



# War Remains

Mediations of Suffering and Death  
in the Era of the World Wars

Marie Cronqvist & Lina Sturfelt (eds.)

NORDIC ACADEMIC PRESS

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Edited by  
Marie Cronqvist  
&  
Lina Sturfelt



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*Marie Cronqvist & Lina Sturfelt*



Kollwitz, Käthe (1867–1945): *The Widow I (Die Witwe I)*, plate 4 Digitale (1) from *War (Krieg)* 1921–22 (published 1923). New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

# Introduction

## A media history of war remains

*Marie Cronqvist & Lina Sturfelt*

Once there was a shock  
that left behind a long, shimmering comet tail.  
It keeps us inside. It makes the TV pictures snowy.  
It settles in cold drops on the telephone wires.

Tomas Tranströmer, 'After a death' (1966)<sup>1</sup>

What remains with us after somebody's death? In a poem from 1966, the Swedish poet and future Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer reflected on the 'long, shimmering comet tail' that the shock leaves behind, and which 'keeps us inside'. Death has a comet tail, a tendency to remain with us, sometimes for a very long time. Tranströmer also uses references to different media—the television, the telephone wire—to enforce the image of how communication is somehow broken or challenged. To communicate the meaning of death is not only a complex and challenging enterprise, it is also largely dependent on the materialities of media.

This book is about the mediations and sense-making narratives of war deaths and suffering. In the first half of the twentieth century, more than 120 million people died an untimely or violent death—on the battlefield, in concentration camps, through fierce air strikes, or as casualties of the many severe epidemics and hardships that followed on the heels of war. The experiences and narratives of war that flowed through the different media of the time were often focused on the emotional, the personal, the everyday, and the subjective. War, shock, and trauma also lived on in the stories, sometimes to a remarkable

extent, once the years of conflict were replaced by peace and prosperity. The displaced remains of bodies and the reminiscences of personal or collective suffering lingered on as sad mementos in the culture of the everyday. They settled ‘in cold drops on the telephone wires.’

The experience of twentieth-century warfare not only flowed through different media of the time, however. Its legacy is still very much with us today, framing our understanding of war, conflict, and suffering. In this way, the findings in this book are not merely about past events, but also about the present and the future. Stories of death are always more about the living than the dead. Through mediated memories, we are immersed in the struggle to make sense of our troubled past, and the remaining narratives and images of death and suffering are transmitted and echoed in our understanding of contemporary conflicts.

In this volume, we present a collection of long-lived media representations and narratives. The fact that they were anchored in various media forms has determined our unwavering focus on a range of media, which all communicated the realities of war.<sup>2</sup> Our thesis is that in the period roughly covering the 1910s to the 1970s, diverse forms of cultural production—newspapers, film, television, and radio, but also commemorative rituals, fiction, music, comic books, and monuments—repeated, reinforced, or renegotiated people’s beliefs about war experiences, turning the terror and trauma of war into stories that could be situated within the conventions of public display.

Mediations of war, suffering, and death are at the heart of the book, but we also go beyond the study of mere representation to ground our analysis in both genre and media form. The contributors represent a variety of scholarly fields—history, human rights studies, media history, film studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, publishing studies, and rhetoric—and the primary sources analysed in the chapters range from anti-war fiction in the First World War, interwar and post-war reportage, radio war correspondence, and film documentaries in the aftermath of the Second World War, to Cold War comic books and men’s magazines. By drawing on a diverse range of sources and empirical examples, we set out to compare different forms of media and expression over an extended period. With the varied cases represented here, we want to demonstrate that the horror of war is hard to conceive of but through its mediations.

This edited volume is inspired by different vibrant research fields, each of them rich in scope. Those we have singled out as particularly important are discussed in this introduction: *the cultural history of war*, and *sensing and mediating war*. We cannot hope to cover these fields in their entirety, of course, nor would we claim that they are unrelated, or by placing an emphasis on these two particular questions that we mean to ignore the obviously relevant field of historical memory studies. Quite the contrary, as will become apparent, memory is a crucial dimension, and we owe a debt of thanks to seminal works on the memory of the world wars in several European countries.<sup>3</sup> Yet to this vast and thoroughly researched field of war and cultural memory, our contribution is to add an interdisciplinary discussion that focuses more specifically on media specificity and the history of human sensation.

## The cultural history of war

In recent decades, the cultural history of war has become one of the most dynamic and inventive fields of historical scholarship. Cultural historians have appropriated the theme of war, broadening the often static and narrow view of war and militarism that long characterized military history. Scholars such as Joanna Bourke, Jay Winter, Omer Bartov, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker have substantially changed our understanding of the history of war and violence in the twentieth century by offering new perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Today, the cultural history of war and warfare has developed into a vast and truly interdisciplinary field, drawing insights and methods from disciplines as diverse as anthropology, literary and visual studies, media studies, memory studies, and lately archaeology and cultural geography.

Suffice to say, the present volume is very much part of this new tradition, and we are all in some way indebted to the cultural approaches to the study of war represented by series such as *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare* (Cambridge University Press), which focuses on ‘the social and cultural history of armed conflict, and the impact of military events on social and cultural history’ from the 1850s to the present day, and the *Cultural History of Modern War* (Manchester University Press)—associated with the

Cultural History of War Group at the Centre for the Cultural History of War at Manchester University—which ‘interrogates the divisions between war and society, war and peace, allies and enemies, heroes and villains ... maintaining a focus on the cultural meanings of the myriad practices of modern war.’<sup>5</sup> Another constant source of inspiration has been the work of the Group for War and Culture Studies based at the University of Westminster since 1995, and their important publication *War and Culture Studies* (2007–), an interdisciplinary journal that ‘emphasises cultural histories and cultural production as significant forces that have shaped experiences, representations and memories of war’, with a specific focus on the relationship between war and culture in the modern era.<sup>6</sup>

Like the contributions to the present volume, much of this research is preoccupied with the lasting cultural impact of the world wars or the era of total war. Following Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish, we would argue that ‘the industrialized nature of twentieth-century war was a unique cultural phenomenon, in possession of a material and psychological intensity that embodies the extremes of human behaviour, from total economic mobilization to the unbearable sadness of individual loss.’<sup>7</sup> It has profoundly shaped the ways conflicts are imagined and remembered, and framed the language we use to describe traumatic memories.<sup>8</sup> However, counter to the overwhelmingly British, German, and French cultural histories of war, we offer new and detailed empirical analyses of hitherto under-researched or overlooked primary sources for this particular period. Some of the chapters examine Swedish examples of mediated experiences and memories of death and suffering by using findings that are unfamiliar to international audiences. Still, it should be noted that all the chapters even so deal with European or Western narratives of war and suffering.

While total war scarred entire societies—and all media obviously played an important role in totalizing war as a common experience and in blurring the lines between ‘front’ and ‘home front’, ‘civilian’ and ‘combatant’—it is important to bear in mind that the way war is mediated is also shaped by social institutions and social experience, reflecting a ‘politics of the senses’. As Christine Sylvester has pointed out, the question of who is seen and heard in the media, whose stories are told, does matter.<sup>9</sup> In the present volume, we hold to a broad concept

of war and what counts as ‘war experience’, paying special attention to both civilian testimonies and the representations and mediations of women and children (in the chapters by Qvarnström, Sturfelt, Skoog, Bergström, and Cronqvist), and to the soldiers’ stories and the more traditional battlefield narratives (Kärrholm and Saarenmaa).

Another lasting response to the traumas of total war has been the rise of human rights as law, politics, and rhetoric. The link between the world wars, the Holocaust, and human rights is often taken for granted rather than scrutinized, but as Åsa Bergström and Lina Sturfelt show in their chapters, ‘the age of catastrophe’ also resulted in new kinds of humanitarian reporting, which served as an emotive and ritual response to the disasters of war. Their contributions call for the interdisciplinary field of human rights studies to pay closer attention to historical context, but above all to pay greater heed to recent developments in media studies and theory.<sup>10</sup> In which ways has the history of human rights and humanitarianism been entangled in the history and memory of the world wars and its mediations? What narrative forms and specific media have favoured such a development?<sup>11</sup>

### Sensing and mediating war

In the cultural study of war and violence, the examination of human experience and emotion has played an important part. Over the past decade, there have been attempts to rethink the genealogy and ontology of war by factoring in the sensory dimension. Feminist international relations scholars in particular have argued for an understanding of war as experienced and sensed.<sup>12</sup> This shift requires us to place the body at the centre of any war analysis in order to understand both the social institutions and individual experiences of war. In the end, as Sylvester writes, war is experienced through the body, both physically and emotionally, which is why Kevin McSorley argues that the body should be central to our thinking about war, recognizing ‘the countless affective, sensory and embodied ways through which war lives and breeds.’<sup>13</sup> Critical of most of the conventional ‘body-absent’ war scholarship, and indeed the Clausewitzian paradigm that war is just politics by any other means, McSorley instead suggests that we should explore war as ‘politics incarnate, politics written on and experienced

through the thinking, feeling bodies of men and women.<sup>14</sup> This entails an explicit focus on war's many sensory practices, and the ways in which war is prepared, enacted, and reproduced in embodied action, suffering, and memory. As McSorley notes, 'an analytical focus upon the body tends to render any clear demarcations of war zones and times problematic, emphasizing instead the enactment and reproduction of war through affective dispositions, corporeal careers, embodied suffering and somatic memories that endure across time and place'.<sup>15</sup> In a recent example, which like us concentrates on the world war era and on war's material and affective remains, *Modern conflict and the senses* (2017) investigates 'the sensual worlds created by modern war, focusing on the sensorial responses embodied in and provoked by the materiality of conflict and its aftermath'.<sup>16</sup>

The present collection of chapters also takes the line that 'the nodal role of the body as a trans-disciplinary means of analysis and understanding' war and its human consequences is the way forward, albeit with a nod to the embodied, sensory experiences of different media, such as radio (Skoog) or comic books (Kärholm).<sup>17</sup> In war stories, the dead or deformed body was frequently used to invite the reader, viewer, or listener to reflect on the meaning of war, often combined with an anti-war message or the issue of responsibility (Qvarnström, Sturfelt, and Kärholm). Others also used the body of the reporter as a medium to convey certain emotional responses to the suffering of war (Sturfelt). While some media, such as men's magazines, stressed information, the broad picture, and engagement as a 'male' way of taking pleasure in war (Saarenmaa), humanitarian reporting might emphasize empathy and compassion (Sturfelt), and short stories, literary reportages in the weekly magazines, or comic books might concentrate on the horror and outrage of war (Qvarnström, Cronqvist, and Kärholm).

Another choice we have made, which resonates with the wider research on war and culture, is to give priority to the visual. Despite the media forms analysed here we have all found that sight was very much the privileged sense when it came to narrating and remembering the emotional and sensory experiences of twentieth-century warfare. The many testimonies are all in some way focused on the visual, on 'seeing' suffering, either literally or metaphorically. Practices of looking

and the importance of the visual in connection with violence and war are something that have been thoroughly investigated by a number of media scholars in recent years, highlighting the role of a variety of media in challenging or reinforcing war experiences. Not least, analyses of the role of photojournalism have raised the question of possible ‘compassion fatigue’ in the Western media and the chances of instilling a new ethical sensibility for what Lilie Chouliaraki calls ‘distant sufferers’.<sup>18</sup> Also, as Ekaterina Balabanova and Katy Parry rightly point out in their introduction to a special issue on communicating war in the *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, there is a need to further explore the visual construction of war narratives in media forms, because in moving away from the traditional focus on news to concentrate on other forms of popular culture, visual culture, or activist media, we can at last investigate ‘how alternative media forms and actors are able to challenge preconceptions of legitimate voices in the “storytelling” of war experiences.’<sup>19</sup> This invites us to consider which representations and forms of remembrance become dominant, and which are contested, adjusted, or resisted. These dimensions are discussed in several of the chapters in this book (Sturfelt, Skoog, Kärrholm, and Saarenmaa).

This also taps into the broader discussion about the role of the media in the processes of commemorating war and suffering. The memory dimension runs through all the chapters in this volume, and some (Skoog, Cronqvist, and Saarenmaa) have chosen to foreground the issue. Alongside the broad research field of collective or cultural memory, there is now a new, vibrant field directly concerned with media and memory, including, for example, journalism, film, and digital media. Some of its scholars, indeed, have focused specifically on the memory of violence and war in recent times.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, there seems to be a peculiar lack of connection here between historical studies and media studies of memory. In media studies, the focus is more often than not on aspects of digital memory in the new media age, sometimes to the neglect of the long historical tradition of memory studies, while the mere concept of media or the mediation of memory remains heavily under-theorized by historians.<sup>21</sup> This book is an effort to bridge the gap between the two research fields, converging on the interdisciplinary field of media history.

In contrast to these earlier monodisciplinary studies of memory, then, we present a selection of cases, all of which highlight media specificity and the importance of media forms to the portrayal of war, suffering, and death, as well as the manifestations of war memories. It has been important for us to identify the various strands of narrative or storytelling that a specific medium lends itself to—be it the comic book, the documentary film, the reportage, the photograph, the musical work, the monument, or any other form of cultural production. Which war narratives are unique to which medium, and how can a historically sensitive analysis take such media specificity into account? In their plea for a ‘media-conscious narratology’, Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon argue that media forms are key in the construction of narratives, for they affect their content, presentation, and reception.<sup>22</sup> This leads us to the important issues of how the inherent characteristics of a medium shape the narrative, and how narratives change and produce new meanings in the process of migrating to another medium. In her chapter, Sofi Qvarnström probes the issue of media specificity. What are the possibilities and limitations of a given medium? And what happens to war narratives as they cross from one medium to another?

The answer to such questions, we would argue, has to be anchored in a historical context. Viewed through the lens of media history, this book offers a novel understanding of war narratives and how they have operated in the media. Like Roger Silverstone, we use the term *mediation* in order to highlight the interplay between media as technology and media as discourse, text, narrative, and content.<sup>23</sup> The materiality and temporality of the media form are two such dimensions; for example, in their contributions, Qvarnström and Kristin Skoog reflect on ‘slow’ versus ‘rapid’ media in the shape of literary novels and the radio respectively. Our conscious choice of ‘mediation’ is not meant to oppose any possible inquiries into the ‘mediatization of war’; it is simply to say that the following essays are more in line with Silverstone’s and others’ emphasis on ‘the heterogeneity of the transformations to which media give rise across a complex and divided social space’ rather than a meta process of a cumulative kind.<sup>24</sup>

Our findings also shed light on the public’s role in the making and remaking of war narratives and war memories, and the entangled

relationship between media creators and media consumers. Media such as the comic book, discussed by Sara Kärholm, show evidence of the collaborative relationships formed between editorial boards and the readers. Form and content were necessarily brought together in order to draw readers into a dialogue on the meaning of war, inviting them to take an active role in the genesis of the story and to share the symbolic representation of the events. A similar focus on the public's collaboration was evident from humanitarian reporting, where form and content were engineered to make the reader react and act, for example by making charitable donations (Sturfelt and Bergström). Considering the growing interest in participatory or collaborative media in a broad range of disciplines, frequently against the background of so-called new or interactive media, it is salutary to note that historical perspectives and analyses can confirm that such participatory media are nothing new.<sup>25</sup>

The important question here is to ask how a medium mediates—that is, reconciles—different cultural, political, and economic forces. All the chapters raise key questions about the possibilities and limitations of any given medium. In what way do social actors operate within, or in opposition to, media structures? What is the role of media agents, organizations, and institutions? The concept of mediation in this book can in some senses be related to the resolution or settling of differences. We see war storytelling as an expression of such a 'working through' or 'settling' cultural practice. The mediator or medium acts to reconcile different parties or opposites, in the present instance between the everyday and the horrors of war. The mediation of war is an appropriation of violence and death into people's lives, but it also engages with otherness and, as such, it brings to light the ethical underpinnings of mediation that Silverstone calls 'proper distance.'<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, this again brings to mind a simple but important point, one which Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf have made: stories about death are less about the dead than about the living. They are communicative practices that connect to cultural and religious values and rituals.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Thomas W. Laqueur argues that the dead body serves a fundamental need for the living; 'the work of the dead' is to engender human communities that connect the past to the future.<sup>28</sup> Translated into the language of this book, the dead body is a medium

that makes it possible for the living to work through and communicate pain, agony, and grief. It is about war remains, literally as well as figuratively.

## The outline and content of the book

The contributors represent a variety of scholarly fields, reflecting a conviction that the complexities of the world war era and its mediations call for a fully interdisciplinary approach. Although many of the examples are taken from a Swedish empirical context, the primary aim is not to present a specifically Swedish or Nordic experience, but to highlight the narrative structures and genres, and the significance of different media forms, in public representations of war violence and death. Nevertheless, we would argue that the many Swedish examples bring another geocultural element to the scholarship on war remains, a much-needed corrective in a field very much dominated by German, French, and British perspectives. To that end, the book is arranged chronologically, beginning with the seminal catastrophe of the First World War and ending with memories of the Second World War in a seventies Cold War context.

Sofi Qvarnström uses the First World War short stories of the Swedish pacifist writer Anna Lenah Elgström to investigate how the special characteristics of the literary novel as a slow, resilient medium shaped representations of war, death, and suffering. Elgström's fiction was highly visual and emotional, and often focused on the suffering body. Her narratives highlighted the sufferings of women and children in total war, equating the home front with the battlefield as an arena of war. In her anti-war journalism, she pursued a female pacifism based on ideas of maternity as a way to peace, but, as Qvarnström shows, Elgström's fiction opened up for far more complex, ambiguous, and often pessimistic narratives on the subject of war than her journalistic work allowed for.

Lina Sturfelt analyses the practices of sensing and seeing total war in the humanitarian reporting and media campaigns of Rätts Barnen (Swedish Save the Children, or RB) in the aftermath of the First World War, focusing on the organization's strategic uses of emotional and sensory representations of the war child's body. By examining both

textual and visual narratives in the daily and weekly Swedish press, Sturfelt investigates why and how the RB invested in a certain moral rhetoric of seeing and sensing suffering in order to ameliorate it, showing that a visual/visualizing discourse was key to their interwar humanitarian imagery. When framing hunger as 'war news', the starving body served as a reminder of its horrors, but also of the possibility for compassionate action. By envisioning children's bodies as both temporally and spatially afflicted by war, the traumatic memory of total war was visualized for a Swedish audience, challenging the more conventional war narratives. Acknowledging their embodied suffering was also a way of recognizing and taking responsibility for the wider consequences of war's victimization of (European) humanity.

Kristin Skoog then explores the embodied and sensory experience of war in a study of radio reporting during the Second World War, using the case of the BBC's war correspondent Audrey Russell. Drawing on recent scholarship, Skoog introduces sensory culture and sensory history to the study of mainstream radio and media history. Radio transformed the way war was mediated, and, as Skoog argues, radio war reporting should be thought of as offering a multilevel sensory experience that created a sense of immediacy, intimacy, and presence, changing listeners' perception of proximity and distance. In contrast to a slow medium such as the literary novel, radio was thus a rapid, immediate medium. By focusing on Russell's wartime experiences, Skoog further shows that the way war is mediated and represented by social institutions and social experience undoubtedly produces a 'politics of the senses', which in this case was clearly shaped by gender and the gendered body.

The focus then shifts to the post-war era, and from radio to film. Åsa Bergström investigates the organization Svenska Europahjälpen (Swedish European Aid, or SE), which existed between 1946 and 1951 to raise money for European refugees. During its brief existence, the SE commissioned a number of promotional short films to convince audiences to donate to its relief work. These films primarily focussed on Rädde Barnen (Swedish Save the Children), an organization that is still active today, promoting it as an active helping hand and Sweden as a nation of good-hearted heroes. Pre-production scripts and the films themselves reveal a degree of strategic media awareness, which

Bergström uses to chart the SE's development and its media strategies, and relate them to more general representations of trauma and personal testimony.

Literary journalism is another narrative genre of war, and the magazine is one of the main media forms through which it finds its audience. The journalistic reporting of atomic warfare is addressed by Marie Cronqvist, who looks at the American writer and war correspondent John Hersey's classic reportage 'Hiroshima', published in the *New Yorker* in August 1946. This famous piece has been thoroughly investigated by researchers over the years, but Cronqvist offers a new reading by connecting Hersey's thoughts on journalistic mediation to Geraldine Muhlmann's concept of journalism's decentring tendencies. She shows how 'Hiroshima' should be read in the light of recent scholarship on journalism, memory, and grief, and argues that from a present-day perspective it is with such voices of the other, with journalism that decentres rather than unifies, that the pervasive and destructive media discourse of fear that is the curse of contemporary journalism about mass atrocities can be challenged.

Another widely popular but seldom-analysed medium of war experience is the comic book. Sara Kärrholm explores media-specific aspects of the American EC Comic's fifties war comics. Media specificity conditioned the comics' central message, which was to show the horrors of war—a subversive message at the time of publication. Kärrholm shows that the interplay between text, image and context, in the form of paratexts, is crucial for any understanding of EC's war comics. She shows how EC used a specific motif, the dead body, and its framing in the layout of the comic, to reinforce the central message of the various paratexts of the print comics. Form and content were used in unison to draw readers into a dialogue about the meaning of war, and to provide what was deemed the correct framing for an interpretation not only of the Korean War in the years 1950–1953, but also of the recent experiences of the Second World War.

Laura Saarenmaa then discusses the seemingly endless recirculation of memories of the Second World War and Nazi atrocities among mass readerships. These are now the stuff of popular history magazines, whereas in the sixties and seventies these kinds of materials circulated primarily in men's magazines, sandwiched between nude

pin-ups and articles about sex. Saarenmaa approaches the circulation of Nazi imagery as a source of pleasure and excitement that found parallels in pornography. Driven by the intermediation from older to younger generations, the Nazi stories produced biased historical knowledge by focusing on the personalities of the Nazi officers rather than their victims. Moreover, Saarenmaa argues that in the particular context of sixties and seventies Sweden, this recirculation was linked to the state of the world, and especially to political tensions, wars, and armed conflicts.

Finally, in a short postscript, we editors present the five key findings of the volume and their consequences for further research, returning to the benefit of adopting a historical perspective on the mediation of war remains, especially for the understanding of war trauma in our own time.

The structure of this volume may be chronological, moving from the 1910s to the 1970s, but this does not mean that the cases studied here merely deal with past events. They are also concerns of the present. Several of the chapters concern what might best be called generational layers of remembering war and suffering. As the authors stress, war stories find new meanings whenever they are reread, reheard, or reseen by new generations, be it Elgström's short stories from the First World War, Hersey's journalistic account of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, or the circulation of images of Nazi perpetrators and weapons in today's history magazines. When, where, and how is it even possible to represent traumatic events? Using a range of examples, we all argue that rather than seeing war representations in terms of clear, distinct phases or genres, we should consider how they appear, fade, and reappear in different media forms, and the representational consequences of such transformations. Ultimately, the reason to revisit the era of total war is that it still matters. Its shockwaves are with us even now.

## Notes

- 1 Robert Bly, *The half-finished heaven: The best poems of Tomas Tranströmer* (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2001), 28.
- 2 Although the chapters in this book focus on some of the possible media forms that communicated war experiences, we work with a very broad definition taken from the cultural history of the media. See Peter Burke & Asa Briggs, *A social history of*

- the media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); Lisa Gitelman, *Always already new: Media, history, and the data of culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006); Solveig Jülich et al. (eds.), *Mediernas kulturhistoria* (Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2008); Marie Cronqvist et al. (eds.), *Mediehistoriska vändningar* (Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 25; Lund: Lunds universitet, 2014).
- 3 Among the many valuable works covering a range of countries, are the following from the UK, France, Germany, and Scandinavia: Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European memory* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995); Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–6); Monika Flacke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen: 1945—Arena der Erinnerungen: Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historisches Museums*, 2 vols (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2004); Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander (eds.), *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical cultures in contemporary Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003); Claus Bryld & Anette Warring, *Besættelsetiden som kollektiv erindring* (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1999).
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# Regarding the pain of mothers

## The First World War, Anna Lenah Elgström, and fiction as media

*Sofi Qvarnström*

To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell's flames. Still, it seems good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one's sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others.<sup>1</sup>

In her essay *Regarding the pain of others* (2003), Susan Sontag discusses the meaning of the photographic image in war. Photography cannot prevent war, nor relieve human suffering. But it can bear witness to the war, and thereby teach us something about the world and the human condition. In the passage on suffering it is not obvious that Sontag is talking about the photography, though; it could just as well have been a television programme, a newspaper article, or a piece of fiction writing. What Sontag is describing is a fundamental function of media in wartime.

There are, of course, fundamental differences in the representation of war and suffering that depend on the type of media, since both medium and genre limit what can be represented. We have seen an increased awareness of the importance of the media type in narrative in recent decades, even if these ideas are not new. In the sixties, Marshall McLuhan coined the well-known expression 'the media is the message', but as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics* we can find a discussion of media (even if he did not use the term *medium*, which is derived from Latin). Aristotle understood the medium to be an expressive resource, such as colour, shape, rhythm, melody, or language (voice).

Thereafter he classified different art forms according to the media they use—for example, music (melody and rhythm) and dance (rhythm only).<sup>2</sup> However, it is only in recent years that the axiom of narratology, as a project that transcends disciplines and media, has been called into question; hence the two volumes edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative across media* (2004) and *Storyworlds across media* (2014), which raise the question of how the intrinsic properties of a medium shape the form of the narrative, and how narratives mutate and create new meaning as they migrate to another medium.

In terms of theory, this chapter develops ideas from these two works, but also adds a rhetorical perspective on media analysis. I have earlier argued that a rhetorical focus in media analyses brings a methodologically complementary perspective to a discussion of cross-media relations.<sup>3</sup> At the time, I was concerned with persuasiveness, and the ways in which a message changes when it is formulated in a range of media. Persuasion works differently depending on how its arguments are formulated: verbally, in writing, or figuratively. Where the arguments are made—in newspaper articles, in novels, or in parliament—must also be taken into account. A rhetorical perspective, unlike a narrative approach, emphasizes the fact that content, form, and representation not only create meaning, but *do* something to us, affecting or changing us in different ways. What I discuss here can be seen as a development of my previous work, but now with a focus not on media transcendences, but on the characteristics of rhetoric in a single medium: fiction books.

My aim with this chapter is to investigate fiction as a medium, and its role in representing war, death, and bodily suffering. More specifically, it concerns depictions of the First World War (1914–1918). What characterizes the fiction about this war, and what are the possibilities and limitations of the medium? This will be discussed using a number of short stories by the Swedish writer, Anna Lenah Elgström (1884–1968).

### Fiction as a medium

The concept of medium has been much discussed and its definitions are numerous.<sup>4</sup> A recurring definition is that a medium is a combination of modality (language, sound, image, moving images, music) and a physical channel (a book, newspaper, painting, or debate, for

example). Yet a medium also consists of technology (whether speech, writing, print, film, television, or digital technology) and has a cultural dimension—‘the public recognition of media as forms of communication and the institutions, behaviours and practices that support them.’<sup>5</sup> Comics, the theatre, and the press are all examples of media types where the cultural dimension is significant—media forms cannot be distinguished between purely on the basis of modality, physical channel, and technology. In what follows, however, the main focus is the modality (language), the physical channel (book), and the technology (writing) of fiction, putting to one side the fact that a book is a printed medium.

In order to talk about what characterizes a certain medium, we have to relate, directly or indirectly, to other media. Wallace Chafe can talk about the slowness of writing because he compares it with speech. Where spoken language is ephemeral, written language is permanent and transportable; where speech is often spontaneous, writing is, for the most part, deliberate and ‘worked over.’<sup>6</sup> If we focus on the physical channel or the materiality of a book, and compare it with a newspaper, we will find a temporal difference similar to the one between spoken and written language: the process from writing to publication takes months, and often years, whereas it takes approximately a day for a newspaper. It is not only the production process that is characterized by slowness, of course, as reading and reception can be much the same. A newspaper might be read in a matter of hours—each article takes only a few minutes—but a book can take several hours, and often days, to finish. Another way to trace media-specific properties is to look at the development of new media.<sup>7</sup> To take one example, it is only when we start to discuss multimodal texts, which use several means of expression (for example, words and images), that we become aware of the mono-modality of written language (only words).<sup>8</sup>

The following discussion is organized around a number of properties or features, which characterize both the book as a medium and the fiction genre. The question is the extent to which these properties affect the representation and mediation of war, death, and bodily suffering. These features can either be linked to the writing and production process of the book, to its materiality, or to its reception. In this chapter, then, I present the evolution rather than the test of a theory, for instead of beginning with a complete theory (top-down), the five properties I

discuss here emerged during the empirical work (bottom-up). This resembles the method applied by Ryan in her discussion of what defines a medium.<sup>9</sup>

## Elgström, Sweden, and the First World War

One aim with this chapter, in other words, is to examine how suffering and death was represented and mediated during the First World War.<sup>10</sup> However, the short stories chosen for my analysis should not be thought especially representative for the time. They are one illustrative example out of many. Anna Lenah Elgström may be forgotten today, but during her lifetime she was a prominent voice in Sweden's public life as a writer, journalist, feminist, pacifist, socialist, and founder of the Swedish section of Save the Children. Her writing was driven in a more overtly political direction by world events in 1914, and in one way or another the war permeated almost everything she wrote thereafter. She was one of the Swedish writers who most vociferously criticized the war at the time.<sup>11</sup> Sweden was not a combatant and observed events at a distance; however, even though the country had declared itself neutral, there was a clear tendency to take sides, with the conservatives sympathizing with Germany and the liberals and the left with the Entente Cordiale.<sup>12</sup>

Elgström's collection of short stories, *Mödrar* (1917, 'Mothers'), includes nine short stories exploring the changing meaning of maternity. She depicted motherhood as a life-giving and liberating force, but also as a form of bondage that prevented women from taking part in the world and meeting men on equal terms. This tension was a central conflict in Elgström's feminist pacifism. Another was the opposition between the notion of a tender-hearted, self-sacrificing motherhood and an active, radical, societal motherhood that demanded a degree of selfishness and contrariness. The overall structure of the short stories can also be described as a battle between two conflicting principles: mothers are life incarnate, creating and cherishing life and earth, while war represents the death which will devastate them.

Elgström was strongly influenced by the Swedish social reformer Ellen Key (1849–1926), whose notion of her own coinage, societal motherhood ('sammhällsmoderlighet'), was thought crucial to peacemaking. Key's



Portrait of Anna Lenah Elgström (1884–1968) by Jan de Meyere, 1925–1941, Stadsmuseet, Stockholm.

societal motherhood should be understood as a moral and political concept—a metaphor for women’s participation in society and public life. She wanted to subject one-sided male power to a female corrective.<sup>13</sup> Women’s suffrage was a necessity if women were to be able to participate and influence society in a fresh direction. Consequently, the tasks that women had acquired through motherhood, such as nurturing, protecting, and educating children, would gain in stature

in the public sphere. In the war years, motherliness and maternal care would be emphasized as invaluable for promoting peace not only in Sweden, but throughout Europe.<sup>14</sup> The crux of this so-called maternal pacifism was that women, as potential or actual mothers, had developed certain abilities that made them want to save their children from all harm. Since war took the most violent of forms and led to the worst consequences, women were supposed to oppose war.

The two short stories that are my particular focus here, 'Ur kaos' ('Out of chaos') and 'Spökbarnen: En sann historia' ('The ghost children: A true story'), depict physical and material experiences in wartime.<sup>15</sup> In the first story, the reader meets a woman desperately digging for her child in the ashes of her burnt home. When the child, who has miraculously survived, comes crawling towards the mother, a reunion is impossible: the child does not recognize her, but is frightened by her distorted figure. The mother turns away in pain and lets the child crawl on, 'out of chaos, into life itself, the new, forgetful, forgiving life.'<sup>16</sup> 'The ghost children' describes a mother's anxiety at not being able to feed her children properly in war-torn Berlin. She is haunted by visions of emaciated and deformed children, and she is afraid her youngest son will develop the same deformations. She also dreads her husband's leave from the army, which for her part is always followed by a new pregnancy.

### The genre conventions of fiction

All kinds of communication can be said to be a combination of genre and medium. However, it is not evident that one should distinguish between them, especially considering the many definitions that exist of the two. Ryan offers a useful definition when she argues that the differences concern the character and origin of the restrictions on both genre and medium. The restrictions on genre are conventions—relatively arbitrary rules, of course, but the result of the culture in which they exist. Genre uses those restrictions to channel expectations, optimize expression, and facilitate communication. The restrictions on medium (which could just as well be possibilities) are dictated by its materiality, modality, and technology, which the medium then forces on the user or audience. You choose a medium for its possibilities, while you try

to work around or compensate for the negative restrictions.<sup>17</sup> For example, fiction compensates for its lack of images by using metaphor, symbols, and variations in style. In this way, it tries to paint with words and create *evidentia*. In the following, I want to explore how some of fiction's genre conventions interact with the medium, and how that affects representations of war and bodily suffering.

The most distinctive genre convention of the fiction book is, not surprisingly, its fictionality. A fiction is something made up, something that imitates reality without being reality.<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, not having to answer to truth claims of various kinds gives an author far greater freedom. In order to answer the question of how this affects the representation of war and suffering, Elgström's short stories will be compared to other non-fiction, such as newspaper articles, pamphlets, and reportage. At first glance, it looks as if Elgström's theme in her short stories is the same as in her prose contributions to public debate.<sup>19</sup> In her collection of short stories, the reader meets women with unconditional love for their children; women who are willing to sacrifice themselves for their children or for a higher idea; women who protect the weakest in society; women who embody the qualities that will change the world and prevent war. But where the articles and pamphlets mostly contain exhortations, the short stories depict the sequel—the consequences of the mothers' actions. Do they manage to break with the warlike structures and male dominance of their lives and bring about change, or are they themselves broken down? The answers are ambiguous, and it is obvious that the mothers encounter resistance. Here, there are no women who take an active part in politics and public life, but instead women who succumb to the war, but are portrayed as role models since they sacrifice themselves for something bigger and more important.

In other words, Elgström problematizes maternal pacifism in her short stories. Her fiction is far more pessimistic in its view of women's possibilities in wartime. In the two short stories 'Out of chaos' and 'The ghost children', each woman's time is totally taken up with childcare. Making sure the children will survive takes all her time and efforts, to the extent that each succumbs. Such an end testifies to the tyranny of motherhood in a time of war, but what Elgström does by relating this experience in a fictional form is to verbalize the experience, making it visible despite its private character. Ultimately, it is a human conflict

that she depicts: the difficulty of simultaneously reconciling dependence and independence, altruism and egoism. The fact that she dares to be more pessimistic in her fiction is probably linked to its absence of direct reference to reality. An author does not need to answer for a fiction story in the same way as for a debate article, but can hide behind the veils of fiction.

One genre trait associated with fiction is internal focalization, a narrative technique where the narrator's point of view largely coincides with the protagonist's, enabling descriptions of events from within a character. The narrator sees, thinks, and feels with the character.<sup>20</sup> Internal focalization is apposite to Elgström's brand of feminism, given that it is a conscious strategy that can give a voice to silent or forgotten women, and to show their thoughts and feelings in their own right. She is inclined to modernism, a style which often focuses on the subjective experience and the inner consciousness, and her narrative technique promotes the emotional and subjective experience, and enables identification between protagonist and reader.

In 'Out of chaos,' internal focalization is used to depict how war destroys the mother and the values associated with her.<sup>21</sup> The mother, who finds the body of her dead husband in the ruins of their home, appears more thing than human, mechanically continuing to dig through the ashes; instead, it is the threatening environment that is given a human form: she senses the darkness standing guard, the silence holding its breath in excitement.<sup>22</sup> When she sees her own reflection in the window of an abandoned patisserie, she no longer recognizes herself: 'The thing stared at her from there, too—a blank white spot; a meaningless, scary, empty surface—her own face. But she did not understand it, no longer understood the meaning or context of anything, at one with chaos, dissolved in its nothingness.'<sup>23</sup>

The first part of the fourteen-page story focuses entirely on the mother's experiences, and begins *in medias res* to emphasize her chaotic impressions. One-third in, the narrative is suddenly interrupted with the words, 'Then, the miracle happened.'<sup>24</sup> The focalization is now transferred to the lost child, who is crawling among the piles of stones and corpses, searching for her mother. It is in the meeting of mother and child that Elgström's handling of the internal focalization is at its most effective. The point of view is transferred from the child, via the narrator, to the

mother, when she recognizes her child. The child sees only a terrifying, ghostly phantom, but with the help of the narrator, the reader also sees a woman teetering on the verge of madness, having to muster all her strength to make sense of what she sees. The woman—a stranger, a mad thing—is no longer a mother, but yet she still recognizes her child. When she sees ‘clear tears of horror’ running down the child’s cheek, the woman turns her head away, ready to give her child up and leave it to face a new life on its own. For the woman, it is too late. She falls back into the ashes, ‘whose darkness embraced her as if to mercifully conceal her; to forgivingly efface her and everything that was hers.’<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence of the dual exposure of the meeting, the same emotional event is related twice from two distinct perspectives. The child’s fear of the phantom is in heart-breaking contrast to the mother’s joy of recognition, and that joy is forced to give way to fear. Consequently, the narration enables a double identification, both with the child and the mother. As a result, the reader’s empathy is strengthened, and the fate of the mother and child remains a brutal testimony of the cruelties of war.

### The reception situation

It is not only the narrative technique that is designed to provoke the reader’s empathy, but its reception too. The commonest way to experience fiction is by reading silently to oneself, alone. Unlike television or films, which are often watched together with others, print fiction is almost invariably a private and individual encounter. Thus, the reader’s personal interpretation becomes more important in fiction, at least initially. The gaps (*Leerstellen*) that a text always contains, according to Wolfgang Iser, and which the individual reader must fill in to create meaning, are filled with different content depending on the reader’s individual knowledge and previous experience.<sup>26</sup> Also, since fiction often sets out to be deliberately ambivalent, unlike journalism for example, the fiction book can generate a greater range of interpretations of one and the same story.

We find an example of this in the short story ‘The ghost children.’<sup>27</sup> The story examines the thin line, eroded by the war, between reality and imagination. It begins in a realistic style with a distinct narrative voice, which with carefully evaluative wording locates the story in a

well-known contemporary place: a tenement house in Berlin in the third year of the war. Women and children live in constant fear while the men are at the front fighting. Their existence is equated with that of the men in the trenches—everyone, regardless of sex, is at war. The narrator's initial function is to strengthen the social critique voiced in the short story.

Then, suddenly, the perspective narrows to the experience of an increasingly desperate mother. The language changes character, taking on an expressive and personal tone. By alternating between internal and external focalizations, Elgström creates uncertainty about what is real. Initially, it seems Mrs Mayer knows that the deformed, ghostly children she sees are visions, but in the next paragraph that is questioned: 'But the worst of all was, that they so often were real.'<sup>28</sup> It remains unclear whether it is the narrator or the mother speaking here. The next time she catches a glimpse of the deformed children, she once again doubts her senses.

This passage is open to a dual reading in which her offspring simultaneously represent the real starving war children and her anxiety for their health. The uncertainty about what she is actually seeing remains when, on the doorstep to her home, she discovers another 'ghost child': 'a small, skeleton-like, half-year-old tot who, at her cry, laboriously lifted his abnormal, dangling head on his narrow stalk of a neck, which at every moment seemed ready to break under its weight, and looked upon her with big, dark, suffering eyes.'<sup>29</sup> It turns out to be Mrs Mayer's own son there on the threshold, a sight that becomes too much for her and she falls to the ground in a faint.

Even in the older children, she sees signs of sickness: 'There the children sat around the dinner table under the hanging lamp, which illuminated their faces with a sharp light, causing their bones to stick out from under their death-pale skin, as if corpses. But these little skulls grimaced from crying, silent and helpless now.'<sup>30</sup> Again, an alternative picture is added to the story, this time by her husband when he looks at the children around the dinner table: 'Everything seemed to him to be in order now—happy, healthy children—albeit skinny and pale—hardened by destitution—Germany's great age strengthened—'<sup>31</sup> By weaving the narrator's path in and out of the characters' minds, Elgström destabilizes the boundary between inside and outside, reality

and imagination, not only for Mrs Mayer, but for the reader too. The initial realism of the text, which after all has the subtitle 'A true story', collapses in on itself, ebbing out as several stories in one. Mrs Mayer gives a voice to all oppressed mothers during the world war. Her truth is not the truth of her husband, and the inner contradictions of the text effectively question whose truth is legitimate during war.

Thus the story is receptive to multiple or parallel readings. This is especially true when it comes to how the reader should interpret its ending. The last few lines show that the husband still has priority in defining reality, because Mrs Mayer's experiences are drowned in the jubilation of victory, and all mothers' losses of their sons are transformed into land conquests. In the narrator's words: 'How it looked under the surface—what a small, grey atom Mrs Mayer felt, when she lay down next to her slumbering husband and sensed the ghost children tip-toeing, crawling up her body, nestling in her arms, whispering: Mother! Mother!— it— well, it does not matter at all',<sup>32</sup> all while the husband's truth is undermined by the ironic tone. But the question is how to interpret this fruitless end? The overall tenor of the story is very clear throughout—war is a destructive force that hits women and children particularly hard—but what is the role of the idea of societal motherhood? Can women help change the world so that life and love conquer the forces of destruction? One interpretation after reading 'The ghost children' and 'Out of chaos', in which the women die or are silenced, is that their struggle is futile; another, especially if the reader is aware of Elgström's political ideas and journalism, is that the war will force a change in the state of the world.

