the meaning of the original news magazine sources to get at the truth. The work had a “didactic function”, according to Brecht scholar David Evans, the title *War Primer* recalling “the textbooks used to teach elementary school children how to read”. Brecht’s aim was to teach us to understand what the introduction to the original East German edition described as the indecipherable “hieroglyphs” that constituted bourgeois photography. His photo-epigrams were thus designed as modern, portable “monuments” – not stone, not heroic, but practical – to aid future generations in “critical remembering”. The following notes on a selection of 9 of the 85 “photo-epigrams” attempt to show what is so powerful about this work.

2



‘What’s that you’re making, brothers?’ ‘Iron waggons.’ ‘And what about those great steel plates you’re lifting?’ ‘They’re for the guns that blast the iron to pieces.’ ‘And what’s it all for, brothers?’ ‘It’s our living.’

In this epigram, the poet/observer addresses the photograph’s subjects, US steelworkers, who respond as in an interview for a documentary. The reporter is clearly partisan, twice addressing the

men as “brothers”. Their responses are straightforwardly factual, deadpan, without a hint of bitterness or irony – which makes them all the more devastating. The men speak the plain truth like the child pointing out that the emperor has no clothes. By focusing on a basic productive material, steel, Brecht exposes the irrationality of useful products being destroyed by the system that made them – stated as a dull inevitability with no explanation or surprise: “They’re for the guns that blast the iron to pieces”. The last three words “It’s our living” deliver the poem’s full complexity. Having demonstrated the destructive nature of the economic system in a nutshell, Brecht shows the workers’ alienation, their disinterestedness in capitalist wars – their main purpose being to survive, to make a “living”. Brecht takes sides with the workers by viewing the world through their eyes.

22



Far older than their bombers is the
hunger That they’ve unleashed on us.
And to survive We have to earn the
cash to buy provisions So, for survival,
gamble with our lives.

The original caption from a Swedish newspaper was headed “New Source of Income” and followed by a long caption: “London’s poor have found a new source of income. Children gather round the exits of underground

stations, which serve as air-raid shelters. They have reserved places in the shelters and hire them out, with bedding, when there is an alert. Our picture shows a group of youngsters with mattresses and blankets carried in prams." Brecht's epigram transforms this picture of innocuous-sounding entrepreneurialism to reveal the truth – that these children are risking their own lives for money for food, and that it is class oppression that kills – only the weapons vary: poverty, bombs, or both.

24



What you see here, caught in your night defences These steel and glass cocoons for killing people With tons of bombs, are just the consequences For all, and not the causes of the evil.

Brecht's interest in the what things are made of – the steel in **2** above, and here the steel and glass of the bombers – is influenced by Greek epigrams which treated ordinary material utensils as subjects for lyric poems. The bourgeois emphasis on glamorous makes and names of planes is stripped away and the deadly purpose of the bombers becomes the focus. But it isn't a pacifist poem. Brecht asks us to think about what causes

war in the first place – but typically without giving a ready-made answer. This poem provides a stark contrast, almost a riposte, to the decadence of Italian Futurist artist, Marinetti, who wrote about the 1935 Italian invasion of Abyssinia: “War is beautiful because it establishes man’s dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers and small tanks It initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body.”

26



You see me here, eating a simple stew Me, slave to no desire, except for one: World-conquest. That is all I want. From you I have but one request: give me your sons.

Hitler’s folksy image – like that of many leaders today – is destroyed by Brecht, who makes it into an image of sheer cannibalism. There is an echo here of the work of Brecht’s contemporary, John Heartfield, the great German Communist artist, who used photomontage to produce vitriolic images showing the inherently violent nature of fascism.



But when we sighted the red walls
of Moscow People appeared from
farm and factory And they repelled
us in the name of every people Even
the people back in Germany.

Though the picture is of Soviet
partisans, the voice speaking here
is that of the German soldiers of
the Nazi invasion force. Brecht
gives ordinary Germans a voice in
many of these epigrams, making a
clear distinction between the men

and their leaders. The repeated word “people” acts as a refrain, reminding us the commonality of the oppressed. The poem raises the revolutionary idea that being defeated militarily by the “enemy” socialist state was in the soldiers’ own interests.

Alas, poor Yorrick of the burnt-out tank! Upon an axle-shaft your head is set. Your death by fire was for the Domei Bank To whom your parents are still in debt.

This grotesque photo from Life February 1st 1943 has an original caption of its own: “A Japanese soldier’s skull is propped up on a burned-out Jap tank by U.S. troops.



Fire destroyed the rest of the corpse." The use of the word "Jap" here reveals the triumphalism of this image. By addressing the head directly as a fellow human being, Brecht restores its dignity, echoing Hamlet's sympathetic speech on mortality addressed to the skull of Yorrick. The inflated rhetoric of the Shakespeare, followed by the high-flown word-order of "Upon an axle-rod your head is set", is punctured by the blunt down-to-earth "burnt-out tank" and "axle-shaft". This is no pompous war memorial inscription. In the final lines, Brecht provides an explanation, something the bourgeois press photo avoids – a concise analysis of the brutal workings of capitalism. In doing so he

reminds us movingly that the head was once a human being, with parents, who have lost doubly under capitalism. Our feeling is, finally, not the passivity and completeness of pity, but anger, which is as alive and unfinished as the banks' power, and which demands action.

63

A summer day was dawning near Cherbourg A man from Maine came crawling up the sand Supposedly against men from the Ruhr In fact against the men of Stalingrad.



This is a terse, direct reminder of the Western allies' fear and hatred of Communism – always their long-term enemy, more worrying to them than the fascist threat, which they only confronted with reluctance. Years of appeasement had been followed by the phoney war, and the opening of a second front had been delayed in the hope that the Nazi invasion of Russia would destroy Soviet power. D-day began the race for Berlin, whose aim was principally to stop socialism gaining ground in Europe.

74



Worn out by battle, if you only had sufficient strength now for yourselves to fight the world, in death- and birth-pangs, would be glad it took the pains that led to your defeat.

As with epigram 39 above, this poem reminds us that the German working class is not the enemy. If the ordinary soldiers fought for their own class interests they would confront the ruling class – which

would make the suffering of the war worthwhile. The phrase “in death– and birth–pangs” encapsulates the revolutionary hope of the defeat of the old order and the start of a new era of struggle for socialism.

85



Never forget that men like you got hurt
So you might sit there, not the other lot. And now
don't hide your head, and don't desert
But learn to learn, and try to learn for what.

This photograph – intended for a later book *Peace Primer* – was taken from an East German photographic archive. Brecht's epigram can also be found as the third verse of his poem 'To the Students of the Workers' and Peasants' Faculty'. The opening appears conventional, a plea to modern youth to remember and be grateful to those who laid down their lives for their sake – except that the ordinary, spoken tone of “not the other lot” undermines the

usual bourgeois notion of war memorials, where class is never mentioned, and speaks directly to the students of the GDR on their level. The last two lines take us suddenly into a complex thought about the process of education itself, the relationship of the present peace to the recent war. Peace shouldn't lead to ivory-tower scholarship (hiding your head) or forgetting there are still sides to take (deserting), but should be

about developing a class perspective on history and politics. The repetition of “learn”, three times in a single line urges us to think for ourselves, with the last phrase, as so often in these poems, containing the key point – not an answer, only the injunction to the students, and to us, to work out why we need to know, to understand.

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Poetry and Photography: Mastering Reality in the *Kriegsfibel*¹

Tom Kuhn

*The critical literature is notably reticent or uncertain about Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* and its importance. This article seeks to reassess the collection, both by close analysis of selected pages and, above all, by reading the work against two contexts: Brecht's long-standing interest in photography and the pictorial, and his preoccupations of the war years: realism and the lyric. The work emerges as a very considered and carefully constructed cycle with a crucial place in Brecht's ongoing reflections about a cognitive, even interventionist realism.*

Brecht's collection of press cuttings and accompanying epigrams, the *Kriegsfibel*, has suffered a rather peculiarly, not to say scandalously, delayed and attenuated reception. The work is perhaps familiar enough to readers now, even in Britain (especially since the publication of an English translation in 1998), but it is still surprisingly little discussed in the secondary literature, and its place in Brecht's oeuvre is not so much disputed as simply passed over, in confusion over its generic status and its whole import. So I shall start with a descriptive account of a couple of pages from the work. The location of the conference at which this paper originated, not so very far from the City of London, gives me the excuse for my choice of examples: images of the bombing raids over Britain.

The first picture in this short sequence from about a quarter of the way through the work (Nr. 15)² is provided with a caption – possibly by Brecht or Ruth Berlau, or, more

likely, by the designer (Peter Palitzsch) and editors (Günter Kunert and Heinz Seydel) of the first book publication in 1955: "Besatzung eines deutschen Bombers". Brecht's four-line verse beneath the photograph reads as follows:

Wir sind's, die über deine Stadt gekommen
O Frau, die du um deine Kinder bangst!
Wir haben dich und sie aufs Ziel genommen
Und fragst du uns warum, so wiss': aus Angst.

The 1994 edition includes material which it was deemed impolitic to publish in the GDR in the 1950s. The order and numbering of the images in the English edition, *War Primer*, translated and edited by John Willett (London: Libris 1998) differs substantially and includes some pieces which, although they are photo-epigrams, were never part of the original *Kriegsfibel* (there is quite a detailed account of the genesis of the work and a concordance at the back).

The whole book is constructed like this: with a black page on the right providing a frame and context for the newspaper photographs, which take up markedly different amounts of the space on the page; and with a white page on the left, either blank, or with these minimal captions and translations into German of any foreign text included on the newspaper cuttings themselves (mostly from the English or Swedish). The Swedish text above and below the next image (16) reads in English translation: "The City of today. In the course of the air raids the central districts of London have acquired the character of a ruined quarter. This view over the City was taken from St Paul's Cathedral". The verse reads:

So seh ich aus. Nur weil gewisse Leute
Tückisch in andre Richtung flogen als

Ich plante; so wurd ich statt Hehler Beute
Und Opfer eines, ach, Berufsunfalls.

The next (17) is an aerial photograph of the docks in Liverpool, with fires smoking in the background.

Noch bin ich eine Stadt, doch nicht mehr lange.
Fünfzig Geschlechter haben mich bewohnt
Wenn ich die Todesvögel jetzt empfangen:
In tausend Jahr erbaut, verheert in einem Mond.

And then (18) another German airman: “Die hat hingehauen!”, reads what is this time a German newspaper text, “Der Beobachter, der soeben die Abwurfvorrichtung ausgelöst hat, freut sich über den Erfolg seiner Bombenreihe”.

Seht einen Teufel hier, doch einen armen!
“Ich lache, weil ich andre weinen wei”.
Ich bin ein Wäschereisender aus Barmen
Wenn ich auch jetzt in Tod und Elend reis”.

This short sequence already makes a number of things very clear. First of all, this is a cycle. The alternation of ruined cityscapes and very individualized bombers is important. The relationships are not always quite as easy to explicate as that. More often we have to contend with jerky, Brechtian discontinuities and cross-associations, which demand work and imagination from his readers. Nevertheless, even though over the years between its conception and its first publication the order was tinkered with, it was clearly always an important part of the composition. Secondly, the order

also tracks the chronological course of the war, or of those parts of it which seemed important to Brecht at the time. It is often impossible to date these little poems precisely, but the first and the last of these were furnished with dates by Brecht himself: the first was written on 26 September 1940 and the last on 6 November the same year, a span of just six weeks. The first air raids on London had begun on 13 August. The first major bombardment of Liverpool took place on 11 October. Brecht was tracking these events with horror, as they unfolded, with newspapers and radio broadcasts his primary sources. Even before the Blitz began, he had noted in his *Journal* (10.8.1940): "Der eiserne Ring schließt sich um England. Das Flugzeug, die neue Waffe, zeigt sich um so schrecklicher neu, als sie schon im letzten Krieg angewendet wurde". And a month later, on 10 September:

Es ist zwölf Uhr zwanzig. Ich hörte eben den Ansager in dem bombardierten London. Er sitzt im Luftschutzkeller, die deutschen Bomber sind wieder über der "Hauptstadt der Welt". Das Feuer wütet noch von den gestrigen und vorgestrigen Bombardements, es ist "beinahe in jedem Fall under control". Über einem zerstörten Geschäft in der City habe der Inhaber heute früh die Aufschrift angebracht "Gegründet 1628, immer noch in Betrieb".

