



The War in the Empty Air: Victims, Perpetrators, and Postwar Germans

Dagmar Barnouw

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Sixty years after the defeat of the Nazis and the discovery of Auschwitz, the impact of WWII on the German people remains a subject that is difficult to broach in public discourse. The experiences of Germans civilians were little studied, as if the memories of the defeated were not deserving of preservation. In Germany 1945, an examination of Allied photography of postwar Germany, Dagmar Barnouw demonstrated one of the means by which the victors sought to impose the burden of responsibility for World War II and the Holocaust on the German people as a whole. Now, in *The War in the Empty Air*, she demonstrates how deeply that narrative took hold and the silence it imposed. In Germany, the re-emergence of memories of wartime suffering is being met with intense public debate. In the United States, the recent translation and publication of *Crabwalk* by Gunter Grass and *The Natural History of Destruction* by W. G. Sebald offer evidence that these submerged memories are surfacing. Taking account of these developments, Barnouw examines this debate about the validity and importance of German memories of war and the events that have occasioned it.

Steering her path between the notions of "victim" and "perpetrator," Barnouw seeks a place where acknowledgment of both the horror of Auschwitz and the suffering of the non-Jewish Germans can, together, create a more complete historical remembrance for postwar generations. Dagmar Barnouw is Professor of German and Comparative Literature, University of Southern California, and author of *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity, Germany 1945*, and *Naipaul's Strangers* (all Indiana University Press), among other books of cultural criticism.



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