### The modality of the book

The main modality of the book is language. Unlike, for example, newspapers, movies, television and children's books, literary fiction for adults is not multimodal—it rarely uses multiple modalities at the same time. For someone who hopes to affect readers emotionally and make them take a stand against war, it would be advantageous to use images. Images have a special ability to stir the emotions, because they consist of iconic signs which seem to depict something present, and not, like the symbolic signs of language, to represent something absent.<sup>33</sup>

Emotions arise when we think we see something that we recognize from the real world—and it is the same emotions that we would have experienced if we had seen it in reality. This is why pictures are said to develop a series of programmed emotional responses.<sup>34</sup> For a writer, though, language is the only tool available with which to testify to the immeasurable suffering of war. By using detailed descriptions, writers try to create vividly illustrative images (*evidentia*).<sup>35</sup>

Symbolism and imagery are important in Elgström's work as she illustrates the everyday life of war using several different literary styles.<sup>36</sup> Her short stories are rooted in a realistic tradition, her themes are always contemporary. Her explicit criticism of gender relations develops the problem-oriented prose of the Nordic women writers of the 1880s. Like Alfhild Agrell—who in the drama *Räddad* ('Saved') from 1883 paints a pessimistic picture of women's opportunities to leave home—Elgström depicts women's imprisonment in patriarchal structures. Unlike Henrik Ibsen's *Ett dockhem* (*A doll's house*) of 1879, however, their texts express a far greater pessimism in their view of women's chances for liberation. Viola in 'Saved' cannot leave home until after her son's death. In all Elgström's short stories there is a pervading critique of the misogynist social system that women are forced to live in. And war appears as the ultimate consequence of this system.

However, when representing human suffering, the realistic narrative gives way to another form of prose. The mother's anxiety at not being able to protect the life she gave birth to is narrated in expressionist language. In 'Out of chaos' reality is said to be broken, and the world in which the despairing mother moves appears threatening and uncertain:

Mere shadows—shadows of dark shores pounded by thunderous waves, shadows of steep paths winding all the way up to the wild clouds, high shadows of black cliffs around which vultures cried, and the gloomy shade of deep, autumn-red woods, where the falling leaves silently hid bloody corpses with mysterious, mouldering faces—an endless, shadowy jungle of sinister dreams, through which she vainly struggled to reach clarity about what was real, and what not, ridden by demons in a flickering dance, which always ended in the same place.<sup>37</sup>

The landscape she evokes is reminiscent of the poem 'Ängest' ('Anguish') from 1916 by the poet Pär Lagerkvist, one of the more prominent early Swedish expressionists. Lagerkvist's poem also has images of forests, cliffs, and clouds piling up, blood, and darkness, albeit highly stylized. It has been characterized as one of the most obvious Swedish examples of the expressionist landscape, where the scenery is 'a projection of the experience', and the bare landscape is said to enhance the fundamental feeling he wants to convey: 'As naked as this reckless anxiety is, as stylistically austere is its landscape.'<sup>38</sup> Elgström's landscape, unlike Lagerkvist's, is anchored in the material world and rather is a reflection of the woman's state of mind, yet her reductionism and austerity function in the same way.

Another central expressionist topos found in both short stories—and in Lagerkvist's poem—is the scream.<sup>39</sup> In the visual arts, it had already been isolated as a theme in 1893 by the Norwegian painter Edward Munch. In 'Out of chaos', silence has 'stiffened to a silent scream of despair',<sup>40</sup> and in 'The ghost children', Mrs Mayer chokes back a panicked scream in order not to wake her sleeping husband).<sup>41</sup> The scream motif is also found in several of the other short stories in the collection. In 'The spirit of gravity', which alludes to Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85), Elgström paints a frightening portrait of the burdens and slave-like state of motherhood, in which Mrs Björkman regrets that her male friends fail to see poetry as 'a scream from the heart, the blaze of a life's eternally burning, secret fire'.<sup>42</sup> Elgström much later expressed a similar view of literature, explaining that 'Mothers' was not a book, but 'a cry from a woman who was, without exaggeration, almost scared to death by what she saw'.<sup>43</sup>

Piotr Bukowski has discussed Lagerkvist's collection of short stories *Järn och människor* (*Iron and men*) from 1915 in terms of German expressionism, arguing that the scream appears mainly in two forms: as the scream with no subject, and as the collective scream.<sup>44</sup> In the first case, the origin of the scream is unknown, detached from human agency. The collective scream erupts from wounded soldiers, but calls to mind the thunder of artillery on the battlefield. The human scream, the most immediate expression of the individual's inner being *in extremis*, is turned into something strange and impersonal. For Bukowski, Lagerkvist's use of the scream is an expression of how war alienates

man from himself, and forcing him into a mechanical ordering. In Elgström's 'Out of chaos', the scream—despite being silent—can be said to serve a similar function. It comes from the woman and becomes one with the chaos that she meets: 'The silence around her had somehow stiffened to a silent scream of horror. Her own mouth was open, but although ready to burst with fear, she was unable to draw her breath, could not understand what she saw'.<sup>45</sup>

The expressionist style is used fluently here to create *evidentia*; however, it is not limited to vivid, emotional waves of expressionism. When the panicking mother runs from her burning house and stumbles across her husband lying on the ground, it is the materialistic and naturalistic descriptions that conjure up the dead man in front of her:

– when in the same minute, in her frenzy, she bumped into an object on the ground, and, tumbling over it, she suddenly looked into her husband's dead face, where not his friendly eyes, not his happy face, but his red meat, his bones, crushed and caked in bloody mud, stared at her—then it was as if the abyss of horror had swallowed her own brain, and spread out into a predominant meaningless emptiness. She looked into the red mask which had been her husband's face, and all that stared back at her was the thing—the unknown, incomprehensible *it*.<sup>46</sup>

A third way of visualizing the boundless suffering of war is symbolism. Elgström's symbolism relates to an imagery of decadence. In 'The ghost children', Mrs Mayer visits one of the families who has made a fortune out of the war by speculating in food. The family has decorated their mansion with war trophies and art treasures, and Mrs Mayer walks through the halls and salons looking for the family's son, who has hidden himself somewhere. In a room reminiscent of a crypt, the tables groan under the weight of busts and animal sculptures, all with stiff, obscene grins. She feels ill at ease, and understands that it is because they remind her of the deformed children's excessive heads that she sees on the streets of Berlin and in her mind's eye. Suddenly she catches a glimpse of a life-size ivory image of a deformed child who looks like it was alive:

Through the sedan chair's greenish glass its appearance was disgustingly similar to a foetus in a glass jar, almost seeming to vibrate with an awkward, somehow galvanized life.

She stepped backwards, staring at it in fascination—God in heaven, she was persecuted! Could she never escape reminders! It looked at her as if it were alive—sadly and reproachfully, enigmatically accusatory, like the others, the living children—with a firm, blind gaze that made her sick with horror, from its big, black stone eyes in the little pale, bloodless bone face over which the rest of its head hung, like an obnoxious outgrowth, a giant, white sponge—

... Yes, it moved—the stone eyes closed half-way in the ancient little face, the nose-like, animal opening of the mouth slowly unclosed with a feature of inhuman, sad wisdom—the monster emerged—<sup>47</sup>

Of course, it is the family's son whom Mrs Mayer encountered, he too one of the emaciated and sick children of war. Mrs Mayer, 'half-unconscious from horror', rushes away from the child, out of the house. Afterwards, arriving home, she sees the ghost child in her own son on the stairs. Fainting, she miscarries.

The symbolism of decadence is there in the feeling of disgust that permeates the description of the character and in the accompanying metaphors of plants and degeneration. The loathing that Mrs Mayer initially experiences when she looks at the figure she thinks looks like a preserved foetus, remains when she realizes that the child is real. Her open disgust at the child is in sharp contrast to the other child portraits in Elgström's collection, which depict the symbiosis between mother and child and the mother's all-encompassing love. Instead of representing the usual hope for the future, the children in 'The ghost children' are emblematic of a degenerate world and an equally degenerate bourgeoisie that the world war has generated—or perhaps it is they who have generated the world war. She even contemplates taking her youngest son's life to save him future suffering. Such a radical questioning of maternity and childbirth is unusual in Swedish war literature.<sup>48</sup>

Like many contemporary writers, Elgström links the world war with degeneration and decay. Decadent literature is often described as literature that thematizes the feeling of dissolution of the world and its values, and the decay of culture and the subject, and as such

it is a literature that emphasizes surface and artificiality.<sup>49</sup> But unlike the decadent writers, who most often traced degenerate tendencies within the individual, Elgström located the degeneration to a particular perception of society, embodied by the war. The phenomena could be called an externalization of decadence.<sup>50</sup> Elgström's socialist social criticism is reserved for a patriarchal, nationalist ideal and the greed and expansionist plans of those in power.

### The permanence of the book

We have seen Elgström employ a variety of styles in her portrayal of the suffering of women and children in wartime. We can view these short stories as samplers, bringing together a range of literary motifs and styles—romance, realism, naturalism, decadence, and expressionism—in prose that both looks backwards and, given that we are reading it today, a century later, forwards too. A book, unlike a newspaper or the radio, is a permanent and transportable medium, often consumed long after it was printed.<sup>51</sup> That means that today it is possible to see the links to modernism, which, when the book was written, was in its infancy. Today, the distance in time is sufficient to reveal to us the similarities and differences between Elgström and the decadent writers. Reading changes according to time and context, and the interpretations only multiply.

Even in Elgström's time, though, reviewers were alert to the boundary-crossing features in terms of language and style. When characterizing her short stories, they used the most varied epithets and descriptions, some emphasizing the realism and the links to the realist tradition of the 1880s, others highlighting the visionary, metaphysical element.<sup>52</sup> But instead of concentrating on variations in style, the reviewers homed in on one feature at a time in their reviews. The one thing they could all agree on was Elgström's sentimentality. All the reviews mention something of Elgström's fervent pathos, her passionate voice, and her fierce indignation. However, her sentimentality was not linked to a modernist aesthetic until much later—in fact, only in the late twentieth century, by Catrine Brödje.<sup>53</sup> The fact that Brödje saw Elgström as belonging in the feminist, modernist tradition can also be regarded as a consequence of the time Brödje lives and works in. Since

the 1970s, feminist literary research has expanded exponentially, one of its significant achievements having been the revaluation of women writers. In other words, Elgström's becoming a modernist pioneer at Brödje's hands is very much in line with this tradition.

When the reviewers remarked on her decadent themes, they did so primarily in direct or indirect comparisons with the decadent poets.<sup>54</sup> Elgström alluded to the symbolism of plants which the decadent poets cherished—the evil flowers of Charles Baudelaire and the *Sensitiva Amorosa* of the Swedish writer Ola Hansson, among many others—by repetitively comparing the children to sick flowers: 'Around her, they lifted their large, pale skulls from the darkness, like strange, sick flowers—the fading shoots of something, which was withering away—'.<sup>55</sup> This, of course, makes it possible to establish what distinguishes Elgström from the decadent writers. Instead of the decadents' nexus of women, flowers, and sexually transmitted disease, Elgström's children carry another kind of metaphoric disease—the contagion of war, which spreads poverty and decay. Elgström rephrases the decadent theme so that it is war, not emancipation or sexuality, which perverts men and makes them sick. The layers of interpretation of the decadent theme created over time lend greater complexity to the narrative.

What then has the permanence of this particular book meant for the depiction of war, suffering, and death? Fiction is universal in a way that many other media are not. Elgström's short stories depict mothers' suffering in the First World War *and* the situation of all mothers during war. The world today has since experienced yet another world war, and a series of minor and major conflicts, some of them still ongoing. Links are created between the world then in 1917 and the world now, the stories bearing witness to what has changed and what has remained the same. Even though the collection's interest does not lie in its topicality—which explains the permanence of the book—it is sufficiently embedded in the First World War era to give the reader a sense of the causes and consequences of precisely this war: 'Soldiers! New soldiers! the cry sounded all over Germany. In newspapers, at meetings, everywhere women were called on—Do your duty! Give birth, so that Germany may remain strong!<sup>56</sup> Elgström depicts a society in which the individual only exists to serve the state and increase its power; a society where the rich only pursue greater wealth, at the expense of the poor. The war,

matched with the state's determination to expand, seems to be of the utmost consequence for the materialization of existence. The morals of such a society reduce the value of the individual, and women and children are those who suffer most severely.

While mothers' concern for their children is still the same, the legal and social situation has changed radically, at least in some parts of the world. The question that the short story 'The ghost children' poses to today's reader is how this change matters in a country at war. Would women and children be affected the same way today if war were to break out? What are women's options for action and resistance? These are just a few examples of how time and new contexts contribute to the complexity of fiction. Another important factor is the slowness of the medium, which is the last property to be discussed here.

### An extended and slow medium

A fiction book is an extended medium, usually totalling a couple of hundred pages at least. It takes time to read a book, much longer than to read a newspaper, watch a film, or listen to a radio programme. It also takes time to write and publish it, at least compared to a newspaper or pamphlet. The long production process is connected to the permanence of the book, which, not being topical, does not need to be written in a hurry. If written discourse in comparison with spoken discourse is more elaborate or, in Chafe's words, 'overworked', then fiction is the kind of writing that ranks as the most thorough or overworked. It allows authors to write more complex stories in terms of characterization and intrigue.<sup>57</sup> That in turn requires a slower reading, that we in a metaphorical sense carry the story with us for a long time. In this way, we become more receptive to more complex stories.

In other words, both permanence and slowness favour more complex stories. As David Herman says of the relationship between these two features, 'The increased span of time separating the production of the narrative from its interpretation and, for that matter, the longer span of time allowed for interpretation of literary narratives, facilitates complex blends of various processes with their attendant participants.'<sup>58</sup> As a result, he continues, it is sometimes difficult for readers to determine exactly how a particular phenomenon is coded or interpreted. It becomes

apparent that the consequence (complexity) of these two properties of the medium (permanence and slowness) is also linked to the reception process (reading alone). In Herman's reading of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the ambivalence is about whether Gregor Samsa's experience as a beetle is a projection of a mental state or of actions by other characters in the narrated world. In Elgström's 'The ghost children', the narration creates uncertainty about Mrs Mayer's visions, whether the children really are sick and deformed or if it is her fear and anxiety that drives her mad.

Elgström calls her short story 'a true story'. This suggests that she wanted us to read it as if it really happened. Yes, it is in many respects a realistic story, and one which the reader has no reason to question, yet at the same time the title can be read as a deliberate attempt on Elgström's part to double encode her texts. Repeatedly, she breaks the realists' code by using decadent or expressionist imagery, whether to depict the mother's interior life or to dissolve the border between dream and reality. The language becomes an important way for her to express what to her mind is true. True, in the sense of authentic and credible, rather than documentary and real. Sometimes, a slow reading—or perhaps a rereading—is a prerequisite for this second level of interpretation to occur.

## Conclusion

How then did the properties of the book as a medium affect Elgström's representation of the suffering of the First World War? She uses the medium's one and only modality, language, very efficiently. Using varied imagery she depicts the dead, wounded, and sick, her sensuous descriptions an attempt to evoke fear, abhorrence, and disgust in the reader. The descriptions' emotional intensity can also be linked to one of the genre's conventions: internal focalization. In fiction, it is possible to depict mental processes in a subjective way, and a subjective narration creates empathy and identification between character and reader. Elgström's approach, making mothers the main characters of her short stories, gives a voice to an often-forgotten dimension of the world wars: women's experiences in wartime. In her fiction, she problematized the idea of maternal pacifism that she in her journalism argues is the answer to a peaceful world. In the two short stories discussed here,

things end badly for the women. Another genre convention—fiction itself—is open to such pessimistic endings. Elgström's anti-war prose always had more hopeful endings, a necessity for a statement of opinion intended to change the world for the better. There must be hope for the future, here and now, or how else are we supposed to believe that another, better world is possible?

A constant feature of Elgström's short stories is their ambiguity: events can be interpreted several ways and new meanings appear on rereading. Here, the slowness and permanence of the medium interact with its reception, read in solitude. The individual reader interprets the narrative based on a changing horizon of expectation which varies according to the reader and over time. New contexts give rise to new readings. In the same way, a slow reading or rereading generates new interpretations. In addition to the problematization of the ideology of maternal pacifism, this ambiguity also results in a more nuanced representation of war. Although Elgström's fiction has a clear anti-war message, the short stories are no pamphlets. They have their ambiguities and uncertainties, as for example when it comes to the question of who will be held accountable for the war. What responsibility has Mrs Mayer's husband for her situation—a man who comes home on leave and only sees healthy and happy children around the dinner table, and who does not leave until he has got her pregnant with another potential soldier for Germany's army? What role does Germany have in this? Or is it the social system, or rather its capitalism and patriarchalism, which bears ultimate responsibility? The fiction book is a medium to return to again and again, not to look for unambiguous answers, but because it bears witness to history, and at the same time speaks to the now in which it is read.

## Notes

- 1 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003), 114.
- 2 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447a in Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius, *Poetics, longinus: On the sublime, demetrius: On style*, translated by Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, W. Rhys Roberts, revised by Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). See Marie-Laure

- Ryan, introduction in ead. (ed.), *Narrative across media: The languages of storytelling* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 22.
- 3 Sofi Qvarnström, 'Är mediet retoriken? Medieringen av skogsfrågan under år 1894', in Marie Cronqvist et al. (eds.), *Mediehistoriska vändningar* (Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 25; Lund: Lunds universitet, 2014), 70–1.
  - 4 For a discussion of various media, see, for example, Solveig Jülich et al., introduction in eid. (eds.), *Mediernas kulturhistoria* (Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 8; Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2008), 12–17.
  - 5 Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Story/worlds/media: Tuning the instruments of a media-conscious narratology', in Marie-Laure Ryan & Jan-Noël Thon (eds.), *Story-worlds across media: Toward a media-conscious narratology* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 30.
  - 6 Wallace Chafe, *Discourse, consciousness, and time: The flow and displacement of conscious experience in speaking and writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42–3.
  - 7 Leif Dahlberg & Pelle Snickars, 'Inledning—mot ett transmedialt berättande', in eid. (eds.), *Berättande i olika medier* (Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 7; Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2008), 23.
  - 8 Mono-modal discourse has been challenged, with the argument that the book page is visual in layout, so that there is no such thing as a mono-modal text. But I would argue that mono-modality serves a pedagogical function, underlining the fact that most fiction texts consist only of words and not images, sound, or motion.
  - 9 Ryan 2014, 29.
  - 10 This chapter enlarges on my work on Anna Lenah Elgström's anti-war prose in Sofi Qvarnström, *Motståndets berättelser: Elin Wägner, Anna Lenah Elgström, Marika Stiernstedt och första världskriget* (diss.; Möklinta: Gidlund, 2009).
  - 11 Qvarnström 2009; for an introduction to Elgström's early work, see Catrine Brödje, *Ett annat tiotal: En studie i Anna Lenah Elgströms tiotalprosa* (Stehag: Gondolin, 1998).
  - 12 For Sweden in the First World War, see, for example, Claes Ahlund, *Diktare i krig: K. G. Ossiannilsson, Bertil Malmberg och Ture Nerman från debuten till 1920* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2007); Nils-Olof Franzén, *Undan stormen: Sverige under första världskriget* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1986); Lina Sturfelt, *Eldens återsken: Första världskriget i svensk föreställningsvärld* (diss.; Lund: Sekel, 2008).
  - 13 Claudia Lindén, *Om kärlek: Litteratur, sexualitet och politik hos Ellen Key* (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2002), 156.
  - 14 Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting forces, writing women: Identity and ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994).
  - 15 Anna Lenah Elgström, *Mödrar* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1917). All translations are my own. A special thanks to Allan Burnett for his comments on my translations.
  - 16 Elgström 1917, 184.
  - 17 Ryan 2004, 19.
  - 18 The theory of fiction turns on three main definitions: (i) a semantic definition based on fiction's relation to the real world; (ii) a syntactical definition based

- on fiction's formal traits; and (iii) a pragmatic definition based on how fiction is used; Jean-Marie Schaeffer, 'Fictional vs. factual narration', in Peter Hühn (ed.), *Handbook of narratology* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2009), 98.
- 19 See, for example, *Den sjunde basunen* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1915); *En dröm* (Stockholm: Svenska Andelsförlaget, 1916); 'Tvångsföreställningar' (1916), in *Samtal och brev* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1918); *Till kvinnor* (Stockholm: Svenska Freds- och skiljedomsföreningen, 1917).
- 20 Focalization is Gérard Genette's coinage, and builds on such concepts as point of view and omniscient narrator; Gérard Genette, 'Discours du récit', in id., *Figures 3* (Paris: Seuil, 1972); id., *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).
- 21 Ur 'Kaos', in Elgström 1917, 169–184.
- 22 Elgström 1917, 171.
- 23 Elgström 1917, 175.
- 24 Elgström 1917, 180.
- 25 Elgström 1917, 184.
- 26 Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976).
- 27 'Spökbarnen: En sann historia', in Elgström 1917, 185–229.
- 28 Elgström 1917, 198.
- 29 Elgström 1917, 218.
- 30 Charles Sanders Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A chronological edition*, ii: 1867–1871 (Peirce Edition Project; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 56.
- 31 Elgström 1917, 224.
- 32 Elgström 1917, 227–8.
- 33 Elgström 1917, 229.
- 34 Paul Messaris, *Visual 'literacy': Image, mind and reality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
- 35 Quintilian, *The orator's education*, translated by Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 127 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 9,2,40; Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, translated by Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library 403 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 4, 68.
- 36 See Brödje 1998, 210–16.
- 37 Kjell Espmark, *Själen i bild: En huvudlinje i modern svensk poesi* (Stockholm: PAN/Norstedt, 1994), 53, 56.
- 38 Elgström 1917, 176.
- 39 Brödje 1998, 63–4.
- 40 Anna Lenah Elgström, *Innan det blir för sent* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1940), 22; see also Brödje 1998, 210–11.
- 41 Elgström 1917, 172.
- 42 Elgström 1917, 229.
- 43 Elgström 1917, 130.
- 44 Piotr Bukowski, *Ordnungsschwund—Ordnungswandel: Pär Lagerkvist und der deutsche Expressionismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 204–208.
- 45 See Ahlund 2007, 390.

- 46 Elgström 1917, 172.  
 47 Elgström 1917, 174.  
 48 Elgström 1917, 212–14.  
 49 Per Thomas Andersen, *Dekadense i nordisk litteratur 1880–1900* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1992); Claes Ahlund, *Medusas huvud: Dekadensens tematik i svensk sekelskiftesprosa* (Historia litterarum 18; Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1994).  
 50 Ahlund 1994, 38, 42.  
 51 Chafe 1994, 42.  
 52 See, for example, Carl R. Ugglas, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 Dec. 1917; Erik Hedén, *Folkets Dagblad Politiken*, 6 Dec. 1917; Fredrik Vetterlund, 'Det stora medlidandets diktare', *Aftonbladet*, 2 Dec. 1917; 'Sign. G.', *Uppsala Nya Tidning*, 2 Jan. 1918.  
 53 Brödje 1998.  
 54 Gurli Hertzman-Ericson, 'Ur bokmarknaden', *Rösträtt för kvinnor*, 23 (1917); Vetterlund 1917.  
 55 Elgström 1917, 217.  
 56 Dahlberg & Snickars 2008, 20.  
 57 Elgström 1917, 192.  
 58 David Herman, 'Toward a transmedial narratology', in Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative across media: The languages of storytelling* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 61.

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# Visualizing war victims

## Rädda Barnen's humanitarian reporting in the interwar years

*Lina Sturfelt*

Dwarfed by rickets and bone softening, ruined, deformed creatures with unnaturally big heads, pale cheeks, the facial expression that of old people, the skin shrunk and dry due to lack of fat, their tummies swollen like drums, underdeveloped legs as thin as sticks compared to the body, knees clenched, unable to walk, and usually to talk, too. This is how they look, the children of the twentieth century in the suffering Berlin and the starving Vienna.<sup>1</sup>

The twentieth century should have been a century of hope and progress, 'the century of the child' as the Swedish author Ellen Key had put it in her famous work first published in 1900.<sup>2</sup> But as Alice Trolle wrote in the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* as one of Rädda Barnen's (RB; Swedish Save the Children) representatives in Austria, by the end of the First World War the surviving children of the new era looked completely different: suffering, starving, ruined, deformed. What to make of the terrible sight of such prospects? What did the emaciated war child's body signify to the RB, and how did the organization direct the eyes of the Swedish audience to the suffering? As Trudi Tate reminds us, the anxiety of bearing witness to war 'is expressed most powerfully through the sight of the suffering human body, the place in which history and fantasy meet'.<sup>3</sup> This chapter investigates practices of seeing and sensing total war in the humanitarian reporting of the RB's media campaigns in the early twenties, focusing on the organization's strategic emotional uses and sensory representations

of the war child's body. I will examine how and why the RB invested in a certain moral rhetoric of seeing and feeling suffering in order to ameliorate it, showing that a visual–visualizing discourse was key to its interwar humanitarian imagery. To behold the smallest and most vulnerable remains of war was to experience their pain, and to realize that they had the right to be saved.

## A humanitarian awakening

When the RB was founded in November 1919, only the second counterpart to the pioneering children's relief and rights organization, the British Save the Children Fund (SCF), it was part of the 'great humanitarian awakening' in the wake of the mass death of the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Branden Little has suggested that the war's 'dynamic of destruction' was countered by a 'dynamic of salvation', igniting an explosion of humanitarian activity by old and new actors alike.<sup>5</sup> In the expanding field of the history of human rights and humanitarianism, the legacy of the First World War—long eclipsed by the Second—has attracted increasing attention from scholars over the last decade.<sup>6</sup> However, humanitarians' sensory experiences and emotions in war have yet to be investigated, not least from a media history perspective, and it is there this chapter makes a contribution.<sup>7</sup> It does not help that the field has been heavily biased towards American and British humanitarianism, with the history of Save the Children largely the history of the SCF.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, in this chapter I present new archival findings from the lesser-known but still highly influential Swedish organization, focusing on its media campaigns in the early twenties.<sup>9</sup> With the 'neutral periphery' viewpoint of Europe, I offer a different perspective than the standard one on how humanitarians mediated war and suffering in the interwar years. During the conflict and its aftermath, neutral Sweden saw several humanitarian enterprises, including relief action for Belgium and a huge exchange of invalid POWs administered by the Swedish Red Cross.<sup>10</sup> In the national imagination and in the eyes of the international community, Sweden was increasingly constructed in exceptionalist terms as a peaceful 'humanitarian great power' and a progressive 'champion of the child'.<sup>11</sup> Both images permeated the humanitarian imagery of the RB, where Sweden saving children and the peace were discursively linked.

During the organization's first six years, the period covered here, the RB headed an impressive international humanitarian effort, helping mostly Central European children and their families with food, medicine, care, clothes, fuel, work, and housing. It managed local orphanages, kindergartens, canteens, and sanatoriums, and offered children temporary (and sometimes permanent) homes with Swedish families.<sup>12</sup> Mediations of the suffering child played a crucial role in this effort, engaging the neutrals in what Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann calls 'a compassionate gaze at Europeans' and at a continent in ruins.<sup>13</sup> In the interwar years, the daily and weekly press, films, novels, and women's magazines were key in constructing starvation in distant Central Europe as a 'disaster', making it a media event for the Swedish public.<sup>14</sup> Exposing the body of the war child brought a different kind of 'war news', and fostered new ways of seeing and feeling suffering. By highlighting and sponsoring the RB's humanitarian work, the press also offered readers a way to help solving the terrible situation. It was news reporting and promotion of the RB at the same time. In both cases, the RB cause benefitted from the more socially engaged and active journalism established during the war years, when Swedish newspapers had become increasingly involved in fund-raising activities for the needy, addressing the readers as both donors and benefactors, and alleviating the pressing situation by proffering a helping hand.<sup>15</sup> The RB was part of this reciprocal development, where the daily press became more humanitarian and the reporters acted more as humanitarians; and humanitarianism in turn became more oriented towards the narrative techniques and visual strategies of the so-called 'new journalism', resting on 'the epistemological authority of the "eyewitness account"' and investigative reports, exposés, drama, and human interest stories.<sup>16</sup> As actors and spectators, participants and witnesses all at the same time, humanitarian reporters and reporting humanitarians together made common cause over the image of the emaciated toddler, one of the most powerful icons for aid in the post-war years—'a projection screen for public appeals to end and relieve the suffering of the crushed nations.'<sup>17</sup>

The RB originated in a press appeal, and the organization was convinced of the importance of using the media to promote its cause, so it prioritized this part of its strategic work, despite a stretched

budget. The RB had a special ‘press and propaganda section’ with a full-time press officer and a member’s paper (*Rädda Barnen*). They had frequent access to the daily and weekly press, especially women’s or family magazines such as *Idun*, *Husmodern*, and *Veckojournalen*. Articles and reports by the RB representatives—many of whom were also well-established journalists, writers, and opinion makers such as Anna Lenah Elgström, Anna Lindhagen, Gerda Marcus, Marika Stiernstedt, and Elin Wägner—were published in Stockholm’s daily papers along with the RB appeals and advertisements, and this material was frequently reprinted (sometimes under new headlines) in the local press a few days later. The papers regularly published interviews with the leading RB figures and reports from its meetings and congresses, and reproduced its public lectures as well as its appeals to the Swedish public. Many newsrooms administered donations to the organization from their readers and made big donations themselves. The newspapers sponsored special fundraising events such as ‘Linen Sunday’ in 1920, promoting them for weeks at a time.<sup>18</sup> The intensive press coverage of the RB activities testifies to the war children becoming a national preoccupation in Sweden, and how this early form of human rights reporting and activist journalism made distant European suffering into breaking news on Swedish front pages.

### The morality of sight

Ever since the first wave of humanitarianism in the late eighteenth century, sympathy has been regarded as spectatorial in nature, and a sentiment prompted mainly by sight. The humanitarian narrative appealed to the reader’s senses—especially ‘the morality of sight’—by making the eyewitness into a compassionate donor and activist.<sup>19</sup> The moral rhetoric of early twentieth century humanitarianism had an instructive aspect, for it encouraged particular ways of seeing and feeling about suffering, and taught the public how to experience and act on those feelings.<sup>20</sup> Following Heide Fehrenbach, it was a kind of moral training of vision and emotion.<sup>21</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur holds that humanitarian narratives ‘demanded new ways of seeing’ in a more active, engaged way in order to keep distant others ‘within ethical range.’<sup>22</sup> Humanitarians transformed specific episodes of privation and

suffering into humanitarian crises, commanding viewers' attention via specific narratives and moral framings. In their campaigns, they articulated a distinct worldview that 'forged communities of emotion and action ... around specific causes' by appealing to people's sense of duty.<sup>23</sup> But the humanitarian imagery must also be understood as part of a wider discourse of visual, instructive pedagogy and reform from the late nineteenth century onwards. Anna-Maria Hällgren claims that a 'governing of vision' privileged certain practices of looking that enabled otherwise problematic representations of social issues to become a valuable resource, creating upstanding citizens who were aware of their responsibilities to actively engage in curing social ills.<sup>24</sup> The RB reporting worked in such a way as to engage the Swedish public and make them aware of their international charitable responsibilities to relieve the suffering of war children.

Recent works have explored how humanitarians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century made extensive use of the new visual media, such as photographs, films and lantern slides, and how new visual cultures in turn helped drive the evolution of new mediated forms of humanitarianism and human rights activism, reaching out to save an 'imagined humanity'.<sup>25</sup> In this period, the picture (and especially the photograph) was often thought to break down distance and to offer a truer picture of suffering than words alone, thus helping instil sympathy towards distant others. Images demanded a specific affective approach that was key to the sense of moral outrage that could rally public opinion.<sup>26</sup> New visual strategies of representation and communication thus gave rise to what Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno call 'humanitarian imagery', a kind of moral rhetoric that gave both 'form and meaning to human suffering, rendering it comprehensible, urgent, and actionable for European and American audiences'.<sup>27</sup>

The body held a special place in this achievement. Visualizing the human body as vulnerable, endangered, in pain, or in recovery, was the imperative onlookers needed to recognize and respond to their moral duty to address human suffering.<sup>28</sup> According to Laqueur, the humanitarian narrative created this kind of moral concern and action above all 'by the pain of a stranger crying out—as if the pain were one's own or that of someone near' and 'through this discourse of the body a

common ground of feeling is established and the cognitive pathways for intervention laid in place.<sup>29</sup>

As Friederike Kind-Kovács has argued in her study of the American Red Cross's interwar relief work with Hungarian children, the First World War was 'an indisputable turning point in the body's politization', making the destitute children's bodies into a site of humanitarian intervention and a new political battlefield, both symbolic and real.<sup>30</sup> Even if the suffering body had long been central to the humanitarian imagination and to the laws of war, the war years saw a more widespread focus on bodies of war in general, and the war-wounded body became a political object both valued and devalued.<sup>31</sup> The dominant, gendered narrative of the war-torn soldier-body was supplemented with stories of other bodies at war, and the body of the innocent, vulnerable child played a prominent part in psychological warfare and propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

In analysing the humanitarian imagery of the RB in its early days, I will look at the interwar interventions in this 'battlefield', arguing that in the case of the RB, textual and visual narratives *together* formed a special humanitarian imagery around the suffering body of the war child. I will thus study the uses and meanings of both photographs and texts, and their intermedial entanglement. Even if textual accounts dominated over photographs, both forms of representation were very graphic, trusting to the reader's vision and 'inner sight'. Rhetorically, the campaigns emphasized the visual over the other senses. Descriptions focused on what the children looked like, their expressions, and how to respond to their demanding gazes. Metaphors of sight, the eye, and the eyewitness were frequently used to privilege a discourse of the visual. To quote a telling formulation in *Stockholms Dagblad* in January 1920, 'The eyes of the whole world are fixed on Vienna.'<sup>33</sup>

## Sensing war

I will start by examining how the war child's suffering body was used, focusing on the humanitarian strategies of the RB, the intended reading of the narratives presented, and the making of an emotional community of Swedish war witnesses. Due to the lack of material, it is hard to say exactly how the terrible pictures of suffering affected individual readers, or the reception by a Swedish audience; however,

we can say something about how the RB imagined—or wished—the reader, spectator, and donor would respond.

The invitation to readers to engage and participate involved both the humanitarian body and the body of the compassionate humanitarian public, pointing to the imagined attachment between the body of the child, the humanitarian reporter, and the Swedish audience. Following Laqueur, the personal body is ‘the common bond between those who suffer and those who would help’, the very basis of identification. The humanitarian narrative has the power to make readers feel the pain of the victim as if it were their own or that of someone close to them. Readers are asked to feel vicariously, through the body of the protagonist.<sup>34</sup> The RB’s visual discourse thus used the humanitarian’s body as the medium between the victim and the donor. Readers were invited to walk the streets of Vienna and other cities, to step inside the hospitals and sanatoriums, lending their eyes and ears to the humanitarian.<sup>35</sup> The affective and physical effects of seeing the war children’s bodies were vividly registered and described. In one report, the narrator depicted an overwhelming visit to a deprived Viennese hospital and how she was so taken by the encounter with the small suffering children that she had to turn away, silenced. She then underscored the severity of the situation by explaining that not even the paediatrician accompanying her could control his emotions, but cried silently.<sup>36</sup> An interpretation of the situation in Vienna as ‘paralysing’, as one subheading had it, reinforced the supposed effect on the reader’s body when partaking of—and hence in—the terrible news.<sup>37</sup>

The humanitarian reporter or reporting humanitarian was an expression of a special type of turn-of-the-century reporter ideal, ‘the witness ambassador’, whose physical presence and embodied closeness to the stricken objects was crucial. Each used his or her own body as both a reference and an instrument. As the ‘ultimate witness’, the body was considered critical in giving evidence to the reader who could not be present. Reliability was created by accounts of the physical and emotional reactions of the reporter, whose body mediated the experiences. The body was supposed to be a reliable source of information about ‘the naked truth’, transcending conflicting opinions since it ‘could not lie’, and with sensations or reactions that were believed to make the testimony universally comprehensible.<sup>38</sup>

Thus the camera lens was not the only ‘humanitarian eye’ intended to establish realism and evidentiary truth claims. Framing humanitarianism as an eyewitness account was another opportunity to recognize its authority, accuracy, and authenticity. ‘The person writing this has herself spent several months this year in Vienna. I know, therefore, that the talk of the city dying is not a phrase, not a figure of speech, not an exaggeration, but reality’, the RB’s Elin Wägner wrote, and Alice Trolle repeatedly referred to ‘we down here in Vienna’, seeing the war children *with her own eyes*: ‘I have seen them in the wards of the hospital, where they rest in rows, bed after bed.’<sup>39</sup> The rhetorical device of opening the sentence with ‘I have seen—’ was commonplace in the reports. Again, the primacy of seeing was confirmed. By referring to special correspondents and dating the reports as exactly as possible—‘Vienna, January the 26<sup>th</sup>’, ‘Vienna, December 1920’, ‘Vienna, January’, ‘Vienna at this very moment’—the narrative created a sense of historical accuracy, directness, and proximity to the events depicted, sometimes ‘hour by hour.’<sup>40</sup>

The humanitarian reporter was not only an observing witness, but also an emotional guide of sorts, directing the reader to react appropriately to the suffering bodies. Sight was the privileged sense here: the panoramas of the hungry were repeatedly referred to as ‘horror pictures’ and ‘horror images.’<sup>41</sup> The public was frequently urged to look at (and then subsequently feel) the pain of the starving bodies: ‘As you can see the little one’s body is totally disfigured by starvation and suffering’, ‘Look at the pictures of the stunted children’s bodies on the front page!’, ‘Look at the little girl on the far left of our picture.’<sup>42</sup> Newspaper readers were not only told where to look (instead of looking away), but also how to look. The act of witnessing, if only on the front page of a newspaper was also an assumption of responsibility: if you saw, felt, and knew, you would be obliged to take action. The responsibility to end the suffering was placed on ‘humanity’, but also more explicitly on those enjoying neutrality, especially the Swedes.<sup>43</sup> Occasionally, it was even extended personally to the reader, rhetorically addressed as ‘you’: ‘Don’t you want to help an Austrian family in distress?’<sup>44</sup>

Shame and guilt were sometimes used to remind the public that helping the children was a long-term commitment. The RB’s checklist

for the summer of 1920 was a strong emotional appeal in the face of possible compassion fatigue, addressed to a privileged Swedish ‘you’:

*Remember* the hundreds of thousands starving and suffering children in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Russia. *Remember* that while You enjoy Your well earned rest and the beautiful Swedish summer, at the same moment poor little innocent victims die, a death You could have prevented with Your gift. Your consideration. ... Help must arrive *now*. For want, death, do not rest. Don't forget it. *Remember them now*. ... *Remember that the suffering out there appeal to You, trust Your help!*<sup>45</sup>

The narrative repeatedly appealed to sensibility rather than sense. It was, in a way, more performative than informative, trusting to emotional reaction over rational argument. Sight was the first and most important sense, but not the only one: touch and hearing were called for as well. The children's bodies spoke directly to ‘the hearts’ of others: ‘The thought of these little innocent sufferers makes your heart ache.’<sup>46</sup> When ‘we think of Vienna’, as *Stockholms-Tidningen* inclusively stated, ‘we’ were also expected and even instructed to instinctively ‘*feel for* the terrible destitution down there.’<sup>47</sup> The liberal use of exclamation marks and the inclusive second person ‘we’ and ‘us’ was deliberate, forging an emotional community around the humanitarian reporter and her fellow witnesses. And the privileged feelings in this emotional community were compassion and sympathy, not horror, aversion, or sensationalism—and absolutely not anger or a yearning for revenge. Even if the sight of the children's starving, filthy, and sick bodies were described as horrifying, they were nevertheless poignant, not repulsive. This was in obvious contrast to how the very same children were mediated in other contemporary media, such as the fiction short story.<sup>48</sup>

In order to work strategically, the humanitarian narrative must prompt identification.<sup>49</sup> In the RB's narratives, the focus was on the heart, on the passion that knowledge of the suffering body would arouse in the humanitarian public, who could hear and feel the pain as if the experience was their own or their children's: ‘The cries; cries of horror, suffering and hunger, the cries of the distressed mothers, as they watched the life leaving the limbs of children who were once

rosy and chubby ... rang in the hearts of other mothers.<sup>50</sup> *Upsala Nya Tidning* took a similar line: 'May all hearts that are capable of compassion, today be touched and honourably answer the overwhelming cry of distress from all these vast realms of despair. ... Save the Children!'<sup>51</sup>

## Representing war

Part and parcel of the RB's humanitarian emotional strategies were the representational aspects of the organization's humanitarian imagery, and the kind of meanings and memories of war that were inscribed in the body of the war child. I would argue that the starving child's body represented the remains of war, and served as a reminder of its horrors. The legacy of war was engraved on the child's skin and bones, and to see such suffering was also to recognize the wider victimizing consequences of the First World War for (European) humanity. By envisaging the child's body as both temporally and geographically trapped by war, the traumatic experiences of total war were visualized for a Swedish audience.