Die Slums an den Docks stehen in Brand.³

Several of the themes and preoccupations of the cycle are also evident in these four examples. Time and again Brecht returns to the fates of mothers and their children in this war, as he often had when writing about the First World War as well: "O Frau, die du um deine Kinder bangst!". Time and again he insists that the ordinary soldiers on both

sides are the victims: "arme Teufel" who are driven, above all, by fear of their superiors, and later by hunger and desperation. And, as if his social and political sympathies were not clear enough, in that second poem, which is not immediately so simple to comprehend, the direction in which the London financial centre might more logically, according to Brecht, have planned its offensive is, it is implied, against the Soviet Union.

The very fact that some of these poems seem obscure or difficult to understand – and there are plenty of more extreme examples of this in the cycle⁴ – is itself also worthy of note. Brecht's syntax is sometimes complex, his main clauses interrupted, his word order inverted. He seems to be aiming here at a quite elevated diction, with frequent apostrophe and exclamations, "O" and "ach". Amongst his models – and others have written in persuasive detail about this – was a collection of classical Greek epigrams in German translations, which he had recently acquired.⁵ The sense of the cycle is further complicated by the voices of these poems. Brecht puts words – as in my examples – into the mouths of soldiers, addressed directly to their victims, and he lets the ruined cities speak up for themselves, in the first person. He also gives voices to nations and classes, and to the dead. The different sources of his newspaper cuttings (and the anonymity of the photographers) permit him to combine and juxtapose perspectives from different countries and different sides in the conflict. In the poems he employs direct speech marks too; some of the poems are little dialogues, one between industrial workers preparing the war effort, another between Göring and Goebbels themselves. But as well as all this, he also speaks as the poet, in the first person again, and addresses his readers in the second person plural. The cycle is a complex weave of voices and perspectives.

Finally, some commentators have written about these poems, perhaps seduced by the direct speech and the concrete and occasionally very direct vocabulary, as if they were

in some popular, vernacular verse form. The editors of the *Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* even talk of “Knittelverse”.⁶ Nothing could be further from the truth. These fourliners are, almost without exception, in impressively regular iambic pentameters, with alternating rhymes, and with just the occasional inversion of stress at the start of a line, or an irregular foot at the end. By its very regularity, the metre sometimes struggles a little with the natural speech rhythms of a clause – that second poem (16) is a good example – thus underlining the formality and, again, elevated register of the whole enterprise. This was the same metre as employed in those German versions of Greek elegiac distichs which Brecht had been reading. And the whole impression of a “high” literary form is also underpinned by the frequent internal rhymes, assonances and repetitions which the verses employ, as well as by, amongst the more down-to-earth expressions, the occasional antiquated lexeme, biblical-sounding formulation, or direct literary quotation.

Even this brief introduction must dispel any impression that this might be a somehow casual composition, a scrapbook of random images and hastily composed captions. On the contrary, the *Kriegsfibel* is a very considered and carefully constructed cycle of crafted poems, designed both to tell the story of the war and to disclose its larger context and purposes.

These aspects of the text – literary and visual sources, form and register, narrative stance and cyclical structure – are discussed in more detail in my piece in *The Brecht Yearbook* (2007).⁷ What I intend to do here is to trace some of the roots of this work in Brecht’s intellectual and artistic development, in the earlier exile and in the 1920s, and to argue for a more central place for it in Brecht’s oeuvre than it has usually been accorded. First, a very brief note about the genesis and publication history of the work. Brecht called this combination of newspaper cutting and fourline poem a “Fotoepigramm”, and the

very first attested examples of the new form date from the summer of 1940. In October of that year a couple of these compositions appear amongst the pages of the *Journal*. It was not, however, until February to June 1944 that Brecht first published such photo-epigrams, in the New York journal *Austro American Tribune*. There they were introduced as extracts from a longer work by Brecht given, at this point, the perhaps revealingly biblical title, "Und siehe, es war sehr schlecht" (an inversion of Genesis). At the end of 1944 Ruth Berlau, whose technical assistance was essential to the work, put together a whole series of sixty-six photo-epigrams, now under the title *Kriegsfibel*, and a copy, which is now in Harvard University Library, was sent to Karl Korsch. After this, for the time being, very little was done to the cycle. However, as soon as they were back in Europe, Berlau was instructed to try to find a publisher. After the Munich publisher Kurt Desch rejected the work, it seemed for a time that the East Berlin Verlag Volk und Welt would provide a home. Then, in March 1950, the "Kultureller Beirat für Verlagswesen" stepped in, and the GDR "Ministerpräsident" himself, Otto Grotewohl, judged the volume "völlig ungeeignet" for publication, because of its generally pacifist tendency and supposedly inadequate analysis of the imperial warmongers.⁸ All of this was accompanied by detailed wrangles over individual images and poems – the total number of which had now grown to over seventy, some of which had been newly put together, and others of which were re-written and included or excluded from the selection at various points. It was only in November 1955 that the *Kriegsfibel* (now comprising sixty-nine photo-epigrams) was finally published, by the Eulenspiegel Verlag in East Berlin. The West German edition, by Zweitausendeins, did not appear until 1978. An extended edition by the Eulenspiegel Verlag appeared in 1994, and the first English edition as late as 1998. So it is a work that has been slow in reaching a public.

Yet it is an extraordinary composition, critics agree on that, strikingly innovative in its form and still remarkably powerful in its anti-war protest. It is exceptional within

Brecht's own oeuvre, and in this post-war period, in its juxtaposition of materials. Indeed, there are few works like it anywhere. When the English edition came out, a critic in the *Guardian* compared it to Goya's famous *Disasters of War*, which was indeed almost certainly an inspiration for Brecht.⁹ All the same, despite this sort of high praise, there has been comparatively little informed criticism, and it has often been treated as somewhat marginal to Brecht's output, neither taken very seriously as a cycle of poems nor easily categorized as anything else. Most of the important commentaries have approached the work, very reasonably, from Brecht's own genre description of the "Fotoepigramm", and there has been a degree of discussion of the relationship between image and text. Much of the early debate was dominated by Reinhold Grimm's notion of a "Marxistische Emblematik", developed on the basis of the baroque model.¹⁰ This was not a very fruitful approach. As my examples show, the images here are very different from the kind of memorable symbol we associate with the baroque emblem, nor are they at all consistently tripartite (*pictura*, *inscriptio*, *subscriptio*) in their structure. Indeed, part of the principle is that they are all structured slightly differently, again demanding input from the reader. Besides, their source, in the contemporary news media, is quite evidently important. Several of them, but by no means all, have their own original captions or other textual material, as well as Brecht's epigrams. One is a cutting of newspaper-text only, with no picture. Other critics have invoked the idea of the documentary. Of course, this has some force. These are pictures from the world of the real, derived from documentary sources. What they show, however, is precisely that that surface of reality is insufficient for comprehension and must be explicated by commentary, and high-literary commentary at that. If this is a work of documentary, it expands our notions of what that term can mean.

My own point of approach is somewhat different. For one thing my view of the work is informed by a study of Brecht's long-standing interest in photography. This is a

medium he has thought about before, and those thoughts are pertinent. What is more, throughout his creative life, Brecht made enormous use of pictures and the pictorial, from Neher to Breughel and from Grosz to *Life* magazine, as potentially powerful instruments in the cognitive process (He thought of his theatre too as a succession of tableaux). Secondly, I shall try to contextualize the *Kriegsfibel* in relation to Brecht's ongoing reflections, especially in the exile period, on the lyric and on realism. These two contexts do not necessarily contradict the previous literature; they are rather an adjustment and expansion of our view of the work and help to establish that more central place for it in Brecht's oeuvre.¹¹

This is not the place to reprise the history of Brecht's early interest in photography,¹² but let's go back a little. Brecht's most famous remark about photography is from the writings of the *Dreigroschenprozeß* from about 1930: "Eine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute. Die eigentliche Realität ist in die Funktionale gerutscht".¹³ Here photography stands in for the sort of surface realism which permits no analysis. Elsewhere he remarks: "Die Fotografie ist die Möglichkeit einer Wiedergabe, die den Zusammenhang wegschminkt".¹⁴ This account of photography as little more than a model of impotent and contextless mimetic realism is not, however, just the throwaway opinion of someone not much interested in the medium; rather it is a concerted reaction against some of the developments of the more "artistic" photography which was then enjoying such a boom in the popular print media, the so-called "neue Photographie" of the 1920s and early 30s. It is a resistance on two fronts: both to the aestheticized images of such trendy practitioners as Albert Renger-Patzsch, and also to the naive documentary claims of some photographic reportage. Back in 1928, in a short sketch unpublished at the time, Brecht observed that the time when a photograph had had true documentary force had passed:

Ich meine nicht nur die Auswahl der Objekte, obwohl ich auch die meine, sondern vor allem jenen Ausdruck von Einmaligkeit, Besonderheit in der Zeit, den Künstler ihren Bildern verleihen können, die wissen, was ein Dokument ist. Aber dazu gehört Interesse für die Dinge und genügt nicht Interesse für die Beleuchtung.¹⁵

And in 1931 he wrote a very short piece for the celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*. As well as providing more evidence that Brecht had been watching the development of modern photography with rather more alert and critical eyes than that passing remark about the Kruppwerke might imply, his piece gives us some sense of the resistance which he felt in the face of the bourgeois fetishism of the “truths” which could supposedly be revealed by placing objects before a camera lens.

Die ungeheure Entwicklung der Bildreportage ist für die *Wahrheit* über die Zustände, die auf der Welt herrschen, kaum ein Gewinn gewesen: die Photographie ist in den Händen der Bourgeoisie zu einer furchtbaren Waffe gegen die Wahrheit geworden. Das riesige Bildmaterial, das tagtäglich von den Druckerpressen ausgespien wird und das doch den Charakter der Wahrheit zu haben scheint, dient in Wirklichkeit nur der Verdunkelung der Tatbestände.¹⁶

Brecht's more familiar early remarks on photography seem at first sight, out of context, just an expression of his repudiation of mimetic literalism, where the medium is made to stand in, almost lazily, for the “mirror” aesthetic. To a certain extent, photography

does indeed have that function in Brecht's critique of realism in the later 1920s. Considered against this background, however – and in close dialogue with the work of Walter Benjamin certainly and probably Siegfried Kracauer – his scattered comments begin to coalesce as a more sophisticated critique, not of the medium for itself, but of a particular set of assumptions about photography and photographic reportage and of a particular fashionable practice of photographic art. Ruth Berlau, in her prefatory note to the first edition of the *Kriegsfibel*, makes a comment which almost eerily echoes Brecht's remarks of some twenty-five years earlier:

Die große Unwissenheit über gesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge,
die der Kapitalismus sorgsam und brutal aufrechterhält,
macht die Tausende von Fotos in den Illustrierten zu wahren
Hieroglyphentafeln, unentzifferbar dem nichtsahnenden Leser.¹⁷

There is, however, one other earlier text where Brecht mentions photography, and this time – this will become important in the long run – it is in the context of reflections on poetry. In his 1927 *Kurzer Bericht über 400 (vierhundert) junge Lyriker* Brecht makes another passing, disparaging remark about the uselessness of photographs as a tool of enlightenment, and in the very same text exhorts that poems – almost, it would seem, in the place of photographs – should aspire to documentary force: "Alle großen Gedichte haben den Wert von Dokumenten".¹⁸

Given Brecht's interest in the pictorial, given his fascination with photography – as with all new technologies, and given his inclination to generic experiment, it seems astonishing that he didn't produce something like the *Kriegsfibel* earlier. Perhaps we should recognize that Brecht's critique of the naive documentary and his repudiation of the unpolitical avant-garde left him with some rather awkward territory to negotiate

if he was to incorporate photographs into his own artistic practice. The point was to develop a form which might avoid both naturalist realism and context-less abstraction.