Even though I have analysed the textual and visual representations of the child's body together as a unit—much as it was presented to contemporary newspaper readers—it is important to note some media specifics. While prominent members of the RB signed many of the reports, there was no reference to photographers, photo agencies, or the specific context in which the pictures were originally taken, produced and circulated, with one exception.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the detail of the texts, the pictures are generally bare of historical detail, and the children portrayed are all anonymous. Other dissimilarities worth noting are the gendered overrepresentation of the suffering boy in the visual material (unlike the texts), indicating either that the Swedish audience was more sensitive to male suffering, or that the sight of an emaciated, naked boy's body was more socially acceptable than a girl's. Another example of the divergence of the textual and visual narratives was that parents and families were frequently part of the texts,<sup>53</sup> while the child in the humanitarian photographs was usually alone, pictured without recognizable relatives or even adults. According to Fehrenbach, the total focus on the lone child was a novelty in the humanitarian imagery of children, largely invented by Save the Children's interwar campaigns.<sup>54</sup>

## The child's body as traumatic memory

Contemporaries considered the First World War to be a profound rupture in the linear history of progress. Later historians have conceived of the war as a traumatic, collective, 'borderline event'—a radical disruption that destabilized all sense of historical continuity, fracturing the link between past and future.<sup>55</sup> In the RB's humanitarian imagery, the child's body was used to tell of the war's reversal or even perversion of time—of its ability to transcend temporality—through the lasting negative impact on natural biological development and the normal chronology of childhood. The legacy of war was inscribed on the bodies of its children in many enduring ways. The post-traumatic effect of war, disturbing and disrupting the normal phases of progression, was twofold: either the children's bodies were stunted, underdeveloped, and they regressed, or they were prematurely aged. In early 1920, the RB quoted a doctor stating that all Austrian children were undersized: 'four or five years behind for their age, and all had big swollen heads, stoops and big tummies.'<sup>56</sup> They generally appeared to be years younger than their biological age: five-year-olds looked like one-year-olds, and one-year-olds looked like newborns.<sup>57</sup> Not only did the children look younger than they were, they also behaved like infants. Their bodies were regressing instead of growing. Parents and doctors confirmed that children who had once been able to walk, talk, and play were now paralysed, mute, and passive.<sup>58</sup> The massive resurgence of small bodies broken by diseases such as rickets and tuberculosis was seen as yet another sign of the retrogradeness of war: Central Europe was plunged back into the nineteenth century, a whole generation of progressive health work lost.<sup>59</sup>

The counterpart, the prematurely aged body, instead had the look and pains of the elderly: 'I have seen eight-year-old girls look like dwarf women the size of a three-year-old, with heavily wrinkled foreheads and mouths and a smile so heartbreakingly sad it made me cry', Wägner testified, and continued, 'The poor little skeleton enclosed in empty, wrinkled, bluish skin. Their faces have a weird, old, timeworn, and suffering expression. It seems as if these strange creatures have a thousand years of suffering behind them.'<sup>60</sup>

The regressed body and the prematurely aged body were explicitly linked to the war, for it was the war that had 'deeply disturbed the

delicate organisms of the children, and dislocated the biological from the chronological.<sup>61</sup> The children had stopped growing or had aged too fast due to undernourishment and trauma caused by the war; their bodies were still caught in the conflict. Discussing the shell-shocked veteran's body in similar terms, Jay Winter suggests that the disturbing character of such images 'lay both in the body of the sufferer and in the gaze of the onlooker. Together they (and we) share embodied memory'.<sup>62</sup> The shell-shocked soldier's body and the deformed war child's body both told war stories, for embodied memory was inscribed in them. For them, the war was not over. It carried on regardless in their stunted and disrupted—or aged and withering—bodies, both rewinding and fast-forwarding their normal, gradual development: 'The war is over. But the misery that the war has created continues. People in the war-ravaged countries are eaten away by hunger and want. The children are least resistant and hardest effected. Three million will be lost this winter'.<sup>63</sup> In this way, the RB challenged the established war narrative, both the conventional periodization of the First World War (when it ended, whether it was over, and in that case for whom), and which kinds of bodies and bodily harm counted as war invalids and war injuries, and thus rendered the sufferer a deserving war victim. Like the narrative of shell shock, it disrupted the heroic narratives of war and challenged conventional interpretations of the war's meaning, questioning the temporality of antebellum and post-bellum. The traumatic memory of arrested demobilization that both the shell-shocked soldier and the regressed or aged child embodied was circular or fixed, not linear.<sup>64</sup>

As a prolonged war with no foreseeable end ravaged it, body and soul, the symbolic figure of the child was not only constructed as a representation of a better post-war future—as earlier research has noted—but also as the remnants of a dark past, dragging the traces of war with it, a ticking bomb of physical and mental degeneration.<sup>65</sup> Not only had the brutality of the greatest war in history halted the evolution of children, it had also halted or even ended the strong pre-war belief in constant progress and the linear development of mankind with the Europeans in the van. Like its children, the continent now seemed to be moving backwards instead of leading the way.<sup>66</sup> The RB's many stories of deformed children's bodies were part of this larger

narrative, commenting on the terrible loss of (European) humanity and superiority. The RB narrative left it open to the onlooker to decide which side would win, cautioning that now was a fatal time of direst emergency that would determine the future of humanity. Privileging the children as the most worthy and precious war victims was the key to peace, and, again, the viewer was invited to intervene. If only the Swedes would give the RB the means to act quickly, the organization had the power to bring the war to a definitive end by reconstructing the children, hence setting time right.<sup>67</sup>

The humanitarian mending of time by reshaping and regenerating the child's body was captured in the illustrated women's magazine *Idun* in 1920, which wanted to convince its readers of the success story that was the humanitarian work done by the RB by an illuminating comparison before and after. The before and after was a long-standing photographic convention and rhetorical strategy employed by businesses and humanitarians alike.<sup>68</sup> In the RB language, it compared the (nearly) lost and the saved. The before image in *Idun* was of an emaciated, helpless child with its eyes shut, sitting in a hospital bed; after showed three neatly dressed toddlers facing the camera, seated on chairs with toys laid out in front of them. The one in the middle, almost smiling, cuddled a teddy bear. The introduction to the article conveyed the typical conviction in the power of the testimony of the photograph: 'No words, no figures can better speak of what Save the Children is and does than the two photographs below: the emaciated, tormented little child, and the three little ones who have once again begun to flourish.'<sup>69</sup> This way of displaying the children's bodies first before and then after feeding, nursing, and clothing them amounted to a visual affirmation of success, a way of literally showing their progress to the audience and attracting new donors, while at the same time such fundraising advertisements also 'metaphorically placed the responsibility to continue to feed starving children in the hands of the viewer.'<sup>70</sup> Finally, the before-and-after imagery can be seen as a way for humanitarianism to come to grips with wartime and overcome it by giving the saved child *back* its proper peacetime body and childhood. Seeing and saving children thus became peacemaking of both a literal and a figurative kind.

VAD RÄDDA BARNEN GÖR AV EN 25-ÖRING.

INGA ÖRD OCH INGA silfror kunna födligare tala om vad "Rädda Barnen" är och gör än de två fotografier vi här återge: det utmårslade, förpånade lilla barnet, och de tre små, som åter börja blomma upp. Om det på de livets åkrar, där Molaks stridsvagnar krossat och skövlat, åter börjar spira livet av den så som skall bli det nya släktet och den nya tiden, så är det till någon del det internationella "Rädda Barnens" förtjänst.

I Sverige är föreningen "Rädda Barnen" i dessa dagar ett år gammal. Den började, som så mycket annat, med en tidningsartikel (av Elin Wägner), och den har slutat — och nej inte slutat, ty den skall bestå och måste verka ännu — med en miljon i pengar. Så mycket och mer har hirtills insamlats och slänts ut till de nödlidande i våra pengar. Där till komma så alla varer: kläder, underkläder etc. etc.

Men som sagt, det gäller att hålla ut åtminstone ännu en tid. F. n. underhållet för



Berlinborn vänta på Rädda Barnens måltid mat

born, med varandra som i vittret land de bakt det bäst — och alltid kommer då Sverige främst. I Wien skall en lättsa en tackgäldsfest för even-skarna.

Den 30 nov. och i dec. anordnar Rädda Barnen en basar på Grand Hôtel i Stockholm för att få in nya medel. Där blir bl. a. ett särskilt "offerstånd" och man ber att det till detta måtte sändas gåvor: smycken, gravreter, vad som helst. Adressen är Rädda Barnen, Vasagatan 13. — I slutet av månaderna skall föreningen ha ärmåden och man hoppas till det för bl. a. så många ombud som möjligt från hela Sverige.



Tvåtalas mätningar ha följts till Rädda Barnen i ett tillstånd som detta

svenska "Rädda Barnen" omkring 6000 barn i de olika länderna, och man känner sig alljämt moraliskt stå i ansvar för dessa. Eller skola de små behöva åter frysa och svälta och gråta i den hårda värld, där de äro hjälplösa? Det är en fråga, som ställs till var och en bland oss, som åter hjälpa. Åh man betänka att för 25 öre, som skänks till Rädda Barnen, kan denna, tack vare valnöt, skaffa ett barn därute en måltid mat.

I Grönsteinen vere i Algerien (för att ta ett litet exempel på vad Rädda Barnen utövar) inviges nu snart ett kirurgiskt tuberkulosejukhus för barn som underhålles till hälften av Rids Kommit och till hälften av Rädda Barnen. Som föreståndarinnor för centralen i Wien arbetar alljänt fröken Elsa Björkman, hedrad och älskad av hela världen, och som ledare av Berlincentralen den duktiga fröken Elisabeth Klerck.

I Österrike har man nu en så hög tanke som svenskarna, att man tror den om att kunna göra allt, bekvämt fru Elin Wägner, som ju varit där nere en längre tid. Bland pruta mödrar, som haft sina små öte som "krig-

Från M. E. Sundsvall, har Idun föt montagen av Nr till De kungärdens barnen i Biedpica. Smitviken har överlämnats till Rädda Barnen enligt följande kvitto:

Av Tjänstgör Elin för insamling för Biedspet emottagit Komor Fyris, som kändt kvitteras Föreningen Rädda Barnen, Segrif Perzon.



Efter en tids vård börjar de små åter blomna upp.

'What Save the Children can do with a five pennies' ('Vad Rädda Barnen gör av en 25-öring'), *Idun*, 21 Nov. 1920. Image reproduction: UB Media, Lund University Library.

The sight and site of battle

As we have seen, the emaciated body of the child served the narrative purpose of being a sight—a visible memory in a temporal sense, a screen onto which the spectator could project a lost past and possible futures.<sup>71</sup> But the starved, sick, and crippled body was also a site in spatial terms, 'a space where violence is done', to follow Aubrey Graham.<sup>72</sup> The scarred body was seen de facto as the site of battle, pictured as 'ravaged', 'totally broken', and "beaten to the ground".<sup>73</sup> The Swedish press captured the insecurity and instability of demobilization in headlines and catchphrases such as 'marmalade children' for children suffering from an extremely painful form of rickets practically unknown before the war, which made the skeleton 'so loose and swampy that it cannot support them'.<sup>74</sup>

In *Svenska Dagbladet's* report 'A walk through a doomed Vienna,' a centred diptych of a naked boy and girl accompanied the graphic descriptions of disfigured war-marked bodies. Both pictures were examples of what Graham has identified as one of the two commonest visual tropes of 'humanitarian crisis imagery' at the time: the closely cropped portrait, set against a neutral background that draws attention to the victimized body. This type of body-centred, decontextualized portrait was assumed to 'speak for itself', in the sense that it did not need a caption to guide the reader as to the atrocity depicted.<sup>75</sup> However, this did not apply in the Swedish case. First the headline indicated how to read the (possible) fate of the two children portrayed—all hope is despaired of. The caption then added that the photograph to the left showed 'a ten-year-old boy, a victim of extreme undernourishment'. It was a full-length portrait of a naked, emaciated boy, his bony arms outstretched to emphasize his swollen tummy and the empty void behind him. His bare skin and genitals underscored his bodily vulnerability and exposure, a nakedness that also served to highlight the physical contours of starvation. He looked firmly into the lens, facing the viewer with an accusing look. This visual device of the child gazing back at the spectator encouraged a certain way of viewing the image. The sense of having eye contact enhanced a feeling of directness, presence, and proximity to the victim, and hence a sense of obligation towards him.<sup>76</sup> The photograph to the right was also a full-length portrait, but in profile and closer up, and showed a little girl who was naked except for a bow in her hair. Her features were blurry and almost invisible. Instead of the typical marks of starvation—big belly, thin limbs, hollow face—the focus was on her awkwardly wobbly legs and feet. It looked as if she was being held up by the humanitarian hand extended to her. The reader was then told that this rickety girl was yet another 'consequence of undernourishment, suffering from so-called "marmalade legs"'.<sup>77</sup>

Another example of a humanitarian portrait of a sick and starving child's body as a site of battle was published in the weekly magazine *Veckojournalen*, and showed an infant, perhaps aged about one. A wrinkly, skinny baby was held up as evidence for the camera, crying, with his mouth and eyes wide open. A doctor in a white robe supported the baby with one hand placed under his bottom and the other

SVENSKA DAGBLADET Fredagen den 13 Februari 1920

## På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien.

Tragedier ur de f. d. burgna klassernas martyrium och skräckbilder från den fattiga arbetarbefolkningens tillvaro.

(Från Svenska Dagbladets utvalda korrespondent.)

med inflöden skuldsätas en överbefolkad socialisieringsmaktigare. Gustafsdottern, till modför "bortskämd" från pariser för folk med sedertilligt att över för en plannas...

s o s: I förelaget går, att man här självet följerna den sängen med den som bruka jor- ter den i form av H. Det är klart, tem sociallet vill tion till spakörst inkomst av arbe- med tanke på sin svagare av förtä lakt samhälls, där dag lägges av till er sig självt. Vi s om vårt hus, att äll böra kasta ut ut som det pro- dit oss i fråga om ut.)

därför att god- XIII och XIV i kommissionens och sig. Deltagande utryckes att god- ändringskrande, följande föreläs- ningens redig- rades marxistvöl- "Styrdatalay- lite väst av pro- sörslar till punkti

### svenska skatte- met.

r det nya kommu- slaget.

därför till be- ommissionen och er till omständ Vil- delslas:

Progressiv in- satteminimum uti inkomst. Be- katta progressiv, te, Skattelag har- vet beskattningen. ut förtag bidraga hande.

he rikard- lade att formul- stes inkomst, att var skatteinomi- nall för beskatt- nings rådet "skat- böcker eller arbe- vet, är att den ar- beskattas härleva Den grundlägg- re att samhällets nya framför allt



T. v. 19-årigt goss, offer för krigsöring- ning, s. 2. v. 10-årigt goss, offer för krigsöring- ning, s. 2.

### WIEN, 12 jan.

En anlag om hur situationen i Wien är kan man möjligen få, om man här uti alla, säger och skriver alla, familjer med en inkomst underliggande 90 tusen kronor, givets utskickade, räknas som hjälplöshand. För ett i någon mån hanna kontrollera den giva hjälpen har i dagarna ett "Familjörorgelant" utgivits. Detta forumär utvalda till- sammans med beaktningen till alla famil- jer med lägre inkomst än 20 tusen kro- nor. På detta forumär, som svarer de- miljans ekonomiska situation, lärnattal o. d. antecknas av de olika hjälplöshanderna varje givet underord. Na- turligtvis är detta förfarande i många

mentärer redogöra för några intress. Jag fått under löpet av ett par dagar. En eftermiddag, då skyningen godas lagt en grå slöja, över släden, uppköptes jag av en för mig obekant herre, som med sitt "Familjörorgelant" och några andra papper legitimerade sig som finansist, stildt an av staten högt betrodde ämbetsman.

Han hade till fört tillräggallat den två timmar långa vägen för att träffa mig i min bostad i andra ändan av Wien. En skräckfullt kosta en kro- na, en utgift som var allt för stor för honom. Hans ärende var att bedja om ett par åror för sin 9-åriga flicka. Själ- hade han en inkomst av skidertonen

# MEEH HVI VECI

I MORGO  
SISTA  
DAGE

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**90 cm. bred Vit  
90 cm. bred Vit**

Med anledning af  
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säljas dessa kve

Kronor **2.20** pr mir  
Kronor **3.20** pr mir

DROTTNINGGATAN 63

kamp mot svält och hunger. Alla bli- det är en såld, alla möbler, allt hus- gredd allt eller oppbrätt. Nu återstår endast pianot i hela väningen. Till och med sågerna och stänkkläderna ha varit offerat, för att pianot skulle kunna stanna i hemmet. Dock vare detta ha öfverräns, som fått en mycke godpen- musikalisk utbildning kunna ge piano- laktioner för ett par kronor i timmen.

The report 'A walk through a doomed Vienna' ('På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien'), by Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), Svenska Dagbladet, 13 Feb. 1920. Image reproduction: UB Media, Lund University Library.

around his swollen belly. What seemed to be a woman's hand reached in from the left of the picture, holding the crying baby's right hand. The position of the three hands drew the spectator's attention to the boy, as did the doctor's eyes and face, which were fixed on the baby and not the camera: the little boy was the only one gazing back. The caption read 'A German child has got rickets due to undernourishment. The look in the little one's tearful eyes should say more than words.' It

# ETT SLAG FÖR DE SLAGNA

»RÄDDA BARNEN» ANÖRDNAR EN FESTVECKA.

Intet går upp mot konsten att icke förtrötts! Runt omkring i världen slappna viljor, brister energi, stocknar hänförelse — är det då underligt, att man röres vid synen av en utan uppehåll brinnande dödskraft? Var den synen visad? Jo, man träffar på den i huset Vasagatan 13.

»Rädda barnens» adress, alltså. Platsen, varifrån ett 60-tal vagnslaster mat och kläder sänts ut över Europa på mindre än ett halvår. Och där man är beredd att ombestyrta lika många till, om bara resurserna stå bi. Men det är just vad de inte göra...

»Ni skulle se det vita moln av brev, som dalar ned över varje styrelsemöte», sade en av styrelsens ledamöter till mig häromdagen. »Det är böner om hjälp från anstalter, sjukhus och barnhem — och så ser man sig ingen råd att göra vad som väntas och behövs. Rörelsekapital fattas och utan det stå vi maktlösa. Men nog vore det svårt att behöva släppa taget, när vi kommit så pass bra i gång med vårt hjälparbete, bara av brist på pengar!»

Men att sitta och sörja med händerna i kors passar inte föreningen »Rädda barnen». Ett kraftigt tag för att komma ur misären passar den oändligt mycket bättre. Man gjorde en linnedag i vintras — nu blir det en sko- och yllelag. För all del, linne tas även nu emot, men insamlingen går dock mest i skons och strumpans tecken. Insamlingsarbetet, förlagt till Kristi himmelsfärdsdag, blir ett led i en hel »Rädda barnen»-vecka 9—16 maj. Söndagen den 9 maj festas det på Hasselbacken: middag, bal, gardenparty med splitter nya attraktioner, som aldrig fört varit skådade i Stockholm.

Dagen därpå, den 10, blir det stort möte på Audinrum med tal av statsministern och ärkebiskopen. En dag, den 12 maj, reserveras åt skolbarnen, som då i brev, ett till var skola, uppmanas att ge vad de kunna; om t. ex. varje barn skänker blott to öre, blir resultatet 77,000 kr. Ty vad som behövs är fortlöpande hjälp —



Ett tykt barn som fått röhitis till följd av undernäring. Bliken ur den lilles iärfylla ögon torde säga mer än ord förstår.

att man »häller grytan kokandes», som Frälsningsarméns term lyder.

»Rädda barnen» håller till exempel tillsammans med Röda korset en barnkerubba nere i Wien, men den är inte säkerställd för mer än tre månader framåt och sedan... Ett barnhus i Estland har nyligen understötts med 2,000 kr., men även den summan tar slut en gång och sedan... Ett tuberkulosheint för barn i närheten av Wien planeras tillsammans med Röda korset och svensk-österrikiska kommittén — men åter är det pengar som fordras!

Och nu sätter föreningen hela sin lit till den veckan 9—16 maj. Den skall hållas över hela landet — ja, man hoppas för resten, att även privatpersoner skola hjälpa till med att samla medel, genom listor, småfester i hemmen, uppförande av ett nöje o. d.

Men de, som inte ha tid eller tillfälle att själva göra insamlingar, kunna med fördel bli offer för dem! Det är ju nu den tiden, då man gör rent i lädor och garderober — vårrengöringens sköna tid! — och städar fram en oändlig mängd trasiga skor och strumpor. Särskilt strumporna äro »Rädda barnen» livligt intresserade av; allt stickulle har man stort bruk för — det lämnar man till fabriker och färdiga saker i stället. Så tag ett djupt grepp i era gommor!

Miggs.

Miggs (signature), 'Fight for the defeated' ('Ett slag för de slagna'), *Vecko-journalen*, 16 May 1920. Image reproduction: UB Media, Lund University Library.

certainly bore witness to a confidence in the morality of sight, while at the same time its sheer existence paradoxically denied the common humanitarian idea that 'their bones/flesh speak' for themselves.<sup>78</sup> The additional information in the headline also referred to the baby as 'beaten' and 'defeated', using warlike metaphors.<sup>79</sup> This photograph thus functioned as a photographic proof for Swedish readers of the violations of the human body by war, 'a kind of forensic evidence'

of brutality, an inconvertible visual verification that atrocities were occurring.<sup>80</sup> Such images of victimized bodies served a dual purpose as evidence and as emotional provocation to provide factual and visceral explanations for readers.<sup>81</sup> With such direct, naked, and distressing imagery, the Swedish public would be moved to act.

In contrast to Graham's findings, the body-centred humanitarian crisis portraits used by the RB did not stand alone, or at least not in the daily and weekly press. Instead, powerful headlines, headings, and captions helped the reader to see, and hence feel, the motif in the right way. This was especially important when the press photographs were poor quality or blurred—they were frequently announced as 'touching' or as an 'appeal to our compassion.'<sup>82</sup> The reader was never left to look unguided; always the gaze was directed to the chosen meanings and effects of the humanitarian imagery.

The RB's humanitarian imagery can thus be summed up as the picture of a passive, weak, and vulnerable child, an innocent war victim waiting to be saved. The children so portrayed were mostly inactive: staring, lying, sleeping, being carried or held up, unable to support themselves. The headlines, like the photograph captions, led the reader to interpret the children as victimized by referring to them as tortured, crying, fading, lost, beaten, defeated, dying. Their bodies were framed with passive tropes, 'marked as victims by their bodily lack' of strength and ability.<sup>83</sup> Their gaze was decoded as engaging and appealing, not accusing or demanding. They were represented as victims there to plead the humanitarian cause rather than claimants in their own right.<sup>84</sup> The practices of looking thus sometimes came close to what Hannah Arendt calls a 'politics of pity' towards the misfortunate, rather than an act of solidarity with the suffering.<sup>85</sup>

Even if simplicity and directness of emotional address instead of political causation were, at least in part, in the very nature of humanitarian imagery,<sup>86</sup> and even if the RB's strongly sensory, affective reporting sometimes came close to a 'politics of pity', such images at the same time helped to put children on the international agenda and encouraged the idea of children's rights. In 1924, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations, largely due to the activism of the International Save the Children Union, of which the RB was an active part.<sup>87</sup> In its Swedish media campaigns,

the RB used the ‘moralizing icon of the child’ to underscore that the deformed body was not a result of natural disasters or epidemics, but a sight and site of war violence, thus questioning the usual image of war victims and their rights.<sup>88</sup> Bruno Cabanes has suggested that it was exactly the recognition of the other’s victimized body that would be the starting point for the imagining of a common humanity—‘a coalition of pain’—after the extreme nationalization of bodies in the First World War, and for the rethinking of individual, universal human rights.<sup>89</sup>

It is worth noting which purposes the child’s body was not expected to serve in the RB’s humanitarian imagery. The most notable absence from the many depictions of war-ravaged bodies in its media campaigns was the dead body, the corpse. The closest it came was when the children were represented as ‘the living dead,’ ‘ghosts,’ or ‘skeletons,’ as liminal bodies in between life and death, balancing ‘on the brink of the abyss.’<sup>90</sup> When the RB did mention death, it was collective and depersonalized. The dead were abstracted into statistics and figures—tables of birth and death rates, survival percentages, daily numbers of deaths and estimated casualties to come, or hidden in vague or sweeping phrases such as ‘mass death from starvation’ or ‘unparalleled mortality.’<sup>91</sup> This is striking, since we know that other relief organizations at the time did publish accounts and photographs of dead children. According to the literature, the war years wore down opposition to public representations of violence in the media, and also changed the rules for portraying suffering in charitable publications, resulting in a more commercialized, sensationalist, and spectacular humanitarianism. The British SCF, for example, was infamous for its early use of shocking images.<sup>92</sup> Why, then, did its Swedish sister organization refrain from ‘seeing the dead’? Since there is no principled discussion to be found in the sources, it is hard to tell whether it was for reasons of access or the result of an editorial choice. Perhaps the Swedish press—the organization’s main public channel—was cautious about publishing such images, which might have been more shocking in a country that had been spared open war.<sup>93</sup> The RB might also have been wary of being accused of the sensationalism of the SCF, fearing that it might do more harm than good to their cause. If Kevin Rozario is right when he claims that ‘Humanitarian texts have always been sites for encountering horror,’ and that there is only a blurred line between the

humanitarian and the ‘atrocitarian’ gaze, the RB nevertheless shied away from depicting dead children.<sup>94</sup> The dead body was indeed a powerful device, one that could communicate a strong anti-war message,<sup>95</sup> but it was also a horrible sight that risked eliciting unwanted reactions: revulsion, alienation, hopelessness, and a desire for revenge. Instead, the RB activists directed its readership to the survivors, focusing its all on the victims who could be saved.

## Conclusion

This chapter discusses the strategic, representational uses and meanings of the suffering war child’s body in Rädde Barnen’s (Swedish Save the Children) media campaigns in the aftermath of the First World War. I have examined the visual and visualizing discourse privileged within this kind of humanitarian reporting as a kind of moral rhetoric, which was designed to instruct Swedish readers how to view the images in committed, compassionate ways and ultimately to ameliorate the sufferings of war by donating to the RB or by becoming an activist. My focus is the functioning of the emblematic sight of a child’s war-stuck body when sensing, imagining, and questioning total war and its consequences.

The experience of the First World War altered the frames of war, bringing civilian victims and marginalized groups such as children to the fore. According to Laura Sjöberg, it is only on war’s margins that we can understand war itself. War, the daily experience that long predates and post-dates what is traditionally defined as war, fought in non-standard arenas by non-standard combatants (and not by soldiers, men, governments), has its own invisible violence beyond the traditional battlefield.<sup>96</sup> The RB’s interwar media campaigns are one such alternative way of telling war histories. In the organization’s humanitarian reporting, war was represented as a continuum rather than as an event: its narrative repeatedly challenged the conventional periodization in which the war ended in 1918. For the children of Vienna and other ‘haunted places’, the war raged on in their bodies and minds, in many cases worse than during the ‘actual’ war.<sup>97</sup> The physical marks of hunger—the starving, stunted, sickly body—were thus used to contest conceptions of ‘war’ and ‘post-war’, demobilization

and restoration. War remained in the children's bodies, the visual remains—and reminders—of the horrors of war. But the textual and visual narratives also extended the reach of war, siting it in the daily suffering in icy cellars and dark streets of the post-imperial metropolis, far from the trenches. Humanitarian reporting, meanwhile, tried to direct the Swedish public's gaze towards the smallest and often least visible victims of war, and with it change the main characters in the narrative. Obviously, the RB did not use concepts such as 'human security' or 'food insecurity', but the organization certainly considered starvation one way both to wage and to feel war. The sensory experience of hunger—its outcome mediated to Swedish readers by the humanitarian war witnesses' accounts in the press—was accounted an experience of war.

By visualizing the suffering child as a signifier of total war, placing its war-torn body at the centre of a humanitarian imagery and projecting it onto the front pages of the daily papers, the RB thus took part in what Jay Winter has called a 'war of narratives' between competing, contradictory, and unsettled war memories during demobilization.<sup>98</sup> Although the humanitarian, visual discourse of the RB was clearly discursively linked to other war narratives of the soldier-victim and 'the lost generation', it did not primarily foreground loss and disillusion. Humanitarian journalism stood for a more activist and progressive anti-war agenda, a way of getting out of war and hopefully leaving it behind for good by rescuing future generations. It was not only about remembering war, but also about forgetting. By keeping its eyes wide shut, focusing on survivors rather than dead children, it tried to encourage hope, faith, and confidence in the 'humanitarian heart' that some of what had been lost in war could yet be saved.

## Notes

- 1 Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920.
- 2 Ellen Key's *Barnets århundrade* was first published in 1900. This highly influential work on children and childhood was translated into 26 languages, in English as *The century of the child* (1909). Key was a keen supporter of Save the Children—see 'Vad kända män och kvinnor tänka om Rädda Barnen', *Rädda Barnen*, 6 (1920).
- 3 Trudi Tate, *Modernism, history and the First World War* (Manchester: MUP, 1998), 95; cf. Kevin McSorley (ed.), *War and the body: Militarisation, practice*

- and experience (London: Routledge, 2013); Christine Sylvester, *War as experience: Contributions from international relations and feminist analysis* (London: Routledge, 2013); Nicholas J. Saunders & Paul Cornish (eds.), *Bodies in conflict: Corporeality, materiality, and transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
- 4 Julia Irwin, *Making the world safe: The American Red Cross and a nation's humanitarian awakening* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 12.
  - 5 Branden Little, 'An explosion of new endeavours: Global humanitarian responses to industrial warfare in the First World War era', *First World War Studies*, 5/1 (2015), 13. The term 'dynamic of destruction' comes from Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of destruction: Culture and mass killing in the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 2007). For the world wars as turning points in the emotional history of compassion, see Michael Barnett, *Empire of humanity: A history of humanitarianism* (New York: Ithaca, 2011), 15, 28–9; Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the origins of humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 3, 10, 304; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from stones: The Middle East and the making of modern humanitarianism* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015); Friederike Kind-Kovács, 'The Great War, the child's body and the American Red Cross', *European Review of History-Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 23/1–2 (2016), 33; Friederike Kind-Kovács, 'The "other" child transports: World War I and the temporary displacement of needy children from Central Europe', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance 'irrégulière'*, 15 (2013), 75–109.
  - 6 For an overview, see the special issue on humanitarianism in the era of the First World War in *First World War Studies*, 5/1 (2015); Little 2015; Branden Little, 'Humanitarian relief and the analogue of war', in Jennifer D. Keene & Michael S. Neiberg (eds.), *Finding common ground: New directions in First World War studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 75–101; Irwin 2013, especially 213–14, n. 2, n. 5; Cabanes 2014; Watenpaugh 2015; William I. Hitchcock, 'World War I and the humanitarian impulse', *Tocqueville Review/La revue Tocqueville*, 35/2 (2014), 145–63; for the history of humanitarianism, human rights, and world war, see Cabanes 2014, 6, 9–11, 17, 301. I can only agree with Cabanes's remark that the history of humanitarianism and human rights ought to be read together with the cultural history of war, as intertwined rather than separate.
  - 7 Little 2015, 11.
  - 8 Emily Baughan, 'Every citizen of empire implored to Save the Children! Empire, internationalism and Save the Children in interwar Britain', *Historical Research*, 86/231 (2013), 116–37; Clare Mulley, *The woman who saved the children: A biography of Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Linda Mahmood, *Feminism and voluntary action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children 1876–1928* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Cabanes 2014, 248–99.
  - 9 The RB archive is held by the Swedish National Archives and consists of press clippings from the daily and weekly press, commercial campaign material (flyers, leaflets, advertisements, memos, photographs), and minutes from the RB board of directors: Riksarkiven, Stockholm (RA), Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 1985, Samlingsserie

- övriga handlingar F1f: 2. 1920–50-tal diverse trycksaker; RA, Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 2005, Övrigt Pressklipp Ö1, 1–6, 1919–1923; RA, Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 1985, Samlingsserie övriga handlingar F1f: 1. 1920–1949 Medlemstidning 1920–26. See the minutes of the RB board of directors, RA, Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 2005, Styrelsen A2:1 1920–1922 Kartong (protokoll styrelsesammanträden), 8 Dec. 1920, 11 Mar. 1920, 9 Jan. 1921, 27 Jan. 1921, 8 Feb. 1921, 11 Mar. 1921, 22 Mar. 1921, 31 May 1921, 19 Oct. 1921, 8 Nov. 1921, 22 Nov. 1923. See also ‘Vad Rädda Barnen gör av en 25-öring’, *Idun*, 21 Jan. 1920; Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt, ‘Så var det i Wien’, in Vera Forsberg, *Att rädda barn: En krönika om Rädda Barnen med anledning av dess femtioåriga tillvaro* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1969), 117–21.
- 10 Lina Sturfelt, ‘Humanitarianism (Sweden)’, in Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer & Bill Nasson (eds.), *1914–1918-online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2018-01-22), DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11214; Lina Sturfelt, *Eldens återsken: första världskriget i svensk föreställningsvärld* (diss.; Lund: Sekel, 2008), 208–209; Mats Rohdin, ‘När kriget kom till Sverige: första världskriget på bioduken’, *Biblis*, 68 (2015), 13–15.
  - 11 Lina Sturfelt, ‘From parasite to angel: Narratives of neutrality in the Swedish popular press during the First World War’, in Johan den Hertog & Samuël Kruizinga (eds.), *Caught in the middle: Neutrality and the First World War* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2011), 105–120; Sturfelt 2008; Monika Janfelt, ‘Svensk krigsbarnsverksamhet 1919–1922’, *Historisk tidskrift för Finland*, 75 (1990), 465–98; Monika Janfelt, *Stormakter i människokärlek: Svensk och dansk krigsbarnshjälp 1917–1924* (diss.; Åbo: Åbo akademi, 1998).
  - 12 For the RB’s own accounts of its early history, see, for example, *Minnesskrift över föreningen Rädda Barnens 20-åriga verksamhet i Sverige, 1919–1939* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1939); and Vera Forsberg, *Att rädda barn: En krönika om Rädda Barnen med anledning av dess femtioåriga tillvaro* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1969). There is very little historical research on the RB, the one notable exception being Ann Nehlin, *Exporting visions and saving children: The Swedish Save the Children Fund* (diss.; Linköping: Department of Child Studies, 2009), which however is limited to 1938–1956.
  - 13 Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann, ‘Gazing at ruins: German defeat as visual experience’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), 328–50.
  - 14 On hunger as news and the media’s role in making humanitarian crises into media events, see Christina Twomey, ‘Framing atrocity: photography and humanitarianism’, *History of Photography*, 36/3 (2012), 255–8; James Vernon, *Hunger: A modern history* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007); Heide Fehrenbach & Davide Rodogno, ‘Introduction: The morality of sight: humanitarian photography in history’, in Heide Fehrenbach & Davide Rodogno (eds.), *Humanitarian photography: A history* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 2–6; Sharon Sliwinski, ‘The childhood of human rights: The Kodak on the Congo’, *Journal of Visual Culture*,

- 5/3 (2006), 342, 365; Sharon Sliwinski, *Human rights in camera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Cabanes 2014, 303–304. The mediation of contemporary humanitarianism is a huge field. See Lilie Chouliaraki, ‘Afterword: The dialectics of mediation in “distant suffering studies”’, *International Communication Gazette*, 77/7 (2015), 708–714; Shani Orgad & Irene Bruna Seu, ‘The mediation of humanitarianism: Toward a research framework’, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 7 (2014), 6–36; Luc Boltanski, *Distant suffering: Morality, media and politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).
- 15 Johan Jarbrink, *Det våras för journalisten: Symboler och handlingsmönster för den svenska pressens medarbetare från 1870-tal till 1930-tal* (diss.; Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 11; Stockholm: Kungliga biblioteket, 2009), 181.
  - 16 Heide Fehrenbach, ‘Children and other civilians: photography and the politics of humanitarian image-making’, in Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 167–8, 174–5, quote at 167; Kevin Rozario, ‘“Delicious horrors”: Mass culture, the Red Cross, and the appeal of modern American humanitarianism’, *American Quarterly*, 55/3, (2003), 420–21, 430; Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 11; Twomey 2012, 256–8; Little 2015, 5; Thomas D. Westerman, ‘Touring occupied Belgium: American humanitarians at “work and leisure”’, *First World War Studies*, 5/1 (2015), 43–53. There are many notable, sometimes literal, similarities regarding the imagery and metaphorical language of the humanitarian reports cited by Kind-Kovács (2016, 37–8) and in my Swedish material, making the humanitarian narrative genre and humanitarian journalism of the interwar years an interesting avenue to explore.
  - 17 Westerman 2015, 50; Kind-Kovács 2016, 38, 33–4: cf. Fehrenbach 2015, 167, 176–7; Silvia Salvatici, ‘Sights of benevolence: UNRRA’s recipients portrayed’, in Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 210–11; Irwin 2013, 144, 167; Cabanes 2014, 52.
  - 18 See minutes of the RB board of directors, RA, Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 2005, Styrelsen A2:1 1920–1922 Kartong (protokoll styrelsesammanträden), 8 Dec. 1920, 11 Mar. 1920, 9 Jan. 1921, 27 Jan. 1921, 8 Feb. 1921, 11 Mar. 1921, 22 Mar. 1921, 31 May 1921, 19 Oct. 1921, 8 Nov. 1921, 22 Nov. 1923; see also ‘Vad Rädda Barnen gör av en 25-öring’, *Idun*, 21 Jan. 1920; Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt, ‘Så var det i Wien’, in Forsberg 1969, 117–21; for Elgström, Stiernstedt, and Wägner and their anti-war writing, see Sofi Qvarnström, *Motståndets berättelser: Elin Wägner, Anna Lenah Elgström, Marika Stiernstedt och första världskriget* (diss.; Möklinta: Gidlund, 2009), and her chapter in the present volume.
  - 19 Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015; Twomey 2012, 256–6; Sliwinski 2011.
  - 20 Rozario 2003, 421, 425–6.
  - 21 Fehrenbach 2015, 193.
  - 22 Thomas W. Laqueur, ‘Mourning, pity, and the work of narrative in the making of humanity’, in Richard Ashby Wilson & Richard D. Brown (eds.), *Humanitarianism and suffering: The mobilization of empathy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 8.
  - 23 Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 4.

- 24 Anna-Maria Hällgren, *Skåda all världens uselhet: Visuell pedagogik och reformism i det sena 1800-talets populärkultur* (diss., Möklinta: Gidlund, 2013).
- 25 Twomey 2012, 255–9; Sliwinski 2006; Sliwinski 2011; Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 2–6; Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's battle: The origins of humanitarian intervention* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 5–9, 25–8; Brendan Simms & D. J. B. Trim, *Humanitarian intervention: A history* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 22, 389–90; Davide Rodogno, *Against massacre: Humanitarian intervention in the Ottoman Empire 1815–1914* (Princeton: PUP, 2012), 15–16, 268–9.
- 26 Sliwinski 2006, 334, 342, 346; Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 1; Twomey 2012, 256.
- 27 Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 2–6, quote at 4.
- 28 Ibid. 15–16.
- 29 Laqueur 1989, 180, 190, original emphasis.
- 30 Kind-Kovács 2016, 37–8, quote at 37.
- 31 Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Gendering the politics of war wounds since 1914', in Ana Carden-Coyne (ed.), *Gender and conflict since 1914* (Houndsmill: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 5, 83, 95; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the male: Men's bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996); Tate 1998, 80, 84–5, 95; Cabanes 2014, 6.
- 32 Tate 1998, 24, 41–50, 59–61; Rozario 2003, 419; Cabanes 2014, 272–3, 283–4, 297–8; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, 14–18: *Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 110–112; James Marten (ed.), *Children and war: A historical anthology* (New York: NYUP, 2002).
- 33 'Där köld och svält dagligen kräva offer', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 7 Jan. 1920.
- 34 Laqueur 1989, 177, 179, 180, 183, quote at 177.
- 35 See, for example, Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), 'På vandring genom det dödsdömda Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 Feb. 1920; Gerda Marcus, 'En tidsbild från Wien', *Jämtlandsposten*, 31 Jan. 1921; Eugenie Schwarzwald, 'Det svenska barnsanatoriet i Grimmenstein', *Gotlands Allehanda*, 22 Feb. 1921.
- 36 Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; for similar emotional reactions to witnessing, see 'Ännu mer hjälp åt Wienbarnen är oundgänglig', *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 Feb. 1920; E. Th., 'Rädda Barnen! Samt livkläd-naden och nästan', *Idun*, 1 Feb. 1920; Elsa Björkman, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921; Elin Wägner, 'Den döende världsstaden', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 Feb. 1921.
- 37 Regan, 'Då Wien mottog Sveriges första hjälpsändningar', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 Jan. 1920.
- 38 Johan Jarlbrink, 'Objektiv journalistik i bandspelarens tidevarv', in Marie Cronqvist et al. (eds.), *Mediehistoriska vändningar* (Mediehistoriskt arkiv, 25; Lund: Lunds universitet, 2014), 47; Géraldine Muhlmann, *A political history of journalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).
- 39 Elin Wägner, 'Den döende världsstaden', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 Feb. 1921; Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920.
- 40 Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), 'På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 Feb. 1920; Elsa Björkman, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien',

- Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921; Elin Wägner, 'Alla onda drömmars land', *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 Feb. 1920; 'Ännu mer hjälp åt Wienbarnen är oundgänglig', *Dagens Nyheter*, 16 Jan. 1920; Gerda Marcus, 'En tidsbild från Wien', *Jämtlandstidningen*, 31 Jan. 1921.
- 41 Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), 'På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 Feb. 1920; Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; 'Skräcktillståndet i Budapest förvärras', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1 Mar. 1920; 'Där köld och svält dagligen kräva offer', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 7 Jan. 1920; 'Där nöden och eländet råda', *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, 29 Feb. 1921.
- 42 'Svältens följder för Wienbarnen', *Politiken*, 29 Jan. 1920; 'Nu 2,200 kr. åt Wienbarnen', *Bäragslags-Posten*, 13 Dec. 1919; Elsa Björkman, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921. My emphasis.
- 43 'Rädda Barnen!', *Falkenbergsposten*, 29 Nov. 1920; Elin Wägner, 'Den döende världsstaden', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 Feb. 1921; 'Hjälp! Hjälp! Hjälp!', *Alingsås Tidning*, 15 Dec. 1920; Elin Wägner, 'Ett utfattigt Centraleuropa en stor fara', *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 Nov. 1920; 'Svältens följder för Wien-barnen', *Politiken*, 29 Jan. 1920.
- 44 'Vill du hjälpa en nödställd österrikisk familj?', *Södermanlands Läns Tidning*, 21 Jan. 1920; cf. 'Hjälp i nödens tid' (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1920).
- 45 'Rädda Barnens minneslista', *Afton-Tidningen*, 30 July 1920, original emphasis. The RB's list was published in several papers including *Stockholms Dagblad* (1 Aug. 1920) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (5 Aug. 1920).
- 46 'Nu 2,200 kr. åt Wienbarnen', *Bäragslagsposten*, 13 Dec. 1919; cf. 'Nöden i världen', *Upsala Nya Tidning*, 27 Dec. 1920; Gurli Hertzman Ericson, 'Från det hungrande Wien', *Afton-Tidningen*, 7 Jan. 1920.
- 47 Fanny Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'Det tigande landets nöd', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 16 Feb. 1920, my emphasis.
- 48 See Qvarnström's chapter in this volume.
- 49 Laqueur 1989; Rozario 2003, 421, 425–6.
- 50 Gurli Hertzman Ericson, 'Från det hungrande Wien', *Afton-Tidningen*, 7 Jan. 1920.
- 51 'Nöden i världen', appeal from the International Save the Children Union, published for example in *Upsala Nya Tidning*, 27 Dec. 1920.
- 52 The reference is most likely to the Austrian branch of the Catholic Church charity Caritas (misspelt 'Charitas') in 'Svältens följder för Wien-barnen', *Politiken*, 29 Jan. 1920. Very few of the original press photographs have been found in the RB archives (RA, Förenings- och organisationsarkiv (73), Rädda Barnens riksförbund, Rädda Barnen 1985, Fotografier K1:2–6).
- 53 See, for example, Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; Elsa Björkman, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921; 'Sverige—Hela världens lilla vän', *Veckojournalen*, 29 Nov. 1920.
- 54 Fehrenbach 2015, 167, 176–82.
- 55 See, for example, Jörn Rüsen, 'Holocaust, memory and identity building: Meta-historical considerations in the case of (West) Germany', in Michael S. Roth & Charles G. Salas (eds.), *Disturbing remains: Memory, history and crisis in the*

- twentieth century* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2001), 252–3; Jay Winter, *Dreams of peace and freedom: Utopian moments in the twentieth century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006a), 7–8.
- 56 'E. Th', 'Rädda Barnen! Samt livklädnaden och nästan', *Idun*, 1 Feb. 1920; Friederike Kind-Kovács 2016, 41, 57 discusses how Hungarian children's deviating bodies were visualized as markers for how they differed from the nutritional norms and standards of the American Red Cross at the same time.
- 57 'Där nöden och eländet råda', *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, 29 Feb. 1921; Gerda Marcus, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921; Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; Elin Wägner, 'I förödmjukelsens dal', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 Jan. 1920.
- 58 Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; Gerda Marcus, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921.
- 59 Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; 'Nöden i Tyskland', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 25 Jan. 1920; Elin Wägner, 'I förödmjukelsens dal', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 Jan. 1920; 'Där nöden och eländet råda', *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, 29 Feb. 1921.
- 60 'Livets igenstoppade källa', *Tranås Tidning*, 5 Mar. 1921, a report that is unsigned, but almost an exact reprint of Elin Wägner, 'Den döende världsstaden', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 Feb. 1921; cf. Eugenie Schwarzwald, 'Gävor från Fru Liljecronas hem', *Upsala Nya Tidning*, 30 Mar. 1920.
- 61 'Tusen sinom tusen barn förgås ännu af hunger', *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 18 Dec. 1920; cf. 'För mycket för att dö, men för litet för att leva', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 12 Jan. 1921; 'Wienbarnens svenska mamma på besök', *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 Jan. 1921.
- 62 Jay Winter, *Remembering war: The Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006b), 55.
- 63 'Rädda Barnen!', appeal for Save the Children, published for example in *Falkenbergsposten*, 29 Nov. 1920.
- 64 Winter 2006b, 60–1, 75.
- 65 Fehrenbach 2015, 167, 176–7; Barnett 2011, 85–6; Irwin 2013, 88, 167–81; Cabanes 2014, 248–99; Kind-Kovács 2016, 39; Dominique Marshall, 'The construction of children as an object of international relations: The Declaration of Children's Rights and the Child Welfare Committee of the League of Nations, 1900–1924', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 7 (1999), 103–147.
- 66 Sturfelt 2008, 175–7.
- 67 Barnett 2011, 27–28, 227 discusses the 'transcendental' aspects of post-war humanitarianism, claiming that it helped the survivors 'to come to terms with their ghosts' by turning communities of memory and mourning into moral communities (and institutions) of care; cf. Bergström's chapter in this volume.
- 68 Fehrenbach 2015, 179.
- 69 'Vad Rädda Barnen gör av en 25-öring', *Idun*, 21 Nov. 1920.
- 70 Linda Mahood & Vic Satzewich, 'The Save the Children Fund and the Russian famine of 1921–23: Claims and counter-claims about feeding "Bolshevik" children', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 22/1 (2009), 63.

- 71 Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).
- 72 Aubrey Graham, 'One hundred years of suffering? "Humanitarian crisis photography" and self-representation in the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Social Dynamics*, 40/1 (2014), 153.
- 73 'Svältens följderna för Wien-barnen', *Politiken*, 29 Jan. 1920; Gerda Marcus, 'En tidsbild från Wien', *Jämtlandsposten*, 31 Jan. 1921.
- 74 'Där nöden och eländet råda', *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, 29 Feb. 1921; see also Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), 'På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 Feb. 1920; Alice Trolle, 'De små martyrerna', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Jan. 1920; 'Nöden i Tyskland', *Stockholms Dagblad*, 25 Jan. 1920.
- 75 Graham 2014, 141–6, 149, 157.
- 76 Ibid. 146; cf. Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 6.
- 77 Gerfred Mark (Gerda Marcus), 'På vandring genom det dödsmärkta Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 Feb. 1920; for photographs similar to that of the boy, see 'Svältens följderna för Wien-barnen', *Politiken*, 29 Jan. 1920; Anna Lenah Elgström, 'Den dömda stadens döende barn' (Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1919).
- 78 Twomey 2012, 259; Laqueur 1989, 179; for war stories become flesh, see Winter 2006b, 57.
- 79 Miggs, 'Ett slag för de slagna', *Veckojournalen*, 16 May 1920.
- 80 Sliwinski 2006, 335; cf. Twomey 2012, 255, 258, 263.
- 81 Fehrenbach 2015, 176; Graham 2014, 147.
- 82 'Sverige—Hela världens lilla vän', *Veckojournalen*, 29 Nov. 1920; 'De namnlösa barnen i Wiens baracker vädja till vårt medlidande', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 Mar. 1920; cf. Elsa Björkman, 'Bland dem som förgås i Wien', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2 Jan. 1921; 'Vad Rädda Barnen gör av en 25-öring', *Idun*, 21 Nov. 1920.
- 83 Graham 2014, 153.
- 84 According to Kind-Kovács 2016, 45, the ways in which interwar humanitarians accessed and regulated the impaired and powerless child's body was also 'an invasion into the children's most intimate lives'.
- 85 Hannah Arendt, *On revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 78f.
- 86 Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 6.
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- 92 Cabanes 2014, 220–2, 260–1, 288; Mahood & Satzewich 2009, 63–4; Salvatici 2015, 210–11; Fehrenbach 2015, 177, 179, 181; Rozario 2003, 419, 430–2; Irwin 2013, 87; Francesca Piana, 'Photography, cinema and the quest for influence: The International Committee of the Red Cross in the wake of the First World War', in Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 152, 156–8; Fehrenbach & Rodogno 2015, 11. In neutral Scandinavia, the war was also a turning point in the visual mediation of war and for photojournalism. Accurate and authentic war pictures became a matter of fierce competition and keen marketing practices. There was a widespread notion that the visual mediation especially brought the war's suffering closer to the neutrals; see Ulrik Lehrmann, 'An album of war: The visual representation of the First World War in Danish magazines and daily newspapers', in Claes Ahlund (ed.), *Scandinavia in the First World War: Studies in the war experience of the Northern neutrals* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 57–84; Sturfelt 2008, 37–43; Jarlbrink 2009, 181–4; Rohdin 2015.
- 93 It is notable that during the war years Swedish illustrated magazines, otherwise rich in horrifying images of death and destruction, including human remains, explicitly refrained from publishing pictures of dead or maimed civilians, especially women and children (Sturfelt 2008, 139–83, especially 155).
- 94 Rozario 2003, 443.
- 95 See Kärrholm's chapter in this volume.
- 96 Laura Sjöberg, *Gender, war and conflict* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 113, 123, 133, 156, 164, 167; see also Laura Sjöberg, *Gendering global conflict: Toward a feminist theory of war* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Sylvester 2013; Nicholas J. Saunders & Paul Cornish (eds.), *Modern conflict and the senses* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); and Skoog's chapter in this volume.
- 97 'Hjälp! Hjälp! Hjälp!', *Alingsås Tidning*, 15 Dec. 1920.
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## A sensory experience

### BBC correspondent Audrey Russell reporting (and remembering) the Second World War

*Kristin Skoog*

The Second World War transformed the everyday soundscape in Britain. A ‘Total War’ on the home front, as James Mansell writes, ‘altered what people heard in their daily lives and how they listened.’<sup>1</sup> One key feature of this transformed soundscape was the radio. Radio was to take centre stage in British daily life during the Second World War. It was no longer simply a medium for private enjoyment, but had an important function providing public information and entertainment in the home, the workplace, and on the battle front. The British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC, entertained factory workers, the forces, and listeners at home with morale-building popular music.<sup>2</sup> Variety and comedy created what Anne Karpf has called ‘a kind of audio home front’, with recognizable characters and catchphrases that ‘became enormously reassuring, providing an aural anchor in turbulent times.’<sup>3</sup> There were also other developments. Radio came into its own as ‘a rapid news medium’ in wartime.<sup>4</sup> The recording of shellfire in the First World War brought the front into the home and audiences closer to an understanding of the sound of war.<sup>5</sup> This was to become even more prevalent in the Second World War due to the development of radio broadcasting and recording technology. The immediacy and speed of radio gave it an advantage over newspapers, and it became a key platform for the reporting and mediation of war at home and abroad. The radio war correspondent was to play a key role in this mediation.

‘Hello BBC. This is Audrey Russell speaking from an airfield

somewhere in Britain. I've just landed in a Lancaster with 24 ex-prisoners of war whom we went over to fetch in France this morning.<sup>6</sup> One such radio war correspondent was Audrey Russell (1906–1989). Russell has been credited with being the first woman radio war correspondent at the BBC—and possibly even the first woman BBC news reporter.<sup>7</sup> During the Second World War, the BBC adopted new production techniques and ‘shifted from being a conduit of news from other sources to a news-gathering organization in its own right.’<sup>8</sup> This meant it relied more on collecting information through war reporters and correspondents (or ‘observers’ as they were initially called), and making use of recording cars and newly developed portable recording technology. Eyewitness accounts and recorded actuality were introduced into news presentation and reporting. This would also have a dramatic effect on how news sounded. One such early attempt from July 1940 was Charles Gardener’s exciting commentary, recorded live, of an aerial ‘dogfight’ over the Strait of Dover that produced a somewhat sensational commentary: “Oh, we’ve just hit a Messerschmitt! Oh! That was beautiful.”<sup>9</sup> A Listener Research report, done in response to the commentary, indicated that the ‘broadcast aroused enormous interest’ and that a large majority of respondents gave it ‘full approval’ and wanted more.<sup>10</sup> In essence, this was news reporting and presentation more appropriate to the *sound* medium. For example, BBC’s *Radio Newsreel*, introduced in 1940, had been designed to imply ‘immediacy’, and deliberately sought ‘radiogenic stories.’<sup>11</sup> Between 1941 and 1943 the BBC began to develop frontline broadcasting. After D-Day in June 1944, it launched the pioneering *War Report*, the ‘most technically challenging, topical and thrilling radio programme of the war.’<sup>12</sup> In the first programme listeners heard the war correspondent Howard Marshall describing the landing in France with the Allied forces, and other two prominent war correspondents, Richard Dimbleby and Frank Gillard, reported from Normandy.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, listeners were able to follow the Allied advance, as if they too were at the front.

This chapter focuses on the mediation of war by radio war correspondents. First of all, I am interested in how the characteristics of radio—its codes being auditory—shaped the mediation and representation of war in war reporting. Radio’s ‘blindness’, as David Hendy suggests, allows radio to create and stimulate images in the listener’s

mind, thus a form of ‘co-production’ takes place that forces a more cognitive activity.<sup>14</sup> While technically, radio did not offer visuals, it is still worthwhile considering Tim Crook’s question: ‘What is the philosophical difference between seeing physically with the eye and seeing with the mind?’<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the radio war correspondent played a key role, as a mediator, in the mediation and representation of war. Most radio war reports were not live running commentary, but instead were recorded. Andrew Crisell describes radio commentary as ‘the improvised description or word-picture of an event.’<sup>16</sup> Importantly, the commentator has to act ‘as our eyes and to a large extent our ears.’<sup>17</sup> Taking inspiration from recent scholarship exploring ‘sensory culture’ and ‘sensory history’, I would like to draw attention to the embodied and sensory experience of radio war reporting.<sup>18</sup> In mediating and representing war, radio created a more personal, intimate, and emotional experience. Listening and hearing, as well as seeing (for the listener albeit imaginatively) produced not only a sense of intimacy but also *presence*. In a text exploring war, cognition, and the media, Michael Bull, applying ideas from Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, and John Durham Peters, points to the transformed ‘sensory and cognitive relation between proximity, distance and importantly presence’ brought by media technologies.<sup>19</sup> This, as I will argue, is particularly fitting in relation to the radio war correspondent.

The development of BBC war reporting during the Second World War has received considerable scholarly attention. The focus is often the institutional context and developments, for example, the expansion of news, news production and presentation techniques (due to new portable recording technology), the appointment of war correspondents, and consequently the introduction of new programming (such as the pioneering *War Report* in 1944). In addition, issues with regards to censorship and the often-complicated relationship with the government and the Ministry of Information, are often foregrounded.<sup>20</sup> A ‘sensory’ dimension—exploring the role of the media in ‘reflecting and shaping our minds, our perceptions, our emotions’, as David Hendy has pointed out, still remains broadly absent from mainstream media history.<sup>21</sup> And so this chapter aims to take up Hendy’s call, providing an alternative analysis of the BBC radio war correspondent.

To explore a sensory dimension of war reporting, I consider the work

of Audrey Russell. The reasons for this are twofold. First, despite being credited as the first woman war correspondent at the BBC, Russell has received relatively little attention from radio historians. She is not as well known as other ‘celebrity reporters’ and is often omitted from research focused on women and journalism.<sup>22</sup> The extent and quality of her wartime reports have therefore remained relatively unknown. While it is true that, compared to some of her male counterparts, she did not produce a wealth of war reports, she nevertheless contributed a number of shorter reports, eyewitness accounts, and interviews between 1941 and 1945. The attention here will be on her wartime output, to which end I have analysed the surviving sound recordings, manuscripts, and transcripts.<sup>23</sup> The chapter is less concerned with Russell’s internal BBC career, concentrating instead on bringing to light her actual reports from the war, which to date have received little analysis.

Secondly, by looking at Russell’s wartime reporting, the chapter will provide a different perspective by shifting the focus from the traditional battlefield to the *civilian* experience.<sup>24</sup> I will concentrate on two case studies from 1944. I begin by exploring her dispatches from Dover and Folkestone, where she reported on the last days of German long-range shelling. I then explore a report on the destruction of a V-2 rocket. Field Marshal Montgomery banned women war correspondents from travelling with British forces or even covering them.<sup>25</sup> This complicated the access women had, and consequently the stories they could tell. Frontline battles were mainly covered by men, and women were instead limited to stories about hospitals, nurses, or other ‘stories then deemed peripheral to the principal events of war’.<sup>26</sup> BBC News was dominated by men, and in Russell’s case there was clearly a gendered aspect in terms of what stories she reported. As will be discussed, this also reveals the ‘politics of the senses’,<sup>27</sup> which I will develop while analysing her wartime output, but I also return to the point in the final part of the chapter—a brief discussion of her *memories* of reporting war.

### Sound pictures of Hellfire Corner

Russell was not a trained journalist nor did she have a journalistic background. Instead, she had studied drama and theatre and joined the BBC in her thirties more or less by chance.<sup>28</sup> Initially, she gave a series

of short talks for the BBC Home Service about the Women's Auxiliary Airforce (WAAF), the female auxiliary of the Royal Airforce created in 1939. In 1942 she was appointed to the BBC's Overseas Service, where she became what appears to have been the first female reporter for *Radio Newsreel*, a news programme regularly broadcast from 1940 for the Overseas Services, and for the General Forces Programme from 1944. She was made a fully accredited war correspondent in the autumn of 1944, and travelled abroad to Belgium, the Netherlands, and France.<sup>29</sup>

Having examined the source material, I can say that Russell clearly had a natural flair for radio. Her stories are descriptive and carefully composed for the ear. Russell remained interested in drama and theatre, and particularly in the spoken word and poetic drama.<sup>30</sup> It is not strange that she understood how important words, voice, and tone were to radio broadcasting. Her interest in theatre and poetry may well have helped shape her way of reporting. Street makes the point about radio's poetic qualities that 'poetry is made for voice and ear', and that 'a good poet has a voice and a good producer has a voice. It is a "voice" that can show you pictures.'<sup>31</sup> For example, one of her earliest reports was a visit in September 1941 to an air force station where WAAFs were completing their training as barrage balloon operators. In March 1941 women had been conscripted into war work, and the BBC was to encourage this type of recruitment.<sup>32</sup> Her short report is really about showing that women can do the work usually done by men, and gives a vivid impression through the detailed descriptions: 'girls in Navy Boiler-Suits ... daubed with oil and grease, crawling under the huge lorries, apparently quite enjoying themselves.'<sup>33</sup> The main function of radio language is to describe the real world, and this is particularly characteristic of radio news, documentary, and commentary.<sup>34</sup> Any physical object, activity, setting, or atmosphere has to be described. The details given are then 'pictured' by the listener. As Crisell suggests, the listener 'must imagine not only a character's thoughts and feelings but also her expression, total appearance, physical situation, and so on.'<sup>35</sup> The use of our imaginations or inner minds to 'see' these sound pictures makes radio an 'inward, *intimate* medium.'<sup>36</sup> The first example from Dover is a useful illustration of this.

On 1 October 1944, *War Report* was given over to the civilian

experience of Dover's Hellfire Corner.<sup>37</sup> The bottleneck of the Dover Strait was a key target for German long-range shelling from the Pas-de-Calais coast, and saw heavy bombardment from 1940 to 1944, and over the course of the war the repeated shelling and bombing of the narrows gave it the nickname Hellfire Corner. The broadcast featured several dispatches from Russell who had spent nearly three months with the anti-aircraft battery, covering the shelling of the Dover area.<sup>38</sup> In September 1944, Allied forces intensified their operations to capture the German guns in Calais. In the first recording, from 27 September 1944, Russell reported from Dover, and the last days of German shelling. The recording was not made on location, instead it appears to have been recorded inside a studio or some other closed space. It featured just Russell's voice, her words clearly articulated and tone serious. She functioned here as the listener's eyes and ears:

This is Audrey Russell speaking from Dover. Yesterday was a bad day for this town. Things started pretty early; indeed the first shelling warning went when I was in my bath. I heard a few distant explosions but by breakfast time the all-clear went, but it didn't last for long. As we drove through the town on our way to visit a gun site on the cliff the warning went again. And as we rounded a corner we saw a party of school children being shepherded and scurried into a shelter—they seemed pretty accustomed to it, and in no time at all the streets were completely deserted. We were rather glad when we got to the top of the cliff; there is something ominous about those empty, battered, shattered streets grimly waiting for what may come. And although the cliff is pitted with chalky shell holes, it feels safer up there than out in the open.<sup>39</sup>

The passage described the situation, and the sounds she heard as she lay in her bath, and later as they moved through the town—warning sirens and explosions. For many people the sound of warning sirens were the most familiar sound of the wartime soundscape, and therefore easy to imaginatively 'hear', although no sound effect was actually included. The description of the town with its deserted streets, the cliffs pitted with shell holes, provided a clear illustration for the listener of the impact of war. In the report there were several descriptions of

hearing and seeing, including ‘we could hear our bombers going out towards the opposite coast, we watched them out of sight, but it was only a matter of seconds before pillars of black smoke rose up on the horizon.’<sup>40</sup> Using the word ‘we’ not only emphasized her presence on location, giving a sense of authority or credibility speaking from first-hand experience, but it also made it more personal, more involved.

The radio commentator was also expected to read events, making connections that were not self-evident.<sup>41</sup> Thus the next passage again provided striking visual clues and detail of a badly hit Dover, in which Russell also provided a metaphor for the state of mind of the people, referring to the strength and shelter of the Dover caves.

Street after street with police traffic diversion signs—street after street of gaping windows and rubble all over the place. Yet—there was order even in that chaos, no crater was [small stumble] was without a red hurricane lamp to show where it was, and no damaged street was without a notice neatly roping it off. Today there is no gas or water in Dover, and the police and civil defence workers—flogged dead beat as they must be—are making the most of the present merciful lull to clear up the mess. Casualties are miraculously light when you think of the desolation—but Dover caves are strong, some fifty-five shells fell in the vicinity yesterday. So far the figures are seven killed and about forty seriously injured.<sup>42</sup>

Dover’s caves provided shelter for civilians during shelling, so on one level her words implied that the civilians were protected by the strength of the caves. However, by changing tone and placing the emphasis on the words ‘are strong’ there was an emotional change of tone creating a new meaning. Pitch, volume, and tempo are key in how we colour our voices.<sup>43</sup> Russell’s voice has been described as an ‘attractive voice’ and a ‘soothing voice’, as well as a ‘voice that conveyed confidence.’<sup>44</sup> Speaking is itself shaped by bodily experience. ‘Emotions produce changes in muscle tension, breathing patterns, the brain.’<sup>45</sup> The nerves from the larynx, which helps us produce the sound of the voice, pass through the limbic area of our brain, the so-called emotional brain, meaning that our emotional state impacts on the voice.<sup>46</sup> This part of the brain also impacts on hearing, and

there are therefore clear links between speaking, hearing or listening, and emotion.<sup>47</sup> On another level, then, the strength of the caves can also be read as a metaphor for the people. The people of Dover are still standing strong. Making the point that Dover's caves 'are strong' provides reassurance, evoking a sense of duty that reflected the BBC's wider wartime purpose to 'maintain national unity and to secure the nation's morale'.<sup>48</sup> Siân Nicholas argues that in contrast to other media, radio could provide the intimacy of the spoken word, which meant that it had a more 'direct relationship' with the listener, whether at home or at work.<sup>49</sup> Most dispatches also open with the words 'This is Audrey Russell speaking from—', which also produced a familiarity. The radio, more than newspapers or newsreels, could carry a 'sense of the individual', that promoted a closer relationship between speaker and audience.<sup>50</sup>

Russell's words were also striking because they were spoken by a woman. Women's voices were naturally a key feature of wartime output. They were frequently heard in talks, entertainment, variety, and comedy, and were a key component of the so-called kitchen front programmes. However, the news genre was different. At the BBC, news was mainly a male preserve and associated with the male voice. For a long time the perception was that women's voices were not suitable for radio news reporting or announcing.<sup>51</sup> Listening to Russell's voice, then, was also significant because she had encroached on a space otherwise dominated by male voices. As David Howes and Constance Classen point out, the way we are sensing things affects 'not only how we experience and engage with our environment, but also how we experience and engage with each other'.<sup>52</sup> This is an important observation, since hearing or listening to a woman's voice in a male-dominated genre represented a small but significant challenge to the social order, since 'who is seen, who is heard' played an important role in establishing or challenging positions of power in society.<sup>53</sup>

### Listening in on Folkestone

Most radio reports were not transmitted live, but were recorded. However, they still managed to convey a sense of immediacy, liveness, and, more importantly for the listener, presence. 'Liveness' is a key aspect

of radio's characteristics, with some even calling it a 'present-tense' medium, offering an 'account of what *is* happening rather than a record of what *has* happened.'<sup>54</sup> This was evident in a second recording used in the same programme, recorded on 30 September 1944, which featured recorded sound, or 'actuality', which helped to create a sense of presence together with the commentary. Actuality became a key feature of BBC wartime output, enabled above all by the development of portable disc recorders, mobile transmitters, and good engineering support.<sup>55</sup> At the end of September 1944, Allied forces had captured the German guns in the Pas-de-Calais, and consequently this ended the German cross-Channel shelling of the British coast. The following example featured the celebrations in Folkestone at the end of German long-range shelling. It started with the Mayor of Folkestone expressing his relief and joy now that the shelling had come to an end. The Mayor's speech was followed by Russell reporting from a churchyard, where a service of thanksgiving was about to begin. It was recorded outside, and the listener could clearly hear the noises of someone in the open air. An aeroplane was heard in the background as she described the scene, as people gathered for the service:

This is Audrey Russell on Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> of September speaking from Folkestone. We've just driven down to this town and to see what celebrations are going on now that the people know that the channel guns are captured. An aircraft has just gone overhead as I speak. The announcements of the capture of the guns were made so suddenly this morning that as far as I can see no one has had time to put out any flags or banners yet. And the mood of the people isn't one of celebration anyway. I'm sitting on the churchyard wall of the old parish church overlooking the Channel; the parish church of St Marys and St Eanswythe.<sup>56</sup>

The listener was introduced to the scene and the location, and then invited to take part, or at least, *was made to feel as if present*:

The service is going on now—maybe you can hear the people singing a hymn. I watched them walk to church and they had quiet, unsmiling faces. But there was a serenity there that I haven't seen

for a very long time. This night—the first night when they know they may be free of shelling, the mood is one of thanksgiving, the celebrations will come afterwards. Listen to them singing a hymn.<sup>57</sup>

Listening, you can hear the sound of the people singing, which breaks through in the background and fades in, creating a touching atmosphere, and the footsteps of people walking into the service are also audible. What is striking here, however, is the direct exhortations to the listener: ‘maybe you can hear’ and ‘listen to them sing.’ Radio’s communicative manner and style is conversational, chatty, and personal, often using ‘I’, ‘you’, and ‘we’. Broadcasters had to develop forms of talk that ‘spoke to listeners’, making them a part of the conversation.<sup>58</sup> As John Durham Peters writes of radio communication, ‘dialogic forms were another technique of simulating presence.’<sup>59</sup> He continues that ‘the remote audience was invited to become an imaginary participant in the world of the characters and of its fellow auditors.’<sup>60</sup> The listener was addressed directly by Russell, and invited to participate. The sensory and cognitive relationship between proximity, distance, and presence was transformed. The listener was transported to the church service. These radio examples from the South Coast were in stark contrast to a British Pathé Newsreel, from the *Pathe Gazette*, also reporting on the last days of German long-range shelling at Hellfire Corner.<sup>61</sup> The newsreel contained upbeat dramatic orchestral music and a male narrator, who in an equally dramatic manner described the events unfolding, producing a detached viewing and listening experience overall, and one that was less cognitive since visuals were provided.

Similar techniques to the ones described in the examples from Dover and Folkestone are found in other reports. For example, in an interview for *Radio Newsreel* on 4 May 1945, Russell spoke to Wing Commander William Smith of the Royal Air Force (RAF) about humanitarian food drops made by the RAF to the Dutch people to prevent a famine. Wing Commander Smith, who flew the mission, was asked, ‘Can you tell *us* what the trip was like today?’ and ‘Where did you go today if *we* may know?’<sup>62</sup> Here the ‘us’ and the ‘we’ represent Russell and the listeners, who are made to feel as if the Wing Commander is talking to them directly. Although no listener responses directly related to Russell’s reporting have been identified, there is other testimony that

suggests this new style of reporting was well received.<sup>63</sup> According to one contemporary commentator, immediacy and presence were the strengths of the radio medium. Mrs Arnot Robertson, novelist and (it should be pointed out) a regular contributor to BBC programmes, wrote in the *BBC Year Book* in 1945 about the sense of immediacy and presence brought by radio war reporting. Robertson suggested radio brought war home to listeners, literally, ‘unsoftened by distance.’<sup>64</sup> She continued, ‘the spoken word carries the feeling of immediacy of time and place: we were in the Mitchell bomber, flying low over the places where our men were fighting ... we were there, in the precarious beach-heads, among the ships which landed the army.’<sup>65</sup> This also produced a more emotional experience while listening. Robertson continued, saying she was ‘intensively moved’ by hearing the British war correspondent Howard Marshall report from the thanksgiving service in France; hearing French voices ‘singing through tears’ conveyed a better understanding than any newsreel picture of what ‘the restoration of France meant to her citizens.’<sup>66</sup> Further evidence of this can be found in listener research conducted by the BBC. Audiences liked the war correspondent’s own voice and immediate impressions, whether visual or aural—demanding more of “the real thing”—reports from the fronts were therefore popular.<sup>67</sup> *War Report*, for example, had an audience of between 10 and 15 million listeners in Britain. Its popularity boiled down to a combination of immediacy, sound footage, and commentary, which gave listeners a sense of presence.<sup>68</sup> Actuality and first-hand reporting clearly added to the listening experience.

### V-2 rocket experience: eye- and ear-witness accounts

Russell was a regular contributor to *Radio Newsreel*. The programme’s synopsis was tellingly described in the BBC’s *Radio Times* as ‘close-ups from the world’s battle-fronts’ or ‘close-ups from the war fronts of the world’—an interesting choice of words, drawing on cinematic language, that obviously played on the suggestion of being within close range and offering a detailed and intimate experience.<sup>69</sup> The focus of one such close-up was the civilian experience of the impact of the V-2 rocket explosions in London. The example used ‘inserts’ of interviews recorded on location, mixed with a scripted commentary

by Russell (recorded in a studio by the sound of it), which guided the listener and provided narration for the news story similar to today's radio news packages. As in the example from Folkestone, by hearing the actuality the listener was brought closer to the event. The focus was on the first-hand experience of the detonation of a V-2 rocket, but also individual 'earwitness' accounts describing the lack of sound as the rocket approached and hit its target.

Despite the unexpected explosion caused by the V-2 rocket, Russell found the victims calm and collected. She interviews a young woman, Mrs Johnson, who had *heard nothing* but had woken up to find everything 'falling all around me'.<sup>70</sup> And Mrs Cunningham, an older woman, who was sitting in the rubble of what used to be her home with 'a few of her salvaged belongings stuffed into a tin bath'.<sup>71</sup> Russell continued, 'She was holding court with the neighbours when I went up to her with a microphone',<sup>72</sup> and she almost sounded a little embarrassed at the fuss being made when she was interviewed. The actuality is clearly audible, with people giggling in the background:

Russell: Well, Mrs Cunningham, how are you, you're looking very well considering the experience you've had—

Mrs Cunningham: Oh, well I feel fine, thank you, after all this lot.

Russell: Where were you when it happened?

Mrs Cunningham: Upstairs in bed—

Russell [interrupts]: Hm hm, did you hear anything?

Mrs Cunningham: Nah, I didn't hear nothing, but I heard my girl call out for me, and I got out and she said the baby were injured ... and I rushed to [?] to get the baby out of the cot, and I went to the window to call out for help—of course there were nobody near or by but I see the bomb burning or something in the middle of the road burning and I hollered up for somebody to take me baby cause she was injured ... and that was all there was to it until somebody come and rescued baby.<sup>73</sup>

Russell's voice, with her BBC English or received pronunciation, is in stark contrast to the working-class voices of Mrs Johnson and Mrs Cunningham. Their accents are reminiscent of an east or south London accent. Before the war, the working class had been marginalized

on national radio both as an audience and as a subject.<sup>74</sup> This would dramatically change during the course of the war. By offering these victims the microphone, they were allowed to speak for themselves and to share their own individual experience of war. Another interview featured Mr Crickman, who also had a local accent and who had been leaving a café carrying a cup of tea for his wife and a bit of fish when the explosion happened:

I made my way across towards the stall and I was a few—somewhere about 15 yards with a cup of tea in me hand...and a bit of fish in the other when all of a sudden, crash bang—there was a terrific eh noise eh, I thought I heard [tails off]. It was all black in front of me. I dropped me tea and in the excitement all the fish—and I don't know what had happened, and I tried to make me way across to my missus but I couldn't get to her, my eyes were full of grit and smoke and everything else, and I had to wait for eh quite eh a few minutes before I could see me way sufficient to get there—when I got there I finally oh terrific state my missus [?] supported by two men, she was in a terrible state—the place around me is awful, but thank god my missus is all right.<sup>75</sup>

Crickman provided a horrifying description, momentarily losing one of his senses, his sight, and consequently his direction and sense of the place. Together with Mrs Johnson and Mrs Cunningham, his were visual clues to the horror and destruction of the V-2 explosion, with falling debris, fire, and smoke. The listener was able to imagine what the destruction might have been like. And, again, hearing the voices of individuals involved made it more personal and therefore powerful, since eyewitness accounts are not just factual but 'emotionally coloured by the voices in which they were heard.'<sup>76</sup>

What is also striking about these accounts, however, was that the civilians interviewed act as our earwitnesses; their function was not only to describe what they saw and experienced, but particularly to reflect on what they had heard (or in some cases, had not heard). During the Second World War, new noises were introduced to the soundscape, including air raid and warning sirens, exploding bombs, and enemy fighter planes.<sup>77</sup> Civilians learned to listen out for V-1 flying

bombs, also known as doodlebugs or buzzbombs for the buzzing sound they made before impact. There were widespread concerns about the lack of sleep among the civilian population, because people were lying awake listening for incoming planes or bombs.<sup>78</sup> The V-2 missiles were silent, however, because they descended faster than the speed of sound. They began falling on London in September 1944, causing great destruction. Their unexpectedness made them particularly malicious, a point also made in the BBC report for *Radio Newsreel*. Russell interviewed an Air Raid Precautions Controller, who concluded, 'In any case, it must have travelled in a terrific height into the atmosphere in order to come down as it did without us having any prior warning of the sound of its approach.'<sup>79</sup> The remainder of the recording focused on the fact that these ballistic missiles did not give away their position by sound, but that it might be possible to see them. The final insert was an account by one of their own newsroom sub-editors, who talked about the rocket he had seen one night: 'It was a long way off—just a ball of light falling steeply through the sky, steeply but also sort-of lazy sort-of action. Much too leisurely to be a shooting star, it reminded me rather of tracers of shell that I've seen snaking up from flying bombs.'<sup>80</sup> So the piece ended with visual clues of what to look out for.

## Remembering war

In 1945 Russell travelled abroad, following the path of the Allied advance, and reporting from Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. After the war she joined the Home News Reporting Unit and her work moved more towards reporting for women's programmes and other 'softer' news stories. She left the BBC in 1951 to go freelance, and pursued a successful career as a royal commentator and reporter, covering Queen Elizabeth II's first royal tour in 1953, for example.

Time creates distance from the events themselves, prompting a different experience of war. Later in life, in her autobiography *A Certain Voice* published in 1984, Russell reflected on her wartime experiences. Kevin Williams suggests that reflections on war and the problems of covering war are commonly found in war correspondents' memoirs and autobiographies. Here the focus was on her individual experience rather

than the organizational context. These accounts are often ‘anchored in the personal experiences of the reporter in confronting the horror of war, negotiating their relations with military personnel and civilian victims and dealing with psychological trauma.’<sup>81</sup> And, as Williams suggests, the autobiographical genre therefore allows correspondents to ‘use their memoirs to explain or justify their reporting.’<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, this type of self-reflexivity will generally be framed in a particular way. Russell’s autobiography constructed a new narrative of her war experience, a type of war remains—and one clearly shaped by gender.

Christine Sylvester has argued that war should be studied as a social institution, where people’s experience of war is affected by their social experience.<sup>83</sup> Her approach further highlights the body and its centrality to the social institutions and individual experience of war. War, Sylvester writes, is ‘experienced through the body’ both physically and emotionally.<sup>84</sup> The body is neither a neutral nor a universal entity; rather, it is highly contested and diverse, shaped by ‘gender, race, class, generational, cultural and locational markings that affect and are affected by social experiences.’<sup>85</sup>

Russell’s autobiography was published in a very different context with an evolving feminist agenda, and her memories were clearly shaped by a feminist interpretation of events.<sup>86</sup> In it, Russell recalled that being the first BBC woman war correspondent inevitably meant she had the lesser news stories, and she often had to focus on the so-called woman’s angle, while the men were covering the hard news.<sup>87</sup> Her gendered body was a prominent feature of this narrative. Describing her new appointment as a war correspondent, travelling Europe, she wrote about the clothes and the fit of her uniform, and how it had to be worn in: ‘I was wearing for the first time a khaki battle dress top that looked slightly too large and much too new. Happily the skirt and the beret and the brown calf shoes were fine.’<sup>88</sup> She continued by describing the rest of her clothing, and in particular how the uniform transformed her into a war correspondent: ‘I was self-consciously pleased with the dark green and gold chevrons on the shoulders neatly indicating “British War Correspondent” with the rank of Junior Commander. I felt rather new all round, for this was my first ever flight in an aeroplane, a bumpy one at that.’<sup>89</sup>

Carrying the portable recording equipment, she kept the blank discs

under her blouse of her battle dress (having been told to keep them at a reasonable room temperature), which caused some teasing in the camp 'because it made me look a very curious shape in front'.<sup>90</sup> Following the advancing Allied Forces, she arrived in the Netherlands, at a former youth hostel taken over by the British Army and used as accommodation for BBC personnel. She described how her presence as the only woman initially caused some embarrassment. Russell placed her bodily needs firmly in the story by describing how in the camp she managed to wash her hair and dry it over the 'electric pop-up toasters' left by the Germans, which were soon converted into an efficient hairdryer.<sup>91</sup>

Other women war correspondents' memoirs have similar remarks, suggesting that many of them took pride in maintaining their feminine identity.<sup>92</sup> Some also used their memories of the war to highlight the heightened sexualization of women reporters, and the attention their bodies received.<sup>93</sup> One American female radio correspondent based in Europe during the Second World War was told to 'keep her voice pitched low'; another that her voice was 'too young and feminine for war news'.<sup>94</sup> The Second World War opened up new opportunities for women, and saw many move into jobs and roles that previously had been men's; however, women moving into what had been male-dominated jobs or industries was not uncontroversial, and was a source of resentment among the remaining male workers, fuelling resistance to equal pay for equal work. In Britain, the Second World War came to reinvigorate the feminist activists, who pursued women's rights to contribute to the war effort and to do so for equal pay, and for equal compensation in the event of injury.<sup>95</sup> The war on the one hand did open up new opportunities for women, but, equally, gender difference continued to be expressed and applied. Russell's memoirs of the war, clearly shaped by her gendered experience, were a testimony to this.

## Conclusion

Angela Smith and Michael Higgins suggest that 'the changing character and scope of mediation' has its own influence on the representation of the modern war.<sup>96</sup> This chapter has explored the embodied and sensory experience of radio war reporting during the Second World War by looking at the case of the BBC reporter Audrey Russell. The aim has

been to shift our attention from the institutional histories of radio war reporting to the sensory experience produced by the radio war correspondent—and in so doing, to introduce a ‘sensory’ dimension to mainstream radio and media history.

Radio arguably changed the way war was mediated and represented. It brought the sounds and ‘visions’ of the battlefield and civilian experience into the home. On one level, listening to war, being able to hear the sounds, the actuality, and the voices, created a sense of immediacy and presence, transforming perceptions of proximity and distance. Visualizing the impact of war by ‘seeing’ images imaginatively also produced a more personal, intimate, and arguably more emotional experience. On another level, the mediation of war by a war correspondent was a highly sensory experience. It is through the correspondent’s eyes and ears that listeners were brought closer to the events of war. The words of the commentator played a key role in inviting listeners to participate. Radio war reporting should therefore be considered a multilevel sensory experience. A sensory dimension helps us to understand how radio penetrated listeners’ minds and personal space by bringing the experience of war closer. The use of war correspondents allowed the BBC to realize and utilize the strengths of the radio medium, incorporating techniques and strategies that we still find in radio reporting today. Arguably, the embodied and sensory experience of radio is key to its longevity.

By exploring Audrey Russell’s war reports, it can also be concluded that the mediating and representation of war is also shaped by social institutions and social experience, reflecting a ‘politics of the senses.’ Who is seen and who is heard *does* matter, as does whose stories are told. This reinforces the notion that ‘understanding people’s experiences with/in war is essential for understanding war.’<sup>97</sup> The role of the media in challenging or reinforcing different war experiences remains paramount.

## Notes

- 1 James G. Mansell, *The age of noise in Britain: Hearing modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 145.
- 2 Christina Baade, *Victory through harmony: The BBC and popular music in World War II* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

- 3 Anne Karpf, *The human voice: The story of a remarkable talent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 242.
- 4 Andrew Crisell, *An introductory history of British broadcasting* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London: Routledge, 2002), 61; cf. Qvarnström in this volume on slow Vs rapid media.
- 5 Elodie A. Roy, 'Worn Grooves: Affective connectivity, mobility and recorded sound in the First World War', *Media History*, DOI: 10.1080/13688804.2016.1190639; Louis Goddard, "'A few feet of film run backwards": Tracing the sonic construction of shellfire, 1914–30', in Michael Bull & Les Back (eds.), *The auditory culture reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 293–303.
- 6 BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Reading (WAC), Radio Talks Scripts pre 1970 RUS R450, Prisoners Home by Air, Transcription, 24 May 1945.
- 7 Siân Nicholas, *The echo of war: Home front propaganda and the wartime BBC, 1939–1945* (Manchester: MUP, 1996), 213; BBC WAC Oral History Transcript R143/10, 10, Audrey Russell interviewed by Madeau Stewart Oct. and Nov. 1977.
- 8 Nicholas 1996, 6–7.
- 9 Quoted in Hugh Chignell, *Public issue radio: Talks, news and current affairs in the twentieth century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49; for a more detailed discussion of the impact of Gardener's commentary and listener reactions, see Nicholas 1996, 197.
- 10 Charles Gardener, *A listener research report: Air battle commentary by Charles Gardener*, BBC, 24 July 1940, 4 pp., <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/battleofbritain/11432.shtml?page=1> (accessed 20 Dec. 2017).
- 11 Asa Briggs, *The history of broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, iii: *The war of words 1939–1945* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 45.
- 12 Nicholas 1996, 190.
- 13 *Ibid.* 212.
- 14 David Hendy, *Radio in the global age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 115–122.
- 15 Tim Crook, *Radio drama: Theory and practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 54.
- 16 Andrew Crisell, *Understanding radio* (London: Routledge, 1994), 127.
- 17 *Ibid.* 128.
- 18 Mansell 2017; Bull & Back 2016; David Hendy, *Noise: A human history of sound & listening* (London: Profile, 2013); for the impact of media technology on listening and ways of seeing, see also Robert Jutte, *A history of the senses: From antiquity to cyberspace* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); David Howes, 'Introduction: "Make it new!"—Reforming the sensory world,' in id. (ed.), *A cultural history of the senses in the modern age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–31.
- 19 Michael Bull, 'War, cognition and the media: Training the senses in a fully mediated world,' in Bull & Back 2016, 305.
- 20 See, for example, Briggs 1995; Nicholas 1996; Crisell 2002; Richard Havers, *Here is the news: The BBC and the Second World War* (Chalford, Stroud: Sutton, 2007); Guy Starkey & Andrew Crisell, *Radio journalism* (London: SAGE, 2009); Chignell 2011; Brian P. D. Hannon, 'Creating the correspondent: How the BBC reached the frontline in the Second World War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, 28/2 (2008), 175–94.