It perhaps took time to work that out. It has been suggested that there were other models for the *Kriegsfibel* in the late Weimar Republic: Ernst Friedrich's shocking collection of documentary photographs of the First World War, *Krieg dem Kriege* (Berlin 1926), which Brecht recommended when it first came out; Kurt Tucholsky and John Heartfield's satirical volume, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Berlin 1929); and the combinations of photographs and commentaries, even poems, in the *A-I-Z*.¹⁹ It seems pretty plain that these did indeed all stimulate Brecht's interest. It is, however, equally clear that none of them comes very close to the actual practice of the *Kriegsfibel*. What they all have in common is just some degree of experiment in the relationship between photograph and text or caption, an issue in which both Benjamin and Brecht were particularly interested, both at the time and later.

It is not quite clear when Brecht himself started collecting newspaper cuttings; it must have been sometime in the 1920s. The first editions of both *Mann ist Mann* and *Im Dickicht der Städte* (Berlin: Propyläen 1926 and 1927) include (unattributed) photographs on the cover, endpapers and, in the latter, a series of four plates, to support their radically *verfremdet* views of modern society.²⁰

There are already substantial collections of cuttings amongst the working materials for *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe* and for *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe*. The practice continued and probably intensified through the 1930s. An entry in the *Journal* from 1939 mentions "eine Mappe mit Fotos" (8.12.1939) amongst a list of Brecht's (more valuable) possessions. Besides, by this time he had already started the practice of sticking photos and cuttings into this work journal, which he maintained from July 1938 into the 1950s.

No one has undertaken a proper analysis of the function of the illustrations in the *Journal*, nearly all of which are photographs from the news media, or of the relationship between the images and the text. Philip Brady has made an extremely useful start. He speaks, in general terms, of the “unintended ambiguities and ironies” provoked by some of the banal and hardly newsworthy pictures, and comments that the purpose is not documentary, rather the interest for Brecht is “the camera’s ability to capture assumptions about authority and the social order and unwittingly to expose those assumptions as vulnerable”.²¹ The very first photographs included are of Brecht himself and his family, and of the house at Skovsbostrand – as if he were first fixing an identity and locality, a perspective for the subsequent entries. Even here, the very first photograph (a rather anxious-looking portrait of Brecht) is situated between an entry about reading Shelley and one ridiculing Lukács’s view of realism (16.8.–18.8.1938). It is these sorts of preoccupations of the *Journal*, and these juxtapositions which will become important for my argument. The first photograph which is not of family, friends or their homes is from a Swedish newspaper, and it shows a man in a gas-mask (5.9.1939). This is a full year later, amidst talk of the “phoney war” in the West and the inadequacy of preparations for war. Then, just a couple of days later (10.9.1939) comes a comment on the “Hirtengesänge” in Goethe’s fragmentary *Pandora*, and on the close encounter in that work of the refined and the primitive: “Immer wieder taucht die Hand da in die Tiefe, etwas nach oben hebend, von dem einiges herabtropft, andres bleibt, völlig verfremdet in der neuen Gesellschaft”. It is striking that reflections on the lyric, on the aesthetics of realism, and on politics here rub shoulders extremely closely, and are interspersed with photographs. To suggest that these were simply Brecht’s unconnected preoccupations at the time, and that he was unaware of their proximity in the *Journal*, would be daft. After all, he typed, cut and pasted most of the pages himself. Rather, I would contend, he is beginning to try something out which will connect all these things.²² The comment on *Pandora* provides a first clue: for he seems to be

remarking how productive the “verfremdet” relationship (and that is scarcely a chance choice of word) can be between the high literary (or here, reversing the metaphor, “deep”) and the primitive, surface, comparatively “real” world: “Die Glätte des Stroms zeigt seine Tiefe an”. Throughout 1940 the photographs become much more frequent interruptions to the text of the *Journal*. Then, on 24 June 1940, he comments on his first sight of Picasso’s *Guernica*: “Es macht starken Eindruck auf mich, und ich nehme mir vor, in dieser Richtung einmal etwas zu machen”. Now I have no wish to imply that this has anything very intimately to do with the aesthetics of the *Kriegsfibel*, but it is most certainly a symptom of Brecht’s interest in the power of the pictorial to intervene in this political world: “Interessante romantische V-Effekte, dabei klassizistische Form”. One month later (25.7.1940) he writes about August Oehler’s translations of Greek epigrams, and starts himself to write epigrams.

It is, finally, a series of entries in the last week of August 1940 which fully establishes the connections I want to make. Before discussing these, though, let me just say a word about the great essays on realism of the later 1930s, which also contribute to the intellectual context for these thoughts. From about the time of the *Dreigroschenprozess* onwards, Brecht is clearly and increasingly less interested in the representation of reality, than in what he calls the “Meisterung der Realität”.²³ There is a shift towards explanatory or cognitive realism. The main arguments are set out in detail in *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* (BFA 22.1. Pp. 405–413) and *Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise* (BFA 22.1. Pp. 424–433) both from the summer of 1938, and *Notizen über realistische Schreibweise* of 1940 (BFA 22.2. Pp. 520–640). In the first of these Brecht defines his, or rather “unser Realismusbegriff” as follows:

Realistisch heißt: den gesellschaftlichen Kausalkomplex aufdeckend/die herrschenden Gesichtspunkte als die Gesichtspunkte

der Herrschenden entlarvend/vom Standpunkt der Klasse aus schreibend, welche für die dringendsten Schwierigkeiten, in denen die menschliche Gesellschaft steckt, die breitesten Lösungen bereit hält/das Moment der Entwicklung betonend/konkret und das Abstrahieren ermöglichend (BFA 22.1. P. 409).

Notice how the capacity for abstraction has now become a part of his definition of realism. In *Weite und Vielfalt* he goes on to subject his notion of realism to what might seem to be the ultimate test, lyric poetry: he argues that the politically useful poet may be a realist, just as much as any novelist – specifically, that Shelley is as great a realist as Balzac. Here Brecht's argument for a greatly expanded sense of what counts as realism proceeds not just through a defence of Shelley's poetic imagination, but also, by implication, through a defence of Shelley's own great aesthetic essay, *Defence of Poetry*, in which he, in turn, argues that every line of real poetry proceeds by erasing or negating the given or everyday understanding of things as they are.²⁴

Two years later, in August 1940, Brecht revisited these questions in his *Journal*:

Zur Frage des *Realismus*: Die gewöhnliche Anschauung ist, daß ein Kunstwerk desto realistischer ist, je leichter die Realität in ihm zu erkennen ist. Dem stelle ich die Definition entgegen, daß ein Kunstwerk desto realistischer ist, je erkennbarer in ihm die Realität gemeistert wird. Das pure Wiedererkennen der Realität wird oft durch eine solche Darstellung erschwert, die sie meistern lehrt (6.8.1940).

Realism too proceeds by, first of all, making the recognition of reality more difficult or by contradicting our everyday assumptions. Let us recall that the very first example of

a photo-epigram in the form of the *Kriegsfibel* also dates from August 1940, in fact it bears the date 4 August.²⁵ At the end of that same month, at the height of the Battle of Britain (when one might have expected him to have very different things on his mind) he returned to the idea of the potentially "realist" (in his sense) function of lyric poetry and, in a note in the *Journal* (24.8.1940), he enlisted the even more unlikely figure of Wordsworth for his argument.

Ich traf auf "She was a phantom of delight" und dachte über
diesem uns so entfernten Stück, wie vielfach die Funktion der
Kunst ist und wie achtsam man sein muß beim Aufstellen von
Vorschriften. [...] Der Kleinbürger, der heute mit Jagdflinte und
Dynamitflasche [...] Englands Felder durchpatroulliert, mag
seinen Wordsworths einige Schuld geben können, aber gerade
in dieser entmenschten Situation kann

"a lovely apparition, sent
to be a moment's ornament"

die Erinnerung wachrufen an menschenwürdigere Situationen.
[...] Die Kunst ist ein autonomer Bezirk, wenn auch unter keinen
Umständen ein autarker.

These reflections on the social practice of lyric poetry, which Brecht now sees as directly interventionist ("geschichtsbedingt und geschichtemachend"), end with this thought: "Der Unterschied liegt zwischen 'widerspiegeln' und 'den Spiegel vorhalten'". In that last phrase, the metaphor of the mirror aesthetic is transformed from the relatively passive notion of reflection (familiar from aesthetic commentators from Plato to Alberti

to Johnson to Abrams) to a much more specific active choice. The phrase, "jemandem den Spiegel vorhalten", means not just "holding the mirror up to someone", but "revealing, disclosing their true nature, which hitherto had been concealed". In the first published version of *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* Brecht uses the metaphor in a similarly active sense, when he writes that the oppressors have "viele Methoden, sich dem Spiegel, der vorgehalten wird, zu entziehen".²⁶ So one forms the image, not of Plato's great reflector of nature set up in the landscape, but of a hand-mirror, apt for swift and unexpected interventions in the hands of the wily political artist – the sort of mirror you could hit someone over the head with if the need arose.

Now it so happens that there is a photograph stuck into the *Journal* at exactly this moment, on the sheet with this one day's entry and immediately after that phrase about holding up the mirror.²⁷ It shows a group of people doing drill in gas masks – they are in fact British civilians preparing for the possibility of German invasion. The illustration was taken from the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, but it originated from the London *Picture Post*.²⁸ The connection between Brecht's thoughts on the lyric and this somewhat bizarre document of contemporary reality is at first unclear. But it must be this: inspired, as it were, by Wordsworth's image of "menschenwürdiger Situationen", the English petty bourgeoisie is preparing to repulse a German invasion. The commentary on the poem and the photographic document conspire in a mutually *verfremdend* dialectic to make us re-assess our assumptions and to get Brecht's message across.²⁹

This last week in August has some other relevant fragments to add to the emerging picture. The next entry sees a mention of the graphic artist Hans Tombrock and of Breughel; and the one after includes a remark about Greek epigrams as a poetry of objects, "Gebrauchsgegenstände", including specifically weapons; then there are three

attempts at adaptations from Oehler's translations, and photographs of the interior of a bomber and of hand-grenades (BFA 26. Pp. 418–421). The close interweaving of all of these concerns is remarkable. And the first steps towards the photo-epigram form come at exactly this same point in the *Journal*. All of this antedates by only one month the sequence of pages from the *Kriegsfibel* with which I opened this essay.

Two years later, in April 1942, at another low point for the Allies (in the face of rapid Japanese advances and the fall of Singapore), we encounter another *Journal* entry devoted to the problem of lyric poetry. This one ends with the seemingly desperate assertion, "Die Schlacht um Smolensk geht auch um die Lyrik" – the point being, again, that this is a war for the sake of "menschenwürdigere Situationen" in which it will no longer be a "schlechte Zeit für Lyrik" (BFA 14. P. 432). Again there is a photograph, this time a cutting from *Life* magazine, which shows a woman sitting amidst the devastation of a bombed-out Singapore, apparently bewailing the destruction of her own child, whose corpse lies nearby.³⁰ As many readers will recognize, it is an image which Brecht takes up and uses again in the *Kriegsfibel* (Nr. 39), where it is accompanied by a notably elevated four-line poem:

O Stimme aus dem Doppeljammerchore
Der Opfer und der Opferer in Fron!
Der Sohn des Himmels, Frau, braucht Singapore
Und niemand als du selbst brauchst deinen Sohn.