- 21 David Hendy, 'Listening in the dark', *Media History*, 16/2 (2010), 215–32.
- 22 Angela Smith and Michael Higgins, 'Introduction: Reporting war history, professionalism and technology', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 5/2 (2012), 131–6 suggest that the rise of radio in the Second World War further produced 'celebrity reporters' such as the British war correspondent Richard Dimbleby (BBC), who was the first war correspondent in 1945 to enter the concentration camp at Belsen, or American broadcast journalist Ed Murrow, who during the London Blitz produced *This is London* for CBS; Deborah Chambers et al., *Women and journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 23 The author wishes to acknowledge and thank the staff at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham.
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- 26 Ibid. 214.
- 27 David Howes & Constance Classen, *Ways of sensing: Understanding the senses in society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 5.
- 28 At the outbreak of war Russell volunteered for the London Fire Brigade or Auxiliary Fire Service as a firewoman, and was posted at a central Fire Station in London only a few minutes from the BBC. During the Blitz she was interviewed by BBC reporters gathering news stories about the air raids and civil defence, and this connection eventually saw her transfer temporarily to the BBC (BBC WAC Oral History Transcript R143/10, Audrey Russell interviewed by Madeau Stewart Oct. and Nov. 1977).
- 29 Ibid. 10–17.
- 30 Audrey Russell, *A certain voice* (Bolton: Ross Anderson Publications, 1984), 10–26.
- 31 Sean Street, *The poetry of radio: The colour of sound* (London: Routledge, 2012), 5, 7.
- 32 Nicholas 1996, 116.
- 33 BBC WAC Radio Talks Scripts pre 1970 RUS R450, 12 Sept. 1941, WAAF Training, 1 p.m. (Home Service), Programme as Broadcast Transcript.
- 34 Crisell 1994, 61.
- 35 Ibid. 9.
- 36 Ibid. 11, original emphasis.
- 37 Nicholas 1996, 213; some of these dispatches were also reproduced on 5 Oct. 1944 in the BBC's *The Listener* magazine; Audrey Russell, 'The relief of Hellfire Corner', *The Listener*, 5 Oct. 1944: 369+. The Listener Historical Archive (accessed 10 Jul. 2014).
- 38 BBC WAC R143/10, 8 Oral History Transcript, Audrey Russell interviewed by Madeau Stewart Oct. & Nov. 1977.
- 39 BBC recording, catalogue number: 1884, access Imperial War Museums, London 27 Sept. 1944, Audrey Russell, 'British correspondent's account of German long range shelling of Dover, GB, 26/9/1944', my transcription.
- 40 Ibid.

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- 42 BBC recording, catalogue number: 1884, access Imperial War Museums, London 27 Sept. 1944, Audrey Russell, 'British correspondent's account of German long range shelling of Dover, GB, 26/9/1944', my transcription.
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- 44 BBC Radio 4, *BBC Radio Lives* [radio programme], 25 Mar. 1993, catalogue no. 13176, access Imperial War Museums, London, recalls the broadcasting career of the war reporter and commentator Audrey Russell, 1939–1945.
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- 46 Ibid. 135.
- 47 Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American imagination* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 22–39.
- 48 Nicholas 1996, 2.
- 49 Ibid. 5.
- 50 Ibid. 202.
- 51 Karpf 2006; Kate Murphy, *Behind the wireless: A history of early women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- 52 Howes & Classen 2014, 6.
- 53 Ibid. 65.
- 54 Crisell 1994, 9, original emphasis.
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- 56 BBC recording, catalogue number: 1885, access Imperial War Museums, London 30 Sept. 1944, Audrey Russell, 'Actuality of celebrations to mark the end of German long range shelling of Folkestone, GB, 30/9/1944', my transcription.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Paddy Scannell, *Radio, television and modern life: A phenomenological approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 24, original emphasis.
- 59 John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 216.
- 60 Ibid. 216.
- 61 British Pathé, 5 Oct. 1944, film, ID 1125.20, 'Hellfire Corner filmed by Pathe Gazette cameraman Pat Gay', <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/hellfire-corner-aka-hell-fire-corner/query/Hellfire+corner>.
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- 63 To date, the author has not been able to identify any listener research specifically about Russell's reporting.
- 64 Arnot Robertson, 'Listening to war reports: What do you feel?', in *BBC year book*, (1945) 15–19, quote at 16.
- 65 Ibid. 16.
- 66 Ibid. 17.
- 67 Nicholas 1996, 205.
- 68 Ibid. 217.
- 69 See, for example, <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/generalforces/1944-11-01>

- 70 BBC recording, catalogue number: 2350, access Imperial War Museums, London, 1 Nov. 1944, Audrey Russell, 'British correspondent's interviews with civilians and Air Raid Precautions personnel on experiences of V2 rocket attacks, London, GB, 11/1944', my transcription.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Scannell 1996, 37.
- 75 BBC recording, catalogue number: 2350, access Imperial War Museums, London, 1 Nov. 1944, Audrey Russell, 'British correspondent's interviews with civilians and Air Raid Precautions personnel on experiences of V2 rocket attacks, London, GB, 11/1944', my transcription.
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## A means to an end

### Media strategies and films commissioned by Svenska Europahjälpen in the late 1940s

Åsa Bergström

To help fund the Swedish relief programme, donate one day's wages to Swedish European Aid postal account 900 700.<sup>1</sup>



Screenshots from *Barnen är utan skuld—Svenska hjälpverksamheten i Wien* ('The children are blameless—The Swedish relief programme in Vienna', 1946, dir. Eduard von Borsody). Courtesy of Sveriges Television AB.

In Sweden, the humanitarian organizations Röda Korset (Swedish Red Cross, RK) and Rädda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children, RB) reveal an apparent awareness of the impact of film. Throughout the Second World War, RK appeared in several films, primarily in relation to reports of refugees arriving in Sweden and the 1945 rescue transport with the White Buses. These films presented some of the consequences of the Second World War and the Holocaust, promoting neutral Sweden as an active helping hand. During the immediate post-war period, the short-lived organization Svenska Europahjälpen (Swedish European Aid, SE) suddenly commissioned a number of films. These post-war representations are best described as educational and promotional films, supplemented by explicit spoken or written

exhortations to donate money, exemplified by the quotation with which I opened this chapter.

The aim of this survey is to investigate the SE's media strategy and its consequences. The survey is performed in three steps, with an overview of the theoretical approaches to testimonies of war and representations of trauma followed by a mapping of the SE and its media strategies. Finally, the films that the SE commissioned and promoted are analysed and related to a discussion of representations of testimony and trauma.

## Representations of trauma

Given that representations of traumatic events are dependent on the when, where, and how, one way to think about them is to use the two phases identified by Joshua Hirsch apropos representations of the Holocaust.

When photographic evidence of genocide first appears, it may need relatively little narrative support in order to cause vicarious trauma. It would be enough for the image to be presented by a reputable source (newspaper, magazine, newsreel), to be identified in historical context ('this is a liberated concentration camp'), and to be authenticated ('this is an actual photo taken by Allied photographers'). ... In the second phase, when relatively unsupported images are no longer effective, the film must, in a sense, work harder. It must overcome defensive numbing. Documentary images must be submitted to a narrative form whose purpose is, if not to literally traumatize the spectator, then to invoke a posttraumatic historical consciousness—a kind of textual compromise between the senselessness of the initial traumatic encounter and the sense-making apparatus of a fully integrated historical narrative, similar to LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma'.<sup>2</sup>

Hirsch's distinction, like LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma', is a useful clarification, although I find it limiting to define representations of the Holocaust as either 'traumatic' or 'post-traumatic', and of course national differences in approach to specific traumas have to be contextualized and set in perspective. Yet despite these minor objections,

Hirsch's approach and LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma' are applicable in a Swedish context, where the films representing Swedish relief work in the aftermath of the Second World War coincided with the transition from the first to the second phase of Holocaust representations.

Like Hirsch, Cecile Felicia Stokholm Banke distinguishes between the phases of Holocaust representation, yet on different grounds.<sup>3</sup> Stokholm Banke argues that post-war modes of visualizing the Holocaust 'can be divided into three phases, which were, and continue to be, tied to a political context.'<sup>4</sup> Commencing immediately after the war, the first phase largely comprised black-and-white photographs of the camps. Her examples from the second phase are drawn from the 1950s to the 1990s, and different artists' interpretations of documented images of the genocide. These artists are said to have been in the camps themselves, or they 'had been on the spot when the American soldiers entered Nordhausen and Buchenwald.'<sup>5</sup> It was in this second phase that 'the ideological battle about how to understand the Holocaust began.'<sup>6</sup> In the third, ongoing phase, the Holocaust 'is remembered, genocide is acknowledged, the victims receive compensation. ... In addition to its contribution to the culture of memory, the Holocaust has inspired a vast number of artistic and literary works.'<sup>7</sup> Stokholm Banke also spies a potential forth phase in the making, when the normative impact of the Holocaust 'has moved from something directed inwards to European societies to something directed outwards—a universal symbol of evil that is relevant not only for Europe but for the entire world.'<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding the political impact, I find it counterproductive to rely solely on an omniscient perspective when analysing historical representations such as exhibitions, novels, documentaries, or feature films, if only because it risks excluding the parameters of media specificity, aesthetics, and contextualization. To elaborate on Hirsch's and Stokholm Banke's distinctions, I would suggest using a 'phase zero'—which in its initial state could be considered 'pretraumatic'—during which traumatic events such as the Holocaust are difficult, if not impossible, to represent. This owes something to LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma', introduced in a discussion of the nine-hour French Holocaust documentary *Shoah* (1985, dir. Claude Lanzmann): 'In the case of *Shoah*, the issue of length is nonetheless more problematic. On the one hand, one might argue that the very subject of the film ... is so

vast and important that any length is small and inadequate—indeed that the very length, seeming repetitiveness, and empty stretches or silences of the film are necessary to transmit to the viewer a muted trauma required for empathetic “understanding”.<sup>9</sup> Then again, I do not find the sequence of phases either entirely linear or completely consistent. To grasp the full consequences of traumatic events, different kinds of images and narratives are crucial. Due to the fact that such representations change over time, I find that what I describe as phase zero appears, declines, and reappears over the years, each time in a different form. It is therefore important to consider and contextualize these transformations and their representational consequences. Film from liberated concentration camps was being shown in cinemas in Sweden as early as April 1945, yet the word ‘Holocaust’ (‘Förintelsen’ in Swedish) was not in use in the immediate post-war period. Raul Hilberg emphasizes that: ‘In the beginning there was no Holocaust. When it took place in the middle of the twentieth century, its nature was not fully grasped.’<sup>10</sup>

By stressing the problems he ran into with his book *The Destruction of the European Jews*, finally released in conjunction with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, Hilberg characterizes the immediate post-war period by its obvious lack of interest in the consequences of the Nazi regime.<sup>11</sup> Dori Laub says much the same thing when coining his theory of bearing witness, arguing ‘that what precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, *the event produced no witnesses*.’<sup>12</sup> Given the effectiveness of the Nazi machinery and the murder on an industrial scale, this is of course a relevant observation. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is crucial to widen Laub’s theoretical approach to Holocaust testimony.

First, the impact of surviving witnesses who have given testimony in the trials of Nazis, as well as the vast variety of Holocaust testimony communicated through witness literature, film, television, theatre, exhibitions, and lectures by survivors, must not be ignored. Second, and just as relevant, there are many different ways to bear witness. The earliest testimony to the full horrors of the Nazi regime was silent, after all. Stills and film of dead bodies and silent survivors communicate just as clearly. A more distanced, yet equally emotional, way of communicating such silent testimony are the images of piles of bodily

remains and personal belongings—hair, false teeth, spectacles, prostheses, shoes, clothing, suitcases et cetera. These human remains and belongings bear silent witness to the lives of the anonymous people they once belonged to. Silent testimony is often interpreted in written texts or voice-over, and accordingly the dialogical relation between embodiment and voice is essential in this context.

Thinking about human rights and memory, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider argue:

By rooted cosmopolitanism we mean universal values that descend from the level of pure abstract philosophy and engage people emotionally in their everyday lives. It is by becoming symbols of people's personal identities that cosmopolitan philosophy turns into a political force. By embodying philosophy in rituals, such identities are created, reinforced, and integrated into communities. ... War crimes trials exemplify such rituals, given the extensive media and scholarly attention they receive. This emotive dimension is also a crucial element for some of the shared assumptions that guided the cosmopolitan reactions to the catastrophes of World War II. The Holocaust in particular posed a challenge to the universal Enlightenment premises of reason and rationality.<sup>13</sup>

Much like the war crimes trials, relief work in the immediate post-war period can be considered an emotive and ritual response to the catastrophes of war.<sup>14</sup> In turn, the films depicting relief not only collectivize reactions to the horrors of the war, they also confirm that the work they show has actually been done. Moreover, the films performatively encourage individual viewers to partake by donating money.

There has been little work done on the films included in this survey, and research on the SE is just as absent. There is some literature on the RK and the RB, although when it comes to the RK, whose rescue action with the White Buses just preceded the formation of the SE, it should be noted that the priorities which made it possible to rescue certain groups of concentration camp prisoners, and the potential impact a certain Swede, Count Folke Bernadotte, had on these actions, have come in for criticism and scrutiny.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the RB, Ann Nehlin argues that:

Rädda Barnen seems to have been somewhat reluctant to support Jewish children, but in the early fifties this changed and relief work in Israel was carried out in conjunction with Swedish authorities. Here as well, as part of the activities, it was important to generate goodwill for Sweden. Perhaps the most visible sign of this was the establishment of the Swedish village Kfar Achim.<sup>16</sup>

Suitably rephrased, Nehlin's observation can constructively be used as a research question in the present survey. Is it possible to identify a gradually altered approach towards children, adolescents, and adults of different nationalities, classes, genders, and perhaps also religions in the films representing the relief work promoted by the SE in the late 1940s?

### Three Swedish humanitarian organizations

As a response to what the Swiss banker Henry Dunant witnessed on the battlefield at Soferino in Italy 1859, the Red Cross (RC) was founded in 1863. With an explicit aim of assisting people in need, regardless of nationality, class, and gender, the movement presently incorporates the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as well as national societies in 186 countries.<sup>17</sup> In Sweden, Röda Korset (RK) was founded on 24 May 1865, its first years being devoted to preparations for humanitarian aid in the event of war, while later in the interwar years it also worked to improve conditions for Sweden's poor.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent changed priorities, which made it possible for the RK to countenance saving certain groups in its rescue actions with the White Buses in 1945, plus Bernadotte's impact at the time, are reflected in its official website, which includes information on the debate and online access to certain documents.<sup>19</sup>

Initiated by Eglantyne Jebb, the organization Save the Children Fund (SCF) was officially founded in the UK on 19 May 1919, with the self-appointed task of improving children's rights.<sup>20</sup> A mere six months later Rädda Barnen (RB) was set up in Sweden and in 1920 the Swedish organization joined the International Save the Children Union (ISCU). Over the years, the RB has stressed its political and religious independence, its slogan still prominent on its website.<sup>21</sup> More

importantly here, in 1946 the RB's influence increased exponentially in the international arena, and it is not too farfetched to consider this a key factor in its initiation of an entirely new cooperative venture with the RK that same year.<sup>22</sup>

On 9 February 1946, the RB convened a meeting to 'form a committee with the purpose of centralizing the Swedish relief work in Europe'.<sup>23</sup> This led to the formation of Svenska Europahjälpen (SE), which would exist until April 1951. The minutes of the next joint meeting, 15 February 1946, includes a list of the members of the Steering Committee, with both the RK and the RB represented.<sup>24</sup> One of the points in the minutes is an all-important resolution:

Every single day we receive new reminders of the needs of the war-torn countries of Europe. . . . Crowds of orphans, nameless and homeless children, know nothing but hunger, disease and suffering. Thanks to the great contributions made by Swedish citizens, help has already reached certain countries. The needs are limitless and the circumstances more serious than ever. What could be more natural than that we, the Swedes, who fortunately were spared the devastating war, and gradually are enjoying improved living conditions, join forces to provide assistance on an even greater scale. Contributions can be made to SE's postal account—900 700. If contributions are intended for a specific country, this should be indicated on the payment slip. Every donation goes to activities carried out by the organization.  
—Stockholm, 15 February 1946.<sup>25</sup>

The resolution was signed by approximately forty different organizations, some of the signatories, such as Folke Bernadotte, having been involved with relief work in the past.<sup>26</sup> Despite the fact that the SE comprised a large range of organizations, its minutes reveal that the RK and the RB representatives dominated the new organization. The reason why the SE was so short-lived is not clear, yet the decision to disband it was unanimous, as was the choice to split its remaining funds equally between the RK and the RB.<sup>27</sup>

## SE's media strategies

The minutes show that the SE Steering Committee was alert to the impact of media strategies and different forms of propaganda. The minutes of its second meeting on 15 February 1946 append a list of possible propaganda outlets—daily newspapers, magazines, radio, newsreels, films, and poster campaigns are all there.<sup>28</sup> An early report mentions that 'a speech by the Prime Minister will be simultaneously screened in 600 Swedish cinemas between 29 April and 7 May' and that 'the estimated cost of producing the film copies is SEK 7,000.'<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, none of the minutes indicate the title of this film, which makes it difficult to identify in the archives, and the same is true of the cinema advertisement. Even so, it is clear that the Steering Committee's initial conviction that film was an effective propaganda tool was only strengthened in 1946 and 1947. In the minutes for 4 September 1947, their choices for how to mark the Ruby Jubilee—the celebration of King Gustaf V's forty years on the Swedish throne—had boiled down to 'The Royal Pin 1947' (of small interest here) and 'The Royal Film':

The second project concerns the production and distribution of a 'Royal Film', depicting important events and developments in Sweden in King Gustaf V's reign, the proceeds to go to European Relief. Investigations into financially profitable ways of producing and distributing the film have been initiated. In connection with the screenings of the 'Royal Film', a suitable short film illustrating the relief work performed in Europe by either RB or RK will be shown.<sup>30</sup>

The minutes for 28 April 1947 clarify that the film, now with the distribution title *40 år med Kungen* ('40 years with the King', 1947, dir. Gösta Werner), had been swiftly produced by Kinocentralen and was about to be distributed by AB Europafilm. It was stressed that production costs 'have been covered by individual donors.'<sup>31</sup> A note from the SE National Conference in 1949 underlines that the film 'through the cinemas' kind offices has been shown countless times all over the country, which has generated about SEK 266,000 for the SE.<sup>32</sup> This indicated that, needless to say, their expectations of a high box office

and impact had been met. The takings continued to grow, and at the very last meeting, which marked the endpoint of the organization on 21 December 1951, an updated figure of SEK 275,000 is mentioned.<sup>33</sup> Over the years, in fact, the minutes contained several reports of the income it generated, yet even so there is very little information about the distribution and screenings of the film.

Today, *40 år med Kungen*, which opened in Swedish cinemas in December 1947, is listed in the main film databases—Svensk Film-databas (Swedish Film Database, SFDB) and Svensk mediedatabas (Swedish Media Database, SMDB)—and is still easily accessible.<sup>34</sup> The film consists of a mix of contemporary and archive footage, and covers the period from King Gustaf V's coronation in 1907 to his Ruby Jubilee in 1947. Consequently, much of the historical reportage had been filmed before the advent of sound, and apart from the last sequence, where King Gustaf V read a speech addressed to 'every Swede' from a script, Sven Jerring provides the voice-over. In Sweden, Jerring was famous as a radio announcer and for leading his long-running radio show for children, *Barnens brevlåda* ('Children's Letterbox', 1925–1972), which earned him the nickname 'Farbror Sven' ('Uncle Sven'). Jerring's instantly recognizable voice would have been the ideal choice for a film calling for donations aimed at Europe's children.

The minutes show that *40 år med Kungen* was commissioned by the SE, and in the opening credits the SE's name appears over the royal emblem. The film is distinctly royalist in tone, and emphasizes Sweden's steadily improving living conditions over the forty years depicted. Almost nothing is said of the Second World War or the post-war situation—whether in Sweden or elsewhere—and the only



Screenshots from *40 år med Kungen* ('40 years with the King', 1947, dir. Gösta Werner). Courtesy of Sveriges Television AB.

footage of refugees dates from the First World War. To sum up, the benefits that *40 år med Kungen* brought the SE say something about the impact and popularity of King Gustaf V, but the film says nothing at all about Swedish relief work in 1947.

When it comes to other SE-related films, there is again a distinct lack of information about their distribution and screening. However, we can get a general sense of what was expected and potential target groups from the SE minutes:

In order to attract young people's interest, the SE can on request lend the following films for a small charge to cover postage (order from Filmo, Saltmästargatan 8, Stockholm):

- (a) *Barnskor* (13 min)
- (b) *Barnen är utan skuld* (c.15 min)
- (c) *Hemlösa* (20–25 min)
- (d) *Med Rädda Barnen i Rumänien* (10 min)
- (e) *Hade Ni glömt* (c.25 min)
- (f) *För pest och hungersnöd* (c.20 min)<sup>35</sup>

I have tracked down the first four films, but the fate of the last two is presently unclear. Because of the vague information about distribution, it is unfortunately difficult to tell where and when the films were screened, a problem compounded by the SE minutes, in which the films seem to be randomly listed. In an attempt to make sense of what information there is, I will discuss the films according to their estimated year of production. The SFDB lists only two of the films—*Barnskor* and *Hemlösa*—while the SMDB has all four.<sup>36</sup> The duration of the known copies is not entirely consistent with the estimated lengths given in the list above, and it is thus tricky to tell if the digitalized versions are the same as the versions distributed in the late 1940s.<sup>37</sup>

## Children are blameless

The first film the SE commissioned appears to have been *Barnen är utan skuld*—*Svenska hjälpverksamheten i Wien* ('The children are blameless—The Swedish relief programme in Vienna', 1946, dir. Eduard von Borsody).<sup>38</sup> The SFDB has no information on the film,

while there is a short summary in the SMDB.<sup>39</sup> A Swedish–Austrian co-production, it combines documentary footage of Viennese exteriors with dramatized scenes in German by the Austrian director and actor Willi Forst.<sup>40</sup> There are no Swedish subtitles, a fact for which there are two tentative explanations: the version provided by SMDB might not be entirely consistent with the version distributed in Sweden in the late 1940s and early 1950s; and German was long the first foreign language studied in Sweden, and it was still the case that many Swedes spoke reasonable German in the post-war period.<sup>41</sup>

After the opening credits, which end with a pointedly symbolic turning of pages, an intertitle explains the funding of the Swedish relief programme: ‘Subsidized by the Swedish government and organized by RB, Swedish relief in Austria commenced on 4 February 1946. Covering children from three to six years of age, it has reached 64,000 children, 54,000 of them in Vienna.’ This is followed by another intertitle that introduces Willi Forst, ‘the famous director and actor, here presenting the sad state of Vienna and the welcome contributions from Sweden.’

The establishing shot has Forst entering through a stage curtain and approaching the camera, where he welcomes the viewers with a bow. He then delivers a prologue straight to camera, occasionally lowering his eyes to check the script. The scene then shifts to the city of Vienna, with Forst providing the voice-over, accompanied by the Austrian composer Franz Schubert’s Eighth Symphony. The exterior sequences resemble the 1920s films of modern city life—often described as city symphonies—yet the war-torn buildings of 1946 tell an entirely different story, distanced, emotive, about the passage of civilization and modernity.<sup>42</sup>

Exterior footage of children and adults collecting debris serves as a narrative bridge to a short dramatized sequence. In this brief family drama, Forst modulates his voice to portray different characters. A small girl is left alone at home while her mother and older siblings are out collecting firewood. When they return to their starkly empty working-class apartment one of the brothers, desperately hungry, asks for bread, but it is revealed that his younger sister has eaten it all, leaving only a few crumbs on the floor in the midst of her toys. Sheltering in their mother’s arms, the small girl is confronted by the family, and her sad face is shown in medium close-up. Still comforting her youngest daughter, the mother knocks on the door of the

neighbouring apartment, pleading for bread. The woman next door has none, but she solves the problem by telling the desperate mother about the help to be had from the 'Schwedischen Hilfsaktion', the Swedish relief programme.

As Forst describes the help on offer, the film cuts to a poster by 'Schwedischen Hilfsaktion Rädde Barnen' on a wall above a queue of women and children. A longer indoor sequence follows of grown-ups in uniform and children warming their hands by a fireplace and eating 'Die Schwedische', a Swedish soup of 'macaroni, vegetables, meat, and oatmeal with raisins'. Finally, 'Schwester Dagmar' speaks for the children in first person, saying 'Now I feel much better, and I am so fond of my Swedish soup, that no one, no one in the whole wide world can take it away from me.'

From the direct effect of the Swedish relief programme, the film moves on to the way the humanitarian work in Vienna is structured. Deliveries and food preparation are shown, and in voice-over Forst describes the immense work done by the RB. The film keeps showing the Swedish flag and the emblem of the RB on trucks and jackets, stressing the same point as Forst's voice-over—in 1946, the RB aimed to reach every Viennese child in need, as long as they were aged between three and six.

In the last sequence, Forst is back where he began, in front of the curtain, to deliver an epilogue in which he speaks for the whole of Austria, expressing the country's 'gratitude towards their Swedish friends and the RB'. He concludes his monologue in Swedish, with a noticeable German accent, and, as the screen fades to black, Forst is seen thanking the viewers by bowing again. The film ends with a final intertitle, quoted at the start of the present chapter, that explicitly encourages viewers to support SE: 'To help fund the Swedish relief programme, donate one day's wages to Swedish European Aid, postal account 900 700'.

With Forst's prologue, epilogue, and two bows the film resembles a theatrical performance in which RB plays the part of the good-hearted hero. Dramatic theory is generally concerned with if—and if so, how—a drama engages and affects its audience. Whenever a drama includes a hero, viewers tend to identify themselves with that specific character. Consequently, it would seem *Barnen är utan skuld* was consciously structured to engage its audience: the assumption seems to have been

that, by identifying with the benevolent hero, they would be affected to such an extent that they too would join in the SE's relief programme by donating money.

## Children's shoes

Like *Barnen är utan skuld*, the film *Barnskor* ('Children's shoes', 1947, dir. Eduard von Borsody) is a Swedish–Austrian co-production produced by Willi Forst-Film, and with a dialogue in German. The difference is that *Barnskor* has some Swedish subtitles. There are summaries of the film provided by both the SFDB and the SMDB.<sup>43</sup>

The title is also the pervading theme of the film, introduced by an establishing close-up shot of two feet, wearing worn-out shoes, stumbling through deep snow. In the next shot a group of grown-ups and children are struggling up a snowy slope. Suddenly one of the women collapses. Two of the men carry her to a seemingly derelict house, and as they lay her down on a bed she cries out 'I can't take it any longer—please take my children with you.' The three youngest immediately follow the two men out of the door, while the eldest stays behind. In medium close-up, the mother makes him promise to take care of his siblings. The brief exchange also reveals that his name is Peter. Just as he catches up with the others, his three siblings leave the group and run back to their mother. Peter goes after them, and when they enter the house they find their mother dead. The sequence that reveals the dead mother begins with a shot of her feet in ragged shoes.

This sequence is then revealed to be a flashback, telling the story of how Peter became an orphan. Flashbacks in film can be utterly subjective, internal, and traumatic. This is not the case here, however. The information the viewer is first given in the flashback is repeated by the real protagonist of the film, the RB, in the persona of the staff of one of its orphanages. Peter is given a voice, but he, his story, and his testimony are all objectified.

The scene moves first to an exterior shot of an RB orphanage, 'Kinderheim Rädde Barnen', and then to two women in uniform getting out of a car in picturesque countryside. A group of children gather around the car, which significantly has 'Save the Children' in English on both sides. As the women hunt about for some chocolate to give



Screenshot from *Barnskor* ('Children's shoes', 1947, dir. Eduard von Borsody). Courtesy of Sveriges Television AB.

to the children they notice a boy—Peter. He grabs a parcel they had put on the car bonnet and runs off. Like the little girl who ate the entire family's bread ration in *Barnen är utan skuld*, Peter is caught and confronted. Thanks to the use of high- and low-angle shots—the women at the top of a flight of stairs looking down at Peter, while he looks up at them—the adults are seen literally and visually talking over his head. The confrontation is interrupted by a man, who introduces himself as the children's teacher. He explains that Peter could not have guessed that the chocolate was destined for him and the other children. To make his point, he invites the women into his office, which is dominated by a long shelf full of shoes, and he takes down a worn pair, the tattered soles shown in close-up. He explains that Peter was wearing them when he arrived at the orphanage. The narrative now shifts to Peter and his siblings' past struggle, the second flashback to tell their backstory. When the narrative returns to the orphanage, the teacher explains that Peter ended up in a 'camp', but no further explanation is given; instead, Peter is said to have considered shabby shoes to be his worst problem.

The women show an interest in the shoes, which encourages the teacher to tell the 'very sad story of Rut'. He is reluctant to tell the *actual* story of Rut, which he considers too heart-rending, and instead he tells the story of how he revealed what she had gone through. This flashback thus focuses on an incident at the orphanage and is strictly told from the teacher's perspective. The teacher is seen in the sunlit garden and a child is heard screaming 'March! Get in!' He approaches a small girl, who is playing with a little boy, sits down beside them and asks if the cows do not want to go into their barn. Holding a cone in her hand, the girl answers 'that's no barn, that's an oven, and the lady doesn't want to go in'. The camera shifts to the boy, who hits another cone with a stick while ordering 'Don't mess around! Get in! Hurry! Hurry!' With a troubled look the teacher leaves the children to themselves and in voice-over explains that 'the children had spent two years in a concentration camp, their parents were gassed'. There is a wipe transition back to the teacher's office. The women look down at his hands, still holding Rut's shoes, and one of them says 'Poor children'.

Their puzzlingly restrained reaction can partly be explained by the nature of the narrative, in which the flashbacks are designed to make the case for the relief work, here accomplished by the RB. However, it also exemplifies what is best defined as phase zero in Holocaust representations. In the late forties and early fifties, the once-explicit representations of the concentration camps, including images of dead bodies, gas chambers, and piles of personal belongings, were replaced by alternative images and narratives, making LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma' essential.<sup>44</sup> The restraint of *Barnskor*, like the adult character's distant reaction to the story within a story, mirrors a general approach in the late forties to the consequences of the Second World War. By invoking this 'muted trauma', the restrained narrative also served the SE's purposes. The assumption was not only that *Barnskor's* audience would identify with the relief workers' approach, and thus would engage in the problems the children had endured, but they would also be spurred into action and would contribute financially to the SE. The 'muted trauma' so invoked is thus performative.

Prompted by another pair of shoes, which the teacher describes

'less horrifying than Rut's,' the narrative switches to the final flashback: shoes are once again the narrative catalyst, presented as even more 'horrifying' than the stories told. The first shot again shows two feet in worn-out shoes, this time belonging to a grown man returning to an affluent-looking home. When his two daughters finally recognize him they fall into each other's arms. Their reunion is interrupted by a small boy coming into the room, and the father includes him in the family hug. Hastily, the daughters explain that the boy is Hans, their little brother, who was delivered by the stork. Bewildered by their father's reaction, the younger sister realizes 'How could Daddy possibly know that? When Hans arrived, Dad had been gone a long time.' Just as the father lets go of Hans, a woman comes through the front door. When she recognizes her husband, her initial surprise gives way to a look of devastation. Cross-cutting between the spouses' expressions, the father leaves the room. As he walks through the door the camera focuses in on his shoes, and again the teacher's voice links the flashback to the narrative present, concluding Hans's story with the words 'and the door stayed closed.' Like their response to the Rut flashback, the women's reaction to Hans's fate and his little shoes on the shelf is strangely unemotional, their only response being to say 'Poor little Hans' and 'The children are always blameless'—echoing the title of *Barnen är utan skuld*.

The conclusion of the film is constructed as a happy ending, as the teacher removes a geranium from its pot to illustrate a point about the importance of treating the orphans as plants: 'when they are unwilling to grow, you need to replant them, provide new soil consisting of new thoughts, care, and love.' This is underscored by the sight of the teacher in the sunlit garden, surrounded by well-dressed, healthy-looking children, singing in perfect harmony. There are no comments about ethnicity, class, gender, religion, or politics; the orphans at 'Kinderheim Rädde Barnen' are symbolic of any child in need in post-war Europe.

## RB in Romania

The paucity of information about the films included in this survey is perhaps most obvious when it comes to *Svensk hjälp i Europa—På besök hos Rädda Barnen i Rumänien* ('Swedish assistance in Europe—visiting Save the Children in Romania', 1947, dir. anon.). The SFDB entry for the film is fragmentary, while the SMDDB has some of the details and a summary of the film, but neither lists a director or production company, and the male voice-over is simply given as 'unknown'.<sup>45</sup>

The first sequence of the film has adults sweating in the city of Bucharest, underscored by the voice-over, which says it is as 'hot as a baker's oven'. When the scene shifts to the countryside with parched fields, the voice-over explains that Romania is in the grip of a three-year drought, and that the starving Romanians are in desperate need of international assistance. This is followed by footage of the domestic and international relief work. The British, who are said to be in need of aid themselves, 'have already generously contributed food parcels formerly intended for the British soldiers during the war'. Ships and trains from Romania's neighbours, Russia and Bulgaria, are arriving with food supplies. There is also a French canteen, and the voice-over remarks that 'the French still remember that the Romanians provided them with grain during the war'.

This initial contextualization is followed by a longer reportage on Swedish relief work in Romania, and the voice-over explains the shift in focus by stating that 'the Swedes are hitherto the only foreigners to have been able to establish and organize long-term assistance in Romania. The simple truth is that in the last year the RB has done miracles'. The voice-over explains that there is Swiss dried milk powder available, and that Switzerland also runs a relief programme in Moldavia, 'yet the Swedish organization has been entrusted to organize the deliveries'. The importance of international cooperation is thus underlined, but while stressing the unique Swedish ability to organize the relief. The statements about trustworthy Sweden being everywhere and reaching everyone are accentuated by the sight of the Swedish flag, primarily on vehicles.

When a small convoy of cars reaches the countryside to deliver supplies, shots of outdoor cooking and children eating from bowls reinforce the voice-over's remarks about a mission accomplished—the

food they delivered are transformed into a nourishing soup to fill young stomachs. Statements such as ‘The soup is always eaten immediately, because of the risk of it ending up in someone else’s tummy’ serve to stress that the children are surrounded by untrustworthy people, only too ready to take advantage of them. Some of the children are well dressed, and according to the voice-over this is because ‘their old rags have already been replaced by Swedish clothes’. After a short sequence to introduce ‘the RB centre in southern Moldavia at the Children’s Hospital in Galați’, the film ends by praising the relief programme. Over shots of well-dressed, healthy-looking schoolchildren in Iași, the voice-over concludes with a brief but glowing evaluation of the completed project with the words ‘with that healthy attitude, the RB’s project in Romania was accomplished.’ This particular film does not include a call for donations, given that the Romanian project was already complete, but it still serves to confirm and promote the work performed by the RB.<sup>46</sup>

## Homeless

The promotion of the RB is also apparent in *Hemlösa* (‘Homeless’, 1948 [SFDB], 1951 [SMDB], dir. Karl Zieglmayer & Karl Sztollar). The SFDB and SMDB both have short descriptions of the plot, but differ widely as to the date, the SFDB claiming that the film was produced in 1948, while the SMDB has it as 1951.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the opening credits confirm that it was indeed produced in 1948, by Helios Film in Vienna, and that Kinocentralen in Stockholm did the post-production work.

The co-writers, Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt and Gunnar Höglund, structured the film as a short melodrama in three acts.<sup>48</sup> Despite being a work of fiction, the credits stress that ‘all settings are authentic’, although apart from a road sign pointing towards Budapest, the film lacks place-specific references. The credits are projected over a map of Europe which has Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia highlighted. Consequently, the lack of reference to particular places also means that the story could play out in any of the countries where there were relief projects underway.

A brief introduction spells out the reasons why it was made: ‘This

film wants to show how vile circumstances—distress, hunger, and disorderly conditions—can transform an ordinary boy into one of the many “wild children” currently living in Central Europe.’ Arguably, the epithet ‘wild children’ is as patronizing as Sweden’s positioning as rescuing hero is blatant.

The first act takes place in a courtroom, where 14-year-old Robert Timm has been charged with ‘serious violence’ for shooting Thomas Hober. This scene establishes the melodramatic mode, further underpinned by the musical score and the Swedish dubbing—*Hemlösa* stands out as the only production in the present survey dubbed into Swedish. Much like the low position of little Peter in the confrontational scene in *Barnskor*, Robert is placed far below the judge, who initially does not even see him.

The second act then starts with a long flashback, telling the dire story of how Robert ended up in court. It is told from Robert’s perspective, so the Swedish is dubbed by a child. First we see Robert’s mother sending him off to school, while his beloved dog has to stay at home. Robert’s father, who is said to have been killed in the war, is introduced in a close-up of a photograph in their apparently middle-class home. The drama is triggered by bombing, which forces Robert to shelter on his way to school. When the air raid is over he runs home and finds his entire neighborhood in ruins. There is no sign of his mother, but his beloved dog crawls out from the shattered remains of their apartment building. No injured or dead are seen, yet Robert realizes that his mother is beyond hope. He has no one left to turn to there, so accompanied by his loyal dog he sets off on foot to look for his grandmother in Budapest. As Robert is in desperate need of a roof over his head and something to eat, he falls in with a gang of street children in a city just as shattered as the one he left behind—an obvious paraphrase of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*.<sup>49</sup> One night Robert is given a pistol with the mission to stand guard while the rest of the gang is asleep. During the night, the slightly older gang member Thomas decides to play a trick on Robert. Thomas knocks on the door, pretending to be the police come to impound Robert’s dog, whereupon Robert shoots him.

The third act returns to the narrative present and a resolution. At the trial it is revealed that Thomas is not only alive, he is uninjured.

As the prosecutor speaks of the importance of ‘helping these unfortunate children to a better and happier life’, the camera pans across the audience in the courtroom and stops at two women in uniforms decorated with Swedish flags. The next shot shows the very same facade of ‘Kinderheim Rädde Barnen’ seen in *Barnskor*, albeit from a slightly different angle. Robert and his dog are shown approaching the orphanage, escorted by a woman in RB uniform. Happy children are playing and dancing in the sunlit garden, an obvious parallel to the joyful atmosphere shown in *Barnskor*.

In the epilogue, representatives from different countries ‘providing relief for the distressed people of Europe’ are having a round-table meeting. The chairman gives a short speech, dubbed into Swedish, about the relief work performed by countries such as Argentina, Canada, Denmark, the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the US, and ‘many more’, the countries rhetorically united by their good deeds. This scene is followed by a shot of innumerable young people walking towards the horizon across a sunny meadow, while the chairman’s voice concludes: ‘The young people are waiting for us, hungry and impatient, and therefore the responsibility is twice as large.’ The film comes full circle with another map of Europe, and the closing credits end with an intertitle with ‘Slut’ (the Swedish word for ‘The End’) and a musical flourish. The melodramatic mood is thus maintained throughout the film.

## Conclusion

As I have demonstrated here, SE’s minutes can be used to chart the development and decline of this short-lived organization. The SE was clearly aware of the promotional, psychological, and emotional impact of film, and this awareness resulted in conscious media strategies for the commissioning and distribution of audiovisual narratives of war and trauma. To enable a more substantial study of the consequences of the organization’s media strategies, the films promoted by the SE have been analysed here using a media-specific approach, looking at representations of testimony and trauma.

In general terms, SE’s films can be described as educational promotional films, which often explicitly exhort the audience to donate to

the cause; however, the analysis also shows that the representational modes can range from reportage to melodrama. The same message conveyed in a variety of filmic modes is an efficient way to communicate the essentials to various types of audience. Arguably, the use of different modes indicates a real awareness of the impact and possibilities of the film medium. In relation to the development of Holocaust representations, all the films exemplify LaCapra's notion of 'muted trauma', with a clear avoidance of depicting actual suffering.<sup>50</sup> Instead, it is the *consequences* of trauma that are the narrative catalyst, where symbols such as shoes are emblematic of the unmentionable, driving the audience not only to react, but to act—in this case by donating money. This cautious avoidance is also evident in the lack of national specificity—the native and religious origin of the refugees and/or orphans remains unclear. Consequently, these films are of no use in answering the tentative and over-optimistic research question about gradual shifts in the RB's and the SE's approach to children of different national and religious backgrounds in the late 1940s.<sup>51</sup> When it comes to class, ethnicity, and gender, however, the films are notably inclusive—boys and girls, working, middle, or even upper middle class, it makes no difference; all children of Europe should be saved. That said, the prime focus is the children of Austria and Romania. And neither do the children have a voice of their own—the testimonies of war and trauma are adapted and told from a Swedish relief perspective.

One slightly surprising finding is that the SE is more-or-less invisible in the films. The relief work in focus is first and foremost that done by the RB, the humanitarian organization behind the founding of SE on 9 February 1946. The films similarly are post-war equivalents of the newsreels and short films about the work of the RK screened in the last months of the Second World War, which depict the RK and Sweden alike as holding out a helping hand, primarily in the shape of the rescue action with the White Buses. This kind of marketing had proved valuable in more than one way. The founding of SE hence would have seemed like an excellent idea, not only for Europe's children in need, but for the post-war marketing purposes of the RB and the goodwill of Sweden.<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

- 1 *Barnen är utan skuld—Svenska hjälpverksamheten i Wien* ('The children are blameless—The Swedish relief programme in Vienna', 1946, dir. Eduard von Borsody). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.
- 2 Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 18–19; Dominick LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's "Shoah": Here there is no why', *Critical Inquiry*, 23/2 (1997), 231–69.
- 3 Cecile Felicia Stokholm Banke, 'Remembering Europe's Heart of Darkness: Legacies of the Holocaust in post-war European societies', in Małgorzata Pakier & Bo Stråth (eds.), *A European memory? Contested memories and politics of remembrance* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 163–74.
- 4 *Ibid.* 170.
- 5 *Ibid.* 170.
- 6 *Ibid.* 173.
- 7 *Ibid.* 171.
- 8 *Ibid.* 174.
- 9 LaCapra, 1997, 250.
- 10 Raul Hilberg, 'Developments in the historiography of the Holocaust', in Asher Cohen et al. (eds.), *Comprehending the Holocaust: Historical and literary research* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 21.
- 11 Raul Hilberg, *The destruction of the European jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961). For the problems associated with its publication, see Raul Hilberg, *The politics of memory: The journey of a Holocaust historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 105–19.
- 12 Dori Laub, 'Truth and testimony: The process and the struggle', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 65.
- 13 Daniel Levy & Natan Sznaider, *Human rights and memory* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 48–49.
- 14 See Sturfelt's chapter in this volume.
- 15 See, for example, Lena Einhorn, *Handelsresande i liv: Om vilja och vankelmod i krigets skugga* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1999); Jean-Claude Favez, *The Red Cross and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); Ingrid Lomfors, *Blind fläck: Minne och glömska kring svenska Röda Korsets hjälpinsats i Nazityskland 1945* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2005); Sune Persson, 'Vi åker till Sverige': *De vita bussarna 1945* (Rimbo: Fischer, 2002); Åke Svenson, *De vita bussarna* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1945); <http://www.redcross.se/>, s.v. 'Vita bussarna' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 16 Ann Nehlin, *Exporting visions and saving children: The Swedish Save the Children Fund* (diss.; Linköping: Department of Child Studies, 2009), 198.
- 17 <http://www.redcross.int/>, s.v. 'history' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 18 <http://www.redcross.se/>, s.v. 'historik' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 19 <http://www.redcross.se/>, s.v. 'passagerarlistor', 'Vita Bussarna' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 20 <https://www.savethechildren.net/>, s.v. 'history' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).

- 21 <https://www.raddabarnen.se/>, s.v. 'historik' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 22 Riksarkivet, Svenska Europahjälpen (SE), Protokoll 1946–1951, Vol. 1, 9 Feb. 1946.
- 23 Ibid. 9 Feb. 1946.
- 24 Ibid. 15 Feb. 1946.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid. 21 Dec. 1951.
- 28 Ibid. 15 Feb. 1946.
- 29 Ibid. 25 Apr. 1946.
- 30 Ibid. 4 Sept. 1947.
- 31 Ibid. 28 Nov. 1947.
- 32 Ibid. 3 Mar. 1949.
- 33 Ibid. 21 Dec. 1951.
- 34 <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/>, s.v. '40 år med Kungen' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015); <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. '40 år med Kungen' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 35 Riksarkivet, SE, Protokoll 1946–1951, Vol. 1, 1 Dec. 1948.
- 36 <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/>, s.v. 'Barnskor', 'Hemlösa' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015); <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. 'Barnskor', 'Barnen är utan skuld', 'Hemlösa', 'Med Rädda Barnen i Rumänien' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 37 All copies of the films included in the survey were provided by SMDDB.
- 38 Eduard von Borsody (1898–1970) was an Austrian cameraman, film editor, screenwriter, and director; for Willi Forst see, for example, Robert von Dassanowsky, *Austrian cinema: A history* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005); however, Dassanowsky does not mention the fact that Borsody directed *Barnen är utan skuld* in 1946 and *Barnskor* in 1947.
- 39 <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. 'Barnen är utan skuld' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 40 Willi Forst (1903–1980) was an Austrian actor, singer, scriptwriter, director, and producer, and much appreciated by German-speaking audiences. As a director he is still considered one of the most significant filmmakers of the Viennese period musical melodramas and comedies of the 1930s, known as Wiener Filme. In 1936, Forst founded his own film production company, Willi Forst-Film, in Vienna, followed by a branch in Berlin (Dassanowsky, 2005).
- 41 After a government decision on 10 March 1939, English replaced German as the first foreign language studied in Swedish schools. The reform was gradually introduced and it was not until 26 Aug. 1946 that all Swedish schools had made the curriculum changes.
- 42 Levy and Sznajder, 2010, 49 recognize the paradoxical impact of the emotive dimensions that guided reactions to the catastrophes of the Second World War and to the Holocaust in particular: 'Paradoxically, the Holocaust functioned simultaneously as the source for a critique of Western universalism and the foundation for a cosmopolitan desire to propagate human rights universally.'
- 43 <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/>, s.v. 'Barnskor' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015); <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. 'Barnskor' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 44 LaCapra, 1997, 250.

- 45 <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/>, s.v. 'Svensk hjälp i Europa—På besök hos Rädda Barnen i Rumänien' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015); <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. 'Svensk hjälp i Europa—På besök hos Rädda Barnen i Rumänien' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 46 The RB project in Romania and the impact of the Securitate (the secret police agency in Communist Romania, 1948–1991), is scrutinized by Vadim Guzun (ed.), *Rädda Barnen și Securitatea: Documente româno-suedeze 1946–1949* (Clju-Napoca: Argonaut, 2015); however, Guzun does not include any kind of film material.
- 47 <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/>, s.v. 'Hemlösa' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015); <https://smdb.kb.se/>, s.v. 'Hemlösa' (accessed 1 Nov. 2015).
- 48 Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt (1888–1982) was a key figure in RB, not least because of her involvement in relief work in Vienna after the two World Wars; see Elsa Björkman-Goldschmidt, 'Så var det i Wien', in Vera Forsberg, *Att rädda barn: En krönika om Rädda Barnen med anledning av dess femtioåriga tillvaro* (Stockholm: Rädda Barnens Riksförbund, 1969).
- 49 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist: Or the parish boy's progress* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838).
- 50 Hirsch, 2004, 18–19; LaCapra, 1997, 250.
- 51 Nehlin, 2009, 198.
- 52 Without discussing film, Nehlin, 2009, 198 arrives at similar conclusions in her analysis of the RB.

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# Journalism after mass death

## Memory, mediation, and decentring in John Hersey's 'Hiroshima' (1946)

*Marie Cronqvist*

What can possibly be said or written after mass death? How can a collective trauma of such magnitude be narrated and made sense of? These questions have been debated in intellectual circles for at least half a century. Representations of mass atrocities and mutilated bodies are most often found in Holocaust literature and poetry, which gradually became a genre of its own in the post-war period. The experience of the Holocaust found its way into artistic expression before any factual representation was possible—and quite contrary to Theodor Adorno's famous statement that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. Many times, the unfathomable horror was most grippingly captured in the austere works of Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, Elie Wiesel and others, who all described the everyday art of surviving in the concentration camps by using a plain, even understated, prose.

Whereas art, drama, and poetry have their ways of expressing horror, grief, and memory, collective and individual traumas present some different challenges to the practice of journalistic documentation. But there are also common traits. The American journalist Martha Gellhorn, an experienced war correspondent who was among the first to report the Allied Forces' liberation of Dachau on 7 May 1945, commented on what she saw with the following words, painful and distressing in their attention to detail and plainness of style: 'Behind the barbed wire and the electric fence, the skeletons sat in the sun and searched themselves for lice'.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the best journalistic accounts of war deaths are precisely

the naked, almost blunt, pieces that resist all temptation to descend into sentimentality or sensationalism. Gellhorn's brief dispatch from Dachau is one of them, and it has much in common with the narrative style of the most influential Holocaust fiction writers.

Another important journalistic account after mass suffering and death is John Hersey's pivotal and much-celebrated reportage 'Hiroshima' (1946), which is the work considered in this chapter. It tells the well-known story of the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945, estimated to have killed 140,000 people in the blast, and then, over a period of several decades due to the lingering effects of radiation sickness, the death toll rose to a quarter of a million.<sup>2</sup> The shattering attacks on Hiroshima and its sister city Nagasaki three days later are both intellectually incomprehensible in the magnitude of their destructive force, and psychologically numbing in the realization of their effects on humanity. The journalist John Hersey was one of the very few journalists who tried to make sense out of the senseless.

Taking 'Hiroshima' as my point of departure, I will address the question of journalistic mediation in two ways, moving beyond the points raised in earlier research on Hersey's literary journalism. First, I will argue that Hersey's choice of representation is an example of what Géraldine Muhlmann has called a decentring journalism, one that transcends and challenges any attempt to construct the world in terms of 'us' and 'them', and in which the position of the journalist is primarily characterized by discomfort and displacement. Second, I will connect this reading of 'Hiroshima' to the emergent field of research on journalism and memory, a scholarly inquiry that has risen at least partly out of the debris of the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. I mean to suggest that there are some key lessons to be learnt from 'Hiroshima' when we as citizens take upon ourselves the task of reporting and commenting with dignity and credibility on the victims of global terrorism and mass atrocity in our own time.

### The story of the reportage

John Hersey's 'Hiroshima' has an unassailable position in the history of American journalism, and is invariably listed among the most influential pieces of writing in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> It has been hailed



John Hersey traveling on assignment in the Far East, 1946. Photo: Dmitri Kessel, The LIFE Picture Collection, Getty Images.

as an early prototype or precursor of the so-called ‘new journalism’ movement of the sixties and seventies, and *Time Magazine* has called it ‘the most celebrated piece of journalism to come out of World War II.’<sup>4</sup> In an American context, its contemporary importance cannot be overestimated. In a review of the subsequent book edition, the *New York Times* stated, for example, ‘nothing that can be said about this

book can equal what the book has to say. It speaks for itself, and in an unforgettable way, for humanity.<sup>5</sup> Suddenly, a year after the atomic bombing of Japan, the mainstream jingoistic patriotism of early post-war reporting in the US was challenged by a different story. Historian John Toland has concluded, upon the impact of ‘Hiroshima’, that ‘those of us who had hated the Japanese for five years realized that Mr Hersey’s six protagonists were fellow human beings.’<sup>6</sup>

‘Hiroshima’ filled an entire issue of the magazine the *New Yorker* on 31 August 1946, and very soon after, the 31,000-word article came out in hardcover and was also read to the American public in a radio adaptation.<sup>7</sup> The publication was an instant success, partly due to the unconventional and unprecedented decision of the *New Yorker* to devote an entire issue to one piece, and partly because the magazine was previously associated primarily with other types of content—cartoons and humorous pieces mixed with a cultural New York city guide, short stories, reportage, and art criticism. Undoubtedly, the publication of Hersey’s graphic description of the horrors of Hiroshima was designed to shock, especially in a medium such as the *New Yorker*. The cover of the 31 August issue certainly did not give much away: the picture collage of summer activities including tennis, croquet, and swimming presented the starkest possible contrast to what awaited readers inside.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that literary journalism of the kind that Hersey and others produced, from the early twentieth century onwards, had generally found an outlet not in daily newspapers but in weekly magazines such as the *New Yorker*, because of the rapid advance of objectivity as a professional norm in news journalism.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1946, 32-year-old John Hersey (1914–1993) was a correspondent quite familiar with the Far East, having been born and raised in Tientsin, China, the son of missionaries. According to him, this upbringing created a sense of dislocation and unrest that came to mark his life, even though he had already moved back to New York with his parents by the mid 1920s. He went on to public schools and then to Yale, where he combined his interest for American football with writing for the college newspaper.<sup>10</sup> At the age of 25, firmly set on becoming a journalist, he seized an opportunity when Japan invaded China in 1937 to go to Asia in order to report on the war for *Time*, *Life*, and the *New Yorker*. While serving as a war correspondent, he

published several books, among them *A Bell for Adano* (1944), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize.

Even before Hiroshima, Hersey had developed an interest in the impact of war and catastrophe on the psyche of the survivor. Two decades before the Vietnam War and its emblematic journalistic accounts of traumatized soldiers by, for example, Michael Herr and John Sack, Hersey wrote about returning American soldiers' post-traumatic stress disorder, their psychological displacement and emotional numbing, in for example the *Life* article 'Experience by battle' in 1943.<sup>11</sup> His approach was more novel than it may seem from our perspective. And one year after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American readers had already had a fair number of reports about the bombings, though nearly all of them had placed their focus on material damage—the physical devastation of cities, landscapes, and buildings. The human sacrifice was overshadowed by American triumphalism in combination with a fascination with the bomb's destructive power. President Harry Truman's conclusion that the bombing of Hiroshima had saved lives was in August 1946 still largely unquestioned, and mainstream US journalism had also increasingly begun to universalize Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seeing in events a necessary rebirth of a new, humble, and reconciliatory Japan.<sup>12</sup> As Paul Boyer notes in his classic history, *By the bomb's early light*, 'the statistics of devastation and death were simply recited as prefatory to a plea for international control, civil defense, or some other cause', while accounts of human death and suffering were conspicuously absent.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to this, Hersey's ambition—strongly encouraged by the *New Yorker's* managing editor William Shawn—was to shed light on what actually happened in Hiroshima, and not to buildings, but to human beings.<sup>14</sup>

Before taking a closer look at the reportage and how it was written, Hersey's inspiration for his choice of narrative representation is worth mentioning. Allegedly, on a previous assignment for the *New Yorker* in the Pacific, he had come across the 1927 Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder, a story about five people who were all killed when an Inca rope suspension bridge in Peru gave way. The individual paths which eventually led the five to that bridge at that particular moment were the core of Wilder's novel, creating a drama with deep existential undertones. 'That seemed to

me to be a possible way of dealing with this very complex story of Hiroshima,' Hersey later recalled in an interview, 'to take a number of people—half a dozen, as it turned out in the end—whose paths crossed, bringing them to this moment of shared disaster.'<sup>15</sup>

Following Wilder's formula, which can be related to the thirties' literary tradition in which many authors explored the impact of the Great Depression by focusing on specific individuals,<sup>16</sup> 'Hiroshima' tells the story of six residents on different paths through life, all of whom survived the blast at 8.15 a.m. on 6 August 1945. The six protagonists are Miss Toshiko Sasaki, an office clerk; Dr Masakazu Fujii, a medical doctor; Mrs Hatsuyo Nakamura, a widow with three children; Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German Jesuit missionary; Dr Terufumi Sasaki, a Red Cross surgeon; and Mr Kiyoshi Tanimoto, a Methodist minister.

'Hiroshima' is the before, during, and after of these six individuals, based on a series of long interviews undertaken in the summer of 1946. The first section ('A noiseless flash') introduces the main characters and what they were doing the minutes before and after the bomb fell; the second section ('The fire') deals with events in the immediate hours following the blast; the third section ('Details are being investigated') covers the first week, and finally the fourth section ('Panic grass and feverfew') follows the main characters from about twelve days after the bomb to a year later. And although the story moves on chronologically, different themes are raised in each of the sections. Shock is the theme of first, while horror and realization is dealt with the second. Ethical reflection and political response is the main theme of the third section, and the fourth deals with the reconstruction and rebuilding of everyday life.

## Representation and narrative techniques

Already convinced that journalism could be enlivened by the use of devices from fiction, Hersey deliberately adopted a plain style with dispassionate words and a restrained tone when writing his reportage. The text is remarkably devoid of any kind of sentimentality, and despite this—or perhaps precisely because of it—it remains an emotionally engaging read. The flat and naked prose contains a number of narrative tools and techniques such as a very conscious use of scene-by-scene

construction, dialectical oppositions, dialogue, third-person point of view, suspense, symbolism, and even elements of fine irony and understatement.

Careful and detailed descriptions of scenes, often combined with dialectical opposition, are key to the unfolding of 'Hiroshima'. One moving example is the initial few lines of the story, which instantly captures the dramatic collision of everyday life and atomic catastrophe:

At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiki Sasaki, a clerk in the personnel department of the East Asia Tin Works, had just sat down at her place in the plant office and was turning her head to speak to the girl at the next desk.<sup>17</sup>

Immediately, Hersey here introduces an element of suspense, which is repeated many times throughout the text in the conscious building-up of events to a moment of crisis, then shifting to another scene, thereby creating an expectation from the reader who wants to know what happens next. Miss Sasaki's story, like the other five protagonists', is told in episodes. Each is presented from their viewpoint without further commentary, in a flat, matter-of-fact style, which means that their states of mind are presented not by their thoughts but by their actions. The dramatic tension between global event and mundane activity is ever present in the small, almost unconscious, actions of each individual—tiny actions which in a mysterious way saved them from hellfire and instant death on that first day of the atomic age. And as a whole, 'Hiroshima' retells the story of human struggle for normalcy under the most horrid circumstances. It is not a story describing the heroism of ordinary people anchored in a local setting, however. In one way it is quite the contrary—a story about a number of helpless individuals adrift in a universal script. The reader is invited to share their confusion, their loss of direction, and their endeavours to stay sane as each gradually realizes the extent of the disaster. It is clear that survival in Hiroshima was a matter of pure coincidence, creating among some of the survivors a sense of guilt for being alive—not least in the stories of the two physicians, Dr Masakazu Fujii and Dr Terufumi

Sasaki, in their endless and futile struggle to aid their fellow citizens.

Apart from his consistent use of point of view, Hersey also employs the narrative technique of dwelling on certain details of the characters' stories in order to make symbolic points. Details in general are of utmost importance: vegetables cooked in the ground, human eyes melted, blood spattered on walls and floors, vomit and tiny pieces of glass on the street, shapes of flowers that had been the pattern of kimonos but after the blast were burned into the skin, and faces of corpses lying in Asano Park.

Hersey also uses fine irony combined with understatement, such as when Mr Tanimoto describes the morning of the bombing as 'perfectly clear and so warm that the day promised to be uncomfortable', or when the story presents Mrs Nakamura as someone who 'seemed to fly into the next room over the raised sleeping platform, pursued by parts of her house'.<sup>18</sup> In the morning of 6 August, Ms Sasaki had started her working day by planning a funeral scheduled for ten o'clock. A number of the characters said that they had been relieved to hear the all-clear only fifteen minutes before the noiseless blast, the signal that the city had survived the night and that it was safe to go outside.

Some passages in 'Hiroshima' are highly symbolic. The most vivid is when Ms Sasaki's office building is destroyed and she finds herself trapped under a fallen bookshelf. Hersey recounts the crumbling state of science and knowledge, represented by shelves of books, with the words: 'There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.'<sup>19</sup> The symbolism in this passage reveals an underlying message from Hersey about human warfare and its relation to science and technology. 'Hiroshima' is thus not only a story about victims in a vaporized city, and not only a story about what happened in Japan, but a story of man-made catastrophe in general. And it certainly relates to a discussion underway in 1946 in the science community about the atomic bomb, which resulted in the book *One world or none: A report to the public on the full meaning of the atomic bomb*, published in conjunction with the Federation of American Scientists and with contributions by the likes of J. Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein.<sup>20</sup>

## Mediation and the politics of decentring

Hersey's consistent use of literary techniques and storytelling in 'Hiroshima' was not unique. It followed a tradition of literary reporting going back at least half a century. In journalism research, the literary reportage has been described as a twentieth-century counter movement, an alternative genre of writing in opposition to the cult of objectivity in mainstream news journalism. This split in journalistic representation ran parallel to the development in academia, the historian John C. Hartsock has argued. Hartsock points to the simultaneity of the literary reportage and the so-called crisis of the humanities and its attempts to resist positivism. The literary reportage, he writes, strives for something beyond 'objective reporting'; it indicates the existence of other truths and alternative stories to be told by the journalist—stories other than the hegemonic narratives of power elites. In its subjectivist approach, the literary reportage therefore has a subversive potential.<sup>21</sup> In the choice of key texts for his anthology of the 'new journalism' of the sixties and seventies, the author Tom Wolfe pointed to this liberating potential of literary journalism. The need for subjectivity, creativity, and expression was a call to arms against the kind of traditional reporting which, according to Wolfe, consistently failed to represent and articulate the transformations of social life and public reality in the sixties, with its countercultures, war protests, and revolutions.<sup>22</sup>

As we all know, subjectivism does not necessarily imply the fabrication of facts and stories. And the use of fiction devices in journalism does not automatically mean the absence of truth or credibility. Hersey's answer to this seems to have been to adopt an ethical stance. In one of the rare interviews he ever gave, for the *Paris Review* in 1986, he developed his thoughts on the very deliberate choice of representation in 'Hiroshima':

My choice was to be deliberately quiet in the piece, because I thought that if the horror could be presented as directly as possible, it would allow the reader to identify with the characters in a direct way. I've thought quite a lot about the issue of fiction and journalism as two possible ways of presenting realities of life, particularly such harsh ones as we've encountered in my lifetime. Fiction is the more attractive to me, because if a novelist succeeds, he can enable the reader

to identify with the characters of the story, to *become* the characters of the story, almost, in reading. Whereas in journalism, the writer is always mediating between the material and the reader; the reader is conscious of the journalist presenting material to him.<sup>23</sup>

What Hersey points to here is the fact that the traditional journalist is always the narrator, the medium, between the material and the reader. This means that (s)he is present *in* the work, not merely *behind* it, which unavoidably erects a wall between the reader and the reality portrayed. Hersey himself spoke about fiction as a means to overcome and perhaps even eliminate this type of active mediation on behalf of the journalist. ‘This was one of the reasons why I had experimented with the devices of fiction in doing journalism,’ he said, ‘in the hopes that my mediation would, ideally, disappear.’<sup>24</sup> He had a clear aim—to get the reader to enter into the minds of his protagonists just enough to suffer at least some of their pain, fear, and agony. And in this process of direct encounter with the characters, and perhaps only then, would the reader be able to at least begin to realize, internalize, and understand the global, political, and moral implications of an event such as the bombing of Hiroshima. The fiction mode would, in other words, unlock history and make it emotionally accessible to the reader. Thus, it seems that any use of a simple fact–fiction dichotomy is an obstacle to understanding Hersey’s epistemological mission in ‘Hiroshima.’ He himself argued there is no contradiction between factual claims and literary style.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, then, ‘Hiroshima’ addresses mediation not only as an ethical question, but also as a political question. In laying bare the human cost of Hiroshima and giving voice to the victims’ stories in a long, graphic reportage, quite unexpected in an American weekly magazine, a political statement was made, although Hersey somehow declined to make it. His refusal to actively mediate forces the reader to encounter the victim as him- or herself, and in this process, the American ‘we’ is set in motion—and perhaps even questioned. In her seminal work on the political history of journalism, Géraldine Muhlmann differentiates between two different forms: unifying journalism, and decentring journalism. The latter, according to Muhlmann, is one that is able to free itself from the unifying tendencies that bring

people together and create an ‘us’. Such tendencies are most visible in twentieth-century journalism’s main concern about delivering the truth and facts to the public—unquestionable truths and facts that are acceptable to ‘all of us’. Hence, there seem to be a connection between objectivist ideology and the unifying workings of mainstream journalism over the century, Muhlmann argues. In her work, she sets out to identify processes and journalisms of resistance and decentering alongside those of unification and centring—those that are daring, questioning, othering.<sup>26</sup>

In unifying journalism, which Muhlmann traces back to the so-called penny press of the 1880s, an ideal type of journalist which she calls ‘the witness–ambassador’ reigns supreme. In the shape of the witness, the journalist’s body is essential to establishing the truthfulness of the story: ‘I was there’, ‘I saw it’. In the shape of the ambassador, the journalist brings people together around her- or himself, turning ‘our’ attention to a specific time and place, and thereby centring the ‘we’ around the ethos of the journalist.

The counter-type is the decentred journalist, who is condemned to a deeply unsettling position and whose main state of mind is unease, dissonance, and separation. (S)he is an individual, as Muhlmann puts it, ‘inconceivable except in a perpetual state of crisis.’<sup>27</sup> This journalist ‘wants to make us, the public, see something that is “other” to us, and to do it in such a way as to cause this otherness to have an effect on us, question us, and change us; this requires that, by one means or another, a connection is established between it and us.’<sup>28</sup> Muhlmann exemplifies this with George Orwell’s writing of exile and solitude, always positioning himself outside, always trying to remain nomadic, alienated, and unfixed in relation to his study object—be it the tramp, the slum, or the unemployed.<sup>29</sup>

Hersey’s journalistic writing can be seen as decentering in that it questions the ‘we’ and establishes the perhaps painful connection between this destabilized ‘we’ and the other, although this is done differently in earlier reportages by, for example, Orwell. In one way, Orwell has more in common with the new journalism writers of the 1960s; he is writing the story of himself and his own endeavours, though constantly turning them around, destabilizing and questioning his own position. Hersey, in contrast to such an approach, is deliberately absent from his pieces.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, it is usually ‘Hiroshima’ along with other books and journalistic articles by John Hersey that were hailed as forerunners to the experimental journalism of, for example, Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Joan Didion, and Hunter Thompson. The devices of fiction—point-of-view, suspense, dialectic oppositions, and others mentioned earlier—were already present in his work in the mid 1940s.

Hersey himself was, however, deeply critical of the so-called ‘new journalists’, because he thought they were fabricators. Invention polluted journalism, he argued, in the sense that the fiction *methods* used tempted writers to create fiction *content*. The substantial fallacy here, according to him, was that in this process where facts were made out of fiction, the fictional voice of the journalist ultimately became more important than the events being written about. The journalist as mediator was exposed, revealing a distasteful and, according to Hersey, unforgivable self-centredness.<sup>30</sup>

### Decentring memories

In the spring of 1985, Hersey returned to Hiroshima in order to write a follow-up to his 1946 piece, and he then met with four of the six people whose stories he had previously told (Father Kleinsorge and Dr Fuiji had died in the 1970s). The article, ‘Hiroshima: The Aftermath’, originally published in the *New Yorker* in July 1985, was later incorporated into the original story in several new editions of the book. ‘The Aftermath’ differs from the four other sections in both style and tone. It follows each person’s forty-year story, and through their accounts, different aspects of Japanese post-war life are outlined: Mr Tanimoto dedicates his life to peace activism; Mrs Nakamura initially falls into poverty and struggles for many years to support her family because, due to her stigmatization as an A-bomb victim, she has a hard time getting a job; Dr Sasaki continues to work at the Red Cross Hospital and eventually sets up his own clinic devoted to helping fellow citizens who are sick from radiation diseases; and Miss Sasaki makes a decision to become a Catholic nun.

One main theme of ‘The Aftermath’ is not only the element of contemporary history, but also memory. How will Hiroshima be remembered, and how do experiences of 6 August 1945 continue to

affect the lives of the protagonists? How does the memory of Hiroshima continue to affect us all? In fact, Hersey argued, the role and significance of factual, historical research in the writing of fiction is memory, and it is therefore essential to make the past as concrete and specific as possible.<sup>31</sup> Fiction can both be a substitute for and a supplement to memory.

The theme of memory also has to do with the protagonists themselves and how their own memory of what happened in 1945 was shaped and altered in different ways over the course of the forty years that had passed. In Japan, the memory of the bomb was forever inscribed in public life as well as in the lives of the so-called *hibakusha*, defined by the government as people directly affected by the bomb and who were therefore entitled to financial and medical support.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, post-war Japan was marked not by hostility, but by reconciliation with the US, and it is this reconciliatory process the reader encounters in 'The Aftermath'. But it is also problematized. For example, in the fifties, in order to raise money for his Japanese centre for peace, Mr Tanimoto travels to the US where he, ironically and despite his outspoken pro-American attitude, is met with considerable suspicion; in a country in the throes of a red scare, every stranger who openly propagates pacifism had to be a communist.

The Cold War and its nuclear build-up is also interwoven into the story of Mr Tanimoto, and through this, Hersey introduces not only memory, but also forgetting (a necessary prerequisite of memory) as a general theme of his postscript in 1985. By the end, it is not clear who remembers what anymore—or even who has the obligation to remember what happened in Hiroshima. In the last few lines of 'The Aftermath', Hersey concludes that Mr Tanimoto's own memory, 'like the world's, was getting spotty.'<sup>33</sup> In 1985, who remembered Hiroshima anymore, when all the world's attention is directed to a future nuclear war and its apocalyptic visions of nuclear winter? What is the function of history and memory? And for what purpose should the world tell the story of Hiroshima? The fact that our memory is 'getting spotty' and requires us to actively remember is also a key element in the narrative structure of Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), based on a screenplay by Marguerite Duras.<sup>34</sup> Memory is not something that comes to us unbidden—it requires a decisive act of remembering.

However, the deliberate choice Hersey made was to stay as unemotional, quiet, and calm as possible in his prose, filling the pages of his reportage with detailed and mundane accounts of his protagonists when they tried to cope with disaster. He himself refused to mediate or interpret; in fact, he refused to actively condemn warfare or advocate pacifism. And it was precisely this choice that came up in some critical reviews of his original reportage in 1946 (although negative reviews were few and far between). In the words of one such reviewer, ‘naturalism is no longer adequate, either aesthetically or morally, to cope with the modern horrors’, claiming that Hersey’s attitude and his unwillingness to spell out a pacifist message in his reportage was deeply unethical.<sup>35</sup>

And yes, it is true that the original ‘Hiroshima’ reportage, the first four sections, in this respect were hardly a call to arms against atomic weapons. In the late 1940s, it seems it simply did not spur activism and readers’ political engagement. The historian Michael J. Yavenditti, who has investigated the contemporary reception of the reportage in the immediate post-war period, concludes that although widely read and highly acclaimed, it did not in fact lead its readers to reconsider the legitimacy of the American decision to drop the bomb.<sup>36</sup> But is this really the main task of journalism after mass death? I would argue that taken together, ‘Hiroshima’ was as disturbing to the American ‘we’ than any reportage explicitly debating US policy. The decentring publication context—the relaxed and fun summer activities on the magazine cover on 31 August 1946—made this even stronger; it established a link between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and problematized the former in the most distressing way. Hersey’s journalistic gaze seems to look beyond political statements and positions to address the more fundamental issues of humanity and the need to document events *as they were*—not by saying that the descriptions constitute a perfect mirror of what really happened, but by giving a voice to somebody who suffered through these events.

### Hiroshima, journalism, and memory

John Hersey’s account of the disaster in Hiroshima and the human suffering that ensued was a remarkable piece of literary journalism to come out of the Second World War, and one that resonated

throughout the post-war era. Not only did it lay the foundation for the new journalism movement of the sixties and seventies, it also became emblematic of reports of violence and mass death in the Cold War era, and in particular the Vietnam War. Without conveying any explicit political message, it encouraged—or even required—readers to take a moral stance in the atomic age. But by emphasizing the dignity of individuals in the face of horror, Hersey's own moral and political stance became visible.

But what then is the task of the journalist after mass death? In the last decade or so, there has been a vibrant discussion on journalism, media, and memory.<sup>37</sup> As Carolyn Kitch and Janice Hume argue in their book *Journalism in a Culture of Grief*, journalism's preoccupation, especially with the commemorative practices and processes of public mourning in today's Western societies, urges us all to revise Philippe Ariès's claim that death has become taboo in collective life.<sup>38</sup> Even today, journalism is in fact constantly engaged in rituals of redemption and consolation.

Are such rituals of consolation unifying or decentering? Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan argue in the introduction to their book *Journalism after September 11*, that in the face of such horrors as 9/11, journalists need to serve 'simultaneously as conveyor, translator, mediator and meaning-maker.'<sup>39</sup> This could (although perhaps not necessarily) indicate a very active, interpretative role for any journalist reporting on mass death; indeed, this memory work may imply a unifying journalism, one that explains what this horrible event might mean to 'us,' and how 'we' could possibly deal with the pain. A question raised by Hersey's classical reportage, then, is whether a decentering journalism of consolation and reconciliation is even possible.

As a reportage, 'Hiroshima' may not have had a therapeutic aim or function, but through its decentering approach to the journalist as well as to the historical event, it contributed in an essential way to an opening up of history and memory with regards to atomic weapons. In the postscript 'The Aftermath,' it becomes even clearer that Hersey's main concern was war casualties in general. His field of vision was global, and as a journalist he wanted to tell the story of Hiroshima in order to support historical and cultural memory. 'I think that what has kept the world safe from the bomb since 1945,' he said in the *Paris*

*Review* interview in 1986, ‘has not been deterrence, in the sense of fear of specific weapons, so much as it’s been memory.’<sup>40</sup> But now, the memory is ‘getting spotty’, and therefore he felt it was more urgent to write ‘The Aftermath’. And fiction, he continued,

should have the kind of relationship to the writer’s memory that dreams may have. The dream material doesn’t often seem to have any direct source in the person’s life, but it must have been constructed from what the writer remembers. So I think a measure of the power of a work lies in the depth of the memory that is drawn on to fabricate the surface of the work.<sup>41</sup>

Incomprehensible acts of violence and terror may spark great works of fiction, because fiction often has the means to make some sense out of the meaningless. In the field of journalistic reporting, Hersey’s ambition to win the reader’s sympathy for his six survivors in 1946 was one of these sense-making endeavours, using literary journalism as a tool to mediate between the victims and the readers. Not least because in the stories of these six survivors lay the stories of the hundreds of thousands who perished. And in our own time, through such voices of the other, by means of a journalism that decentres instead of unifies, it is my belief that the pervasive and destructive media discourse of fear, the curse of contemporary journalism on mass atrocities, can be challenged. After all, reporting on horror and fear ought to be something quite different from any deliberate act designed to evoke such feelings in the audience.

## Notes

- 1 Martha Gellhorn, *The face of war* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), 179 (first pub. 1959).
- 2 James L. McClain, *Japan: A modern history* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 513–514; Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *Hiroshima in history and memory* (New York: CUP, 1996).
- 3 John C. Hartsock, *A history of American literary journalism: The emergence of a modern narrative form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); David Sanders, *John Hersey revisited* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); Nancy Lyman Huse, *John Hersey and James Agee: a reference guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978). In 1999, a panel at New York University selected ‘Hiroshima’ as the twentieth century’s finest

- piece of journalism, ahead of such seminal works as Rachel Carson's *Silent spring*, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's Watergate reportages, and W. E. B. Du Bois' *The souls of black folk*.
- 4 'Books: Awakening the Sleeping Giant the Call', *Time Magazine*, 6 May 1985; see also Felicity Barringer, 'Journalism's greatest hits: Two lists of a century's top stories', *New York Times*, 1 Mar. 1999.
  - 5 Cited in Paul Boyer, *By the bomb's early light: American thought and culture at the dawn of the atomic age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 205.
  - 6 Kevin Kerrane & Ben Yagoda, *The art of fact: A historical anthology of literary journalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 111.
  - 7 Citations in this chapter are from the Penguin edition of 2001: John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (London: Penguin, 2001) (first pub. 1946).
  - 8 See Boyer 1994, 203–204.
  - 9 Hartsock, 2000.
  - 10 'The art of fiction No 92', *Paris Review*, 100 (1986).
  - 11 Dan Gerstle, 'John Hersey and Hiroshima', *Dissent*, 59/2 (2012), 90–4.
  - 12 According to a Gallup poll on 16 August 1945 cited in Michael J. Yavenditti, 'John Hersey and the American conscience: The reception of "Hiroshima"', *Pacific Historical Review* 43/1 (1974), 25, 31, fully 90 per cent of the Americans surveyed were either in approval of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or had no opinion on it.
  - 13 Boyer 1994, 207. According to another interpretation, Hersey's style of writing was inspired by T. S. Eliot's *The waste land* from 1922; Patrick Sharp, *Savage perils: Racial frontiers and nuclear apocalypse in American culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).
  - 14 Robert J. Lifton & Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: 50 years of denial* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1995), 86–7. See also K. R. Forde, 'Profit and public interest: A publication history of John Hersey's "Hiroshima"', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88/3 (2011), 562–79.
  - 15 'The art of fiction' 1986.
  - 16 Some examples are novels by John dos Passos, John Steinbeck, and James Agee.
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  - 20 Dexter Masters & Katharine Way (eds.), *One world or none: A report to the public on the full meaning of the atomic bomb* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946).
  - 21 John C. Hartsock, *A history of American literary journalism: The emergence of a modern narrative form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); see also Kevin Kerrane & Ben Yagoda (eds.), *The art of fact: A historical anthology of literary journalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
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# Framing the waste of war

## Motifs, paratexts, and other framing devices in EC's Cold War comics

*Sara Kärrholm*

The period immediately after the Second World War has been described as one of the most difficult times to express messages that in any way deviated from the norms of containment culture. The publication of the Comics Code by the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) saw the introduction of censorship to that particular form of popular entertainment.<sup>1</sup> The publishing house EC Comics, under its editor-in-chief Bill Gaines, was among the comic producers who received most attention in the debate about the potentially harmful effects of comics on young readers, thanks to their list of horror titles such as *Tales from the Crypt* and *Shock Suspenstories*. EC also published war comics that could be seen as controversial for other reasons. The visualization and narrative depictions of war were in these stories designed to shock the reader in a similar way to the effects of the horror books. They aimed to show the gruesome side of war, but also to provoke thoughts of a more philosophical kind about war and its effects on the human body and soul. This was done using a range of recurring motifs, but also different framing devices.

The Second World War was a golden age for comic book sales. This was due to a growing readership of adolescents with money to buy their own comic books without the mediation of their parents, but also to a vast audience of soldiers consuming comic books while at war.<sup>2</sup> According to the historian Jean-Paul Gabillet, comic books 'maintained the morale of troops stationed in foreign countries, participated in the anti-fascist propaganda on the home front, and satisfied the demand

for entertainment from an audience that had more money to spend at a time when the possibility of purchasing consumer goods was severely restricted by the constraints of the war effort.<sup>3</sup> Comic books thus had an important function for readers who were fighting or otherwise engaged in the war, providing strategies to cope with their experiences by enforcing certain values. In this context, it is interesting that EC managed to express a very different and subversive image of combat in their own war magazines: *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to chart the media-specific factors that determined how certain subversive messages might be communicated. The first part of the chapter will show how EC used a specific motif—the dead body—and its framing in the layout of the comic, to convey an anti-war message. The second part of the chapter will demonstrate how that same message was enforced by the different paratexts associated with the comics in the magazines. Form and content were made to work together to draw readers into a dialogue about the meaning of war and to provide the right framing for their interpretation specifically of the Korean War (1950–1953), but also for recent experiences of the Second World War.

For this chapter, the reprinted issues of *Two-Fisted Tales* in the *EC Archives* series are used as primary sources. This means that the comics discussed are in a sense lifted into a new context, one that has the ambition to consolidate EC's production and uphold its legacy—indeed, I end the chapter with a reflection on this situation and what it means for the analysis. In the reprints, the original issues are reproduced in chronological order, assembling six dated issues in each volume. The issues are printed as facsimiles up to a point, but extra material is dispersed between them, adding a commentary function as well as providing a historical context for the individual issues and EC's work as a whole.<sup>5</sup> The analysis in this chapter, then, is not based on an entirely historically accurate material, but one that brings the issues of history and memory, connected to a printed medium, to the fore.

*Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* were the two of EC's publications to feature war stories. Besides the importance of Bill Gaines as decision maker, the artist Harvey Kurtzman had a central role in the making of the stories. He 'researched, wrote, edited, and provided complete visual breakdowns for all of the war stories', with the support

of several other artists.<sup>6</sup> The stories were a mix of recent events in the Korean War or Second World War, and others inspired by wars further back, such as the American War of Independence. Most of the stories describe the hopelessness of war, making the point that there really are no winners, and that all men are equal in its path, as is claimed by the narrative voice in the story 'Hill 203!': 'death treats all men equally and makes no distinction between Chinese and Americans.'<sup>7</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 was the immediate reason that EC started to publish their war comics, and the end of the war in 1953 similarly spelt the end for these publications.<sup>8</sup> After that, EC instead chose to concentrate on their humorous titles: *MAD* and *Panic*.<sup>9</sup> The war publications were thus created and sold for a short timespan of two years, directly connected to the war in Korea, while the experiences from the Second World War were still a very fresh memory.

Against this background, it is interesting to see EC's war comics as a medium that was used to comment not only on a war that was ongoing at the time of their publication (and to motivate combatants), but also on the recent Second World War, *and* to express a post-war experience. According to Leonard Rifas, the Korean War years were a 'peak period for US comic book sales and impact (but *not* respect)'. He shows that the norm at the time was to glorify war and describe the enemy in generalizing terms, which was in great contrast to how this particular war and its enemies were described in EC's war comics.<sup>10</sup>

### Paratexts and frames

Part of the analysis will concern what the literary theorist Gérard Genette has defined as *paratexts*. Genette describes paratexts as 'thresholds of interpretation', and uses them mainly with literary texts.<sup>11</sup> They consist of the elements surrounding the narrative text, and are used to guide the reader's understanding when it comes to providing information about, for example, genre and author. Genette furthermore divides the paratext into *peritext* and *epitext*. Peritexts exist in the immediate context of the literary work, such as the jacket, title page, footnotes, illustrations, et cetera. Epitexts are more peripheral and not as easily defined, but could consist of other material that could be assigned as

the author's or the publisher's intentions, such as marketing texts in catalogues and interviews with the author.<sup>12</sup> In a sense, then, these paratexts serve to direct the reader's attention towards certain things inside as well as outside the text. In this context, it is of interest to study the peritexts, or immediate surroundings of the war narratives—all the other elements that were included in the comic books and that could be read alongside the comics.

The literary scholar Marie Maclean has developed Genette's terminology, discussing the way paratexts work as frames, 'what relates a text to its context', and the different ways this can function:

The frame may act as a means of leading the eye into the picture, and the reader into the text, thus presenting itself as the key to a solipsistic world; or it may deliberately lead the eye out, and encourage the reader to concentrate on the context rather than the text. Sometimes indeed the frame defines the text, by appropriateness or complementarity; at others it defines the context, like an elaborately carved art nouveau setting to a simple mirror.<sup>13</sup>

The paratextual frame thus contextualizes, but is not to be conflated with, the context *per se*, since it is the means by which the reader is directed towards the text and context.