An unconscious memory of the same picture, Brecht believed, may have inspired Helene Weigel for the famous silent scream, the *Gestus* with which, as Mother Courage, she greeted the corpse of her son at the end of Scene 3 of that play.³¹ So it is an important and resonant image in several ways.

What I set out to do in this paper was to re-situate the *Kriegsfibel* in relation to Brecht's interest in photography and the pictorial, on the one hand, and, on the other, to his more commonly recognized central obsessions of the later exile: realism and the lyric. I hope that has been achieved, and with it a clearer idea of how important the *Kriegsfibel* is in Brecht's output. Whereas one might usually think of newspaper photography and lyric poetry at opposite ends of some aesthetic spectrum – the one base, realist, objective, scientific, dependent on the particulars of social reality, the other elevated, subjective, un-technological, shading off into abstraction or into some autonomous realm – Brecht's practice is always to upset one genre or medium by confronting it and juxtaposing it with another. It begins to seem almost a logical extension of his thoughts on realism to bring together the polished lyric and the grainy documentary photograph. The images are transformed by Brecht's difficult lyric voice; and the poems are made shockingly powerful by the insistence on the real which the photographs appear to guarantee.

The "Singapore Lament" photo-epigram has many of the features I picked out at the outset. It is of course very overtly about mothers and sons again. It is of an elevated register, and the interrupted and slightly forced syntax have perhaps classical echoes. And it is tightly written in the standard iambic pentameters and ABAB rhyme, with repetition (Opfer/Opferer; Sohn/Sohn) and perhaps little archaic gestures in the words "Chore" and "Fron". It divides into two halves: the first two lines an exclamation, the second two a direct address by the poet to the woman. In the first half, Brecht makes that move, not unfamiliar from the rest of this work, of insisting that the perpetrators are also in their way victims of the war, forced to do this work, and so allied to their "Opfer" in a "Doppeljammerchor". So our perceptions of the reality to which the photograph refers us are immediately complicated. Our assumptions about perpetrators and victims – an intensely pathetic example of which squats in the centre of this picture –

are disturbed. This is not just an empathetic lament. The significance of the picture is not that one woman is bewailing her child's death, but that the world resounds with a chorus of "Jammer", of which the event pictured here is just a symptom and a symbol. The "Sohn des Himmels" in the third line is a typically slightly obscure reference, here not to one of Brecht's individualized bombers but to the Japanese Emperor Hirohito. Hirohito is one of the many political leaders who also appear on the pages of the *Kriegsfibel*, and who are never given their own names, but referred to by a series of evasive epithets and euphemisms. In this way Brecht makes another of those briefly sketched and deft gestures towards a political analysis which are characteristic of the cycle. At the same time, the very fact of poetry recalls an alternative world of dignity and creativity that is in marked contrast to the destruction apparent in the photograph: the howl of despair is opposed to the balanced iambic cadences of Brecht's "Stimme aus dem Doppeljammerchore", and both can be taken to refer as much to his own voice, the poet observing this destruction, as to the bereft mother. In their mutually *verfremdend* interaction it becomes possible to re-read the poem as a document (of the poet's response on the occasion of this news item) and to look again at the picture as a formal construct (with qualities of balance, frame and symbolism).

The position of this photo-epigram in the cycle also serves to contextualize and relativize what seems at first one of the most pathetic images of the whole collection. The picture which precedes this one is of Churchill with a tommy gun, looking for all the world like a gangster from *Arturo Ui*; and immediately after we have an American soldier posing with a cigarette over the corpse of a Japanese soldier he's killed – "It was just like in the movies" – and, most bizarre of all the images in this work, the photograph of a "sexy carrot", sent in by a reader to the editor of *Life*. It is part of a sequence about capitalist-imperialist pillage. On this particular page, the cutting is not this time from *Life*; Brecht must have had another source, although we do not

know what that was. In comparison with the version in the *Journal*, the picture has now been severely cropped along the top, bringing the focus down to the foreground, where the child's body has also been retouched for clarity. And it is given that huge bold banner title: "Singapore Lament", which is then directly taken up in Brecht's word, "Jammerchor". There is, I think, no suggestion that Brecht or Berlau themselves manipulated these images, but they certainly sourced and selected them very deliberately. The picture is very neatly framed by the black surround this time. Black has, throughout the *Kriegsfibel*, the potential to refer us to war, death, and lament; and in this instance the black edging seems to reflect a suggestion of mourning in the woman's clothes. The symbolism also of the broken wheels and wrecked carriage seems almost as important as the human wreckage – and is again resonant in relation to *Mutter Courage*. Yet one is discouraged from going too far in a formal reading of the photograph, firstly by the blurred quality of the image – all the photographs of the *Kriegsfibel* betray their origins in the news media, and that is obviously important here too. Moreover, in this instance there is also a small label in the bottom left corner which reads "AP WIREPHOTO". That seems both to give us that guarantee of authenticity and immediacy which are so crucial for the whole composition, and also to take up the critique of press photography and the whole politics of representation, which is equally a part of the collection.

Here indeed is a contemplative, cognitive, even interventionist realism, which eschews both passive naturalism and context-less abstraction, without missing out either on particular reality or on general reflection. Here is a genre, of what one might call *gestische tableaux*, that demands our active reading, as we move back and forth between image and verse, on this page and between pages. Instead of simply indexing "objective reality" in an attempt to uncover the real as something independent of social and political subjectivity, Brecht has developed an approach that

dialogically structures reality into representation, invites a disrobing gaze, encourages understanding, and even implies the possibility of intervention. In the *Messingkauf* (these notes also written in the last years of the war) he comments: “Es müssen die Gesetze sichtbar werden, welche den Ablauf der Prozesse des Lebens beherrschen. Diese Gesetze sind nicht auf Photographien sichtbar”³² – not, that is, on photographs alone. Photographic positivism has been replaced by a radically probing version of documentary. The *Kriegsfibel* is of course (in the terms of that note from the *Journal*) “geschichtsbedingt” and has no wish to be otherwise, but, in 1944 – and in 1955 when it was finally published, and still in 2007 – it can also aspire to be “geschichtemachend” in its project of enlightenment. That is the challenge and, I would suggest also, the achievement of this *Fibel*.

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Footnotes

1. This essay originated in a paper given at a conference initiated by the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies at the University of London. It takes up material and issues also discussed in my two articles published recently in *The Brecht Yearbook*: “Was besagt eine Fotografie?”. Early Brechtian Perspectives on Photography. In: *Young Mr. Brecht Becomes a Writer*. Ed. by Jürgen Hillesheim. Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press 2006. Pp. 261–283 (The Brecht Yearbook 31). and Beyond Death: Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel* and the Uses of Tradition. In: *Brecht and Death*. Ed. by Jürgen Hillesheim, Mathias Meyer and Stephen Brockmann. Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press 2007. Pp. 67–90 (The Brecht Yearbook 32). In fact it attempts something of a bridge between those two articles, to pose the question how Brecht got from those early sceptical reflections on the medium of photography to arrive at the daring experiment of the *Kriegsfibel*. I am grateful for

- the encouragement and critiques provided by my discussants both in London and in Augsburg (where the second of the above articles was born) and by my most critical reader on this occasion, Simon Korner.
2. Bertolt Brecht: *Kriegsfibel*. BFA 12. Pp. 127–283. Here p. 159. This follows the sequence of the second, extended German edition (Berlin: Eulenspiegel 1994). In the first GDR edition (Eulenspiegel 1955) and the West German imprint (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins 1978) both the pages and the images are unnumbered.
 3. Bertolt Brecht: *Journal*. BFA 26–27. Henceforth entries will be identified by date only.
 4. I have, for example, read no convincing explanatory commentary on Nr. 58.
 5. *Der Kranz des Meleagros von Gadara*. Selected and translated by August Oehler (pseud. of August Mayer). Berlin: Propyläen 1920. It is mentioned in the *Journal* 25.7.1940. See also Marion Lausberg: Brecht's Lyrik und die Antike. In: *Brecht's Lyrik*. Neue Deutungen. Ed. by Helmut Koopmann. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1999. Pp. 163–198; and Anya Feddersen's piece on the *Kriegsfibel* in: *Brecht Handbuch in fünf Bänden*. Ed. by Jan Knopf. Stuttgart: Metzler 2001–2003. Vol. 2. Pp. 382–397, to which I am in general much indebted.
 6. BFA 12. P. 414. On this point compare Feddersen: *Kriegsfibel* (n. 5). P. 393.
 7. Kuhn: *Beyond Death* (n. 1).
 8. Compare BFA 12. P. 409; Feddersen: *Kriegsfibel* (n. 5). P. 385; Willett: *War Primer* (n. 2). P. xiii.
 9. Cited from the cover of the paperback edition.
 10. Reinhold Grimm: Marxistische Emblematik. Zu Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. In: *Wissenschaft als Dialog. Studien zur Literatur und Kunst seit der Jahrhundertwende*. Ed. by Renate von Heydebrand and Klaus Günther Just. Stuttgart: Metzler 1969. Pp. 351–379 and 518–524. A version of the baroque model is still occasionally asserted, e.g. by Theo Stammen: Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. Politische Emblematik und zeitgeschichtliche Aussage. In: Koopman (ed.): *Brecht's Lyrik* (n. 5). Pp. 101–141 (especially p. 124), but the approach has been roundly denounced by Feddersen.
 11. Of course I am not the first to attempt this sort of historical sweep through Brecht's approaches to photography and the visual. Amongst those who have made some similar points to what follows and in whose writing the *Kriegsfibel* looms large are

- Philip Brady: From Cave-Painting to "Fotogramm": Brecht, Photography and the *Arbeitsjournal*. In: *Forum for Modern Language Studies* XIV (1978). Pp. 270–281; Dieter Wöhrle: Von der Notwendigkeit einer "Kunst der Betrachtung": Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel* und die Gestaltung von Text–Bild–Beziehungen. In: *alles was Brecht ist... Fakten – Kommentare – Meinungen – Bilder*. Ed. by Werner Hecht. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997. Pp. 232–244; and Philippe Invernol: L'oeil de Brecht. À propos du rapport entre texte et image dans le Journal de travail et l'ABC de la guerre. In: *Brecht 98. Poétique et Politique/Poetik und Politik*. Ed. by Michel Vanoosthuyse. Montpellier: Bibliothèque d'Etudes Germaniques et Centre–Européennes 1999. Pp. 217–231.
12. That is the subject of my article in *The Brecht Yearbook* (2006) (n. 1). See also Philip Brady: Die "zweite Betrachtung": photography and the political message, 1925–1933. In: *Text und Bild, Bild und Text: DFG–Symposion 1988*. Ed. by Wolfgang Harms. Stuttgart: Metzler 1990. Pp. 329–338, and the article by Steve Giles.
 13. Bertolt Brecht: *Der Dreigroschenprozeß. Ein soziologisches Experiment*. BFA 21. Pp. 448–514. Here p. 468.
 14. Bertolt Brecht: *[Durch Fotografie keine Einsicht]*. BFA 21. Pp. 443–444. Here p. 443.
 15. Bertolt Brecht: *[Über Fotografie]*. BFA 21. Pp. 264–265.
 16. Bertolt Brecht: *[Zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der A–I–Z]*. In: *A–I–Z*. No. 41. October 1931 (BFA 21. P. 515). This comment is very similar to more or less contemporary remarks by Kracauer.
 17. Ruth Berlau: In: *Kriegsfibel* (1955) (n. 2).
 18. Bertolt Brecht: *Kurzer Bericht über 400 (vierhundert) junge Lyriker*. BFA 21. Pp. 191–193. Here p. 191.
 19. These are variously discussed in my article in *The Brecht Yearbook* (2007) (n. 1); Feddersen: *Kriegsfibel* (n. 5). Pp. 394–395; and in BFA 12. P. 410.
 20. "Fotografische Belege, nicht Buchschmuck, Sachdarstellung, nicht Illustration", commented Herbert Ihering in his review of *Im Dickicht*. See Herbert Ihering: *Von Reinhardt bis Brecht. Vier Jahrzehnte Theater und Film*. Berlin: Aufbau 1958. P. 247.
 21. Philip Brady: From Cave–Painting to "Fotogramm" (n. 11). P. 274. Grischa Meyer is currently undertaking a detailed study of the pictures of the *Journal* and the *Kriegsfibel* and their sources, and in particular he is looking at the context of the

images that would have been available to Brecht as he scanned the news media of the time. This work, which establishes once and for all just how odd Brecht's "selection" was, is unpublished and I am grateful to the author for giving me the benefit of some of his preliminary findings.