The frame as a concept is also central to frame analysis, coined by sociologist Erving Goffman (1986), and used to discuss how frames are used to provide meaningful structures for the individual interpreter of any scene or social interaction.<sup>14</sup> Media theorists have used this to model how the media can provide mediated events with frames in order to evoke certain meanings for the media consumer.<sup>15</sup> According to this theory, both consumers and producers use frames in order to make meaning out of the message. The frames provided by the producer act to direct the consumer's attention to a certain symbolic field, for instance, while the consumer also brings to the situation the frames that he or she has developed in earlier and similar situations.<sup>16</sup>

In comic books, frames are used to talk about the spatial dimensions of the medium: how frames are placed on the page or the two-page spread. Lefèvre defines it thus: 'Framing in comics refers both to the choice of a perspective on a scene, and to the choice of borders of the

image.<sup>17</sup> As the literary scholar Hillary Chute has pointed out, comics are of special interest to discuss in relation to framing, since ‘while all media do the work of framing, comics manifest material frames—and the absences between them. It thereby literalizes on the page the work of framing and making, and also what framing excludes.’<sup>18</sup>

The comic theorist Thierry Groensteen uses the concepts of *frame*, *hyperframe*, and *multiframe*. The frame is used for the immediate frame of a single frame in a comic. The hyperframe is the frame consisting of each page in a comic—how the placing of the frames are assigned a certain space on the page, framed by the (often white) outer margins, not counting the white spaces within the margins. The multiframe, in turn, can take on varying forms and consist of less than a page—in the comic strip—a half page, and also the whole comic book or magazine. It is a frame comprising one or more comic narratives.<sup>19</sup> When discussing the different elements of the comic books, different peritexts, I will be commenting on the multiframe of the war comics, while the hyperframe and frame, in Groensteen’s sense, may become interesting while analysing the stories themselves. For this chapter, however, the meaning of the frame will also be used as a paratext function, when analysing for instance bulletin boards, book jackets, and advertisements, and how they relate to the stories about the waste of war.

## Dead bodies everywhere!

One of the most frequently analysed functions in comics is the media-specific uses of temporality. The reader has to actively participate in creating and interpreting temporal movement from a succession of still frames or panels.<sup>20</sup> Another important and media-specific aspect of comics is the function of the parts to the whole. The whole page is always present to the reader—and so is normally the counter-page in a two-page layout—when reading single frames. The page as a whole thus becomes a primary context for the interpretation of each frame. This makes spatial dimensions integral to the medium in a different way than in, say, film.<sup>21</sup> The gutter, the space in between the frames, can be seen to have a decisive function in this regard, since it serves to ‘divide and proliferate time’ in comics.<sup>22</sup> Spatial concerns and how

they affect the temporal in EC's war stories will be addressed in the following.

Death as a consequence of war is naturally present in most if not all of the stories in both *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*. In two of the stories commented upon here, a dead body is used as both the starting and finishing point. This kind of circular movement, where a scene is repeated with variations in the first and last frame, was a narrative device that was used repeatedly in EC's war comics in interesting ways. It can be seen in the story 'Bug out!', where the same words, with a slight variation, are repeated at the beginning and the end of the story. In this case, the repeated movement back to the beginning serves as an interesting way to describe the disturbed mind-set of a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, who is unable to let his mind go of the events of one catastrophic day of war.<sup>23</sup> Another version is in 'Lost battalion!', where the narrative at the outset is told from the perspective of a man lying on the ground with his rifle. At the end of the story the man is still lying there with the same facial expression, and turns out to be dead, but still narrates: 'The boys will go back but I'll stay here... covered with branches and why not... I'm dead!'<sup>24</sup> Many of the stories use this circular movement with dead bodies serving as the starting and the end points, which serves to emphasize the waste of war.<sup>25</sup> I will specifically look at the function of the dead in 'Search!' (1951), 'Hill 203!' (1951), and 'Corpse on the Imjin!' (1952).<sup>26</sup>

The story 'Search!' describes the meeting of a young American soldier with a senior American soldier of Italian descent in a bomb crater in Salerno, Italy, in 1943. The older soldier, Joe, has already been posted there for a long time when the newcomer arrives, and he tells the boy a story that explains why he has chosen to stay on in Italy. His older brother Mario, the sole survivor of his family beside himself, was left behind in Italy when Joe was sent to America. Joe now wants to reunite with him before returning home. He made sure he was picked to serve in the 45<sup>th</sup> Division, where he would have a chance to search for his brother.

The images underline the contrast in age and experience between the two men. This meeting between generations on the battlefield, where the older man passes on his wisdom to the younger, is another

device that was used repeatedly in EC's war comics.<sup>27</sup> In 'Search!', Joe is described as a tough character, his face black with dirt and with a grim look on it. The boy is portrayed throughout with the same facial expression, one that reflects his fear and inexperience: his eyes as well as his mouth are drawn round and wide open.

During their conversation the boy points in shock at the foot of a dead body, sticking up out of the side of the shell hole. Joe tells him to calm down: 'It's only the foot of a corpse buried in the rubble! You get used to them after a while!' The conversation is suddenly interrupted by an attack, and after silencing the assailants, Joe can continue his story about his brother. He claims that after all the time that has passed since he last saw him, he will still be able to recognize him from the ring on his finger, engraved with his initials, M. A. Joe wears one himself, with his own initials. Another attack interrupts him and when Joe turns around afterwards, it is to find the boy killed, still with the same blank expression on his face.

The dead state of the boy's body is accentuated in the images through a sequence of pictures of his stiff body, locked into an uncomfortable position, and with that blank, staring look in his eyes. Right through a sequence of six frames, Joe continues to talk to the dead body as if he was still there. He then decides to leave the shell hole in order to continue his search for his brother. The perspective, as he walks away, remains on the dead body in the crater, along with the foot still sticking out from the rubble. We follow the dead bodies through another attack, while the narrative voice says: 'Soon the guns spoke, and the torn ground was ripped again! Men long dead were killed once more'. The whole body of the man with the foot is thrown to the surface and the story ends with a close-up of his hand, a deathly grey colour, with a ring on its finger with the initials M. A. What was before an anonymous, lifeless foot is now a whole and visible body with a specific identity.

The narrative in a powerful way contrasts the anonymity of death and war with the specific and personal narrative of Joe Angliosani, the man in search of his brother and a way to find closure in the long-awaited reunion with what remains of his family. His very personal reasons for being in that place at that time are paralleled with the situation that makes him, his fellow soldier who is sharing a moment with him in



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THAT'S THE WAY WAR IS, KID! IT'S ROUGH GOING! YOU MEET SOME SWELL GUYS ALL ALONG THE ROAD! AND YOU LOSE 'EM JUST AS FAST!... THEN YOU'RE SORRY YOU EVER GOT TO KNOW 'EM!



THAT'S CAMPFALEONE, WHERE I WAS BORN UP AHEAD, KID! THAT'S WHERE I LEFT MY BROTHER AND THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND HIM! THEN MY SEARCH WILL BE OVER!

BETTER GET GOING! NO USE WAITING AROUND!

AND SO...G.I. JOE ANGLIOSANI STEPPED OUT OF THE SHELL HOLE AND CONTINUED NORTH...

FOR A WHILE THE UNNATURAL SILENCE OF A BATTLE LULL SETTLED ON THE FIELD, BUT NOT FOR LONG!

SOON THE GUNS SPOKE, AND THE TORN GROUND WAS RIPPED AGAIN! MEN LONG DEAD WERE KILLED ONCE MORE...



AND THE BODY THAT BELONGED TO THE FOOT PROTRUDING FROM JOE'S SHELL HOLE WAS NOW THROWN TO THE SURFACE...

ON THE HAND WAS A RING... A CURIOUS RING! AND ON THE FACE OF THE RING WERE INSCRIBED THE INITIALS... M.A.!



DID YOU ENJOY TWO-FISTED TALES? WE ARE INTERESTED IN KNOWING THE KIND OF STORIES YOU LIKE! WON'T YOU WRITE AND TELL US WHICH STORY YOU LIKED BEST IN THIS ISSUE?

WRITE TO:  
THE EDITORS,  
TWO FISTED TALES  
ROOM 106, DEPT. 21  
225 LAFAYETTE ST.  
NEW YORK, 12, N.Y.

'Search!', page 7. Art by Harvey Kurtzman. Copyright © 1951, William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

the crater, and the dead body of his brother into anonymous nobodies. His exertions to hold on to his personal history are futile in the face of the horrors of war. Apart from the fact that we never learn the name of the boy (only ever called 'Kid' by Joe) and that the foot at first is described as just another dead body, anonymity is evoked again when Joe Angliosani—a man who we do know by name—is called 'GI Joe Angliosani' by the narrator, when he steps out of the shell hole and walks away at the end of the story. He still has his name, but the first part of it is just the anonymous name used for any American soldier.

In contrast, the dead bodies are in some sense treated as more than faceless bodies. Despite the lack of name and facial characteristics, the boy is talked to after his death as if he was still alive and listening. His function as an attentive listener lives on for as long as Joe needs it. This is accentuated by the presence of his stiff body in a sequence of nine consecutive frames. The final four frames show only dead bodies, first the body of the boy together with the foot of the corpse in the rubble, and then the corpse in the strange process of being 'killed once more' and thus brought to the surface. The corpse of what the reader will eventually learn is Joe's brother regains his lost identity at the end because of the signet ring, making Joe's earlier comment that he was just another dead body ironic.

Another story, 'Hill 203!', starts with a company of UN soldiers getting a machine gun rigged to defend a hill. It is a 'fifty-calibre air-cooled machine gun, a light tripod, and four cans of ammo', a weapon that so fascinates one of the younger soldiers that he wishes to take some of its oversized ammo as a keepsake to take home. The gun requires one man pulling the retracting handle and one man feeding the gun with the ammo belt. A confrontation between the soldiers and their Korean enemies is set off, and the men handling the machine gun have the main function of holding ground until help arrives. Before that can happen, three men are killed one after another while manning the gun, among many others killed on both sides, so that when help finally arrives all the soldiers holding the hill are dead, as well as all the Korean soldiers attacking them.

The opening frame as well as the very last shows George's corpse, the last man to use the gun. His image thus becomes, in a way, the framing of the story. The scenery is a beautiful sunrise, and a little

bird is perched on the barrel in the first frame and flies away in the last one. The scene is highlighted as if a strange pause in the killing. At the outset everything is quiet and still, as if the narrator had somehow paused the image in order to philosophically take a moment to investigate: ‘What happened here? Look at the pile of burnt shells, each as long as your hand! Who were they fired at? [Frame 2] What happened here? Look at the spent machine-gun barrel... the empty cartridge cases... [Frame 3] Who is to tell us what happened... what has gone before? The soldier won’t tell you! He’s *dead!*’<sup>28</sup>

The pictures highlight the gun and its grotesque dimensions, the littering of empty cases, and the unnatural pose of the soldier’s dead body, which seems to be resting on the gun, ready to shoot. At the end of the story this scene is recalled, but only after showing the piles of dead bodies around the soldier, while the rescuing planes sweep in. The last five frames show the dead bodies of Corporal MacSwain, Duke, Yodonz, and George—all soldiers who held off the attackers with the machine gun. The story ends with the gun: ‘The sun rises on a fifty calibre Browning M2 machine gun, still oiled and shining! The blue steeled gun has outlived its crew! In the background, fresh replacements move in to occupy the position! A little bird perched on the gun muzzle flies away! *Hill 203 has been held!*’<sup>29</sup>

The insistence on the reality of the dead bodies is accomplished by this framing of the story in both images and narrative text. The futility of the task of holding the hill is what comes out as the main argument of this story.<sup>30</sup> The hill has been held, but at what cost? There is little hope that the situation will not repeat itself with the new soldiers arriving on the horrible scene. The machine gun, however, stands out as the cold-blooded survivor. With its shining blue steel and large barrel, it has the ultimate design for war. The men needed to operate it, however, do not. The little bird emphasizes this point by flying away from the scene. Unlike the soldiers, it has the freedom to choose whether to stay or leave.

Versaci has pointed out how the frames of ‘Hill 203!’ freeze the action by breaking the scene up into many separate images.<sup>31</sup> This pause technique, he argues, opens up a space for reflection on the meaning of war and death that would be difficult to achieve in another medium such as film.<sup>32</sup> This technique is repeated, with variations,

WAW! IN KOREA! THE SUN IS RISING ON A LITTLE BIRD PERCHED UPON THE BARREL OF A  
MACHINE GUN! THE SUN IS RISING ON A UNITED NATIONS SOLDIER SLUMPED BEHIND THE MACHINE  
GUN! THE SUN IS RISING ON...

# HILL 203!



WHAT HAPPENED HERE? LOOK AT THE  
PILE OF BURNT SHELLS, EACH AS LONG  
AS YOUR HAND! WHO WERE THEY FIRED AT?

WHAT HAPPENED HERE? LOOK AT  
THE SPENT MACHINE-GUN BARREL...  
THE EMPTY CARTRIDGE CASES...

WHO IS TO TELL US WHAT HAPPENED...  
WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE? THE SOL-  
DIER. WON'T TELL YOU! HE'S **DEAD!**



'Hill 203!', page 1. Art by Jack Davis. Copyright © 1951, William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

AND WITH THE RISING OF THE SUN, AIRPLANES RISE FROM THE SOUTH OF KOREA, SEARCHING LIKE HAWKS, PASSING OVER THE HEAPS OF DEAD CHINESE BELOW...

... ALSO PASSING OVER DEAD UNITED NATIONS SOLDIERS! FOR DEATH TREATS ALL MEN EQUALLY, AND MAKES NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICANS!



THE SUN RISES ON A DEAD MACHINE GUN TEAM ON HILL 203! CORPORAL MACSWAIN!

... DUKE!

... YODONZA!

... GEORGE!



THE SUN RISES ON A FIFTY CALIBER BROWNING .M2 MACHINE GUN, STILL OILED AND SHINING! THE BLUE STEELED GUN HAS OUTLIVED ITS CREW! IN THE BACKGROUND, FRESH REPLACEMENTS MOVE IN TO OCCUPY THE POSITION! A LITTLE BIRD PERCHED ON THE GUN MUZZLE FLIES AWAY! **HILL 203 HAS BEEN HELD!**



'Hill 203!', page 8. Art by Jack Davis. Copyright © 1951, William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

in this story, where the killing of North Korean soldiers is narrated through a sequence of four frames in which the tremendous power of the machine gun stands against their bodies in varying states of agony and dying.<sup>33</sup> The machine gun is also made into a protagonist in this story. The focus on the machines of war in this and other stories in EC's production emphasizes not only the futility of war, but also pushes a more explicit critique of technological warfare.

In 'Corpse on the Imjin!', the beginning and end of the story feature an anonymous corpse floating in the water, barely recognizable as human in the early sequences, but at the end looking less like flotsam and more like a lifeless body, floating further and further away. The corpse is in fact, in this case, two different corpses. The first is seen by an American soldier who is seated on the riverbank, and in a philosophical mode he starts to wander off in his mind, trying to figure out how this man died. He starts to think about different ways of dying in the war and rules out a regular fistfight, since physical combat, man to man, has become a rare sight in contemporary warfare. Ironically, a Korean man, his enemy, is watching him from a bush close by. The Korean jumps the American in order to take his food to still his own hunger. The American's gun is thrown into the river and they are left with only rubble and their fists to fight with. They both fall into the river, still fighting, and eventually the American soldier uses the strength of his arms to hold the Korean under water until he drowns. The corpse floating away in the water at the end is thus another dead man, but this time he is recognizable as a man. The soldiers have seen each other up close, and the American leaves the scene ashamed of what he has done.<sup>34</sup>

The end sequence shows the body in seven different frames, slowly floating away into the river, with a narrator commenting, first on how the wind and the water is handling the corpse in the river and then on the moral of the story: 'and it is as if nature is taking back what it has given! Have pity! Have pity for a dead man! [Frame 5] For he is now not rich or poor, right or wrong, bad or good! Don't hate him! Have pity... [Frame 6] ... for he has lost that most precious possession that we all treasure above everything... he has lost his *life!*' [Frame 7] Under the last frame, the scenery is commented on again: 'Lightning flashes in the Korean hills, and on the rain-swollen Imjin, a corpse floats out to sea.'<sup>35</sup>

The sequence with the frames showing the floating body on the first page, and then again on the last page, again dissects time into the briefest of stills, which together can be seen as a slow-paced room for reflection and contemplation. While the bodies are slowly floating away, there is time to think about what happened here. A life has ended, and, as the opening commentary said, 'Though we sometimes forget it, life *is* precious, and death is ugly and *never* passes unnoticed!'<sup>36</sup>

When speculating about how the first dead man had died, the American soldier's first thought was of bombers, F-51s, and 155 mm cannons, all weapons that must have killed 'thousands of them in this offensive'. While ruling out a fight at close quarters, the soldier thinks: 'Now with all the long-range weapons, we can kill pretty good by remote control!' The high-tech weapons seem to obscure the human conditions of war: that actual men are being killed, and that men engage in killing other human beings. Seeing the dead body floating past his position on the riverbank is the spark that helps the American soldier reflect on these things, while the final frames of the dead Korean man, seen only by the reader and the narrator, close the circle, and ask the reader to reflect on the same question, taking the recent experience of the American soldier into account.

An interesting feature of this story is that the American soldier is addressed throughout as 'you'. This calls for a deeper identification between the reader and the American soldier.<sup>37</sup> While 'you', the soldier, is asked to actively ponder his actions while confronting his enemy up close, the reader is supposed to put him- or herself in the soldier's position. Ironically, the narrator asks, 'Where are the wisecracks you read in the comic books? Where are the fancy right hooks you see in the movies?'<sup>38</sup> The comments seem to suggest that, unlike those other silly magazines and movies, this one takes its subject seriously.<sup>39</sup> One of the strategies for showing this is to make the reader search his or her own conscience while confronted with the themes of the comics. Considering the fact that many readers could be expected to have first-hand experience of the war in question, this appeal becomes even more effective.

In all three stories, then, the dead bodies are used to invite the reader to reflect on the meaning of death and the consequences of war. The stories underscore somewhat different aspects, of course:

IT IS A DARK DAY IN MAY! LIGHTNING FLICKERS IN THE SOUTH KOREAN HILLS, AND A STORM WIND ROARS OVER THE IMJIN RIVER! OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RAIN SWOLLEN IMJIN, A LONELY CORPSE FLOATS WITH THE RUBBLE DOWN TO THE SEA! FOR THIS IS WHAT OUR STORY IS ABOUT! A...

# CORPSE ON THE IMJIN!



BUT MANY THINGS FLOAT ON THE IMJIN! DRIFTWOOD, AMMUNITION BOXES, RATION CASES, SHELL TUBES!

...WE IGNORE THE FLOATING RUBBLE! WHY THEN, DO WE FASTEN OUR EYES ON A LIFELESS CORPSE?

...THOUGH WE SOMETIMES FORGET IT, LIFE IS PRECIOUS, AND DEATH IS UGLY AND NEVER PASSES UNNOTICED!



'Corpse on the Imjin!,' page 1. Art by Harvey Kurtzman. Copyright © 1952, William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

THE WIND IS RUSHING FITFULLY  
OVER THE IMJIN! IT STIRS THE HAIR  
ON THE BACK OF THE DEAD MAN'S HEAD!



THE WATER RIPPLES BEFORE THE  
WIND... LAPS AT THE SHORE...SWAYS  
THE BODY FROM SIDE TO SIDE!



THE FLOWING RIVER GENTLY SWINGS  
THE BODY OUT, AWAY FROM THE  
BANK AND INTO THE CURRENT!



AND NOW THE CURRENT, WEAK  
NEAR THE SHORE, SLOWLY TURNS  
THE BODY AROUND AND AROUND...



...AND IT IS AS IF NATURE IS TAKING  
BACK WHAT IT HAS GIVEN! HAVE  
PITY! HAVE PITY FOR A DEAD MAN!



FOR HE IS NOW NOT RICH OR POOR,  
RIGHT OR WRONG, BAD OR GOOD!  
DON'T HATE HIM! HAVE PITY...



... FOR HE HAS LOST THAT MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION THAT WE ALL TREASURE ABOVE EVERYTHING...  
HE HAS LOST HIS **LIFE!**



LIGHTNING FLASHES IN THE KOREAN HILLS, AND ON THE RAIN SWOLLEN IMJIN, A CORPSE FLOATS OUT TO SEA.

'Corpse on the Imjin!', page 6. Art by Harvey Kurtzman. Copyright © 1952, William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

‘Search!’ points to how war works to dehumanize and depersonalize its participants, ‘Hill 203!’ underlines the disproportion between men and the machinery of war, as well as the intrinsic irony of warfare, while ‘Corpse on the Imjin!’ specifically addresses the act of killing and how it changes you, but also how it is wrongfully sanctioned by a state of war.

The literary scholar Elaine Scarry has noted that the human body is often the point of departure for making sense of the world. Physical pain or injury becomes a symbol for what is incontestably real, in that it always withdraws from the realm of representation in language.<sup>40</sup> In war, this incontestable reality of injured bodies is juxtaposed with the unrealities or fictions of war.<sup>41</sup> The way that EC’s war comics relate their stories reflects these ideas by their insistence on looking at dead bodies, while also picturing the ‘fictions’ of war in different senses, often through ironic situations like those portrayed in these three stories. This insistence on looking—or ‘seeing seeing’ as it has been called by the anthropologist Michael Taussig—is a central quality of comics as a medium, where the act of drawing is tightly linked to the act of seeing. In her account of war comics as documentary forms of witnessing, *Disaster Drawn* (2016), Chute comments on this: ‘Driven by the urgencies of re-seeing the war in acts of witness, comics propose an ethics of looking and reading intent on defamiliarizing standard or received images of history while yet aiming to communicate and circulate.’<sup>42</sup> Even if EC’s war comics are not presented as documentary narratives, they share this quality with the comics discussed by Chute.

The stories and how dead bodies are used in them are really just examples of a recurring narrative device in EC’s war comics, where a certain framing—whether it uses a dead body or some other motif—is used to direct the reader’s interpretation. In another story, for example, ‘Tide!’, the tide and the image of a tiny crab in its wake serves the same function.<sup>43</sup> This is done by a circular movement, but also with other enforcing measures, such as the narrator’s voice at the beginning and end of the stories, and with how the frames are broken up sequentially on the pages. The motif of the dead body is accentuated by showing it as a whole sequence or in recurring stills, as if creating a moment in time that is so often absent in the action in an actual war. This moment is supposed to be used for a deeper contemplation of what

is at stake and the meaning of taking another person's life. The next part of this chapter will discuss how the stories in turn are framed by their immediate context: the paratexts.

### Combat Correspondence and other peritexts

The covers of the war comic books reinforced the anti-war message of the stories, often by portraying condensed situations of war's irony expressed in a magnified image chosen from one of the stories inside the book. The cover of the thirtieth issue from 1952, for example, has a close-up of a soldier telling his mate behind him 'Shots from the hill! Douse that light!'; while the soldier behind him is holding out his lit lighter and at the same time being shot before he can hear and follow through on the order.<sup>44</sup>

*Two-Fisted Tales* had a bulletin board for readers' comments entitled 'Combat Correspondence'. These pages provide an interesting insight to the readership's attitudes towards EC's take on war, as well as the motivations of EC's editors and artists. The bulletin boards of EC's different magazines reveal how a close relationship developed between the editorial board and the readers, which set them apart in the market for comics in the 1950s:

EC created a self-referential community, winking at inside jokes and speaking with their readers in a slang likely to mystify new readers. The strategy worked, creating a loyalty to the publisher, especially among young adult readers, and the sense that EC was something apart from the standard fare blanketing the newsstands. The first fanzine specifically devoted to comic books was *The EC Fan Bulletin*, founded by Bhub Stewart in 1953, and Gaines liked the title so much he adapted it for his own promotional newsletter, *The EC Fan-Addict Bulletin*.<sup>45</sup>

The bulletin boards in the comic books thus formed a starting point for what would grow into a larger fandom, with EC's products at its centre.

The mix of letters published on the pages of 'Combat Correspondence' shows that the audience for the war magazines was largely teenage boys and men, many of them with experience of war.<sup>46</sup> The editors

encouraged readers to send in first-hand accounts of their own war-time experiences in order to provide inspiration and secure a higher level of realistic accuracy for the publications. For one reader, asking about the authors' own experiences of war, the answer was that 'Our artists all did serve with the armed forces in the last war! Severin was a GI in the Pacific, Elder saw action in Germany and Belgium, Davis served with the Navy in the Pacific, Woody was a Merchant Mariner and a Paratrooper, and Kurtzman was with the state-side Infantry.'<sup>47</sup> The exchanges on these matters show that accuracy and first-hand experience were rated highly by editors and readers alike.<sup>48</sup>

The readers had different responses to the endings too. On some occasions, the comments in 'Combat Correspondence revealed that not all readers were happy with the anti-war sentiment of the stories published in *Two-Fisted Tales*. In the twenty-fifth issue of 1952, for instance, two readers wished for 'better' endings:

'Dear Editors, I wish you would change the endings of your stories. I'm sure I'm not the only one who doesn't like them.'

'Dear Editors, I wish you would end your stories better. As it is, they end not so hot.'

The editorial board presents these comments together with an answer for both of them:

We take it that you readers didn't like the sad endings in some of the stories. But you see, if we gave all the stories happy endings, you might get the impression that war is all happiness... which it is not! We'd like to get other reader's reactions to this. Do you feel that you'd like all the stories to end happily?—Ed.<sup>49</sup>

In a later instance of 'Combat Correspondence', the editors published a list of comments on the same subject. One of them states that 'I think it is great to show that war is actually hell, and it shouldn't be presented as anything else but just that!' and another writes to tell them to 'Keep those sad endings, because when I finish them, it makes me sit up and think!'<sup>50</sup> Other readers expressed views in line with some of the anti-war statements in the narratives. One example was a letter

from a Gary Zeltzer, in Detroit: 'Dear Editors, After reading your magazine, I realized what war meant. A terrible waste of human life inflicted on both sides. When will the civilized world learn to settle their differences by peaceful methods?'<sup>51</sup> Ultimately it was taken as making the stories more authentic: war has no happy ending.

As shown by these examples, the relationship between the editorial board and the EC fans was one of mutual interest and inspiration. According to Gardner, 'the image of the comics reader as lonely and isolated is itself largely a product of the post-war anxiety about the rising popularity of the comic book form, a form that openly inspired not isolation but collaboration, community, and communication.'<sup>52</sup> Those who feared the effect of comics on the young readers' minds believed that the threat had much to do with the lack of control over what happened in the individual reader's isolated meeting with the comics.<sup>53</sup> This fear did not take into consideration the fact that many of the most devoted EC fans were actually discussing their readings and interpretations with other fans, not to mention the editors.

The endings of *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* resembled the equally moralistic endings of EC's other publications, such as *Tales from the Crypt* or *The Haunt of Fear*, where the main ambition was to horrify their readership. These twist endings were EC's trademark, who often called for the readers' opinion about these as well as other ingredients in all their comics. It is interesting to note the similarities as well as the differences between the war stories and the horror stories. Both categories were about the darkest sides of humanity, and just like many of the war stories, the horror stories explored the darkness within. There is one substantial difference, however: the horror stories often described people and events that were entirely fictional, while the war stories strove to be authentic, in the sense that they used realistic war terminology, geographical data, and other factual ingredients.

### Other reinforcing techniques

Many of EC's artists worked on several or all of the comics. In the artwork of the horror stories as well as the war stories, the artists tended to experiment with facial expressions to express the horrified

emotions at the depicted atrocities. Many of the war comics portrayed men with their eyes wide open in wordless fear, their faces frozen in extreme agony, in ways that were very similar to the depictions of terrified faces in the comics. The similarities show that the horror of war was every bit as real as the emotions stirred up by the ghastly stories of the horror genre, and the facial expressions of the characters were also an indication of the proper emotions that the reader should experience when reading the stories.<sup>54</sup>

The generous use of exclamation marks in the war comics—just as in the horror comics—was another way for the creators to stress the horror of the narratives. Just about every sentence ended with an exclamation mark, the titles were exclamatory, as were the final sentences, which so often were stressed on every word by the narrating voice, as in the story ‘Wake!’, which ends: ‘Back in the United States, we thought of war as a *soldier’s* war and not a *civilian’s* war! Yet... many civilians gave their lives on Wake Island! And back in the United States, we all found out that whether we wanted it or not, we were all *in this war together... soldiers and civilians!*’<sup>55</sup> This insistent orthography might paradoxically have risked undermining some of the urgency of what was said; however, the endless exclamations also served to point readers in the right direction when interpreting given events on an emotional level: the correct impression should be one of fear, alarm, and outrage, not acceptance or passive disinterest. In some sense, the exclamations are—in this case perhaps more so than in EC’s other publications—a legitimate way to reproduce talk, since what were shown were often life-and-death situations where it was important to make quick decisions and give clear orders.

In the imagery of the war comics there was a surprising lack of blood, entrails, and other visual representations of severe bodily harm, which made them stand out from EC’s horror publications, which were awash in gore. They might have been full of dead or injured soldiers, but the bodies were remarkably ‘clean’ and unspoilt, unlike what must have been the experience of the actual soldiers and ex-soldiers who wrote in to the magazine to tell their stories. This seems to suggest that there were aspects of war that were simply too real to be used as means of providing realistic accuracy. In fact, however strongly the accuracy aspect was stressed by both editors

and readers, the staging of war within recognizable and repeatable framings could have worked to create a reassuring distance to events and the memories they evoked. The readers of *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat* knew they would not be exposed to an actual war experience in these comics, but rather to a staged scene where the outline and outcome were carefully aligned by the skilled hands of the EC team.

In the horror comics, the 'editors' of the bulletin boards were often presented as three fictional (and monstrous) creatures, who also functioned as narrators and presenters of the comic strips: the Crypt-keeper, the Vault-keeper, and the Old Witch, together known as the Ghou-Lunatics. They 'provided a continual external point of view that kept the reader outside the story. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy or the proscenium in a theatre, their presence was bizarrely reassuring, a reminder to the reader that it was "just a story".<sup>56</sup> The lack of a fictional narrator to frame the story meant that the reader's safe space, assuring him or her that it was 'just a story', was not there in the war comics. There was, however, a distinctive narrative voice, framing the story and providing a moral standpoint for the reader's interpretation of events, and this voice could easily be understood as the collective moral standpoint of the same 'editors' who were responsible for the 'Combat Correspondence' page. The strong presence of the editorial board, thus, had a reassuring function.

Even if these stories should not be read as 'just stories', they were clearly recognized to be hypothetical constructs. As Tom Gunning points out, 'the power of comics lies in their ability to derive movement from stillness—not to make the reader observe motion but rather participate imaginatively in its genesis.'<sup>57</sup> In its visual dimensions, comics also differ from other media, which use mainly photographic images: 'The artist not only depicts something, but expresses at the same time a visual interpretation of the world, with every drawing style implying an ontology of the representable or visualizable.'<sup>58</sup> The medium, with its insistence on the reader accepting an active role in the genesis of the story and the world depicted according to the vision of the artist, thus underscores the importance of interpretation, and invites the reader to share a symbolic representation of events, whether they are realistic or not.

Some of the issues of *Two-Fisted Tales* introduced the specific artists involved in the series as ‘the artist of the issue’ with a photograph and a longer text, which tended to give a presentation of the individual behind the scenes. It was common to mention where and in what capacity the artist had served in the military; another was to say how he had met his wife.<sup>59</sup> In the presentation of Jack Davis, for example: ‘But all work and no play made Jack a dull life, so he headed south to fetch himself a wife. And he fetched a beauty too! Name’s Deena!’<sup>60</sup> These personal stories were told with a tone of familiarity, and often ended with a comment about what a good fellow he was, well-liked by both fans and co-workers. The presentation mixed these ingredients with hard facts about the person’s experience of war and his life as a hard-working artist. The ‘artist of the issue’ feature thus individualized the team behind the comic books and built their personas and credibility among their audience.

The bulletin board was also at times used to discuss the work of individual artists, and the editors could on such occasions highlight the specific trademarks of an artist, which facilitated the recognition of their work. The mentions of individual artists reflected a deep admiration and mutual respect on the part of the comics’ creators—hence the editors’ description of the specific circumstances of an issue in 1953, when Kurtzman, who normally would ‘mastermind ... the mag from cover to cover’, fell ill with jaundice and had to be admitted to hospital.

Harvey managed to write the Guynemer story for Evans while the nurse wasn’t looking ... Jack Davis turned out script and art for ‘Betsy’ single-handed ... Wally Wood came up with the solid ‘Trial By Arms’ theme, which Jerry embellished ... and Jastly Jerry managed to find time to write the French Foreign Legion story for Severin. In all this, of course, Harvey had a HAND ... rather than, as per usual, being up to his NECK! All the boys came through wonderfully in the pinch, and deserve much praise ... which I hereby bestow!—William M. Gaines, Managing Editor (Oh, yes ... Harvey is coming out of the hospital now and coming along nicely as of this writing!)<sup>61</sup>

The tone is frank, humorous, and familiar, which made it easier for readers to develop a connection with the makers of the comic books.

The constant stress on the attention to detail, and on the skills and experience of the various artists, also encouraged the readers to appreciate the artwork, and to understand it as such and not just amusement. In the evolving dialogue between creators and consumers, a basis for a new view of comics as a form of art was laid out, one that implied a non-conformist ideological stance.

The effort to build individual trademarks out of EC's various artists bore fruit, as was seen at the launch of what was to become their next flagship, *MAD*. An advertisement featured all the artists, drawn by themselves, with Kurtzman holding up the new magazine: 'We at EC proudly present our latest baby .... A 'comic' comic book! This is undoubtedly the zaniest 10 [cents]' worth of idiotic nonsense you could ever hope to buy! Get a copy of *MAD*... on sale now! We think you'll enjoy it!'<sup>62</sup> In *MAD*, this self-ironic use of the artists' portraits became a standard feature.

The readers were often treated as having the agency to change EC's production in different peritexts. This was especially the case with the 'Combat Correspondence' page, but also in a repeat advert for other EC productions that stated: 'You've written! You've telegraphed! You've phoned! You've threatened us! So here it is! The magazine you've demanded!', followed by an issue of, say, *Weird Fantasy* or *Shock! Suspensestories*.<sup>63</sup> The tone adopted towards readers was often more familial than respectful, but it was still clear that the editors listened attentively to reader's demands and did their best to accommodate them, as long as it did not conflict with EC's ideals and standards.

The paratextual 'frames' provided by the 'Combat Correspondence' page and other peritexts, provide different but combinable perspectives to the stories narrated in the comics. Firstly, they underscore the importance of historical and factual accuracy as a means to add authenticity to the war stories. Second, they set out some of the intentions of the producers while also providing them with an aura of skilled expertise and artistry. Third but not least, they provide a setting where the audience is invited in to the production and evaluation of the stories and their artwork. This setting is also to be interpreted as a place where likes and dislikes, and indeed the political and moral ideals of readers and EC co-workers, were welcome and discussed, in a way that helps the interpretation of the narratives from a moral

standpoint. This function was further developed by the framing of stories within the stories themselves, using the different narrative devices discussed earlier.

### Adding layers of paratexts

The collected *EC Archives* edition of *Two-Fisted Tales* consists of three volumes. All include forewords and introductions by the various editors and other experts on EC's work. The stories have been recoloured for the new edition, but with the express aim of faithfully reproducing the style of the original artist, Marie Severin—the only female member of the EC staff.<sup>64</sup>

In providing new material, consisting mainly of commentaries and advertisements for other titles in the *EC Archives* series, the editors of the collected volumes of *Two-Fisted Tales* gave their comic fiction new, stronger 'frames'. These frames generally supported the interpretation of the anti-war message of the war comics, as when commentaries were given under the heading 'EC: War is hell', with interpretations and analysis of select artworks along with quotes from the artists. In this way, they provide today's readers with information that helps to see these war comics in a historical and ideological context. The material also serves to further highlight the sheer artistry of the comics. One example is when Russ Cochran explores 'Editorial Style in the EC Comics: Feldstein and Kurtzman' or 'Kurtzman's Cinematic Style'; another when Versaci shares his analysis of chosen stories, such as 'Jeep!' or 'Hill 203!'<sup>65</sup>

Some of the additional material consists of memoirs or comments by the artists themselves. In Volume 1, Cochran has a piece about 'Working with Kurtzman', and Volume 3 has a foreword written by former staff member Joe Kubert, who states that he 'learned a lot from Harvey Kurtzman', and goes on to give a personal account of what it was like to follow his lead.<sup>66</sup> This type of material consciously adds to the mythologizing of EC and its artists. In a sense, these editions can be seen as an extension of fan-based activity centred on EC's trademark—they certainly conflate the roles of producer and consumer in a way typical for what has been labelled convergence culture.<sup>67</sup> The fans have taken on the task of maintaining the production of EC's comic

books while striving to stay as close as possible to the style of the originals. When advertising for the rest of the collected *EC Archives* titles, for instance, the style of the original advertisement has been imitated, while also adding information of interest to the modern day reader:

The *EC Archives* proudly presents *Tales from the Crypt*. *Tales from the Crypt* is the best-known and most popular comic in the EC line! This comic book has spawned several feature films and the HBO series! Vampires, werewolves and ghouls galore! Great horror stories with art by the best comic artists in the business!<sup>168</sup>

The edition is thus addressed to already devoted fans, wanting to complete their private collections of EC's work, and to potential new readers, interested in EC because of its legacy and great artwork.

## Conclusion

In EC's war comics, form and content come together to convey the main anti-war message of its publishers. The tools used, both in the magazines as whole and in separate comics, can be described in terms of framings that operate on different levels to guide the reader's interpretation. The motif of the dead body in the analysed stories is an example of a narrative device that is repeated with variations in many of the war stories. The dead body is shown through sequences of stills that force the reader to actually look at it and ponder what made it take this unnatural state. Using the dead body is also one of many ways to create a circular movement in the stories, where the beginning and end serve to ascribe a moral outlook or perspective to the events recounted in the comics, and the return back to the beginning serves as a kind of 'framing' of the stories on a metaphorical level.

As paratexts, the same messages are enforced by their moral framings, such as the discussion of sad and happy endings on the bulletin board, or by stressing the accuracy of the backstories. Yet the paratexts also signal an openness to interaction with readers, who also have a relevant background that is used to improve the comics. In addition, the paratexts provide information about the comics' creators, and frame this as information on artworks rather than 'just for entertainment'.

The close relationship built up between creators and consumers with the help of these paratexts has helped construct a legacy around EC's trademark, where the brand has come to represent quality and seriousness as well as humour and a general cult status.

As a mediator of war, EC worked to question rather than justify it, while taking soldiers' first hand-experiences into serious consideration. The plots, like the artwork, stressed the proximity of war to horror, suggesting that war changes those caught up in it in ways that extend far beyond the cessation of the fighting. The suggestion is that to be morally outraged, or even shocked beyond disbelief, is the normal response to what war asks of human beings. The many framings found in EC's comic books were safety devices in the sense that they existed to ensure that, unlike other successful comic books of the day, the message could not be misread, while also providing the reader with tools to deal with very real experiences within a reassuring and confined context.

## Notes

- 1 Chris York & Rafiel York, introduction in eid. (eds.), *Comic books and the cold war: Essays on graphic treatment of communism, the Code and social concerns 1946–1962* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 5–15 at 5.
- 2 Jean-Paul Gabillet, *Of comics and men: A cultural history of American comic books*, tr. Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 197 (first pub. as *Des comics et des hommes* 2005); see also Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster drawn: Visual witness, comics, and documentary form* (London: Belknap, 2016), 11.
- 3 Gabillet 2010, 197–8.
- 4 Rocco Versaci, foreword in *The EC archives: Two-fisted tales* (2007), ii. 7; and Christopher B. Field, “‘He was a living breathing human being’: Harvey Kurtzman’s war comics and the “Yellow Peril” in 1950s containment culture”, in York & York 2012, 45–54; Rocco Versaci, *This book contains graphic language: Comics as literature* (London: Continuum, 2007); Jared Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the history of twenty-first-century storytelling* (Stanford: SUP, 2012); Robert S. Petersen, *Comics, manga, and graphic novels: A history of graphic narratives* (Denver: Praeger, 2011), 158.
- 5 Other material has been taken from advertisements for other products than EC's own as necessary for economical purposes (*EC archives* 2014, iii. 4–7). Note that the issues of the original magazines started at number 18 but are numbered from number 1 in the reprinted Archives-edition, in the first two volumes. The third and last volume, however, follows the original issue numbers and calls the last six issue numbers 30–35, accordingly.
- 6 Versaci, foreword in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 7.

- 7 *EC archives* 2007, ii. 2, 18; see also Field 2012; Versaci 2007.
- 8 David Hajdu, *The ten-cent plague: The great comic-book scare and how it changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008), 195; Gabillet 2010, 38–9.
- 9 Gabillet 2010, 39.
- 10 Leonard Rifas, 'Korean War comic books and the militarization of US masculinity', *Positions: East Asia cultures critique*, 23/4 (2015), 619–31 at 619–20.
- 11 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*, tr. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: CUP, 1997, first pub. as *Seuils* 1987).
- 12 Genette 1997, 5.
- 13 Marie Maclean, 'Pretexts and paratexts: The art of the peripheral', *New Literary History*, 22/2; *Probing: Art, criticism, genre* (1991), 273–9 at 273.
- 14 Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 21.
- 15 See, for example, Dennis Chong & James N. Druckman, 'Framing theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10 (2007), 103–26; Dietram A. Scheufele, 'Framing as a theory of media effects', *Journal of Communication*, 49/1 (1999), 103–122; and Gail T. Fairhurst & Robert A. Sarr, *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1996).
- 16 Scheufele 1999, 106.
- 17 Pascal Lefèvre, 'Mise en scène and framing: Visual storytelling in *Lone Wolf and Cub*', in Matthew J. Smith & Randy Duncan (eds.), *Critical approaches to comics* (London: Routledge, 2012), 71.
- 18 Chute 2016, 17.
- 19 Thierry Groensteen, *The system of comics*, tr. Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 31 (first pub. as *Système de la bande dessinée*).
- 20 Tom Gunning, 'The art of succession: Reading, writing, and watching comics', *Critical inquiry, Special issue: Comics & media* (2014), ed. by Hillary Chute & Patrick Jagoda, 36–51, quote at 50.
- 21 Lefèvre 2012, 24.
- 22 Chute & Jagoda 2014, 3.
- 23 'Bug out!' in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 19.
- 24 'Lost battalion!' in *EC archives* 2014, iii. 89.
- 25 When it comes to dead bodies specifically, this also happens: for example, in 'Jeep' in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 137; and 'Massacred', in *EC archives* 2014, iii. 79.
- 26 'Search!' in *EC archives* 2006, i. 1–6, 137–43; 'Hill 203!' and 'Corpse on the Imjin!' in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 11–18 & 63–8.
- 27 For example in the stories 'War story!' and 'Old soldiers never die!' (*EC archives* 2006, i. 45–54, 189–98) and 'D-Day!' and 'Fire mission!' (*EC archives* 2007, ii. 131–6, 205–211).
- 28 'Hill 203!' *EC archives* 2007, ii. 11.
- 29 *Ibid.* ii. 2, 18.
- 30 See also Versaci 2007, 167–9.
- 31 *Ibid.* 167–9.
- 32 *Ibid.* 169.

- 33 Ibid. 169. The technique of breaking up scenes into several stills was also common in EC's war comics.
- 34 See also Versaci 2007, 164.
- 35 'Corpse on the Imjin!', *EC archives* 2007, ii. 68.
- 36 Ibid. ii. 63, original emphasis.
- 37 Field 2012, 49 talks of this 'you' function in another storyline in EC's war comics, concluding that 'This has the effect of emphasizing the reader's complicity with the American soldier's actions in the story.'
- 38 'Corpse on the Imjin!', in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 65.
- 39 Versaci 2007, 139–81 discusses at length the differences between film and comics, and specifically EC's war comics.
- 40 Elaine Scarry, *The body in pain: The making and unmaking of the world* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), 27.
- 41 Scarry 1985, 125.
- 42 Chute 2016, 31.
- 43 'Tide!' in *EC archives* 2014, iii. 105–111.
- 44 Cover by Jack Davis for *EC archives* 2014, iii. 13.
- 45 Gardner 2012, 98.
- 46 There are, however, occasional women readers who enjoy the war stories, as pointed out by Miss Nancy Cash, in Louisville: 'Dear Editors, You may think your magazine appeals only to men! However, I want you to know that I enjoy it as much as any man!' ('Combat Correspondence', in *EC archives: Two-fisted tales*, No. 22, Jul.–Aug. 1951).
- 47 *EC archives* 2007, ii. 28.
- 48 See also Hajdu 2008, 197 who comments on Kurtzman's high ambitions when it comes to realism.
- 49 *EC archives* 2007, ii. 62.
- 50 Ibid. ii. 130.
- 51 Ibid. ii. 96.
- 52 Gardner 2012, 104.
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- 54 See also Sturfelt's and Qvarnström's chapters in this volume.
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- 57 Gunning 2014, 50.
- 58 Lefèvre 2012, 16.
- 59 *EC archives* 2007, ii. 11.
- 60 Ibid. ii. 44.
- 61 *EC archives* 2014, iii. 166.
- 62 Ibid. iii. 12.
- 63 See, for example, the advert in *EC archives* 2007, ii. 162.
- 64 Stated in *EC archives* 2014, iii. 6.

- 65 *EC archives* 2006, i. 110, 178; *EC archives* 2007, ii. 42 (analysis of 'Hill 203!'), 178 (analysis of 'Jeep!'); *EC archives* 2014, iii. 166.
- 66 *EC archives* 2006, i. 12; *EC archives* 2014, iii. 9.
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# Circulating Nazi imagery

## Wars, weapons, and generational layers of cultural remembrance

*Laura Saarenmaa*

Hitler's hangman killed by a bomb.

Himmler turned Gestapo into a super-efficient police force.

Local butchers did Gestapo's dirty work.<sup>1</sup>

A recent issue of the Swedish popular history magazine *Historia & Vetenskap* recollects, yet again, the atrocities of the Gestapo, the secret police of Nazi Germany. The cover of the issue is dominated by a large black-and-white portrait of the uniformed Gestapo chief, Heinrich Himmler. The background to Himmler's portrait consists of a series of smaller photographs of concentration camp prisoners in their iconic striped uniform, collaging the separate images into the well-known homogeneity of the Holocaust grand narrative.

The legacy of the Second World War and the atrocities of the Gestapo have become common property in endless iterations of popular culture, with the circulation of books, magazines, feature films, television series, and documentaries, and the recirculation of Nazi narratives and images on social media.<sup>2</sup> Circulating the memory of the Nazis, however, is hardly limited to the Internet age. Details about the Holocaust, the Gestapo, Hitler, and his fellow Nazi officers were already being consumed eagerly by mass audiences as early as the immediate post-war period. In her seminal essay 'Fascinating Fascism', Susan Sontag pondered the eroticism that surrounded fascism in popular culture and pornography in seventies America. 'Why has Nazi Germany, which was a sexually repressive society, become erotic? How

could a regime which persecuted homosexuals become a gay turn-on?<sup>3</sup> Sontag wondered at the erotic appeal of the Nazis in a radical American context. In the West European countries at the same time, the debate about the sexual dimensions of Nazism coincided with the rise of the political radical right and the neo-Nazi movement.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter discusses the circulation of memories of the Second World War and the Nazis in Swedish men's magazines in the sixties and seventies. The analysis charts the broader theme of war in *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuell* between 1965 and 1975.<sup>5</sup> Popular men's magazines in their day, they combined pinups, nude pictures, and articles on sex with articles on crime, politics and current issues, international affairs, and military history. As has been shown in earlier studies, both magazines turned into explicit sex magazines in the late seventies.<sup>6</sup> Until the mid 1970s, however, they were rich in detailed analyses and features on subjects other than sex. Regardless of the nude centrefolds and the articles on the art of lovemaking, it could be claimed that *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuell* in the sixties and early seventies were *war* magazines as much as *sex* magazines. The headlines shout of the acute danger of a third world war, reflecting the usual Cold War contradictions ('These are the frozen warzones!', 'Push the button and the war is started!'). Moreover, the magazines covered the Second World War and the cruelties of the Nazis at length and from various angles.

According to the historian Jay Winter, the second phase of the twentieth-century 'memory boom' in the sixties and seventies was in large part a form of remembrance of the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> In this, an important stimulus was the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, which saw one of the chief organizers of the Holocaust brought to justice. Winter finds the entanglement of lived memories and media representations of wartime to be a cultural remembrance, building bridges between generations. In the print media, this remembrance has been enacted through the circulation of images, stories, and anecdotes about the Nazi villains, as well as through the recollections of the victims and the nexus of violence. Katja Valaskivi and Johanna Sumiala discuss circulation in the media as a theoretical concept that captures the full range of temporal and geographical movement.<sup>8</sup> From a historical perspective, circulation is used to build up a set of scripts about the past and so construct a shared West European history. As a methodological tool,



Remembering a sunny day in Hiroshima twenty years before (*Lektor* 1965:36).

the concept of circulation makes it possible to study the role of the nation-state as an actor in the transnational process.<sup>9</sup>

From the early nineties onwards, Sweden's national self-image as a peaceful, non-aligned party to the Second World War has been contested evidence of people's engagement, in spite of the official policy of government-level neutrality. Popular culture has discussed

how Sweden could function as an ally for members of the Danish and Norwegian resistance, or as an asylum for those escaping from the war, but yet remain a place where German influence and Nazi sympathies were strong.<sup>10</sup> The debate has recently been fuelled by the rise of the extremist neo-Nazi movement (Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen) in Sweden. But why were the German Nazis and their legacy interesting in Sweden in the sixties and seventies, a time when those expressions of post-war modernity, left-wing welfare politics, social democracy, and moral liberalism, were in the ascendant?<sup>11</sup> And why did past and current wars receive such broad coverage in Swedish men's magazines, which in the literature are held up as examples of the sexualization of culture and mainstreaming of pornography?<sup>12</sup> Answers to these questions will be sought by focusing on *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuellt* as arenas for war-related content—as war magazines rather than sex magazines, in other words. In so doing, I would argue that it becomes plain that Cold War political tensions and the threat of the nuclear war were inseparable elements in the Swedish zeitgeist of the sixties and seventies.

In addition to the tensions between the Cold War superpowers, both magazines showed a broad interest in the ongoing wars and conflicts in far-away places such as Vietnam, Yemen, Kurdistan, Angola, and Pakistan. In fact, *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuellt* both covered the historical and current wars with in-depth, expert analyses, richly illustrated with photographs, maps, charts, and tables.

In a typical *Lektyr* feature on Cold War contradictions and the rising threat of nuclear war in 1968, the readers of the magazine were informed about the current political situation in a detailed map that identified the global conflicts with graphic symbols. In this board-game-like display of world politics, flames marked conflicts during decolonization, a fist stood for civil war and armed conflict, and arrows denoted conflicts between neighbouring states. Rather than a complex combination of geopolitics and diplomatic interaction, world political tensions were reduced to a flat, graphic surface that could be studied analytically from afar.

Irit Rogoff has discussed maps as a cultural form that links aspirations to territorial power with truth claims. Maps provide solid bases for judgement on the grounds of an informed overview—a god's eye

view far distant from the reality of the common soldier.<sup>13</sup> Rather than empathy and compassion, the maps and tables give an impression that the readers of *Fib Aktuellt* or *Lektyr* were thoroughly informed and quite capable of arriving at broader conclusions.

According to the popular trope, the educational features existed merely as an excuse for the sexually explicit content of men's magazines. However, the recent scholarship on the immense success of popular history magazines instead implies that images, facts, and narratives about historical wars are in themselves a source of excitement and pleasure.<sup>14</sup> The documentary theorist Bill Nichols has used the term *epistophilia*, the 'pleasure of knowing about the real world', to explain the enjoyment of documentary films.<sup>15</sup> Nichols's idea of the pleasure of the real applies equally well to historically oriented magazine journalism that leans heavily on historical 'facts' and 'authentic' archive photography. Nichols does not discuss the *gendered* aspect of epistophilia, but nevertheless the pleasure of reading and 'knowing' facts about war, warfare, and military history could be defined as a distinctively male-typical pleasure. Hence the men's magazine format that combines nudes, articles on sex, and fact-oriented features on societal issues was a natural forum for the circulation of Nazi trivia and other Second World War-related material. Moreover, in the sixties and seventies the Swedish magazines seem to have found plenty of visual and written material on the Second World War and Nazis, mostly of international origin.

At the same time, the American press agencies such as Gamma, Magnum, and Associated Press were sending pictures and reports straight from the world's warzones, reflecting the internationalization of the news media business and the continued rise of the dangerous and exciting profession of the war photographer. Particularly in the case of the Vietnam War, the continuous flow of press photos of American origin could be seen as part of the cultural Cold War in Western Europe. It is likely that the archive photos of the Second World War that the Swedish men's magazines published were also bought from the international, American, British, and French press agencies, even though they are seldom credited. As Bodil Axelsson has noted of popular history magazines, when publishing archive photographs they lack the full critical insight into the historical contexts of the photographs, which

# EN VÄRLD I

*I skuggan av ett kärnvapenkrig brinner oroshär*



Mapping the current conflict areas in 1968 (*Lektyr* 1968, 51–2).

# ORO!

dar över hela jordklotet.

-  Ideologisk konflikt sedan 1949
-  Sedan 1948 totalitära eller auktoritära stater (kommunistiska och nationalistiska diktaturer, republiker med president)
-  Politiskt vacklande stater. Sedan 1948 inre omvälvningar: statskupper, oroligheter, uppror..
-  Stater som blivit oberoende efter 1948, med årtal för oavhängighetsförklaringen. (I regel politiskt vacklande u-länder. Framför allt republiker med president utan verkligt demokratiskt styrelsesätt.)
-  Osjälvständiga områden (kolonier 1968.
-  Konflikt vid konfrontation med supermakterna USA och Sovjet.
-  Mellanstatliga konflikter.
-  Inbördeskrig, uppror, oroligheter.
-  Konflikt vid avkolonisering.
-  Kommunistiskt sedan 1948.
-  Årsuppgifter: 1954, 1967, efter 1962.

AV HANS LINDAHL



VÄND!

Geografiska Utgåvan 1968

stem from culturally and historically very different frameworks.<sup>16</sup> The pictures themselves are represented as authentic and unambiguous testimony to the historical events that definitely took place.

### Eyewitness access to the Führerbunker

In the competition for people's leisure time at a time when television was making serious inroads, popular magazines specialized in anniversaries and commemorations of historical events, typically serialized over several months, issue after issue. In its 1964 series 'The history of our time', for example, *Fib Aktuell* remembered the Spanish Civil War and the early days of Franco's dictatorship, while the '20 years after the Second World War' series, which also ran in 1964, went through a number of separate wartime events and stories, from the Battle of Iwo Jima to Spandau Prison.

In the same year, *Fib Aktuell* published a four-part series about the attempted assassinations of Adolf Hitler. The first focused on the attempt to blow him up with explosives hidden in brandy bottles during a flight from the Eastern Front to Berlin.<sup>17</sup> The second focused on another attempted suicide bombing, this time at the Berlin gun exhibition, while the third part examined the 20 July Plot, which centred on a bomb hidden in a briefcase. The articles were illustrated with faded black-and-white photographs, many of them showing Adolf Hitler surrounded by his officers. There is also a photograph taken from the trial of the conspirators. No sources for the original pictures are provided. Some of the captions mention that the photograph is a still from a film, but fail to say which film. The final part of the series goes through Hitler's last days alive. Under the blunt headline 'Hitler kills himself', the piece goes through the now well-known details of the events in the Führerbunker in Berlin.<sup>18</sup> The illustrations show Hitler having a meal in the company of Eva Braun, and reviewing his troops, a group of very young-looking soldiers lined up in front of him. There is also a photograph taken outside the Führerbunker, with no reference to the photographer or the source of the photograph.

As is characteristic of these sorts of features on the Nazis, based on archive photos, the bold headlines and layout made the maximum use of the visual effect of Hitler's name and physical persona. Other



be expected that they will argue that Adolf Eichmann was actually a jolly good fellow, who, as a former boy scout, just happened to take his given task a bit too literally?<sup>19</sup>

Across Europe, the Eichmann trial and recent research fed the debate about the Second World War and its meaning in the mid sixties. On one hand, the temporal distance began to make lighter comments possible. On the other, events were still so recent that there were plenty of first-hand sources available. The series on the rise and fall of the Third Reich published in *Fib Aktuell* in 1965 narrated it using a first-person account by Artur Axmann, the officer who had been in charge of the Hitlerjugend.<sup>20</sup> Presented without any references to original sources, the readers were given 'eyewitness access' to the final dramatic moments in the Führerbunker.

We entered into Hitler's room. He was seated on the sofa in his uniform: black trousers, grey jacket with the golden emblems and an Iron Cross First Class. Torso, bent to the right. Face and forehead were very pale. Over both temples ran a small blood trail.<sup>21</sup>

The eyewitness' case was backed up with uncredited photographs of Nazi officers and the locations mentioned in the text.

Photographs were also a central element in an eight-part series on Gestapo atrocities, written by the author of a recent book on the Gestapo, Jacques Delarue.<sup>22</sup> While it is evident that the story, which was apparently wrong in some details, was again translated from English, there is no reference to the origins of the photographs that presented the shocking details of the piles of shoes collected from interned Jews, and the piles of bodies found in the mass graves at the concentration camps. The tone of the article is dramatic. 'Never, even in the time of Attila, had there been such bloodshed in Europe. Wherever the Germans arrived, hundreds of thousands of people were murdered. How could this happen? How could one of the continent's cultured nations become captivated by such cruelty?'<sup>23</sup> The series rehearses the personal traits and characteristics of the SS officers Herman Göring, Heinrich Himmler, and Reinhard Heydrich, and presents detailed information about its organization at the heart of Hitler's governance. It claims that the German people knew very well what was going on

in camps, but that the Gestapo had instilled such fear into people that no one dared to tell the world about it. The concluding paragraph then turns to contemporary society, articulating the primary reason for remembering the Nazi atrocities:

The nightmare is over. But is it really over for good? People's memory is short, new generations have grown up after the heyday of Nazism, and around the world similar movements are on the rise. We have seen signs of that even in this country [Sweden]. That's why knowledge of the Gestapo's crimes against humanity must be taught. New generations, who barely know who Hitler was, must be enlightened about what happened in Europe between 1933 and 1945. That is the only way to avoid the same nightmare that Hitler and his partners in crime put into action.<sup>24</sup>

The reason for remembering and recirculating Nazi imagery thus draws on the rise of the neo-Nazi movement and the need to enlighten the younger generation about the horrors of the past. The men's magazines *Fib Aktuellt* and *Lektyr* had a strong input into this knowledge production. Of course, running features on the Nazis was also an editorial policy designed to see off competing commercial magazines. In *Lektyr*, Hitler's name framed the most varied subjects, from the series on the German occupation of Norway, to the nuclear arms race between the Germans and the Americans.<sup>25</sup> Even the story of Volkswagen was framed around Hitler's persona, giving the picture editor an excuse to include several photographs of Hitler in a story that actually focused on the car.<sup>26</sup>

Another much-used frame was an artificially constructed continuity between the historical past and the present. This is seen in the types of stories that viewed the past in terms of anniversaries, or which showed how past evil still lived among us. One of the early examples of that is the series about the German city of Würzburg where it was claimed a number of former members of the Nazi party held high public office, including judges, district attorneys, and the mayor.<sup>27</sup> The story was told by a German Nazi-hunter Elmer Herterich, who had applied for political asylum in Sweden after revealing the Nazi past of the German judicial elite. The same continuity theme was also evident in the interest in Nazi descendants: the offspring of high-ranking Nazi



# Nazist- staden åter på marsch

1937 i Northeim. Nazisterna drog genom gatorna med musikkår och flaggor, alla imponerades av deras ungdom och vitalitet.

**Detta måste ni  
läsa. Det är  
något väsentligt**

□ **Staden Northeim blev på tre år Tysklands mest nazifierade stad. Den gamle landshövdingen(th) förklarar: Vi var fega! Det som**

TEXT OCH FOTO: LARS C G ERICSSON

Parallelling the street view (*Lektyr* 1967:48 12-13).



1967: i dag är huvudgatan i Northeim betydligt lugnare. Men i konfektionshandlare Schulenbergs butik samlas hans anhängare...



**blev — det ville vi inte. Nu är nynazisterna på väg till makten i Northeim. Det finns likheter mellan 1937 och 1967.**

VÄND!

leaders and their current lives.<sup>28</sup> The evil spirit of the Nazis was seen as being embodied by the Nazi officers who were still alive, above all Rudolf Hess, but also the likes of Heinz Lammerding, Gustav-Adolf Janssen, Reinhard Gehlen, and Werner Best.<sup>29</sup>

Continuity with the past was underscored in the magazine layout by the placing of historic archive photography and pictures representing the current situation next to each other. In the instance of the 1967 feature on the Nazi officer Martin Bormann ('Martin Bormann is alive!'), the blurry archive photograph of Bormann in his Nazi uniform was matched with a similar-sized portrait of an elderly Bormann in a suit and tie. Equally, in the 1973 report from Northeim, 'the most pro-neo-Nazi city in Germany', the layout compared the same street view in photographs from 1937 and 1967. 'There are similarities between 1937 and 1967', it was claimed, ominously.

The rise of neo-Nazism in Europe was reported in both *Fib Aktuell* and *Lektyr*. In the mid sixties, the magazines featured the desecration of Jewish graves, the marches, and the growing political support for the neo-Nazis in West Germany.<sup>30</sup> In the seventies it was reported to have even reached the UK and Italy.<sup>31</sup> It was said that the headquarters of European neo-Nazism were on the small island of Ibiza, and that the movement was funded and run by old German Nazi party representatives, their ultimate goal being to build a New Germany.<sup>32</sup> The magazines also brought to their readers' attention the fact that the European neo-Nazis even had Scandinavian branches, and that there were established neo-Nazi groups and organizations in Sweden as well as in Denmark. In addition to a sarcastic piece about a public speech given by a Danish 'Nordic Hitler', *Lektyr* ran a story about a Danish entrepreneur who was making a fortune, manufacturing and selling decorative items such as miniature busts of Hitler and swastika-decorated brass ornaments.<sup>33</sup> In 1974, the magazine discussed the issue of neo-Nazism in a column that commented on a number of recent popular books about the philosophies of Nazi Germany. Mostly published in the UK, the columnist claimed that the books gave an alibi to current political developments and the rise of the radical right, rather than working for a critical reconsideration of the history of the Second World War: 'There is a strong interest in getting people to recognize fascist developments in our societal system. ... There is still time to react against this fascist propaganda.'<sup>34</sup> Illustrating

**VECKANS MEST SPÄNNANDE LÄSNING!** **LÄSNING!**

**Här är bildbeviset som sätter fart på jakten på Hitlertysklands största massmördare:**



**MARTIN BORMANN**

**LEVER!**

Martin Bormann, Adolf Hitlers högra hand och Tredje rikets grå eminens, lever! Han finns i Sydamerika och kallar sig Bauer. En argentinsk polisman och nazistjägare har till och med talat med honom. Under samtalet togs bilden till vänster av en annan polisagent. Jämför den bilden med den högra, som visar nazistpampen Bormann i full utstyrsel under glansdagarna i Tyskland. Det är samme man!

Det här är berättelsen om Bormanns flykt och jakten på honom – en av de sista stora massmördarna från andra världskriget!

Parallelling past and present Bormann (*FIB* 1973:30, 21).

the somewhat confused nature of popular publishing, the column ran in *Lektyr*, the Swedish-language magazine responsible for circulating much of the information and anecdotes about the Nazis. That said, the column shows that men's magazines did not only blindly circulate Nazi imagery; they could occasionally subject it to critical scrutiny. Yet while this was certainly true of the left-wing magazine *Fib/Kulturfronten*,

launched in 1973, it was hardly common among Sweden's mainstream men's magazines, even though the most traditional magazines were beginning to react to the changing cultural climate in the seventies by adopting the new fashion for the social reportage.

Seventies radicalism was especially evident in *Fib Aktuell*, which published disapproving reportages on the Swedish Nazi movement. In 1970 the magazine paid a visit to the headquarters of Nordiska rikspartiet (the Nordic Realm Party, NRP), founded in 1956 by Göran Assar Oredsson and run by him and his German-born wife Vera. The story showcased details of this peculiar Nazi couple: how they lived, how they dressed, what their childhoods had been like. It was said that their living room was dominated by an oil painting of Hitler. According to the Oredssons, Hitler was a great man, and everything said about him and the Holocaust was untrue: 'They talk about camps in Auschwitz and Buchenwald and Dachau without presenting any reliable evidence that such places even existed.' The Oredssons insisted that the facts of the Holocaust were mere fabrications, as were all the newsreels, films, reports, and photographs published in the newspapers, because the majority of newspapers were owned by European and American Jews. The Oredssons were happy that national socialism was on the rise once more in Europe. In Sweden, this was the direct consequence of the moral decay of the Swedish people.

I can see why National Socialism arouses interest in Sweden. Just look at the strikes in prison, where the slackers and burglars complain about the quality of the food. At the same time, there are people struggling with unemployment and starving in the streets. I am not brutal, but if I were in power, those gentlemen would be treated in another manner altogether. ... Look at the drug addicts, the slobs, the long-haired hippies. If our party were in power, we would build barracks for these people so that decent, nice people would not have to see them.<sup>35</sup>

Asked about their foreign policy objectives, the Oredssons' responses were vague generalizations about national independence and military neutrality, and cutting aid to developing countries. Ultimately, it was their fanatical admiration for Hitler that was the premise of their

political action. *Fib Aktuellt*, spurred into action by the Oredssons' truly outrageous claims, provided the article with 'footnotes', which gave the accepted basic facts about the Holocaust, the concentration camps, and Nazi crimes against humanity. The piece ends with a paragraph describing the reporter's relief at getting away from the Oredssons, despite the chilly weather outdoors.<sup>36</sup>

Even though the historical details about the Nazis attracted readers, both magazines shared a very real concern about the resurgent neo-Nazi movement. At *Fib Aktuellt*, the aversion was driven by the magazine's strong socialist orientation, as evident in its social reportage on the famine in Africa and the concurrent overproduction of food in Sweden.<sup>37</sup> In a similar spirit, it contrasted the misery of the slums of Calcutta with the world table tennis championships hosted by the city.<sup>38</sup> In March 1975 *Fib Aktuellt* announced that it had 'adopted five political prisons', and encouraged its readers to do the same: 'You can help us to rescue these prisoners by filling in the form attached to the page and sending it to the editor.'<sup>39</sup> In a fashionably left-wing vein, the magazine educated its readers about their rights to strike, and started a debate about racism in Sweden.<sup>40</sup>

*Lektyr* was perhaps more to the right in its coverage of national politics. It invited the conservative party leaders to explain their shadow budget in the magazine, and advised readers on the 'smartest moves' when doing their annual income tax returns. It also covered the internal disagreements and weaknesses of Olof Palme's government, implying that their readership would not much mind a change of direction in a country where the Social Democrats had held power for decades.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps in seventies Sweden, presenting the economic policy of the conservative opposition parties was just as 'improper' and 'daring' as circulating Nazi imagery and commemorating the Second World War, given that the public sphere was dominated by discourses of social responsibility and political correctness.

### Disturbing information

*Fib Aktuellt* and *Lektyr* may have taken somewhat different stances on national politics, but they had a common interest in wars and conflicts, both past and present. In the early seventies, both magazines raised

the issue of the Swedish defence industry and the country's role in international arms deals. In 1971 *Fib Aktuell* could state that Sweden was 'the biggest arms exporter in the world'.<sup>42</sup> Large, detailed pictures filled its readers in on the international success of the latest fighter planes from Saab and tanks from Bofors, and the news that Swedish 'Carl Gustav' rifles had recently been sold to Australia, a country that was actively supporting the US in Vietnam.

In 1972, *Lektyr* in turn published a digest of an Italian magazine reportage about the sheer scale of the Swedish defence industry, including 'pieces of information that Swedish people may find very disturbing'.<sup>43</sup> At the time, Sweden's defence industry was still largely governed by the country's post-war policy of non-alignment, with its emphasis on maintaining a strong domestic arms industry. Arms exports were seen as a way to support the domestic arms industry, reducing procurement costs for the Swedish government, and maintaining levels of production that would allow Sweden to increase supplies if it were to be drawn into a conflict. During the seventies, Sweden accounted for 0.3 per cent of global arms transfers and was the twelfth largest exporter.<sup>44</sup> The *Fib Aktuell* article in question expected there to be public unease at the figures, suggesting that the public was unaware of the scale of Swedish exports. This does not mean that the issue had not been covered by the mainstream media—on the contrary, at least some news and opinion pieces were published in the daily papers—but it could still be argued that with their sensationalist aesthetic and full-colour spreads, the men's magazines drew public attention to the arms industry and the political reasoning behind Sweden's soaring arms exports. At the same time as the magazines increased public awareness of global conflicts, they reminded readers of Sweden's complicity. Their tone tended towards the sensationalist: *Fib Aktuell* reported that Swedish machine guns had been used in the 1973 coup in Chile, and published photographs were said to support the claim, and it used the same accusing tone to report that Sweden was selling dum dum bullets, generally forbidden for military use, to the Kurdish guerrillas fighting in Iraq in 1975.<sup>45</sup> In the same year, it carried a story about Swedish Scania trucks being used to run grenades for the guerrilla fighters in the Kurdistan mountains.<sup>46</sup>

The mix of moral dilemmas, financial journalism, and eroticized

excitement about armed conflicts and the arms trade found here is in broad agreement with earlier analyses of the political climate in Cold War Sweden, which was characterized by discourses of fear, social responsibility, and political correctness. The daring attitude characteristic of men's magazines offered some scope to raise public awareness and fuel debates on social issues. *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuellt* seem to have been primarily concerned with Sweden's connivance in the international wars and conflicts of the day.

The circulation of Nazi imagery and preoccupation with the Second World War was more part of an international, Western trend. In the Swedish context, given the interest in current armed conflicts, the recirculation of Nazi atrocities kept the memory of the Second World War alive and perhaps shaped public opinion to be more favourable towards a strong defence industry. By making much of interconnectedness and comparing past with present, the magazines at least increased historical awareness. Another explanation, though, might perhaps be the interests of the magazine's young male readership. As Fia Sundevall has pointed out, *Fib Aktuellt* and *Lektyr* were particularly popular leisure-time reading among Swedes doing military service.<sup>47</sup> In the sixties and seventies, the circulation of Nazi imagery and Second World War stories was driven in part by an intergenerational transfer of information to younger readers, who did not have personal memories of the war. By this circulation, the next generation were addressed as members of the Western cultural community, and invited to share in Western Europe's historical legacy, but in their own language.

These seemingly disparate topics—Nazi officers, global Cold War tensions, Swedish arms exports, the rise of neo-Nazism—were in fact all situated in an overarching sensationalism that characterized the magazines in question. All the topics were similarly shocking; all were covered in a similarly dramatic manner, although not with similar modes of representation. As journalistic products, the magazines were platforms for war-related material of all sorts. What they were not were sharply defined niche publications. Rather than one strident editorial voice, there was a chorus of voices as numerous journalists and photographers used their personal connections and networks to promote their personal and professional interests in their published work. This polyphony also explains the broad mix of high-quality

war photography and historic photographs, and detailed maps and charts that presented global conflicts in game-like scenarios, studied analytically from afar.

Women and their physical qualities were also studied from afar in the magazines. Women did not feature as subjects, agents, or public figures, and the changing role of women was not discussed. All in all, women's voices were seldom heard in *Lektyr* and *Fib Aktuellt*, apart from in inconsequentially saccharine interviews—or freaks such as Vera Oredsson. Given that this was the age of women's rights and gender equality in the Western countries, the omission is striking. In contrast, American *Playboy Magazine* included debates about women's liberation, and invited famous feminist activists to explain their ideas and express their dislike of the magazine *in* the magazine. In Sweden, women attacked the sexist imagery of the men's magazines by burning *Lektyr's* and *Fib Aktuellt's* sandwich boards.<sup>48</sup> Yet despite this, the magazines kept on with their countercultural male space, which could countenance the horrors of Nazism, but exclude the horrors of female subjectivity.

In the seventies literature, the eroticism of the Nazi images was seen as tapping into a fear of the feminine. As Klaus Theweleit wrote in *Männerphantasien*, published in Germany in 1977 and 1978, fascist fantasy, with its order, discipline, and clarity, pushed away the anxiety and messiness associated with women and the feminine, and war, as a male-centred enterprise, was accordingly felt to be the wellspring of pure, unrestrained manliness.<sup>49</sup> Even Susan Sontag concluded as much when looking at the Nazified pornography and sexual metaphors of fascist leadership.<sup>50</sup>

Read in relation to their war reportages, the circulation of Nazi imagery in Swedish men's magazines owed more to Cold War political contradictions than to gender politics. The seventies saw a growing interest in war and conflict in terms of the international politics of peacekeeping and the Swedish defence industry, and at the same time there were growing concerns about the rise of neo-Nazism in Italy, France, Germany, Britain, Denmark—and Sweden. Keeping alive the memory of the Second World War and the horrors of the Nazi regime constructed a proximity between a historically and geographically distant past and the present, and showed their interconnectedness

with the current political concerns, at the same time winning over Swedish hearts and minds to the idea of a strong defence industry and arms exports.

The entangled narratives of wars past and present, the maps, charts, and Cold War framework, all called for an analytical and distant reading rather than an empathic one. The same went for the endlessly recirculating images of Nazi officers, which tended to highlight the personality and perspective of those acting rather than those suffering. From the glossy cover of *Historia & Vetenskap*, Heinrich Himmler stares out at us, all vigorous pose and military fastidiousness, while behind him the victims of the Holocaust blur into an unrecognized, unrecognizable mass, crushed by the overwhelming superiority of that one Nazi. Perhaps the endless fascination with Nazi personalities is right there: in our inability to look at their individual victims and their personal histories.

## Notes

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- 13 Bodil Axelsson 'History in popular magazines: Negotiating masculinities, the low of the popular and the high of history,' *Culture Unbound*, 4 (2006), 275–95.
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- 15 Bill Nichols, *Representing reality: Issues and concepts in documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 178–9.
- 16 Axelsson 2006, 285.
- 17 'Mörda Hitler,' *Fib Aktuellt* 1964:27, 10–13, 28. The series was composed by Bertil Lagerström, but the copyrights were owned by Stephan Richter, supposedly the original author of the piece.
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- 19 'Himmel var "beskedlig", Hitler ett militärt geni,' *Fib Aktuellt* 1965:22, 30. Column by Olof Lennart Praesto.
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- 21 'Hitler riktar revolvern mot sig själv,' *Lektyr* 1965:24, 24.
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- 23 *Lektyr* 1965:36, 12: 'Aldrig, inte ens under Attilas tid hade en sån blodström brutit ut över Europa. Vart tyskarna än kom mördades hundratusentals människor på det mest bestialiska sätt. Hur kunde det ske? Hur kunde ett av världsdelenas kulturfolk gripas av en sådan totalitär grym ondska.'
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- 25 'Norska Finnmark i flammor,' *Lektyr* 65:9, 4–5, 38; 'Söder åt eller dö!,' *Lektyr*

- 65:10, 9, 10–11, 35; 'Blod och tårar i Halden', *Lektyr* 65:49, 18–19, 38; 'Hitler kunde ha varit först med atombomben', *Lektyr* 1967: 21, 6–7, 40; 'Kapplöpning om tyskarnas reaktor', *Lektyr* 1967:22, 22–3; 3; 'Kapplöpningen om atombomben', *Lektyr* 1967:23, 10–11.
- 26 'Den fantastiska sagan om Volkswagen', *Lektyr* 70/2, 8–9, 10–11, 50.
- 27 'Skuggan av Hitlers Hakkors', *Lektyr* 1964:34, 16–21, 46; 'Här är beviset—Men nazisterna segrade ändå', *Lektyr* 1964:35, 4–5, 44.
- 28 'Hitler fick barn med Eva Braun!', *Fib Aktuellt* 1965:21, 21; 'Vad blev det av nazistledarnas barn?', *Fib Aktuellt* 1966:1, 22.
- 29 'Han [Hess] utförde andra världskrigets galnaste företag', *Lektyr* 1971:30, 34–5, 36–7, 38–9, 54; 'SS-Generalen Fritz Lammerding: I denna idyll lever massmördaren', *Lektyr* 1971:7, 34–5, 36–7, 44; 'Gustav Adolf Jansen—Hitlers privatsekreterare som blev diplomat', *Lektyr* 1971:20, 2–3, 4–5; 'Dr Werner Best och två av hans Gestapo män står nu inför rätta för att ha dödat 10,000 människor. De kastade upp barn i luften och sköt prick på dem', *Lektyr* 1972:31, 38–9, 46; 'Århundradens spion Reinhard Gehlen: En av Hitlers närmaste män', *Lektyr* 1972:20, 52–3, 54–5.
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- 32 'Häriifrån ska nynazister erövra världen!', *Lektyr* 1971:49, 34–5, 36–7.
- 33 'Här talar Nordens Hitler', *Lektyr* 1970:22, 16–17; 'Dansk utnyttjar Nynazismen', *Lektyr* 1971:45, 33.
- 34 'Nazismen—Är den på väg tillbaka?', *Lektyr* 1974:6, 16. The column was written by Tony Rosendahl, a freelance journalist with a conviction for fraud, who was author of a number of reportages on international politics and armed conflict published in *Lektyr* in the seventies.
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# Postscript

## After death

*Marie Cronqvist & Lina Sturfelt*

War remains have various meanings. In this volume, for example, they signal a specific interest in how narratives materialize in a range of media forms and genres. In the introduction, we identified a lack of connect between media studies of memory and historical studies of memory, and our solution has been to approach the field by launching a different type of history: a media history of war remains.

The different cases brought up by the authors testify to the very real potential of such a venture. In this postscript we will reflect upon the core arguments of the book, and suggest some possible orientations and promising lines of enquiry that we hope this collection will help fuel.

First, this book has not only focused on media representations and narratives, but also how they were anchored in different media forms. We have presented a selection of cases, which combine the study of media representations with a historical sensibility for the importance of how media forms shape messages or—at the very least—set the limits for what can be represented. Surely, as the chapters by Sofi Qvarnström, Kristin Skoog, Sara Kärrholm, and Laura Saarenmaa would have it, it would be worth investigating systematically what continuities and changes arise when war narratives migrate from one medium to another, or when experiences from one war are retold and reframed in another wartime context.

Our second point, a general conclusion worth stressing, is the overall priority of the visual. The broad spectrum of different cases and sources presented here has allowed us to acknowledge the importance of the visual in mediating war in the twentieth century; not only in more

obviously visual media such as film and comics, but also in novels, the radio, and reportage. One common finding is that sight was the privileged sense when it came to narrating and remembering the emotional and sensory experiences of the world war era, and when mediating and overcoming its traumas. The insistence on ‘seeing suffering’, which Lina Sturfelt develops in her chapter, is thus a key aspect that seems to have bridged both lapses in time and otherwise media-specific differences between ‘slow’ and ‘rapid’ media, or between traditional news and the more subversive media such as comic books or men’s magazines. Is it possible to talk of a common ‘visual regime’ in the world war era? How can this historical research be used to nuance and challenge the claims of novelty often made about contemporary conflicts being a new form of war defined by its visuality?

Third, we would like to underscore the relevance of historical and cultural contexts, and the value of shifting temporal and spatial foci when studying war remains. For the benefit of coherency and comparability, all the chapters have been broadly restricted to the period from the 1910s to the 1970s, but we are confident that the timeframe for analysing the long era of the two world wars might with advantage be extended into the late 1970s and beyond. And although we have stressed the lasting cultural impact of the world war era when it comes to mediating modern war and its suffering, our overall perspectives and more general conclusions should not necessarily be reserved for understanding the era of total war. ‘Visual’ wars such as the Vietnam War, ‘forgotten’ wars such as the wars of decolonization, or raging conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, to mention just a few, would be worthy of attention within an extended media history of war remains. Similarly, other media left out here—perhaps most notably television, but also letters and monuments—deserve to be analysed from the perspectives developed in this volume.

Some of the cases presented here may also be seen as an attempt to move beyond the conventional British, French, and German framing of the world war era, to make a significant contribution to the field by adding another geographical and cultural area—which in this case happens to be Sweden—to the scholarship on war remains. We encourage other researchers to continue investigating and presenting such less known empirical cases to the cultural study of war, by for example

refining the Nordic perspective or tackling non-Western narratives and memories of the world war era. Above all, just as our approach has favoured an interdisciplinary outlook, we do believe in moving beyond nationally oriented histories to instead apply a transcultural perspective on the entangled media histories of war remains.

There is also a point to be made about the gendered aspects of war remains. Although not a unifying theme of the book, many of the chapters raise the subject of gender and the ways sensory narratives and memories of the world war era have been gendered, shaping both *what* and *who* was seen and heard. These observations point to possible further research on the roles of men and women in war stories, and of historical constructions of masculinity and femininity in relation to different media. Is there a difference between ‘male’ and ‘female’ war media and narratives? What were the roles of media actors such as feminist journalists or subversive comic artists in challenging the dominant male narratives of the world war era? Another avenue only hinted at here, but certainly worth exploring, would be to pay closer attention to the historical relationship between media creators and media consumers, and to the changing role and attitudes of media audiences.

Our fifth and final point concerns memory and grief. In the introductory chapter we emphasized that stories about death always seem to be less about the dead than about the living. Through a wide range of cases, this book has shown how the dead body was itself a medium, making it possible for the living to work through and communicate their pain, agony, and grief. At the same time, as for example pointed out in Åsa Bergström’s chapter, there was often a curious absence of the ever-present dead in various media. The dead body itself was evaded, as the war narrative moved on to the needs and desires of the survivors.

Against the background of these five points—the significance of war representations alongside media forms, the importance of the visual, the value of shifting both temporal and spatial foci, the highlighting of the gendered aspects of war remains, and the intractable focus on the remembering and grieving survivor—it is our hope that this book will inspire the reader to reflect on the mediations of war and conflict in our own time and on the media dependency of all war experiences. What are the media-specific qualities of today’s

so-called 'new media' interactive environments, and what are the possibilities of war 'remaining' in such constant flows? How do the sensory or cultural aspects of war materialize in the dominant media forms of our day? And how does the increasing use of a human rights language affect contemporary media narratives of human suffering and abuses? Perhaps our findings could be used to better understand the mediated conflicts of the present—and not only by other scholars and students expanding on the subject, but by journalists and attentive media audiences. As Marie Cronqvist argues in her chapter on John Hersey's reportage 'Hiroshima', by decentring journalism we could challenge and possibly alter the destructive media discourses of war and mass atrocities.

Finally, this brings us back to the opening quote from Tomas Tranströmer's poem 'After a death'—that the long comet tail of the deaths and suffering of the world war era is ever visible today. It looms above us, still portending fierce conflict and terrible human destruction, but now in the Middle East, in Central Africa, and elsewhere. War remains with us. The remains of war are everywhere, forever imminent. If we refuse to let the shock keep us inside, or make the TV pictures snowy, but instead respond by actively remembering and collectively making sense of the most appalling circumstances, perhaps the mediated memories of twentieth-century war trauma can be worked through. At best, this will even encourage empathy for the war victims of our own time.

# About the Authors

**Åsa Bergström** is a PhD student in Film Studies at Lund University, Sweden. Her dissertation analyses how Sweden has addressed and represented the Holocaust in moving images. The project investigates newsreels, documentaries, docudramas, and feature films from the Second World War to the present. Her research interests include factual theatre, children's film, newsreels, media representations of humanitarian organisations, and Swedish docudrama on screen, stage, and television.

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