22. Brady makes a similar point, about "disparate worlds" not joined neatly (Philip Brady: From Cave-Painting to "Fotogramm" (n. 11). P. 279). And Invernel speaks thus of the relationships between the parts of the *Journal*: "convergences, décalages, distorsions, le jeu des éloignements et des rapprochements oblige à d'incessants rétablissements, pour une pensée qui entend relever le défi de la pratique" (Philippe Invernel: L'oeil de Brecht (n. 11). Pp. 224–225).
23. Bertolt Brecht: [*Über die eigene Arbeit*]. BFA 22. 1. Pp. 445–449. Here p. 446.
24. In this sentence I am paraphrasing and part-quoting sentences from Robert Kaufman's unpublished paper presented to the MLA (San Diego, December 2003).
25. "Fliegende Haie nannten wir uns prahlend" See BFA 12. P. 411.
26. Bertolt Brecht: *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus*. In: *Sinn und Form* 10 (1958). P. 499.
27. The relevant archive sheet (BBA 277/37) makes it entirely clear that this photograph belongs with this particular day's journal entry. The German edition of the *Journal* includes the photograph at this point (24.8.1940. BFA 26. P. 418), but it is missing from the English edition (*Journals*. Ed. by John Willett, trans. by Hugh Rorrison. London: Methuen 1993. Pp. 90–91).
28. See note at BFA 26. P. 661.
29. Brady (n. 11) makes much the same point (p. 279).
30. Brecht: *Journal* 5.4.1942. BFA 27. Pp. 79–80 and notes p. 412. The Battle of Smolensk (July–September 1941) was an important reversal for the German troops advancing on Moscow.
31. Bertolt Brecht: *Couragemodell*. BFA 25. Pp. 169–398. Here pp. 203–204.
Bertolt Brecht: *Messingkauf*. BFA 22. Pp. 695–869. Here p. 792.

Split/Subject – Notes on War Primer 2

Sam Skinner

War Primer 2, by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, is a radical 21st century appropriation of Bertolt Brecht's seminal 1955 *Kriegsfibel* publication. Many other artists have also engaged with and appropriated Brecht's work, and before delving into *War Primer 2*, it is worth considering some of these examples.

Discussion of Brecht's legacy tends to focus on his impact upon theatre, film and literature, but he has also had a significant influence on the development of visual art. During the 60s and 70s, his dramaturgical theories fed into the performance art of Dan Graham and Yvonne Rainer amongst others, and his emphasis on political commitment and historical materialism inspired a burgeoning politicised art practice, by artists including Hans Haake and Martha Rosler.¹ Brecht's work contributed to the development of artistic practices that reflected critically upon their own concepts, methods and functions, in dialogue with the social upheavals of the period and new developments in art, including pop, minimalism and conceptualism. Brecht's blend of aesthetics and politics was fertile ground for artists seeking to engage directly with the political moment and aesthetic possibilities within it.

Today, Brecht continues to provide a model for politicised art practice, albeit in a re-functioned, fragmented and estranged manner. Dmitry Vilensky, founding member of the Russian collective *Chto delat?* (*What is to be done?*), which seeks to merge "political theory, art and activism",² has described Brecht as providing a "nexus of

relations”³ for the group. Drawn to Brecht’s methods, rather than simply restaging his plays, the collective has produced a significant body of Brecht-inspired work, since its founding in 2003. These works include three *Songspiels* and two newspapers of essays on Brecht,⁴ which use his theories to engage with contemporary political issues, with a particular focus on the art world and its methods of production and political potential. *Chto delat?* attempts to enact what Boris Groys has described as art’s inherent power and currency within wider political systems, which Groys suggests lie dormant within the institutions of contemporary art.⁵

The Brechtian possibilities of contemporary art practice were powerfully suggested in the 2009 Istanbul Biennial curated by *What, How and for Whom*, (WHW, comprising Ivet Curlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić and Sabina Sabolović), a Zagreb-based curators’ collective. The Biennials’ title, *What Keeps Mankind Alive*, taken from Brecht’s song in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, functioned as its guiding curatorial concept. The Biennial artists were selected for their explicitly political practice, and many made work that directly referenced Brecht. For example, Jesse Jones’s *Mahogany* film restaged Brecht and Kurt Weill’s *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in the Australian outback, transforming the original’s “criticism of the false freedoms of the Weimar Republic ... [to Australia’s hinterlands and testing] the marginality of political gesture in contemporary society in the absence of any utopian horizon.”⁶ The curators of the 2009 Istanbul Biennial sought to be guided by Brecht’s “spirit”⁷ and when writing in the catalogue they asked: “Is it not possible, today, to think of art the way Brecht understood theatre – that is, as a mode of ‘collective historical elucidation’, an apparatus for constructing truth rather than what amounts to a viewing feast for the bourgeoisie?”⁸

Another recent example of artists’ engagement with Brecht is Anja Kirschner and David Panos’s film *The Empty Plan* (2010), which intersperses a dramatization of Brecht’s time

in the USA with scenes of a contemporary American theatre company rehearsing scenes from his plays. This work is less explicitly political and more concerned with notions of realism, a stance that is similar to Peter Friedl's Brecht-inspired film installation *Bilbao Song* (2010). This film was produced at the Serantes Theatre in Santurtzi, Spain, and featured actors, non-actors, and specially invited guests in an allegorical *tableau vivant*. The only action that takes place on stage during this film is the interpretation of Brecht's *Bilbao Song* by a local pianist and an accordionist; here, it could be said that the so-called 'Bilbao Effect' meets *Verfremdungseffekt*. Friedl's *Bilbao Song*, like *The Empty Plan*, is concerned with subjectification, staging, history and an oblique political dimension.

The artist Gerard Byrne's engagement with Brecht spans film, installation and photographic work. He comments: "Brecht's legacy seems exemplary in terms of how it values stories, whilst also being formally disruptive of conventional configurations of theatrical storytelling. Brecht saw theatre as a communal art form – deeply idiomatic. Historically, he is synonymous with the idea of theatre as a tool for social change. I think the potential for social change through artistic means is differently understood right now, although Brecht remains a central reference in the discussion."⁹

Alongside up-front engagements and subtler relations with Brecht, more violent and transgressive forms of appropriation exist, as exemplified by *andcompany&Co's* 2010 production of *FatzerBraz* – a reworking of Brecht's *Fatzer* fragment. This work builds upon Heiner Müller's discussion and restaging of *Fatzer*, fused to Brazilian Marxist revolutionary Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. For performances in Brazil and Germany, *andcompany&Co* sought to build on the Brazilian Brecht tradition established by Augusto Boal, but with a radically remixed and cannibalized approach. The group described *FatzerBraz* as an "attempt to 'tropacalise' Brecht – and

more than that to really eat him! ... trying to apply an anthropophagic aesthetics ... an attempt to 'conquest singularity': to incorporate the other and transform him into one self."¹⁰

War/Primer

Artist duo Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin have attempted their own cannibalized remix of Brecht, but rather than the *Fatzer* fragment, they have taken his 1955 *Kriegsfibel*¹¹ (*War Primer*) publication¹² as their bare bones. Working with a team of assistants,¹³ the artists collected photographs and video–stills from the Internet depicting the so–called 'War on Terror' and montaged these in the pages of Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. The 85 selected images, which both relate to Brecht's epigrams and form a photomontage with the original pictures, were mounted by hand into 100 copies of the 1998 English edition. The resulting work, published by Mack Books in October 2011 as an edition of 100, sold out¹⁴ and has now been reissued and developed as a free digital e–book edition.

Many authors have written about *Kriegsfibel*'s brilliance as a work dealing with the atrocity of the Second World War; in particular, its poetic dissection of the role the media and photography played in the war. Tom Kuhn suggests that *Kriegsfibel* reflects Brecht's yearning for information, a need to squeeze every ounce out of the news that was available to him.¹⁵ Kuhn notes that Brecht was more concerned with depicting survival rather than death, with violence functioning as a backdrop to events and persons. In this, *Kriegsfibel* is quite different from "the general run of photographs of war in *Life* magazine.... Nearly all war art and literature is more explicit in its representations of violence and death."¹⁶

In short, the *Kriegsfibel* is no unthinking reader's digest of photo-illustrated magazines. Instead, Brecht carefully picks out particular themes; for example, "sleeping and waking become a variation of the theme of seeing and blindness."¹⁷ Groups of photos presented in the *Kriegsfibel* are chosen for their "metaphorical and gestisch qualities",¹⁸ creating a disjointed narrative tableaux of "self-contained scenes bearing a full burden of meaning in themselves and yet also dispossessed along a story line."¹⁹ Brecht's approach forged a work that is "not just for those who are victims of war, but also for those who are otherwise subjected to these images."²⁰ This is a crucial aspect War Primer 2 builds upon: working through mass media's excessive spectacle and conflicted narratives.

Kuhn states that *Kriegsfibel*'s particular address is achieved by "the confrontation of the two (word/image) [which] was designed to make it harder, and to gesture, not toward some singular hidden 'truth', but rather to a third self-aware subjectivity, that of the spectator reader."²¹ Beyond this, the *Kriegsfibel* represents not only its immediate sources, but also the "literary and iconographic tradition of the representation of death. Reading the *Kriegsfibel* like this, it is scarcely surprising that it looks so un-documentary."²²

Kuhn also draws attention to the range of different viewpoints within *Kriegsfibel* – from mothers and children, to soldiers and politicians – and how the interweaving complexity of these different voices disrupts any linear narrative. Furthermore, Brecht employs a "quite elevated diction with frequent apostrophe and exclamations"²³ as he "puts words ... into the mouths of soldiers"²⁴; as if he is a ventriloquist, a technique which creates a sense of uncanny disjunction. Moreover, the act of close-cropping of the appropriated imagery anonymises the material, stripping away its borders, and forcing images to mix with the other words and worlds on the page.

In another essay, Kuhn considers early works of Brecht's that influenced *Kriegsfibel* – particularly collaborations with Caspar Neher and George Grosz – and how their restless dynamics “expand the allegorical horizon of the poem.”²⁵ Kuhn outlines how the varied tones of the epigrams within the *Kriegsfibel* challenge “the thoughts which the photographs alone might provoke,”²⁶ and how in keeping:

the interplay of text and image alive, ... this work may indeed achieve the contemplative, cognitive, even interventionist realism to which Brecht aspired, a realism which eschews both passive naturalism (documentary protest) and context-less abstraction, without missing out either particular reality ... an approach that structures reality into representation, invites a probing gaze, encourages understanding, and even implies the possibility of intervention.²⁷

In Kuhn's “Beyond Death” paper, he asks: “Is it still possible to invigorate that project? To steer against the powerful tide of sentimental, idealistic, pessimistic and “merely” historical readings of Brecht's cycle... and wrest back the *Kriegsfibel* for a more productive reading of our present?”²⁸ One could posit that Broomberg and Chanarin in *War Primer 2* have attempted to produce such a reading and carry forth the “analytical method which the *Kriegsfibel* seeks to pass on.”²⁹

It is as if *Kriegsfibel* cries out to be continually re-read and re-worked. As Walter Benjamin observed, Brecht's use of the epigram has an air of being intended for later generations.³⁰ Broomberg and Chanarin attend to this call: just as Brecht used the epigram for his own ends,³¹ so too Broomberg and Chanarin breathe new life into this process of appropriation and transformation.

In *War Primer 2*, Broomberg and Chanarin revitalise the critique of photography that Brecht began in the *Kriegsfibel*, reflecting how photography as a medium and area of study has grown and changed. As Jennifer Bajorek writes, *Kriegsfibel* “substitutes a highly mediated understanding of truth in the place of any possible restoration or overcoming, asking what we learn precisely not ‘from war’, but from photographs from it.”³² Kristopher Imbrigotta writes in his account of the *Kriegsfibel*: “Photographs do not dominate words; rather word and image have come to depend on one another.”³³ Brecht imbued the *Kriegsfibel* with a dynamism that “catalysed communication between the photographic image and the viewer.”³⁴

Georges Didi-Huberman has referred to *Kriegsfibel* as a dialectical machine, which is subversive in its imaginative appropriation of source material, but remains far from the nonsensical grammar of Dada montage.³⁵ This allusion to a machine coupled to its status as a ‘primer’ underlies how it is a work implicitly intended to be operated, studied, and put to work. As John Willets notes, *Kriegsfibel* has a history of people trying to change it, particularly party officials of the DDR who delayed its publication for fear it was not damning enough of the Nazis nor sufficiently adulatory of Soviet Russia³⁶ and, rather pertinently with regard to *War Primer 2*, DDR officials worried that its bold photo reproductions of figures such as Joseph Goebbels, were potentially too easily torn from the book, pinned to a wall and venerated. In an echo of this, the printing of the new images for *War Primer 2* was temporarily halted as the printer’s staff were disturbed by the nature of some of the images, and initially refused to print them, until the case was made for their validity.³⁷

War Primer 2 becomes a kind of ectoplasmic emanation from the original *Kriegsfibel* and is suggestively Brechtian in the sense that “the theory envelops the individual work.”³⁸ Furthermore, *War Primer 2*’s embrace of *Kriegsfibel* becomes an examination

of appropriation itself as “a way out, an alternative strategy that sees an original as open, a lingering, unfinished problem.”³⁹ Thus, *War Primer 2* begs many questions; in particular, how does it promote and add to the original *Kriegsfibel*, but at the same time deface it? How do the original *Kriegsfibel* and *War Primer 2* relate to contemporary debates concerning war and photography? And, furthermore, how do the radical appropriation strategies of *War Primer 2*, re-frame our present-day understanding and experience of history?

Cruel/Radiance

Susie Linfield writes, in *The Cruel Radiance – Photography and Political Violence*, that “it is Brecht whose shadow hangs over photography criticism and whose sensibility continues to define it. Brecht, I think it fair to say, really did loathe photographs, or at best deeply distrust them.”⁴⁰ She goes on: “There is no doubt that we approach photographs, first and foremost, through emotions. For Brecht, this was the worst possible approach to anything. His poetry and plays are an assault not just on sentimentality but on sentiment: for Brecht, the two were kin.”⁴¹ To which she adds: “What is often forgotten, however, is that Brecht and the Frankfurt critics were particular men who lived in a particular time and place who observed particular events, not holy oracles who had discovered eternal truths. Their time and place was Weimar Germany, whose daily reality was extraordinarily turbulent and extraordinarily traumatic.”⁴² What Linfield seems to be forgetting or ignoring, is that Brecht did not die in 1933. In fact, he died in 1956, and, furthermore, he vigorously used and engaged with photography, particularly in his later life, in his *Kriegsfibel*, *Arbeits Journal* and *Modelbuch*s, not in a loathing fashion, but rather in a complex, critical manner.

She concludes her discussion stating:

Brecht's relentless insistence on the necessity of distancing us from emotion was politically and artistically (and, I suspect, psychologically) necessary for him, but it has been adopted in an all too uncritical way by generations of photography critics working in very different times and facing very different challenges.

Indeed, today we are all Brechtians, – or, at least, professional ironists; we excel at ridiculing passion and mocking sentiment. We are experts, too – especially in the digital age – at distancing ourselves from photographs: every teenager knows how to manipulate them, tear them apart, dismiss them as lies.⁴³

If only this were true. However, as seems all too apparent from a society enthralled by image, evident from our attitudes to cosmetic surgery and advertising, and a political class that is more focused on managing the media, than its banking system; it would seem that this is very far from the case. Perhaps, inversely, Brecht, and Broomberg and Chanarin, are not so dissimilar to the unruly teenagers Linfield imagines and describes; except they never simply dismiss photographs as lies, rather they interrogate them for some grain of truth.

Broomberg/Chanarin

Just as Brecht saw it as an anathema for an actor to attempt to 'inhabit the role' or for the audience to passively 'entertain the illusion', so too Broomberg and Chanarin

have sought to challenge the use and abuse of photography. Their previous project *The Day Nobody Died* (2008) is of particular significance to this approach and to *War Primer 2*. For *The Day Nobody Died*, they worked as embedded photographers with the British army in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, taking with them a 50-metre roll of photographic paper. They unrolled a seven-metre section of the paper and exposed it to the sun in response to various acts of atrocity, including a suicide bombing, and more mundane events, such as a press conference. Alongside this work, they produced a film of the photographic paper's journey, which was encased in a lightproof cardboard box, as it travelled from London to Afghanistan and back again, shuttling between taxis, tanks, helicopters, Jeeps and soldiers. The film is, in the artists' words, an "absurd performance ... an analytical process, revealing the dynamics of the machine in its quotidian details, from the logistics of war to the collusion between the media and the military,"⁴⁴ whilst the photos themselves "deny the viewer the cathartic effect offered up by the conventional language of photographic responses to conflict and suffering ... [functioning as] a series of radically non-figurative, unique, action-photographs offering a profound critique of conflict photography in the age of embedded journalism and the current crisis in the concept of the engaged, professional witness."⁴⁵

In 2011, Broomberg and Chanarin curated the Krakow *Photomonth* and presented a project entitled *Alias*, in which: "Twenty-three writers (of fiction, fact and medical history) were commissioned each to create a text describing an invented persona, which was then assigned to a visual artist to inhabit. The work that accompanies these texts is the result of each individual artist's residency in their fictitious character."⁴⁶ The curatorial concept behind *Alias* explores artists' desire to trade identities, and the extent to which this is possible, and prefigures *War Primer 2*'s later appropriation and reanimation of Brecht.

In 2007, Broomberg and Chanarin were jury members for the *World Press Photo Awards*, following which they wrote an essay detailing the clandestine processes involved and critiquing the wider contexts surrounding the competition, such as the “privatized censorship” employed at news corporations. They wrote: “Sadly the photographer’s intention does not always inform the meaning of a photograph and it is hard to see how the images produced ... or this year’s winning picture can be perceived as critical of war.”⁴⁷ Such concerns are carried through into *War Primer 2* and fuse with the original *Kriegsfibel*’s own challenge to any passivity or predisposition in the production and reception of war photography.

Media/War

Photography and war, and their relationship to one another, have developed significantly since *Kriegsfibel*’s publication in 1956. Since World War Two, armed conflict has become ever more diffuse and difficult to define; once seemingly-obvious distinctions have now become eroded. Cyber and drone warfare disregard boundaries and mix with the old forms of heavy artillery and nuclear armaments, and terror-cells act independently of one another in an asymmetrical and de-territorialized form of warfare. In the confusion and division, the real and imaginary blur in what W.J.T. Mitchell describes as “a scene of Mutually Assured Deception, with both sides creating double layers of fantasies about their respective enemies and about themselves.”⁴⁸ The media’s echoing of war’s globalized diffusion and complexity compounds this confusion. The apparatus of war and the media operate in alliance. Journalists are ‘embedded’ within military contingents and cameras are soldered to bombs, their images flickering across our phones, TVs and computer screens. A situation has now emerged where it has been argued “war and war journalism have merged into one.”⁴⁹

Digitally enhanced war journalism has become a key weapon in the arsenal of the war machine. Carl von Clausewitz argued two hundred years ago that “War is a continuation of politics by other means.” In the media age, news of war can itself be seen as a continuation of war by other means. As Paul Virilio notes, it is through “the phenomenon of speed and representation ... through audio–visuals, through the press, through the media ... [that] war perpetuates itself in ‘emoting power’.”⁵⁰ Such insidious control, coupled to its diffusion through digital mass media, forms a paralyzing and blinding spectacle that “makes television viewers alert. They are citizens of the world, but relativized.”⁵¹ This desensitizing overexposure is a norm in which, as journalist Thomas Friedman describes, the proliferation of violent images becomes a kind of “muzak”⁵² to the world.

Running counter to, or alongside, news corporations’ professional war reportage, is the ‘citizen journalist’ employing the social media tools of Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook – used to such powerful effect during the so–called Arab Spring. To the editors of the *E-flux* journal this is a newly empowered voice that challenges orthodox systems and answers a call:

... if cognitarians and knowledge workers have been searching for a body — for genuine social, physical, and socioeconomic connections in the midst of a loose field of cursory contact — this body has now manifested itself as more than a mere possibility, and it is a beautiful thing.⁵³

However, to others it is a threat, for example to political and military regimes and also to journalists themselves. Veteran war correspondent Martin Bell has described citizen journalism disparagingly, and in an echo of Friedman’s comment, as “muzak

journalism"⁵⁴ that lacks professionalism and acuity and that can all too easily become counterfeit or act as propaganda. *War Primer 2* questions and represents such images of war produced by citizens and corporations alike, plucked from blurred and contested zones, between war and media.

Appropriated/Imagery

The art of photography once lay partly in the places and situations a photographer could physically reach. Today, as many more people have cameras, and can freely distribute images across the web, the role of the professional photographer has become radically transformed. Emphasis and power have now shifted to post-production strategies,⁵⁵ and in the case of photography, to the picture editor. It is this post-production role that Broomberg and Chanarin seek to appropriate and challenge in *War Primer 2*, through founding their own picture-desk of sorts, and by recruiting a team of assistants to search the web for images. As such, *War Primer 2* is the result of appropriating a role and a method, to appropriate photographs, to be included in an appropriated book, which was already, photographically speaking, a work of appropriation.

However, as Peter Sloterdijk warns, "There can be no such thing as a neutral representation of violence, no innocent reminder of it, no harmless reproduction in pictures or stories. Wherever it is quoted or depicted, it itself comes into play as a quoting force demanding pictures. Its narrator is always its accomplice, its chronicler is involved in the game, its critic is its partner, its painter its delegate."⁵⁶ This notion underscores the problematic line *War Primer 2* treads. In its simultaneous critique and appropriation of war photography, lies a paradox: that its thinking and making, both constitute and divide itself.

At an early stage, Broomberg and Chanarin initially attempted to use a coded formula by cutting and pasting sections of Brecht's epigrams into Google Image Search. Ultimately, however, they rejected this idea and decided upon a more subjective approach. The considerable extent to which *War Primer 2* is able to expose the materiality of photography and estrange its illusions and power plays, derives from the critical space the artists in their role as editors occupy. It is this role Brecht himself performed with such verve in producing *Kriegsfibel* and that Broomberg and Chanarin, in producing a sequel of sorts, proffer as still being a viable analytical enterprise, capable of being more than simply another cohort of war.

Meta/Narrative

The critical space of *War Primer 2* is created via its appropriation of a wide range of source material that forges a "metanarrative"⁵⁷ on war photography. It represents its many guises, from multiple angles, in dialogue with the complex web of corresponding and competing images and voices in the original *Kriegsfibel*.

War Primer 2 appropriates a number of photos of individuals or groups of people in the act of taking photos. Such images explicitly foreground the act of photography, and draw attention to the authored and constructed nature of every photograph, in the book and beyond. Plate 12 shows a routine US Army procedure: a dead Iraqi boy, his clothes cut off to check for identifying tattoos, has his iris scanned using a portable biometric scanner. In this example, we see how a form of photography itself functions as an instrument of war. Brecht's accompanying epigram concludes: "And then to show you all what came of him we photographed the scene." The original *Kriegsfibel* image is obscured but for its caption, that reads "The Germans were 'kind' to this Frenchman.

They blindfolded him before he was shot.” The cruel irony of these captions, together with their historical dimension, shows that the US soldiers’ act as part of a continuing history that seeks possession of the ocular, to brutalize and control it. Furthermore, lens-based media’s direct role in the war machine has profound implications for the medium and all who use it.

Other similar images in *War Primer 2* include: Israeli soldiers posing for the camera with a dead Palestinian man at their feet; a pack of press photographers surrounding Fabienne Cherisma, a 15-year-old girl shot dead by police for looting paintings in the wake of the earthquake in Haiti; a woman posing with her daughter for a photographer in front of the final hiding place of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, and Palestinian mourners using their mobile phones to take pictures during the funeral of Mosub Daana, who was shot and killed by Israeli troops in Hebron. Showing photographers at work is not unlike the strategy of ‘a play within a play’ that Brecht used in *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, in which two warring communities gather to watch a play that dramatises their dispute in allegorical form, teaching themselves and the audience a political lesson about the use of resources and land ownership.

Broomberg and Chanarin also include several war trophy photographs in *War Primer 2*, “a genre which, regrettably, is almost as old as the photographic medium itself”⁵⁸ and which, with the rise in digital camera ownership and ease of distribution, has seen many more trophy photos made public, including most strikingly, those from Abu Ghraib prison that depict the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers. Plate 50 shows perhaps the most infamous of these images: an unidentified detainee standing on a box with a bag on his head and wires attached to his body. The vertical lines of the box at the base of the photo flow into the “sexy carrot” – as it is referred to in the epigram accompanying the original image – lending it both trailing roots and emphasizing the

winged appearance of the figure, as if it is about to take flight. The image, in this sense, prefigures its own ironic destiny, as the original photo from Abu Ghraib, taken in 2004 and hidden away, escaped and became public in 2006, as if a ghost returning to haunt its captors. Adding to this sense, Brecht's accompanying epigram concludes: "They say such pictures rouse the dead to action." In the context of *War Primer 2*, this line alludes to Brecht and *Kriegsfibel*'s own reanimation, as if in response to such images and acts.

It is the same thing that makes the carrot "sexy" that makes the Abu Ghraib image so potent; namely, it is the ability to animate them in our mind's eye and for them to offer some other symbolic potential. Most obviously in this case, the figure's outstretched arms suggest the iconic archetype of Christ on the cross. But does the compulsion, to see this image iconographically, distract from its reality? As photographer Trevor Paglen states in his discussion of the Abu Ghraib photos, "when you repeatedly scrutinize any kind of documentarian media, you can capitalize on the fact that representations don't transparently represent reality—as-it-is ... Those photos undeniably showed horrible abuse, but the logic of photography is such that the photos couldn't show systemic torture or abuse as political policy."⁵⁹ So one can ask, where does the image's power lead? After all, at the time of their disclosure US officials attempted to condemn "the images themselves as the crime."⁶⁰ Thus, though these images directly implicate photography as an instrument of war, as both part of the torture process, as a means to humiliate and blackmail, they also inversely become a scapegoat and get-out for politicians.⁶¹ When we encounter these images, does some kind of sublime schism and unintelligibility unfold, in which, as WJT Mitchell writes, "terror fuses the divine and the demonic in a single unspeakable and unimaginable compound."⁶²

Peggy Phelan writes: "The Abu Ghraib photographs dramatize the fact that we don't know what the image conveys ... a double portrait that simultaneously exposes too

little and too much.”⁶³ She adds: “But for those who look into the blind spot of the Abu Ghraib photographs the limit of sight produces a rejection of the idea that one can know what and who one sees when looking at atrocity.”⁶⁴ These notions of a disconnection between seeing and understanding are a continuation of themes within the original *Kriegsfibel*. As Jennifer Bajorke writes, Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel* includes a number of images of aerial bombardment and smoke expressly for their obscuring qualities.⁶⁵ These and other images of ‘blindness’ contained in both *Kriegsfibel* and *War Primer 2*, become a metaphor for the inherent paradox of photography; its blinkered visibility and blind spots, and perception’s uncanny and instinctive compulsion to fill in the gaps, animate and form judgments, however erroneous they may be. The paradox of visibility and blindness is further compounded by *War Primer 2*’s montage methods, which variously conceal and merge with the original images beneath.

The concepts of deception and distortion are key to the metanarrative of *War Primer 2*. All the images, by their very nature as digital files, betray some grainy evidence of pixilation or compression. These pixelated photos draw attention to the material and technological dimensions of photography, its production, consumption, distribution and manipulation. A number of images in *War Primer 2* manipulate and hide the identity of individuals through digital distortion; these include images of dead soldiers or people posing with the dead. These images of censorship and defacement connect with a number of images of blindfolded or hooded figures, disfigured bodies, and also to the carefully controlled official images of politicians. These censored images echo the techniques of torture, where sensory deprivation is used for the purposes of control and intimidation.

In this new, radical dynamic of photography – a struggle between censored and leaked material is played out across the web. Digital technology is vulnerable to both

infiltration and virus like outbreaks. This is perhaps best personified in the actions of Bradley Manning (pictured on plate 14), which led to the Wikileaks controversy. It is the control of images combined with their accessibility that both motivates and enables *War Primer 2*. Broomberg and Chanarin have turned the 'hacktivist' approach into an artistic strategy of media infiltration and appropriation. *War Primer 2* seeks to wrest the control of images from both the mechanisms of censorship, and from their confinement within news media, where news of atrocity sits alongside celebrity gossip and advertising, all merging into a mush of infotainment.

Other images ripped from the net and stuck to the pages of *War Primer 2* include US soldiers returning home, training exercises, prosthetic limbs, explosions, decapitated heads, funerals, prayer, baptism, George Bush holding a roast turkey, torture, a child in a suicide bomber fancy dress outfit, panopticon-like rooms, martyrs, Donald Rumsfeld on a unicycle, CCTV of 9/11 terrorists passing through airport security and Saddam Hussein's execution. Any one of these images would benefit from detailed contextualization, and though all the images' original captions and hyperlinks are included, printed over John Willett's essay at the back of the book, they provide little detail and no pronounced critique. As such, *War Primer 2* can be criticised for its failure to contextualise individual images, by providing further discussion or evidential facts. Images of war, more than most, need this. As Rebecca Solnitt writes with regard to erroneous or prejudiced captions to photos: "we live and die by words and ideas, and it matters desperately that we get them right."⁶⁶ However, *War Primer 2* seeks a different and very particular kind of engagement with these images, one that tells a truth both about and beyond their individual circumstance to create a metanarrative of war photography's chaos and complexity. And in this swirl of war and photography, of mad delusions of grandeur and blinkered misrule, *War Primer 2* becomes a product of both that which it seeks to represent – conflict and spectacle, and its guiding voice: the original *Kriegsfibel*.

A poetic and performative approach is potentially problematic, especially in light of the images' connection to atrocity and war. However, the narrative and lack of contextualisation is not a failing of the work, rather it implicates, performs and problematizes our relationship to war photography and news media. In splitting war photography into its broad constituent parts, we see its range and power, but also how boundaries blur: Censorship doubles as propaganda; trophy photos become front-page news, and once innocent studio portraits become icons of martyrdom. It is a frightening image, such slippery meaning on such a massive scale, armies of photographers and cameras, across the globe, continually enacting their *raison d'être*: to double and divide themselves. In the metanarrative of *War Primer 2* the individual identity of each image, each photographer, each subject, is partially traded in for an understanding of a larger narrative. This denial or loss of identities challenges specificities, creating a community of degraded images, in which new identities and contexts can potentially be forged.

The chaos of the metanarrative reflects war in all its constant violent flux and takes the media's depiction of the war to an extreme, concentrating it and spitting it back out, with a kind of abject relish and disgust. *War Primer 2* has an open-endedness that is a retort to the mainstream news media, and also to a resistance movement that is all too often defined by reactionary conspiracy theories and paranoid delusions of criticality. *War Primer 2* has thousands of authors, from the subjects, to the photographers, to the webpage coders – a complex web of interdependence. It is an examination of the mass use of photography and our fascination with it, but also with the compulsion to photograph scenes of atrocity and the politics of looking at such images.

Photo/Montage

The diversity of imagery in *War Primer 2* is channeled through its multi-layered montaging with the original book.⁶⁷ Either only the new image is visible, or both the old and the new, and they often join to form a third combined image. There may also be within the new image another layer, which is produced by some secondary manipulation e.g. a blacked-out face. The captions and hyperlinks at the back of the book that overlay Willett's own text are combined with Brecht's epigrams and the original photo's caption, plus the further contextual captions on the left hand page, meaning that up to 10 different elements interact with one another; thus, *Kriegsfibel*'s already complex composition and narrative, becomes a veritable constellation of relations in *War Primer 2*.

At an early stage in the production of *War Primer 2*, Broomberg and Chanarin attempted to produce their own poems, but eventually decided to leave Brecht's epigrams intact.⁶⁸ In so doing they rejuvenate and foreground Brecht and emphasise the epigrams' continued relevance and currency. This approach also broadens *War Primer 2*'s focus, linking World War Two to the present War on Terror. *War Primer 2* does, though, include new text in the links and captions to the websites from which material is sourced, which run across Willett's essay at the back of the book. Like Brecht's multi-voiced epigrams, these links dart from unicyclist to terrorist websites. Their hypertext, both technological utility and compressed default description, becomes a self-generating poem in its own right.

The juxtaposition of multiple images and texts in the montages in *War Primer 2* creates an energized, open-ended dialectic between style and content. The particular historical/contemporary flux of *War Primer 2*, combined with its de-centered fluid perspective, invokes a sense of possibility and mutability in our understanding of materiality and temporality.

George Didi-Huberman's discussion of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*⁶⁹ can be read in terms of *War Primer 2*'s own approach. He describes it as an endeavor "to read the past through the lens of the present ... a critical, analytical and participatory re-reading of the past."⁷⁰ It is "sensible and systematic but at the same time, it breaks and invents ... It deconstructs with its very exuberance ... It is a tool not for the logical exhaustion of possibilities given, but for the inexhaustible opening up to possibilities that are not yet given. Its principle, its motor, is none other than the *imagination*."⁷¹ A methodical practice combined with a quixotic nature is at the heart of *War Primer 2*'s experiment in bilateral thinking. Like the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, its "disorder is only unreason for those who refuse to think, to respect, to accompany in a way, the parceling out of the world."⁷² Its ambition is to "*re-montage a world that had been de-montaged* by the disasters of history."⁷³ And is "not afraid of 'over-interpretations' since it is only interested in over determined objects."⁷⁴ Sharing a belief that:

Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.⁷⁵

Cutting and pasting is exactly the *modus operandi* of *War Primer 2*, but it is a more pointed and tenacious montage than Warburg's *Atlas*. In the *Atlas*, images never overlap and are not stuck but pinned, whereas *War Primer 2* "parcels out the world" like Warburg, but then recombines and overlaps it, and wilfully obscures old images. *War Primer 2* has a more radical urgency and direction: it deals with a shorter period of time, a more confined subject area, and is a primer intended to be used in relation to

other works, just as its own dynamic structure relates to different media. Furthermore, its digital e-book incarnation recombines it further, returning its matrices to the digital fold, attaching itself to yet another frame.

The overlap of images, and their joining, a feature that is absent from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, is crucial to *War Primer 2*. It acts as a 'punctum', a wounding aspect that forges an intimate bond between the old and new images and grabs our attention.⁷⁶ When two images are joined, an element of surprise is produced through the paradox of a single seamless image that is actually composed of two images.⁷⁷ This effect of blending—in shares something of war's own 'disruptive pattern material' – camouflage; or, like wordplay in a joke, or rhyme in a poem, operates as some extra device that enables us to connect more deeply, and experience something from a different angle. Just as *Kriegsfibel* makes us work hard to follow the narrative within the work, so through the optical illusion of the join we experience the liberties the mind's eye takes; thus, the join becomes a pedagogical device to highlight perception and how it may affect action.

The surreal, almost dreamlike or nightmare character of some of *War Primer 2*'s montages, in which past events are mirrored or distorted in the present, blur notions of consciousness with history. In this sense, the join is almost portal-like and multi-dimensional – between worlds, times, dreams and reality. From this perspective, *War Primer 2* can be seen to steer surrealism's early engagement with the subconscious toward a more emphatically politicized understanding or approach. Added to this, although lifted from the Internet and scaled up or down, the photos and the subjects within have been left in their entirety and not cropped or dissected, which is the common practice of photomontage. Leaving the image intact relates to the aspect of Brecht's estrangement techniques that both foreground and subvert conventions

that represent a naturalistic illusion of reality. The images' un-cropped nature is accentuated through the various overlays of the original *Kriegsfibel* image. This serves to highlight the images' original rectangular form and reinforce a dialogue with photography in its broadest sense. This technique and form owes something to the approach of British artist John Stezaker, who combines postcards and Hollywood publicity images, to surreal effect. Broomberg and Chanarin divert this method, where "one image into another....[becomes] at once familiar and alien",⁷⁸ toward an exploration of more political psychologies and realities. *War Primer 2*'s doubling and transmogrified montaging; the repetition of form, the following of lines, the making of joins, implicitly suggests how war and photography repeat themselves through history.

War and photomontage have significant noteworthy precedents, from Dada's anarchic reactions, to John Heartfield's anti-Nazi propaganda. *War Primer 2* itself is an ally of sorts to two recent incarnations: Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967–72 and 2004), especially her later version, which "purposefully evoked the old because it seemed to her that people were falling for the same sort of political manipulation as they had during Vietnam."⁷⁹ And Gerhard Richter's book *War Cuts* (2004), which combines photographs of details of his abstract paintings with reports from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of the Iraq War.

Ritual/Defacement

War Primer 2 is distinctive for its 'occupation' of one hundred copies of the English translation of Brecht's original *Kriegsfibel*, which connects it to a lineage of other artists' physical interventions in books including those by, amongst others, John Latham and

Marcel Broodthaers. In so doing, for all its homage to Brecht, *War Primer 2* is also a violent act of defacement and is divided in its means of expression. For however seamless the joins are in *War Primer 2*'s montages, they are disrupted by how the new hand-tipped images are glossy colour prints, stuck fast to the pages of the book. The new images irreversibly fix themselves to the page, pictorially in accord, but physically assertive and antagonistic.

In *War Primer 2* historical photo-illustrated magazines confront and switch sides with digital media's immaterial upstarts, each wrestling and undermining the other. This ruck of sorts, attends to one of Susan Sontag's principal problems with images of atrocity, which is what she saw as a kind of troubling equilibrium between impotent victims and impotent viewers.⁸⁰ *War Primer 2*, with its model of an active viewer and the production of a complex antagonistic frame, fractures this enfeebled stalemate.

The time spent engaging with the original *Kriegsfibel*, finding new relevant images and then sticking them into the books, has a ritualistic quality. The prints are sticker-like and are an ode to the retreating physicality of photographs, to the art of printing, and act of collecting; but also to the photo book, which has become a fetishized object to collectors. This continues the tradition of the 'book as art', which has been firmly established through conceptual art practices. Amongst the pages of *War Primer 2*, images that once roamed free on the Internet, are now copied, printed and stuck fast – binary code and dots-per-inch meet pigment and lustrous viscosity, in a votive sacrificial gesture; or like a sacrificial move in chess, done for some other good or to experiment, or to learn from one game to the next. As Marshal McLuhan presciently observed, in the electronic age and its digital domain, archaic forms are re-enacted.

For all *War Primer 2*'s shifting engagement with Brecht, the original *Kriegsfibel*, montage, appropriation, digital technology, the Internet, media, news and photography, at its heart and running through the book's relationship to all these subjects, is war and the struggle over its representation.

Beyond the images, montages and Brecht's narrative, *War Primer 2* has a performative dimension, which enacts itself on the body of the book with almost violent excess – countering that image and text are simply not enough. It is as if the subjects of *War Primer 2*; photography, war and Brecht, demand something more and this is incarnated through the physical occupation and partial defacement of the book, which moves beyond two-dimensional symbolism to physical act. And now this process, this object, this book, mutates into another form, encased within the shining surface of the e-book.

Of course, the quasi-transformation-destruction of art or books has its precedents, from the Third Reich to *Fahrenheit 451*, from iconoclasm to Jake and Dinos Chapman defacing Goya's series of etchings, *Los Desastres de la Guerra*. Broomberg and Chanarin have themselves dealt with this subject before in their work *People in Trouble Laughing Pushed to the Ground* (2011), which gave voice and reason to the defacement of images in the *Belfast Exposed* photographic archive.⁸¹

The splitting and defacement of the 100 copies of *War Primer* could be compared to what philosopher Simon Critchley describes as the result of an ethical demand and politics of resistance:

The outside, the other, that leaves its imprint, its demand on our inside. ... the subject is also *divided* by this demand, it is

constitutively *split* between itself and a demand that it cannot meet, but which is that by virtue of which it becomes a subject. The ethical subject is a split subject.⁸²

Critchley continues by discussing how, for Jacques Lacan, “the entire itinerary of the subject, articulates itself around the Thing that casts its shadow across it.”⁸³ This is comparable to how Didi-Huberman describes Warburg’s *Atlas*: “It is a tragic knowledge ... a knowledge gained by the Titan on the basis of a conflict that he lost, and of a punishment he had to endure.”⁸⁴ *War Primer 2* resonates both with the conflict of war, and the conflict inherent in photography’s relation to war itself. War photography cannot meet the demand placed upon it, but must nonetheless persevere; it is only with a critical, self-reflexive dimension, and a profound burden of knowledge and experience, that it can ever come close to ethical resistance. As Sylvere Lotringer states: “We must get inside Pure War, we must cover ourselves with blood and tears. We mustn’t turn away. *That* is political and civic virtue.”⁸⁵ He continues that we are told: “Above all, don’t look at death, we’ll take care of it; you work.”⁸⁶ Or as Tom Junod writes with reference to the censorship of photos of the “jumpers” leaping to their deaths from the Twin Towers on 9/11: “Dozens, scores, maybe hundreds of people died by leaping from a burning building, and we have somehow taken it upon ourselves to deem their deaths unworthy of witness – because we have somehow deemed the act of witness, in this one regard, unworthy of us.”⁸⁷ It is in the zone of images, of censorship and perception, things that are so central to war, that artists have a foothold, and some currency to intervene directly.

War Primer 2 acts as witness towards both acts of war and photography. Enacting an iconomachic (icon–conflict), rather than simply iconoclastic (image–destroyer), dispute with imagery and meaning.⁸⁸ The demand that dealing with war makes upon the artist

is inscribed in the method of *War Primer 2*. It is as if Brecht's work on the original *Kriegsfibel* and the lessons of history are partially humiliated through the book's defacement. The book's disfigured appearance becomes an echo and embodiment of the distortions and destructions enacted by war and photography.

The final plate in *War Primer 2* has no new photo stuck to it. Instead, a square of silk-screened red lies across a photo of students in a lecture hall. Perhaps an allusion to the colour coding of terrorist threat levels or abstraction, but in forsaking the inclusion of a final photo, weight is added to Brecht's last epigram, which concludes "learn to learn, and try to learn for what." Here, the pedagogical imperative of *Kriegsfibel* and *War Primer 2* is stressed and suggests that in a changing environment, we must continually start from zero and re-think again our complex relationship to past and present and the relationship between atrocity and photography. As Marianne Hirsch asks, "What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our stories displaced by them."⁸⁹ *War Primer 2* attempts to work through such predicaments and conflicts, via a radical historiographic epistemology, in which the past and the present are not side-by-side, but are rather folded one into the other. And for all its recourse to history, and to Brecht, it is nonetheless unashamedly contemporary, in the way that Boris Groys describes how "being contemporary – *zeitgenössisch* – can be understood as being a comrade of time, helping time when it has problems, when it has difficulties."⁹⁰ Perhaps *War Primer 2* can be seen to give *Kriegsfibel* a helping hand, and vice versa – artists and artworks as comrades across time. In this way, it is post-modern in the classic sense of a simultaneous recycling and denial of the old avant-garde, but also in the more recent sense of a post-modern modernity, as a continuation or return to aspects of an unfinished, but not completely worthless, modernist project.

In *War Primer 2* the act of war blurs with the artistic act. The desire to bear witness through photography conflicts with critical theory's deconstruction of the image, of mimesis, of what is real. However, this denial of the image chimes troublingly with attempts to censor photography and fails to see that photography makes its own reality. We enact poses for the camera, seek out photo opportunities, as satellite photographs are used to justify war and as others document it. In such a system, where the image dominates, a subversive engagement with photography becomes an essential primer to the wider world and action within it.

Sam Skinner, Berlin 2012

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War Primer 2

by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

This project originated as a book, *War Primer 2* by Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, published by MACK in 2011. *War Primer 2* is a limited edition book that physically inhabits the pages of Bertolt Brecht's remarkable publication *War Primer* (Libris, 1998). The original was published in German in 1955 under the title *Kriegsfibel*.

War Primer 2 was published by MACK in 2011 and sold out immediately. While *War Primer* was concerned with images of the Second World War, *War Primer 2* updates Brecht's piece with images of the conflict generated by both sides of the so-called "War on Terror".

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www.broombergchanarin.com
www.choppedliverpress.com

Collaborators:

Giulia Astesani, Natalia Grabowska, Piero Martinello, Chloe Rafferty and Sam Skinner.

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Essay credits

Bertolt Brecht, originally published as a short piece in *Pariser Tageblatt*, December 1934.

Jennifer Bajorek, 'Holding Fast to Ruins: The Air War in Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*', in *Bombs Away*, ed. Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2006), pp. 97-111. © Jennifer Bajorek

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David Evans, 'Brecht's War Primer: The 'Photo-epigram' as Poor Monument', *Afterimage* 30:5 (2003), pp. 8–9. © David Evans

Simon Korner, originally published online at: www.21stcenturysocialism.com, 2005. © Simon Korner

Tom Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography: Mastering Reality in the *Kriegsfibel*', in *Bertolt Brecht: A Reassessment of his Work and Legacy*, ed. Robert Gillett and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2008), pp. 169-189. © Rodopi 2008

Sam Skinner, 'Split/Subject – Notes on *War Primer 2*', (Berlin, October 2012). © Sam Skinner